



European
Commission



Evaluation of the European Union's cooperation with the Central African Republic

Executive Summary (EN)

September 2021

Directorate
General for
International
Partnerships



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Leader of the Consortium: Particip GmbH

Contrat n° FWC COM 2015
EuropeAid/137211/DH/SER/Multi
Specific Contract n° 2019/405518

Evaluation of the European Union's cooperation with the Central African Republic (2008-2019)

This evaluation was commissioned by the Evaluation Unit of the Directorate
General of International Partnerships
(European Commission)

Evaluation carried out by:



The opinions expressed in this document represent the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Commission of the European Union or of the authorities of the country concerned.

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COVER PAGE Photos:

Right: Photo taken by the local consultant, Mr. Rédrick Mongonou, in the Ombella Mpoko (Boali) during the field visit of the " ANEA Capacity Building Project for Sustainable Access to Water and sanitation in rural areas ";
Left: Photo taken by the local consultant, Mr. Rédrick Mongonou, in the Ombella Mpoko (Boali) during the field visit of "Water for Peace, Water for Life".

Scope of the evaluation

The Evaluation focuses on the development cooperation of the European Union (EU) with the Central African Republic (CAR), the cooperation strategy since 2008 and its implementation from 2014 to 2019¹. It covers both financial and non-financial actions (including political dialogue and policies and joint programming). The actions of other Directorates-General of the European Commission and of the European External Action Service are analysed in terms of coordination and coherence with respect to development actions, within the framework of the integrated approach and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace triple nexus. The evaluation focuses on the priority intervention sectors identified in the National Indicative Programmes (NIP) of the 10th and 11th European Development Fund (EDF) and those covered by the Békou trust fund². It is structured around the macro-sectors **of economic governance and public administration, justice, democratic governance, security, education, health (including urban water and sanitation), as well as rural resilience, job creation and the management of natural resources**. The evaluation also marginally analyses the support **for major infrastructure networks and regional economic integration**. The analysis takes into account cross-cutting issues, such as gender equality, youth, environment and climate change, conflict-sensitivity and addressing human and children's rights (“rights-based approach”).

Methodology

The evaluation took place from April 2019 to February 2021. It used the Contribution Analysis approach and was based on the intervention logic and 11 evaluation questions. It used a sample of interventions which covered 71% of the overall portfolio. The methodology was adapted to the Covid-19 context to obtain sufficient data to answer the evaluation questions. An important limitation to note is the under-representation of the point of view of direct beneficiaries from the CAR, with exception of those involved in the rural resilience sector. The context did not allow the experts to fully assess the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions.

Context

The CAR is a landlocked country (located) in the middle of the African continent and surrounded by Chad, Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Congo and Cameroon. The history of the CAR is marked by cycles of politico-military crises producing recurring spikes in violence every decade or so. These cycles are explained, amongst other things, by chronic poor governance and by the often-violent competition to obtain power and a share of the country's wealth. Continued instability has led to a reduction in the State's resources. There are great geographic disparities and socio-economic differences between the different provinces of the country, which generates a feeling of exclusion and marginalisation amongst some parts of the population. The “hinterland”, to use the Central African expression, has a very limited presence of security and public administration services as well as basic social services (also limited in the capital). The negative effects on social cohesion are even more serious as these disparities add to the longstanding cultural antagonism between the Bantu and the Sahel peoples - between settled farmers and nomadic transhumant herders. In addition to these internal dynamics, there is also high vulnerability to external influences. The Human Development Index (HDI) shows that the CAR remains one of the poorest countries in the world: ranked 188th out of 189 countries since September 2018, but ranked as the poorest country for most of the period covered by the evaluation.

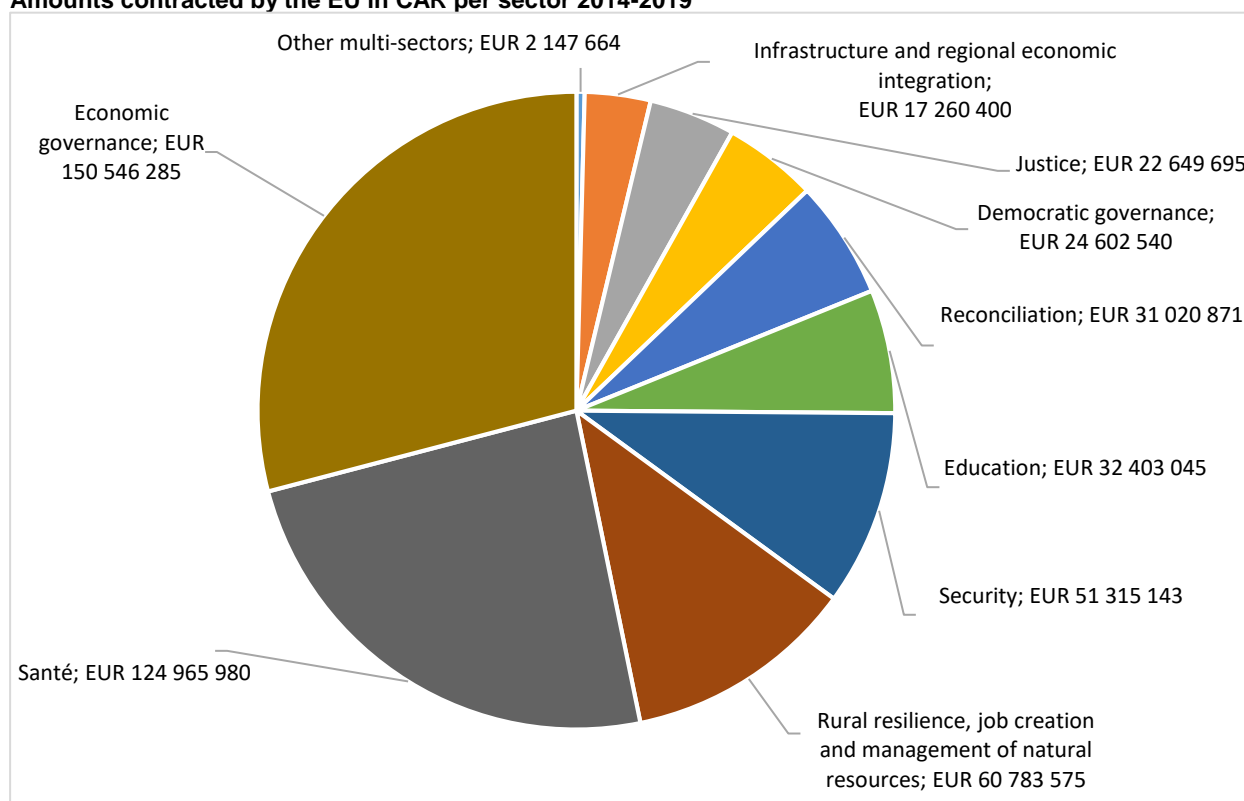
¹ With the exception of strategy and interventions financed through the African Peace Facility.

² Békou means “hope” in the Sango language, the EU Békou trust fund is the first European trust fund with multiple funders (UE institutions, EU member states, other funders), created in 2014 for the Central African Republic.

The EU support in the CAR

The aim of the EU support in the CAR is to contribute to peace, stabilisation, and socioeconomic development. The strategic challenges of the EU include the stabilisation of the sub-region,³ the development of the regional economy and also trade⁴ which can benefit both the international and European economy. For the period under review (2014-2019), the EU signed contracts for 507 million euros, of which 56% has already been paid. The EDF covers roughly three-quarters of the contracts; the other quarter is financed by Foreign Policy Instruments - IFS, IFS-RRM, IcSP (21%) and thematic lines (6%).

Amounts contracted by the EU in CAR per sector 2014-2019



(*) 2019: incomplete figures, only the contracts included in the evaluation period are included. Source: CRIS, Békou Fund Terms of Reference and Reports; ECORYS information.

Conclusions

C.1. The strategic use of cooperation instruments within the framework of an integrated approach to the Central African crisis has enabled the EU to exert discreet but effective influence on the process of reconciliation and stabilisation of the country.

The EU has adopted an integrated approach in the CAR to support stabilisation of the country and reduce poverty. The EU's strategy in CAR has adapted over time and produced responses in accordance with the context, taking into account the evolving positions of other international stakeholders. At the political level, the EU has been able to promote its role as an impartial and influential stakeholder thanks to instruments of cooperation and diplomatic activity. The EU has engaged in dialogue with the Presidency and the government based on its concerted position between Member States, the African Union and the United Nations. Thanks to being in this strong position, the EU obtained greater bargaining power for negotiations with Central African political actors adopting forms of democratic legitimisation to exercise power, particularly during the period preceding the signing of the APPR in February 2019.

³ NIP 11th EDF and RIP 11th EDF.

⁴ RIP 11th EDF.

C.2. The Bêkou Fund has made it possible to adapt aid to the co-presence of emergency and development situations that characterise the CAR, and to experience and address the challenges of both.

With the Bêkou Fund, the EU, in partnership with its Member States and other contributing countries (such as Switzerland), has adopted a flexible instrument adapted to the situation of non-linear transition between emergency and development which characterises the various regions of the country. The EU has created conditions for a shift in its support towards a more restructuring approach in stabilised areas, while continuing to address the immediate challenges emerging from conflict in other areas. The Bêkou Trust Fund has made it possible to bridge the grey area between the humanitarian support of ECHO and the restructuring interventions of the EDF, and to implement the nexus approach (humanitarian-development-peace).

C.3. The EU has based its interventions on a strategy of restoring the social contract, which has proved insufficiently sensitive to conflict, thus limiting the achievement of objectives, developing a fitting approach to address the fragility of the State.

The EU has supported the redeployment of the State in the territory and the embryonic reactivation of basic services on the assumption that this would restore the social contract between the State and the population. The specific governance challenges in the CAR were considered, in particular: i) the conflict to monopolise resources at all levels and the endemic problems of corruption and ii) the lack of accountability and professional ethics of service providers. Despite being aware of these problems, the EU (and, more broadly, the international community) has not put in place a public administration reform and anti-corruption strategy that can meet these challenges. The EU has clearly understood the positive potential of women, young people, and the civil society for maintaining social cohesion. However, it has rarely made the link between this transformative potential, effective public policies and the functioning and accountability of basic service providers which is essential for the re-establishment of the social contract.

C.4. EU support has made it possible to keep the State functioning and to re-establish it in an embryonic way in stabilised parts of the territory.

The EU has contributed significantly, arguably more than any other donor, to the preservation of state functions, in particular the central government bodies. Between 2014-2015 it also financed a significant portion of expenditure. With all the aid, the EU has also contributed to the re-establishment of the state presence in the stabilised areas of the country in the form of basic services in the fields of health, education, justice, internal security, civil registry, etc. It is sometimes a symbolic, effective presence with an extension of access to disadvantaged populations, rarely with an adequate level of service quality but, nevertheless, a presence. Budget support has contributed to macroeconomic stabilisation and has resulted in some improvements, albeit limited, in public finance management.

C.5. EU support has contributed to rural resilience by boosting productive capital and rural organisations.

The support provided under the Bêkou Fund has contributed to the reconstitution of the productive capital of smallholders and to the strengthening of advisory support organisations and producers, of rural sectors and rural finance. Access to water and sanitation has also improved in targeted areas. The sustainability of these improvements is uncertain for two reasons: on the one hand, the weak presence of the State and the absence of sectoral governance of rural development makes it impossible to ensure a continued supply of production; on the other hand, security challenges persist and can undermine the results obtained at any time. In terms of rural development, the EU and other technical and financial

partners have not paid sufficient attention to the macro dimensions of the challenges. Coordination with partners has also been weak. It is only in the area of management of the environment and protected areas that this aspect has been effectively addressed.

C.6. EU support has helped resolve local disputes and reduce intra-community tensions amid unfinished national reconciliation.

The conflict resolution mechanisms supported at local level have helped to reduce tensions generated by local disputes. The effectiveness demonstrated in bringing armed groups together around the APPR negotiating table has not been sufficient to ensure their compliance with the Accord. Indeed, the frequent violations of the APPR by armed groups and the persistent clashes in several regions show that the attempt to transform the military conflict between the government and armed groups into a non-violent political conflict has not happened in the CAR. In addition, the EU's influence on the pace of progress of transitional justice and security system reform processes has proved to be limited by the inadequacy of certain strategic choices with the absorption capacities of implementation partners and the national partner. The transitional justice system is still in progress and the added value of support for the Special Criminal Court (SCC) in the repression of serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law has remained limited throughout the time period under evaluation.

C.7. EU support has enabled localised progress in restoring the rule of law in a context where political-military power relations prevail in most regions of the territory.

At national level, peace negotiations and agreements as well as demobilisation and disarmament attempts have succeeded, whilst armed groups have continued to multiply and prosper. Even in this context of unachieved peace, the EU support for the re-establishment of judicial services has made it possible to improve practice and make localised progress in the redeployment of the criminal justice system. The consultation framework agreements between legal stakeholders and those of traditional and customary justice have made it possible to make progress in access to justice. A slight improvement in the perception of security and the presence of the Internal Security Forces and the Central African Armed Forces was recorded in the evaluation period (until 2019). However, gains can be lost overnight, and people in two-thirds of the country can be held hostage by armed groups.

C.8. The gender mainstreaming strategy still lacks the consistency to ensure the sustainability of results and the development of their transformative potential.

The mainstreaming of the gender dimension in all interventions appears more systematic from 2018 onwards, despite lacking an integrated strategy to ensure its consistency. The EU has contributed to greater visibility of Central African women's organisations in community and electoral reconciliation processes and has promoted the localisation and extension of socio-economic and protection initiatives in favour of women. In interventions for rural resilience, gender mainstreaming efforts have been focused on economic empowerment, with insufficient attention given to the additional workload on women and their ability to influence decisions relating to their own lives and within the context of household management. Progress in knowledge of the law, legal procedures, the phenomenon of GBV and legal assistance still remains very localised and has no real impact on women's access to justice or on inequalities or discriminatory behaviour within family, community and state institutions.

C.9. The diversification of cooperation instruments has improved the outreach to the population while highlighting a persistent need for sectoral structuring and overall coherence.

The EU has adopted an approach of growing diversification of its cooperation instruments while retaining a large number of areas of intervention. In doing so, the choice was to prioritise certain

instruments in each sector. The EU has not developed in all intervention sectors the complementary use of its instruments, within the framework of a sectoral approach, to strengthen both the central structures of the State and local communities/civil society. The lack of a results framework at the level of long-term effects aligned with the RCPCA has been a weakness in the implementation of the sectoral approach. In addition, intervening in a wide range of sectors has reduced the possibility of furthering intervention in each sector.

C.10. Internal coordination has been effective while the investment in human resources has not matched the ambitions of the cooperation strategy and the growing ambitions of the integrated approach.

The EU has strengthened the collaboration between its services and the synergies between diplomacy and development cooperation throughout the evaluation period. To set up and manage its instruments in a coherent and strategic way, the EU has created a coordination and consultation mechanism. The Country Team (in which the EEAS, DG INTPA, FPI, DG ECHO and the Delegation participate), has proven able to provide an integrated response to the Central African crisis in line with the evolution of the context. Despite the professionalism and adaptability demonstrated by the staff present in the Delegation, good internal coordination does not hide the reality of insufficient investment in human resources for the EUD, both in quantitative terms and in terms of covering the various expertise required in light of growing ambitions and the diversification of instruments within the framework of the integrated approach.

C.11. The division of labour between the EU and Member States has been insufficient.

Within the framework of the Bêkou Fund, the provision of the contributions of France, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany, as well as Switzerland, represented a step forward in terms of the involvement of Member States in the response to the Central African crisis. However, coordination with Member States has not developed much at the strategic level, neither within the framework of the Bêkou Fund, where discussions have remained rather formal, nor at the level of the integrated approach to the Central African crisis. The lack of division of labour between the EU and its Member States (also linked to a low level of investment in the CAR) combined with inefficient and dispersed donor coordination and immense needs in all areas, has complicated the EU's efforts to concentrate its support, forcing it to remain present in a large number of sectors.

Recommendations



R.1. Even in the current situation of a deteriorating security situation in the CAR and in the face of the challenges of the implementation of the APPR⁵, it is important that the EU continues to strategically use its various instruments, in addition to diplomatic activity to promote and strengthen national reconciliation, justice, good governance and inclusiveness for lasting peace.

R.2. In order to promote the re-establishment of the social contract between the State and the population, the EU should pay more attention to improving the quality of services provided by the State (health, education, justice, internal security, civil registry, etc.) and the fairness with which they are offered to the population and to the most vulnerable groups, by strengthening its support in the fight against corruption at all levels that undermines the confidence of the population in service providers and weakens the legitimacy of the state.

⁵ Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (APPR) signed in Bangui on 6 February 2019 by the Government and 14 armed groups.

R.3. In view of the macroeconomic fragility which persists in the CAR, it is recommended that the "State and Resilience Building Contract" instrument maintains an important place in EU cooperation. At the same time, this instrument should be more focused on macroeconomic stabilisation and more budget support should be devoted to sector reform performance contracts.

R.4. In order to limit the negative impacts of the conflict on the population and promote its resilience in a situation of prolonged instability, the EU should capitalise on the experience acquired from the Bêkou Fund in the implementation of the humanitarian-development-peace triple Nexus, continue to strengthen coordination between European services and involve international partners to optimise the overall impact of EU support on territorial inequalities.

R.5. In order to promote the country's economic recovery, the EU should consolidate and scale up the results obtained in strengthening the resilience of rural populations, to promote their sustainability over time with adequate institutional support with a view to structuring the sector and laying the foundations for public-private sector collaboration.

R.6. The interdependencies between the objectives of the fight against impunity, peace consolidation and security require further progress in the synchronisation of interventions in order to capitalise on the gains and limit the risks of unwanted effects.

R.7. In order to ensure a meaningful contribution to a transformative agenda regarding gender relations and conflict in CAR, it is recommended that the EU continues to put the principles of equality and gender mainstreaming at the heart of its support for post-conflict recovery policies and mechanisms.

R.8. In order to increase its efficiency and effectiveness despite limited resources, it is important for the EU to prioritise the intervention sectors where it can be involved over time, with substantial funding and adequate and better synchronised expert input (technical assistants and staff of the EUD), while strengthening coordination with technical and financial partners and seeking more involvement from Member States.

R.9. In order to ensure greater coherence and better complementarity of interventions, the EU could support the government in defining and approving missing sectoral policies, and updating sectoral approaches (supported by the EU), based on a results framework and a monitoring and evaluation system.