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COI QUERY

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The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities. The answer was finalised on 16 November 2021. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.

COI QUERY RESPONSE – Cameroon

Trafficking in Human Beings (THB)

1. Prevalence of Trafficking in Human Beings in Cameroon

Several forms of human trafficking, including forced labour and trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation are present in Cameroon. The prevalence of THB in the country is also due to the conflicts in the Far North, Southwest and Northwest regions, which generate displacement, reduce the presence of security forces, disrupt education and the general livelihood.¹ The 2021 Freedom House report stated that ‘Cameroon remains a source, transit, and destination country for forced labor and sex trafficking of children, as well as a source country for women who are subject to forced labor and prostitution in Europe’.² Citing NGOs representatives and governmental officials, the United States Department of State (USDOS) reported that:

‘The economic impacts of the pandemic combined with ongoing violence in the Northwest and Southwest regions contributed to a sharp increase in the number of victims exploited domestically. [...] the conflict increased the risk of human trafficking during the reporting period due to the more than one million displaced individuals, diminished police and judicial presence, as well as deteriorated economic and educational conditions’.³

While the closure of borders, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ‘likely reduced the scale of transnational exploitation’,⁴ at the same time ‘modern slavery and human trafficking practices in Cameroon’ have been reinforced.⁵

Main profiles of victims of trafficking

Sex trafficking and forced labour at domestic and international level are reported as forms of trafficking in Cameroon.⁶ The country is considered as ‘a source, transit, and destination country for child trafficking from neighboring countries in Central and West Africa’,⁷ ‘with girls being trafficked for domestic servitude and sexual exploitation and boys being forced to work in agriculture as well as in factories, street selling and fishing’.⁸ According to Organised Crime Index (OCINDEX), a project by the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC):

‘The lines between human trafficking and human smuggling are often blurred in the context of Cameroon. However, there is a fairly high prevalence of women being smuggled to the Middle East, Europe, the US, and multiple African countries for employment, who are subsequently trafficked into slavery or sex work. There is also a growing new phenomenon involving the smuggling of young boys and girls identified as young football talents in urban areas. Overall, many young people in the country are willing to pay exorbitant fees to go abroad, using migration ‘brokers’ who secure fraudulent documents and visas for travelling

¹ GI-TOC, OCINDEX, Cameroon, 2021, [url](#), p. 3

² Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021- Cameroon, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

³ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 164

⁴ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 164

⁵ GI-TOC, OCINDEX, Cameroon, 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁶ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), pp. 161-164

⁷ USDOL, 2020 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, Cameroon, 29 September 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁸ Child Sponsorship, Cameroon Children, n.d., [url](#)

overseas. A resurgence of violence and conflict may trigger an upsurge in displaced people and subsequently an upsurge in migration facilitators.⁹

Some of the most common forms of children's exploitation throughout the country include sex trafficking, forced labour, domestic service in restaurants and houses, begging and vending, working in mining and fishing industries, animal breeding and agriculture and assistants in urban transportation.¹⁰ Due to school closure related to COVID-19 restrictions, some Cameroonian children were sent to 'stay with intermediaries who, instead of providing education and safety, exploited the children in domestic servitude'.¹¹ The promise for better educational and future employment in the cities was used as a method by traffickers to convince parents from rural area to entrust children to intermediaries who exploited children for sex trafficking or forced labor.¹² According to the Ministry of Social Affairs of Cameroon, and referenced by USDOS, during 2019, as many as 1 147 children were identified as vulnerable to trafficking, and 162 homeless children were identified as vulnerable to trafficking between April and June 2020.¹³

Due to displacement and destruction of homes, as a result of the Northwest and Southwest crisis, some children do not have or lose their birth certificates,¹⁴ which increases the risk of being exploited and trafficked.¹⁵ Unaccompanied minors and orphaned children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and other forms of exploitation.¹⁶ Sources reported that Cameroon is becoming a hub for baby trafficking (selling babies).¹⁷ In January 2021, a man was arrested for selling babies to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). According to a media source, young poor mothers or girls with unwanted pregnancies sell their babies to trafficking networks who in turn sell Cameroonian babies to DRC via internet.¹⁸ Trafficking networks for baby trading include a variety of actors such as sellers, 'medical experts, such as nurses, and babysitters who provide support and care for the pregnant girls and their infants in illegal shelters where the babies are kept in transit'. ENACT's research indicates the city of Douala as the main trading point.¹⁹

Kribi and Douala have been identified as the main cities where child sex trafficking/ child sex tourism used to²⁰ take place. The main countries of origin of people engaging in sex tourism was Belgium, Chad, France, Germany, Nigeria, Switzerland, and Uganda.²¹

Cameroonians from rural areas were particularly exploited by traffickers in forced labour and sex trafficking. Cameroonians aged between 20-38, usually coming from the Northwest, Southwest, Littoral, Center, South, and West Regions were the profiles of possible victims of forced labor and sex trafficking in 'the Middle East (especially Kuwait and Lebanon), Thailand, as well as in Europe (including Switzerland and Cyprus), the United States, and multiple African countries (including Benin and Nigeria)'.²²

⁹ GI-TOC, OCINDEX, Cameroon, 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 164

¹¹ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 164

¹² USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 164

¹³ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 163

¹⁴ OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Cameroon, 23 June 2020, [url](#), p. 45

¹⁵ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 163; DRC, Focus Group Discussion report: Child Protection Needs in South-West Cameroon, December 2020, [url](#), p. 12; DRC, Rapid Protection Assessments Summary Report, Southwest Cameroon, December 2020, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁶ OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Cameroon, 23 June 2020, [url](#), p. 46

¹⁷ ENACT Observer, Is Cameroon becoming Central Africa's baby trading hub?, 14 July 2021, [url](#); VOA, Cameroon Man Arrested for Baby Trafficking Gives Stunning Details of Operation, 18 January 2021, [url](#)

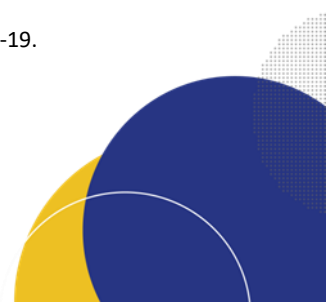
¹⁸ VOA, Cameroon Man Arrested for Baby Trafficking Gives Stunning Details of Operation, 18 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹ ENACT Observer, Is Cameroon becoming Central Africa's baby trading hub?, 14 July 2021, [url](#)

²⁰ USDOS recorded a decrease in the phenomenon during 2020 due to the travel restrictions related to COVID-19.

²¹ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 164

²² USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 164



Trafficking networks

Trafficking networks are composed of people from various sectors and different profiles. The 2021 USDOS Trafficking in Persons report provides a general picture on the modalities in which these actors act and co-operate to form a trafficking network. The source explains:

‘Trafficking networks generally consist of local community members, including religious leaders and trafficking victims who have become perpetrators. These networks advertise jobs through the internet, as well as other media, and recruit and sell other Cameroonians directly to families in need of domestic workers. Advocates working on trafficking issues report the government’s awareness-raising activities targeting fraudulent recruitment have raised awareness among vulnerable populations, but have caused intermediaries to operate with greater discretion, often directing victims to travel to the Middle East through neighboring countries, including Nigeria. International organizations, NGOs, and migrants report Cameroonian trafficking networks in Morocco coerce women into sex trafficking’.²³

2. Response by the state: legislation and support system (with particular focus on Douala and Muyuka)

According to the 2020 report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), ‘the current legislation on trafficking in persons in Cameroon covers all forms of trafficking indicated in the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol’²⁴. ‘Cameroon has ratified International Human Rights Instruments relating to the subject cited in §70 of Cameroon Common Core Document’²⁵.²⁶

Cameroon remains in the ‘Tier 2 Watch List Category’ of the United States Department of State.²⁷ Tier 2 Watch List’ includes those ‘countries whose governments do not fully meet the TVPA’s [Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000] minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards’.²⁸ The 2021 USDOS report further noted:

[...] ‘the 2011 Cameroonian anti-trafficking law²⁹ criminalized some forms of sex trafficking and all forms of labor trafficking. Inconsistent with international law, Cameroon’s legal framework required a demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion to constitute a child sex trafficking offense, and therefore did not criminalize all forms of child sex trafficking’.³⁰

[...] ‘The law was published in French and English, the two official languages of the government. The English version conflated trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling offenses by referring to trafficking in persons offenses, as defined under international law, as “slavery in persons,” while referring to smuggling-related offenses as “trafficking in persons.” Increasing the potential for conflating smuggling and trafficking in persons, Article 342 of Cameroon’s 2016 Penal Code prohibited both “trafficking in persons” and “slavery in

²³ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 164

²⁴ UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020; Country Profile Sub-Saharan Africa, January 2021, [url](#), p. 12

²⁵ UN HRI, CORE DOCUMENT FORMING PART OF THE REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES, CAMEROON, 19 June 2000, [url](#)

²⁶ UN CERD, Combined twenty-second and twenty-third reports submitted by Cameroon under article 9 of the Convention, due in 2017*, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 30-31

²⁷ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 67

²⁸ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 52

²⁹ For an English translation of the Law No.2011/024 visit: Archdiocese of Bamenda, Commission for Justice and Peace and UNODC, LAW No 2011 / 024 of 14 December 2011 Relating to the fight against trafficking in persons and slavery, September 2012, [url](#)

³⁰ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 162

persons.” Legislation drafted in 2012 to address victim and witness protection and correct inconsistencies with international law remained pending for the ninth consecutive year.³¹

‘Lack of capacity to investigate trafficking issues’ and ‘limited labor inspection and remediation resources’ were identified as reasons for the non-effective implementation of the law by the government.³² OCINDEX noted that ‘high levels of corruption exist in state institutions, which potentially provide a safe haven for criminal actors’. The same source also reported that during the past years, Cameroonian state encouraged actors and victims of human trafficking and smuggling ‘to settle cases out of court due to weak cooperation between state and NGOs’ as a result of the crisis in the Far North Region and the Anglophone crisis in the Northwest and Southwest of the country.³³

Official statistics on trafficking in Cameroon, are not clear but according to officials, cited in the USDOS report, from January to August 2020, 752 potential victims were identified and between the period April-June 2020 162 homeless children were identified as vulnerable to trafficking.³⁴ In January 2021, Cameroonian police arrested, in Yaoundé, members of a trafficking network who were selling babies and new-borns ‘from the central African state to the Democratic Republic of Congo’.³⁵

Cameroonian authorities worked ‘closely with NGOs as well as intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) such as The Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)’ in order to eliminate the phenomenon of human trafficking.³⁶ In July 2021, the NRS/SOP (Standard Operating Procedures) was updated, by MINAS and an international NGO, and shared to officials in order to help them for the better identification and referral of victims of trafficking.³⁷

In Douala and Yaoundé five social centres exist and are under the jurisdiction of the Cameroonian Ministry of Social Affairs.³⁸ In the town of Betamba, an educational institute, the Betamba Childhood Institute, provided specialised re-education and training courses at 40 homeless children who were identified as potential victims of trafficking.³⁹

From 2017 up to date, the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, funded by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund (EU-IOM), has supported returnees to reintegrate in Cameroon. The program works in cooperation with the state authorities and NGOs.⁴⁰ This reintegration program provides assistance to returnees ‘to set up community-oriented projects in farming, cattle rearing and other fields, which can become self-sustaining’ as IOM Cameroon head described in an article by the Thomson Reuters Foundation.⁴¹

Within the time constraints for drafting this COI query response, no information could be found specifically on the city of Muyuka.

³¹ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 162

³² USDOS, 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 50

³³ GI-TOC, OCINDEX, Cameroon, 2021, [url](#), p. 4; USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 162

³⁴ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), pp. 162-163

³⁵ VOA, Cameroon Man Arrested for Baby Trafficking Gives Stunning Details of Operation, 18 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁶ Chin, A., 5 Facts About Human Trafficking in Cameroon, Borgen Project (The) [Blog], 30 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁷ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 163

³⁸ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 163

³⁹ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2021, [url](#), p. 163; Journal Du Cameroon, Cameroon: 40 street children to be placed in public institution in Centre region, 29 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰ IOM, Migrant Return and Reintegration: Complex, Challenging, Crucial, n.d., [url](#)

⁴¹ Thomson Reuters Foundation, Migrants rescued from Libya's prisons "start again from zero", 21 February 2018, [url](#)

3. Societal treatment of THB's victims and support networks/NGOs

Although not referring specifically to Cameroon, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Trafficking noted that victims of human trafficking (and their children) are often stigmatised and punished, and therefore their reintegration to the society can be difficult. The source explained:

‘Such stigmatization has material consequences for the victims, including their rejection by communities, refusals to provide them with consular assistance or to facilitate and support their repatriation, and difficulties in securing identity documents, which, in turn, leads to statelessness and associated human rights violations’.⁴²

In an anecdotal story by Francisca Awah, a former victim of trafficking and the founder of Survivors' Network, a non-profit organisation supporting victims of trafficking in Cameroon, she reported that her return to Cameroon was not easy, being stigmatised by her family.⁴³ Survivors' Network is ‘led by survivors of human trafficking, rescues women from national and international situations of exploitation, and empowers them to rebuild their lives and be reintegrated into society’.⁴⁴

The Global Welfare Association (GLOWA)⁴⁵ Cameroon is a ‘counter-trafficking NGO’ based in Bamenda, which runs programs aiming at identifying ‘trafficking scams, educate communities, lobby policy-makers and deliver programs to help in the rehabilitation of victims.’⁴⁶ In its website, GLOWA noted that rescued children victim of trafficking ‘are often traumatised and in need of shelter, food, medical and psychological care, education, vocational training, and family tracing’.⁴⁷

In February 2021, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) partnered with Martin Luther Jr. King Memorial Foundation – Cameroon (LUKMEF)⁴⁸ and Street Child⁴⁹ to provide and strengthen their knowledge on ‘community-based child protection interventions’.⁵⁰

Referring on the ‘alarming’ phenomenon of ‘forced labour, sexual slavery, forced marriage; extraction of human organs in Cameroon’, on 15 September 2021, the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRNA)⁵¹ held a workshop for local authorities and civil society organizations to discuss topics such as trafficking indicators, possible causes, legislation, social integration of victims of human trafficking, measures for assisting the victims.⁵²

Related EASO COI Query Responses:

- [Cameroon, Sexual and gender-based violence \(SGBV\), 5 June 2019](#)
- [Cameroon, Forced Recruitment, 29 June 2021](#)
- [Cameroon, Internally displaced persons \(IDPs\) and returnees in Douala and Yaoundé, 24 August 2021](#)

⁴² UN General Assembly, Trafficking in persons, especially women and children**, Note by the Secretary-General, 3 August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁴³ UNODC, Survival Stories, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁴ Survivors Network Cameroon, Who we Are, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁵ More about GLOWA Cameroon, visit About us, [url](#)

⁴⁶ GLOWA Cameroon, Our Story, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁷ GLOWA Cameroon, Our Story, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁸ More about LUKMEF Cameroon, visit About us, [url](#)

⁴⁹ More about Child Street Cameroon, visit About us, [url](#)

⁵⁰ UNICEF, Cameroon Humanitarian Situation Report No. 2, 24 February 2021, [url](#)

⁵¹ More About CHRNA, visit About us, [url](#)

⁵² CHRNA, The Fight against Human Trafficking; the protection of victims through the provision of humanitarian assistance in the South West Region of Cameroon, 18 September 2021, [url](#)

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