



# MIGRANTS REFUGEES

## Migration Profile

### CAMEROON

#### A. Executive Summary

The Republic of Cameroon is a Central West African nation in the Gulf of Guinea. Historically it was colonised by France and Britain, thus English and French are its official languages. Cameroon has a population of 25 million, with an annual population growth of 2.5%. In 2019, the Cameroonian economy experienced a 3.7% growth rate. However, in 2020 the economy experienced a setback, due to the combined effect of COVID-19, the political crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions of the country, and a further decline in world oil prices. As a consequence, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contracted by 2.4% in 2020.

Cameroon is commonly referred to as “Africa in miniature” due to its cultural diversity and abundant natural resources (wood, cotton, refined petroleum oils, unwrought aluminium, etc.). Cameroon also has an extremely heterogeneous population, with a total of approximately 240 tribes. As of 2020, the Human Development Index (HDI) stood at 0.563. Out of 188 countries, Cameroon was ranked 153th, with 37.5% of Cameroonians lived below the poverty line. Cameroon is considered a low-income country, and has a stagnant per capita income, with a relatively inequitable distribution of income, a top-heavy civil service, and a generally unfavourable climate for business enterprise. The country’s socio-economic and political situation has led to the decline of the economically active population, especially youth with greater mobility, and to a brain drain as experts travel abroad in the hope of achieving a better future for themselves and their families. Many of those who emigrate support their extended families in Cameroon through remittances, and these have become an important factor in the country’s economy.

#### B. Country Profile

##### I. Basic Information

The Republic of Cameroon is a central West African nation in the Gulf of Guinea. Its neighbouring countries are Nigeria to the West, Chad to the Northeast, the Central African Republic to the East, and Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo to the South. It is a low per capita income country and has a population of about 25 million people. Two of its border areas with Nigeria (in the Northwest and Southwest of the country) are Anglophone, while the remaining eight regions are Francophone. It is an indigenous polarised society with about 240 tribes, which can be broken down into the following ethnic groups: Bamileke-Bamu (24.3%); Beti/Bassa, Mbam (21.6%), Biu-Mandara (14.6%), Arab-Choa/Hausa/Kanuri (11%), Adamawa-Ubangi 9.8%, Grassfield (7.7%); Kako,

Meka/Pygmy (3.3%); Cotier/Ngoe/Oroko (2.7%); Southwest Bantu (0.7%); and foreign ethnic groups (4.5%). The religious denominations are as follows: Roman Catholic (38.3%); Protestant (25.5%); Muslim (24.4%); other Christian (6.9%); animist (2.2%); other religions (0.5%); and no religious affiliation (2.2%). Historically, Cameroon was a German territory called "Kamerun" from 1884-1914. During World War I, the French and British invaded, and the Germans in Cameroon were defeated in 1916. At the end of the First World War, the territory was divided between France and Great Britain. French Cameroon achieved its independence in 1960 (becoming the Republic of Cameroon), while Southern Cameroon became independent from Britain in 1961 through a plebiscite in which they voted to join the Republic of Cameroon. Thus, a new nation was formed, called the Federal Republic of Cameroon, comprising the East (French) and West (English) parts of the country. With the 1972 referendum, the federal arrangement that brought these two territories together was dissolved, and the country returned to its former name after independence from France - the Republic of Cameroon.

## **II. International and Internal Migrants**

Over the last decade, a considerable number of people have emigrated from Cameroon. According to the most recent publication by Macro Trends in 2021, Cameroon experienced a steady increase in its international migration from 2000 to 2015. In 2005, the number of international migrants from Cameroon was 258,737, a 13.29% increase from 2000. By 2010 it had increased to 289,091, a rise of 11.73% from 2005. In 2015, the number was 381,984, which is a 32.13% increase from 2010. The most recent statistic of international migration as a percentage of the population was published in 2015, and it stood at 1.6%. Most Cameroonians are considered economic migrants, and the possibility of being granted a visa is slim at the various foreign embassies in Cameroon. Therefore, they resort to using unconventional routes and irregular pathways to reach their destination. Cameroonian migrants often travel through two or more countries before they are able to head on to Europe. One frequent route used is travelling by land through Libya and Morocco. In many cases, they end up being sold as slaves in these two countries.

With regards to internal migration, that there is no current literature on this type of movement in Cameroon, Nevertheless, current trends indicate that because of the pull factors of better opportunities in the cities, Cameroon has one of the highest rates of urbanisation in Sub-Saharan Africa, with 56% of the population living in urban areas. With the imbalance of rural versus urban development rates, it is estimated by the United Nations that by 2050, 70% of Cameroonians will live in urban areas. Douala has the greatest competitive edge, offering employment in 31 different industries, while cities like Yaounde, Bafousam, Ngaoundere, Maroua, Bamenda, and Kumba count between 7 and 13 different industries. In Cameroon, internal migration improves people's living conditions, leading to the development of an informal economy sector, which creates relevant jobs and dominates the country's national economy.

## **III. Emigration and Skilled Migration**

According to the Human Flight and Brain Drain Index, the average value for Cameroon in 2021 is 7.1 index points, which is above the world average of 5.25, based on 173 countries.

Most Cameroonian skilled migrants emigrate to neighbouring countries, to Europe, or to the United States. Emigration from Cameroon contributes to brain drain on an on-going basis. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OSCE), 42.3% of the 57,050 Cameroonians working in Europe are highly qualified. Afrol News further indicates that, according to the Cameroonian Medical Association, 4,200 Cameroonian doctors, mostly specialists, are working abroad and only 800 are left in the country with a doctor-patient ratio of 1:10,000-20,000 in the cities and 1:40,000-50,000 in rural areas.

#### **IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, and Refugees, Climate Displaced People)**

Cameroon has a long history of providing refuge to asylum seekers and refugees in the region of Central Africa. In principle, Cameroon is a fitting host for refugees, ranking 7<sup>th</sup> in Africa and 13<sup>th</sup> in the world among the largest host countries. Cameroon is home to approximately 1,945,610 people of concern to the UNHCR, including some 446,911 refugees and asylum seekers, and 1,032,942 internally displaced persons (IDPs). A total of 321,886 of IDPs live in the Far North and 711,056 in the Northwest and Southwest regions. There are also 465,757 returnees (former IDPs) in Cameroon. The refugee crisis and IDPs in the Far North are fuelled by political instability in the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, while the IDPs in the Northwest and Southwest regions are caused by the clash between the government and activists calling for the independence of the Anglophone region. Since 2013, sectarian violence in the CAR has resulted in a massive flow of refugees in the Eastern part of Cameroon. There are currently 331,000 CAR refugees in Cameroon, including about 6,700 new arrivals fleeing the 2020 post-electoral violence. The Anglophone crisis has resulted in a total of over 650,000 Cameroonian refugees (men, women, and children) registered in Nigeria (in the Akwa-Ibom, Benue, Cross River, and Taraba States), as well as over 4,000 new refugees (mostly women and children) from the Northwest region of the Nwa Sub-Division who have arrived in the State of Taraba. In Cameroon, 13,600 Nigerian refugees were enrolled in primary schools and 10,000 emergency shelter kits were provided to benefit some 58,200 IDPs in the Northwest and Southwest regions. While Cameroon receives refugees from Nigeria in the Far North region, Nigeria receives refugees from the Southwest region of Cameroon.

Many IDPs in Cameroon look for safety in large cities like Douala. However, they are faced with other challenges like accessing services and employment and often end up displaced again. Natural disasters are also a cause of displacement for people in Cameroon. For example, in August 2020, the worst coastal flooding that the country had experienced in decades displaced nearly 5,000 people. Likewise, a flood swept through the semi-arid Far North region forcing people already displaced from conflict areas to move again.

#### **V. Victims of Human Trafficking**

Cameroon is ranked as Tier 2 in the 2021 Trafficking in Person (TIP) Report, as the government of Cameroon does not meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, though it has made some significant efforts. Cameroon is still a source, transit, and destination country for children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. Even though pandemic-related border closures have reduced the number of trafficked victims

abroad, the economic impact of the pandemic, combined with the on-going crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions, has contributed to a sharp increase in the number of victims who are domestically exploited. The four years of school closure in certain regions has resulted in parents sending their children to intermediaries who exploit them in domestic servitude and sex work, rather than sending them to school. Criminals coerce women, IDPs, homeless children, and orphans into sex trafficking and labour. Traffickers force children to work in artisanal gold mining, gravel quarries, fishing, animal breeding, restaurants, and begging on streets. Foreign business owners and herders force children from neighbouring countries, including Benin, the CAR, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, and Nigeria, to work in spare parts shops or cattle grazing. Nevertheless, the government has made some strides in its effort to fight against human trafficking. In 2019, the government reportedly investigated nine potential trafficking cases, prosecuted seven suspected traffickers, and convicted two traffickers, sentencing them to 15 year imprisonment. In February 2021, law enforcement agencies arrested seven suspects in the city of Limbe in the Southwest region of the country, accused of exploiting 29 children between the ages of seven and fourteen in domestic servitude, after promising the parents to provide the children with education. The case is currently on-going. In 2019, the government held 2,864 information sessions, providing ways to help prevent human trafficking and reaching out to 397,447 people, which is a significant increase compared to the 69,000 attendees in 2018.

## **VI. National Legal Framework**

Cameroon is a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Cameroon has also ratified the 1969 OAU Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa. Cameroon has likewise incorporated the key principles of international protection into its 2005 Refugee Law, including the refugee definition contained in the 1951 Convention as well as the definition enshrined in the OAU Convention, the principles of *non-refoulement* and non-expulsion, and the exemption from sanctions for illegal entry. In May 2017, the government of Cameroon formally entered the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), signed in 2014. A process of domesticating this Convention into national law is currently underway, in order to provide the country with a national protection and assistance framework.

Legislative provisions on refugee rights in Cameroon clearly require that refugees be treated equally compared to nationals in accessing work, education, housing, social assistance, property, justice, naturalisation, and freedom of movement.

The main national legislation dealing with the regulation of migration flows is the Law No. 97/012 of January 1997, providing conditions for exit, expulsion, and repatriation. In 2008, Cameroon introduced Decree 2008/052, amending and supplementing some provisions to the 2007 Decree regulating the conditions of entry, stay and exit of foreigners in the country. The Decree provided the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee to monitor its implementation, especially for the granting and suspension of visas. Cameroon enacted Act No. 2005/006 in July 2005 concerning the status of refugees and the establishment under this law of a commission responsible for determining eligibility for refugee status. Decree 2011/389 of November 28, 2011 has also been established on refugee management structure.

Moreover, Cameroon adopted Law No. 2005/015 in December 2005 on child trafficking and slavery and the ratification of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and its two Optional Protocols – the Protocol to Prevent Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air.

## **VII. Main Actors**

### *The State*

Three ministries are in charge of migration affairs in Cameroon: the General Delegation of National Security, which is in charge of emigration and immigration, and border management; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the focal point for international cooperation on migration issues, is in charge of relations with the Cameroonian diaspora and handles requests for legalisation from associations of foreigners present in Cameroon; and the Prime Minister's Office, which is in charge of the Inter-Ministerial Technical Platform for the Management of Labour Migration. Additionally, there are two organs in charge of refugee management: the Refugee Status Eligibility Commission (CESR) and the Refugee Appeals Commission at the Ministry of External Relations, whose main role are to decide whether to grant refugee status to asylum seekers, and to serve as an organ of appeal. A specific Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) for supervising the prevention and the fight against human trafficking was established in Cameroon on November 2, 2010 and has been coordinating governmental efforts to fight against human trafficking since then. The IMC is chaired by the Secretary General of the Office of the Prime Minister and involves eight ministries, law enforcement personnel, civil society organisations, and NGOs, which regularly convene to address trafficking in persons in the country.

### *The Catholic Church*

The presence of the Catholic Church in Cameroon is widespread. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest faith group in the country (38.3%), followed by the Protestant churches (25.5%). In the context of the current Anglophone crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions of the country, many Cameroonians believe that the Catholic Church can lead a mediation process between warring factions in the regions.

To respond to the two armed conflicts that Cameroon has been facing for more than 10 years, dioceses in Nigeria and Cameroon have started an important cooperation to better plan humanitarian support, including spiritual and pastoral care. Amidst the Anglophone crisis, the Catholic Church has been fostering dialogue and national reconciliation in order to facilitate the peace process. This need for solidarity in building peace for Cameroon is also at the core of the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon's appeals for an end to the protracted conflict in the country. Within the Episcopal Conference, the Migration Commission is proactively working to assist Nigerian refugees and Cameroonian IDPs in the country. Additionally, in August 2021 the bishops in Cameroon's Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province – the region affected by the conflict, where the Cameroonian refugees come from – renewed their appeal for an immediate ceasefire, inviting everyone to work for a more peaceful resolution.

The Catholic Church has several projects that assist migrants and refugees, including: the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Caritas, and Catholic Relief Services (CRS). In the Eastern region, where refugees come primarily from the neighbouring Central African Republic, JRS works in the areas of Batouri, Bertoua, and Garoua-Boulai, providing access to vocational training, psychosocial support, community-based preschool centres, and women empowerment programs. Through its initiative to encourage refugees and host communities to work together, JRS especially focuses on youth and women empowerment, peace and reconciliation, and social cohesion.

Caritas in Mamfe - one of the hardest-hit towns in the Southwest region - provides food, medical supplies, water sanitation, rebuilding homes, and communal shelter for displaced people, training local leaders in emergency relief programs, and providing psycho-social help to the traumatised population. In the Northwest region, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Cameroon is involved in assisting internally displaced people. Through its Anglophone Crisis Emergency Response, CRS provides food and other assistance to vulnerable families through the use of electronic vouchers, in collaboration with local vendors.

Another Catholic agent proactively working in assisting migrants and refugees in Cameroon, particularly with IDPs in the Anglophone regions, is the Tertiary Sisters of Saint Francis (TSSF). The TSSF implements different projects to respond to the on-going armed conflict in the Northwest and Southwest regions of the country. The services provided by TSSF include rehabilitation, food items, delivery packs for pregnant women, and the distribution of other consumables to displaced children.

#### *International Organisations and Other Organisations*

The most important international organisation dealing with migration-related concerns in Cameroon is the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), which coordinates, protects, and provides assistance to persons of concern in collaboration with the government and its partners. Among UNHCR implementing partners in Cameroon there is the International Medical Corps (IMC), which works in refugee camps to implement health programmes involving disease surveillance, nutrition activities, gender-based violence response, mental health and psychosocial support, and child protection. African Humanitarian Action (AHA) provides comprehensive healthcare, nutrition, and infrastructural development services to refugees. Plan International ensures that children have access to protection, as well as quality inclusive education and health information and services, and works to provide decent work to disadvantaged community members and refugees.

Another UN agency operating in Cameroon is the World Food Programme (WFP), which provides food assistance to communities affected by disasters, including refugees, IDPs, returnees, and host communities. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is also present in the country, providing assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes to stranded Cameroonians abroad, and working in the areas of migration policies and research.

Association *Aide aux familles et victimes des migrations clandestines* (AFVMC) helps with the social and economic reintegration of repatriated migrants, assists in providing protection of the rights of migrants through advocacy, helps with the documentation process of migrants, and provides medical assistance to migrants. Furthermore, Refugee Welfare Association

Cameroon (REWAC) protects the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs through advocacy. Finally, Women Poverty Eradication Centre (WOPEC) Cameroon provides counselling for refugees, especially women who have been abused.

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