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CMR43544.FE

Cameroon: Situation and treatment of young women, including the existence of forced or arranged marriages; prevalence of such marriages; whether a woman can refuse such a marriage, and the consequences of the refusal; available protection and redress (April 2005)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

According to Cameroon's Civil Code, a marriage that was "contracted without the free consent of both spouses is deemed null and void" (CRLP Nov. 1999, 10; see also OMCT 7 July 2004, 126). In addition, according to Article 52 of Order No. 81-02 of 29 June 1981 on civil status, the minimum legal age for marriage is 15 for a woman and 18 for a man (CRLP 2000, 79; see also US 5 May 2003; OMCT 7 July 2004, 126).

According to the information obtained in a 17 to 25 January 2004 fact-finding mission by the United Kingdom (UK) Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND), forced marriages were "considered a big problem in Cameroon" (12 May 2004, Sec. 9.16). Several other sources indicated that forced (AFROL n.d.; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5; UK Oct. 2003, Sec. 6.68) or early marriages (AFROL n.d.; BBC 8 Mar. 2001; Canada Mar. 2002; CRLP Nov. 1999, 10; OMCT 7 July 2004, 126-127) are still practised, particularly in rural regions and in the northern part of the country (US 5 May 2003; UK Oct. 2003, Sec. 6.68). In some regions, parents force their daughter to marry men who are much older and who, once the dowry is paid, consider the woman to be their property (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5; OMCT 17 Nov. 2003, 127).

In a 2004 report, the World Organisation Against Torture (Organisation mondiale contre la torture, OMCT) stated that 24 per cent of married women in Cameroon were between the ages of 15 and 19 (7 July 2004). According to that source, women can even be married at the age of 12 in some communities (OMCT 7 July 2004, 126-127; see also AFROL n.d.).

According to the UK's IND, the majority of forced marriages are customary and not civil (UK 12 May 2004, Sec. 9.16). The IND also indicated that "girls are not protected through the family law and have few rights" (ibid.).

No information on whether a woman can refuse a forced or arranged marriage and on the protection and redress available in such a case could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including : Abyz News Links, AllAfrica, Amnesty International (AI), *CIA World Factbook* , Danish Immigration Service, European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), Famafrique, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC), *Jeune Afrique/L'Intelligent* , Norwegian Refugee Council, Radio France internationale (RFI), United National High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), World News Connection (WNC).

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