

Central African Republic

Geography

Location: Central Africa, north of Zaire

Area:

total area: 622,980 sq km

land area: 622,980 sq km

Land boundaries: total 5,203 km, Cameroon 797 km, Chad 1,197 km, Congo 467 km, Sudan 1,165 km, Zaire 1,577 km

Coastline: 0 km (landlocked)

Maritime claims: none; landlocked

Climate: tropical; hot, dry winters; mild to hot, wet summers

Terrain: vast, flat to rolling, monotonous plateau; scattered hills in northeast and southwest

Natural resources: diamonds, uranium, timber, gold, oil

Land use:

arable land: 3%

permanent crops: 0%

meadows and pastures: 5%

forest and woodland: 64%

other: 28%

Irrigated land: NA sq km

Environment:

current issues: tap water is not potable; poaching has diminished reputation as one of last great wildlife refuges; desertification

natural hazards: hot, dry, dusty harmattan winds affect northern areas; floods are common

Note: landlocked; almost the precise center of Africa

People

Population: 3,209,759 (July 1995 est.)

Age structure:

0-14 years: 43% (female 690,290; male 694,153)

15-64 years: 53% (female 886,421; male 825,268)

65 years and over: 4% (female 64,846; male 48,781) (July 1995 est.)

Population growth rate: 2.1% (1995 est.)

Birth rate: 41.84 births/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Death rate: 20.89 deaths/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Net migration rate: 0 migrant(s)/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Infant mortality rate: 135.6 deaths/1,000 live births (1995 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:

total population: 42.15 years

male: 40.68 years

female: 43.67 years (1995 est.)

Total fertility rate: 5.37 children born/woman (1995 est.)

Nationality:

noun: Central African(s)

adjective: Central African

Ethnic divisions: Baya 34%, Banda 27%, Sara 10%, Mandjia 21%, Mboum 4%, M'Baka 4%, Europeans 6,500 (including 3,600 French)

Religions: indigenous beliefs 24%, Protestant 25%, Roman Catholic 25%, Muslim 15%, other 11%

note: animistic beliefs and practices strongly influence the Christian majority

Languages: French (official), Sangho (lingua franca and national language), Arabic, Hunsu, Swahili

Literacy: age 15 and over can read and write (1990 est.)

total population: 38%

male: 52%

female: 25%

Government

Names:

conventional long form: Central African Republic

conventional short form: none

local long form: Republique Centrafricaine

local short form: none

former: Central African Empire

Abbreviation: CAR

Capital: Bangui

Independence: 13 August 1960 (from France)

National holiday: National Day, 1 December (1958) (proclamation of the republic)

Constitution: 21 November 1986

Legal system: based on French law

Suffrage: 21 years of age; universal

Flag: four equal horizontal bands of blue (top), white, green, and yellow with a vertical red band in center; there is a yellow five-pointed star on the hoist side of the blue band

Economy

Overview: Subsistence agriculture, together with forestry, remains the backbone of the CAR economy, with more than 70% of the population living in outlying areas. The agricultural sector generates about half of GDP. Timber has accounted for about 26% of export earnings and the diamond industry for 54%. Important constraints to economic development include the CAR's landlocked position, a poor transportation system, a largely unskilled work force, and a legacy of misdirected macroeconomic policies. A major plus is the large forest reserves, which the government is moving to protect from overexploitation.

Industries: diamond mining, sawmills, breweries, textiles, footwear, assembly of bicycles and motorcycles

Agriculture: self-sufficient in food production except for grain; commercial crops - cotton, coffee, tobacco, timber; food crops - manioc, yams, millet, corn, bananas

Transportation

Railroads: 0 km

Highways:
total: 22,000 km

Inland waterways: 800 km; traditional trade carried on by means of shallow-draft dugouts; Oubangui is the most important river

Ports: Bangui, Nola

Airports:
total: 61

Defence Forces

Branches: Central African Army (includes Republican Guard), Air Force, National Gendarmerie, Police Force