

Cameroon

Government Policies and Programs to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor

In 2001, the Government of Cameroon began collaborating ILO-IPEC to participate in a USDOL-funded regional project to combat trafficking in West and Central Africa.⁴³⁴ The government is also in the final stages of developing a national action plan to combat child labor, which will create a specialized child labor inspectorate and put new legislation in place to bring Cameroon into compliance with ILO conventions on child labor.⁴³⁵

In September 2001, the Minister of Education began requiring public school principals to establish school councils to ensure that students are not forced to pay bribes in order to enroll in school.⁴³⁶ The government has worked with UNESCO on the development of an Education for All Plan to improve access to schools for all children, including children with disabilities, reduce disparities in school attendance by region, and improve the quality of girls' education.⁴³⁷

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 1999, the ILO estimated that 23.4 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 14 in Cameroon were working.⁴³⁸ According to a study conducted in 2000 by the ILO, the Ministry of Labor and NGOs, children in Cameroon work in the agricultural sector, in informal activities such as street vending and car washing, as domestic servants, and in prostitution and other illicit activities. The study also found that 7 percent of working children in the cities of Yaounde, Douala and Bamenda were less than 12 years of age and that 60 percent had dropped out of primary school.⁴³⁹

Cameroon is a source, transit and destination country for the trafficking of children. Children from Cameroon are trafficked internally from rural areas of the country to urban areas

⁴³⁴ ILO-IPEC, *Combating the Trafficking of Children for Labour Exploitation in West and Central Africa (Phase II)* (Geneva, 2001) [hereinafter *Combating the Trafficking of Children*].

⁴³⁵ U.S. Embassy— Yaounde, unclassified telegram no. 3239, October 2001 [hereinafter unclassified telegram 3239].

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ UNESCO, *The Education for All 2000 Assessment: Country Reports—Cameroon*, at <http://www.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/cameroon/rapport-1.html>.

⁴³⁸ *World Development Indicators 2001* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2001) [hereinafter *World Development Indicators 2001*] [CD-ROM].

⁴³⁹ The study found that 19.8 percent of children are working in agriculture and the informal sector, 3.4 percent are in car wash businesses, 31 percent work as domestic servants for their relatives, and 7 percent work in prostitution or other illicit activities. See unclassified telegram 3239.

and to other countries in West Africa.⁴⁴⁰ Children are trafficked to Cameroon primarily from Nigeria, Benin, Niger, Chad, Congo, Central African Republic, Togo and Mali.⁴⁴¹ According to the ILO, children who have been trafficked within or into Cameroon are employed most often as domestic workers, street traders, farm laborers, waiters in cafes and bars, prostitutes, manual workers and night guards.⁴⁴²

Education is compulsory and free through the age of 14.⁴⁴³ In February 2000, the President of Cameroon announced the elimination of school matriculation fees for public primary schools.⁴⁴⁴ Nevertheless, reports indicate that some school principals have been requiring bribes to enroll children in school⁴⁴⁵ and the families of primary school children must pay for uniforms and book fees.⁴⁴⁶ Tuition and fees at the secondary school level remain unaffordable for many families.⁴⁴⁷

The gross primary enrollment rate has steadily declined during the last decade, from 101.1 percent in 1990 to 85.4 percent in 1996.⁴⁴⁸ Primary school attendance rates are unavailable for Cameroon. Although the Constitution of Cameroon guarantees a child's right to education,⁴⁴⁹ girls suffer discrimination in their access to schooling and have lower attendance rates than boys.⁴⁵⁰ In 2001, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child indicated a number of problems with the educational system in Cameroon, including rural/urban and regional disparities in school attendance, limited access to formal and vocational education for children with disabilities, children falling behind in their primary education, a high dropout rate in primary education, lack of primary school teachers, and a high degree of violence and sexual abuse against children in schools.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁰ *Combating the Trafficking of Children*. See also *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000—Cameroon* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State) [hereinafter *Country Reports 2000*], Section 6f, at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/af/index.cfm?docid=713>.

⁴⁴¹ *Combating the Trafficking of Children*.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴⁴³ *Country Reports 2000* at Section 5.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ Unclassified telegram 3239.

⁴⁴⁶ *Country Reports 2000* at Section 5.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ In 1994, the gross primary enrollment rate was 84.3 percent for girls and 93.2 percent for boys. See *World Development Indicators 2001*.

⁴⁴⁹ Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon (Law no. 96-06), 1996, preamble, at <http://confinder.richmond.edu/Cameroon.htm> on 12/10/01.

⁴⁵⁰ In 1991, the net attendance rate for girls attending primary school was 61.7 percent and for boys was 70.3 percent. See USAID, Global Education Database 2000, Washington, D.C., at http://www.usaid.gov/educ_training/ged.html. See also *Country Reports 2000* at Section 5.

⁴⁵¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 44 of the Convention: Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Cameroon*, CRC/C/15/Add.164 (Geneva, November 6, 2001), 54.

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Code and the Ministerial Order on Labor set the minimum age for employment at 14 years.⁴⁵² The Ministerial Order prohibits youths between the ages of 14 to 18 from engaging in certain work, including moving heavy weights, working in dangerous and unhealthy tasks, working in confined areas, or engaging in tasks that can harm a youth's morality.⁴⁵³ The Labor Code also specifies that children cannot continue working in any job that exceeds their physical capacity.⁴⁵⁴ Under the Labor Code, the Labor Inspectorate can require children to be examined by a medical professional to make sure their work does not exceed their physical capacity. Children can also request this examination themselves.⁴⁵⁵ The Ministerial Order prohibits work by youths in excess of eight hours per day and work between midnight and 6 a.m.⁴⁵⁶

Part I of the Labor Code prohibits forced labor.⁴⁵⁷ Article 292 of the Penal Code prohibits a person from imposing a work or service obligation on another person for which that person has not freely applied.⁴⁵⁸ Article 293 of the Penal Code prohibits slavery and engaging in the trafficking of human beings.⁴⁵⁹ An amendment to Article 293 prohibits procuring, as well as trafficking of a person for prostitution or sharing in the profits from another person's prostitution.⁴⁶⁰ The penalty under Article 293 doubles if the crime involves a minor less than 21 years of age.⁴⁶¹ Prostitution is prohibited under Article 343 of the Penal Code.⁴⁶²

The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Labor enforce child labor laws through site inspections of registered businesses. However, a lack of resources hinders the effective enforcement of child labor laws.⁴⁶³ Cameroon ratified ILO Convention 138 on August 13, 2001 but has not ratified ILO Convention 182.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵² Cameroun Labour Code (Law no. 92/007), 1992 [hereinafter Cameroun Law 92/007], Part V, Chapter III, Section 86, as cited on NATLEX database at <http://natlex.ilo.org/txt/E92CMR01.htm> on 12/10/01. See also *Country Reports 2000* at Section 6d.

⁴⁵³ *Country Reports 2000* at Section 6d.

⁴⁵⁴ Cameroun Law 92/007 at Part V, Chapter III, Section 87.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ *Country Reports 2000* at Section 6d.

⁴⁵⁷ Cameroun Law 92/007 at Part I, Section 2.

⁴⁵⁸ *The Protection Project: Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children: A Human Rights Report, Cameroon* (see Criminal Statutes), January 2001 [hereinafter *Human Rights Report*] [hard copy on file].

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

⁴⁶³ *Country Reports 2000* at Section 6d.

⁴⁶⁴ ILO, Ratifications of ILO Fundamental Conventions, at <http://www.ilolex.ilo.ch:1567/English/>.

NOTE: Hard copies of all Web citations are on file.