

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	241
Land:	Cameroun
Kilde:	National Romanian Council for Refugees
Titel:	General Report Cameroon: Human Rights Situation – Updated February 2022
Udgivet:	Februar 2022
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	21. november 2022

UPDATED FEBRUARY 2022

GENERAL REPORT CAMEROON

Human rights situation

Country of Origin Information

National Program

Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund

Proiect

Managing research and use of information from the countries of origin

Contract no.: FAMI/21.03.01.

Beneficiary

National Romanian Council for Refugees

This work is destined for general information, in service of professional interest of all practitioners within asylum procedure in Romania. This work does NOT analyze the merits of granting a form of international protection.



UNIUNEA EUROPEANĂ



Proiect finanțat de Uniunea Europeană

Ministerul Afacerilor Interne



Directia Fonduri Externe Nerambursabile

Ministerul Afacerilor Interne



Inspectoratul General pentru Imigrări

Fundația



C.N.R.R.

Note

This report has been translated and compiled in accordance with „Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (2008) and „EASO Country of Origin Information Report Methodology (2012). As a result, this report is based on some very carefully selected sources of public information. All sources used are references sources compiled from specialty reports and profile information and also press articles.

All information presented has been carefully verified, with the exception of some general aspects which represent common knowledge. The offered information has been studied, evaluated and carefully analyzed, with some time constraints. Thus, this document does not claim to be an exhaustive one. As such, we do not claim that it could be used in order to decide only on its basis the humanitarian issue in the country of origin.

The main way of presenting information within this report is citation, used to convey exactly what a source said, using the source's own words. Whenever there are used other techniques, like summarizing or synthesizing, this will be marked in a visible way (the most common way is through brackets []).

If a certain event, person or organization is not included in this report, this does not mean that the event did not take place or that the person and the organization itself do not exist. This document does not offer conclusions regarding the merits of granting any form of protection. It only partially contributes to forming the opinion of the decisive factor, who should take the decision by respecting the other procedural aspects and by taking into consideration the specific circumstances of each case.

The information and opinions expressed do not reflect the official position of the General Inspectorate for Immigration or of his partner in implementing the project AMIF/21.03.01 - Management of COI Usage and Research Processes.

This general report presents information publicly available as of February 14th, 2022.

Contents

I. General context	3
A. Country Background	3
B. Political situation.....	5
C. Security situation.....	7
II. Human Rights Situation.....	9
A. Abuses by government forces and armed groups	9
B. Religious freedom	11
C. Freedom of association, expression and of the press	12
D. State of the judiciary system	14
E. Women rights.....	16
F. LGBT rights.....	18

I. General context

A. Country Background

Cameroon [is a] country lying at the junction of western and central Africa. Its ethnically diverse population is among the most urban in western Africa. The capital is Yaoundé, located in the south-central part of the country. The country has been described as an “ethnic crossroads” because of its more than 200 different ethnic groups. There are three main linguistic groups: the Bantu-speaking peoples of the south, the Sudanic-speaking peoples of the north, and those who speak the Semi-Bantu languages, situated mainly in the west. The first Bantu groups included the Maka, Ndjem, and Duala. They were followed at the beginning of the 19th century by the Fang (Pangwe) and Beti peoples. The Sudanic-speaking peoples include the Sao, who live on the Adamawa Plateau; the Fulani; and the Kanuri. The Fulani came from the Niger basin in two waves, in the 11th and 19th centuries; they were Muslims who converted and subjugated the peoples of the Logone valley and the Kébi and Faro river valleys. The Semi-Bantu groups mainly consist of small ethnic entities, except for the Bantu-related Bamileke, who live between the lower slopes of the Adamawa Plateau and Mount Cameroon. Other western Semi-Bantu-speaking groups include the Tikar, who live in the Bamenda region and in the western high plateau.¹

Cameroon is a diverse, resource-rich country of 28.5 million people. Formed through a merger of two separately colonized entities – one administered by France, one by England – Cameroon is largely French-speaking, with a minority population of English-speakers concentrated in the west. Perceived marginalization among Anglophones has long provoked demands for political decentralization as well as calls from some activists for the independence of the English-speaking regions. Cameroon is predominately Christian; Muslim comprise an estimated 20% of the population and are concentrated in the north, which is generally poorer and less economically developed than the south.

In the past decade, Cameroon’s reputation for stability under President Biya has dissipated with the emergence of security crises on several fronts Boko Haram began operating more openly in northern Cameroon around 2013, and attacks by Boko Haram and IS-WA (which split from Boko Haram in 2016) persist. In the west, the conflict between Anglophone separatists and state security

¹ Britannica, Cameroon, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cameroon/People>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

forces has featured widespread abuses against civilians, while efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement have foundered. Together, the conflicts in the north and west have displaced over one million Cameroonians internally. Cameroon also hosts nearly 330,000 refugees fleeing security in neighboring Central African Republic, and 120,000 Nigerians displaced by the Boko Haram and IS-WA insurgencies, according to U.N. agencies. ²



Title: Maps of the provinces of Cameroon

Source: Wikimedia Commons,

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cameroon_provinces_english.png, accessed on 14.02.2022.

² Congressional Research Service, Cameroon: Key Issues and U.S. Policy, 22 September 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1437316/download>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

B. Political situation

Cameroon is a republic dominated by a strong presidency. The president retains power over the legislative and judicial branches of government. The ruling political party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, has remained in power since its creation in 1985. The country held legislative elections on February 9, which were marked by irregularities. The ruling party won 152 of 180 National Assembly seats. Paul Biya has served as president since 1982. He was last reelected in 2018 in an election marked with irregularities.³

President Paul Biya won a seventh term in the October 2018 presidential election, taking 71 percent of the vote in a process marked by low turnout and a lack of genuine democratic competition. Maurice Kamto of the CRM came in second, with 14 percent of the vote. The election was tainted by irregularities including unsigned results sheets, and intimidation and fear in the Anglophone regions kept many from casting their votes.

Long-delayed National Assembly elections were finally held in Cameroon in February 2020, together with municipal elections. The CRM refused to put up candidates, though the SDF participated, as did the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP), which is allied with the CPDM. The CPDM retained its majority, winning 139 of the 167 seats contested. The Constitutional Council invalidated the results in 11 constituencies of the Anglophone Northwest and Southwest Regions, where boycotts and ongoing tensions resulted in low turnout; separatists claimed that 98 percent of eligible voters had boycotted the election. Reruns took place in March, and the incumbent CPDM won all 13 of the seats at stake. On December 6, 2020, the first-ever regional elections took place despite calls for boycott by opposition parties, who rejected the government's characterization that they would lead to greater regional autonomy in the country, and threats by separatist groups in the Anglophone regions to arrest would-be voters. In the indirect election, a 24,000-member electoral college composed of regional delegates and traditional chiefs

³ US Department of State, 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 30 March 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2048145.html>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

chose 900 regional councilors in all 10 regions (90 for each region). Biya's CPDM party won the majority.⁴

The dispute over the 2018 presidential vote, which many observers, including the Catholic Church, criticised as flawed, continues to shape Cameroonian politics. Since electoral authorities declared him runner-up to Biya, Kamto has contested the result, culminating in his February 2019 arrest on charges of insurrection, sedition and inciting violence. Even after leaving prison in October 2019, he has regularly lambasted the government for its failure to reform the electoral system. He and his party boycotted municipal and parliamentary elections in February 2020. Their abstention left the ruling party with an overwhelming majority in parliament, meaning that the government's main rivals are not there to engage it in debate about the country's major problems. Kamto and his allies continue to butt heads with the government on the country's most divisive issues. Kamto, himself part of Cameroon's Francophone majority, criticizes the government for holding elections in which few Anglophones could vote due to violence and a separatist-led boycott. He accuses Biya of mishandling the Anglophone crisis by prioritising force over dialogue. During street protests, he has advocated for the release of jailed separatist leaders, leading the government to depict him as a dangerous rabble rouser. Among both Biya's supporters and Kamto's, many frame the political dispute as a competition for power between their respective ethnic groups – between, on one hand, Biya's Bulu group, indigenous to the Francophone South region, and the Beti of the Francophone Centre with whom the Bulu identify; and, on the other, Kamto's Bamileke, indigenous to the Francophone West.⁵

The government limited the ability of the political opposition to function freely. Authorities prohibited a demonstration by the country's main opposition party, Cameroon Renaissance Movement (Mouvement pour la renaissance du Cameroun, MRC), planned for July 25 in Yaoundé, the capital, citing concerns around Covid-19 and general public order. On the same day, a demonstration by supporters of the ruling party took place in Bertoua, Eastern region. On August 9, gendarmes arbitrarily arrested prominent tech entrepreneur, human rights campaigner, and vocal critic of President Paul Biya, Rebecca Enonchong, in Douala. She was held in custody for

⁴ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021 – Cameroon, 3 March 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2052748.html>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

⁵ International Crisis Group, Easing Cameroon's Ethno-political Tensions, On and Offline, 3 December 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/295-easing-camerouns-ethno-political-tensions-and-offline>, accessed 15.02.2022.

“contempt of a magistrate” until August 13, when she was released and all charges against her dropped. At least 124 opposition party members and supporters arrested in September 2020 during peaceful demonstrations remained in detention on politically motivated charges, including Olivier Bibou Nissack and Alain Fogué Tedom, two prominent MRC members.⁶

C. Security situation

Prior to 2013, when Boko Haram began to operate more openly in the country’s north, Cameroon had enjoyed a reputation for general stability in a Central African sub-region that has experienced recurrent conflicts and humanitarian crises. As insecurity has since proliferated in Cameroon, some analysts have debated the effectiveness of what many observers have characterized as a militarized state response to security threats in the north and, more recently, the predominately Anglophone west.⁷

In the first half of 2021, attacks and raids by the Islamist armed group Boko Haram increased in the Far North Region, with at least 80 civilians killed. On January 8, a Boko Haram suicide attack killed at least 14 civilians, including 8 children, and wounded 3 others, including 2 children. The presumed death in May of Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram, in a confrontation in Nigeria with the splinter faction Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), helped consolidate ISWAP’s power and increased insecurity in Cameroon’s Far North region.⁸

Fighting continues between State security forces (SSFs) and non-State armed groups (NSAGs). The population in the NWSW continues to suffer the impact of armed clashes and insecurity, ranging from exposure to crossfire and abductions to explosions from improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) reported 11 IEDs incidents in December; four in the NW and seven in the SW. While most incidents had SSFs as target, three incidents reported in the Fako division directly targeted populations. On 6 December, allegedly NSAG fighters detonated an IED at Soppo market. A second IED was discovered at the market and deactivated by SSFs. On 13 December, an IED explosion was

⁶ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2022 – Cameroon, 13 January 2022, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2066485.html>, accessed on 15.02.2022.

⁷ Congressional Research Service, Cameroon: Key Issues and U.S. Policy, 22 September 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1437316/download>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

⁸ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2022 – Cameroon, 13 January 2022, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2066485.html>, accessed on 15.02.2022.

reported at a trade fair at Bongo Square in Clerks Quarter neighbourhood. An unspecified number of people were injured. These attacks and others reported in Buea in the past months targeting civilians are instilling fear among the population. Imposed Monday ghost town rule declared by NSAG are still in place.

Displacement continues due to insecurity and violence. Protection continues to be a major concern as civilians continue to be arbitrarily arrested, assaulted, abducted for ransom, and denied access to basic services. Over 2,490 individuals were reportedly displaced in the NWSW in December, following armed confrontations between SSFs and NSAGs, or as a preventive measure for fear of being attacked. Emergency assessments were conducted to identify priority needs of the affected population. Most of them intended to go back to their locations of origin once the situation allows, due to poor living conditions in the bush settlements and limited access to services in host communities.⁹

To date, little progress toward a political settlement to the Anglophone conflict has been apparent. Divisions within the separatist movement and hardliners on each side of the conflict complicate the path toward negotiations, as does the presence of criminal actors who profit from the violence through extortion and kidnapping for ransom. The Biya government held a political dialogue aimed at resolving the conflict in late 2019, but appears intent on pursuing a military solution to the crisis. Many separatist leaders continue to publicly reject any solution short of independence for the Anglophone regions. Moderate, non-violent activists have come under pressure from both sides, amid repression and political marginalization by the government and accusations of betrayal by armed separatists.¹⁰

⁹ OCHA, Cameroon Situation Report, 3 february 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-situation-report-3-february-2022>, accessed 15.02.2022.

¹⁰ Congressional Research Service, Cameroon: Key Issues and U.S. Policy, 22 September 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1437316/download>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

II. Human Rights Situation

A. Abuses by government forces and armed groups

Anglophone separatist armed groups continued to commit serious human rights abuses, and targeted people perceived as government supporters in the North-West and South-West regions. Meanwhile, in the conflict in the Far North region, armed groups related to Boko Haram carried out hundreds of attacks, committing serious human rights abuses. Some of these amounted to war crimes. Between January and December, at least 312 civilians, including children as young as 10, were killed in at least 412 attacks, according to data compiled from UN bodies, media and other organizations.¹¹

Separatist fighters continued to kill, torture, assault, and kidnap civilians. They also continued their attacks against education. According to the United Nations, 700,000 students were out of school in March 2021 as a result of the crisis. On January 9, suspected separatist fighters killed the principal of a high school in Eyumojock, South-West region, and wounded a principal from another high school in Tinto, South-West region. On January 12, separatist fighters shot and injured a female public-school teacher in Bamenda, North-West region.

Separatist fighters killed three tribal chiefs in Essoh Attah village, South-West region, on February 13. On February 27, armed separatists kidnapped a medical doctor in Bali, North-West region and threatened to kill him before releasing him the same day after a ransom payment.

Security forces responded to separatist attacks with a heavy hand, often targeting civilians across the Anglophone regions. On January 10, army soldiers killed at least nine civilians, including a woman and a child, in Mautu village, South-West region. The soldiers also looted scores of homes and threatened residents.

In Gom village, North-West region, on June 8, two soldiers broke into the house of *fon* (the local traditional authority) and harassed eight people there, including a 72-year-old man whom they beat. They also shot and killed Nwang Lydia, a 60-year-old woman, after she failed to provide information about a separatist fighter.

¹¹ Amnesty International, Amnesty International Report 2020/21: The State of the World's Human Rights: Cameroon, 7 April 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2048653.html>, accessed 15.02.2022.

On June 9, soldiers from the regular army and the elite Rapid Intervention Battalion (*Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide*, BIR) killed a 58-year-old man and raped a 53-year-old woman during a security operation in and around Mbuluf village, North-West region. They also broke into, damaged, and looted at least 33 shops and homes, including the residence of the fon in Ndzeen village.¹²

According to the Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa (CHRDA), on August 13, Cameroonian soldiers raided the village of Mautu in the Southwest Region and killed seven unarmed civilians. The victims, including an elderly man and a pregnant woman known as ‘Mami Blessing,’ were reportedly shot at close range in their homes. Before these killings, the military raided a church on the outskirts of Mautu and shot the church’s pastor. The soldiers executed two boys alongside the pastor and shot another as he tried to escape. The soldiers allegedly invaded the church because the worshipers sympathized with separatist ideology.

On August 11, multiple media outlets reported the beheading of 32-year-old Comfort Tumassang by suspected Anglophone separatists. The incident took place in Muyuka, Southwest Region. A video circulating on social media that day showed a woman seated on the ground with her hands tied behind her. She begged for mercy before she was beheaded; her body was left in the street. Human Rights Watch also reviewed a second video, filmed before the killing, showing separatists interrogating and threatening Tumassang, whom they accused of collaborating with the military. The three main Anglophone separatist groups—the Ambazonia Governing Council, the “interim government” led by Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, and its splinter faction led by Samuel Ikome Sako—condemned the killing and denied responsibility for the crime.

On November 24, suspected Islamist terrorists attacked the village of Gabas, located within Mayo Tsanaga in the Far North Region, killing three civilians. On November 25, a member of the Gabas vigilance committee, Jean Baptiste Yagai, told the media that terrorists attacked at about 7:00 p.m., hours before the normal time that residents leave the village to hide in the surrounding hills every evening to avoid Boko Haram and ISIS-WA attacks. The assault on Gabas was the latest in a series of attacks by Boko Haram and ISIS-WA in the Far North Region, especially within Mayo Tsanaga

¹² Human Rights Watch, World Report 2022 – Cameroon, 13 January 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/en/document/2066485>, accessed on 15.02.2022.

and Mayo Sava. In November at least six civilians were killed in attacks in Mayo Sava, while five civilians were killed and at least four others abducted in Mayo Moskota.¹³

Reported abuses have implicated elements of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), an elite military unit that has received U.S. counterterrorism training and other support. (The BIR was established in 2001 to address banditry and other criminality, particularly in border areas; BIR personnel began receiving U.S. training in the mid-2000s. 49) In 2017, Amnesty International accused BIR personnel of extrajudicial killings and torture, including at a facility in the Far North where it alleged that U.S. military forces were regularly present during the period in which such incidents reportedly occurred. 50 U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) denied knowledge of abuses. 51 Human rights groups also have accused BIR personnel of abuses in the Anglophone conflict, including extrajudicial killings, rape, torture, the looting and destruction of homes and other property, and the desecration of heritage sites.¹⁴

B. Religious freedom

The constitution establishes the state as secular, prohibits religious harassment, and provides for freedom of religion and worship. According to media and religious leaders, most abuses involving religious freedom occurred in the English-speaking Northwest and Southwest Regions, where a violent separatist conflict continued. In July, security officers killed a timekeeper at a Protestant church in Bangem as he rang the bell for morning prayers. In August, soldiers looking for separatists arrested and killed a Protestant pastor and several of his followers in the village of Mautu. In October, security forces arrested a Catholic priest one day after he began a protest march to raise awareness about violence in the Anglophone region and call for the release of political detainees. Also in October, gendarmes in the town of Ndop arrested the pastor of the Cameroon Baptist Convention, stating that he supported separatists spiritually and financially. Religious leaders in the Anglophone regions repeatedly accused security forces of burning churches, forcing residents to quarter soldiers, and desecrating religious spaces and objects. On several occasions, Christians in the Northwest and Southwest Regions said security forces interrupted church services

¹³ US Department of State, 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 30 March 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2048145.html>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

¹⁴ Congressional Research Service, Cameroon: Key Issues and U.S. Policy, 22 September 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1437316/download>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

and prevented them from accessing places of worship. In August, the government shut down a Yaounde church whose leaders preached that COVID-19 was a hoax and refused to comply with official public health mandates on crowd sizes. Religious leaders expressed frustration with the government's failure to register any new religious groups for the 10th consecutive year and said many requests remained pending.¹⁵

Religious freedom is somewhat restricted in northern areas affected by the presence of the Boko Haram extremist group, which has carried out violent attacks against places of worship. In addition, random attacks against believers and facilities in connection with the conflict in the Northwest and Southwest regions are common. In November 2020, Roman Catholic cardinal Christian Tumi was kidnapped by gunmen in Cameroon's Northwest Region, but was freed shortly after.¹⁶

C. Freedom of association, expression and of the press

Public criticism of the government and membership in opposition political parties can have a negative consequences for professional opportunities and advancement. Cameroonians tend to avoid discussing sensitive political issues for fear of reprisals, notably the potential for a return to a federal system that would grant the Anglophone regions more autonomy, or the regions' outright secession. Social media users and individuals who possess or distribute antigovernment material have also faced arrest.¹⁷

The law provides for freedom of expression, including for the press, but the government often restricted this right, explicitly or implicitly. Government failure to investigate or prosecute attacks on human rights defenders and peaceful protesters led to de facto restrictions on the freedom of speech, assembly, and association.

Government officials penalized individuals or organizations that criticized or expressed views at odds with government policy. Individuals who criticized the government publicly or privately

¹⁵ US Department of State, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Cameroon, 12 May 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2051530.html>, accessed on 15 February 2022.

¹⁶ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021 – Cameroon, 3 March 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2052748.html>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

¹⁷ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021 – Cameroon, 3 March 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2052748.html>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

frequently faced reprisals. On several occasions, the government invoked laws requiring permits or government notification of public protests to stifle discourse.

On July 24, the senior divisional officer for Upper Plateaux in the West Region, Yampen Ousmanou, sent a warning letter to Jean Rameau Sokoudjou, the traditional ruler of Bamendjou in the West Region, accusing him of rebellion after he organized a meeting in his palace on July 18 without prior approval. The meeting reportedly brought together citizens of diverse political sides and civil society groups to exchange ideas about the country's future.

On May 15, according to reports by multiple organizations, including the National Association of English-speaking Journalists, security forces arrested freelance journalist Kingsley Fomunyoy Njoka. He was taken from his home in Douala and detained incommunicado for 24 days. According to Njoka's legal team, the security forces accused him of criticizing the government's handling of the Anglophone crisis on social media. On June 12, the Yaounde Military Tribunal indicted the journalist on multiple counts, including secession and collusion with an armed group, and placed him in pretrial detention at the Kondengui Central Prison in Yaounde. On July 13, Njoka filed a defamation complaint against Colonel Cyrille Serge Atonfack, the Ministry of Defense's communication officer. The suit followed a July 5 interview on Equinoxe Television, during which Atonfack said that Njoka admitted he participated in the killing of former separatist fighters who surrendered at disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) centers in the Northwest and Southwest Regions. He characterized Njoka as the coordinator of the Bui Warriors, an armed separatist group based in Bui, Northwest Region. On June 30, Reporters without Borders noted the allegations against Njoka had not yet been substantiated. They stated that persons close to the journalist characterized his criticism of the government's handling of the Anglophone crisis as factual and stated the security forces probably monitored him because he regularly discussed the conflict with colleagues.¹⁸

The authorities continued to crack down on peaceful dissent, banning demonstrations and arbitrarily arresting those who exercised their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. On 18 September, four members of the Stand Up For Cameroon movement, a coalition of political parties, NGOs and others, were arrested by the gendarmerie in Douala city after

¹⁸ US Department of State, 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 30 March 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2048145.html>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

attending a meeting at the Cameroon People's Party headquarters. They were brought before a military court on false charges of attempted conspiracy, revolution and insurrection. The judge ordered their pre-trial detention in New Bell prison where they remained at the end of the year.¹⁹

Press freedom continues its long decline in Cameroon, now one of Africa's most dangerous countries for journalists. The government often points to the existence of many media outlets but this doesn't mean they enjoy a favourable environment. Reporters are often detained arbitrarily and prosecuted, including by military tribunals or special courts. The 2014 terrorism law was used to keep a Radio France Internationale correspondent in detention for two and a half years. But it is the preventive detention of the former head of the public radio and TV broadcaster since 2016 that testifies most to the level of the retaliation to which journalists can be subjected if they act independently and resist government interference in their work. Aside from Eritrea, no other African country has held a journalist without trial for so long. The UN recognises the arbitrary nature of his detention and has requested his release, in vain. The Internet is meanwhile often disconnected in the English-speaking parts of the country and the authorities target the journalists there in particular, often accusing them of abetting the secessionist movements in these regions that the central government in Yaoundé has been trying to crush for years. One of these journalists was held incommunicado after being arrested in 2019 and died in very suspicious circumstances a few days later. More than ten months went by before the government finally recognised that he had died in detention.²⁰

D. State of the judiciary system

The judiciary is subordinate to the Ministry of Justice, with corruption and political influence, including by the executive, weakening courts. The president appoints judges, and can dismiss them at will. Prosecutors have been pressured to stop pursuing corruption cases against some high-profile officials. Due process rights are poorly upheld. Lengthy pretrial detentions are commonplace. Civilians accused of terrorism are frequently not afforded the right to a fair trial. French legal norms are regularly imposed upon Cameroonians in Anglophone regions.

¹⁹ Amnesty International, Amnesty International Report 2020/21: The State of the World's Human Rights: Cameroon, 7 April 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2048653.html>, accessed 15.02.2022.

²⁰ Reporters Without Borders, 2021 World Press Freedom Index – Cameroon, 2021, <https://rsf.org/en/cameroon>, accessed on 18.02.2022.

The government has invoked charges of terrorism, rebellion, and insurrection against opposition leaders and separatist supporters in 2019 and 2020, and they are often detained in the absence of due process and without realistic avenues for challenging their detention. A number of people arrested in the aftermath of the September 2020 CRM antigovernment rallies face charges in military courts.²¹

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair and public trial without undue delay, and the defendant is presumed innocent. Authorities did not always respect the law. Criminal defendants have the right to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges, with free assistance of an interpreter. Defendants have the right to be present and to consult with an attorney of their choice, but in many cases the government did not respect this right, restricting access to lawyers, particularly in cases of individuals suspected of complicity with Boko Haram, Anglophone separatists, or political opponents. When defendants cannot pay for their own legal defense, the court may appoint trial counsel at public expense, but the process was often burdensome and lengthy and the quality of legal assistance was poor. Authorities generally allowed defendants to question witnesses and to present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. Defendants have the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense and not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt, but authorities often violated this right. Hearsay and anonymous testimony were sometimes permitted, especially in terrorism cases. Defendants are entitled to an interpreter at no charge, but often the quality of interpretation was described as poor. Defendants may appeal convictions. In some cases, authorities did not give the victim a chance to confront the offender and present witnesses or evidence to support his or her case.

Citizens and organizations have the right to seek civil remedies for human rights abuses through administrative procedures or the legal system; both options involved lengthy delays. Individuals and organizations may appeal adverse decisions domestically or to regional human rights bodies, but the decisions of regional human rights bodies are not binding.²²

²¹ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021 – Cameroon, 3 March 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2052748.html>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

²² US Department of State, 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 30 March 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2048145.html>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

The trial of 21 people accused of involvement in the killings of 21 civilians in Ngarbuh, in Cameroon's North-West region, on February 14, 2020, has dragged on for 14 months, Human Rights Watch said today. The slow pace raises concerns about the justice system's efficiency and ability to deliver justice to the victims. The lack of progress is compounded by the limited opportunity for access and participation by victims' families, the lack of probative witnesses, and the fact that senior officers with command responsibility have not been arrested or charged. The only witnesses so far did not see the killings and claimed the victims were separatist fighters.²³

A court in Cameroon has sentenced four people to death for their roles in a shooting attack on a school last year that killed seven children and wounded 12 others, according to a court document seen by Reuters on Wednesday. A military court in Buea, the capital of Cameroon's South West region, found the men guilty of terrorism, assassination, and attempted secession, according to its judgment, which was issued on Tuesday. The men were sentenced to execution by firing squad in the town square, but their sentences are likely to be converted to life imprisonment. Cameroon has not executed any of the hundreds of prisoners sentenced to death since 1997.²⁴

E. Women rights

Equal opportunity is only partially achieved, and discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, and region exists. Cameroon has ratified many international conventions and relevant accords to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. In practice, however, women continue to encounter barriers to economic, cultural, educational, and political participation. Women make up one-fifth of the Senate, and their share of National Assembly seats has increased to 31% due to gender quotas. Likewise, women now chair two parliamentary committees. However, following a cabinet shuffle in January 2019, there is now only one female cabinet minister. Women are also severely underrepresented among diplomats, public administrators, and magistrates. Disadvantages for women are reflected through other indicators as well. Men register higher literacy rates than women (78% vs. 65%), and there remains some discrepancy in secondary school

²³ Human Rights Watch, Cameroon: 2 Years On, Massacre Victims Await Justice, 14 February 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/14/cameroon-2-years-massacre-victims-await-justice>, accessed 18.02.2022.

²⁴ Reuters, Cameroon sentences four men to death for shooting attack on school, 9 September 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/cameroon-sentences-four-men-death-shooting-attack-school-2021-09-08/>, accessed 18.02.2022.

enrollment rates (66% vs. 57%) and labor force participation rates (81% vs. 71%). According to the UN, many social practices also limit equal opportunity for women. More than one third of women in Cameroon report domestic abuse (half report lifetime physical violence), and one third report participation in a child marriage. One percent of women report genital mutilation.²⁵

The constitution guarantees equal rights to men and women, but traditional legal values and practices often take precedence and do not always provide women with full rights. The Boko Haram conflict has exacerbated the already prevalent practice of child marriage and sexual abuse of minors in the Far North Region. Customary law can allow rapists to escape punishment if the victim consents to marriage. Despite laws guaranteeing equal rights to men and women to file for divorce, in practice courts often disadvantage women by making proceedings prohibitively expensive or lengthy. Cases of domestic violence and rape continue to be widespread in 2020, and perpetrators are rarely prosecuted.

Despite a 2011 law against human trafficking, 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. Some internally displaced women have also resorted to prostitution in the cities of Yaoundé and Douala. Child labor remains common, and child workers are frequently exposed to hazardous working conditions, particularly when collecting scrap metal for sale.²⁶

The law protects the bodily integrity of persons and prohibits genital mutilation. Perpetrators are subject to a prison sentence of 10 to 20 years or imprisonment for life if the offender habitually carries out this practice for commercial purposes or the practice causes death. FGM/C remained a problem, but its prevalence was low. As in the previous year, children were reportedly subjected to FGM/C in isolated areas of the Far North, East, and Southwest Regions and among the Choa and Ejagham ethnic groups.

Widows were sometimes forcibly married to one of their deceased husband's relatives to secure continued use of property left by the husband, including the marital home. To better protect women, including widows, the government included provisions in the law outlawing the eviction

²⁵ BTI, 2020 Country Report – Cameroon, <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/CMR>, 2020, accessed 15.02.2022.

²⁶ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021 – Cameroon, 3 March 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2052748.html>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

of a spouse from the marital home by any person other than the other spouse. The practice of widow rites, by which widows forgo certain activities such as bathing or freedom of movement, was also prevalent in some parts of the country, including in some rural communities of the West Region.

The law prohibits sexual harassment. Offenders can be subject to imprisonment for periods of six months to one year and a monetary fine. If the victim is a minor, the penalty can be one to three years in prison. If the offender is the victim's teacher, the penalty can increase to three to five years in prison. Despite these legal provisions, sexual harassment was widespread and there were no reports that anyone was fined or imprisoned for sexual harassment, in part due to sexual harassment victims' reluctance to file official complaints for fear of reprisal and or stigmatization.²⁷

An attack by Cameroonian soldiers on March 1, 2020 has come to light in which soldiers raped at least 20 women, including four with disabilities, arrested 35 men, and killed one man, Human Rights Watch said today. The attack on the village of Ebam in the South-West region was one of the worst by Cameroon's army in recent years.

Human Rights Watch interviewed 20 women, ranging in age from 23 to 42, who said they were raped by soldiers during the attack in Ebam on March 1. Human Rights Watch corroborated their accounts with a medical doctor who screened and treated them, and a humanitarian worker from an international group that provided psychological counseling and material assistance to the survivors. Sexual violence has altered life for all the women interviewed. None of them could access post-rape medical care in the immediate aftermath of the attack due to a range of obstacles, including displacement, lack of medical facilities, the cost of travel to such facilities, the cost of medical care, and fear of stigma and rejection.²⁸

F. LGBT rights

Cameroon's laws deny LGBT people access to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The criminalization of consensual same-sex conduct under article 347(1) of the Penal Code, which punishes "sexual relations with a person of the same sex" with up to five years

²⁷ US Department of State, 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 30 March 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2048145.html>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch, Survivors of Military Assault Await Justice, 26 February 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/26/cameroon-survivors-military-assault-await-justice>, accessed 16.02.2022.

in prison, infringes on the right to health of people who are sexual and gender minorities. Studies demonstrate that laws criminalizing same-sex intimacy pose barriers to HIV prevention, care, and treatment services.²⁹

As in other African countries, albinism and HIV-positive status creates significant social stigma. LGBTI rights are not protected in Cameroon and member of that community face severe discrimination. Same-sex sexual activity is illegal, and each year, members of the LGBTI community are jailed, harassed, or publicly exposed.³⁰

The constitution provides for equal rights for all citizens, but the law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination against LGBTI persons in housing, employment, nationality, and access to government services such as health care. Security forces sometimes harassed persons on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, including individuals found with condoms and lubricants. Fear of exposure affected individuals' willingness to access HIV/AIDS services, and a number of HIV-positive men who had sex with men reported also partnering with women, in part to conceal their sexual orientation. Anecdotal reports suggested some discrimination occurred in places of employment with respect to sexual orientation.

In an online article, a human rights activist with the pseudonym John Enama reported that on July 28 the Court of First Instance of Bafang in the West Region imposed fines on four men who were arrested due to what was described as their LGBTI conduct on June 9 in Kekem. The four men pleaded guilty but their lawyer highlighted extenuating circumstances, alleging that their confessions were given under threats and torture. The court accepted the guilty pleas; one man was sentenced to a month in prison and a token fine; the other three were fined. Because the families of the defendants were unwilling to pay the fines, two local NGOs paid them, and they were released.³¹

On February 24, police officers raided the office of Colibri, an organization that provides HIV prevention and treatment services, in Bafoussam, West Region, and arrested 13 people on

²⁹ Human Rights Watch, Submission by Human Rights Watch to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Cameroon, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/28/submission-human-rights-watch-committee-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>, 28 January 2019, accessed 15.02.2022.

³⁰ BTI, 2020 Country Report – Cameroon, 2020, <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/CMR>, accessed 15.02.2022.

³¹ US Department of State, 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 30 March 2021, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2048145.html>, accessed on 14.02.2022.

homosexuality charges, including 7 Colibri staff. The police released all 13 people on February 26 and 27. Three of those arrested said that police beat at least three Colibri staff members at the police station and that the police threatened and verbally assaulted all those arrested. They also said that the police interrogated them without the presence of a lawyer and forced them to sign statements they were not allowed to read.³²

Two transgender women in Cameroon have been sentenced to five years in jail for contravening homosexuality laws. Their lawyers say they were found guilty of "attempting homosexuality" as well as outraging public decency and problems with their ID cards. One of them is trans celebrity Shakiro, a YouTuber who highlights the problems Cameroon's banned LGBT community faces.

She and her friend Patricia have been in detention since February after their arrest at a restaurant. The court in the city of Douala also fined Shakira and Patricia 200,000 CFA francs (\$370; £260) each. If the two are unable to raise the money to pay the penalties, they will face another 12 months in prison on top of their five-year sentence.³³

A violent mob sexually assaulted, beat, threatened, and humiliated a 27-year-old intersex person on November 15, in Yaoundé, Cameroon's capital. The perpetrators filmed the attack, which lasted for several hours, in two horrific videos which circulated on social media. According to medical reports issued by a health facility in Yaoundé, the victim Sara (not her real name) suffered multiple hematomas all over her body. Sara's doctor said that she needed monitoring for 15 to 18 days due to the severity of her injuries.³⁴

³² Human Rights Watch, Cameroon: Wave of Arrests, Abuse against LGBT People, 14 April 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/14/cameroon-wave-arrests-abuse-against-lgbt-people>, accessed 15.02.2022.

³³ BBC, Cameroon jails transgender women for 'attempted homosexuality', 12 May 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57085664>, accessed 16.02.2022.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch, Intersex Person Victim of Horrific Attack in Cameroon, 20 November 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/20/intersex-person-victim-horrific-attack-cameroon>, accessed 16.02.2022.

This document is a product of the General Inspectorate for Immigration in partnership with the Romanian National Council for Refugees by the grant contract FAMI / 21.03.01 – Management of COI Usage and Research Processes – Romanian National Council for Refugees.

Editorial Team

General Inspectorate for Immigration Asylum
and Integration Directorate International
Protection and Asylum Procedures Service

SUPERVISION:

Eleodor PÎRVU – Director DAI

NATIONAL EXPERT:

Felix DAVID

Editorial Team

Romanian National Council for Refugees

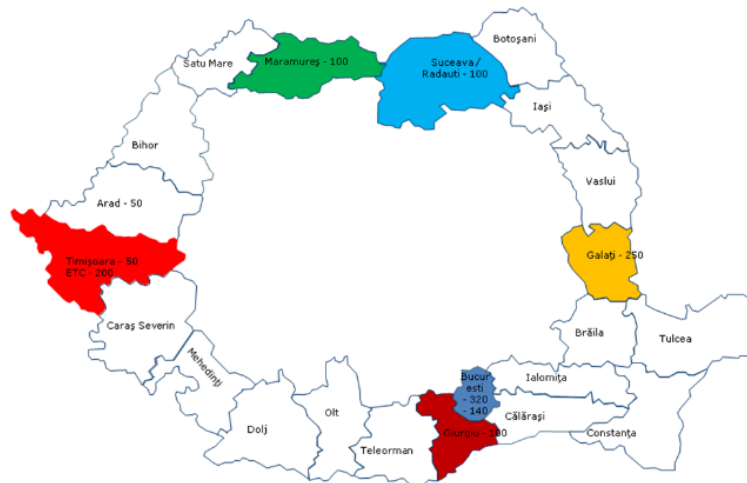
COORDINATOR:

Niculae CÂRCU - CNRR President

COMPILER AND EDITOR:

Andrei-Vlăduț Terteleac – COI Researcher

This paper is published, serving the professional interests of all parties involved in the asylum procedure in Romania. Using the information contained herein shall be made by citing sources basic and only in conjunction with other relevant data. Title of the paper will not be quoted without explicit consent of the issuer.



www.portal-ito.ro

ASYLUM AND INTEGRATION DIRECTORATE
Str. TUDOR GOCIU nr.24A, București, Sector 4

ROMANIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES
Str. VIESPARILOR nr. 19, etaj 2, București, Sector 2

