

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	323
Land:	Cameroun
Kilde:	Nationalt ID-center Cameroon
Titel:	Administrative structure and civil status registration
Udgivet:	2. november 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	21. marts 2024



2 November 2023

Danish National ID Centre

Birkerød Kongevej 2
DK-3460 Birkerød
Denmark

Phone +45 61 98 39 00
Email nidc@nidc.dk
Website www.nidc.dk

Cameroon: Administrative structure and civil status registration

Introduction

The following note describes the administrative structure and the registration of civil events in Cameroon. In doing so, the note includes a brief description of civil status registers and of the clerk competent to issue civil status documents. Likewise, the note contains a description of the civil status registration system.

The note is primarily based on interviews conducted in Yaoundé in March 2019 and is one out of several NIDC notes focusing on civil registrations in Cameroon.

The administrative structure in Cameroon

Cameroon has been a Presidential Republic since 1996. The country is divided into four levels of governance, with a government, ten regions, 58 divisions (*fr. départements*) and subdivisions (*fr. arrondissement*). Subdivisions are constituted by 374 local government councils, 43 of which are city councils. The branch of the government responsible for civil status matters is the Ministry of Decentralization and Local Development.¹

Civil status registration is articulated by Ordinance n. 81-2 of 29 June 1981, as amended by law of 6 May 2011 (hereinafter: Ordinance). The law regulates civil status registration in the whole country with no exceptions, i.e. in both the Francophone and the Anglophone areas and supplements the laws on judicial organisation as regard to the issuance of civil status certificates.²

According to article 4 of the Ordinance, registration of birth, marriage and death is mandatory in Cameroon. Failure to comply with these mandatory provisions, constitute a criminal offence punishable under section 370 of the penal code.³

¹ Commonwealth Local Government Forum (N/A).

² Law no 2006/015 of 29 December 2006 on judicial organization, as amended by Law no 211/027 of 14 December; Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (13 January 2013), p. 10.; National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019; Main Centre Yaoundé 1, Yaoundé, March 2019.

³ Ordinance n. 81-2 of 29 June 1981, as amended by law of 6 May 2011.

Civil status registration

The civil status registration system is a three tier system since 2016, when the National Civil Status Registration Office (*fr. Bureau National de l'Etat-civil*, hereinafter referred to as BUNEC) became operative. BUNEC is an administrative public unit, whose tasks are to supervise, control, regulate and assess the national civil status system. In addition, the office is responsible for the decentralisation of data and documents related to civil status. BUNEC is further responsible for standardising and printing the civil status registers that are used throughout all of Cameroon.⁴

The civil status registration system is administered by BUNEC in its supervising role, by councils entitled of both registration and issuance of certificates, and by 45 diplomatic missions and consular posts abroad.⁵ These are in charge of registering marriages, births and deaths. Councils in turn are categorised as “main centres” and as “secondary centres”.⁶ In the whole country, there are 420 main centres and 2,406 secondary centres”.⁷

Secondary centres are linked to main centres and have jurisdiction over the population residing in their area of competence. The role of secondary centres are to assist main centres in registering civil events and in issuing civil status certificates. Citizens, who wish to register a civil event, are free to choose whether to register the civil event at the main centre covering their area of residence, or at the secondary centre attached to the competent main centre and covering the area where they reside.⁸

The role of the judiciary in civil status registration: rectification, reissuance, divorce

According to the Civil Status Registration Ordinance, courts of first instance are competent to rectify civil status certificates “if they contain erroneous information” or to reconstitute them in the event of loss or destruction of registers.⁹ The references of the court’s decision must be inserted at the margin of the certificate. The original of the court decision remains with the applicant and the main or secondary centre attaches a copy to the register.¹⁰

In addition, courts are competent to declare divorces. The court’s decision is supposed to be inserted at the margin of both the marriage and the birth certificates.¹¹ However, according to representatives from BUNEC, this does not always happen.¹²

⁴ Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (13 January 2013), p. 11; National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

⁵ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

⁶ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

⁷ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

⁸ Secondary Centre, Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

⁹ Ordinance n. 81-2 of 29 June 1981, as amended by law of 6 May 2011, articles 22-29.

¹⁰ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹¹ Ordinance n. 81-2 of 29 June 1981, as amended by law of 6 May 2011, section 19.

¹² National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

The competent court is the court “under which falls the civil registry in which the certificate was or ought to have been drawn up.”¹³ There is a court of first instance in each subdivision, according to the law on judicial organisation. However, only Anglophone areas have implemented this provision, while only the regions and two or three subdivisions have a court of first instance in the Francophone areas.¹⁴



Image 1: Secondary centre in Yaoundé, March 2019 (NIDC reference material).

Registrars

Civil status certificates are signed by both a registrar and a secretary. At main centres, all mayors are automatically registrars and they are elected by the population. According to the Ordinance, registrars shall be assisted by “one or several clerks appointed in accordance with the regulations.”¹⁵

At secondary centres, registrars are appointed by the Ministry of Decentralization and Local Development, while their secretaries are appointed by a senior divisional officer. At Cameroonian diplomatic missions abroad, the civil status registrars are the heads of diplomatic missions and consular posts as well as those assuring interim.¹⁶

According to the Ordinance, only sworn-in officials can sign.¹⁷ Registrars and clerks can only perform their duties within their registry of attachment. They are not authorised to issue certificates in the main- or secondary centre other than the

¹³ Ordinance no. 81-2 of 29 June 1981, as amended by law of 6 May 2011, articles 22-29.

¹⁴ Local lawyer (A), Yaoundé, March 2019; Law no 2006/015 of 29 December 2006 on judicial organization, as amended by Law no. 211/027 of 14 December.

¹⁵ Ordinance n. 81-2 of 29 June 1981, as amended by law of 6 May 2011, section 11.

¹⁶ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁷ Ordinance n. 81-2 of 29 June 1981, as amended by law of 6 May 2011, sections 8-9; Main Centre Yaoundé 1, Yaoundé, March 2019.

one they are attached to.¹⁸ According to the Ordinance, registrars cannot issue certificates concerning themselves or their family members.¹⁹

Civil status registers

Registers are kept manually in books. Each book can contain 25, 50 or 100 pages. The pages are numbered and initiated by the president of the court of first instance geographically competent at the beginning of each calendar year. According to the law, civil status registers shall be crosschecked, endorsed and closed on 31 December of each year, then forwarded within 15 days to the State counsel of the area for endorsement and cancellation of unused pages. A civil status register is not valid if it is not signed or endorsed by a territorially competent court.²⁰



Image 2: The stamp of the court and the initials of a court's employee are visible on the top right corner of the register, Yaoundé, March 2019 (NIDC reference material).

There are three categories of books, where information about birth, marriage and death are registered.²¹ Each category is, in turn, drafted and kept in three copies, meaning that every civil status event is registered in three books, and the registration is made twice in every book as for births and deaths, and three times for marriages. This procedure results in the preparation of six identical forms for every event of birth and death, and nine identical forms for every marriage. Applicants receive one original certificate as for births and deaths, and two original marriage certificates. At the end of each year, one register remains with the main centre or is sent to it from the secondary centre. A second register is kept in the archives of the court territorially competent, and a third one is kept in BUNEC's archives.²²

¹⁸ Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (13 January 2013), pp. 20-21.

¹⁹ Ordinance n. 81-2 of 29 June 1981, as amended by law of 6 May 2011, section 20.

²⁰ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019; Ordinance n. 81-2 of 29 June 1981, as amended by law of 6 May 2011, article 15.

²¹ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

²² National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019; Main Centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

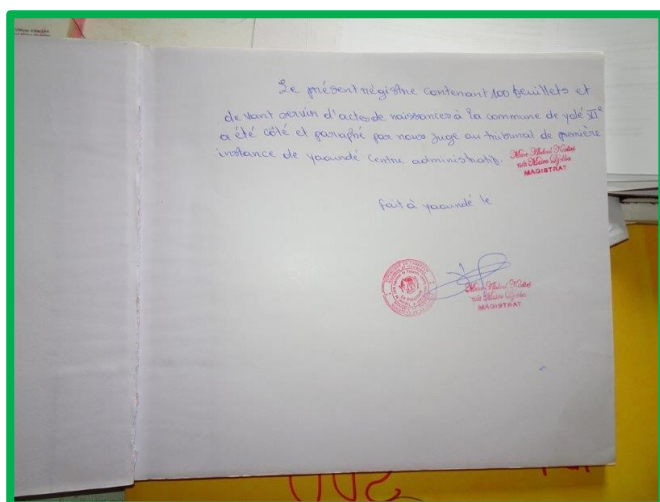


Image 3: Endorsement of a civil status register by the court of first instance, March 2019 (NIDC reference material).

Registers are printed in both French and English. They are filled in by hand in either French or English, following a decision taken by the registrar responsible for that specific centre.²³ Civil status certificates are jointly signed by registrars and secretaries.²⁴

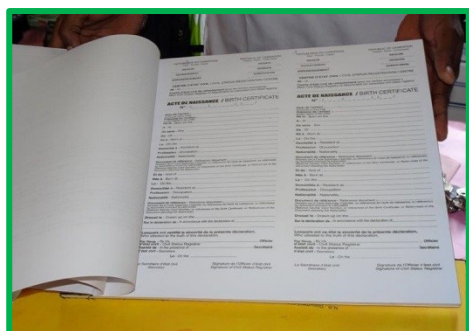


Image 4: Appearance of a Cameroonian civil status register and certificate, March 2019 (NIDC reference material).

²³ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

²⁴ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019; National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019; Secondary Centre, Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

References

Oral sources

Local lawyer (A) (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.
Main Centre Yaoundé 1 (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.
Main Centre Yaoundé 6 (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.
National Civil Status Registration Office (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.
Secondary Centre, Yaoundé 6 (March 2019): Interviewed in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Written sources

BUNEC, *Report of audience*, General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.
Commonwealth Local Government Forum (N/A): Cameroon, Country Profile 2017-18, http://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/Country_profiles/Cameroon.pdf, retrieved 7 July 2021.
Constitution of Cameroon Law no. 96-06 of 18 January 1996 to amend the Constitution of 2 June 1972, <https://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/africa/CM/cameroon-constitution-of-cameroon-2008>, retrieved 8 July 2021.
Election Cameroon, Elecram (19 April 2012): Electoral Code, Law n. 2012/001 of 19 April 2012 relating to the Electoral Code, Amended and Supplemented by Law n. 2012/017 of 21 December 2012, http://www.elecram.cm/sites/default/files/Electoral_Code.pdf, retrieved 7 July 2021.
Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (3 January 2013): Training Manual on the Civil Status System, <http://www.procivis-cm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/valise/Manuel%20de%20formation%20sur%20e%CC%81tat%20civil%20-version%20anglais.pdf>, retrieved 7 July 2021.
The Commonwealth (N/A): Cameroon: History, <http://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/cameroon/history>, retrieved 7 July 2021.
UNICEF (N/A): Law 2011/011 of 6 May 2011, amending the Ordinance n. 81-02 of 29 June 1981 concerning the organization of civil status and other dispositions regarding physical persons, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/crvs/cameroon/>, retrieved 7 July 2021.