

# Cameroon

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

Cameroon is an associated country of ILO-IPEC.<sup>650</sup> In 2001, the Government of Cameroon began collaborating with ILO-IPEC to participate in a USDOL-funded regional project to combat the trafficking of children in West and Central Africa.<sup>651</sup> The government has also developed a national action plan to combat child labor.<sup>652</sup> This plan focuses on community awareness raising and mobilization; developing and reinforcing the welfare and protection of working children; promoting both formal and informal education and apprenticeships; improving and strengthening child labor legislation; identifying partners for action, and establishing mechanisms for coordination, monitoring and evaluation.<sup>653</sup> In that regard, the Government of Cameroon has established inter-ministerial programs to address child labor, notably those concerning the trafficking of children.<sup>654</sup>

The government has worked with UNESCO on the development of an Education for All Plan and a number of educational reforms are envisioned for the period 2000-2009, which include increasing the supply and quality of, and access to, basic education; improving the management capacity of education administrators; improving data collection and analysis; and mobilizing resources for basic education.<sup>655</sup>

## Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2000, the ILO estimated that 23.7 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Cameroon were working.<sup>656</sup> 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. It was also

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<sup>650</sup> ILO-IPEC, *All About IPEC: Programme Countries*, [online] [cited November 16, 2002]; available from [http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/about/countries/t\\_country.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/about/countries/t_country.htm).

<sup>651</sup> ILO-IPEC, *Combating the Trafficking of Children for Labour Exploitation in West and Central Africa (Phase II)*, RAF/01/P53/USA, Geneva, 2001.

<sup>652</sup> Republic of Cameroon, *Plan d'Action Nationale de la Lutte contre le Travail des Enfants au Cameroun*, n.p., n.d., Ministry of Employment, Labor and Social Insurance.

<sup>653</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>654</sup> U.S. Embassy- Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 3036*, August 2002. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2001: Cameroon*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2002, 97-99, Section 6f [cited December 16, 2002]; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8285.htm>. This report notes that although an interagency anti-child trafficking committee was established and developed an action plan, the National Assembly's draft budget provided no funds for action plan implementation save under Presidential instruction.

<sup>655</sup> UNESCO, *The Education for All 2000 Assessment: Country Reports- Cameroon*, prepared by Mr. Yakouba Yaya, pursuant to UN General Assembly Resolution 52/84, 2000, Section III [cited December 26, 2002]; available from <http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/cameroon/contents.html>.

<sup>656</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2002.

found that 7 percent of working children in the cities of Yaounde, Douala and Bamenda were less than 12 years of age, and 60 percent of these had dropped out of primary school.<sup>657</sup> Some child sex tourism has been reported in Douala.<sup>658</sup> Some street children reportedly work to earn school money during school vacation.<sup>659</sup> Certain forms of child labor are reported to be culturally accepted traditions in the North and Southwest.<sup>660</sup>

Cameroon is a source, transit and destination country for the trafficking of children.<sup>661</sup> A 2000 ILO study conducted in Yaounde, Douala and Bamenda indicated that trafficking accounted for 84 percent of an estimated 610,000 child laborers.<sup>662</sup> Children from Cameroon are trafficked internally from rural areas of the country to urban areas and externally to other countries in West Africa.<sup>663</sup> Children are trafficked to Cameroon primarily from Nigeria, Benin, Niger, Chad, Congo, Central African Republic, Togo and Mali.<sup>664</sup> 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.<sup>665</sup> Trafficking is a lucrative business and it is reported that one government official attempting to address the issue received threats from traffickers and required police protection.<sup>666</sup> Cameroon has no place to shelter child victims of trafficking<sup>667</sup> although the government is working with local and international NGOs to provide temporary shelter and assistance.<sup>668</sup>

Education is free in elementary school and is compulsory through the age of 14.<sup>669</sup> In February 2000, the President of Cameroon announced the elimination of school matriculation fees for public primary schools and the National Assembly passed a budget bill increasing by 49 percent the

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<sup>657</sup> 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 U.S. Embassy- Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 3239*, October 2001.

<sup>658</sup> Theophile Ella Menye, Ministry of Social Affairs Technical Adviser, interview with USDOL official, August 4, 2002.

<sup>659</sup> Foyer l'Esperance staff, interviews with USDOL official, August 4, 2002. See also Catholic Relief Services staff, interviews with USDOL official, August 6, 2002.

<sup>660</sup> Feyio, interview with USDOL official, August 2002.

<sup>661</sup> Cameroon is a transit country for regional traffickers transporting children among Nigeria, Benin, Niger, Chad, Togo, the Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Cameroon*, 97-99, Section 6f.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

<sup>663</sup> ILO-IPEC, *Combating the Trafficking of Children*. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Cameroon*, 97-99, Section 6f.

<sup>664</sup> ILO-IPEC, *Combating the Trafficking of Children*.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Flavien Zogo Awona, Deputy Director, Ministry of Employment, Labor and Social Insurance, interview with USDOL official, August 4, 2002.

<sup>667</sup> Menye, interview, August 4, 2002.

<sup>668</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Cameroon*, 97-99, Section 6f.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid., 93-96, Section 5.

spending on national education.<sup>670</sup> Nevertheless, reports indicate that some school principals have been requiring bribes to enroll children in school<sup>671</sup> and the families of primary school children must pay for uniforms and book fees.<sup>672</sup> Tuition and fees at the secondary school level remain unaffordable for many families.<sup>673</sup>

The gross primary enrollment rate has steadily declined during the last decade, from 101.1 percent in 1990 to a low 85.4 in 1996, and rising again to reach 90.3 percent by 1998.<sup>674</sup> Primary school attendance rates are unavailable for Cameroon. While enrollment rates indicate a level of commitment to education, they do not always reflect children's participation in school.<sup>675</sup> Although the Constitution of Cameroon guarantees a child's right to education,<sup>676</sup> girls suffer discrimination in their access to schooling and have lower attendance rates than boys.<sup>677</sup> 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 drop-out rate in primary education, lack of primary school teachers, and a high degree of violence and sexual abuse against children in schools.<sup>678</sup> Domestic workers are also often not permitted to attend school.<sup>679</sup>

### Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Code and the Ministerial Order on Labor set the minimum age for employment at 14 years.<sup>680</sup> The Ministerial Order prohibits youths between the ages of 14 to 18 from engaging in

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<sup>670</sup> Ibid.

<sup>671</sup> U.S. Embassy- Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 3239*.

<sup>672</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Cameroon*, 93-96, Section 5.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid.

<sup>674</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002*.

<sup>675</sup> For a more detailed description on the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report.

<sup>676</sup> *Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon (Law no. 96-06)*, (January 18, 1996), preamble [cited December 10, 2001]; available from <http://confinder.richmond.edu/Cameroon.htm>.

<sup>677</sup> 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*, [database online], [cited December 16, 2002]; available from [http://www.usaid.gov/educ\\_training/ged.html](http://www.usaid.gov/educ_training/ged.html). See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Cameroon*, 93-96, Section 5.

<sup>678</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Cameroon*, CRC/C/15/Add.164, Geneva, November 6, 2001, para. 54.

<sup>679</sup> Catholic Relief Services staff, interviews, August 6, 2002.

<sup>680</sup> Government of Cameroon, *Labour Code (Law no. 92/007)*, (August 14, 1992), Part V, Ch. III, Section 86 [cited December 31, 2002]; available from <http://natlex.ilo.org/txt/E92CMR01.htm>. The penalty for infringing the law ranges from fines to imprisonment. The law also prohibits night work and identifies the tasks that cannot be performed by children between the ages of 14 and 18. Children cannot work before 6 a.m. or after midnight. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Cameroon*, 97-99, Section 6d.

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.<sup>681</sup> The Labor Code also specifies that children cannot continue working in any job that exceeds their physical capacity.<sup>682</sup> Labor law also requires that employers train children between 14 and 18, and the work contracts must contain a training provision for minors.<sup>683</sup> 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.<sup>684</sup>

The Labor Code prohibits forced labor but does not specifically address child labor.<sup>685</sup> The Penal Code prohibits a person from imposing a work or service obligation on another person for which that person has not freely applied and is punished by imprisonment of 5 to 10 years and/or a fine.<sup>686</sup> The Penal Code prohibits slavery and engaging in the trafficking of human beings and punishes these acts with prison terms of 10-20 years,<sup>687</sup> and prohibits procuring, as well as prostitution or sharing in the profits from another person's prostitution.<sup>688</sup> The penalty includes fines and prison sentence of up to five years which double if the crime involves a minor less than 21 years of age.<sup>689</sup> Prostitution is prohibited under the Penal Code.<sup>690</sup>

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.<sup>691</sup> There are only 49 labor inspectors in Cameroon who focus on the formal sector and labor inspectors are neither trained in nor sensitized about child labor issues.<sup>692</sup>

The Government of Cameroon ratified ILO Convention 138 on August 13, 2001 and ratified ILO Convention 182 on June 5, 2002.<sup>693</sup>

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<sup>681</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Cameroon*, 97-99. Section 6d.

<sup>682</sup> *Cameroon Labor Code*, Part V, Ch. III, Section 86.

<sup>683</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Cameroon*, 97-99, Section 6d.

<sup>684</sup> *Cameroon Labor Code*, Part V, Chapter III, Section 87.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Section 2. The ILO will soon be conducting a study on forced labor. See ILO staff, interview with USDOL official, August 5, 2002.

<sup>686</sup> Protection Project, *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children: A Human Rights Report, Cameroon*, January 2002, "Criminal Statutes", Article 292.

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 292.

<sup>688</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>690</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>691</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Cameroon*, 97-99, Section 6d.

<sup>692</sup> Awona, interview, August 4, 2002.

<sup>693</sup> ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited December 16, 2002]; available from <http://ilolex.ilo.ch:1567/english/newratframeE.htm>.