

CAMEROON

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

The Government of Cameroon is an associated country of ILO-IPEC.⁸⁰⁰ 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.⁸⁰¹ The Government of Cameroon has also established inter-ministerial programs to address child labor, notably those concerning the trafficking of children.⁸⁰² In February 2002, the government signed the “Libreville Declaration” designed to harmonize national legislation on child trafficking in West and Central Francophone Africa.⁸⁰³ In June 2002, the U.S. State Department’s Africa Bureau announced its West Africa Regional Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons, which includes Cameroon. As part of this strategy, U.S. missions in the region will focus U.S. Government resources to support efforts by host governments to prosecute traffickers, protect and repatriate victims, and prevent new trafficking incidents. The strategy is being implemented through improved coordination among donors, funding of regional and international organizations, and direct funding for host government or local NGOs.⁸⁰⁴ The Ministry of Tourism and UNICEF have collaborated on a study of child sex tourism, and in August 2002, the Ministry of Tourism trained tourism professionals on how to combat sexual tourism.⁸⁰⁵ In January 2003, the Minister of Social Affairs publicly condemned the exploitation of children and reiterated the government’s commitment to protect children from abuse and exploitation.⁸⁰⁶ In February 2003, the government, in collaboration with the African Soccer Confederation (CAF), promoted a radio and television “red card” campaign against child labor.⁸⁰⁷ In April 2003, the government also signed a convention with the ILO to eradicate child trafficking in the Central African sub-region and the ILO launched a sensitization campaign to eradicate child trafficking in Cameroonian airports through the distribution of anti-trafficking embarkation and disembarkation cards on all Cameroonian flights.⁸⁰⁸

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.⁸⁰⁹ In August 2002, the government created a

⁸⁰⁰ ILO-IPEC, *All About IPEC: Programme Countries*, [online] [cited July 7, 2003]; available from http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/about/countries/t_country.htm. Since 2001 the government has developed a draft national action plan to combat child labor. The plan has been submitted to the Prime Minister for approval. See Republic of Cameroon, *Plan d’Action Nationale de la Lutte contre le Travail des Enfants au Cameroun*, Ministry of Employment, Labor and Social Insurance, n.d. See also U. S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1450*, August 2003.

⁸⁰¹ ILO-IPEC, *Combating the Trafficking of Children for Labour Exploitation in West and Central Africa (Phase II)*, project document, RAF/01/P53/USA, Geneva, 2001.

⁸⁰² U.S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 3036*, August 2002. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices-2002: Cameroon*, Washington, D.C., March 31, 2003, Section 6f; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18172.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. The inter-agency anti-trafficking group is comprised of 10 ministerial agencies and has supported public awareness raising programs throughout 2002. In the same year, the Government of Cameroon, in collaboration with the ILO, also hired a consultant to assess the level of national trafficking. See U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 11, 2003.

⁸⁰³ U. S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1450*.

⁸⁰⁴ The strategy is intended to encourage governments in the region to develop and implement laws that allow for the prosecution of traffickers. See U.S. Embassy-Abuja, *unclassified telegram no. 1809*, June 2002.

⁸⁰⁵ U. S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1450*.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Cameroon*, Section 6d. See also ILO-IPEC, *Campagne de ratification: Carton rouge au travail des enfants*, 2002; available from <http://www.ilo.org/public/french/standards/ipecc/ratification/redcampaign/redcard.htm>.

⁸⁰⁸ U. S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1450*.

⁸⁰⁹ 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 October 22, 2003]; available from <http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/cameroon/contents.html>.

new ministry for technical and vocational education that is supervising the reform of this sector.⁸¹⁰ In March 2003, the government began distributing school furniture and over one million books to 196 selected schools in ten provinces.⁸¹¹ In April 2003, the Government of Cameroon launched its global education week with the theme “All for the Education of Girls.”⁸¹²

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2000, UNICEF estimated that 58 percent of children ages 5 to 14 in Cameroon were working.⁸¹³ Only 5 percent of these children work for wages.⁸¹⁴ Domestic work is performed by seven out of 10 children, and 11 percent of them work for more than 4 hours a day on these tasks.⁸¹⁵ 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.⁸¹⁶ The ILO has 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.⁸¹⁷ Some child sex tourism has been reported in Douala.⁸¹⁸ Some street children reportedly work to earn money for school during school vacation.⁸¹⁹ Certain forms of child labor, such as domestic work by girls, are reported to be culturally accepted traditions in the North and Southwest.⁸²⁰ Children are also employed in the cocoa industry and engage in certain hazardous tasks such as application of pesticides and use of dangerous tools like machetes.⁸²¹

⁸¹⁰ President of Cameroon Paul Biya, *Head of State's Message in the Occasion of the 37th Youth Day*, Yaounde, February 10, 2003; available from http://www.spm.gov.cm/pm/discours/pr/pr2003_03a.htm. See also Irene Morikang, “Technical Education Leaves the Back Bench,” *Cameroon Tribune*, September 4, 2002.

⁸¹¹ Irene Morikang, “Free Books and Equipment for 196 Schools Nation-wide,” *Cameroon Tribune*, March 18, 2003.

⁸¹² During this week, the government raised awareness of the importance of girls' education. See Irene Morikang, “Education: In Search of Gender Parity,” *Cameroon Tribune*, April 11, 2003.

⁸¹³ The UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) was conducted with the Government of Cameroon's Ministry of Economics and Finance. See Ministère de l'Économie et des Finances, *Rapport Principal. Enquête à Indicateurs Multiples (MICS) au Cameroun 2000*, 14. The percentage of child labor reported for Cameroon in this year's report is substantially higher than that included in last year's Trade and Development Act report because this year's percentage includes a larger age group and because it is based on information in the MICS instead of the World Bank's *World Development Indicators* (WDI). Because the MICS is a stand-alone survey on children, it offers a more comprehensive look at work that children perform than the WDI, which projects numbers of working children based on existing non-child labor specific surveys.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁶ 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.

⁸¹⁷ See *Ibid.* The 2000 joint UNICEF/government study found, however, that the rate of child labor is lowest in the metropolitan areas of Yaounde and Douala. See Ministère de l'Économie et des Finances, *Rapport Principal. Enquête à Indicateurs Multiples (MICS) au Cameroun 2000*.

⁸¹⁸ Ella Theophile Menye, Technical Advisor, Ministry of Social Affairs, interview with USDOL official, August 4, 2002.

⁸¹⁹ Foyer l'Espérance staff, interviews with USDOL official, August 4, 2002. See also Catholic Relief Services staff, interviews with USDOL official, August 6, 2002.

⁸²⁰ Feyio, interview with USDOL official, August 4, 2002.

⁸²¹ Cameroon was one of the countries studied as part of the International Protocol signed by the global chocolate industry in September 2001 to address abusive child labor practices in cocoa-growing West Africa. See International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, *IITA Update on West Africa Child Labor Study*, [online] 2002; available from <http://www.iita.org/news/chlab3.htm>.

Cameroon is a source, transit, and destination country for the trafficking of children.⁸²² The 2000 ILO study conducted in Yaounde, Douala and Bamenda indicated that trafficking accounted for 84 percent of an estimated 610,000 child laborers.⁸²³ Children from Cameroon are trafficked internally from rural areas of the country to urban areas.⁸²⁴ Children are trafficked through Cameroon to Nigeria, Benin, Niger, Chad, Togo, the Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic.⁸²⁵ 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.⁸²⁶ 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.⁸²⁷ Cameroon has no place to shelter child victims of trafficking⁸²⁸ although the government is working with local and international NGOs to provide temporary shelter and assistance.⁸²⁹

Education is free in elementary school and is compulsory through the age of 14.⁸³⁰ 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 spending on national education.⁸³¹ Nevertheless, reports indicate that some school principals have been requiring bribes to enroll children in school⁸³² and the families of primary school children must pay for uniforms and book fees.⁸³³ Tuition and fees at the secondary school level remain unaffordable for many families⁸³⁴ and school enrollment varies widely by region with less than 50 percent of children attending school in the Far North Province.⁸³⁵

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 107.8 percent by 2000.⁸³⁶ 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.⁸³⁷ Although the Constitution of Cameroon guarantees a child's

⁸²² U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report, June 11, 2003*. According to this report Cameroon is a transit country for regional traffickers transporting children between Benin, Chad, Gabon, Niger, Mali and Nigeria. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Cameroon*, Section 6f.

⁸²³ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Cameroon*, Section 6f.

⁸²⁴ ILO-IPEC, *Combating the Trafficking of Children*. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Cameroon*, Section 6f. See also The Protection Project, "Human Rights Report on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children: A Country-by-Country Report on a Contemporary Form of Slavery," 2002; available from http://www.protectionproject.org/human_rights/countryreport/cameroon.htm.

⁸²⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Cameroon*, Section 6f.

⁸²⁶ ILO-IPEC, *Combating the Trafficking of Children*.

⁸²⁷ Feyio, interview, August 2002.

⁸²⁸ Menye, interview, August 4, 2002.

⁸²⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Cameroon*, Section 6f.

⁸³⁰ *Ibid.*, Section 5.

⁸³¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2001: Cameroon*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2002; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8285.htm>.

⁸³² U.S. Embassy- Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 3239*.

⁸³³ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Cameroon*, Section 5.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁶ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2003.

⁸³⁷ For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report.

right to education,⁸³⁸ girls suffer discrimination in their access to schooling and have lower attendance rates than boys.⁸³⁹ 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, lack of primary school teachers, and a high degree of violence and sexual abuse against children in schools.⁸⁴⁰ Completion rates also vary by region, with 87 percent of children who enroll in the first year of primary school completing their fifth year in the North West and South West Regions, whereas only 39 percent of children complete their fifth year in Central, South and East Regions.⁸⁴¹ Domestic workers are also often not permitted to attend school.⁸⁴² In addition, because of the informal and disorganized nature of the training provided in apprenticeships, children often spend many hours working while acquiring very few skills.⁸⁴³

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Code sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years.⁸⁴⁴ The law 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 in prostitution.⁸⁴⁵ The Labor Code also specifies that children cannot continue working in any job that exceeds their physical capacity.⁸⁴⁶ Labor law also requires that employers train children between 14 and 18 years, and the work contracts must contain a training provision for minors.⁸⁴⁷ Under the Labor Code, the Labor Inspectorate is empowered to 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.⁸⁴⁸

The Labor Code prohibits forced labor.⁸⁴⁹ 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

⁸³⁸ Government of Cameroon, *Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon*, Law no. 96-06, (January 18, 1996), preamble [cited October 22, 2003]; available from <http://confinder.richmond.edu/Cameroon.htm>.

⁸³⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Cameroon*, Section 5. In Cameroon, “[discrimination] against girls and women in education occurs as a result of son preference: it is still common for families to send boys to school while girls stay at home. Aside from financial constraints, there is an expectation that instead of going to school, girls should help in crop farming, animal husbandry and household activities. Evidence of these expectations is reflected in the statistic that 68 percent of women over the age of 25 are illiterate compared to 43 percent of men.” See Convention Article 10, Education, in International Women’s Rights Action Watch, *Cameroon Country Report*, [online] 1999; available from <http://iwraw.igc.org/publications/countries/cameroon.htm>.

⁸⁴⁰ 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. Besides sexual relations with female students, other problems publicly recognized include teachers’ drunkenness, sale of exam papers, bribery, and corruption. See Anthony Chungong, “South-West: Teachers Advised to Refrain From Sex with Students,” *Cameroon Tribune*, October 29, 2002.

⁸⁴¹ Ministère de l’Economie et des Finances, *Rapport Principal. Enquête à Indicateurs Multiples (MICS) au Cameroun 2000*, 26.

⁸⁴² Catholic Relief Services staff, interviews, August 6, 2002.

⁸⁴³ Because informal apprenticeship training is disorganized, an apprentice may learn little and spend long periods of time working without being released from apprenticeships. See Irene Morikang, “Apprentice, But For How Long?,” *Cameroon Tribune*, May 22, 2003.

⁸⁴⁴ Government of Cameroon, *Labour Code*, Law no. 92/007, (August 14, 1992), Part V, Chapter III, Section 86; 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. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Cameroon*, Section 6d.

⁸⁴⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Cameroon*, Section 6d.

⁸⁴⁶ *Cameroon Labor Code*, Part V, Ch. III, Section 86.

⁸⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Cameroon*, Section 6d.

⁸⁴⁸ *Cameroon Labor Code*, Part V, Chapter III, Section 87.

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Part I, Section 2.

10 years and/or a fine.⁸⁵⁰ The Penal Code prohibits slavery and engaging in the trafficking of human beings and punishes these acts with prison terms of 10 to 20 years.⁸⁵¹ The Code also prohibits procuring, as well sharing in the profits from another person's prostitution.⁸⁵² The penalty includes fines and prison sentences of up to 5 years, which double if the crime involves a person less than 21 years of age.⁸⁵³

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.⁸⁵⁴ There are 58 labor inspectors in Cameroon who focus on the formal sector and also investigate child labor cases and conduct onsite visits.⁸⁵⁵ In July 2002 labor inspectors were trained on ILO Convention 182 and the worst forms of child labor.⁸⁵⁶

The Government of Cameroon ratified ILO Convention 138 on August 13, 2001 and ratified ILO Convention 182 on June 5, 2002.⁸⁵⁷

⁸⁵⁰ The Protection Project, "Human Rights Report on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children: A Country-by-Country Report on a Contemporary Form of Slavery," Article 293.

⁸⁵¹ Article 293 as cited in The Protection Project, *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children: A Human Rights Report, Cameroon*, January 2002.

⁸⁵² Article 292 as cited in *Ibid.*

⁸⁵³ The Protection Project, "Human Rights Report on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children: A Country-by-Country Report on a Contemporary Form of Slavery."

⁸⁵⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Cameroon*, Section 6d.

⁸⁵⁵ In 2002 it was reported that the number of onsite visits by labor inspectors to investigate illegal child labor had significantly increased. See U. S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1450*.

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁷ ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited October 22, 2003]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newratframeE.htm>. For background and legal issues related to Cameroon's ratification of ILO Convention 182, see Zogo Awona Flavien, *Coopération Internationale. Ratification de la convention no. 182 sur les pires formes de travail des enfants*; available from <http://www.metps.gov.cm/pages/international/ratification.htm>.