



Home Office

Country Background Note

Cameroon

Version 1.0

December 2020

Preface

Purpose

This note provides a summary of and links to country of origin information (COI) for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims. It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) general background to the country concerned, including demography and geography; and (2) issues which may be relevant to protection claims. Unlike country policy and information notes, it does **not** contain an assessment of risk, availability of protection or reasonableness of internal relocation.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after this date is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion.

Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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Country information

Section 1 updated: 3 December 2020

1. History

1.1.1 The Encyclopaedia Britannica provided a short [history of Cameroon](#).

The [BBC Cameroon Country Profile Timeline](#) noted some key dates in the country's history¹.

1.1.2 CIA World Factbook stated:


'French Cameroon became independent in 1960 as the Republic of Cameroon. The following year the southern portion of neighboring British Cameroon voted to merge with the new country to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon. In 1972, a new constitution replaced the federation with a unitary state, the United Republic of Cameroon. The country has generally enjoyed stability, which has enabled the development of agriculture, roads, and railways, as well as a petroleum industry. Despite slow movement toward democratic reform, political power remains firmly in the hands of President Paul BIYA.'²

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Section 2 updated: 3 December 2020

2. Geography and demography

2.1 Country snapshot

Full country name	The official name of the country is the Republic of Cameroon ³ .
Area	The total area of the country is 475,440 sq km, with a land mass of 472,710 sq. km and water mass of 2,730 sq km ⁴ , almost twice the size of the UK ⁵ .
Flag	<div><p>flag of Cameroon</p></div> <div>6</div>

¹ BBC, '[Cameroon profile – Timeline](#)', 22 October 2018

² CIA World Factbook, '[Cameroon](#)' (section Introduction), updated 24 November 2020

³ Perm Cmttee for Geographic Names/FCDO, '[Country Names](#)', last updated 5 November 2020

⁴ CIA World Factbook, '[Cameroon](#)' (section Geography), updated 24 November 2020

⁵ CIA World Factbook, '[United Kingdom](#)' (section Geography), updated 24 November 2020

⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica, '[Cameroon](#)' (section Introduction), 2 April 2020

Population	The estimated population projection for July 2020 is 27,744,989 ⁷ and for 2030 is 31,355,000 ⁸ .
Capital city	Yaoundé ⁹
Other main cities/towns	See Main population centres
Location	'Cameroon is triangular in shape and is bordered by Nigeria to the northwest, Chad to the northeast, the Central African Republic to the east, the Republic of the Congo to the southeast, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea to the south, and the Atlantic Ocean to the southwest.' ¹⁰
Languages	The official languages of Cameroon are English and French, with 24 major African language groups also spoken ¹¹ .
Ethnic groups	Ethnic groups comprised 'Bamileke-Bamu 24.3%, Beti/Bassa, Mbam 21.6%, Biu-Mandara 14.6%, Arab-Choa/Hausa/Kanuri 11%, Adamawa-Ubangi, 9.8%, Grassfields 7.7%, Kako, Meka/Pygmy 3.3%, Cotier/Ngoe/Oroko 2.7%, Southwestern Bantu 0.7%, foreign/other ethnic group 4.5%. ¹²
Religious groups	Cameroon has no official religion ¹³ and a 2018 estimate of adherence of religions in the country indicated Roman Catholic 38.3%, Protestant 25.5%, other Christian 6.9%, Muslim 24.4%, animist 2.2%, other 0.5%, none 2.2% ¹⁴ .

- 2.1.1 Encyclopædia Britannica noted: 'Cameroon, [is a] country lying at the junction of western and central Africa. Its ethnically diverse population is among the most urban in western Africa. The capital is Yaoundé, located in the south-central part of the country.'¹⁵
- 2.1.2 Cameroon's total land border is approximately 5,018 km long as well as 402 km of coastline. Central African Republic 901 km, Chad 1116 km, Republic of the Congo 494 km, Equatorial Guinea 183 km, Gabon 349 km, Nigeria 1975 km¹⁶.

⁷ CIA World Factbook, '[Cameroon](#)' (section People and society), updated 24 November 2020

⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica, '[Cameroon](#)', 2 April 2020

⁹ RoC – Presidency of the Republic – website, '[Presentation of Cameroon](#)', undated

¹⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica, '[Cameroon](#)' (Introduction), 2 April 2020

¹¹ CIA World Factbook, '[Cameroon](#)' (section People and society), updated 24 November 2020

¹² CIA World Factbook, '[Cameroon](#)' (section People and society), updated 24 November 2020

¹³ Encyclopædia Britannica, '[Cameroon](#)', 2 April 2020

¹⁴ CIA World Factbook, '[Cameroon](#)' (section People and society), updated 24 November 2020

¹⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica, '[Cameroon](#)' (section Introduction), 2 April 2020

¹⁶ CIA World Factbook, '[Cameroon](#)' (section Geography), updated 24 November 2020

- 2.1.3 The climate of the country ‘varies with terrain, from tropical along coast to semiarid and hot in north.’¹⁷ The terrain is ‘diverse, with coastal plain in southwest, dissected plateau in center, mountains in west, plains in north.’¹⁸

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2.2 Maps

- 2.2.1 A [Map of Cameroon](#) is available on the UN’s Geospatial Information Section website.
- 2.2.2 The Perry Castaneda Library Map Collection provides [thematic maps of Cameroon](#).
- 2.2.3 The On the World Map website provides [administrative and political maps of Cameroon](#).
- 2.2.4 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) provided information on the humanitarian situation in the country, including a [map](#).

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2.3 Administrative divisions

- 2.3.1 The CIA World Factbook listed ‘10 regions (regions, singular - region); Adamaoua, Centre, East (Est), Far North (Extreme-Nord), Littoral, North (Nord), North-West (Nord-Ouest), West (Ouest), South (Sud), South-West (Sud-Ouest)’¹⁹

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2.4 Main population centres

- 2.4.1 The Republic of Cameroon, Presidency of the Republic undated website stated: ‘Cameroon is a country with several major towns, amongst which are Yaoundé, the political capital of the country with about one million inhabitants. Douala, which is the major economic city, has more than two million inhabitants. The other main towns are Garoua, Bafoussam, Maroua, Bamenda.’²⁰

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2.5 Transport network

- 2.5.1 Cameroon has over 77,500km of roads, of which only around 5,100km are paved, plus over 980km of railway. As of 2013, there were 33 airports, 11 of which were paved, and as of 2015, one registered air carrier²¹.
- 2.5.2 Encyclopædia Britannica noted:
- ‘Douala, the main port, is located on the estuary of the Wouri River and accounts for the majority of Cameroonian port traffic. One of the best-equipped ports in western Africa, it has docks for cargo ships, including a wood-loading dock and a tanker dock with adjacent facilities for the

¹⁷ CIA World Factbook, ‘[Cameroon](#)’ (section Geography), updated 24 November 2020

¹⁸ CIA World Factbook, ‘[Cameroon](#)’ (section Geography), updated 24 November 2020

¹⁹ CIA World Factbook, ‘[Cameroon](#)’ (section Government), updated 24 November 2020

²⁰ RoC – Presidency of the Republic – website, ‘[Presentation of Cameroon](#)’, undated

²¹ CIA World Factbook, ‘[Cameroon](#)’ (section Transportation), updated 24 November 2020

unloading and storage of minerals. [...] Other ports include those at Kribi, located at the mouth of the Kienké River; Limbe, on Amba Bay; and Garoua, along the Benue River.

‘There are a number of international airports located throughout Cameroon; the main international airport is located at Douala, although Yaoundé and Garoua also handle international flights. The generally poor quality of the Cameroonian road system has encouraged the proliferation of domestic air service; domestic airports include those at Tiko, Ngaoundéré, Bafoussam, Bamenda, Maroua, Ebolowa, Bertoua, and Batouri, as well as numerous airfields. Cameroon Airlines provides domestic service and routes to European and African cities, although mismanagement and massive debt have affected its ability to deliver those services.’²²

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Section 3 updated: 3 December 2020

3. Constitution

- 3.1.1 See [Cameroon's Constitution of 1996 with Amendments through 1972](#).

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Section 4 updated: 3 December 2020

4. Political system

- 4.1.1 The Encyclopaedia Britannica observed in April 2020:

‘Cameroon’s constitution has undergone various developments since the country achieved independence. The constitution of 1961 linked the states of West Cameroon and East Cameroon together into a federation. The constitution of 1972, subsequently revised, replaced the federation with a centralized government. The constitutional revision of 1996 provided for the establishment of a bicameral legislature—although a second body was not created until 2013—and, to a minor extent, decentralized the government.

‘Executive powers are conferred upon the president, who serves as chief of state and head of the armed forces; the president also appoints a prime minister and a cabinet. The president is elected to a seven-year term by direct universal suffrage. A controversial constitutional amendment promulgated in 2008 eliminated presidential term limits and granted immunity to the country’s president for any acts committed in an official capacity during the president’s time in office.

‘Legislative power is vested in the bicameral parliament, consisting of the National Assembly and the Senate. The 180 members of the National Assembly are directly elected for five-year terms. The Senate is composed of 100 members. Each of the country’s 10 regions is represented by 10 senators, 7 of whom are indirectly elected while the remaining 3 are appointed by the president. Senators serve five-year terms.’²³

- 4.1.2 The same entry stated:

²² Encyclopædia Britannica, ‘[Cameroon](#)’ (Transportation & telecommunications), 2 April 2020

²³ Encyclopædia Britannica, ‘[Cameroon](#)’ (Constitutional framework), 2 April 2020

'Cameroon became a de facto one-party state in 1966 and was dominated by the Cameroon National Union, a union of six political parties; it was renamed the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement in 1985. After significant political unrest and a number of violent clashes, a constitutional amendment in 1990 established a multiparty system. Other major political parties include the National Union for Democracy and Progress, the Cameroon Democratic Union, and the Social Democratic Front.

'The constitution guarantees every Cameroonian the right of participation in the government of the country, whether directly or by way of elected officials. Women have held a number of posts within the government, including seats in the National Assembly and the cabinet and positions in some of the major political parties. Although all ethnic groups have the right to participate in the political process, the constitution does not guarantee that they are represented proportionally in government positions; historically, the Beti have held a disproportionately high number of government posts.' ²⁴

- 4.1.3 Paul Biya was elected President for a seven year term (no term limits) with 71.3 per cent of the vote. His Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CDPM) party received 81.1% of the Senate votes (100 seats, 70 members indirectly elected by regional councils and 30 appointed by the president; members serve 5-year terms)²⁵.

- 4.1.4 The Freedom in the World report 2020: Cameroon stated that:

'In principle, laws and policies in Cameroon are created and approved by Parliament and the president. In practice, many policies are adopted by presidential decree. Otherwise, Parliament shows little independence and largely acts as a rubber stamp for the president's policy initiatives. President Biya has extensive executive authority, including wide-ranging appointment powers and strong control over state institutions...

'Decisions, especially those made by presidential decree, are often adopted with little or no public consultation. Cameroon lacks an access to information law, and it is difficult to gain access to government documents or statistics in practice. Despite the launch of an e-governance initiative in 2006, which was tasked with making government data more available online, the websites of most ministries do not provide substantial information.' ²⁶

- 4.1.5 RFI, a French news and current affairs public radio station, reported that 'President Paul Biya's People's Democratic Movement party (RDPC) took 139 out of 167 declared seats in the controversial 9 February [2020] polls. ... Elections did not take place in 13 seats covering the Anglophone regions and are expected to be held at a later date.'²⁷

- 4.1.6 For more information on Legislative and municipal elections, see the country policy and information note on [Cameroon: North-West South-West Crisis](#)

- 4.1.7 The CIA World Factbook lists the political parties and leaders:

- 'Alliance for Democracy and Development

²⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica, '[Cameroon](#)' (Political process), 2 April 2020

²⁵ CIA World Factbook, '[Cameroon](#)' (section Government), updated 24 November 2020

²⁶ Freedom House, '[2020 Freedom in the World Report](#)' (section C1&C3), 4 March 2020

²⁷ RFI, '[Biya's party maintains grip on parliament as Cameroon election...](#)', 28 February 2020

- 'Cameroon People's Democratic Movement or CPDM [Paul BIYA]
- 'Cameroon People's Party or CPP [Edith Kah WALLA]
- 'Cameroon Renaissance Movement or MRC [Maurice KAMTO]
- 'Cameroonian Democratic Union or UDC [Adamou Ndam NJOYA]
- 'Cameroonian Party for National Reconciliation or PCRN [Cabral LIBII]
- 'Front for the National Salvation of Cameroon or FSNC [Issa Tchiroma BAKARY]
- 'Movement for the Defense of the Republic or MDR [Dakole DAISSALA]
- 'Movement for the Liberation and Development of Cameroon or MLDC [Marcel YONDO]
- 'National Union for Democracy and Progress or UNDP [Maigari BELLO BOUBA]
- 'Progressive Movement or MP [Jean-Jacques EKINDI]
- 'Social Democratic Front or SDF [John FRU NDI]
- 'Union of Peoples of Cameroon or UPC [Provisionary Management Bureau]
- 'Union of Socialist Movements.'²⁸

4.1.8 See also:

- [USSD, '2018 Human Rights Practices Report' \(section Executive summary\), 13 March 2019](#)

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Section 5 updated: 3 December 2020

5. Economy

5.1.1 Economic snapshot:

Currency	CFA – Central African Franc ²⁹
Exchange rate	1 GBP = 726.729 CFA Francs ³⁰ (as at 2 December 2020).
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per person	US\$3700 (2017) ³¹ (GBP £2787) ³² . US\$1497 (2019) ³³ (GBP £1127) ³⁴ .
GDP growth	GDP growth is expected to fall to -1.2% in 2020 and pick up to 4.1% in

²⁸ CIA World Factbook, '[Cameroon](#)' (section Government), updated 24 November 2020

²⁹ CIA World Factbook, '[Cameroon](#)' (section Economy), updated 24 November 2020

³⁰ [XE Currency Converter](#), undated

³¹ CIA World Factbook, '[Cameroon](#)' (section Economy), updated 24 November 2020

³² [XE Currency Converter](#), undated

³³ The World Bank, '[GDP per capita \(current US\\$\)](#)', undated

³⁴ [XE Currency Converter](#), undated

	2021, subject to the post-pandemic global economic recovery.' ³⁵
Inflation rate	2.8% (2020 est) ³⁶
Unemployment rate	3.3% (2019) ³⁷
Labour force by occupation	agriculture: 70% industry: 13% services: 17% (2001 est.) ³⁸
Poverty rate	30% below poverty line (2001 est) ³⁹ 26% (2014) ⁴⁰ Nearly 40% (8 Million people est) ⁴¹

- 5.1.2 For further information on the economy the country policy and information note on [Cameroon: Internal relocation](#).

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Section 6 updated: 3 December 2020

6. Healthcare, water, sanitation and hygiene

- 6.1.1 see the country policy and information notes on [Cameroon: Internal relocation](#) and [Cameroon: North-West South-West Crisis](#)

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Section 7 updated: 3 December 2020

7. COVID-19

- 7.1.1 UN OCHA in their June 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan stated:
[...], the COVID-19 disease outbreak has completely disrupted the health system in the entire country. As of 13 June, 9,572 cases including 275 deaths has been registered. The most affected regions are the Centre (1,152 cases with 19 deaths), the Littoral (739 cases with 39 deaths) and the West (103 cases with 2 deaths). As of 30 April, 2020, all regions of Cameroon already have at least one case of COVID-19. A total of 339 infected health personnel has been recorded (74 in the Littoral, 61 in the West, 49 in the Center, 44 in the East, 34 in the North West, 30 in the South, 22 in the North, 18 in the South West, 5 in the Far North, and 2 in Adamawa). Around 850,477 people don't access health care out of fear of getting infected if they go to health facilities where COVID-19 cases have been detected or because some health facilities deny services to people who present flu-like

³⁵ Lloyds Bank, [‘The economic context of Cameroon’](#), October 2020

³⁶ Lloyds Bank, [‘The economic context of Cameroon’](#), October 2020

³⁷ Lloyds Bank, [‘The economic context of Cameroon’](#), October 2020

³⁸ CIA World Factbook, [‘Cameroon’](#) (section Economy), updated 24 November 2020

³⁹ CIA World Factbook, [‘Cameroon’](#) (section Economy), updated 24 November 2020

⁴⁰ The World Bank, [‘Poverty headcount ratio at \\$1.90 a day \(% of population\)’](#), undated

⁴¹ Lloyds Bank, [‘The economic context of Cameroon’](#), October 2020

symptoms. COVID-19 needs a specific health material that is not available in most of the regions.’⁴²

7.1.2 UN OCHA in a COVID-19 emergency situation report as of 15 November 2020 stated:

‘Cameroon remains eleventh in the list of countries with the highest number of positive cases in Africa. As of 30 October 2020, the case-fatality rate of the pandemic in Cameroon was two per cent. Two weeks later, the case fatality rate is 1.9 per cent. This decrease in the mortality rate country-wide suggests high recovery rates among infected people, despite new cases arise every day.

‘The East, Far-North and South regions have not reported any new positive case among health workers for more than three weeks, compared to the seven other regions that cumulate four new cases as of 11 November 2020. In general, the epidemiological curve tends to rise with an average of 549 cases per week compared to 223 cases per week last month. On 10 November 2020, the Governor of the West region issued a press release on the exponential resurgence of COVID-19 positive cases in the region. He indicated thirty-four new cases were reported within a week (from 4 to 11 November 2020), including five serious cases and two deaths. In the Littoral region, cases grow in schools among students and teachers in the city of Douala since reports from massive screenings in schools have started. Prevention among students in schools appears to be a great concern because of overcrowded classrooms and insufficient or lack of preventive materials such as handwashing stations. During the reporting period, fifty-eight COVID-19 cases were reported among teachers and students – although fortunately with no deaths – country-wide. WHO, UNESCO and UNICEF, along with health and education partners, continue to support schools in sensitizing teachers and students, training health staff and providing personal protective equipment, as well as infection prevention and control (IPC) material.

‘The Ministry of Public Health has reinforced COVID-19 screenings for all travelers landing on Cameroonian soil. This requirement comes after a network of fake negative COVID-19 tests sold to travelers flying to Cameroon was dismantled. According to French and local media, this network comprised seven alleged counterfeiters from Benin and Cameroon living in France.’⁴³

7.1.3 Up to date figures on COVID cases and deaths are available at [the African Union dashboard](#).

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Section 8 updated: 3 December 2020

⁴² UNOCHA, ‘[Humanitarian Response Plan: Cameroon](#)’, (p54) June 2020.

⁴³ UNOCHA, ‘[COVID-19 Emergency situation report](#)’, 15 November 2020

8. Media and telecommunications

8.1 Media/telecommunications snapshot

International dialling code	The country calling code is +237 ⁴⁴ .
Internet domain	.cm ⁴⁵
Broadcast media	' Cameroon Radio Television - state-run ' Canal 2 - private ' Equinoxe TV - private 'Spectrum TV (STV) – private.' ⁴⁶
News agencies	' Journal du Cameroun - news site ' Cameroon-Info.Net - news site ' Camer.be - news site.' ⁴⁷
Newspapers	' Cameroon Tribune - state-owned daily in French, English ' Mutations - privately-owned French-language daily ' The Sun - English-language ' The Post - private, English-language ' La Nouvelle Expression - private, French-language.' ⁴⁸ 'Le Quotidien, which is issued in French 'Popular periodicals include: 'La Gazette and Le Messenger, each issued in French 'Cameroon Outlook and Cameroon Times both of which are published in English.' ⁴⁹
Radio	' Cameroon Radio Television - state-run 'Radio Reine - Catholic station 'Radio Siantou – private.' ⁵⁰

8.1.1 The time in the country can be seen on the timeanddate.com website.

8.1.2 A Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) article noted: 'By 2018, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications reported that mobile phone subscribers stood at 18.8

⁴⁴ Country Calling Codes, '[Cameroon](#)', undated

⁴⁵ CIA World Factbook, '[Cameroon](#)' (section Communications), updated 24 November 2020

⁴⁶ BBC, '[Cameroon profile – media](#)', 22 January 2019

⁴⁷ BBC, '[Cameroon profile – media](#)', 22 January 2019

⁴⁸ BBC, '[Cameroon profile – media](#)', 22 January 2019

⁴⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica, '[Cameroon](#)', 2 April 2020

⁵⁰ BBC, '[Cameroon profile – media](#)', 22 January 2019

million representing a penetration rate of 83%, while internet penetration was 35%.⁵¹

- 8.1.3 The BBC's media profile for Cameroon adds 'Cameroon has a busy media environment. State-run CRTV operates national TV and radio networks and provincial radio stations. There are dozens of private radio and TV stations and hundreds of press titles'.⁵²
- 8.1.4 Encyclopædia Britannica noted 'Radio programming is available in French, English, and a variety of other languages, depending on the station; satellite broadcasts are also available. Domination of television broadcasting by the state was broken by the country's first private television station in 2001. The government exercises substantial control over the media.'⁵³

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Section 9 updated: 3 December 2020

9. Citizenship and nationality

- 9.1.1 The Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative (CRAI) noted that 'Nationality in Cameroon is governed by the 1968 Code de la Nationalité'⁵⁴. CRAI produced [an unofficial translation](#).
- 9.1.2 CIA World Factbook stated with regard citizenship:
- 'citizenship by birth: no
 - 'citizenship by descent only: at least one parent must be a citizen of Cameroon
 - 'dual citizenship recognized: no
 - 'residency requirement for naturalization: 5 years'⁵⁵

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Section 10 updated: 3 December 2020

10. Corruption

- 10.1.1 Cameroon was ranked 153rd out 180 countries in Transparency International's 2019 Corruption Index (a lower ranking equates to a higher level of corruption)⁵⁶.
- 10.1.2 The Freedom in the World report covering events in 2019 stated that:
- 'Corruption is systemic and bribery is commonplace in all sectors. Initiatives to fight corruption, including the creation of the National Anticorruption Commission (CONAC), have been insufficient. A number of former high-level government officials have been successfully prosecuted and imprisoned for corruption, and this activity continued in 2019. In March [2019], the government accused former defense minister Edgar Alain Mebe Ngo'o of

⁵¹ CIPESA, '[Overview of Cameroon's Digital Landscape](#)', 12 September 2019

⁵² BBC, '[Cameroon profile – media](#)', 22 January 2019

⁵³ Encyclopædia Britannica, '[Cameroon](#)', 2 April 2020

⁵⁴ Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative, '[Cameroon](#)', undated

⁵⁵ CIA World Factbook, '[Cameroon](#)' (section Government), updated 24 November 2020

⁵⁶ Transparency International, '[Corruption Perception Index 2019](#)', January 2020

corruption and the diversion of public funds. However, analysts suspect that many such cases are politically motivated; Mebe Ngo'o was considered a future presidential contender.⁵⁷

10.1.3 The USSD human rights report 2019, covering events in 2019 noted:

'The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not implement the law effectively. The penal code identifies different offenses as corruption, including influence peddling, involvement in a prohibited employment, and nondeclaration of conflict of interest. Reporting of corruption was encouraged through exempting whistleblowers from criminal proceedings. Corruption in official examinations is punishable by up to five years' imprisonment, fines up to two million CFA francs (\$3,400), or both. There were reports that senior officials sentenced to prison were not required to forfeit ill-gotten gains.

'In 2018 the National Anticorruption Commission instituted a toll-free number to encourage citizens to denounce acts of corruption of which they were victims or witnesses. In addition, there were a number of organizations who joined a common platform known as the National Platform of Cameroonian Civil Society Organizations, which under the 2018 Finance Law was provided a budget of 150 million CFA francs (\$255,000).

'Corruption: The results of the 2019 competitive examination into the National School of Administration and Magistracy highlighted unethical practices surrounding the organization of public service examinations. Anecdotal reports suggested most successful candidates either hailed from specific localities or were sponsored by or related to senior-level government officials, to the detriment of ordinary candidates.

'The government continued Operation Sparrow Hawk that was launched in 2006 to fight embezzlement of public funds. As in the previous year, the Special Criminal Court opened new corruption cases and issued verdicts on some pending cases. On March 8, the court placed former defense minister Edgar Alain Mebe Ngo'o and his wife in pretrial detention at the Yaounde Kondengui Central Prison. Authorities accused them of financial malpractices associated with the purchase of military equipment for the army, from the time Mebe Ngo'o served as minister of defense.

'Financial Disclosure: The constitution requires senior government officials, including members of the cabinet, to declare their assets prior to and after leaving office, but the government had not implemented it since its promulgation in 1996.'⁵⁸

10.1.4 For further information on corruption, see the country policy and information note on [Cameroon: Actors of protection](#)

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⁵⁷ Freedom House, '[2020 Freedom in the World Report](#)' (section C2), 4 March 2020

⁵⁸ USSD, '[Human rights report 2019](#)' (section 4)', 11 March 2020

11. Official documents

11.1 Birth certificates

11.1.1 The UN Economic and Social Council remarked in their report 'Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon' in March 2019: 'While taking note of the adoption of a universal birth registration project, the Committee notes with concern that the birth registration rate remains low and that a large number of people do not have access to identity cards, which interferes with the enjoyment of certain economic, social and cultural rights.'⁵⁹

11.1.2 In April 2019 the Global Protection Cluster noted that:

'... by July 2018, 90% of households were estimated to have experienced a birth certificate loss in the South West region. Some reports, seconded by the declaration of a traditional leader, described that children have lost their birth certificates because their houses were burnt. Moreover, according to

International Medical Corps (IMC), "only 6% of women are now giving birth at a health facility, compared to 93% before the crisis". ... As described by the NGO, "the replacement of these documents is now even more challenging than ever. Likewise, as many women are now giving birth in the bush, children are being left without proper registration".'⁶⁰

11.1.3 The USSD human rights report covering events in 2019 noted that 'Children derive citizenship through their parents, but not through birth in the country's territory, and the responsibility to register birth falls upon parents. Many births went unregistered because children were not always born in health facilities, and many parents faced challenges in reaching local government offices.'⁶¹

11.1.4 The USSD Reciprocity Schedule noted on the process for obtaining a birth certificate:

'Birth certificates (Actes de Naissance) are issued by the Council (la Mairie or Commune) or Secondary Civil Status Center (Centre Secondaire d'Etat Civil) at the child's place of birth. If application is made within three months of birth, Civil Status officials rely on the hospital birth record to issue a birth certificate. After 3 months, they require a Declaratory Judgment of Birth from the High Court (Tribunal de Grande Instance) of the area of birth of the child. Adoption, recognition and legitimation of the child are annotated at the back of the birth certificate by the Civil Status official. If the father's name is left blank on the birth certificate, the child was not recognized by the father. There may be a fee for this service. Court declarations used in the re-issuance process of missing/lost/destroyed birth certificates can only be issued by the High Court (Tribunal de Grand Instance).'

⁶²

11.1.5 See also [Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion: 'Civil Society Submission on the right of every child to acquire a nationality', 1 July 2016](#)

⁵⁹ UN – 'ECOSOC, 'Concluding observations...' (Para 44), 25 March 2019

⁶⁰ GPC, 'Risks and Needs for Child Protection in Cameroon...', April 2019

⁶¹ USSD, 'Human rights report 2019 (section 6)', 11 March 2020

⁶² USSD Bureau of Consular Affairs, 'Cameroon Reciprocity Schedule', undated

11.2 National identity cards

11.2.1 The USSD Reciprocity Schedule noted the following points regarding identity cards:

- 'Fees: There are fees
- 'Document Name: National Identity Card / Carte Nationale D'Identité
- 'Issuing Authority: Delegate General for National Security / Delegeue Generale a la Sureté Nationale(DGSN)
- 'Special Seal(s) / Color / Format: There is no Special(s)/Color/Format.
- 'Issuing Authority Personnel Title: Delegate General for National Security / Delegeue Generale a la Sureté Nationale
- 'Registration Criteria: There are no registration criteria
- 'Procedure for Obtaining: There is no Procedure for Obtaining.
- 'Certified Copies Available: Certified copies are not available.
- 'Alternate Documents: There are no Alternate Documents.
- 'Exceptions: Generally minors are not expected to have National Identity Cards.'⁶³

11.2.2 See also

- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (CIRB) request response noted (using a number of largely French sources): ['Cameroon: The new national identity card, including the authority that issues the card, the conditions and documents required to obtain the card, and a detailed description of the card and its use; whether it may be applied for from abroad; whether the former paper cards are still valid \(2014-September 2016\)'](#), 16 November 2016.
- [Cameroon Tribune: 'Cameroon: National Identity Card - Over 600,000 Abandoned'](#), 17 August 2017

11.3 Passports

11.3.1 Regarding passports, the USSD Reciprocity Schedule noted: 'Generally applicants present themselves in person to the regional immigration authorities with birth certificate, fees and National ID card for adults.'⁶⁴

11.3.2 An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (CIRB) request response of noted (using a number of largely French language sources):

'A March 2013 document posted on the website of the Embassy of Cameroon in Washington, DC indicates that Cameroonian citizens may have a "regular or hand-filled, non-machine readable passport [that] is still valid for

⁶³ USSD Bureau of Consular Affairs, ['Cameroon Reciprocity Schedule'](#), undated

⁶⁴ USSD Bureau of Consular Affairs, ['Cameroon Reciprocity Schedule'](#), undated

a few years," but encourages citizens to obtain a machine-readable passport...

Cameroonian media sources indicate that the biometric passport was officially introduced in August 2013...The passport reportedly conforms to the standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organization...The Cameroon Tribune reports that, according to the Secretary General of the Presidency of the Republic, old format passports that have already been issued will continue to be valid until their expiry date.⁶⁵

- 11.3.3 A Business in Cameroon article noted that 'Cameroonian citizens wanting to get an ordinary passport from January 2016, will have to spend FCfa 75,000 (c.£98.00) in fees, against FCfa 50,000 previously...According to the Cameroonian authorities, this increase aims at providing the government with the necessary means to modernise and make this travel and identification document more secure.'⁶⁶
- 11.3.4 A 2017 Journal du Cameroun article noted that 'it was revealed that it takes 114 euros (c.£98.00) to afford a passport in Cameroon.'⁶⁷
- 11.3.5 [Passport Index 2020](#) provided an image of the front cover of the Cameroonian passport.

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11.4 Fraudulent documents

- 11.4.1 An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (CIRB) request response of April 2014 noted (using a number of largely French language sources):
- 'In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Nico Halle Law Firm, a general-practice law firm founded in 1986 and based in Douala, Cameroon, explained that
- '[i]dentity card fraud is commonplace in Cameroon. Those who are engaged in illegal practices are always in possession of more than one NIC [national identity card]. This is possible as the biometric system in Cameroon is not very effective, taking into consideration the fact that such technology in Cameroon is still backward. Some of these NICs are forged by highly skilled professional forgers for purposes of crime.
- 'In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Abeng Law Firm, a Douala-based law firm specializing in trade and investment law, also indicated that identity document fraud is common...In contrast to the above, however, the representative of the Abeng law firm expressed his opinion that the prevalence of ID fraud "is due more to the relatively corrupt nature of ... society than [to] the ID process itself"...The representative also noted that the authorities are becoming increasingly "stringent and effective in identifying cases of fraud and double identity".
- 'A representative of Muna, Muna & Associates, a Yaoundé-based general-practice legal firm (n.d.), stated in correspondence with the Research Directorate that identity fraud was common before identity cards were

⁶⁵ CIRB, '[Cameroon: Requirements and procedures for obtaining passports...](#)' 25 March 2014

⁶⁶ Business in Cameroon, '[The Cameroonian State increases passport...](#)', 22 December 2015

⁶⁷ Journal du Cameroun, '[Cameroon passport ranked most expensive in Africa](#)', 20 June 2017

digitized, but that, with the advent of computerized national ID cards, cases of double identity and fraudulent cards "can easily be identified".

'Various sources report cases of fraudulent national identity cards or authentic cards obtained through fraudulent means.'⁶⁸

11.4.2 A Cameroon24 news article noted:

'Authenticity of certificates and the computerization of the national identification process are some of the ways the government is taking to curb fraud. Before now, it was a common phenomenon to see an individual with more than two identification papers or bearer of a document or certificate in an institution they never attended. Although identity theft and document fraud seem to have eaten deep into the society, the government has not relented any efforts in combating the incident through several security measures such as the computerization of essential documents like the National Identity Card and Passport as well as commissions to evaluate and certify certificates.

'... Some of the documents on focus are the National Identity Card produced alongside other documents such as passports, resident permits, refugee cards, professional ID cards for personnel of the General Delegation of National Security.

'... According to security experts, the new identification system falls within the government's policy to modernize and secure its civil status system which had become permeable and open to all sorts of fraudulent acts.

'The commission [National Evaluation Commission For Training Domains Offered Abroad at the Ministry of Higher Education], which is chaired by the Ministers of Higher Education and Public Service and Administrative Reforms is out to verify the authenticity of foreign certificates obtained by Cameroonians abroad while giving these certificates an equivalent in the country. The commission has uncovered many fake foreign diplomas...'⁶⁹

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Human rights issues relevant to protection claims

The issues below are not exhaustive. Rather they are topics which may be relevant to protection claims.

Section 12 updated: 3 December 2020

12. Human rights overview

12.1.1 The USSD human rights report for 2019 identified, in its view, the key human rights issues:

⁶⁸ CIRB, '[Cameroon: information on fraudulent identity documents...](#)', 11 April 2014

⁶⁹ Cameroun24, '[Cameroon: Fake Documents...](#)', 13 April 2018

‘Significant human rights issues included: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings, by security forces, armed Anglophone separatists, and Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA) fighters; forced disappearances by security forces; torture by security forces and nonstate armed groups; arbitrary detention by security forces and nonstate armed groups; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; political prisoners; significant problems with the independence of the judiciary; the worst forms of restrictions on freedom of expression, the press, and the internet, including violence, threats of violence, or unjustified arrests or prosecutions against journalists, and abuse of criminal libel laws; substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; restrictions on political participation; crimes involving violence against women, in part due to government inaction; violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex (LGBTI) persons; criminalization of consensual same-sex relations; and child labor, including forced child labor.

‘Although the government took some steps to identify, investigate, prosecute, and punish officials who committed human rights abuses, it did not do so systematically and rarely made the proceedings public. Some offenders, including serial offenders, continued to act with impunity.’⁷⁰

12.1.2 Human Rights Watch in its report covering events in 2019 observed:

‘Armed groups and government forces committed widespread human rights abuses across Cameroon throughout 2019. Freedom of expression, association, and assembly continued to be curtailed after President Paul Biya, 86, won his seventh term in October 2018, in elections marred by low voter turnout and allegations of fraud... The Islamist armed group Boko Haram carried out over 100 attacks in the Far North region since January 2019 killing more than 100 civilians. The conflict between government forces and Boko Haram has killed thousands of Cameroonians and displaced over 270,000 since 2014, leading to the rise of self-defense vigilante groups.

‘In Anglophone regions, violence intensified as government forces conducted large-scale security operations and armed separatists carried out increasingly sophisticated attacks... Government forces and armed separatists have killed, violently assaulted, or kidnapped people with disabilities as they struggled to flee attacks, or because they were left behind.

‘Cameroonian authorities cracked down on the political opposition, violently broke up peaceful protests, and arrested hundreds of opposition party leaders, members, and supporters.’⁷¹

12.1.3 UN OCHA in their June 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan stated:

‘Cameroon is today affected by four concurrent, complex humanitarian crises: Boko Haram violence in the Far North region; consequences of the influx of refugees from the Central African Republic into the eastern regions (Adamawa, North and East); growing humanitarian needs resulting from violence in the North West and South West regions with spillover effects in the West and Littoral regions; and the COVID-19 outbreak affecting the

⁷⁰ USSD, ‘[Human rights report 2019](#) (section Executive summary)’, 11 March 2020

⁷¹ HRW, [World Report 2020](#) (Cameroon), January 2020

entire territory of Cameroon. Humanitarian needs are compounded by structural development deficits and chronic vulnerabilities that further challenge the long-term recovery of affected people.’⁷²

12.1.4 For further information see also [North-West South-West Crisis](#), [Actors of Protection](#) and [Internal Relocation](#) CPINs.

12.1.5 See also [UN OCHA – Situation reports and Humanitarian Bulletins](#)

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Section 13 updated: 3 December 2020

13. Children

13.1 Age structure

13.1.1 The CIA World Factbook noted an estimated 42% of the population were under 14, and more than 60% under 25⁷³.

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13.2 Infant mortality and humanitarian situation

13.2.1 The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) data noted:

‘Cameroon’s neonatal mortality rate (NMR) is 24 deaths per 1,000 live births. NMR in rural areas is 36 deaths per 1,000 live births and 25 deaths per 1,000 live births in urban areas for an urban-to-rural ratio of 0.7. NMR among the poorest households is 39 neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to 29 deaths per 1,000 live births among the richest households.

‘...In 2017, approximately 861,000 babies were born in Cameroon, or around 2,400 every day... Approximately 56 babies will die each day before reaching their first month; 45 stillbirths occur every day.

‘...In Cameroon, the main causes of neonatal deaths in 2016 were prematurity (29 per cent), birth asphyxia and birth trauma (31 per cent) and sepsis (16 per cent).’⁷⁴

13.2.2 A February 2020 Unicef report stated that 2,000,000 children are in need of humanitarian assistance in Cameroon.⁷⁵

13.2.3 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) stated in their Humanitarian Needs Overview Cameroon 2020 issued in June 2020:

‘In Cameroon, in 2020, 6.2 million are facing critical problems related to physical and mental well-being. 52 per cent of them are children under 18 years. The main needs relate to protection, including child protection and SGBV, health and food.

‘About 9 million children in Cameroon have been directly affected by school closures, with thousands of school children missing out on school meals. Only a fraction will have access to effective online or other alternative forms

⁷² UNOCHA, ‘[Humanitarian Response Plan: Cameroon](#)’, (p12) June 2020.

⁷³ CIA World Factbook, ‘[Cameroon](#)’ (section People and society), updated 24 November 2020

⁷⁴ Unicef, ‘[Maternal and Newborn Health Disparities](#)’, March 2018

⁷⁵ Unicef, ‘[Cameroon Humanitarian Situation Report No. 02](#)’, February 2020

of learning. Children are thus also disproportionately affected by problems related to living standards, making up 67% of the total 5.7 million.⁷⁶

13.2.4 UN OCHA in their June 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan stated:

‘Life for a child in Cameroon can be very challenging. Children are recruited into armed groups, killed or maimed. Going to school in the North West and South- West regions is a dangerous business for both parents and their children. Providing safe and protective learning environment for children through PSS and C/DRR strategies can equip them with the knowledge and skills to be able to minimize the impacts of these conflicts on them. Without adequate funding, more than 290,000 children will not be able to access education, be it formal or non-formal, thereby making them even more vulnerable to forced recruitment, child labor, early marriage, early unwanted pregnancies and a life in poverty.’⁷⁷

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13.3 Education

13.3.1 Unicef data noted that ‘20% of children aged 3–5 attend preschools in rural areas compared to 55% in urban areas. Only 53% of children of the right age attend secondary school compared to 85% of primary-aged children in primary school. About 15% of the national budget is allocated to education sector.’⁷⁸

13.3.2 Encyclopædia Britannica noted:

‘Primary education generally begins at age six and lasts for six or seven years, depending on the region. Secondary education begins at age 12 or 13 and varies in length. About three-fourths of all children of primary-school age are enrolled either in government schools or in Christian mission schools. This attendance rate is not constant throughout the country, however, because the availability of school facilities varies regionally.

‘There are general-education secondary schools, vocational schools, and teacher-training schools. Manual labour is compulsory in secondary and technical schools as a means of encouraging graduates to take up farming instead of seeking white-collar jobs in the cities. The University of Yaoundé was established in 1962 and divided into two universities in 1992. Additional government universities were subsequently opened in Buea, Dschang, Douala, and Ngaoundéré. There are a number of private universities in operation, including those in Baruenda and Yaoundé.

About three-fourths of those age 15 and older are literate, although there is a notable literacy gap between the genders.’⁷⁹

13.3.3 For more information on children and education see also CPIN [Cameroon: Internal relocation](#) and for schools in the North-West / South-West Regions see the CPIN [Cameroon: North-West South-West Crisis](#).

13.3.4 See also: [UN OCHA – Situation reports and Humanitarian Bulletins](#)

⁷⁶ UNOCHA, ‘[Cameroon Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020](#)’ (p18 & 22), revised June 2020

⁷⁷ UNOCHA, ‘[Humanitarian Response Plan: Cameroon](#)’, (p90) June 2020.

⁷⁸ Unicef, ‘[Education in Cameroon](#)’, undated

⁷⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica, ‘[Cameroon](#)’ (section Education), 2 April 2020

13.4 Child labour and trafficking

13.4.1 The UN Economic and Social Council remarked in their report ‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon’ in March 2019: ‘The Committee notes with concern that, despite the measures adopted to address the situation, many children between 6 and 14 years of age are engaged in some form of economic activity, particularly in the informal sector.’⁸⁰

13.4.2 The Freedom House report covering events in 2019 noted: ‘Despite a 2011 law against human trafficking, Cameroon remains a source, transit, and destination country for forced labor and sex trafficking of children [...]. Child labor remains common, and child workers are frequently exposed to hazardous working conditions, particularly when collecting scrap metal for sale.’⁸¹

13.4.3 The USSD 2020 Trafficking in persons report stated in respect of the profile of trafficked persons:

‘Child traffickers often use the promise of education or a better life in urban areas to convince rural parents to entrust their children to intermediaries, who then exploit the children in sex trafficking or forced labor. Criminals force homeless children and orphans into sex trafficking and forced labor in urban areas. Some labor recruiters lure teenagers and adolescents from economically disadvantaged families to cities with the prospect of employment and then subject victims to labor or sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit Cameroonian children in domestic service, restaurants, and begging or vending on streets and highways. Additionally, criminal elements force Cameroonian children to labor in artisanal gold mining, gravel quarries, fishing, animal breeding, and agriculture (on onion, cotton, tea, and cocoa plantations), as well as in urban transportation assisting bus drivers and in construction as errand boys, laborers, or night watchmen. Observers note child sex tourists exploit minors in the cities of Kribi and Douala, with Ugandan, Chadian, Nigerian, Tanzanian, German, French, Swiss, and Belgian nationals primarily committing this crime.

‘Foreign business owners and herders force children from neighboring countries including Chad, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, Benin, and Equatorial Guinea to labor in spare parts shops or cattle grazing in northern Cameroon; many traffickers share the nationality of their victims. Traffickers exploit some children transiting the country en route to Gabon and Equatorial Guinea...

‘Boko Haram is a consistent terrorist threat, and continues to forcibly recruit Cameroonian children as porters, cooks, and scouts. The terrorist organization also uses women and girls as forced suicide bombers and sex slaves and boys as child soldiers. Observers reported Anglophone separatists recruited and used child soldiers in the Southwest and Northwest

⁸⁰ UN – ‘[ECOSOC, ‘Concluding observations...’](#), (Para 42), 25 March 2019

⁸¹ Freedom House, ‘[2020 Freedom in the World Report](#)’ (section G4), 4 March 2020

Regions, both for fighting government forces and for gathering intelligence.’⁸²

13.4.4 The 2019 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor report for Cameroon, reporting on findings for 2019 noted:

‘In 2019, Cameroon made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government supported a new 6 year project to address child labor in the production of cocoa and continued to support programs that provide services to vulnerable street children. In addition, unlike in previous years, the government published information on labor inspectorate funding. However, children in Cameroon engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in cocoa production. The government has not acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. In addition, it has not prohibited the use of children in illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs. Furthermore, the law does not criminally prohibit the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.’⁸³

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13.5 Child marriage and sexual exploitation of children

13.5.1 The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in their Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019 citing other sources released before December 2018 noted that: ‘Early marriage was especially pervasive in remote provinces where many girls were married off as early as 12 years old.’⁸⁴

13.5.2 In April 2019 the Global Protection Cluster noted that: ‘According to a survey conducted in 2018 in the Fontem, Mamfe and Kumba districts (South West Region), an estimated 58% of households have knowledge of early and forced marriages having taken place within the community.’⁸⁵

13.5.3 The USSD human rights report for 2019:

‘The minimum legal age for marriage is 18. Despite the law, according to UNICEF’s March 2018 child marriage data, 31 percent of women between the ages of 20 and 24 were married before they turned 18, and of these, 10 percent were married before they turned 15. Childhood marriages were more prevalent in the northern part of the country. The law punishes anyone who compels an individual into marriage with imprisonment of from five to 10 years, and with fines between 25,000 and one million CFA francs (\$43 and \$1,700).

‘The law prohibits commercial sexual exploitation, sale, offering or procuring for prostitution, and practices related to child pornography. A conviction requires proof of a threat, fraud, deception, force, or other forms of coercion. Penalties include imprisonment of between 10 and 20 years and a fine of

⁸² USSD, ‘[2020 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’, (Trafficking profile)’, 25 June 2020

⁸³ USDOL, ‘[2019 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Cameroon](#)’, 30 September 2020

⁸⁴ OECD, ‘[Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019](#)’ (section 2), December 2018

⁸⁵ GPC, ‘[Risks and Needs for Child Protection in Cameroon...](#)’, April 2019

between 100,000 and 10 million CFA francs (\$170 and \$17,000). The law does not specifically provide a minimum age for consensual sex. According to anecdotal reports, children younger than 18 were exploited in commercial sex, especially by restaurant and bar promoters, although no statistics were available. Anecdotal reports suggested the ongoing crisis in the two Anglophone regions had contributed to a dramatic increase in the prostitution of underage girls and number of early pregnancies, especially in areas with IDPs.’⁸⁶

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13.6 Violence against children

13.6.1 The USSD human rights report 2019 noted:

‘The law prohibits various forms of child abuse, including but not limited to assault, indecency, kidnapping, forced labor, rape, sexual harassment, and situations where one parent refuses to disclose the identity of the other parent to the child. Penalties for the offenses range from 10,000 CFA francs (\$17) for forced labor to imprisonment for life in the case of assault leading to death or serious harm. Despite these legal provisions, child abuse remained a problem. Children continued to suffer corporal punishment, both within families and at school. Boko Haram continued to abduct children for use as child soldiers or as suicide bombers.’⁸⁷

13.6.2 See also [Crux, ‘New report shows over half of children in Cameroon face abuse’, 30 September 2019](#)

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Section 14 updated: 3 December 2020

14. Civil society including human rights defenders

14.1.1 The USSD human rights report for 2019 noted that:

‘A number of domestic and international human rights groups investigated and published findings on human rights cases. Government officials impeded the effectiveness of many local human rights NGOs by harassing their members, limiting access to prisoners, refusing to share information, and threatening violence against NGO personnel. Human rights defenders and activists received anonymous threats by telephone, text message, and email. The government took no action to investigate or prevent such occurrences. The government at times denied international organization access to the country. The government criticized reports from international human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, HRW [Human Rights Watch], and the International Crisis Group, accusing them of publishing baseless accusations. On April 12, for example, officials at Douala International Airport refused entry to an HRW researcher, even though she held a valid visa.

‘There were several reports of intimidation, threats, and attacks aimed at human rights activists including members of the REDHAC [Réseau des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Afrique Centrale] and the Network of

⁸⁶ USSD, [‘Human rights report 2019](#) (section 6)’, 11 March 2020

⁸⁷ USSD, [‘Human rights report 2019](#) (section 6)’, 11 March 2020

Cameroonian Lawyers against the Death Penalty, among others. A female human rights advocate was sexually assaulted by an armed man who warned her to stop harassing the government.

'The United Nations or Other International Bodies: In May UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet visited Cameroon, at the invitation of the Cameroonian government, to evaluate progress made in the protection and promotion of human rights. Bachelet expressed concern to the government over the shrinking of civic space in Cameroon.

'Government Human Rights Bodies: In June the government passed a law establishing the Cameroon Human Rights Commission (CHRC), as a replacement for the existing NCHRF [The National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms]. Like the NCHRF, the CHRC is a nominally independent but government-funded institution. The law establishing the CHRC extended its missions to protect human rights, incorporating provisions of Articles 2 and 3 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The CHRC did not become operational during the year, because the president had not yet designated its members. The NCHRF continued to operate in its place. It coordinated actions with NGOs, visited some prisons and detention sites, and provided human rights education. NGOs, civil society, and the general population considered the NCHRF dedicated and effective, albeit inadequately resourced and with insufficient ability to effectively hold human rights violators to account. A number of observers questioned the decision to establish a new institution and expressed concerns about its ability to confront the government that funds it.'⁸⁸

- 14.1.2 The Freedom in the World report covering events in 2019 stated that: 'The influence of civil society has gradually weakened over the years, with many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) relying entirely on foreign assistance, and others coopted by the regime.'⁸⁹

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Section 15 updated: 3 December 2020

15. Media workers / journalists / freedom of expression

- 15.1.1 The BBC Cameroon Media Profile updated 22 January 2019 noted:

'Cameroon has a busy media environment. State-run CRTV operates national TV and radio networks and provincial radio stations. There are dozens of private radio and TV stations and hundreds of press titles.

'Journalists reporting on sensitive subjects face pressure and the risk of detention or arrest...the authorities have clamped down on media coverage of protests and unrest in Cameroon's English-speaking regions.

⁸⁸ USSD, '[Human rights report 2019](#) (section 5)', 11 March 2020

⁸⁹ Freedom House, '[2020 Freedom in the World Report](#)' (section E2), 4 March 2020

‘...The Anglophone crisis led to the emergence of separatist media, including online and satellite TV outlets, in response to the government crackdown on coverage.

‘BBC World Service radio is available via local relays (98.4 FM in Yaounde).

‘There were around 6.1 million internet users by the end of 2017...Facebook is the leading social media platform.

‘Amid protests in English-speaking regions, internet access in these areas was suspended for three months in early 2017. The authorities went on to impose targeted restrictions on social media and messaging applications.

‘RSF (Reporters without Borders) said the curbs were an attempt to prevent local people from exchanging information about protests.’⁹⁰

15.1.2 Freedom House in their 2020 report covering events in 2019:

‘Independent and critical journalists face pressure and the risk of detention or arrest in connection with their work, with the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reporting that seven journalists were imprisoned at the end of 2019. Defamation remains a criminal offense, and the National Communications Council (CNC), a media regulatory body, has a history of harassing journalists and outlets. State-run CRTV has been criticized for favoring the ruling CPDM in its coverage.

‘In May 2019, Paul Chouta, a reporter for news site Cameroon Web, was arrested after a French Cameroonian writer accused him of defamation. In the months before his arrest, Chouta, a government critic, received anonymous threats and was attacked by suspected government agents; Chouta remained imprisoned at year’s end, after his trial faced numerous delays.

‘The government also continued its crackdown on media coverage of the Anglophone crisis in 2019. In August, authorities arrested Chillen Muzik and Television (CMTV) journalist Samuel Ajiekah Abuwe and accused him of collaborating with separatists. Abuwe was transferred to military custody several days after his arrest, and has been held incommunicado since. In September, political analyst and Anglophone activist Abdul Karim Ali was arrested on charges including terrorism and secession. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that Ali was denied access to a lawyer before his eventual release in early November.’⁹¹

15.1.3 The USSD human rights report for 2019 noted that:

‘The law provides for freedom of expression, including for the press, but the government often restricted this right, explicitly or implicitly.

‘Government officials penalized individuals or organizations that criticized or expressed views at odds with government policy. Individuals who criticized the government publicly or privately frequently faced reprisals. On several occasions, the government invoked laws requiring permits or government notification of public protests to stifle discourse. Many civil society and

⁹⁰ BBC, ‘[Cameroon profile – media](#)’, 22 January 2019

⁹¹ Freedom House, ‘[2020 Freedom in the World Report](#)’ (section D1), 4 March 2020

political organizations reported increased difficulty when obtaining approval to organize public gatherings.’⁹²

15.1.4 See also

- [Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa, ‘Overview of Cameroon’s Digital Landscape’, 12 September 2019](#)
- [International Freedom of Expression Exchange \(IFEX\), ‘Assault on media freedom in Cameroon needs to stop’, 23 September 2019](#)
- [Freedom House, ‘2019 Freedom in the World Report’ \(section D\), 4 February 2019](#)

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15.2 Anti-terror legislation

15.2.1 The US Department of State’s (USSD) annual terrorism report covering 2019 noted

‘Cameroon continued to use the anti-terrorism law enacted in 2014 to suppress criticism and freedom of expression by arresting journalists and activists in connection with the ongoing crisis in the Anglophone regions. In October, the government released 333 low-level detainees arrested for suspicion of being Anglophone separatists and facing misdemeanor charges. However, hundreds of others remain in detention. The government continued to characterize people espousing separatism for the Northwest and Southwest Regions as terrorists and, in August, sentenced separatist leader Julius Ayuk Tabe to life imprisonment.’⁹³

15.2.2 Bertelsmann Stiftung in their 2020 Country Report for Cameroon stated:

‘In principle, the constitution guarantees the freedom of association and assembly, but in practice these rights are significantly curtailed. Generally speaking, citizens can create associations and political parties. There are currently over 100 registered political parties and numerous civil society groups. However, in January 2017, the government used its authority under the 2014 anti-terror bill to ban two Anglophone advocacy groups: the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC) and the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC).

‘Assembly rights are more often hindered than association rights. District and subdistrict officers are responsible for issuing permits for assemblies and have frequently denied such requests from opposition political groups for unspecified reasons. The government has also suppressed activities under the guise of the 2014 anti-terror bill. For instance, in 2018 a district officer banned defeated presidential contender Maurice Kamto from holding a press conference, citing a threat to public order. Assembly rights in Anglophone regions have especially deteriorated. Throughout 2017, there were several demonstrations that were violently dispersed by government forces. In September 2017, 17 people were killed and hundreds were arrested during an upswing of government resistance to the Anglophone protest movement.

⁹² USSD, [‘Human rights report 2019’](#) (section 5), 11 March 2020

⁹³ USSD, [‘Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Cameroon’](#), (p. 17), 24 June 2020

Since the growth of violent conflict in these areas, there are frequent curfews that significantly limit the freedom of association.

‘As with freedom of association and assembly, the constitution only provides token protections for freedom of speech. State media is under strict government control, and private media outlets are often intimidated. Cameroon’s media regulatory body, the National Communication Council (CNC) frequently bans newspapers and sanctions journalists for reporting on censored issues and spreading supposedly false information. Cameroon’s libel laws are particularly lenient, which allows the government to prosecute reporters and media outlets for defamation and insulting the presidency. The 2014 anti-terror bill has considerably expanded the range of offenses about which the government can censor media. This power was used to limit reporting on government activities during the fight against Boko Haram in northern Cameroon.

‘The environment for freedom of expression has declined noticeably since the start of the Anglophone crisis in 2016. Between 2016 and 2018, dozens of journalists and local reporters were detained under the 2014-anti terror law for reporting on the crisis. For instance, in 2018, editor Michel Biem Tong was charged as an apologist for terrorism and spreading false information. Later that year, TV presenter Mimi Mefo was charged with propagating information that infringed on the territorial integrity of Cameroon. Freedom of expression was also significantly curtailed when the government regularly shutdown internet services to Anglophone regions between January 2017 and March 2018. Internet service has remained spotty.’⁹⁴

15.2.3 See also CPIN: [North-West South-West Crisis](#) and [Actors of Protection](#).

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Section 16 updated: 3 December 2020

16. Minority rights

16.1.1 The UN Economic and Social Council remarked in their report ‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon’ in March 2019:

‘The Committee is concerned at the discrimination and exclusion faced by indigenous peoples in the State party and at the lack of recognition of their rights with regard to access to land, their ancestral territories and natural resources. The Committee is also concerned by reports that the indigenous peoples concerned have not been consulted with a view to obtaining their free, prior and informed consent before development projects are conducted on their lands and in their territories.

‘While taking note of the explanations provided by the delegation, the Committee is concerned at the de facto discrimination and marginalization faced by some ethnic and linguistic minorities, including the English-speaking minority, which hinders their effective enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights.’⁹⁵

16.1.2 The USSD’s Human Rights report for 2019, covering events in 2019 noted:

⁹⁴ Bertelsmann Stiftung: ‘[BTI 2020 Country Report Cameroon](#)’, 29 April 2020

⁹⁵ UN – ‘[ECOSOC, ‘Concluding observations...](#)’, (Para 12 and 25), 25 March 2019

‘An estimated 50,000 to 100,000 Baka, including Bakola and Bagyeli, resided primarily in (and were the earliest known inhabitants of) the forested areas of the South and East Regions. The government did not effectively protect the civil or political rights of either group. Logging companies continued to destroy indigenous peoples’ naturally forested land without compensation. Other ethnic groups often treated the Baka as inferior and sometimes subjected them to unfair and exploitative labor practices. The government continued long-standing efforts to provide birth certificates and national identity cards to Baka. Most Baka did not have these documents, and efforts to reach them were impeded by the difficulty in accessing their homes deep in the forest.

‘There were credible reports from NGOs that the Mbororo, nomadic pastoralists living mostly in the North, East, Adamawa, and Northwest Regions, continued to be subjected to harassment, sometimes with the complicity of administrative or judicial authorities.’⁹⁶

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Section 17 updated: 3 December 2020

17. Political opponents

17.1.1 The Human Rights Watch report on events in 2019 noted: Since elections in October 2018, the government has increased its crackdown on political opposition. Cameroon security forces have used excessive and indiscriminate force to stop demonstrations organized by the members and supporters of the MRC, Cameroon’s main opposition party.’⁹⁷

17.1.2 The March 2019 Congressional Research Service ‘In Focus’ report stated: ‘President Biya has been in office since 1982, having previously served as prime minister. Parliament removed constitutional term limits in 2008, provoking large protests that state security forces violently suppressed. Biya won another seven-year term in October 2018 amid claims of fraud, voter intimidation, and irregularities as well as violence and low turnout in the Anglophone regions. Each past contest has featured allegations of fraud, institutional bias, street violence, and/or opposition boycotts. Cameroon’s political system endows the head of state with strong executive powers, including the ability to appoint and dismiss the prime minister, cabinet, judges, generals, and governors. Numerous parties compete in elections and the local press is diverse, but opposition activism is constrained by restrictions on political freedoms and the media. Repression has escalated in the context of the Boko Haram conflict and the Anglophone crisis, as authorities have detained journalists and imposed a “climate of fear” on the media, per Reporters Without Borders. The ruling Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM, or RDPC in French), holds 148 of 180 seats (82%) in the National Assembly. The CPDM also holds 90% of elected seats in the Senate, in which 70 out of 100 members are indirectly elected and 30 are appointed by the president. Local and parliamentary elections were

⁹⁶ USSD, ‘[Human rights report 2019](#) (section 5)’, 11 March 2020

⁹⁷ HRW, ‘[2020 World Report](#)’, 13 January 2020

delayed from 2018 to late 2019, and could serve as flashpoints for violence amid an ongoing crackdown on civil space.

‘Cameroon’s opposition has long been fractious as the CPDM has co-opted or repressed political challengers. In January 2019, authorities arrested dozens of members of the opposition Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC) who were protesting alleged electoral fraud. Among those detained was MRC leader Maurice Kamto, a former state minister who came in second in the 2018 election. [...] Authorities also have banned public rallies, including by the Social Democratic Front (SDF), the largest opposition party in parliament. Historically rooted in the Anglophone regions, the SDF’s performance in the 2018 polls was likely hampered by low turnout in its traditional stronghold.’⁹⁸

17.1.3 The USSD human rights report for 2019 noted: ‘Although the constitution and law prohibit such practices, there were reports that security force members tortured or otherwise abused citizens, including separatist fighters and political opponents. Amnesty International and HRW documented several cases in which security forces severely mistreated political opponents, and others where armed separatists mistreated civilians and members of defense forces.’⁹⁹

17.1.4 Further information about the political system and treatment of opposition groups is available in CPIN’s [North-West South-West Crisis](#) and [Actors of Protection](#).

17.1.5 See also:

- [Amnesty International, ‘Cameroon: Nearly 60 opposition members tortured by security forces’](#), 26 July 2019
- [BBC News, Cameroon opposition leader Maurice Kamto walks free from jail](#), 5 October 2019
- [HRW, Cameroon: Election Violence in Anglophone Regions](#), February 2020

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17.2 Anglophone situation

17.2.1 For information on the Anglophone situation see the country policy and information note on [Cameroon: North-West South-West Crisis](#).

Section 18 updated: 3 December 2020

18. Crime and security

18.1.1 See CPIN: [Cameroon Actors of protection](#) and [Internal relocation](#)

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Section 19 updated: 3 December 2020

19. Criminal justice system

19.1.1 See CPIN: [Cameroon Actors of protection](#)

⁹⁸ CRS, [‘In Focus – Cameroon’](#) (section Politics), 12 March 2019

⁹⁹ USSD, [‘Human Rights Report 2019’](#), (section 1c), 11 March 2020

20. Prison conditions

20.1.1 The USSD human rights report for 2019 noted:

‘Prison conditions were harsh and life threatening due to food shortages and poor-quality food, gross overcrowding, physical abuse, as well as inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care.

‘Physical Conditions: Overcrowding remained a significant problem in most prisons, especially in major urban centers. Prison overcrowding was exacerbated by the significant increase in arrests related to the Anglophone crisis and CRM protests following the October 2018 elections. Officials held prisoners in dilapidated, colonial-era prisons. Authorities often held pretrial detainees and convicted prisoners in the same cells. In many prisons, toilets were only common pits. In some cases, women benefitted from better living conditions, including improved toilet facilities and less crowded living quarters. Prisons generally had separate wards for men, women, and children. Authorities claimed to hold the sick separately from the general prison population, but this was often not the case.

‘According to prison administration officials, the country had 79 operational prisons, with an intended capacity of 17,915. During the past five years, the prison population increased steadily, from 23,500 in 2013 to 30,701 in December 2017, according to the latest report published in 2018 by the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF). In its 2018 country report on Cameroon, Amnesty International indicated that the Central Prison in Maroua, Far North Region, held 1,500 detainees, more than four times the planned capacity. Malnutrition, tuberculosis, bronchitis, malaria, hepatitis, scabies, and numerous other untreated conditions, including infections, parasites, dehydration, and diarrhea, were rampant.

‘In a July 23 press release following the riots at Yaounde’s Kondengui and Buea prisons, Amnesty International noted that prison conditions were dire, stating that until the situation improved there was a strong risk of further violence. During an August 2 press briefing, Justice Minister Laurent Esso announced some measures to address overcrowding: acceleration of judicial proceedings, a strengthening of disciplinary measures, modernization of the means of controlling and monitoring prisoners, decongestion of prisons with proven overcrowding, and the prohibition on the use of certain items in the prison environment.

‘Physical abuse by prison guards and prisoner-on-prisoner violence were problems. For instance, during the July 22 riots at the Kondengui Central Prison, at least two high-profile inmates, including former prime minister Inoni Ephraim and former health minister Olanguena Awono, sustained injuries after other prisoners attacked them for the privileged lifestyles they carried on within the prison. Corruption among prison personnel was reportedly widespread. Visitors were at times forced to bribe wardens to be granted access to inmates. Prisoners bribed wardens for special favors or treatment, including temporary freedom, cell phones, beds, and transfers to less crowded areas of the prisons. Due to their inability to pay fines, some

prisoners remained incarcerated after completing their sentences or after they had received court orders of release.

‘Administration: Independent authorities often investigated credible allegations of mistreatment. Visitors needed formal authorization from the state counsel; without authorization, they had to bribe prison staff to communicate with inmates. Visits to Boko Haram suspects, alleged Anglophone separatists, and political opponents detained after the October 2018 presidential election were restricted. Authorities allowed prisoners and detainees to observe their religions without interference.

‘Independent Monitoring: The government permitted monitoring by some NGOs, including Buea-based Human Is Right, which in July helped identify at least one case of prolonged illegal detention. The NCHRF and the Commissions for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Archdioceses also conducted prison visits. In a February 27 press release, the NCHRF deplored the challenges in gaining access to CRM activists incarcerated at Kondengui Central Prison. With the exception of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the government restricted international humanitarian organizations’ access to prisoners.’¹⁰⁰

- 20.1.2 The Human Rights Watch report on events in 2019 noted: ‘During the year, there was widespread use of incommunicado detention and torture of people suspected of ties to armed separatist groups at the State Defense Secretariat (Secrétariat d’Etat à la défense, SED) prison in Yaoundé. Gendarmes and other security personnel at the SED used torture, including severe beatings and near-drowning, as well as other ill-treatment to force suspects to confess to crimes, or to humiliate and punish them.’¹⁰¹
- 20.1.3 For information on treatment of separatist’s in detention see the country policy and information note on [Cameroon: North-West South-West Crisis](#).

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Section 21 updated: 3 December 2020

21. Religious groups

- 21.1.1 The Republic of Cameroon, Presidency of the Republic undated website stated: ‘Cameroon is a secular state. Two major religions have followers ; Christianity and Islam. Animism is also widely practised.’¹⁰²
- 21.1.2 The US State Department International Religious Freedom Report covering 2019 noted that
- ‘The constitution establishes the state as secular, prohibits religious harassment, and provides for freedom of religion and worship. According to media, security officers combating Anglophone separatists in the Northwest and Southwest Regions killed Christians and clergymen and attacked places of worship. In April soldiers shot and killed a Baptist pastor on his way to church in Mfumte Village. In September soldiers shot and killed a woman outside the Roman Catholic church in Bambui. In May security forces set fire

¹⁰⁰ USSD, ‘[Human rights report 2019](#) (section 1)’, 11 March 2020

¹⁰¹ HRW, ‘[2020 World Report](#)’, 13 January 2020

¹⁰² RoC – Presidency of the Republic – website, ‘[Presentation of Cameroon](#)’, undated

to a Protestant church during clashes with separatists in Bamenda, the Northwest Region's capital. In October security forces arrested a Catholic priest in Bamenda, reportedly because he accused soldiers of human rights abuses during an address to the United Nations, according to one of his colleagues. He was released a day later. Religious media outlets accused the government of arming Muslim herders and encouraging them to attack Christians in the town of Wum, and of exploiting sporadic clashes over land between Mbororo herders and local farmers, attempting to introduce a religious character to the conflict in the Northwest Region between security forces and separatists. In February police briefly detained a pastor of the Cameroon Evangelical Church (CEC) and accused him of inciting rebellion during a sermon. On several occasions, Christians in the Northwest and Southwest Regions said security forces interrupted church services and prevented them from accessing places of worship. During the year, the government appointed a board to manage the CEC's affairs. The government said it acted to preserve order within the CEC, which was undergoing an internal dispute over the election of Church leaders after the government suspended elected executives. Religious leaders expressed frustration with the government's failure to register any new religious groups for the ninth consecutive year and said many requests remained pending.'

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21.1.3 For more information on religious groups in Cameroon see:

- [USSD 2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Cameroon](#), 21 June 2019
- [International Crisis Group – Cameroon: The threat of religious radicalism](#), 3 September 2015.

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Section 22 updated: 3 December 2020

22. Security situation

22.1.1 For further information see [UN OCHA – Situation reports and Humanitarian Bulletins](#) and [North-West South-West Crisis, Actors of Protection and Internal Relocation](#) CPINs.

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Section 23 updated: 3 December 2020

23. Sexual orientation and/or gender identity

23.1.1 See the Cameroon CPIN on [Sexual orientation and gender identity or expression](#).

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Section 24 updated: 3 December 2020

¹⁰³ USSD, '[2019 International Religious Freedom Report](#)', 10 June 2020

24. Women

24.1 Overview

24.1.1 The UN Economic and Social Council remarked in their report 'Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon' in March 2019:

'The Committee notes with concern that the persistence of gender stereotypes, certain practices and the use of customary law continues to reinforce inequality between men and women, including with regard to their access to land. The Committee remains concerned at the maintenance of certain legal provisions that discriminate against women, in particular in the Civil Code, and that bar women from certain types of employment. The Committee notes with concern that, despite some efforts to improve the situation, women remain underrepresented in administrative and political affairs.' ¹⁰⁴

24.1.2 Cameroon has the world's 18th highest maternal mortality rate with 529 deaths per 100,000 live births, according to 2017 estimates. ¹⁰⁵

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24.2 Legal, social and economic rights

24.2.1 Freedom House report covering events in 2019 stated:

'The constitution guarantees equal rights to men and women, but traditional legal values and practices often take precedence and do not always provide women with full rights. The Boko Haram conflict has exacerbated the already prevalent practice of child marriage and sexual abuse of minors in the Far North Region. Customary law can allow rapists to escape punishment if the victim consents to marriage. Despite laws guaranteeing equal rights to men and women to file for divorce, in practice courts often disadvantage women by making proceedings prohibitively expensive or lengthy...' ¹⁰⁶

24.2.2 The same source further stated: 'In many regions, women are still dispossessed of their inheritance rights.' ¹⁰⁷

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24.3 Domestic violence

24.3.1 The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in their Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019 citing other sources released before December 2018 noted that:

'In 2012, Cameroon ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (The Maputo Protocol). At present, there is no single bill that comprehensively addresses violence against women, however a draft law addressing violence against women and gender-based discrimination is under consideration [...]. The country has however enacted some laws pertaining to different forms of violence against women, such as rape, sexual harassment, and female

¹⁰⁴ UN – 'ECOSOC, ['Concluding observations...'](#) (Para 27), 25 March 2019

¹⁰⁵ CIA World Factbook, ['Cameroon'](#) (section People and society), updated 24 November 2020

¹⁰⁶ Freedom House, ['2020 Freedom in the World Report'](#) (section G3), 4 March 2020

¹⁰⁷ Freedom House, ['2020 Freedom in the World Report'](#) (section G1), 4 March 2020

genital mutilation. In 2012, the government drafted a National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women, provided health and financial assistance victims, established and operates a hotline for victim support and reporting cases, and implemented awareness-raising activities at the national and local levels [...].

‘Despite these government efforts, there is a high prevalence of violence against women throughout the country, in large part due to the inadequate legislation to address the problem and lack of systematic action to eliminate stereotypes and harmful practices that discriminate against women [...]. Paired with this is a limited number of investigations and prosecutions of such cases and overall failure to hold perpetrators accountable.

‘At present, there is no legislation that prohibits domestic violence, although assault more broadly is prohibited under the state’s Penal Code. Given that there is no legal recourse for justice or protection of victims, there are pervasive levels of domestic violence in the country [...]; Advocates of Human Rights, 2014). In most cases, women who have experienced domestic violence resort to counselling and mediation, where the offender is often not held accountable, leaving the practice to continue [...].’¹⁰⁸

24.3.2 The UN Economic and Social Council remarked in their report ‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon’ in March 2019:

‘While taking note of the information provided by the State party on the application of the provisions of the Criminal Code to perpetrators of acts of violence against women, the Committee regrets that it has not received statistics on the number of cases in which those provisions have been applied or on the number of offenders who have been put on trial and convicted. The Committee notes with deep concern that practices that are harmful to women and girls remain widespread in the State party, even though they are prohibited by law.’¹⁰⁹

24.3.3 Referring to the crisis in the NWSW, UN Women in their May 2019 report stated: ‘There is also an increase in physical violence against women by men who have lost their role as economic providers to the family, making them aggressive.’¹¹⁰

24.3.4 Freedom House report covering events in 2019 stated: ‘Domestic violence and rape are widespread, and perpetrators are rarely prosecuted.’¹¹¹

24.3.5 The USSD Human Rights Report covering events in 2019 stated: ‘The law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence, although assault is prohibited and punishable by imprisonment and fines. OCHA recorded 785 cases of gender-based violence in July.’¹¹²

24.3.6 See also CPIN on Cameroon: [Sexual orientation and gender identity](#) and [UN OCHA, ‘Data on gender equality in Cameroon’, 23 October 2019.](#)

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¹⁰⁸ OECD, ‘[Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019](#)’ (section 2), December 2018

¹⁰⁹ UN – ‘ECOSOC, ‘[Concluding observations...](#)’, (Para 46), 25 March 2019

¹¹⁰ UN Women, ‘[Cameroon: Gender profile for the South West crisis](#)’ (p3), May 2019

¹¹¹ Freedom House, ‘[2020 Freedom in the World Report](#)’ (section G3), 4 March 2020

¹¹² USSD, ‘[Human rights report 2019](#)’ (section 6)’, 11 March 2020

24.4 Rape and sexual assault

24.4.1 OECD state in their Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019 citing other sources that:

‘Under the Penal Code, sexual assault is prohibited and punishable by 5 to 10 years of imprisonment [...]. The Penal Code also allows perpetrators to marry the victim, and thus avoid prosecution (Penal Code, Art. 297, 2016; CRC, 2017; [...]). Given the stigmatisation of rape and pressure from their community and family, many victims do not report incidents or resort to marrying their rapists, exonerating their rapists from any crime [...].

‘Spousal rape is not specifically addressed in the Penal Code. Reportedly, marital rape is one of the most prevalent forms of domestic violence experienced by women in Cameroon [...]. While rape is a criminal offense punishable by law, the law is not effectively enforced, cases are often not investigated, and incidents rarely reported [...]. This allows for a culture of impunity and a high prevalence of rape to persist in all regions of the country [...].’¹¹³

24.4.2 The USSD Human Rights Report covering events in 2019 stated:

‘The law criminalizes rape and provides penalties of between five and 10 years of imprisonment for convicted rapists. Police and courts rarely investigated or prosecuted rape cases, especially since victims often did not report them. The law does not address spousal rape. In a report on the Northwest and Southwest Regions, OCHA revealed that it had recorded 74 cases of rape as of July 21, with only 13 victims being able to obtain health-care services due to the absence of services in their localities.

‘The law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence, although assault is prohibited and punishable by imprisonment and fines. OCHA recorded 785 cases of gender-based violence in July.’¹¹⁴

24.4.3 See also CPIN [North-West South-West Crisis](#) and

- [UN OCHA – Situation reports and Humanitarian Bulletins](#)
- [UN OCHA, ‘Data on gender equality in Cameroon’, 23 October 2019.](#)

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24.5 Single women / widowhood rites

24.5.1 The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) state in their Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019 citing other sources that:

‘At the time of writing [December 2018], there are no laws prohibiting harmful practices against widows. There is a stigma attached to widows and traditional widowhood rites are practiced particularly in rural areas of the country, [...]. Widowhood rites may vary across religions, ethnics or tribal affiliations, subjecting widows to degrading, humiliating, discriminating and inhumane practices.... These include being dispossessed of their husbands [sic] property, publicly blamed for their husbands’ death, forced to prove their

¹¹³ OECD, ‘[Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019](#)’ (section 2), December 2018

¹¹⁴ USSD, ‘[Human rights report 2019](#)’ (section 6), 11 March 2020

innocence through traditional rites, forced to have sexual relations or marrying their husbands' relatives, forced to sleep on the floor, shaved and publicly unclothed, forced to beg for food or forced to be imprisoned in their own homes [...].'¹¹⁵

24.5.2 Referring to the crisis in the NWSW, UN Women in their May 2019 report stated:

'Girls and women who are heads of households as a result of the recruitment or radicalization of their husbands and sons engage in sex trade to support their families and survive, or in exchange for the freedom of their husbands and children. Girls who are unable to take care of themselves move in with boys in what is commonly referred to as "come and stay" (common-law unions). Girls are victims of early pregnancy and some of them perform archaic abortions that endanger their health.'¹¹⁶

24.5.3 UN OCHA reported in October 2019 that:

'Many women have become widowed as a result of the crisis [Anglophone]. Thus, they represent 31% of households in the South-West and 38% of households in the North-West, which represents an increase of about 10% compared to 2017. They are at risk of gender-based violence, particularly the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation. Girls, as well as women who became heads of family because of the enlistment or death of their husbands, sometimes use survival sex to provide for their families. In some cases, these sexual relationships are in exchange for the release of husbands and sons.'¹¹⁷

24.5.4 UN OCHA in its situation report dated 31 December 2019 stated: 'There is an increase in women-headed households due to men increasingly abandoning their families.'¹¹⁸

24.5.5 The USSD Human Rights Report covering events in 2019 stated:

'Widows were sometimes forcibly married to one of their deceased husband's relatives to secure continued use of property left by the husband, including the marital home. To protect women better, including widows, the government included provisions in the 2016 penal code outlawing the eviction of a spouse from the marital home by any person other than the other spouse. The practice of widow rites, by which widows forgo certain activities such as bathing or freedom of movement, was also prevalent in some parts of the country, including in some rural communities of the West Region.'¹¹⁹

24.5.6 For further information see

- [Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 'Cameroon: The practice of levirate marriage, including the regions of Cameroon where this tradition is widespread and the ethnic groups that practice it; the consequences if a widow refuses to take part in this practice, recourse and protection](#)

¹¹⁵ OECD, '[Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019](#)' (section 1), December 2018

¹¹⁶ UN Women, '[Cameroon: Gender profile for the South West crisis](#)' (p3), May 2019

¹¹⁷ UNOCHA, '[Data on gender equality in Cameroon](#)', 23 October 2019

¹¹⁸ UNOCHA, '[Cameroon: North-West and South-West Situation Report](#)' (p4), 31 December 2019

¹¹⁹ USSD, '[Human rights report 2019](#)' (section 6)', 11 March 2020

[available, including police intervention in the cities of Douala and Yaoundé \(June 2013-December 2014\)’, 23 December 2014](#)

- [UN OCHA, ‘Data on gender equality in Cameroon’, 23 October 2019.](#)
- [UN OCHA – Situation reports and Humanitarian Bulletins](#)

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24.6 Trafficking

24.6.1 The Freedom in the World report covering events in 2019 stated that: ‘Despite a 2011 law against human trafficking, Cameroon remains a ... source country for women who are subject to forced labor and prostitution in Europe. Some internally displaced women have also resorted to prostitution in the cities of Yaoundé and Douala.’¹²⁰

24.6.2 In April 2019 the Global Protection Cluster noted that:

‘Since the beginning of the crisis in 2016, reports on abduction and trafficking have become common in both North West and South West regions, often targeting women, young girls and boys. The imposition of Ghost town days and the night curfew have inevitably affected the daily lives of civilians. Most vulnerable groups have expressed their fear of walking alone, especially at night, as previously mentioned, when they face greater risk of assault, sexual violence and abduction. With a lack of safe space due to the school closure, children are more prone to spend the days loitering the streets.’¹²¹

24.6.3 The USSD 2020 Trafficking in persons report stated:

‘The Government of the Republic of Cameroon does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so....

Traffickers exploit Cameroonians from disadvantaged social strata, in particular from rural areas, in forced labor and sex trafficking in the Middle East (especially Kuwait and Lebanon), as well as in Europe (including Switzerland and Cyprus), the United States, and multiple African countries (including Benin and Nigeria). Most exploited Cameroonians abroad are between the ages of 20 and 38 and come from the Northwest, Southwest, Littoral, Center, South, and West Regions. Fraudulent labor brokers recruited some Cameroonian women for domestic work in the Middle East where traffickers then subjected the women to sex trafficking or domestic servitude upon arrival at their destination. Some economic migrants in search of opportunity became victims of trafficking in Libya or while in transit through Niger. NGOs reported Nigerians in eastern Nigeria exploited Cameroonian refugees displaced by the Anglophone conflict in forced labor and sex trafficking.

‘Trafficking networks generally consist of local community members, including religious leaders and former trafficking victims who have transitioned to perpetrators. These networks advertise jobs through the internet and other media, and recruit and sell other Cameroonians directly to

¹²⁰ Freedom House, [‘2020 Freedom in the World Report’](#) (section G4), 4 March 2020

¹²¹ GPC, [‘Risks and Needs for Child Protection in Cameroon...’](#), April 2019

families in need of domestic servants. Advocates working on trafficking issues report the government's awareness-raising activities targeting fraudulent recruitment have raised awareness amongst vulnerable populations but have caused intermediaries to operate with greater discretion, often directing victims to travel to the Middle East through neighboring countries, including Nigeria. International organizations, NGOs, and migrants report Cameroonian trafficking networks in Morocco coerce women into commercial sex.¹²²

24.6.4 For further information see the full [US Department of State trafficking report](#)

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24.7 Harmful traditional practices (including FGM)

24.7.1 OECD state in their Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019 citing other sources that:

'Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is criminalised under the Penal Code where offenders may be sentenced to prison for 10 to 20 years (Penal Code, Art 277-1, 2016). This penalty may be increased to life for repeat offenders or if the act leads to death of victim (Ibid). Reportedly, the practice is decreasing, but in isolated areas of the Far North, East, and Southwest provinces, in the Choa and Ejagham tribes, children continue to be subjected to FGM (US, Department of State, 2017; Advocates, 2014). Under traditional law, women who are not circumcised may be cast out by the community, thus reinforcing the practice by women themselves (UNECA, 2010).'¹²³

24.7.2 The same report stated that:

'In Cameroon, the breast ironing of women is considered a way to delay a girl's physical development,, thus limiting the risk of rape, early marriage and teenage pregnancy [...]. In this view, breast ironing is often condoned and perpetrated by family members of victims [...]. The procedure however has seriously harmful physical and psychological consequences, which include pain, cysts, abscesses, and physical and psychological scarring [...]. At present, there is no specific law addressing breast ironing, however the Penal Code more broadly prohibits interference with an organ in order to inhibit its normal growth [...].'¹²⁴

24.7.3 A November 2019 report of 28 Too Many report on Female Genital Mutilation gave the following data:

- 'Prevalence: In Cameroon, the prevalence of FGM in women aged 15–49 was 1.4% in 2004
- 'Geography: The highest prevalence is found in the far north, at 5.4%
- 'Age: Data suggests FGM is most likely to be performed between the ages of five and nine
- 'Type: 'Cut, flesh removed' is the most common type of FGM practised

¹²² USSD, '[2020 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)', (Trafficking profile)', 25 June 2020

¹²³ OECD, '[Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019](#)' (section 2), December 2018

¹²⁴ OECD, '[Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019](#)' (section 2), December 2018

- 'Agent: 89% of women and girls are cut by traditional midwives/birth attendants
- 'Attitudes: 84.1% of women and 84.6% of men who have heard of FGM believe it should be discontinued
- 'HDI Rank: 151 out of 189 countries (2018)
- 'SDG [Sustainable Development Goals] Gender Index Rating: 118 out of 129 countries (2019)'¹²⁵

24.7.4 The USSD Human Rights Report covering events in 2019 stated:

'The law protects the bodily integrity of persons, and the 2016 penal code prohibits genital mutilation. Perpetrators are subject to a prison sentence of from 10 to 20 years, or imprisonment for life if the offender habitually carries out this practice for commercial purposes or the practice causes death. FGM/C remained a problem, but its prevalence was low. As in the previous year, children were reportedly subjected to FGM/C in isolated areas of the Far North, East, and Southwest Regions and among the Choa and Ejagham ethnic groups.

'In 2018 the minister of women's empowerment and the family said the government fully adopted a UN General Assembly resolution on the intensification of the global action aimed at eliminating FGM/C and had been carrying out initiatives to end FGM/C for more than 10 years. These initiatives included granting support for male and female excision practitioners to change professions and creating local committees to fight against the phenomenon in areas of high prevalence, such as the Southwest and North Regions.'¹²⁶

24.7.5 For more information on Women – including sexual and gender based violence, access to justice and health see [North-West South-West Crisis, Actors of Protection](#), [Internal Relocation](#) CPINs as well as

- [EASO COI Query – Sexual and gender based violence](#)
- [UN OCHA, 'Data on gender equality in Cameroon', 23 October 2019.](#)
- [Breast Ironing...A harmful practice that has been silenced for too long, BAWE, August 2011](#)
- [UN OCHA – Situation reports and Humanitarian Bulletins](#)

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¹²⁵ 28TooMany, '[FGM in Cameroon – Short report](#)' (p1), November 2019

¹²⁶ USSD, '[Human rights report 2019](#) (section 6)', 11 March 2020

Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToRs, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Geography and demography
 - Key geographic and demographic facts
 - Administrative divisions
 - Maps
 - Physical geography
 - Population density and distribution
- Economy
 - Key economic points
- History
- Media and telecommunications
- Key media and telecommunications points
- Citizenship and nationality
- Official documents
 - Birth certificates
 - National identity cards
 - Passports
 - Fraudulent documents
- Key issues relevant to protection claims
 - Children
 - Infant mortality
 - Education and child labour
 - Child marriage
 - Violence against children
 - Political situation
 - Current government
 - Anglophone situation
 - Prison conditions
 - Religious conversion

- Security situation
- Sexual orientation and/or gender identity
- Women / gender based harm or violence

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **1.0**
- valid from **23 December 2020**

Changes from last version of this note

First version of CPIN

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