State of **SKILLS**



International Labour Organization

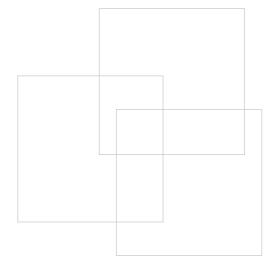






Central African Republic

State of SKILLS



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The socioeconomic context

A landlocked country, the Central African Republic (CAR) is bordered to the east by the Sudan, to the west by Cameroon, to the north by Chad and to the south by the Republic of the Congo. It has a surface area of 623,000 km2 and a population estimated at 5.1 million inhabitants (French Institute for Demographic Studies – INED) in 2016. While the average population density is 8.2 inhabitants per km², this is not uniformly distributed over the territory. The population growth rate is 19.9/1 000 (INED), with an average life expectancy of 52.9 years (INED). The adult literacy rate (15 years and over) is 56.6 per cent (United Nations Development Programme – UNDP). The country is marked by strong institutional instability, linked to the successive and recurrent political crises that CAR has suffered since its independence in 1960.

> This political and institutional instability has had a profound impact on the economic and social sectors, and in particular on the entire educational and vocational training system. It has also had serious repercussions on migratory movements by populations and workers, with the result that CAR is the central African country with the highest number of migrant workers living in neighbouring countries (IOM, 2017).

At the political-economic level, the political and security crisis that the country has endured has exacerbated the already significant economic challenges faced by CAR.

> Landlocked and dependent on the Oubangui-Congo inland waterway and roads to Chad and Cameroon, CAR is one of the poorest least developed countries, with a human development index that ranks it in 188th place out of 188 (UNDP, 2016) and a GDP per capita of USD 335.

In 2014, agriculture and forestry contributed 58 per cent of GDP, and industry – mining (gold and diamonds) and processing (beverages, sugar, cigarettes, sheet metal) – contributed 12 per cent of GDP. Services (banks, trade, the hotel business and telecommunications) account for 30 per cent of GDP. The crisis has strongly affected all sectors, especially in rural areas, where insecurity has disrupted or wiped out socio-economic activities.

At the socio-professional level, the situation is characterized by an unemployment rate that had reached 7.6 per cent in 2003, and which was verging on 10 per cent in 2016.

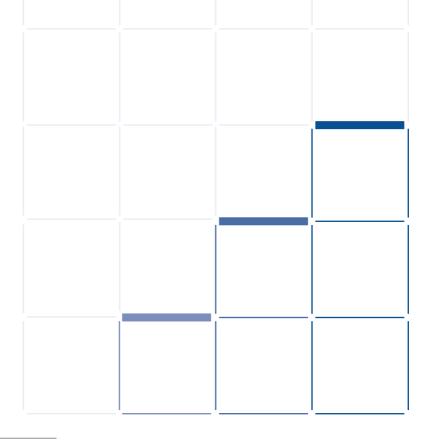
The arrival during this crisis of economic operators from the the mobile telephony sector and international humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has helped to absorb low-skilled labour, which accounts for 34 per cent of the total workforce in the modern private sector. The country's vocational training facilities are in an advanced state of disrepair. The informal sector has also been severely affected by the crisis, and is in need of a support plan to steer its revitalization. In May 2017, 503,600 citizens of the Central African Republic were internally displaced and 481,256 had become refugees (the vast majority in neighbouring countries) (IOM, 2017).

Despite multiple efforts by the Government and development partners, the educational situation remains precarious in several areas.

This is due to the hostilities between warring factions. The violence seen in the recent past has created a climate of tension, affected dynamics between communities and damaged the education system. It is estimated that 48 per cent of young women and 28 per cent of young men aged between 15 and 24 are illiterate in the Central African Republic (UNDP, 2015). It is therefore important to offer alternative education models, including vocational training and literacy programmes. According to the evaluation report of the United Nations system's Education Cluster, enrolment rates declined by 6 per cent between 2012 and 2015 due to the closure of schools. The principal causes of the inadequate functioning of schools include lack of teachers (49 per cent of cases), displacement of populations (31 per cent), destruction of facilities (21 per cent) and insecurity (26 per cent) (Ministry of National Education, 2016).



Development and employment policies



Young people in the Central African Republic face a number of obstacles to entering the labour market, particularly:

- at the personal and social level: i) limited school education; ii) illiteracy; iii) physical and psychological wounds due to experiences of conflict and violence; iv) early family responsibilities; v) social norms that exclude women from productive employment;
- at institutional level: i) lack of education and vocational training, especially in rural areas; ii) high fees for secondary education; iii) the vocational training available does not target young people; iv) vocational training only covers a few limited professions; v) a mismatch between the training offered and the demands of the labour market;
- at **national level:** i) national policies neither target nor directly encourage the young; ii) young people are essentially considered and treated as security problems, labelled as either Anti-balaka or Séléka; iii) limited youth participation in decison-making and policy-making; iv) limited job opportunities in the private sector.

The election of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra in February 2016, and the holding of parliamentary elections, marked a return to the constitutional order in CAR after nearly three years of political transition. The return to the constitutional order and stability is being supported by the international community, and facilitating the intervention of technical and financial partners in helping to develop the employment and vocational training sector.

A National Employment and Vocational Training Policy Framework Document has been drawn up with the assistance of the International Labour Office to support the process of creating jobs and social cohesion: the labour market has been subject to the influence of economic and social behaviour in recent years, exacerbated by the security crisis. A marked feature of this market is that a significant proportion of the labour force works in the informal economy, and is therefore excluded from formal training mechanisms. Indicators relating to employment are negative, in a context where, unlike other countries in the subregion, NGOs are the largest providers of employment. In this situation, the position of women is even more worrying, given their low level of education. Indeed, out of every 100 people without an education, 60 are women. The consequences of the conflict on the labour market and its actors have been and continue to be dramatic, increasing the fragility of a country that is already scarred. Unemployment, underemployment and poverty affect almost the entire working population in CAR, a situation that is compounded by the difficulties of internally and externally displaced persons and refugees.

The Ministry of National Education and Technical Training (MENET) developed and adopted a transition plan for the years 2015 to 2017.

This transition plan aimed to organize a gradual return to the normal conduct of school activities, especially for primary education, and the regular functioning of educational management, enabling the country to resume its path towards development. This plan has produced positive though partial results (especially in large cities), and the lessons learned have formed the basis of the national recovery and peacebuilding plan 2017-2021 (interviews with the director general of vocational training and employment, 2019). Vocational training is an integral component of the national educational system. It should play a special role, particularly as the country emerges from the crisis, for two reasons:

- It represents one of the components of the disarmament and reintegration programmes;
- As support in recovery from the crisis, some partners are proposing employment intensive investment programmes. Vocational training is considered a sector that can provide qualifications to the workforce mobilized through this approach, or to some members of it, and help to reduce youth unemployment and insecurity in the country.

A national strategy for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is being developed with the aim of making a single framework for action available and ensuring that interventions will be harmonized by key actors in the sector. "Everyone has the right to access sources of knowledge. The State guarantees to all citizens access to instruction, culture and vocational training."







– Constitution of the Central African Republic

Article 7

The Central African Republic skills system

Several bodies have been set up to handle issues of employment and vocational training in CAR, but the challenge of rationalizing the operations of all these different structures remains. The TVET governance system involves three levels: Higher Council of Employment and Vocational Training, the Permanent Council of Administrative Reform and the Central African Agency for Vocational Training and Employment (ACFPE).

Vocational training in the Central African Republic is organized in public and private vocational training centres, as well as onthe-job. The system does not operate under a coherent framework due to the lack of coordination between public and private structures. Given the security vacuum that resulted from the conflicts and the absence of the State, national and international NGOs are currently assuming responsibility for providing access to vocational training and employment opportunities. At present, there are only nine public sector TVET facilities, including just one technical high school, one women's technical college and one arts and crafts school, all located in the capital. For vocational training, the country has six centres, in Mbaïki, Berbérati, Bozoum, Bossangoa and Bambari. However, these structures exist in name only, due to the collateral effects of the March 2013 crisis. The public sector TEVT structures operate in difficult conditions and suffer from lack of didactic equipment and qualified trainers.

In the private sector, there are 237 vocational training centres in the country as a whole, of which 15 belong to NGOs and 25 are no longer operating, due to lack of resources. The city of Bangui alone has 105 vocational training centres.

In the provinces, the training provided by these centres focuses on subsistence farming, cash crop production, horticulture and livestock keeping. By contrast, in Bangui, the tertiary sector predominates (accounting, management, information technology, office administration), followed by the secondary sector (mechanics, electricity, electromechanics, craftsmanship). The primary sector is inexistent (UNDP, 2015). There is a tendency within the administration to discriminate against pupils on the basis of their nationality. This is reflected in the practice of increasing subscription fees for children from migrant households (according to one interview at the school of arts). As regards teachers and trainers, the data collected reveal a clear imbalance to the detriment of technical instruction. Indeed, only 125 teaching staff are working in this sector, compared with 1,699 in secondary general education, or just 1.67 per cent of staff, which is very marginal (Central African Republic, 2014).

As far as financing is concerned, vocational training is mainly funded by private sector companies. These have to pay a tax of 2 per cent of their payroll, which is paid directly into the ACFPE budget.

Social dialogue is reflected in the desire of the Government to involve social partners in developing national policy on vocational training. In addition, the ACFPE board of directors is made up of five members as follows: two private sector representatives, two labour union representatives, and one Government representative.

Through their representatives on the ACFPE board of directors, the social partners participate and play a role in guiding and monitoring the training programmes of this agency. The main challenges that they face concern conducting vocational training that aligns with international standards. For this reason, it is important not only to equip the training centres, but also to increase the number of trainers and retrain those already in service, so as to improve their knowledge and skills. Another challenge is to increase public funding of vocational training. In the National Employment and Vocational Training Policy Framework Document, the national authorities explicitly recognize that skills development in all its forms, especially for young people, is of critical importance. Such development generates the following benefits:

- it provides qualifications for youth who have often had little or no schooling, no skills training, and are victims of vulnerability and poverty;
- it helps to promote socio-professional integration into the labour market for these young people, through their recruitment into businesses or the creation of self-employment and the launching of individual entrepreneurial activities;
- it reduces the tendency for violence and insecurity in a social context where youth is the target population for armed groups; and
- it promotes the integration of migrant families into communities, many of whom have lived in the country since colonial times and wish to remain in CAR.



Skills anticipation

The country does not have a mechanism for anticipating needs in terms of skills and related occupations, which would make it possible to prepare for the jobs of the future, in close partnership with the private sector. The University of Bangui is the sole institution authorized to organize competitive examinations for technical and vocational instructors and the awarding of diplomas. This system, set in place several years ago, helps to ensure better control of the quality of diplomas awarded to trainees.

Lack of reliable statistical data makes it impossible to have an accurate picture of the situation regarding decent work in the country. However, taking into account the challenges and trends observed both at the level of estimated unemployment and education, and at the level of skills development and training needs, it is evident that the triggers of fragility from which CAR is suffering are at once exogenous (the external military threat, internal displaced persons) and endogenous (weak democratic governance and dysfunctional public institutions, socio-political crises, the activities of armed groups, movement of populations, inequalities and socio-economic marginalization). The developments observed in these indicators go some way towards explaining the tensions seen in the labour market, which are jeopardizing the real chances of stability and lasting peace for CAR.

The ACFPE has its own system of skills monitoring and evaluation. On a regular basis, it organizes checks on companies and skills evaluations for their staff. Based on these evaluations, it proposes refresher courses and training included in an annual catalogue, in an effort to strengthen the capacities of companies' human resources.



Skills development

Initial vocational training is conducted by a range of public and private facilities. Some structures have the objective of delivering skills development through technical education and initial vocational training. This is true of the technical high school, women's technical college and the arts and crafts school, all three of which are located in the capital. The training supplied focuses on sectors such as mechanics, carpentry, electricity, masonry, screen printing, jewellery-making, sewing, basketwork, etc. It involves two stages – college, where training lasts three years, and high school, where training covers the same time scale. The trainees are mainly from the Central African Republic, but, according to interviews with the management of these facilities, some are drawn from migrant families originating in Cameroon, Chad, the Republic of the Congo and West Africa. There does not appear to be any discrimination between trainees based on their origin, although within the ministry there is a move to charge different enrolment fees, depending on nationality. In fact, such an approach depends on the management of the establishment since, at the educational administration level, children of migrants must pay a higher registration fee (according to an interviews with the management of the arts school).

Given demographic development and rapid urbanization, these structures are facing strong demand, but have only limited capacities. At the technical high school, for example, the number of registered students wanting to enrol in the first level of the certificate of professional competence (CPC) is more than 700, when there is capacity for only 45 pupils. This leads to overcrowded classrooms and has a negative impact on theory-based training, and particularly on practical training.

Another problem is inadequate equipment and material suitable for the practical exercises. Lastly, these structures have poorly qualified trainers, who deserve to have the advantage of advanced training, so as to strengthen their capacities and be able to align their courses with developments in technology and scientific knowledge.

Skills recognition and quality assurance

The evaluation of skills and abilities and their legal recognition through the national formal system is conducted by organizing exams and entrance tests, and delivering a diploma at the end of the course. In CAR, the system of recognition and delivering diplomas is centralized through the University of Bangui following the ending of the accreditation system. This centralized system was introduced in the 2000s after cases of laxity, patronage and corruption were observed in the case of some diplomas that were awarded by the private education sector. To address this failure, the Government decided to centralize and organize state exams and to deliver diplomas that would be recognized in the labour market by both the public and private sectors. These diplomas are aligned with international standards and reflect the real abilities of the trainees. In addition, the ACFPE delivers certificates of competency to trainees who have completed a short vocational training course.



Social inclusion

At the institutional level, the National Employment and Vocational Training Policy Framework Document (PNEFP) adopted in 2016 has identified social inclusion of vulnerable groups as one of its principles. The groups targeted are women and men seeking employment and/or better vocational training, young men and women with no training or poor qualifications, people living with disabilities, demobilized soldiers, the displaced, citizens of of the Central African Republic who have fled their country and wish to return, members of the diaspora and the long-term unemployed (PNEFP, p. 62).

Several initiatives were launched recently with the aim of improving vocational training and youth employment and reducing their state of precariousness. With this goal in mind, German NGO Welt Hunger Hilfe (WHH) has set up a training facility called: "Agricultural vocational training for unemployed youth and young displaced persons in the region of Bangui, prefecture Ombella Mpoko, CAR".

In a general sense, this is an attempt to help establish social and financial stability for unemployed youth and young internally displaced persons (IDPs), so as to reduce migration and crime. More specifically, the training aims to: i) open up new horizons for youth and those who have lost interest in joining armed criminal groups; ii) significantly improve the very poor level of education and training in theory and practice; and iii) strengthen the capacities of young graduates to earn their own living by facilitating their socio-professional integration (Krock, 2018). Other social inclusion initiatives, undertaken by the French Development Agency (AFD) and the French Embassy in CAR, are specifically targeting young people faced with unemployment and vulnerability.



Lifelong learning

Placed under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Protection, the ACFPE is the public service for employment and vocational training in CAR, and conducts in-company training based on demand from employers or the results of the human resource surveys that it carries out in the public and private sectors.

A technical committee tasked with "formulating benchmarks for skills-based and alternation-based learning" was set in place in 2016. Work to develop these benchmarks started in 2017 following confirmation through a mapping study of occcupations and an update of the list of vocational training providers for the 30 occcupations identified during the prospective study. The ACFPE began adopting the benchmarks in 2019. The study of occcupations has made it possible to update the inventory of business units and vocational training centres. The prevailing selection criterion was the demand expressed by companies during surveys conducted by the ACFPE. The committee accurately selected the first ten occcupations for training through apprenticeship, skills-based training and alternation in the pre-pilot phase in Bangui and its suburbs.



Key challenges

Inadequate framework for intervention.

Have a single intervention framework document with a plan of action to facilitate guidance of the sector and harmonize the interventions of actors: the sectoral strategy of vocational training. Steering the TVET system is conducted by several entities, and besides the informal sector, each one individually coordinates its activities. The interministerial commission set in place for this purpose did not survive the leadership crisis and lack of funding for its operations. The creation of the Ministry of Technical and Vocational Education (ETP) and the Ministry of Vocational Training, Trades and Crafts has been unable to address this challenge, due to a misinterpretation of the texts that led to their establishment. Indeed, their coordination is proving a bottleneck, exacerbated by the lack of their own information system. Neither the activities, nor the areas of intervention and financial contributions are coordinated, leading to unintentional overlapping.

2 Weak mechanism for anticipating skills.

There is a need to improve the system for anticipating demand, in close collaboration with the private sector, and this should be based on the priority needs of the country's economy. The Central African Republic has undergone several reforms, including an update of the list of occupations (which guides the creation of sectors). However, due to lack of regular updates, some sectors are outdated, and others are not organized (innovative ocupations). In addition, the training remains more theory-based than practical. Notwithstanding the review of some programmes and benchmarks in line with the competencybased approach (CBA), the professional practices and internships have not been systematized, making it essential to intensify the efforts undertaken to satisfy the real needs of employers.



Up until the start of the 1980s, the country had a great many infrastructures. But these are now dipalidated and not adapted to disabled people and girls. Water and electricity are seldom available, and nearly 80 per cent of TVET establishments do not have the required workshops, laboratories and materials; most of the equipment is obsolete. There has been little support for efforts to adapt to technological development and make a more suitable learning environment available.

Lack of teaching staff, continuous education and quality assurance.

The number of trainers is limited, and their skills are out of step with advances in techniques and knowledge. There is also a problem with funding for TVET. The lack of any public funds to finance vocational training is a serious limitation.



Following the conflicts, the system for renewing teaching staff has stalled. Teachers who were qualified at the time will soon be entering retirement, and those still working are mostly underqualified, requiring their capacities to be strengthened on a regular basis, despite the lack of any plan for continuous training. There are insufficient numbers of specialized inspectors, and some sectors have none at all, with no common standards, making it difficult to ensure effective monitoring and teacher training, and to control the quality of the teaching. Unless particular attention is paid to this issue, there is a serious risk of compromising both the system and the quality of the training supplied.



Over time, the cycle of educational guidance has made it possible to capitalize on the attributes of the recipients. A number of trainees would be hired by companies at the end of an internship. Now that the guidance system has been abolished, trainees make their own choices. Moroever, the graduating trainees do not have the formal benefit of any professional integration, and there is no monitoring mechanism in place. This makes it difficult to calculate how many trainees have found employment, and to regulate the system.



The Government has signed a new partnership agreement with employers' organizations to involve the business world in training, particularly by offering internships, and involving professionals in training, evaluation and certification. Holding regular evaluations of the partnership will enable the limitations of previous subsectoral conventions to be overcome and to address any shortcomings in collaboration. However, this agreement does not make any reference to the social partners of either party, and these could encourage their respective employers to embark on a win-win partnership.



Learning should be structured so as to facilitate the availability of a qualified national workforce and reduce youth unemployment rates.



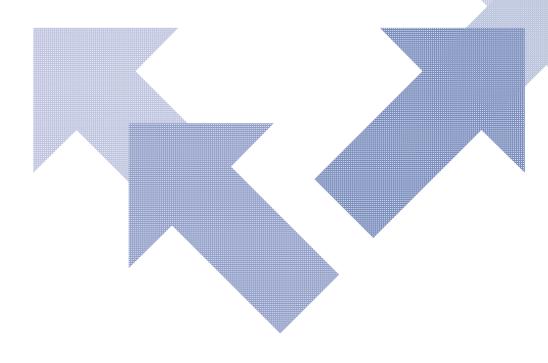
Funding for TVET comes mainly from the private sector through the 2 per cent payroll tax for which businesses in this sector are liable. State funding is negligible and is not clearly discernible in the budget share with other subsectors. Bilateral or multilateral cooperation (official development assistance), as well as that of some development partners, goes some way towards making up TEVT funding. But such efforts are not sufficient to fill the funding gap to ensure effective implementation of the various reforms.

Weak coordination among bodies responsible for operating at the borders.

CAR has nine neighbours and has set up bodies responsible for operating at the borders. However, the lack of coordination among these, together with inadequate financial and human resources and an incomplete or outdated legal framework have led to porous borders, causing insecurity and uncontrolled movements of goods and people at the frontiers. To some extent, this situation has a negative impact on the stability of the country's development. The national system of skills development faces two major challenges. The first consists of improving reception capacities for trainees. Given the country's strong demographic growth, these capacities are clearly inadequate, so much so that classrooms are overcrowded. This situation tends to impair the quality of training and limits the supply of services to national and migrant workers. The second challenge concerns formulating a migration policy, beginning by setting up a database of migrant workers, so as to monitor them and contribute to their socio-professional integration. There is no public body tasked with monitoring migrants and identifying solutions to the socio-professional problems that they encounter.



The way forward



Improve the legal and political framework.

Refine insofaras possible the tasks linked to TVET, to ensure better guidance. These reformist strategies will have the advantage of taking account of inclusive education (equal access to training for migrants, rural workers, women, youth, actors from the informal economy and minorities).



Set in place tools for common benchmarks so as to align all those working in the employment and training sectors: list of jobs and occupations, quality, control and monitoring standards, a national framework for qualifications and certifications (recognition of prior learning), integration and a monitoring mechanism for leavers.

3 Support the learning system.

Support the structuring of the crafts sector, which plays a predominant role in the economy of the Central African Republic, and help set up resource centres and application centres (to compensate for the lack of equipment of existing training facilities), so as to encourage a system of initial learning, at the workplace or as lifelong learning.



Especially from the productive private sector in supplying, evaluating, certifying and financing training, from central to local level, in the formal, non-formal and informal sectors. To do this, the Government will need to improve the business climate so as to encourage companies to increase investments that take account of skills anticipation, with a view to satisfying their real skills requirements and maintaining a win-win partnership.

5 Improve finance mechanisms.

Develop sustainable mechanisms to finance vocational training to bridge the gap left by the State. For example, devise innovative sources of finance to meet the growing needs of technical instruction and vocational training, by forging targeted partnerships with big companies.



Set in place an observatory for vocational training and employment, tasked with monitoring developments in the labour market, including the employment of migrant workers, and their training needs.





Conduct an exhaustive study to identify the future needs of the labour market, including skills, as well as diversification of the priority sectors of the national economy for its development, both in innovative areas and international trade, with a view to selected migration (country of origin and destination).



(The Economic Community of Central African States - ECCAS; Central African Economic and Monetary Community – CEMAC in skills development for migrant workers, which could scale up a form of work integration to regional level and ensure concrete application of the free movement of people and workers.

10 Build new technical high schools.

With the aim of relieving pressure on the one in Bangui, which can no longer supply the demand for training for the whole country.



Including, upgrading programmes on industrial subjects, so as to improve the quality of TVET.



On migrant workers, so as to better manage this sector of the community.



By increasing its staffing levels and budget and by expanding the organization to cover all the country's regions. The Government should provide additional support, for this agency's budget is entirely funded by businesses.



Especially those living in Europe, to form networks that can facilitate their return to their home countries, as well as investments.

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Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

