

## U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

[TEXT ONLY](#) [HOME](#) [WHAT'S NEW](#) [FAQS](#) [SEARCH](#) [GLOSSARY](#) [FEEDBACK](#) [TRANSLATE](#) [PRINT/PAGE](#)

### Immigration Services and Benefits Programs

#### Overview

[National Customer Service Center \(NCSC\)](#)

[Emergency Travel](#)

[Naturalization](#)

[Citizenship](#)

[Green Cards \(LPR\)](#)

[Temporary Visitors](#)

[Employer Information](#)

[Inter-Country Adoptions](#)

[Temporary Protected Status](#)

#### Asylum

[Overview](#)

[History](#)

[Training Materials](#)

[Resource Information Center](#)

[Asylum FAQ](#)

[Two Paths to Asylum](#)

[Affirmative Asylum at a Glance](#)

[Affirmative Asylum Process](#)

[Types of Asylum Decisions](#)

[Coercive Family Planning](#)

## Cameroon

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	CMR03004.ZCH
<b>Date:</b>	October 16, 2002
<b>Subject:</b>	Cameroon: Information on Forced or Arranged Marriage
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center
<b>Keywords:</b>	Cameroon / Consent to marriage / Forced marriage / Matrimonial property / Minimum age / Parental rights / Polygamy / Sex discrimination / Traditional practices affecting women / Young persons

### Query:

Does forced/arranged marriage occur in Cameroon?

### Response:

Under Cameroon law, a girl must be 15 years old to marry and a boy must be 18. However, forced and arranged marriages of girls and boys below these ages is common in northern and rural areas of Cameroon, according to sources consulted by the Resource Information Center.

Cameroon law—Article 52 of Order No. 81-02 of June 29, 1981, on the civil service—stipulates: “No marriage may take place if the girl is younger than 15 or the boy is younger than 18, unless the President of the Republic grants an exemption for a serious reason. Only the President of the Republic may determine if the reason is ‘serious’ ” (CRLP 2000, 18). By law the prospective spouses must consent freely to the marriage, and the consent of a prospective spouse who is a minor is valid only if his or her father and mother consent to the marriage (CRLP 2000, 18). However, according to a study by the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, a U.S.-based non-profit legal advocacy organization that promotes women’s reproductive rights world-wide:

Reasonable Fear  
Screenings

Refugees

Humanitarian Parole

SAWE (Verification  
Program)

"In Cameroon very early marriage still occurs in certain tribes (in Adamaoua and the Northwest, and in the Extreme-North between eight and nine years of age). Some customs call for pre-pubescent girls to leave their homes and live with their husbands. Most of the time, the husband is a friend of the girl's father, and the marriage has been arranged without her being consulted. It is in the house of this 'stranger-husband' that she will experience her entire sexual and domestic life" (CRLP 2000, 18).

The governments of Canada and the U.S. both report continued practice of forced marriage in parts of Cameroon. A report by the Canadian International Development Agency states: "In Cameroon, the minimum legal age to enter into marriage is 15 for women and 18 for men. In addition, early (prior to age 15) and forced marriages are still practiced in some rural areas" (CIDA Mar 2002). And according to the U.S. Department of State human rights report on Cameroon for 2001:

"Another problem facing women is forced marriage; in some regions, girls' parents can and do give them away in marriage without their consent. Often, a bride's parents are paid a 'bride price' by the husband, who is sometimes many years older than the girl. Since a price has been paid, the girl is considered the property of the husband. When a married man dies, his widow is often unable to collect any inheritance, since she herself is considered part of the man's property. The widow often is forced to marry one of the deceased's brothers. Refusal means that she must repay the bride price in full (she usually has no source of funds) and leave the family property. In the northern provinces, some Lamibe (traditional rulers) reportedly prevent their wives and concubines from ever leaving their palaces. The lack of a national legal code covering the family leaves women defenseless against male-oriented customs" (USDOS 4 Mar 2002).

A gender-profile study of women in Cameroon by the news agency Afrol News concluded: "Because of the importance attached to customs and traditions, laws protecting women are often not respected. Despite the law, many girls are married off by their families by the age of 12. Forced marriage is usual" (Afrol News undated). The UN committee examining Cameroon's fulfillment of its obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights concluded:

"The Committee deplores the lack of progress made by the Government in combating the continuing discriminatory practices against women and girls which impede the enjoyment of their rights under the Covenant. Such practices include polygamy, the forced early marriage of girls and discriminatory laws which prevent women from inheriting land" (UN 2 Dec 1999).

BBC News reported: "Data from 22 sub-Saharan African countries shows the highest rates of teenage girls either married or cohabiting are in Mali, Niger, Uganda, Burkina Faso and Cameroon" (Monekosso 8 Mar 2001). Marriage rates for 15-19 year-old girls in Cameroon were 41 percent, the fifth highest rate of 22 African countries surveyed (Monekosso 8 Mar

2001).

According to a senior associate for Africa at the Washington, DC-based National Democratic Institute, a non-profit organization that promotes democracy world-wide, forced marriages were still common in Cameroon, particularly among some ethnic groups in the northern, predominantly Muslim, part of the country. Young girls are still sent into marriages with traditional rulers, lamibes, who may have ten or 15 wives. Forced marriage is less common in the urban areas among a younger generation that is more aware of its rights (Senior Associate for Africa 12 Oct 2002).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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