



## COI QUERY

Country of Origin/Topic	Cameroon
Question(s)	Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Most common forms of SGBV: sexual violence, domestic violence, trafficking, traditional harmful practices</li><li>- Legal framework (national legislation and international instruments) and implementation</li><li>- State actors of protection</li><li>- Social perception and non-state actors of protection</li></ul>
Date of completion	5 June 2019
Query Code	Q11
Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	

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*The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities. The answer was finalised on the 5 June 2019. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.*



## COI QUERY RESPONSE

### 1. Preliminary remarks: general security and humanitarian situation in Cameroon

As of 2019, the humanitarian situation in Cameroon is described as increasingly fragile.<sup>1</sup> The country is experiencing three distinct humanitarian and protection crisis, which are affecting eight out of ten regions in the country.<sup>2</sup>

In May 2019, UN OCHA reported that, due to violence and insecurity, around 4.3 million people are in need of emergency assistance, a 30 % increase compared to 2018. The escalation of violence in several regions of the country have particularly affected women and children, with gender based violence sharply increasing, as of May 2019. Reportedly, women and girls are more than ever at risks of being victims of domestic violence, sexual and economic exploitation, abduction, separation, forced recruitment, arbitrary detention.<sup>3</sup>

The situation in the Anglophone North-West and South-West regions of the country is considered to be of particular concern,<sup>4</sup> as socio-political tensions started in 2016 have escalated, and the crisis<sup>5</sup> has increasingly developed into armed conflict.<sup>6</sup> The violence has uprooted 444 000 people from their homes and forced over 32 000 to seek refuge in neighbouring Nigeria, as of February 2019.<sup>7</sup> Serious human rights violations and abuses, including violence against women, have been committed in these regions by government forces and Anglophone separatists.<sup>8</sup>

In the Lake Chad Basin region in the Far North, Cameroon is estimated to be the second most affected country by the Boko Haram crisis.<sup>9</sup> The security situation in this region continues to deteriorate with an increase of violence in the last quarter of 2018.<sup>10</sup>

A protracted humanitarian crisis is also unfolding in Cameroon due to the large influx of refugees from Central African Republic (CAR), especially in the East and Adamaoua regions, and from Nigeria, in the Far-North region.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ECHO, Cameroon Factsheet, 25 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> UN OCHA, Cameroon: Humanitarian Response Plan 2019 Summary (January 2019), 21 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>3</sup> UN OCHA, Gender-based violence: Financial independence and economic empowerment key to survivors' recovery, 17 May 2019, [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> UN OCHA, Cameroon: Humanitarian Response Plan 2019 Summary (January 2019), 21 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the so-called Anglophone crisis in the North-West and South-West regions, see EASO COI Query Response, Cameroon: Information on the Anglophone crisis, 30 January 2018, [url](#)

<sup>6</sup> UN OCHA, Cameroon: North-West and South-West Situation Report No. 3, 31 January 2019, , [url](#); USDOS, Cameroon 2018 Human Rights Report, 13 March 2019, [url](#) p. 2

<sup>7</sup> UN OCHA, Cameroon: North-West and South-West Situation Report No. 4, 28 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> USDOS, Cameroon 2018 Human Rights Report, 13 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> UN OCHA, Cameroon: Humanitarian Response Plan 2019 Summary (January 2019), 21 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> UN OCHA, Cameroon: Humanitarian Response Plan 2019 Summary (January 2019), 21 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> ECHO, Cameroon Factsheet, 25 January 2019, [url](#); UN OCHA, Cameroon: Humanitarian Response Plan 2019 Summary (January 2019), 21 February 2019, [url](#)

## **2. Most common forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), in particular: sexual violence, domestic violence, trafficking, traditional harmful practices**

Violence against women, including rape, domestic violence and harmful practices – such as breast ironing and female genital mutilation - has been a widespread issue in Cameroon.<sup>12</sup>

### **2.1. Sexual and domestic violence**

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) expressed serious concern over the prevalence of sexual violence in the country, including against very young children. The same source reported that over 22% of girls aged 15-19 have experienced sexual violence, particularly within the context of child marriage.<sup>13</sup> Marital rape is one of the most prevalent forms of domestic violence in Cameroon.<sup>14</sup> An article by Reuters, in March 2019, informed about the existence of a television show that demonstrates how to physically abuse wives. The article reported that some civil society groups have voiced their indignation, calling for an end to impunity over violence against women.<sup>15</sup>

In the Anglophone North-West and South-West Regions, populations affected by the armed conflict, especially women and girls, have experienced sexual violence and rape and are in need of urgent medical and psycho-social assistance.<sup>16</sup> In these regions, persons linked to both the government and separatists have reportedly perpetrated rape and sexual abuses.<sup>17</sup> The UN also stated that SGBV victims in the North-West and South-West Regions, especially those in the remote areas, do not have access to any form of GBV services and are at risk of HIV, STIs, mental health issues as well as unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions.<sup>18</sup>

In the Far North Cameroon, human rights abuses by Boko Haram and its ISIL-adhering faction, IS in West Africa (IS-WA),<sup>19</sup> include violence against civilians, particularly women and children, abductions, child, early and forced marriage, rape, sexual slavery and other sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>20</sup>

### **2.2. Trafficking**

Cameroon is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. The 2018 USDOS report explained that Cameroonian women fall victim to sex trafficking or domestic servitude by applying for jobs as domestic workers in the Middle East through fraudulent labor brokers. The trafficking networks usually consist of local community members, including religious leaders and former trafficking victims. The same source informed that these networks advertise jobs on the internet and other media, recruit and sell Cameroonians directly to families as domestic servants.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Advocates for Human Rights, Cameroon: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 57th Session, 24 January 2014, [url](#) p. 1

<sup>13</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Cameroon CRC/C/CMR/CO/3-5, 06 July 2017, [url](#)

<sup>14</sup> Advocates for Human Rights, Cameroon: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 57th Session, 24 January 2014, [url](#) p. 4

<sup>15</sup> Reuters, 'Grab her by the neck' - TV show on how to abuse women sparks fury in Cameroon - Reuters, 07 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> UN OCHA, Cameroon: North-West and South-West Situation Report No. 4, 28 February 2019, [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> USDOS, Cameroon 2018 Human Rights Report, 13 March 2019, [url](#) p. 5

<sup>18</sup> UN OCHA, Cameroon: North-West and South-West Situation Report No. 3, 31 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>19</sup> EASO, Country of Origin Information Report Nigeria: Security Situation, November 2018, [url](#)

<sup>20</sup> UN Security Council, Security Council resolution 2349 (2017) on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin region S/RES/2349, 31 March 2017, [url](#)

<sup>21</sup> USDOS, 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report, 28 June 2018, [url](#) pp. 128-129

### 2.3. Traditional harmful practices

The 2014 report by the Advocates for Human Rights stated that harmful practices, including breast ironing and female genital mutilation (FGM), occur almost in all provinces and across ethnic and religious groups.<sup>22</sup> The practice of breast ironing or also 'flattening' consists in using an object 'to massage, pound, or press the breasts flat.'<sup>23</sup> A report published in 2011 by Gender Empowerment and Development (GeED) noted that such practice in Cameroon had been silenced for long time. According to the same source, 24 % of women as young as the age of nine are affected by this practice in all 10 of Cameroon's provinces, regardless of location, religion, or ethnicity. Breast ironing was originally done by women in the belief that this will improve a mother's breast milk. However, it has eventually become a practice performed on girls who show signs of puberty in an attempt to protect them from sexual harassment and rape, prevent early pregnancy, or to allow girls to continue education rather than being forced into early marriage.<sup>24</sup>

In 2014, the UN stated that the practice of breast ironing is 'declining to the point of disappearing entirely' thanks to awareness-raising, training and information activities.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, articles in the media have exposed the persistence of this dangerous practice in Cameroon, as well as in other West African countries.<sup>26</sup> In March 2019, The Guardian highlighted the challenges of eradicating the harmful practice of breast ironing in West Africa, deemed as 'extremely secretive', noting that there is no official data on how widespread it is. The same source mentioned the testimony of a senior Cameroonian gynaecologist who told to have dealt with a case in which a 12-year-old girl died after being subject to breast ironing with a stone.<sup>27</sup>

The prevalence of FGM in Cameroon is very low across all regions and population groups.<sup>28</sup> The latest available data on the prevalence of FGM dates back to 2004 and suggests that the practice occurs at a small scale (1.4%), with the highest prevalence in the Far North (5.4%) and among the Arabe-Choa/Peulh/Maoussa/Kanuri ethnic groups (12.7%). FGM is more prevalent among women who practice Islam (5.8%) than among women of other religions, and among women who live in rural areas (2.1%) than among those who live in urban areas (0.9%).<sup>29</sup> According to the UN, a series of measures adopted by the government and aimed at eradicating FGM have contributed to a reduction of this practice in Cameroon.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Advocates for Human Rights, Cameroon: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 57th Session, 24 January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> Feinstein International Center, Understanding Breast Flattening - A Field Study in Bafut, Cameroon, 14 May 2012, [url](#) p. 1

<sup>24</sup> Gender Empowerment and Development, Breast Ironing as a harmful traditional practice in Cameroon, 24 August 2011, [url](#) pp. 4-6

<sup>25</sup> UN Committee against Torture, Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 19 of the Convention pursuant to the optional reporting procedure, Fifth periodic reports of States parties due in 2014 : Cameroon, CAT/C/CMR/5, 03 November 2016, [url](#)

<sup>26</sup> Guardian, Breast-ironing: victims urge stronger action to root out dangerous custom, 04 March 2019, [url](#); Global Citizen, The Sad Reason Mothers in Cameroon Are 'Ironing' Their Daughters' Breasts, 6 April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>27</sup> Guardian, Breast-ironing: victims urge stronger action to root out dangerous custom, 4 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>28</sup> UNICEF, Cameroon: Statistical profile on female genital mutilation, Updated January 2019, [url](#); 28 Too Many, Cameroon - FGM Key Findings, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> Institut National de la Statistique (INS) et ORC Macro, Cameroun Enquête Démographique et de Santé 2004, [url](#) p. 236, p. 10

<sup>30</sup> UN Committee against Torture, Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 19 of the Convention pursuant to the optional reporting procedure, Fifth periodic reports of States parties due in 2014 : Cameroon, CAT/C/CMR/5, 03 November 2016, [url](#)

### 3. Legal framework (national legislation and international instruments) and implementation

Cameroon ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the so-called Maputo Protocol) in 2012.<sup>31</sup>

The Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon (1996), as amended in 2008, does not explicitly refer to violence against women, harmful practices or FGM. The Preamble states, however, that 'every person has a right to life, to physical and moral integrity and to humane treatment in all circumstances. Under no circumstances shall any person be subjected to torture, to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment'.<sup>32</sup> There is no national legislation in Cameroon comprehensively addressing violence against women. However, the country has passed some laws addressing different forms of violence against women, such as rape, sexual harassment, and genital mutilation. In 2012, the government drafted a National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women, established a hotline for victim support and reporting cases, and implemented awareness-raising activities at the national and local levels.<sup>33</sup>

In practice, violence against women is highly prevalent throughout the country, in large part due to lack of adequate legislation and systematic action to eradicate stereotypes and harmful practices against women.<sup>34</sup>

#### 3.1. Sexual and Domestic violence

Rape is prohibited under the Penal Code and punishable by 5 to 10 years of imprisonment.<sup>35</sup> There is no legislation that prohibits domestic violence in Cameroon, nor is spousal rape specifically addressed in the Penal Code.<sup>36</sup> The 2016 amended Penal Code introduced sections providing that a rapist cannot be exonerated by marrying his victim, criminalising sexual harassment with imprisonment where the victim is a minor and considering as an aggravating factor where the perpetrator has educational authority over the victim.<sup>37</sup>

In practice, the law is not effectively enforced, as cases of rape are often not investigated and incidents rarely reported.<sup>38</sup> The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) concluded that legislation 'does not provide full protection for all victims of violence, including sexual violence, or guarantee their

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<sup>31</sup> ACHPR, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa Legal Instruments, 11 July 2003, [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> Cameroon, Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon - Law No. 96-06 of 18 January 1996 to amend the Constitution of 2 June 1972, [url](#)

<sup>33</sup> OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index, Country Profile: Cameroon, 2019, [url](#)

<sup>34</sup> OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index, Country Profile: Cameroon, 2019, [url](#)

<sup>35</sup> Cameroon, Penal Code - n° 67/LF/1, 12 June 1967, Amended 12 July 2016, [url](#); USDOS, Cameroon 2018 Human Rights Report, 13 March 2019, [url](#) p. 29

<sup>36</sup> OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index, Country Profile: Cameroon, 2019, [url](#)

<sup>37</sup> Cameroon, Penal Code - n° 67/LF/1, 12 June 1967, Amended 12 July 2016, [url](#); USDOS, Cameroon 2018 Human Rights Report, 13 March 2019, [url](#); UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Cameroon CRC/C/CMR/CO/3-5, 06 July 2017, [url](#)

<sup>38</sup> USDOS, Cameroon 2018 Human Rights Report, 13 March 2019, [url](#) p. 29

compensation or rehabilitation'.<sup>39</sup> As a result, a high prevalence of domestic violence, sexual assault and rape, as well as a culture of impunity persist across all regions in the country.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2. Trafficking

In 2011, Cameroon enacted an anti-trafficking law criminalising all forms of labor trafficking and some forms of sex trafficking. The 2018 USDOS observed that the law is, however, inconsistent with international legal standards. It requires demonstration of threat, fraud, deception, force, or other forms of coercion to constitute a child sex trafficking offense, and therefore did not criminalise all forms of child sex trafficking. A legislation drafted in 2012 aimed at correcting inconsistencies with international law has yet to be approved.<sup>41</sup> Despite increasing efforts by the government to eradicate trafficking, Cameroon does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.3. Traditional harmful practices

The Cameroonian law does not explicitly criminalise the practice of breast ironing.<sup>43</sup> Law No. 2016/007 of 12 July 2016, commonly known as the 'Penal Code' of the Republic of Cameroon, contains a section specifically referring to the criminalisation and prohibition of 'genital mutilation'.<sup>44</sup> However, the law lacks a clear definition of FGM and it does not criminalise aiding and abetting FGM nor failure to report the practice.<sup>45</sup>

## 4. State actors of protection

### 4.1. Sexual and Domestic violence

Various sources stated that a culture of impunity persist across the country towards violence against women.<sup>46</sup> The 2018 USDOS report informed that police and judges rarely investigated or prosecuted rape cases, and victims often did not report them.<sup>47</sup> It is reported that some judges see domestic violence as a form of a husband's 'disciplinary rights' over their wives.<sup>48</sup> Women who are victims of domestic violence in most cases resort to counselling and mediation, therefore the offender is often not held accountable and the practice continue.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>39</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Cameroon CRC/C/CMR/CO/3-5, 06 July 2017, [url](#)

<sup>40</sup> Advocates for Human Rights, Cameroon: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 57th Session, 24 January 2014, [url](#); Canada: IRB, Cameroon: Domestic violence, including legislation; protection provided by the state and support services available to victims (2014-2016), 21 April 2016, [url](#); OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index, Country Profile: Cameroon, 2019, [url](#)

<sup>41</sup> USDOS, 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report, 28 June 2018, [url](#) pp. 128-129

<sup>42</sup> USDOS, 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report, 28 June 2018, [url](#) pp. 128-129

<sup>43</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Cameroon CRC/C/CMR/CO/3-5, 06 July 2017, [url](#) p. 7

<sup>44</sup> Cameroon, Law No. 2016/007 of 12 Jul 2016 relating to the Penal Code (2016), [url](#)

<sup>45</sup> 28 Too Many, Cameroon: The Law and FGM, July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> Advocates for Human Rights, Cameroon: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 57th Session, 24 January 2014, [url](#); Canada: IRB, Cameroon: Domestic violence, including legislation; protection provided by the state and support services available to victims (2014-2016), 21 April 2016, [url](#); OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index, Country Profile: Cameroon, 2019, [url](#)

<sup>47</sup> USDOS, Cameroon 2018 Human Rights Report, 13 March 2019, [url](#) p. 29

<sup>48</sup> Canada: IRB, Cameroon: Domestic violence, including legislation; protection provided by the state and support services available to victims (2014-2016), 21 April 2016, [url](#)

<sup>49</sup> OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index, Country Profile: Cameroon, 2019, [url](#)



Interviewed by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), a representative of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (Ministère de la Promotion de la femme et de la famille, MINPROFF) stated that in the case of 'legislative gaps' judges are tempted to apply customary rules that discriminate against women. Concerning domestic violence, the MINPROFF representative added that, in her opinion, the police consider cases of domestic violence to be 'a waste of time' and treat them with 'bias and laxity'.<sup>50</sup>

In the Anglophone regions, there have been reports of rape and sexual abuses by persons linked to the government and separatist groups.<sup>51</sup> UN Women assisting survivors of SGBV in the Far-North informed that most of the cases of sexual assault are often not raised and those reported are rarely punished because they are committed by soldiers and important men in the community.<sup>52</sup>

#### 4.2. Trafficking

The implementation of the national victim identification and national referral system (NRS) and standard operating procedures (SOPs) was limited. As a result, many officials have yet to be trained and some victims may have remained unidentified. The government did not report providing counseling, legal support, or any other assistance to victims who testified during court proceedings. NGOs reported the case of one victim who participated in the proceeding against her suspected trafficker, travelling long distances each time to appear at trial and not receiving any assistance or protection by the government, despite threats made against her by the suspected trafficker's relatives.<sup>53</sup>

The 2018 USDOS report stated that the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Affairs, in partnership with international organisations, repatriate more than 559 Cameroonians from Libya and Niger, including potential trafficking victims. Upon their arrival, the government provided temporary shelter, medical care, and counseling to assist these individuals.<sup>54</sup> In the North-West and South-West regions, judicial inefficiencies have been exacerbated by lawyer strikes in Buea and Bamenda, where most of the trafficking cases were referred. Some regional courts and NGOs encouraged victims to settle trafficking cases outside of court.<sup>55</sup>

#### 4.3. Traditional harmful practices

Advocates for Human Rights stated that Cameroon has made little efforts to prevent the continuation of FGM and breast ironing, hold perpetrators accountable, or provide services for victims.<sup>56</sup> In 2016, the UN stated that, although the Cameroon government has yet to conclude the legislative reform project, combating female genital mutilation is at the core of its political agenda.<sup>57</sup> According to the

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<sup>50</sup> Canada: IRB, Cameroon: Domestic violence, including legislation; protection provided by the state and support services available to victims (2014-2016), 21 April 2016, [url](#)

<sup>51</sup> USDOS, Cameroon 2018 Human Rights Report, 13 March 2019, [url](#) p. 5

<sup>52</sup> UN Women, UN Women facilitating reintegration of GBV survivors in the Far North Region of Cameroon, 06 November 2018, [url](#)

<sup>53</sup> USDOS, 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report, 28 June 2018, [url](#) pp. 128-129

<sup>54</sup> USDOS, 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report, 28 June 2018, [url](#) pp. 128-129

<sup>55</sup> USDOS, 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report, 28 June 2018, [url](#) pp. 128-129

<sup>56</sup> Advocates for Human Rights, Cameroon: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 57th Session, 24 January 2014, [url](#)

<sup>57</sup> UN Committee against Torture, Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 19 of the Convention pursuant to the optional reporting procedure, Fifth periodic reports of States parties due in 2014 : Cameroon, CAT/C/CMR/5, 03 November 2016, [url](#)

organisation 28TooMany, so far, the government has mostly focused its efforts on raising awareness on the need to stop FGM rather than enforcing the Penal Code.<sup>58</sup>

## 5. Social perception and non-state actors of protection

Women who do not undergo FGM may be cast out by the community, reason why women themselves support the practice.<sup>59</sup> Family members often perpetrate or condone the practice of breast ironing, as it is considered a way to protect girls from sexual abuse, early marriage and pregnancy.<sup>60</sup> Due to the stigmatisation of rape and pressure from the family and the community, many victims do not report incidents or resort to marrying their rapists, exonerating the perpetrators from any crime.<sup>61</sup>

UN Women assisting survivors of SGBV in the Far-North Region stated that many women are afraid to denounce sexual assault or file a judicial complaint for rape and sexual assault because of fear of persecution from the society, death threats and abuse of authority by the military officers. Victims who report sexual assault suffer humiliation, stigmatisation and isolation from society, while military commanders do not take any punitive sanctions against soldiers who commit the crime. Therefore, many cases of sexual abuse go unreported.<sup>62</sup>

As part of their humanitarian response plan to the violence outbreak in the North-West and South-West Regions, in January 2019, UN OCHA launched the GBV Sub-Cluster, which coordinates some 30-member organisations committed to provide medical care and psychosocial support to vulnerable women and girls.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> 28 Too Many, Cameroon: The Law and FGM, July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>59</sup> UN Economic Commission for Africa African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGSD), Violence against Women in Africa: A Situational Analysis, 2010, [url](#) p. 28

<sup>60</sup> Advocates for Human Rights, Cameroon: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 57th Session, 24 January 2014, [url](#) pp. 8-9

<sup>61</sup> OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index, Country Profile: Cameroon, 2019, [url](#)

<sup>62</sup> UN Women, UN Women facilitating reintegration of GBV survivors in the Far North Region of Cameroon, 06 November 2018, [url](#)

<sup>63</sup> UN OCHA, Cameroon: North-West and South-West Situation Report No. 3, 31 January 2019, [url](#)



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