



Trafficking in Persons Report 2017 - Country Narratives - Cameroon

CAMEROON: Tier 2 Watch List

The Government of Cameroon does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated significant efforts during the reporting period by convicting two individuals for trafficking-related offenses, providing services to potential trafficking victims, sending a delegation to the Middle East to discuss Cameroonian migrant workers' rights with two destination governments, and continuing broad social development efforts to assist vulnerable children, including potential trafficking victims. However, the government did not demonstrate increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period. The government penalized trafficking victims for crimes committed as a result of being subjected to trafficking; did not convict any individuals under the trafficking statute; and did not convene the inter-ministerial committee, hindering government-wide action on trafficking. The government did not support anti-trafficking training for law enforcement officials or fund repatriation for Cameroonian trafficking victims stranded in the Middle East, and it continued to rely on NGOs to bring potential trafficking cases to its attention and provide nearly all victim services. Therefore, Cameroon remained on Tier 2 Watch List for the second consecutive year.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CAMEROON

Increase efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers for all forms of trafficking—including complicit officials and cases referred by NGOs—under the trafficking section of the penal code; provide repatriation assistance, including laissez-passer cards, to Cameroonian trafficking victims identified abroad, and expand trafficking-specific services for all victims; increase collaboration with NGOs on identifying and protecting victims and raising awareness of trafficking; provide funding and training on trafficking investigations to the inter-ministerial anti-trafficking committee and regional taskforces, and regularly convene the groups; enact legislation to address the lack of victim protection measures, to ensure force, fraud, or coercion are not required in cases of child sex trafficking, and to conform the definition of “trafficking in persons” in the English version of the penal code with the 2000 UN TIP Protocol; expand training for law enforcement, judiciary personnel, and social workers on the anti-trafficking section of the penal code and victim-centered investigations; develop and train law enforcement on procedures to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, including among people in prostitution and street children; train government officials and sensitize NGOs on the standardized procedures for referring trafficking victims to services; provide pre-departure information to citizens on their rights as foreign workers and sources of assistance while abroad; investigate labor recruiters and agencies suspected of fraudulent recruitment—including unlicensed recruiters and intermediaries—and prosecute if complicit in trafficking; raise awareness among citizens of registered recruitment

agencies; establish anti-trafficking taskforces in all regions; and investigate cases of hereditary slavery.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. During the reporting period, the government incorporated its 2011 anti-trafficking law into the penal code as Section 342-1 “Trafficking and Slavery of Persons.” The government published the penal code in French and English, the two official languages of the government. The French version defines “trafficking in persons” (*la traite de personnes*) in line with the 2000 UN TIP Protocol, whereas the English version defines “trafficking in persons” to require movement. In addition, although the English version does not define “exploitation,” its definition of “slavery in persons” does not require movement and criminalizes most forms of human trafficking. Contrary to international law, both versions require the use of threat, fraud, deception, force, or other forms of coercion in sex trafficking crimes against children. Section 342-1 prescribes penalties of 10 to 20 years imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 to one million CFA francs (FCFA) (\$80-\$1,608) for “*la traite de personnes*”/“slavery in persons,” which are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with penalties prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. There are enhanced penalties if the trafficking victim is 15 years old or younger, if a weapon is used, or if the victim sustains serious injuries as a result of being subjected to trafficking. The penalties for debt bondage—criminalized in Section 3(1) of the 2011 anti-trafficking law but not explicitly criminalized in the penal code—range from five to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 to 500,000 FCFA (\$16-\$804) and are also sufficiently stringent. Draft legislation to address victim and witness protection and definitional inconsistencies with international law, drafted in 2012 in collaboration with an NGO and national and international experts, remained pending for the fifth consecutive year.

The government did not collect comprehensive anti-trafficking data, resulting in unreliable and incomplete statistics on law enforcement and victim identification efforts. The government reported 13 potential trafficking investigations, 13 prosecutions, and two convictions, compared with 17 investigations, 20 prosecutions, and two convictions the previous reporting period. Several investigations involved child kidnapping for an unknown purpose, so it was unclear how many of the 13 cases were trafficking. Prosecutors initiated 11 adult and child labor trafficking prosecutions under the trafficking statute, and they were all ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Despite strong indicators of trafficking, judges convicted three defendants in two trafficking cases for non trafficking crimes. In one case, two defendants who collaborated with a Kuwaiti trafficker to send multiple Cameroonian women to Kuwait for domestic servitude were acquitted of trafficking charges but convicted on charges related to keeping victims by means of false pretenses, and one of the defendants was additionally charged with causing harm under false pretenses. The judge prescribed a sentence of one year in prison and ordered the defendants to pay court fees and damages to the victim, severely less than the minimum penalty of five years imprisonment prescribed for one of the crimes. In contrast with previous years, judges did not convict any individuals for trafficking charges. The government did not report any sex trafficking investigations.

NGOs alleged the government did not proactively investigate trafficking offenses but relied on NGOs to conduct preliminary investigations and bring cases to its attention. Due to the lack of collaboration between the government and NGOs and judicial inefficiencies, some regional courts and NGOs encouraged victims to settle trafficking cases outside of court; financial penalties

without imprisonment do not provide adequate deterrence given the serious nature of the crime. The judiciary was reportedly investigating several government officials for trafficking offenses at the end of the reporting period, including a police officer and an official from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family. The government did not report any prosecutions or convictions of officials complicit in trafficking offenses. Although law enforcement, judicial personnel, and other relevant officials lacked training in distinguishing human trafficking from other crimes, the government did not directly provide anti-trafficking training or grant in-kind support for trainings by other organizations. Due to the lack of training for law enforcement and judicial staff, some trafficking offenses may have been tried as child abuse or kidnapping, which carry lesser penalties.

The Ministry of External Relations (MINREX) led a delegation to Lebanon and Qatar to meet with Cameroonian trafficking victims, discuss with the host governments the rights of Cameroonian workers, and begin drafting MOUs on Cameroonian workers' rights in each country. In addition, the Cameroonian mission in Lebanon increased collaboration with trafficking victims and the host government, and MINREX established a focal point for trafficking victims who, with NGOs, made travel arrangements to repatriate 14 Cameroonian trafficking victims from Kuwait, Lebanon, and United Arab Emirates. While the delegation formulated a list of future actions, including monitoring employment agencies, creating an agency to monitor Cameroonian workers abroad, and assisting and repatriating victims identified abroad, the government did not proactively regulate such recruiters or initiate investigations of suspicious recruitment practices. Although trafficking victims provided the government a list of alleged middlemen and illegal recruitment agencies involved in exploitation, the government did not report investigating these suspects. Despite the draft MOUs and the identification of several thousand Cameroonian trafficking victims abroad, the government did not report cooperation with foreign governments on transnational trafficking investigations.

PROTECTION

The government increased efforts to identify potential trafficking victims but maintained negligible efforts to protect Cameroonian victims identified abroad. The government did not produce comprehensive statistics on the number of trafficking victims identified or the services these victims received, resulting in unreliable and incomplete statistics on victim identification efforts. Information available indicated the government and NGOs identified 153 potential trafficking victims, compared with zero victims identified the previous reporting period, and all victims received government or NGO services. At least 42 of those identified were victims of kidnapping for an unknown purpose, so it is unclear how many were actually trafficking victims. The government placed one victim in a government-run victim shelter that provided healthcare and education, and the shelter continued to care for a trafficking victim identified in a previous reporting period. These centers were not available to adults and did not provide trafficking specific services. Men, women, domestic, and foreign victims received the same services. The Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) placed 92 children removed from Boko Haram—who had been abducted to serve as child soldiers and suicide bombers—in government-sponsored shelters that offered healthcare, education, and psycho-social services. MINAS also continued to place other vulnerable children and child victims of crimes in these facilities in several cities. NGOs provided shelter and services to the majority of trafficking victims in private centers funded by donors. NGOs provided assistance to 60 trafficking and potential trafficking victims, ranging from repatriation, to temporary shelter in orphanages or social centers, to computer job skills training and a monthly allowance, to family reunification. It is unclear how and when victims were referred to government or NGO centers and

if the government and NGOs communicated on such efforts. MINREX estimated 3,500 Cameroonian victims of domestic servitude remained in Kuwait and Lebanon, some of whom had expired residence permits or passports and were awaiting repatriation; it coordinated travel arrangements for 14 of these women, whom an NGO subsequently repatriated. An NGO and an international organization also repatriated an additional 10 trafficking victims from Kuwait during the reporting period; there is no evidence the government-funded the repatriations or provided access to medical services, shelter, counseling, reintegration support, or financial help to any Cameroonian victims identified abroad before or after repatriation.

There is no evidence the government made efforts to encourage victims to participate in investigations or prosecutions of their traffickers, and the government did not report providing counseling, legal support, or any other assistance to victims who testified during court proceedings. Three victims participated in criminal trials of their traffickers. One of the three victims dropped her case due to threats from the community, and a second victim reported she felt pressured to drop her case because of the financial burdens of traveling to the court, threats against her life and the lives of her children, and the absence of government protection. Victims may file suits or seek legal action against traffickers, and family members may also bring civil suits against traffickers on behalf of children. All three victims who participated in trials of their traffickers also filed restitution suits, two of which remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period; in one case, the judge required the defendant to pay damages to the victim but she did not receive the funds due to an ongoing appeal. It is unclear if courts finished adjudicating any of the 20 restitution suits filed by trafficking victims in the previous reporting period. The government could grant temporary residency status to foreign victims who, if deported, may face hardship or retribution; however, it did not report use of this accommodation during the reporting period. The government punished trafficking victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking. In one case, a judge convicted and sentenced a 14-year-old trafficking victim to 18 months imprisonment when his trafficker—who had refused to pay the child—accused him of stealing a cow. Due to a lack of formal victim identification procedures, including measures to identify victims among vulnerable populations, some victims may have remained unidentified in the law enforcement system. In March 2017, the government deported more than 2,600 undocumented Nigerian refugees without screening for indicators of trafficking.

PREVENTION

The government maintained prevention efforts, but its inadequate provision of resources to national and regional coordinating bodies impeded coordination on anti-trafficking initiatives. Unlike in previous years, the prime minister's office did not convene the inter-ministerial anti-trafficking committee, nor did it coordinate efforts to implement the 2014-2019 anti-trafficking national action plan. While the government did not provide funding to implement the plan, some ministries undertook efforts to assist street children and unemployed youth vulnerable to trafficking. Government-funded awareness campaigns sensitized more than 10,000 students and vulnerable street children to trafficking. MINAS provided family reunification and reinsertion care to 215 street children vulnerable to trafficking. The Northwest regional taskforce, comprised of social welfare agencies, police, *gendarmerie*, magistrates, and NGOs, lacked the resources and training to fulfill its mandate. The previously established taskforces in the Southwest and Littoral regions were not operational during the reporting period, and the government did not establish taskforces in the remaining seven regions. In an attempt to reduce the number of Cameroonian women exploited in Kuwait, the government banned all women and youth from traveling to the Middle East from the

Douala airport; to circumvent the ban, however, migrant workers began transiting Nigeria en route to the Middle East, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. To reduce the demand for commercial sex acts, MINAS continued its public awareness campaign against child sexual exploitation, and law enforcement arrested purchasers of commercial sex; the government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for forced labor. The government provided briefings on international humanitarian law and the requirements governing international peacekeeping missions to members of the Cameroonian armed forces prior to their deployment abroad on such missions; it is unclear whether these trainings included anti-trafficking modules. In the previous reporting period, allegations arose that Cameroonian peacekeepers deployed to the UN mission in the Central African Republic (CAR) sexually exploited civilians; the government did not provide an update on the cases during the reporting period. The government reported providing anti-trafficking training for its diplomatic personnel.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, Cameroon is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking and a source country for men in forced labor. Child traffickers often use the promise of education or a better life in the city to convince rural parents to give their children over to an intermediary, who then exploits the children in sex trafficking or forced labor; traffickers also kidnap victims, as heightened public awareness of trafficking has led parents to be less willing to give their children to intermediaries. Sometimes relatives subject children to sex trafficking within the country. Homeless children and orphans are especially vulnerable to trafficking. Teenagers and adolescents from economically disadvantaged families are often lured to cities by the prospect of employment but are subjected to labor or sex trafficking. Cameroonian children are exploited in domestic service, restaurants, begging or vending on streets and highways, artisanal gold mining, gravel quarries, fishing, animal breeding, and agriculture (on onion, cotton, tea and cocoa plantations), as well as in urban transportation assisting bus drivers and in construction as errand boys, laborers, or night watchmen. In northern regions, parents send young boys—known as *talibes*—to study at Quranic schools, where some are exploited in forced begging by corrupt teachers. Reports document hereditary slavery in northern chiefdoms. Children from neighboring countries are exploited in spare parts shops or by herders in northern Cameroon and transit the country en route to Gabon and Equatorial Guinea.

Cameroonian women and men are lured to Europe and other regions by fraudulent internet marriage proposals or offers of well-paying jobs, and subsequently are subjected to forced prostitution or forced labor, especially in domestic servitude. Cameroonians from disadvantaged social strata, rural areas, and students are increasingly exploited in forced labor and sex trafficking in the Middle East—especially Kuwait and Lebanon—as well as in Europe—including Finland—the United States, and multiple African countries, including Nigeria. Some Cameroonian women reported being recruited for domestic work in Kuwait but sold at “slave shops” upon arrival for sex trafficking. Trafficking networks typically involve destination-country recruitment agencies that use Cameroonian intermediaries to fraudulently recruit fellow Cameroonians for work abroad. Reports suggest local awareness-raising activities targeting fraudulent recruitment have caused intermediaries to operate with greater discretion, often directing victims to travel to the Middle East through neighboring countries, including Nigeria. Some evidence indicates Cameroonian trafficking networks in Morocco force women into prostitution. Cameroonian women also transit Morocco en route to Europe, where they are often forced into prostitution by European trafficking networks.

Adults and children from CAR and Nigeria are lured to Cameroon by the prospect of better opportunities but subjected to labor trafficking. Refugees from CAR and Nigeria, as well as displaced Cameroonians fleeing insecurity in border areas, are vulnerable to human trafficking in Cameroon, especially in urban areas. Nigerian traffickers increasingly bring Nigerian children to major Cameroonian cities for forced labor in spare parts shops. The terrorist organization Boko Haram continued to forcibly recruit Cameroonian children, and Cameroon was also a destination for Nigerian women and girls used as forced suicide bombers and boys used as child soldiers by Boko Haram. An NGO alleged some officially sanctioned community neighborhood watch groups (vigilance committees) may have used and recruited children during the reporting period, including children as young as 12 years old. It also alleged these groups participated in military operations alongside the government security forces and received financial and material support from the government.