

From Local to Global Accountability

CAMEROON



ANALYSIS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS

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From Local to Global Accountability: Analysis of implementation of recommendations from international human rights mechanisms

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Introduction

The security threat facing Cameroon due to illegal arms circulation and trafficking, exacerbated by the socio-political crisis in the North-West and South-West regions, as well as the Boko Haram insurrection, led WILPF Cameroon to conduct a study in partnership with the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF) and other stakeholders to ascertain the level of knowledge of UNSC Resolution 1325 and the impact of armed conflict on women and girls in Cameroon, with a view to developing the National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSC Resolution 1325.¹

In the context of the presidential election on 7 October 2018, WILPF Cameroon also implemented a Women's Situation Room, which is an early warning and rapid response mechanism against electoral violence around, a women's situation room, which is a an early warning and rapid response mechanism against electoral violence, and published an observation report on this election. Additionally, between 2019 and 2020, WILPF Cameroon conducted a study to analyse the gender dimension in the conflicts in Cameroon as well as an analysis of the implementation of Cameroon's NAP 2018-2020 NAP for UNSC Resolution 1325.²

The observations highlighted in the present report are based on the findings of these three studies as well as on desk research. The information in this document is current through July 2022.

1 WILPF Cameroon, 'Report on the Baseline study for the development of the Action Plan for Security Council Resolution 1325 and other Resolutions in Cameroon' (February 2017); WILPF Cameroon, Prevention of electoral violence in Cameroon through the women's situation room: Report on the observation of the 7 October 2018 presidential election in Cameroon.

2 WILPF Cameroon, 'Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon' (March 2020). Available at: <https://www.wilpf-cameroon.org/en/study-publication-of-the-report-on-gender-conflicts-analysis-in-cameroon/>; *Review of Cameroon's 2018-2020 National Action Plan for Security Council Resolution 1325 and other Resolutions on the Women, Peace and Security agenda, Civil society organizations' perspectives* (April 2021).

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I. Non-Discrimination

a. Legal framework

In 2012 and 2019, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) recommended that Cameroon adopt comprehensive anti – discrimination legislation listing all prohibited grounds for discrimination, as set out in Article 2, paragraph 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.³ In 2019, the Committee indeed noted the introduction into the legal framework, including in the penal code, of several provisions against discrimination, but it highlighted with concern that these did not cover all grounds for discrimination, nor all areas covered by the Covenant.⁴ To date, Cameroon has still not adopted a specific law listing all grounds for discrimination. In May 2022, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) also recommended that Cameroon review its laws and policies in order to explicitly incorporate the principle of equality and the prohibition of racial discrimination on all prohibited grounds, in line with Article 1 of the Convention, and to abolish incompatible concepts, such as that of “assimilation”. It also recommended the adoption of anti-discrimination legislation to prevent and combat racial discrimination, covering all grounds of discrimination and encompassing direct and indirect discrimination in both the public and private spheres.⁵

b. Discrimination against women

Furthermore, discrimination against women persists, including through the application of customary law.⁶ Indeed, Cameroon has two court systems, the statutory law courts and traditional courts, which apply laws that are often

3 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Forty-seventh session ‘Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Cameroon’ (23 January 2012) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/2-3, paragraph 9; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon’ (25 March 2019) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 22. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/CMR/CO/4&Lang=En.

4 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon’ (25 March 2019) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 21. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/CMR/CO/4&Lang=En.

5 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘Concluding observations on the combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon’ (26 May 2022) UN Doc CERD/C/CMR/CO/22-23, paragraph 9. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f22-23&Lang=en.

6 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon’ (25 March 2019) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 27. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/CMR/CO/4&Lang=En.

discriminatory against women.⁷ The CESCR has therefore recommended that Cameroon take measures to fight gender-based stereotypes and change traditional attitudes that hinder women's exercise of economic, social, and cultural rights, including their access to land.⁸

The reform of the Civil Code, which includes discriminatory provisions⁹ against women, has been awaited for nearly 20 years. The CESCR has recommended to “repeal all legal provisions, including in the Civil Code, that discriminate against women or bar women from certain types of jobs, and ensure equality between men and women in the application of customary law, as well as in statutory law”.¹⁰ At the last Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2018, a recommendation was made asking Cameroon to “[r]eview laws that discriminate against women, in particular articles 1421 and 1428 of the Civil Code relating to the administration of family assets” but the government only took note of this recommendation without providing justification.¹¹ Cameroon has nevertheless accepted a UPR recommendation to repeal all discriminatory provisions relating to marriage and family relations.¹²

In its latest report to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for 2015-2019, Cameroon stated that “the State continues making efforts to completely eradicate discriminatory provisions against women from the laws”.¹³

7 The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights raised this question in its list of issues: “Indicate how the State party ensures that its Covenant obligations relating to the equal enjoyment of rights by men and women take precedence over customary law, including in cases handled by traditional courts.”; (25 April 2018) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/Q4, paragraph 9. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fCMR%2fQ%2f4&Lang=en.

8 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon’ (25 March 2019) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 28 a. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/CMR/CO/4&Lang=En.

9 From Articles 1421 and 1428 of the Civil Code: “Le mari administre seul les biens de la communauté. Il peut les vendre, aliéner et hypothéquer sans le concours de la femme” (The husband is sole administrator of community assets. He may sell, dispose of, or mortgage them without the agreement of the wife); and “Le mari a l’administration de tous les biens personnels de la femme. Il peut exercer seul toutes les actions mobilières et possessoires qui appartiennent à la femme” (The husband administers all the wife’s personal assets. He may solely exercise all property and possessory actions on behalf of the wife).

10 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon’ (25 March 2019) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 28 b. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/CMR/CO/4&Lang=En.

11 Human Rights Council, Thirty-ninth session ‘Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon’ (10 July 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15, recommendation 121.85: “Review laws that discriminate against women, in particular articles 1421 and 1428 of the Civil Code relating to the administration of family assets (Mexico)”. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>; Human Rights Council, Thirty-ninth session ‘Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon, Addendum Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review’ (12 September 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15/Add. 1. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>.

12 Human Rights Council, Thirty-ninth session ‘Report of the working group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon’ (10 July 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15, recommendation 121.168: “Repeal all discriminatory provisions in marriage and family relations, and adopt legal provisions that criminalise female genital mutilation (Spain)” Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>; Human Rights Council, Thirty-ninth session ‘Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon, Addendum Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review’ (12 September 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15/Add. 1. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>.

13 Republic of Cameroon ‘Single Report comprising the 4th, 5th and 6th Periodic Reports of Cameroon relating to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and 1st Reports relating to the Maputo Protocol and the Kampala Convention’ (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 2015-2019) paragraph 742. Available at: <https://www.achpr.org/public/Document/file/English/Cameroon%204th-6th%20Periodic%20Report,%202015-2019-ENG.pdf>.

Regarding “the 1981 Ordinance that organises Civil status and which gives the possibility to a husband to prevent his wife from exercising a trade separate from his in the interest of the household, the ability to manage joint property recognised as a right to the husband lone under the Civil Code”, Cameroon explains that “the courts increasingly apply equality provisions as provided for by international conventions ratified by the State. This is the case with judgement No. 31/COM/TGI of 16 November 2017 rendered by the Bamboutous High Court wherein the Judge relied on Articles 15 and 16 of the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to cancel the mortgage agreement signed by a husband on a joint property without the consent of his wife.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, Cameroon does not indicate whether any measures have been taken to repeal the Civil Code’s discriminatory provisions and, according to our research based on publicly accessible information, this does not seem to be the case.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee) had already recommended in 2014 that Cameroon: “[r]epeal all discriminatory provisions relating to marriage and family relations, including those relating to polygamy, the role of the husband as the head of household (art. 213 of the Civil Code), the choice of the place of residence by the husband (art. 215), the administration of family property and of the wife’s property by the husband (arts. 1421 and 1428) and the lower minimum age of marriage for women than for men; and raise the legal minimum age of marriage to 18 years for girls, to be equal to that for boys”.¹⁵ The fact that a tribunal relied in its decision on the State’s obligations by virtue of CEDAW is certainly a sign of progress. Nevertheless, the government has an obligation pursuant to the convention to repeal all discriminatory provisions against women in its national laws.¹⁶ This is even more important given that women face significant obstacles in accessing justice in Cameroon as noted by the CEDAW Committee, including the persistent lack of knowledge of basic laws and regulations, the application of customary law, and the very limited implementation of Law No. 2009/004 on the organisation of legal aid.¹⁷

14 Republic of Cameroon ‘Single Report comprising the 4th, 5th and 6th Periodic Reports of Cameroon relating to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and 1st Reports relating to the Maputo Protocol and the Kampala Convention’ (African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights 2015-2019) paragraph 742. Available at: <https://www.achpr.org/public/Document/file/English/Cameroon%204th-6th%20Periodic%20Report,%202015-2019-ENG.pdf>.

15 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, ‘Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Cameroon (28 February 2014) UN Doc CEDAW/C/CMR/CO/4-5 paragraph 39 a. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/CMR/CO/4-5&Lang=En.

16 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Article 2 f).

17 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, ‘Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Cameroon’ (28 February 2014), CEDAW/C/CMR/CO/4-5 paragraphs 10 and 11. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights’ (23 January 2012) UN DOC E/C.12/CMR/CO/2-3.

c. Discrimination against the English-speaking minority

Even though the Cameroonian Constitution recognises French and English as the country's two official languages, discrimination in the practice of official languages to the disadvantage of English speakers is a root cause of the conflict that has been raging in the South-West and North-West regions since 2016¹⁸ (more information on this subject is provided in Section IV). The creation of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism (NCPBM) in 2017 represented some progress in that regard.¹⁹ On this subject, the CESCR recommended in 2019 that Cameroon “ensure the effective operation of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism by ensuring its independence and allocating sufficient human, financial and technical resources to it”.²⁰ However, in 2022 the CERD expressed its concerns with regard to “insufficient resources allocated to the Commission to carry out its mandate, and a lack of information on its roles and activities, particularly with regard to receiving complaints concerning non-compliance with the national legislative framework on bilingualism and multiculturalism”.²¹ It, therefore, recommended that Cameroon allocate sufficient human and financial resources to the National Commission on the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism, and provide detailed information on its activities in its next periodic report to the Committee.²²

Moreover, in its last UPR, Cameroon accepted the following recommendation: “Redouble efforts for the full and effective implementation of the official bilingual policy, and ensure that the English-speaking minority is not subject to inequality in access to public services, the administration of justice, and freedom of speech”.²³ The CESCR had also recommended that Cameroon “redouble its efforts to

18 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘Fourth periodic report submitted by Cameroon under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant’ UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/4 (11 December 2017) paragraphs 23-28. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights raised this question in its list of issues E/C.12/CMR/Q4, paragraph 6. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FCMR%2fQ%2f4&Lang=en.

19 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon’ (25 March 2019) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 62. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/CMR/CO/4&Lang=En.

20 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon’ (25 March 2019) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 63. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/CMR/CO/4&Lang=En.

21 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘Concluding observations on the combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon’ (26 May 2022) UN Doc CERD/C/CMR/CO/22-23, paragraph 20. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f22-23&Lang=en.

22 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘Concluding observations on the combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon’ (26 May 2022) UN Doc CERD/C/CMR/CO/22-23, paragraph 21. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f22-23&Lang=en.

23 Recommendation number 121.66 (Republic of Korea), Human Rights Council, Thirty-ninth session ‘Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon’ (10 July 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>; Human Rights Council, Thirty-ninth session ‘Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon, Addendum Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review’ (12 September 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15/Add. 1. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>.

effectively prevent and combat de facto discrimination and marginalisation of ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities, including the English-speaking minority. In this regard, the Committee recommends that the State party adopt all necessary measures, including temporary special measures, and launch awareness-raising campaigns to ensure the effective enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights.”²⁴ From 16 to 18 June 2021, the NCPBM travelled through several regions of the country as part of the campaign against hate speech and xenophobia.²⁵ The aim of this activity was to meet stakeholders (administrators, political parties, traditional and religious leaders, civil society, and youth) in order to inform these actors of NCPBM’s role and activities. It also sought to identify causes of hate speech and xenophobia and to collect suggested solutions to curb these phenomena.

At the end of the Major National Dialogue²⁶ convened in 2019 by President Biya with the aim of a return to peace, the “Local Development and Decentralisation” Commission called for the implementation of a “special status” for the English-speaking regions in the North-West and the South-West, “in accordance with Article 62, paragraph 2 of the Constitution”, and more broadly for the establishment of “regions” with relative autonomy from the State.²⁷ Following these recommendations, a code for local authorities was adopted on 24 December 2019 by Law 2019/024.²⁸ The Code grants special status to the North-West and South-West regions.²⁹ Section 3(1) states that “[t]he North-West and South-West regions shall have a special status based on their language specificity and historical heritage” and that “[t]he special status shall also entail respect for the peculiarity of the Anglophone education system and consideration of the specificities of the Anglo-Saxon legal system based on common law.”³⁰ The special status provides for the creation of regional missions and the development of traditional chiefdom.

24 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon’ (25 March 2019) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 26. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/CMR/CO/4&Lang=E.

25 Cameroon tribune, ‘Lutte contre le discours haineux : la « Commission Musonge » sensibilise dans le Sud’ (The fight against hate speech: the “Musonge Commission” raises awareness in the South) (22 June 2021). Available at: <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/40703/fr.html/lutte-contre-le-discours-haineux-la-commission-musonge-sensibilise> (in French).

26 The “Major National Dialogue” (French: Grand dialogue national) is the official name of a dialogue between the Cameroonian government and various opposition parties, aiming to resolve the conflict in the North-West and South-West regions. The event was held between 30 September and 4 October 2019. More in Le Temps, ‘Paul Biya convoque un « grand dialogue national » sur la crise séparatiste au Cameroun’ (Paul Biya convenes a “major national dialogue” on the separatist crisis in Cameroon) (11 September 2019). Available at: <https://www.letemps.ch/monde/paul-biya-convoque-un-grand-dialogue-national-crise-separatiste-cameroun> (in French).

27 Jeune Afrique, ‘Cameroun : que reste t’il du grand dialogue national ?’ (Cameroon: what is left of the major national dialogue?) (4 October 2020). Available at: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1053449/politique/tribune-cameroun-que-reste-t-il-du-grand-dialogue-national/> (in French).

28 Law no. 2019/024 of 24 December 2019 to institute the general code of regional and local authorities. Available at: <http://197.159.3.34/index.php/en/instruments-and-laws/laws/298-law-no-2019-024-of-24-december-2019-bill-to-institute-the-general-code-of-regional-and-local-authorities>.

29 Jeune Afrique, ‘Cameroun : que reste t’il du grand dialogue national ?’ (Cameroon: what is left of the major national dialogue?) (4 October 2020). Available at: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1053449/politique/tribune-cameroun-que-reste-t-il-du-grand-dialogue-national/> (in French).

30 Law no. 2019/024 of 24 December 2019 to institute the general code of regional and local authorities, Section 3. Available at: <https://www.prc.cm/fr/multimedia/documents/8036-loi-2019-024-du-24-decembre-2019>.

The other specificity addresses regional bodies in the North-West and South-West regions: the regional assembly and the regional executive council composed of two chambers: the “*house of divisional representatives*” and the “*house of chiefs*”.³¹ As another innovation, the special status established an independent mediator with the title of “*public independent conciliator*” in the North-West and South-West regions.³² To this effect, two mediators were named in these two regions on 10 June 2021, by decree of the President of the Republic.³³

Granting special status to the South-West and North-West regions has not led to an effective solution to the crisis. This measure is seen as illegitimate since it was decided during a Major National Dialogue that did not include the Anglophone leaders, nor a large part of civil society or of the opposition.³⁴ The dialogue also did not ensure an adequate representation of women. Furthermore, the majority of English-speakers in the population seem to prefer federalism over a “special status” that does not meet their aspirations.³⁵ English-speaking leaders wished to hold their own self-determination forum, called the “*All Anglophone Conference*”, which as of today has unfortunately not been accepted by the government since the onset of the crisis until now.³⁶ Cameroon had however received and accepted in 2018 two UPR recommendations to engage in inclusive dialogue with the English-speaking communities.³⁷

31 African Arguments, ‘Cameroon grants “special status” to its restive regions. They don’t feel special’ (13 January 2020) Available at: <https://africanarguments.org/2020/01/cameroon-grants-special-status-anglophone-conflict/>.

32 The Public Independent Conciliator is an independent authority tasked with receiving complaints concerning leaders’ relations with their constituents, the functioning of regional administrations, communities, businesses, and public establishments, and to ensure the respect of regional specificities in the areas of English-language use, the practice of Common Law, and the implementation of the English-language educational sub-system. Decree no. 2020/773 of 24 December 2020 to lay down conditions for discharge of the duties of Public Independent Conciliator in the North-West and South-West regions. Available at: <https://www.prc.cm/en/news/the-acts/decrees/4819-decree-no-2020-773-of-24-december-2020-to-lay-down-conditions-for-discharge-of-the-duties-of-public-independent-conciliator-in-the-north-west-and-south-west-regions>.

33 Decree no. 2020/773 of 24 December 2020 to lay down conditions for discharge of the duties of Public Independent Conciliator in the North-West and South-West regions. Available at: <https://www.prc.cm/en/news/the-acts/decrees/5219-decree-no-2021-342-of-10-june-2021-to-appoint-public-independent-conciliators-in-the-north-west-and-south-west-regions>; CRTV, ‘Les premiers Public Independent Conciliators nommés’ (The first Public Independent Conciliators are named) (10 June 2021) Available at: <https://www.crtv.cm/2021/06/les-premiers-public-independent-conciliators-nommes/> (in French).

34 African Arguments, ‘Cameroon grants “special status” to its restive regions. They don’t feel special’ (13 January 2020). Available at: <https://africanarguments.org/2020/01/cameroon-grants-special-status-anglophone-conflict/>.

35 DW, ‘Cameroon: Anglophone’s special status – too little, too late?’ (23 December 2019). Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/cameroon-anglophones-special-status-too-little-too-late/a-51747683>; Roland Tsapi, ‘Politique/Crise anglophone : Christian Tumi et le fédéralisme’ (Policy/Anglophone crisis: Christian Tumi and federalism), (Lebledparle, 2 December 2020). Available at: <https://www.lebledparle.com/chronique-politique-crise-anglophone-christian-tumi-et-le-federalisme/> (in French).

36 Jeune Afrique, ‘Cameroun : Paul Biya zappe la conférence générale anglophone du Cardinal Christian Tumi’ (Cameroon: Paul Biya switches off Cardinal Christian Tumi’s All Anglophone Conference) (13 February 2019). Available at: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/732595/politique/cameroun-paul-biya-zappe-la-conference-generale-anglophone-du-cardinal-christian-tumi/> (in French).

37 Human Rights Council, Thirty-ninth session ‘Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon’ (10 July 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15, recommendation 121.64: “Initiate a multi-stakeholder dialogue at the political level with the various stakeholders in the English-speaking communities in order to identify appropriate measures to respond adequately to the violence affecting the South-West and North-West areas of the country (Austria)”; recommendation 121.65: “Expressly engage in a sustained dialogue with the representatives of the English-speaking community on the crisis in the North-west and South-west regions of the country to reach a consensual solution that upholds human rights (Canada)”. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>.

Finally, in 2018 the government created new departments in the National School of Administration and Magistracy and proceeded to recruit English-speaking magistrates and one thousand bilingual educators. Despite it being a major step, the fact that the recruited administrators still need to be trained and assigned positions represents a major challenge as this requires a lot of time. A rapid solution could be the direct recruitment of English-speaking administrators and lawyers already trained for public service. There is also an urgent need to train a significant number of translators in order to provide each administration and service with bilingual staff to ensure the translation of documents into French or English, in all public and private services and at all levels. At its May 2022 review, the CERD noted that ethnic and ethnolinguistic minority groups in the North-West and South-West regions are still subjected to exclusion and discrimination leading to inequality, particularly in accessing public services, due to the limited implementation of bilingualism measures.³⁸ It therefore recommended that Cameroon “strengthen its efforts to address inequality and to increase access by the population in the North-West and South-West Regions to public services, and their representation in the public sector, particularly in senior and decision-making positions.”³⁹

d. Ethnic and inter-tribal discrimination

The latest presidential election on 7 October 2018 was marked by an increase in hate speech and tribal rhetoric on social networks and in traditional media. Increasingly, we observe a “tribalisation” of social facts or events on social media,⁴⁰ meaning that an individual’s deeds and actions are often attributed to their tribal affiliations. These trends, paired with post-electoral protests in 2018 in Douala, Bafoussam, and Yaoundé, and even among the diaspora, have amplified the already detrimental climate of insecurity and further weakened peace. The weakening of the social fabric through the circulation of hate speech between ethnic groups, tribes, and political parties both on social networks and conventional media, as well as by certain political actors to consolidate their electoral base, are a significant threat to peace in Cameroon.⁴¹

38 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘Concluding observations on the combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon’ (26 May 2022) UN Doc CERD/C/CMR/CO/22-23, paragraph 20. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f22-23&Lang=en.

39 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘Concluding observations on the combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon’ (26 May 2022) UN Doc CERD/C/CMR/CO/22-23, paragraph 21. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f22-23&Lang=en.

40 VOA Afrique, ‘Les Camerounais en campagne contre les discours haineux et xénophobes’ (Cameroonians against hate and xenophobic speech) (11 March 2021). Available at: <https://www.voafrique.com/a/une-campagne-contre-les-discours-haineux-et-xenophobes/5810509.html> (in French).

41 Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under Articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, ‘Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Cameroon’ (23 January 2012) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/2-3, paragraph 20.

Section 241 of the Penal Code of 12 July 2016 punishes with imprisonment and a fine contempt of race or religion. In 2019, through Law 2019/20 of 24 December 2019, the Penal Code was amended and supplemented to cover offenses relating to tribal hatred. The revisions introduced Section 241-1, which punishes offenses to the tribe and prescribes in its Subsection 3 that: “Where the offense is committed with intent to arouse hatred of contempt between citizens, the penalties provided by the foregoing subsections 1 and 2 shall be doubled.”⁴² At its May 2022 review, the CERD nevertheless stated its concern that the legislative framework does not contain provisions to expressly criminalise racist hate speech and hate crimes in accordance with Article 4 of the Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.⁴³ The Committee also regretted “the lack of information on the efforts taken to monitor the spread of hate speech on the Internet and social media, as well as the lack of information, including statistics, on complaints filed, investigations and prosecutions carried out, and sanctions imposed against those responsible. It is also concerned about reports of incitement to racial hatred by public and government officials (arts. 4 and 6–7).”⁴⁴ Cameroon must urgently implement the CERD recommendations on this matter.⁴⁵

Finally, the National Communication Council (NCC), a regulatory and consulting body, specifically tasked with maintaining “social peace, unity, and national integration in all media” and for “the promotion of ideals of peace, democracy, and human rights” has an essential role in preventing hate speech.⁴⁶ The NCC does not however have the necessary power to issue the binding decisions required to fulfil its position as a regulatory body for communications.⁴⁷

42 Law No. 2016/007 of July 12, 2016, relating to the penal code, available at: <https://wipolex.wipo.int/en/legislation/details/16366>; and Law 2019/20 of 24 December 2019 available at: https://cameroonhighcommission.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/law_2019_020_of_24_december_2019.pdf.

43 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘Concluding observations on the combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon’ (26 May 2022) UN Doc CERD/C/CMR/CO/22-23, paragraph 14. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f22-23&Lang=en.

44 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘Concluding observations on the combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon’ (26 May 2022) UN Doc CERD/C/CMR/CO/22-23, paragraph 14. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f22-23&Lang=en.

45 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘Concluding observations on the combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon’ (26 May 2022) UN Doc CERD/C/CMR/CO/22-23, paragraph 15. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f22-23&Lang=en.

46 National Communication Council website available at: <http://cnc.gov.cm/>.

47 For example, on 28 November 2018, following remarks inciting tribal hatred and violence during the show “Club elites”, presented on 4 November 2018 on Vision4 by Ernest Obama, a Vision4 journalist, the NCC decided to bar him for one month from practising journalism in Cameroon. This decision was unfortunately not implemented, as reported in Marchelo Tientcheu, ‘Vision 4 Tv et Ernest Obama suspendus au Cameroun pour diffusion de fake news et de message de haine’ (Vision 4 Tv and Ernest Obama suspended in Cameroon for broadcasting fake news and a message of hatred) (Lebledparle, 19 December 2018). Available at: <https://www.lebledparle.com/medias/1105882-medias-vision-4-tv-et-son-directeur-ernest-obama-suspendus-au-cameroun-par-le-cnc> and <https://www.lebledparle.com/societe/1103930-parfait-ayissi-et-ernest-obama-a-l-antenne-malgre-la-suspension-du-cnc> (in French).



RECOMMENDATIONS

- › Eliminate all discriminatory provisions against women in the Civil Code, including discriminatory provisions around marriage and family relations;
- › Strengthen the justice system personnel's capacities on legal instruments to promote and protect women's rights;
- › Adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation listing all prohibited grounds for discrimination, as set out in Article 2, paragraph 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- › Engage in multi-stakeholder, inclusive dialogue at the political level with the various stakeholders in English-speaking communities in order to identify appropriate steps to adequately respond to the violence affecting the South-West and North-West regions of the country, all the while ensuring a functional participation of at least 30% of women;
- › Train and recruit a sufficient number of French/English translators and interpreters in public services and extend this measure to the private sector;
- › Ensure the application and effective use of Section 241 and Section 241-1 of the Penal Code in the courts, including through public outreach, in order to mitigate the rise of hate speech and xenophobia.

II. Gender-Based Violence

According to the UN Women global database on violence against women, it was estimated in 2018 that 31,7% of women and girls in Cameroon aged 15-49 years have experienced intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.⁴⁸ According to some sources, 43.2% of married women are victims of domestic violence.⁴⁹ Domestic violence increased with the containment measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown, and promiscuity as well as the decrease in income, increase in stress and alcohol consumption.⁵⁰

48 Global Database of Violence against Women, Cameroon. Available at: <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/fr/countries/africa/cameroon>.

49 Care, 'Analyse Rapide Genre pour COVID-19, Cameroun' (Rapid Gender Analysis – COVID-19, Cameroon) (May 2020) page 13. Available at: https://www.careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/Rapport-RGA_COVID-19_pour_validation_Cameroun-VF.pdf; IASC Gender Standby Capacity Project, 'Data on gender equality in Cameroon' (17 October 2019) page 1. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/data-gender-equality-cameroon>.

50 Care, 'Analyse Rapide Genre pour COVID-19, Cameroun' (Rapid Gender Analysis – COVID-19, Cameroon) (May 2020). Available at: https://www.careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/Rapport-RGA_COVID-19_pour_validation_Cameroun-VF.pdf; Care, 'Rapid Gender Analysis – COVID-19 West Africa' (April 2020). Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/benin/rapid-gender-analysis-covid-19-west-africa-april-2020>; OCHA, 'Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon' (June 2020). Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2020-revised-june-2020>.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), “[t]he increased recourse to domestic violence is explained by the fact that, while men seek to replicate the masculine ideals of protector and provider for the family, the current political and economic context puts them under increasing pressure.”⁵¹ Furthermore, it has been reported that according to a study by the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, over 130 femicides were committed between 2019 and 2020.⁵²

These past few years, Cameroon has received numerous recommendations from the CESCR, the CEDAW Committee, and the UPR urging it to strengthen its legal framework to fight violence against women, including by penalising domestic violence, sexual harassment, and marital rape.⁵³ Cameroon has accepted several UPR recommendations urging it to strengthen its laws and policies around gender-based violence, including by adopting a specific law on violence against women and by criminalising through the Penal Code all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence and marital rape.⁵⁴

Despite the creation of call centres for victims of gender-based violence in four regions of the country, female victims of sexual or domestic violence do not always receive proper care in public services. These call centres set up by the government do not operate as desired due to a lack of financial and human resources.⁵⁵ A specific law on the prevention of and fight against violence towards women has still not been adopted. The lack of criminalisation of domestic violence and marital rape remains significant shortcomings as highlighted by the CEDAW Committee.⁵⁶ In its 2017 report to the CESCR, Cameroon indicated that the revised Penal Code removed

51 OCHA, ‘Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon’ (June 2020) page 20. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2020-revised-june-2020>.

52 Actu Cameroun, ‘Féminicides: 130 cas en deux ans’ (Femicides: 130 cases in two years) (18 October 2020). Available at: <https://actucameroun.com/2020/10/18/feminicides-130-cas-en-deux-ans/> (in French); Agence Cameroun Presse, ‘Féminicide au Cameroun : le cri d’alarme de l’honorable François Biba’ (Femicide in Cameroon: an alarm call by The Hon. François Biba) (14 May 2021). Available at: <https://agencecamerounpresse.com/tribune-libre/f%C3%A9minicide-au-cameroun-le-cri-d-alarmede-l%E2%80%99honorable-fran%C3%A7ois-biba.html>.

53 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Forty-seventh session “Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Cameroon” (23 January 2012) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 20; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, ‘Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Cameroon’ (28 February 2014) UN Doc CEDAW/C/CMR/CO/4-5, paragraphs 10 and 11; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon, (25 March 2019) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 20. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/CMR/CO/4&Lang=En; Human Rights Council, ‘Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon’ (10 July 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15, recommendations 121.78, 121.79, 121.80. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>.

54 Human Rights Council, ‘Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon’ (10 July 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15, recommendations 121.173, 121.178, 121.179, 121.180, 121.182. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>.

55 Information gathered during a WILPF Cameroon interview with a manager in one such centre.

56 Hilary Gbedemah, Follow-up Rapporteur Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Follow-up letter sent to the State Party (26 April 2017). Available at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fFUL%2fCMR%2f27288&Lang=en.

discriminatory provisions concerning adultery, rape, and child marriage.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the government indicated that despite the absence of specific provisions, domestic violence, like marital rape, can be punished under certain Penal Code provisions. Domestic violence against a women would thus fall under Penal Code, Sections 277 and 281 that punish assault and battery, respectively.⁵⁸ However, these general provisions are inadequate considering the circumstances and the specific needs of victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence therefore continues to be considered a private matter by those responsible for applying the law.

According to Cameroon's report submitted to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for the period 2015-2019, Law No. 2016/7 of 12 July 2016 reinforced women's protection against violence and assault on bodily integrity, in particular by introducing Sections 295 and 296 that criminalise rape.⁵⁹ Cameroon reported that between 2013 and 2015, 479 cases of rape were prosecuted⁶⁰ for an average of 159 prosecutions per year. Since the introduction of the 2016 Law, there has been a very slight increase in rape prosecutions as Cameroon reported 264 prosecutions and 153 convictions for rape in 2016, and 309 prosecutions and 146 convictions in 2017.⁶¹ However, information on the number of complaints lodged that led to prosecutions are not provided, despite this information being essential for assessing the efficacy of legal action in this area. Furthermore, Cameroon has not provided any data on domestic violence, including on intimate partner rape or rape within the family, only indicating that a "National Plan to reduce domestic violence was drawn up to promote peace in families and combat violence" has been drafted and that information sessions have been organised to disseminate legal instruments on the protection of family rights.⁶² According to our research, this national plan is not publicly available.

57 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 'Fourth periodic report submitted by Cameroon under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant' (11 December 2017) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/4, paragraphs 44-46.

58 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 'Fourth periodic report submitted by Cameroon under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant' (11 December 2017) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/4, paragraphs 78-79.

59 Republic of Cameroon, 'Single Report comprising the 4th, 5th and 6th Periodic Reports of Cameroon relating to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and 1st Reports relating to the Maputo Protocol and the Kampala Convention' (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 2015-2019), paragraph 779. Available at: <https://www.achpr.org/public/Document/file/English/Cameroon%204th-6th%20Periodic%20Report,%202015-2019-ENG.pdf>.

60 Republic of Cameroon, 'Single Report comprising the 4th, 5th and 6th Periodic Reports of Cameroon relating to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and 1st Reports relating to the Maputo Protocol and the Kampala Convention' (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 2015-2019), paragraph 796. Available at: <https://www.achpr.org/public/Document/file/English/Cameroon%204th-6th%20Periodic%20Report,%202015-2019-ENG.pdf>.

61 Republic of Cameroon, 'Single Report comprising the 4th, 5th and 6th Periodic Reports of Cameroon relating to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and 1st Reports relating to the Maputo Protocol and the Kampala Convention' (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 2015-2019), paragraph 796. Available at: <https://www.achpr.org/public/Document/file/English/Cameroon%204th-6th%20Periodic%20Report,%202015-2019-ENG.pdf>.

62 Republic of Cameroon, 'Single Report comprising the 4th, 5th and 6th Periodic Reports of Cameroon relating to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and 1st Reports relating to the Maputo Protocol and the Kampala Convention' (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 2015-2019), paragraph 466. Available at: <https://www.achpr.org/public/Document/file/English/Cameroon%204th-6th%20Periodic%20Report,%202015-2019-ENG.pdf>.

Given the predictable increase in domestic violence, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the armed conflict in the North-West and South-West regions, resulting in increasingly difficult living conditions for many families, including among the internally displaced population, it is urgent that Cameroon take decisive prevention, protection, and reparation measures for the victims of these types of violence.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adopt without delay a specific law on gender-based violence that addresses domestic violence and marital rape;
- Make public and popularise the National plan to reduce marital, domestic and family violence⁶³ and report the results of its implementation;
- Establish as soon as possible care centres for victims of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, in all regions of the country and provide them with appropriate financial, human, material, and technological resources, in order to ensure safety and assistance for victims;
- Collect, regularly and annually update and publish statistics on the number of complaints lodged for prosecution of domestic violence, including marital rape;
- Expand legal assistance to cases of domestic violence with the aim of facilitating victims' access to justice and reparations.

III. Women's Participation in Public and Political Life

The representation of women in politics is low in Cameroon. Other than in the National Assembly where there has been a notable progress with 33.9%⁶⁴ of women, there is a delay in other institutions: Government 16% (11 women out of 68 ministers), Senate 26%⁶⁵ (with the latest elections on 25 March 2018, the number of women went from 20 to 26 out of a total of 100 senators). Despite an increase in the number of women mayors from 8 to 35 out of a total of 360 communes, this

63 In the French version of Cameroon's report to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, this plan is referred to as "Plan National de réduction des violences conjugales, domestiques et familiales".

64 IPU Parline, Global data on national parliaments, monthly ranking of women in national parliaments (ranking as of 1 April 2021). Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=4&year=2021>.

65 IPU Parline, Global data on national parliaments, Cameroon. Available at: https://data.ipu.org/node/31/data-on-women?chamber_id=13358.

number, which only represents around 10%, is obviously still very low.⁶⁶ There are no women at the head of urban communities and no women were elected to lead a regional council at the first regional elections on 6 December 2020. Furthermore, not one female candidate was retained for the latest presidential election on 7 October 2018.⁶⁷ In addition, 3,108,453, i.e. around 45% of registered voters for the presidential election, were women.⁶⁸

Women were poorly represented as local commission and polling station officials at the latest presidential election. Women face many obstacles limiting their participation as voters and candidates despite representing about 52% of the population. Women candidates face a lack of financial resources for campaigning, they are poorly positioned on electoral lists by their parties, and they are sometimes subject to harassment. Politics continues to be seen as a man's domain, many women are not registered voters, women are sometimes told by their husbands or their families how to vote, and they can face retaliation and violence by their partners for having voted.⁶⁹

The CESCR and the CEDAW Committee have recommended that Cameroon adopt all necessary measures, including temporary special measures, to ensure that women have equal access to all spheres of political and public life.⁷⁰ The CEDAW Committee has indeed called for Cameroon to “implement temporary special measures in various forms, such as outreach and support programmes, quotas and other proactive and result oriented measures”⁷¹, as well as “raise awareness among members of parliament, government officials, employers and the general public about the necessity of temporary special measures, in particular as regard the empowerment of rural women.”⁷² Cameroon also accepted a UPR recommendation

66 Inter-Parliamentary Union, Cameroon, National Assembly. Available at: <http://archive.ipu.org/parline-f/reports/1053.htm>; France Diplomatie, Composition du gouvernement de la République du Cameroun (Governmental composition for the Republic of Cameroon). Available at: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/cameroun/presentation-du-cameroun/article/composition-du-gouvernement> (in French); Inter-Parliamentary Union, Cameroon, Senate. Available at: <http://archive.ipu.org/parline-f/reports/1054.htm>; DD-IKO, *Leadership féminin au Cameroun : des reculades troublantes* (Female leadership in Cameroon: troubling setbacks) (Viviane ONDOUA BIWOLE website, 2 March 2021). Available at: <https://vivianeondouabiwole.com/2021/03/02/leadership-feminin-au-cameroun-des-reculades-troublantes/> (in French).

67 Iknowpolitics, ‘Cameroun : Aucune femme sur les 9 candidats retenus pour la présidentielle 2018’ (Not one woman among the 9 candidates retained for the 2018 presidential election) (7 August 2018). Available at: <https://www.iknowpolitics.org/fr/news/world-news/cameroun-aucune-femme-sur-les-9-candidats-retenus-pour-la-presidentielle-2018> (in French).

68 ELECAM (data communicated at the 2018 presidential election evaluation workshop)

69 WILPF Cameroon, ‘Prévention des violences électorales au Cameroun à travers la salle de veille et d’alerte des femmes : Rapport de l’observation de l’élection présidentielle du 7 octobre 2018 au Cameroun’ (Preventing electoral violence in Cameroon through women’s situation rooms: Observational report on the 7 October 2018 presidential election in Cameroon) (in French).

70 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon’ (25 March 2019) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 28 c). Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/CMR/CO/4&Lang=En; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, ‘Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Cameroon’ (28 February 2014) UN Doc CEDAW/C/CMR/CO/4-5, paragraph 15.

71 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, ‘Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Cameroon’ (28 February 2014) UN Doc CEDAW/C/CMR/CO/4-5, paragraph 15 a).

72 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, ‘Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Cameroon’ (28 February 2014) UN Doc CEDAW/C/CMR/CO/4-5, paragraph 15 b).

to adopt concrete measures to strengthen women's participation in public and political life.⁷³ In the social and economic sphere, salaries remain unequal between men and women, especially in the private sector. The majority of women work in subsistence farming or the informal sectors and are under-employed, which hinders their exercise of other rights particularly political participation.

The electoral code stipulates, in Section 151 Subsection 3, a general obligation to "take into consideration gender aspects" in creating every list of candidates for all elections.⁷⁴ Political parties do not always observe this vague and generalised principle. As was recommended by the CEDAW Committee, Cameroon should take temporary special measures such as results-oriented quotas. To date, Cameroon has only voluntary quotas for the main political parties: 25-30% for the Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement (CPDM) and 25% for the Social Democratic Front (SDF). There are however no legal quotas for governmental and public positions including for territorial administration.

More information regarding women's participation in peace processes and the implementation of Resolution 1325 of the Security Council is included below in Section IV c) of this report.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Take temporary special measures for a representation of at least 30% women in elections, the formation of government at the regional and national levels, as well as in the nomination, recruitment, and placement within the public administration and legal apparatus;
- Strengthen the financial empowerment of women candidates through capacity building, financial support, and other support measures with the aim of eliminating obstacles to the effective participation of women in political, economic, and social life;
- Adopt effective implementation measures for the recommendations made by the Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, including with regard to the adoption of temporary special measures, so that women have access, in equal conditions, to all spheres of political and public life.

73 Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon' (10 July 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15, recommendation 121.128. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>; Human Rights Council, Thirty-ninth session 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon, Addendum Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review' (12 September 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15/Add. 1. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>.

74 Law no. 2012/001 of 19 April 2012 relating to the Electoral Code, Section 151(3). Available at: <https://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/archive/questions/replies/7798903/986792279/ELECTORAL-CODE-OF-CAMEROON.pdf>.

IV. Impact of Conflict on Women and Girls

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 31 August 2021, 1,052,591 persons are internally displaced in the Far North and in the North-West and South-West regions.⁷⁵ According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 4.4 million persons are in need, 25% of whom are women and 52% children.⁷⁶ In 2018, Cameroon accepted the UPR's recommendation to "[t]ake the necessary measures to protect refugee and displaced women against all forms of exploitation."⁷⁷ The CESCR had further recommended that Cameroon:

- (a) Take steps, as a matter of urgency, to ensure the enjoyment of Covenant rights by the people living in areas affected by violence and a lack of security, particularly in the Far North, North-West and South-West regions;
- (b) Conduct thorough, independent investigations into reports of violence and the destruction of hospitals, schools and entire villages, particularly in the North-West and South-West regions, in order to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice and sentenced to penalties commensurate with the gravity of their acts;
- (c) Ensure the effective implementation of the humanitarian assistance plans that have been adopted and of the 2018–2020 national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 and related resolutions on women and peace and security by, inter alia, establishing effective follow-up mechanisms that provide for the participation of the population groups concerned, including women, and by allocating sufficient financial, human and technical resources for their implementation.
- (d) Make every effort to achieve a peaceful solution to the crisis in the North-West and South-West regions of the country.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Operational data portal, refugee situations, Cameroon. Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/cmr>.

⁷⁶ OCHA, 'Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon' (March 2021) page 4. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-march-2021>.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon' (10 July 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15, recommendation 121.195. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>; Human Rights Council, Thirty-ninth session 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon, Addendum Views on conclusions and/or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review' (12 September 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15/Add. 1. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>.

⁷⁸ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 'Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon' (25 March 2019) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 5. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/CMR/CO/4&Lang=En.

a. Far North

In the Far North, repeated attacks by Boko Haram have created a climate of widespread insecurity. Local authorities report that women no longer want to send their daughters to school, to public places, or to markets as they fear kidnapping by Boko Haram.⁷⁹ Women face physical and sexual violence and young girls are used in ‘suicide’ attacks.⁸⁰ Indeed, Boko Haram has adopted an operational method that relies on the use of women and girls as weapons.⁸¹ In April 2017, UNICEF reported that since January 2014, 117 children – over 80% of them girls – had been used in ‘suicide’ attacks in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.⁸²

According to research by WILPF Cameroon in 2019, IDPs and refugees in the Far North are suspected of supporting Boko Haram and are marginalised in their host communities.⁸³ Internally displaced women who were interviewed reported having been attacked, particularly when collecting water.⁸⁴ Many displaced women and girls are also at risk of sexual exploitation and other gender-based violence, including forced and child marriage. According to OCHA, “conflict and displacement have aggravated gender-based violence trends in the Far North region. [...] Men’s frustration at being unemployed or underemployed, unable to fulfil their socially expected role of providers and protectors of the family, combined with the fact that violence is considered socially acceptable in some communities, leads to a recourse to domestic violence as a means of asserting authority and domination. In 2020, 76 per cent of GBV incidents were perpetrated by intimate partners, family members and relatives with the three main incidents being denial of resources, physical violence and forced/child marriage.”⁸⁵ Furthermore, the security context in the region, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has severely increased poverty overall as a key contributing factor to sexual exploitation and sexual violence, as well as to negative coping strategies, including survival sex work.⁸⁶

79 (Special Representative Stresses Need for New Strategies to Tackle Root Causes of Insurgency, as Security Council Considers Situation in Central Africa’ (13 December 2018). Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13618.doc.htm>.

80 Le Monde, ‘Grossesses et mariages précoces : la face cachée de la guerre contre Boko Haram au Cameroun’ (Early pregnancies and marriages: the hidden face of the war against Boko Haram in Cameroon) (22 August 2018). Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/08/22/grossesses-et-mariages-precoces-la-face-cachee-de-la-guerre-contre-boko-haram-au-cameroun_5345027_3212.html (in French).

81 Dionne Searcey, ‘Boko Haram turns female captives into terrorists’ (The New York Times, 7 April 2016). Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/08/world/afrika/boko-haram-suicide-bombers.html?emc=edit_na_20160407&nid=57977175&ref=cta.

82 UNICEF, ‘Silent shame: Bringing out the voices of children caught in the Lake Chad crisis’ (12 April 2017). Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/silent-shame-bringing-out-voices-children-caught-lake-chad-crisis>.

83 WILPF Cameroon, ‘Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon’ (March 2020) page 25. Available at: <https://www.wilpf-cameroon.org/en/study-publication-of-the-report-on-gender-conflicts-analysis-in-cameroon/>.

84 WILPF Cameroon, ‘Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon’ (March 2020) page 25. Available at: <https://www.wilpf-cameroon.org/en/study-publication-of-the-report-on-gender-conflicts-analysis-in-cameroon/>.

85 OCHA, ‘Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon’ (March 2021) page 36 and 56. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-march-2021>.

86 OCHA, ‘Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon’ (March 2021) page 36 and 56. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-march-2021>.

Boko Haram attacks have also led to the abandonment or destruction of many health facilities, which limits access to health care for local populations. Women and girls are particularly affected by the lack of access to health care, including reproductive and maternal health.⁸⁷ Women and girls that have been abused by Boko Haram militants, especially those who were taken as hostages, are stigmatised and discriminated against after their release or after having escaped under suspicion of being Boko Haram agents.⁸⁸ Finally, even though credible allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation by Cameroonian and Chadian soldiers have been reported in the Far North, the alleged perpetrators have not been held accountable by the legal and judicial system. This despite the fact that, as early as December 2017, the Committee against Torture expressed concerns at “reports of alleged arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, acts of violence, sexual exploitation and extortion of asylum seekers in the Far North of Cameroon by military personnel, who had allegedly taken them to be members of Boko Haram” and urged Cameroon to “ensure that effective investigations are conducted and that access to recourse is available to refugees and asylum seekers who were subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or extortion by military personnel.”⁸⁹

b. North-West and South-West regions

The conflict in the North-West and South-West regions began in 2016 following the government’s violent repression of peaceful protests organised by lawyers and teachers in these English-speaking regions against the marginalisation and discriminatory policies towards the Anglophone minority. A majority of the population lived off farming before the conflict. The establishment of “dead cities” several days of the week by the secessionists, including by closing schools and pausing all economic activity, the establishment of a curfew by the government, and administrative safety measures, greatly limit freedoms and have caused the slowdown or virtual non-existence of various economic and social activities.⁹⁰ Threats of attacks, roadblocks, and “dead cities” have a negative impact on business, means of subsistence, markets, and on access to agricultural lands

87 WILPF Cameroon, ‘Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon’ (March 2020) page 25. Available at: <https://www.wilpf-cameroon.org/en/study-publication-of-the-report-on-gender-conflicts-analysis-in-cameroon/>.

88 WILPF Cameroon, ‘Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon’ (March 2020) page 25. Available at: <https://www.wilpf-cameroon.org/en/study-publication-of-the-report-on-gender-conflicts-analysis-in-cameroon/>.

89 WILPF Cameroon, ‘Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon’ (March 2020) page 26-27. Available at: <https://www.wilpf-cameroon.org/en/study-publication-of-the-report-on-gender-conflicts-analysis-in-cameroon/>.

90 The “ghost town” operations were established by secessionists as a protest strategy against the government, including by closing school and pausing all economic activity: International Crisis Group, ‘Cameroun : le risque d’embrasement de la crise anglophone inquiète les francophones’ (Cameroon: the risk of intensification of the Anglophone crisis worries French-speakers) (8 September 2017). Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/cameroun-le-risque-dembrasement-de-la-crise-anglophone-inquiete-les-francophones> (in French); France24, the Observers, ‘Cameroon ‘ghost towns’ protest against French-speaking bias’ (10 January 2017). Available at: <https://observers.france24.com/en/20170110-cameroon-goes-quiet-operation-ghost-town-protest>; Statement by the Governor on 17 September 2018/ Statement by the Fako Prefect restricting movement and assembly in their administrative districts from 30 September to 2 October 2018.

that are abandoned in certain areas or that are not adequately maintained.⁹¹ “Dead cities” are enforced on Mondays and Tuesdays by the armed separatist groups, until the government convenes a dialogue with the separatist group leaders.⁹² Daily life is nevertheless resuming, especially in the main towns and some municipalities. However, the situation remains precarious with frequent attacks by armed groups against the military and security forces, kidnappings for ransom, and assassinations.⁹³

Communities therefore find themselves in extremely vulnerable situations in terms of food security. This disproportionately impacts women who make up the majority of farmers and who are often responsible for producing food for their families.

According to OCHA, sexual violence is endemic in the North-West and South-West regions. In 2021, 12,634 incidents of gender-based violence were reported to service providers specialised in these types of violence. 86% of victims of gender-based violence are women, 14% are men, 66% are adults, and 34% are children.⁹⁴ Women with disabilities and pregnant or breastfeeding women are at higher risk of sexual exploitation and violence.⁹⁵ The presence of armed men exposes women and girls to increased risk of sexual violence, including rape. Young mothers have reported that girls are victims of “rape due to the crisis where someone points a gun to your head and does what he wants.”⁹⁶ Sexual violence is not only perpetrated by members of armed groups or security forces, but is also a consequence of displacement forcing families to live in crowded quarters with relatives or within host communities.⁹⁷ This creates a higher risk of sexual exploitation and violence, particularly for young girls.⁹⁸

91 FEWS Net, Cameroon, ‘Productions agricoles au-dessus de la moyenne dans l’Extrême-Nord et perte des sources des revenus en zone anglophone’ (Crops above average in the Far North and loss of revenue sources in English-speaking areas) (November 2018). Available at: <http://fewsn.net/fr/west-africa/cameroon/key-message-update/novembre-2018> (in French).

92 Actu Cameroun, ‘Les ‘villes mortes’ maintenues dans les regions anglophones’ (“Ghost towns” are maintained in English-speaking areas) (30 June 2021). Available at: <https://actucameroun.com/2021/06/30/les-villes-mortes-maintenues-dans-les-regions-anglophones/> (in French).

93 Amnesty International, ‘Cameroon : Witness testimony and satellite images reveal the scale of devastation in Anglophone regions’ (28 July 2021). Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/07/cameroon-satellite-images-reveal-devastation-in-anglophone-regions/>.

94 OCHA, ‘Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon’ (April 2022) page 35. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2022>.

95 OCHA, ‘Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon’ (March 2021) page 57 and 58. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-march-2021>; OCHA, ‘Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon’ (April 2022) page 35 et 59. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2022>.

96 Plan International, ‘Ecoutez notre cri du cœur, les filles adolescentes des régions du Nord-Ouest et du Sud-Ouest du Cameroun à propos du conflit et de la pandémie de COVID-19’ (Hear our plea, adolescent girls in Cameroon North-West and South-West regions, in the face of conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic) (24 March 2021) page 9. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/coutez-notre-cri-de-c-ur-les-filles-adolescentes-des-r-gions-du-nord-ouest-et-du-sud> (in French).

97 WILPF Cameroon, ‘Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon’ (March 2020) page 46-47. Available at: <https://www.wilpf-cameroon.org/en/study-publication-of-the-report-on-gender-conflicts-analysis-in-cameroon/>.

98 WILPF Cameroon, ‘Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon’ (March 2020) page 46-47. Available at: <https://www.wilpf-cameroon.org/en/study-publication-of-the-report-on-gender-conflicts-analysis-in-cameroon/>.

IDPs fleeing violence, the majority of whom are women and children, turn to other harmful survival strategies notably by reducing the number of meals and the nutrition of adults in order to feed children.⁹⁹ This is often done to women's detriment, as they eat last and are thus more exposed to the risk of malnutrition.¹⁰⁰ Lack of access to basic social services (health, water, shelter, etc.) also aggravate problems linked to access to health care, including for pregnant women, which exposes them to at-risk pregnancies.¹⁰¹

c. Participation of women and girls in peace efforts, implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325

On 16 November 2017, the government launched its first National Action Plan (NAP) implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 for a period of three years (2018-2020).¹⁰² In this plan, the government made a commitment to “[i]ntroduce sex-specific elements in documents related to peace processes (cease fire agreements, peace treaties, constitutions, etc.)”; to involve women (30%) at political dialogue tables, and to “[e]nsure the presence of women affected by conflicts at negotiation and dialogue tables at local, national, regional and international levels.”¹⁰³ In 2021, WILPF Cameroon and other civil society organisations developed a detailed analysis of the implementation of the 2018-2020 NAP and provided recommendations for the design of the second NAP.¹⁰⁴

99 OCHA, ‘Cameroon : North-West and South-West crisis situation report No. 2 – as of 31 December 2018’. (20 January 2019). Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-north-west-and-south-west-crisis-situation-report-no-2-31-december-2018>; OCHA, ‘2018 Emergency Response plan summary, Cameroon North-West and South-West’ (May 2018). Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/cmr_nw_sw_fa_2018-05_summary_v07_light_0.pdf.

100 OCHA, ‘2018 Emergency Response plan summary, Cameroon North-West and South-West’ (May 2018). Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/cmr_nw_sw_fa_2018-05_summary_v07_light_0.pdf. International Committee of the Red Cross, ‘Women and displacement: strength in adversity’ (2 March 2010) Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/interview/women-displacement-interview-020310.htm>.

101 Presse-toi à gauche, ‘Les femmes et les enfants, premières victimes du conflit au Cameroun’ (Women and children, first victims of the conflict in Cameroon) (16 October 2018). Available at: <http://www.pressegauche.org/Les-femmes-et-les-enfants-premieres-victimes-du-conflit-au-Cameroun> (in French).

102 Republic of Cameroon, ‘National action plan for the 1325 Resolution and companion resolutions of the United Nations Security Council on women, peace and security (2018-2020)’ (August 2017). Available at: https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Cameroon_UNSCR-1325-NAP_FR_Aout-2017.pdf.

103 Republic of Cameroon, ‘National Action Plan for the 1325 Resolution and Companion Resolutions of the United Nations Security Council on Women, Peace and Security’ see Output 1.2 viii, Output 1.3 x and xiii (August 2017). Available at: https://www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/sites/www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/files/cameroon-nap_2018-2020_english.pdf.

104 *Review of Cameroon's 2018-2020 National Action Plan for Security Council Resolution 1325 and other Resolutions on the Women, Peace and Security agenda, Civil society organizations' perspectives* (April 2021).

Women were scarcely involved in the October 2019 Major National Dialogue. Only two women led two of the eight dialogue process commissions and only 14 women participated in the different dialogue commissions, as compared to 106 men.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the National Dialogue's recommendations did not substantially consider the recommendations made by women's organisations.¹⁰⁶

On 30 November 2018, a presidential decree created a National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Committee for ex fighters of Boko Haram and armed groups in the North-West and South-West regions.¹⁰⁷ The implementation of this committee should however have been preceded and accompanied by an inclusive national dialogue with the English-speaking communities in order to ensure appeasement, to understand and respond to grievances, and to conduct an effective consensual Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration process. Gender dimension was not considered in the makeup of the Committee, which is composed only of men, nor in the Committee's mandate as defined by Decree 2019/719 of 30 November 2018, despite the government's commitment in its 2018-2020 National Action Plan for UNSCR Resolution 1325 to consider the specific roles of women in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programs.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, this Committee is not inclusive since it is primarily composed of ministry representatives, albeit with the exception of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family tasked with issues of gender.¹⁰⁹

105 WILPF Cameroon, 'Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon' (March 2020) page 39. Available at: <https://www.wilpf-cameroon.org/en/study-publication-of-the-report-on-gender-conflicts-analysis-in-cameroon/>; International Crisis Group, 'Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon's Anglophone Conflict, Report N°307 AFRICA' (23 February 2022). Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/rebels-victims-peacebuilders-women-cameroots-anglophone-conflict>.

106 WILPF Cameroon, 'Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon' (March 2020) page 39. Available at: <https://www.wilpf-cameroon.org/en/study-publication-of-the-report-on-gender-conflicts-analysis-in-cameroon/>; International Crisis Group, 'Rebels, Victims, Peacebuilders: Women in Cameroon's Anglophone Conflict, Report N°307 AFRICA' (23 February 2022). Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/rebels-victims-peacebuilders-women-cameroots-anglophone-conflict>.

107 Decree No. 2018/719 of 30 November 2018 to establish the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Committee. Available at: <https://www.prc.cm/en/news/the-acts/decrees/3177-decree-n-2018-719-of-30-november-2018-to-establish-the-national-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-committee>; Jeune Afrique, 'Le Cameroun lance un processus de désarmement dans les zones en conflit' (Cameroun launches a disarmament process in conflict zones) (1 December 2018) . Available at: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/676074/politique/le-cameroun-lance-un-processus-de-desarmement-dans-les-zones-en-conflit/> (in French).

108 Agence Cameroun Presse, 'Les chefs de centre régionaux du Comité national de désarmement, démobilisation et réinsertion (CNDDR) nommés' (Regional centre leaders for the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Committee (NDDR) have been appointed) (12 December 2018). Available at: <https://agencecamerounpresse.com/defense/les-chefs-de-centre-r%C3%A9gionaux-du-comit%C3%A9-national-de-d%C3%A9sarmement,-d%C3%A9mobilisation-et-r%C3%A9insertion-cnDDR-nomm%C3%A9s.html> (in French); Decree No. 2018/719 of 30 November 2018 to establish the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Committee. Available at: <https://www.prc.cm/en/news/the-acts/decrees/3177-decree-n-2018-719-of-30-november-2018-to-establish-the-national-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-committee>; Republic of Cameroon, 'National Action Plan for the 1325 Resolution and Companion Resolutions of the United Nations Security Council on Women, Peace and Security' see Output 1.2 vii (August 2017). Available at: https://www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/sites/www.un.org.shestandsforpeace/files/cameroon-nap_2018-2020_english.pdf.

109 Decree No. 2018/719 of 30 November 2018 to establish the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Committee. Available at: <https://www.prc.cm/en/news/the-acts/decrees/3177-decree-n-2018-719-of-30-november-2018-to-establish-the-national-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-committee>.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure the effective participation of at least 30% women at all levels of peace processes, including any future dialogue process on the conflict in the North-West and South-West regions;
- Recruit at least 30% women to the National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Committee, assign these women to the three regional centres of the Far North, North-West, and South-West by 2022 and ensure gender and child-rights sensitive analysis in all disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration activities.

V. Birth and Civil Status Registration

Past recommendations and action taken by the State

In 2017, the Committee on the Rights of the Child highlighted the problem of the cost of birth registration, parents' lack of information about the importance of registering births and the time limits for doing so, and inaccessible and under-resourced civil registries, which disproportionately affects populations in situations of vulnerability.¹¹⁰ It recommended that Cameroon remove all birth registration and certificate issuance fees, increase the financial, technical and human resources of the National Civil Status Office in order to make it more accessible throughout the country, and to strengthen awareness-raising campaigns encouraging parents to register births. In 2019, the CESCR made similar recommendations to Cameroon.¹¹¹ Moreover, Cameroon noted, without justifying its lack of support, a UPR recommendation urging it to: "Ensure universal birth registration without discrimination by developing information systems with solid databases that would include information on the number of people yet to be registered, creating mobile registration units to reach the most remote areas, and conducting campaigns to inform all families about deadlines and ways to register their children."¹¹² In its May 2022 review, the CERD expressed concern "about reports of the high number

110 Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Cameroon' (6 July 2017) UN Doc CRC/C/CMR/CO/3-5, paragraphs 18 and 19. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f3-5&Lang=en.

111 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 'Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon' (25 March 2019) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 45. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/CMR/CO/4&Lang=En.

112 Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Cameroon' (10 July 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/39/15, recommendation 121.86. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cm-index>.

of children without birth certificates and persons without identity documents, as well as the shortcomings in the administration of the civil registry system, including corruption, high costs and complex procedures to obtain these documents due to the complex procedures and requirements.”¹¹³ The Committee also expressed concern about the fact that “many internally displaced persons risk statelessness, as they have lost their identity documents and cannot obtain new identity documents due to the complex procedures and requirements, which also leads to discrimination in accessing employment, education, health care and other basic services (art. 5).”¹¹⁴ It recommended that Cameroon “strengthen its efforts to address the administrative shortcomings of the civil registry system and complex procedures and requirements. It also recommends that the State party adopt measures to ensure the accessibility, including by providing them free of charge, of birth registration and identity documents required for citizenship to prevent statelessness, particularly among internally displaced persons. It also recommends that the State party ratify the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.”¹¹⁵

The CERD also expressed concern about reports that children without birth certificates are unable to enrol in the official school system, especially the official examination system.¹¹⁶ The Committee has therefore recommended that Cameroon “consider eliminating the requirement to present a birth certificate, in order to enrol internally displaced children in the official school and examination systems.”¹¹⁷

Cameroon has taken certain measures and actions. It has adopted universal registration of births without discrimination, as soon as a child is born in the national territory, regardless of their origin. A special plenary session was dedicated to civil registry by the National Assembly on 16 November 2020, after which some 30 recommendations were made regarding public policy and on legislative and regulatory measures, in particular to simplify civil status procedures

113 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘Concluding observations on the combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon’ (26 May 2022) UN Doc CERD/C/CMR/CO/22-23, paragraph 30. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f22-23&Lang=en.

114 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘Concluding observations on combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon’ (26 May 2022) UN Doc CERD/C/CMR/CO/22-23, paragraph 30. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f22-23&Lang=en.

115 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘Concluding observations on combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon’ (26 May 2022) UN Doc CERD/C/CMR/CO/22-23, paragraph 31. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f22-23&Lang=en.

116 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘Concluding observations on combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon’ (26 May 2022) UN Doc CERD/C/CMR/CO/22-23, paragraph 28. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f22-23&Lang=en.

117 Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, ‘Concluding observations on combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports of Cameroon’ (26 May 2022) UN Doc CERD/C/CMR/CO/22-23, paragraph 29. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f22-23&Lang=en.

by digitalising documents.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Cameroon has signed agreements with several development aid partners to resolve the multiple problems related to civil registry and to modernise this sector. Since January 2020, the Active Citizenship Strengthening Program funded by the European Union (PROCIVIS), through its “civil status” subsection, covers the entire national territory in the framework of the implementation of civil status projects across all ten regions.¹¹⁹ The Program for Modernisation of Civil Registry (PAMEC) with German Development Cooperation (BMZ), covers the North-West and South-West regions.¹²⁰

Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice and the UN the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) organised in October 2020 a workshop on the “validation of the National Action Plan for the fight against Statelessness in Cameroon”.¹²¹ This action plan is not publicly available according to our research. Among the list of commitments made by the government during the High Level Segment on Statelessness organised by UNHCR in September 2019, Cameroon committed to ratifying both United Nations conventions on statelessness by mid-2021.¹²² To this day, neither one of these conventions has been ratified and, according to UNHCR, Cameroon has shown little engagement in implementing the pledges made in 2019 at the High Level Segment on Statelessness.¹²³

118 CRTV, ‘National Assembly: Parliamentarians call for the digitalisation of civil status documents’ (19 November 2020). Available at: <https://www.crtv.cm/2020/11/national-assembly-parliamentarians-call-for-the-digitalisation-of-civil-status-documents/>.

119 PROCIVIS, ‘Active Citizenship Strengthening Program in Cameroon’ available at: <https://www.procvivis-cm.org>.

120 GIZ, ‘Modernisation de l’état civil au Cameroun’ (Modernising civil registry in Cameroon), available at: <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/87530.html> (in French); Coopération allemande, GIZ, MINDDEVEL, ‘Programme d’Appui à la Modernisation de l’Etat civil (PAMEC)’ (Program for Modernisation of Civil Registry (PAMEC)) (March 2019). Available at: https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/00112-2019_%20Factsheet%20_%20français_GIZ%20PAMEC.pdf (in French).

121 CAMEROON MCO (Multi-country Operation for Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome & Principe) (October 2020) page 2. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR%20CAMEROON%20MCO%20FACT%20SHEET%20OCTOBER%202020.pdf>.

122 Results of the High Level Segment on Statelessness, « Le Gouvernement de la République du Cameroun s’engage par la présente à mise en œuvre de la décision gouvernementale de mars 2019 sur la régularisation de l’état civil des personnes vivant sans acte de naissance. Le Ministre en charge du Décentralisation et du Développement Local a instruit aux Magistrats Municipaux de prendre toutes les mesures jugées utiles en vue de procéder au recensement de toutes personnes ne disposant pas d’actes de naissance dans leurs unités de commandement et de régulariser la situation des dites personnes en liaison avec les hôpitaux (certificat d’âge apparent) et tribunaux de première instance (décisions de jugement supplétifs). » (“The Government of the Republic of Cameroon hereby pledges to implement the March 2019 governmental decision on the regularization of civil status of persons living without birth certificate. The Ministry charged with Local Development and Decentralization has instructed the Municipal Magistrates to take all measures deemed useful with the aim of proceeding to a census of all persons without birth certificates among their constituencies and to regularise the situation of such persons alongside hospitals (certificate of apparent age) and lower courts (issuing duplicates of birth certificates).) « Le Gouvernement de la République du Cameroun s’engage par la présente à finaliser le processus menant à l’adhésion du Cameroun aux Conventions des Nations Unies sur l’apatridie et déposer ses instruments d’adhésion auxdites conventions. (The Government of the Republic of Cameroon hereby pledges to finalise the process of Cameroon’s accession to the United Nations Conventions on statelessness and to deposit their instruments of accession to those Conventions.) « Le Gouvernement de la République du Cameroun s’engage par la présente à mener une étude qualitative sur les risques d’apatridie d’ici décembre 2020. (The Government of the Republic of Cameroon hereby pledges to conduct a qualitative study on the risks of statelessness by December 2020.) « Le Gouvernement de la République du Cameroun s’engage par la présente à l’inclusion d’un cours sur la citoyenneté et l’apatridie dans le curriculum du Centre de formation pour l’Administration Municipale (CEFAM) » (The Government of the Republic of Cameroon hereby commits to including a course on citizenship and statelessness in the curriculum for the Training Centre for Public Administration (CEFAM)), available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/ibelong/results-of-the-high-level-segment-on-statelessness/> (in French); CAMEROON MCO (Multi-country Operation for Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome & Principe) (October 2020) page 2. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR%20CAMEROON%20MCO%20FACT%20SHEET%20OCTOBER%202020.pdf>.

123 UNHCR, ‘Cameroon: refugee protection activity monitoring dashboard (from January to June 2021)’ (January 2021). Available at: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Cameroon%20Protection%20Monitoring%20dashboard%20June%202021.pdf>.

Overview of the situation

The phenomena of not registering births or of possessing non-valid certificates remain widespread. In 2019, over 400,000 children attending school without birth certificates were counted in the Littoral region.¹²⁴ During the 2019-2020 school year, 60,088 children without birth certificates, including 33,403 in host communities and 26,685 internally displaced, were counted.¹²⁵ In the Littoral region, the number of children without birth certificates is thought to have increased considerably due to the crisis in the North-West and South-West and internal displacement of populations. In 2019, over 400,000 children without birth certificates were counted in the Far North.¹²⁶ Free civil status services are still not implemented in the large majority of civil registry centres. Civil registry officers working in secondary civil registry centres (i.e. other than city halls) decry the lack of financial resources to pay for rent and salaries.¹²⁷ They, therefore, justify charging for their civil registry services, despite the law providing that these be free of cost, due to these financial difficulties.

In the Far North, the North-West and the South-West, access to basic social services is largely disrupted by ongoing insecurity. This also disrupts the delivery of legal and civil status documents, including birth certificates, to which the territoriality principle is applied, under which only authorities from the birth location have the power to deliver birth certificates to requesting parents.¹²⁸ However, this is a problem for IDPs since it is difficult, if not impossible, for IDPs to return and obtain civil status documents in their regular place of residence due to the context of armed conflict and widespread insecurity. Hence the urgent need for the State to take measures to allow IDPs to regularise their civil status situations in the host communities.

The absence or loss of birth certificates due to displacement and the destruction of housing is a factor limiting IDPs and refugees' access to certain services, including education for their children. Approximately 1,700,000 children, i.e., 66% of all children in Cameroon,¹²⁹ lack birth certificates and this problem particularly affects the regions of the Far North, the North-West and the South-West where internal displacement is very significant.¹³⁰

124 2019 statistics from the National Bureau of Civil Status' (NBCS) Coastal branch.

125 Statistics Regional Coastal delegation for the Ministry of Basic Education, 2019-2020 school year.

126 Journal La Nouvelle Expression N°5309 dated Thursday 24 September 2020.

127 Interviews conducted by WILPF Cameroon with state officers from secondary civil registry centres in the Coastal region.

128 OCHA, 'Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon' (March 2021) page 23. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-march-2021>.

129 AA, 'Cameroun : plus de 66% des enfants sans acte de naissance' (Cameroon: over 66% of children lack births certificates) (18 November 2020). Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/cameroun-plus-de-66-des-enfants-sans-acte-de-naissance-/2047782> (in French).

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For example, among displaced communities in Zamai in the Far North, lack of birth certificates, and statelessness more broadly, directly affect their access to basic civil status documents, without which mobility and access to basic services and to justice are rendered impossible.¹³¹ Displaced women and girls returning from communities affected by the conflict are generally allowed to register as a precondition for resettlement in a host community with their children. Returning displaced men and boys, however, are mostly seen as suspicious and potentially affiliated with Boko Haram, are imprisoned in military-controlled camps, or are sent to the Meri prison with very limited interaction with their families.¹³² Undocumented IDPs also face increased risks of arbitrary arrest and detention, particularly adolescent boys and men.¹³³

IDPs, sometimes lacking identity papers, were also not sufficiently informed on their options for voting during the October 2018 presidential election, which prevented a large number of IDPs from voting.¹³⁴ In November 2018, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs published recommendations for Cameroon, including regarding political participation.¹³⁵

Obstacles linked to the civil status system and to current regulations

The Cameroonian civil status system is lacking in several respects, including:

- Inadequately meeting human, logistic and infrastructural needs, as well as lacking in training for civil registry agents and staff;
- Significant document fraud leading to a lack of reliability of records;¹³⁶
- Irregular supplies to civil registry centres;

131 WILPF Cameroon, 'Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon' (March 2020) page 26. Available at: <https://www.wilpf-cameroon.org/en/study-publication-of-the-report-on-gender-conflicts-analysis-in-cameroon/>.

132 WILPF Cameroon, 'Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon' (March 2020) page 26. Available at: <https://www.wilpf-cameroon.org/en/study-publication-of-the-report-on-gender-conflicts-analysis-in-cameroon/>.

133 OCHA, 'Aperçu des besoins humanitaires' (Humanitarian needs overview) (January 2019) page 30. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/cmr_hno_2019_vf_light.pdf (in French); OCHA, 'Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon' (April 2022) page 36 and 53. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2022>.

134 Jeune Afrique, 'Présidentielle au Cameroun : le vote impossible des déplacés de la crise anglophone' (Presidential election in Cameroon: voting made impossible for displaced persons in the anglophone crisis) (4 October 2018). Available at: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/639943/politique/presidentielle-au-cameroun-le-vote-impossible-des-deplaces-de-la-crise-anglophone/> (in French).

135 Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs), 'Cameroon: four priorities to strengthen protection for internally displaced persons' (24 October 2018). Available at: https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/Op-Ed-on-Cameroon_SR-on-IDPs.pdf.

136 Cameroon Tribune, 'Fraude à l'état civil : les voies de contournement' (Civil status fraud: circumvention routes) (23 December 2020). Available at: <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/35839/en.html/fraude-letat-civil-les-voies> (in French); UK Home Office, 'Country background note, Cameroon, Version 1.0' (December 2020) pages 19-20. Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1349556/download>.

- An outdated and insufficient archival system in many civil registry centres, which leads to weak safeguarding of civil status data;
- A relatively low utilisation rate of civil registry services by the population.¹³⁷

In its report to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on the implementation of the Kampala Convention for the period 2015-2019, the government indicated that “[a]mid situations of internal displacement observed in the territory, initiatives were taken to facilitate the establishment of civil status documents for IDPs. This has been the case with the massive return of former hostages of the Boko Haram terrorist group and persons displaced as a result of the crisis in the North West and South West Regions.”¹³⁸ It also indicated that “the Emergency Humanitarian Assistance Plan for the North-West and South-West regions has integrated the need to reconstitute civil status documents for displaced persons.”¹³⁹ These efforts are important, but persons displaced by the conflicts still experience major barriers in accessing civil status documents.

As stated earlier, according to the territoriality principle stated in Article 23(1) of Ordinance no. 81-002 of 29 June 1981, IDPs who have lost their papers must currently petition the judge from their birth community to obtain civil status documents.¹⁴⁰ Article 26(1) of the above-cited Ordinance no. 81-002 provides for an exception to the territoriality principle of Article 23(1) in case of war or natural disaster.¹⁴¹ The Cameroonian government regrettably does not officially classify the ongoing crisis in the North-West and South-West as a situation of war according to Article 26(1) of the 1981 Ordinance and consequently the exception provided for in this provision cannot be applied to IDPs. Cameroon must take all measures to allow IDPs to regularise their civil status situations in their host communities. This would comply with its obligations under Article 13, paragraph 3 of the Kampala Convention, which Cameroon signed in 2015 and ratified in 2017, and which states that:

137 IFORD, ‘Etude diagnostic du système d’état civil au Cameroun et faisabilité d’un programme d’intervention prioritaire, Phase 1 : Etat des lieux et présentation de la méthodologie de l’Etude’ (Diagnostic study of the Cameroonian civil status system and feasibility of a priority intervention program, Phase 1: overview and methodology) (October 2006).

138 African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, “Single report comprising the 4th, 5th and 6th Periodic Reports of Cameroon relating to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and 1st Reports relating to the Maputo Protocol and the Kampala Convention’ (3 January 2020) paragraph 994. Available at: <https://www.achpr.org/states/statereport?id=130>.

139 African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, “Single report comprising the 4th, 5th and 6th Periodic Reports of Cameroon relating to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and 1st Reports relating to the Maputo Protocol and the Kampala Convention’ (3 January 2020) paragraph 997. Available at: <https://www.achpr.org/states/statereport?id=130>.

140 Ordinance No 81/002 of 29 June 1981 to organise civil status registration and various provisions related to the status of natural persons. Available at: <https://www.cvuc-uccc.com/minat/textes/34.pdf> (in French).

141 Ordinance No 81/002 of 29 June 1981 to organise civil status registration and various provisions related to the status of natural persons. Available at: <https://www.cvuc-uccc.com/minat/textes/34.pdf>.

“State Parties shall facilitate the issuance of new documents or the replacement of documents lost or destroyed in the course of displacement, without imposing unreasonable conditions, such as requiring return to one’s area of habitual residence to obtain these or other required documents. The failure to issue internally displaced persons with such documents shall not in any way impair the exercise or enjoyment of their human rights.”

In 2018, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs had furthermore urged Cameroon to incorporate the Kampala Convention into its national law and policies.¹⁴²



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase the financial, human and technical resources of the National Civil Registry Office in order to make it more effective and accessible throughout country and strengthen awareness-raising campaigns encouraging parents to register births;
- Take all legislative, regulatory and practical measures to facilitate the regularisation of the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) lacking or having lost their civil status documents without having to return to their places of birth, for example by adopting a specific, simplified and free procedure to issue birth certificates and national identity cards to IDPs who do not have them;
- Rebuild without delay the civil status centres that were destroyed or damaged due to conflict in the North-West and South-West regions and in the Far North;
- Urgently identify IDPs without birth certificates throughout the country and take administrative measures to regularise their status;
- Organise special mobile court hearings to issue decisions on substitute birth certificates in the IDPs’ host communities;
- Evaluate and ensure compliance of national law and relevant public policies and practices with the provisions of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention);
- Ratify in accordance with pledges made during the High-Level Segment on Statelessness the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness;
- Publish the Action Plan against Statelessness and allocate the necessary resources for its implementation.

¹⁴² Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs), ‘Cameroon: four priorities to strengthen protection for internally displaced persons’ (24 October 2018). Available at: https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/Op-Ed-on-Cameroon_SR-on-IDPs.pdf.

VI. Right to Education

In 2019, the CESCR called on Cameroon to:

- “(a) Take steps to raise the enrolment rate in primary and secondary schools;
- (b) Address the remaining challenges and obstacles in order to ensure that girls and boys have equal access to education;
- (c) Take the necessary steps to improve school infrastructure by, inter alia, ensuring access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities;
- (d) Ensure that attendance at primary school is actually free of charge and reinforce the rules and mechanisms for monitoring and overseeing private educational institutions;
- (e) Ensure access to a quality and culturally appropriate education for indigenous peoples by, inter alia, upgrading the instruction provided in their own language;
- (f) Take steps, as a matter of urgency, to ensure that children in the Far North, North-West and South-West regions of the country have access to education and conduct thorough investigations into acts of violence directed at teachers, students and parents, as well as regarding the damage done to educational infrastructure, in order to bring those responsible to justice.”¹⁴³

a. Indirect school fees

Despite adopting a law on free public primary education, the payment of fees to Parent Teacher Associations and other related fees is still required both in public primary schools and in secondary institutions.¹⁴⁴ Numerous civil society organisations contest this practice which represents not only a violation of the law on free education, but also a violation of the right to education that fosters corruption and misappropriation of funds by school officials. The Committee on the Rights of the Child noted in 2017 during its review of Cameroon: “Excessive

143 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Cameroon’ (25 March 2019) UN Doc E/C.12/CMR/CO/4, paragraph 61. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E/C.12/CMR/CO/4&Lang=En.

144 Camer Press, ‘Cameroun : Les frais d’Apee ou la grosse escroquerie du Minedub et Minesec’ (Cameroon: PTA fees or the huge Minedub and Minesec’s scam) (7 October 2020). Available at: <https://camer-press.com/actualite/cameroun-les-frais-dapee-ou-la-grosse-escroquerie-du-minedub-et-minesec/> (in French); Actu Cameroun, ‘Enseignements secondaires : grosse escroquerie autour des Frais d’Apee’ (Secondary schools: big scam around PTA fees) (26 October 2020). Available at: <https://actucameroun.com/2020/10/26/enseignements-secondaires-grosse-escroquerie-autour-des-frais-dapee/> (in French).

costs for education in the form of informal fees disproportionately affecting the large number of families in the State party living in poverty”¹⁴⁵ and recommended that the government remove any indirect costs for primary education and sanction educators demanding payment of informal fees.¹⁴⁶

b. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the right to education

As highlighted by OCHA, in Cameroon, “the COVID-19 pandemic has further worsened an already precarious education situation and created severe child protection risks including for the youth.”¹⁴⁷ Indeed, access to education was strongly restricted by containment measures introduced to prevent the spread of the virus, limiting classes to 50 students at a time, with attendance in shifts.¹⁴⁸ Before this, “[t]he closure of schools from mid-March to the end of May 2020 left 4.5 million primary school children, 1.8 million secondary school children, 40,000 students attending vocational training, and 347,000 students pursuing higher education out of school.”¹⁴⁹ A total of 9 million children in Cameroon are estimated to have been impacted by school closures in March 2020, as online learning or other alternatives were accessible to only a fraction of them.¹⁵⁰

This lack of education entails numerous risks, including gaps in literacy, writing, and numeracy, as well as illiteracy in the long term. There is also the risk that these children will acquire a lower level of education, which leads to increased vulnerability to child labour and exploitation, child pregnancies, higher child and maternal mortality rates, and reduced incomes.¹⁵¹ The COVID-19 pandemic has also resulted in the loss of employment for some parents and the aggravation of poverty, making parents unable to pay school fees for their children.

The gendered impacts of the pandemic on children, particularly on girls, have included increased domestic responsibilities for girls, limiting their ability to participate in home school, such as online classes or completing homework

145 Committee on the Rights of the Child, ‘Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Cameroon’ (6 July 2017) UN Doc CRC/C/CMR/CO/3-5, paragraphs 38 c. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f3-5&Lang=en.

146 Committee on the Rights of the Child, ‘Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Cameroon’ (6 July 2017) UN Doc CRC/C/CMR/CO/3-5, paragraph 39 d. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fCMR%2fCO%2f3-5&Lang=en.

147 OCHA, ‘Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon’ (March 2021) page 24. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-march-2021>.

148 OCHA, ‘Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon’ (March 2021) page 25. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-march-2021>.

149 OCHA, ‘Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon’ (March 2021) page 16. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-march-2021>.

150 OCHA, ‘Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon’ (March 2021) page 38. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-march-2021>.

151 OCHA, ‘Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon’ (March 2021) page 38. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-march-2021>.

provided virtually by the teachers when school was closed.¹⁵² Girls were at higher risk for exposure to the virus, as they helped their mothers care for ill family members and relatives. School closures and containment measures (from March to June 2020) also led to an increase in child marriages and adolescent pregnancies, which negatively affected girls access to education.

c. Impacts of the conflict on the right to education

Thousands of children living in the North-West and South-West regions no longer attend school, several schools have been closed, others were burned, and teachers, parents, and students were threatened, kidnapped, or killed.¹⁵³ According to OCHA, the situation in the North-West and South-West remains deplorable in terms of access to education. In November 2020, only 23% of primary and 25% of secondary schools were operational in the North-West.¹⁵⁴ Women and girls in the conflict zones are also particularly affected by the destruction of socio-economic infrastructures such as hospitals, health centres, and schools.

Children's access to education in the South-West and North-West regions is currently very limited due to the ongoing crisis, which exposes girls to the risks of pregnancy and child marriage.¹⁵⁵ Women and girls of the Mbororo minority are often marginalised and discriminated against, due to cultural and traditional practices that prevent them from pursuing an education. The situation has been aggravated by the current socio-political crisis, as girls have dropped out of school, escaped into the bush to stay safe, or migrated towards other cities where some are forced into sex work and others into marriage. Mbororo children face increased barriers to education, including in camps for IDPs, because the Mbororo speak *Fulfude* and have difficulty communicating in English or French.¹⁵⁶ Some educational institutions also appear to charge higher enrolment fees for Mbororo children.¹⁵⁷

152 UNICEF, 'Technical note on COVID-19 and harmful practices'. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/67506/file/TechnicalNote-COVID-19-and-HarmfulPractices-April%202020.pdf>; Care, 'Analyse rapide genre pour COVID-19, Cameroun' (Rapid Gender Analysis – COVID-19, Cameroon) (May 2020) page 2. Available at: https://www.careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/Rapport-RGA_COVID-19_pour_validation_Cameroun-VF.pdf (in French).

153 Arison Tamfu, 'A generation of unschooled Cameroonians, another generation of conflict?' (The New Humanitarian, 18 December 2018). Available at: <http://www.irinnews.org/news-feature/2018/12/19/cameroon-generation-unschooled-children-could-fuel-long-term-conflict>; Their World, 'Safe schools: attacks and kidnappings disrupt education for children in English-speaking Cameroon' (7 December 2018). Available at: <https://theirworld.org/news/safe-schools-report-cameroon-education-under-attack-kidnappings>; OCHA, 'Cameroon: North-West and South-West Crisis Situation Report N1. As of 30th November 2018'. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA-Cameroon_Situation_Report_no1_SW-NW_November_2018_EN_Final.pdf. ONU Info, 'L'ONU condamne la recrudescence des violences au Cameroun' (UN condemns renewed violence in Cameroon) (20 November 2018). Available at: <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2018/11/1029701> (in French).

154 OCHA, 'Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon' (March 2021) page 59. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-march-2021>.

155 Sam Stone, 'Imagine in five years: how education became a casualty of Cameroon war' (The Guardian, 21 September 2018). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/sep/21/imagine-in-five-years-how-education-became-a-casualty-of-cameroon-war>.

156 OCHA, 'Humanitarian needs overview Cameroon' (March 2021) page 43. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2021-march-2021>.

157 WILPF Cameroon, 'Gender conflict analysis in Cameroon' (March 2020) page 43. Available at: <https://www.wilpf-cameroon.org/en/study-publication-of-the-report-on-gender-conflicts-analysis-in-cameroon/>.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen public budgets allocated for education, remove all indirect fees for primary school and sanction education staff who demand the payment of informal fees, including for parent-teacher association fees, in schools in order to implement free primary schooling;
- Proceed with the rapid reconstruction of schools that have been destroyed or damaged due to the ongoing crisis in the Far North, North-West, and South-West regions;
- Subsidise schooling for internally displaced children and take all measures to provide functional educational infrastructure at all levels and in safe and accessible locations;
- Guarantee indigenous children's access to quality and culturally appropriate education, including by improving education in their own language;
- Take specific measures to decrease girls' school drop-out related to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including by:
 - Outlawing and penalising child marriages;
 - Ensuring that pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers are supported and assisted in pursuing schooling;
 - Implementing a monitoring system to ensure that schools welcome pregnant students and adolescent mothers, and that they do not refuse students who cannot pay indirect fees or other school fees;
 - Working with teachers and school staff to guarantee inclusive distance learning methods, including through low-tech and gender-sensitive approaches, such as flexible schedules and learning structures for girls who are likely to take on increased domestic responsibilities, and monitoring and supporting their participation;
- Providing comprehensive sexual education in schools and in the community.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom's Cameroon Section (WILPF Cameroon, for short), is a national section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, an international non-governmental organisation with observer status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Since its establishment in January 2014, WILPF Cameroon has centred its activities on furthering the country's implementation of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSC Resolution) 1325 and related resolutions, also known as the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. It engages in outreach, capacity-building, research, and advocacy activities on this topic and also works to ensure the implementation of instruments against the proliferation and illicit circulation of arms. WILPF Cameroon focuses on strengthening peace, disarmament, and the rights of women and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Cameroon.

