Cameroon

Country Overview

Politics

Cameroon is a republic in Central Africa which is characterized politically by a strong presidency and a single dominant party within the multiparty system of government. President Paul Biya is a member of the dominant party, the Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM), and has remained in power since 1982. Although the president’s reelection in 2011 was characterized as flawed and marked by irregularities, later Senate elections held in 2013 were peaceful and considered to be free and fair overall.\(^1\)

The terrorist group, Boko Haram, has killed over 1,500 people and displaced over 200,000 people from Cameroon since 2014, particularly in the north of the country.\(^2\)

Economy

Cameroon is classified by the World Bank as having a lower-middle-income economy.\(^3\) In 2015, Cameroon had a GDP of USD 28.42 billion, and GDP growth of 5.8 percent.\(^4\) Oil is the country’s main export commodity, and was reported to account for nearly 40 percent of export earnings despite falling global oil prices. Other main commodities of Cameroon include coffee, cocoa, cotton, rubber, bananas, oilseed, grains, cassava, livestock and timber.\(^5\) Of the labor force of approximately 9.61 million in 2016, an estimated 70 percent worked in the agricultural sector.\(^6\)

Cameroon has economic ties to the United States that include trade and a bilateral investment treaty. Cameroon exports multiple agricultural products to the U.S., notably coffee, cocoa, rubber and timber. The country is also eligible for preferential trade benefits with the U.S. as it is covered under the African Growth and Opportunity Act.\(^7\)

Social/Human Development

Cameroon is a relatively young country, as more than 60 percent of its population is under the age of 25.

The country has experienced rising rates of poverty, particularly in rural areas. In 2016, it was reported that 24 percent of the Cameroonian population lived below the income poverty line of USD 1.90 per day.\(^8\) This poverty and unemployment has driven international migration, including to neighboring Gabon and Nigeria, among other African countries.\(^9\)
Cameroon hosts more than 300,000 refugees and asylum seekers, primarily coming from the Central African Republic, and increasingly, fleeing violence in Nigeria caused by the terrorist group, Boko Haram. It is only able to host them with UN support due to its own limited resources. Attacks by Boko Haram have also pushed Cameroonians away from their villages on the border with Nigeria, and this violence has largely contributed to internally displaced persons, which were estimated to number 192,912 in late 2016. Migrants and refugees appear to be at risk of harassment and extortion by the police; police have frequently stopped travelers to review their documentation, and refugees have reported extortion by police when traveling even when they carried UNHCR-issued identification cards. Over 20 percent of the population was considered internally displaced.

Cameroon’s population is made up of an estimated 286 ethnic groups; the groups are not equally represented in government and business, and minorities have been found subjected to discrimination and harassment. These minorities notably include the Baka and Mbororo. The Baka are indigenous to the forested areas of the South and East, and the Mbororo are pastoralists primarily residing in the North, East, Adamawa, and Northwest Regions. These two groups have reported to experience marginalization, land grabs, and denial of access to water.

Cameroon’s Human Development Index score for 2016 was 0.518, ranking the country 153 out of 188 countries. While this is a relatively low rank, Cameroon still ranks ahead of two countries on its borders: Chad (186), and Central African Republic (188).


U.S. Department of State TIP Ranking: Tier 2 Watch List

According to the Trafficking in Persons Report, trafficking risk may be found among Cameroonian children in export supply chains in agriculture, including the onion, cotton, tea, and cocoa sectors. Additionally, Cameroonian children are vulnerable to trafficking in sectors including artisanal gold mining, gravel, fishing, and construction.

Read the full TIP Report at: https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2017/271160.htm

Migrant and Other Vulnerable Populations

Cameroon has long experienced negative net migration, but the rate of emigration has declined: in 2007, net immigration was estimated to be -90,000, while in 2012 it was estimated at -60,000. International migration to Cameroon has risen slightly but is still relatively uncommon; international migrants were estimated to make up 1.4 percent of the population in 2010, and 1.64 percent of the population in 2015. The largest source country for migrants is the Central African Republic, followed by Nigeria and Chad to the north. There were an estimated 459,650 persons of concern in Cameroon at the end of 2015. Refugees made up 74.6 percent of the persons of concern. None of the persons of
concern were considered stateless. Over 20 percent of the population was considered internally displaced.¹⁸
Exports and Trade

Cameroon’s top exports in 2016 were cocoa, wood, mineral fuels, cotton, fruit and nuts, rubber and tea.¹⁹
The top importers of all goods from Cameroon were China, India, the Netherlands, France and Spain.
Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors Analysis

Legal/Policy Risk Factors

Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers’ Rights

Freedom of Association

Cameroonian law provides for limited freedom of association, as legal rights to form and join unions, legally strike, and collectively bargain were provided for but subject to statutory limitations and other substantial restrictions. For example, the Minister of Territorial Administration may suspend or dissolve an association depending on whether it is judged to be disrupting public order or threatening state security. The ability to freely associate may be further limited by unclear, delayed, and unevenly enforced conditions for operating as a legal, government-recognized organization.\(^{21}\)

Notably, the law on collective bargaining does not apply to the informal sector; this restriction includes the agricultural sector, where the large majority of the population is employed.\(^{22}\)

In 2016, the ITUC added Cameroon to the list of countries found to deny or constrain free speech and freedom of assembly.\(^{23}\) The ITUC also ranked Cameroon as 4 out of 5 in its 2015 Annual Global Rights Index, indicating that Cameroon is the site of “systemic violation of rights.”\(^{24}\)

Working Conditions

The minimum wage for all sectors has been set at CFA 36,270, and represents a significant increase from the previous minimum wage of CFA 28,246. The legal workweek in the non-agricultural formal sector is 40 hours per week, while in the agricultural and related sectors, it is 48 hours per week. There were also exceptions for certain formal sectors, such as the limit of 54 hours per week for household and restaurant staff. Workers are required to receive at least one day of rest per week. They may work overtime hours beyond these weekly hour limits.\(^{25}\) The law provides for health and safety standards, and requires all establishments to provide health and medical services for their employees. The stipulation on provision of health services, however, is not enforced, and health and safety standards have not been enforced in the informal sector where most of the population is employed.\(^{26}\)

Discrimination

The constitution affirms that all individuals have the right and the obligation to work, but does not specifically prohibit specific types of discrimination. The U.S. Department of State has reported that individuals have experienced employment-related discrimination based on their ethnicity, HIV status, disability, and sexual orientation, and that legal requirements have been difficult to enforce because the majority of work takes place in the informal sector.\(^{27}\)
Forced Labor

Cameroon’s constitution and law prohibit all forms of forced and compulsory labor, but enforcement has been limited by a reported lack of institutional knowledge of trafficking, a lack of resources for detection and remediation, and limitations of the courts.

Child Labor

The law sets the legal minimum working age at 14, and requires that children between ages 14 and 18 receive contractually-assured training from their employers. Children under 18 are prohibited from performing various hazardous tasks, working at night, and working longer than eight hours per day. Primary education is compulsory by law.28

Civil Society Organizations

The U.S. Department of State has reported that human rights groups operate in the country, but are obstructed by uncooperative, critical and hostile officials within the government. Human rights activists have received anonymous threats, and there have been several reports of intimidation and attacks on individual human rights activists. The government did not conduct investigations or other activities to halt these incidents. 29

Immigration Policies Limiting the Employment Options or Movements of Migrants

Foreign nationals are automatically issued work permits if they are hired to work for a company under the industrial free zone (IFZ) regime; however, foreign nationals may not exceed 20 percent of the company’s total workforce if the company has operated under the IFZ regime for five years.30
Ratification of ILO Conventions Related to Human Trafficking or Rights of Workers and Migrants

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<th>Conventions</th>
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<td>ILO 29 Forced Labor</td>
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<td>ILO 87 Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize</td>
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<td>ILO 98 Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining</td>
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<td>ILO 100 Equal Remuneration</td>
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<td>ILO 105 Abolition of Forced Labor</td>
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<td>ILO 111 Discrimination</td>
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<td>ILO 138 Minimum Age</td>
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<td>ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies</td>
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<td>ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor</td>
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<td>ILO 97 Migration for Employment</td>
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Use of Export Processing Zones (EPZs)

Cameroon has an Industrial Free Zone (IFZ) regime which is applicable at any industrial park or ‘single-factory’ zone, and the U.S. Department of State has reported that labor laws have been waived throughout the IFZs to attract or retain investment. The 1990 law establishing IFZs includes several noteworthy exceptions to the Labor Code regulations; in IFZs, the employer has the right to determine salaries according to productivity, freely negotiate work contracts and enjoy automatic issuance of work permits for foreign workers. While IFZs do contain certain legal exceptions, the U.S. Department of State reported in 2016 that the IFZ regime has never been fully implemented, and that “there is no special treatment of labor in special economic zones, foreign trade zones, or free ports.”31
Political Risk Factors

Political Instability or Conflict

Cameroon scored a 97.8 in the 2016 Fragile States Index, placing it in the “Alert” category. In comparison, the neighboring country of Nigeria ranked in the “High Alert” category, while neighboring Chad and the Central African Republic ranked in the “Very High Alert” category.32

In addition to the conflict related to Boko Haram in the North and violence in the Central African Republic to the East, there are other sources of tension and instability within the country. International Crisis Group has described options for effective political expression by the opposition as minimal, and social discontent as widespread.33 Residents of minority Anglophone regions in the Northwest and Southwest, for example, have launched general strikes and repeatedly closed schools in protest to government marginalization.34 Other sources of instability include the divided and pressured security forces, and massive youth unemployment.35

Level of Crime and Violence

The U.S. Department of State has rated the overall crime level in Cameroon as critical.36 The World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report ranked Cameroon at 79/140 and 81/140 for business costs of violence and crime and organized crime respectively.37

The U.S. Department of State reports that Cameroon has faced violence from Boko Haram on the Nigerian border, and from the spillover from violent clashes in the Central African Republic. Bandits have also operated in these border regions. Towns in the Far North Region which border Nigeria were judged to be particularly dangerous.38

State Persecution

The actions of the Cameroonian security forces have been cited as contributing to the internal displacement of around 199,000 people in the Far North region. There, security forces have also harassed the approximately 27,000 Nigerian refugees that struggle to live outside of the refugee camp (which itself holds some 59,000 Nigerian refugees) without adequate food and basic services.39

According to Amnesty International, the state and its security forces have arbitrarily arrested individuals suspected of supporting Boko Haram and have detained them in unofficial and inhumane detention centers, often despite having little or no evidence for the arrests. These detainees number in the hundreds, and are denied access to lawyers. The mass arrests of people accused of supporting Boko Haram have contributed to prison overcrowding and worsening conditions.40
Level of Corruption

The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index scores Cameroon as a 26 out of 100, where a 0 signals “Highly Corrupt” and 100 signals “Very Clean.” Cameroon is ranked 145 out of 176 on that index. The U.S. Department of State has described the corruption as “a severe challenge at all levels of government,” including among the police and judiciary. In 2016, the government increased anti-corruption activities, but despite these efforts, corruption remained pervasive.

This corruption may increase individual residents’ vulnerability in a variety of ways. There have been reports, for example, that some police involved in the issuance of identification documents collected additional fees, and there have been reports of police extorting traveling refugees. Corruption can also hinder the resolution of cases of illegal expropriation of land by the government, such as for large development infrastructure. In 2016, corrupt officials misappropriated funds that were meant to compensate communities whose land was seized to implement infrastructure projects. Local sources have reported to the U.S. Department of State that corrupt activities such as the diversion of resources have hindered the response to Boko Haram, a national security threat that is directly correlated to the number of refugees and internally displaced persons in the country.

Socio-Economic Risk Factors

Level of National Economic Development

Cameroon is scored in the low human development category, according to the UN Human Development Index, with a rank of 153 out of 188 countries and a score of 0.518, which increased 16.6 percent from its score of 0.444 in 1990. Cameroon ranks higher, however, than neighboring Central African Republic and Chad.

Level and Extent of Poverty

In 2011, the most recent year for which data was available, Cameroon had a relatively high level of poverty, with nearly 48.2 percent of the population determined to be living in “multi-dimensional poverty” according to the UN. When adjusted for inequality, Cameroon’s human development index score for 2015 falls from 0.518 to .348, a loss of 32.8 percent due to inequality in the country. The Far North has historically been the poorest region, and poverty levels have been exacerbated by the crisis with Boko Haram. Before the crisis, three out of four million inhabitants were found to live under the poverty line, and approximately 46 percent of children in the region went to school. While many refugees receive international humanitarian assistance in the refugee camp, an estimated 30,000 unregistered refugees and 191,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the area live in host communities which are ill-equipped to support them. There have been some anecdotal reports of distrust against recently arrived IDPs due to suspicions that they may have supported Boko Haram.
Degree of Gender Inequality

The UNDP Gender Equality Index scores Cameroon as having low levels gender equality, ranking it 153 out of 155 countries in 2014.50

The government has drafted a law on the prevention and suppression of gender-based discrimination, but other laws such as those regulating property ownership discriminate against women. Women may experience discrimination based on their gender, and indigenous women in particular were reported to experience discrimination around land rights and access to education.51

Women may be limited in their ability to inherit land and carry out other activities in rural areas depending on the customary law in place in the area. This customary law is based on the traditions of the area’s predominant ethnic group. Some traditional legal systems in Cameroon treat women as the legal property as their husbands.52

A law introduced in 1981 permits husbands to oppose their wives’ right to work if they do not judge it to be in the interest of the household and children.53

Landlessness and Dispossession

Approximately 20 percent of the Cameroonian population was considered internally displaced.54

The U.S. Department of State has reported that 83 percent of IDPs are displaced due to Boko Haram and their frequent attacks near the Nigerian border. The displacement of the remaining IDPs was attributed to natural disasters, especially flooding.55

In early 2017, the International Crisis Group reported that in the wake of the struggle against Boko Haram, there were an estimated 191,000 IDPs living among communities in the Far North region that are ill-equipped to support them.56 Of the 2.9 million people estimated to be in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, 1.6 million live in the Far North Region, and over 90 percent of those in the Far North Region are Cameroonian57. There have been some anecdotal reports of distrust against recently arrived IDPs due to suspicions that they may have supported Boko Haram.58

In 2014, the UN’s Independent Expert on Minority Issues reported that Cameroon’s legal and regulatory system for land use and ownership did not adequately protect the rights of certain communities, notably minority and indigenous groups, and groups who practice nomadic and hunter-gatherer lifestyles. These groups were found to need stronger legal protection “against land grabbing, illegal eviction, forced displacement and ongoing land disputes.”59

In the past several years, the government has seized land occupied or used by locals in order to implement infrastructure projects. In 2016, the U.S. Department of State reported that the displaced persons were not compensated promptly, in some cases due to misappropriation of funds by corrupt officials, which led to several protests.60
Environmental Factors

In 2016, the U.S. Department of State reported that 13 percent of IDPs in Cameroon had left their homes as a result of natural disasters, particularly flooding.61

To improve disaster-preparedness in the Far North region, the World Bank has funded a Flood Emergency Project for Cameroon. The project aims to rehabilitate infrastructure for flood protection and rice production, and will involve repairs to the Maga dam.62

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Key Commodity Supply Chains

Cocoa

Cocoa Overview

Cameroon is Africa’s fourth largest cocoa producer, and the country is currently in the process of adding ten new cocoa processing units to boost its processing capacity to 30 percent of total production. In the 2015-2016 growing season, Cameroon’s cocoa production rose by 16 percent, and total output was 269,495 tons. The previous single season record was 240,000 tons in 2010-2011. The country is aiming to produce 600,000 tons of cocoa by the year 2020.63 There are over 800,000 cocoa farmers in Cameroon with the average age falling between 63 and 70 years old. The Cameroonian government has a state-run program called “new generation,” which launches in 2012 in an effort to train young people in cocoa farming.64

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Cocoa

According to the U.S. Department of State and Department of Labor, cocoa in Cameroon is produced with child labor, including forced child labor in some cases.65 Little updated information on the nature of the forced and child labor risk in the Cameroonian cocoa sector is available. A 2002 study found that children in the Cameroonian cocoa sector used dangerous tools and were exposed to pesticides, but did not find evidence of compensated/non-family child workers or of children who were recruited by intermediaries.66

Forestry/Wood

Forestry/Wood Overview

Nearly 40 percent of Cameroonian land (18.8 million hectares) is forested. The country has one of the highest deforestation rates in the Congo basin, losing forest cover at a rate of one percent a year for the past 25 years. There are protected lands in Cameroon on which timber exploitation is prohibited, and
they cover roughly 4.7 million hectares, or 10 percent of land area. The logging industry produced 2.7 million metric tons of logs in 2014, with primary timber products accounting for a total export value of USD 707.3 million in 2014. The government has made an effort to increase the in-country share of the value chain by limiting exports of unprocessed wood. The top countries receiving Cameroonian timber exports are China, Vietnam, Belgium, and Italy.

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Forestry/Wood

Illegal logging reportedly deprives Cameroon of over USD 5 million annually in tax revenue. Reporting by Global Witness has documented how the use of “shadow permits” in Cameroon have allowed logging operations to function outside adequate government oversight. This practice can deprive local communities of their livelihoods.

Oil and Gas

Oil and Gas Overview

The Cameroonian oil industry is currently rebounding from a decades-long slump in oil production, with peak production occurring in 1988 (180,000 b/d). Production declined for the next 20 years, reaching its lowest point in 2008 (75,000 b/d). The industry has since rebounded and 2016 production was up to 100,000 b/d, and the World Bank predicts that production will rise to 150,000 b/d in the next year. The country’s only oil refinery, the Sonara plant, is undergoing renovations to increase production capacity from 45,000 b/d in 2015 to 100,000 by the end of 2017. There is second refinery planned for Kribi, at the end of the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline. The completion of the two facilities would give Cameroon the largest oil processing capacity in all of western and central Africa.

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Oil and Gas

The Chad-Cameroon pipeline has been documented to contribute to environmental degradation in both nations with water supplies being contaminated, indigenous peoples being restricted from traditional hunting/agricultural lands, and farmers returning lower yields and losing access to land. There are anecdotal reports from local people that the pipeline has had leakage problems which have affected farmlands, runoffs, and the water quality of rivers and streams in the vicinity of the infrastructure. The pipeline’s endpoint in the town of Kribi, Cameroon is also the sight of oil related pollution which affects the fishing industry and access to clean water resources. There was a major spill associated with the endpoint terminal of the pipeline in 2013 with no repercussions for the companies operating the pipeline.
Cotton

Cotton Overview

Cotton is the most important agricultural product for communities in the country’s northern region, and is estimated to be directly responsible for the employment of roughly 3 million people. The state-owned cotton processing company Sodecoton purchases 100 percent of Cameroonian cotton. Cameroon consumes only about 5 percent of its domestically produced cotton while the rest is exported around the world.

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Cotton

According to the U.S. Department of State, Cameroonian children are exploited on cotton farms. Many children working in the Cameroonian context are working the context of smallholder family farms that rely on family labor. Child labor is reportedly most common during the labor-intensive harvest period. The presence of migrants has been noted as well – specifically, casual migrant workers from Chad – but demographic information on the workforce is not available.

Tea

Tea Overview

Tea production in Cameroon reached 1,018 tons in 2016, representing 7 percent growth from the previous year. Overall production is expected to reach 2,820 tons by 2021. Tea is grown by both smallholders and estates.

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Tea

According to the U.S. Department of State, Cameroonian children are exploited on tea plantations.
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Endnotes