

Cameroon

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

UNICEF estimated that 58.1 percent of children ages 5 to 14 were working in Cameroon in 2000.⁸⁰⁴ Only 5 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years work for wages.⁸⁰⁵ Of those children who perform domestic work, 11 percent work more than 4 hours a day on these tasks.⁸⁰⁶ 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; in prostitution; and in other illicit activities.⁸⁰⁷ 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.⁸⁰⁸ During school vacation, street children reportedly work to earn money for school.⁸⁰⁹ Certain forms of child labor are reported to be culturally accepted traditions in the North and Southwest.⁸¹⁰ Children are also employed in the cocoa industry and engage in certain hazardous tasks such as application of pesticides and use of machetes.⁸¹¹

Cameroon is a source, transit, and destination country for the international trafficking of children, and trafficking also occurred within the country.⁸¹² Girls are trafficked internally from the Grand North and Northwest provinces to urban areas.⁸¹³ Children are also trafficked to work in the production of cocoa.⁸¹⁴ Cameroon is a destination country for children trafficked from Nigeria and Benin and a transit country for

⁸⁰⁴ The UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) was conducted with the Government of Cameroon's Ministry of Economics and Finance. See Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances, *Rapport Principal. Enquête à Indicateurs Multiples (MICS) au Cameroun 2000*, 14. For more information on the definition of working children, please see the section in the front of the report entitled Statistical Definitions of Working Children.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁷ U.S. Embassy- Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 3239*, October 2001.

⁸⁰⁸ 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'Economie et des Finances, *Rapport Principal. Enquête à Indicateurs Multiples (MICS) au Cameroun 2000*, 41.

⁸⁰⁹ Foyer l'Espérance staff, interviews with USDOL official, August 4, 2002. See also Catholic Relief Services staff, interviews with USDOL official, August 6, 2002.

⁸¹⁰ Feyio, interview with USDOL official, August 4, 2002.

⁸¹¹ 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>.

⁸¹² U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- Cameroon 2004*, Washington, DC, June 10, 2004; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/>. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2003: Cameroon*, Washington, D.C., February 25, 2004, Section 6f; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27716.htm>.

⁸¹³ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*.

⁸¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Cameroon*, Section 6d

the movement of children between Nigeria and Gabon.⁸¹⁵ According to a 2004 study by the Institute for Socio-Anthropological Research, children who have been trafficked in Cameroon are forced to work in agriculture, domestic service, sweatshops, bars and restaurants and in prostitution.⁸¹⁶ There have been credible reports of child slavery in Cameroon, particularly in the Rey Bouba Division of North Province. In some cases, parents offered their young girls to the Lamido (chief) of the Rey Bouba Division as gifts.⁸¹⁷ The Ministry of Social Affairs also reports that children of some large rural families are “loaned” to work as domestic servants, vendors, prostitutes or baby sitters in urban areas in exchange for monetary compensation.⁸¹⁸

Education is compulsory through the age of 14 years.⁸¹⁹ Although the Constitution guarantees the right to education,⁸²⁰ some school officials demand bribes to enroll children in school and the families of primary school children must pay for uniforms and book fees.⁸²¹ Tuition and fees at the secondary school level remain unaffordable for many families,⁸²² and school enrollment varies widely by region with less than 50 percent of children attending school in the Far North Province.⁸²³

In 2001, the gross primary enrollment rate was 106.7 percent.⁸²⁴ Gross enrollment ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and therefore do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. Recent net primary enrollment rates and primary school attendance rates are not available for Cameroon. Completion rates also vary by region. In 2000, 87 percent of children who started primary school were likely to reach grade 5 in the Northwest and Southwest Provinces, whereas only 39 percent of children were likely to complete grade 5 in the Central, South and East Regions.⁸²⁵

⁸¹⁵ U.S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1233*, August 2004.

⁸¹⁶ U. S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1233*, August 2004. A study conducted by the ILO in 2000 in Yaounde, Douala and Bamenda indicated that trafficking accounted for 84 percent of an estimated 610,000 child laborers. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Cameroon*, Section 6f.

⁸¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Cameroon*, Section 6f.

⁸¹⁸ U.S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1233*.

⁸¹⁹ A tradition of child fostering is widespread in West and Central Africa, whereby a family will often place a child with a relative or acquaintance in exchange for compensation, school fees, or the chance to learn a trade. U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Cameroon*, Section 5.

⁸²⁰ Government of Cameroon, *Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon*, Law no. 96-06, (January 18, 1996), Preamble; available from <http://confinder.richmond.edu/Cameroon.htm>.

⁸²¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Cameroon*, Section 5. See also Sylvestre Tetchiada, *Schools for Scandal*, February 24, 2004; available from <http://www.ipsnews.net/africa/interna.asp?idnews=22537>.

⁸²² U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Cameroon*, Section 5.

⁸²³ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁴ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2004. For an explanation of gross primary enrollment and/or attendance rates that are greater than 100 percent, please see the definitions of gross primary enrollment rate and gross primary attendance rate in the glossary of this report.

⁸²⁵ Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances, *Rapport Principal. Enquête à Indicateurs Multiples (MICS) au Cameroun 2000*, 26.

Fewer girls enroll in primary school in Cameroon than boys.⁸²⁶ 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 violence and sexual abuse against children in schools.⁸²⁷ Early marriage, unwanted pregnancy, domestic chores and certain socio-cultural prejudices also contribute to low education rates.⁸²⁸ Domestic workers are also not permitted to attend school by their employers.⁸²⁹

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Code sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years.⁸³⁰ The law prohibits youths between the ages of 14 to 18 from engaging in certain work, including moving heavy weights, performing dangerous and unhealthy tasks, working in confined areas, or in prostitution.⁸³¹ The Labor Code also specifies that children cannot work in any job that exceeds their physical capacity.⁸³² Labor law also requires that employers provide educational training to children between 14 and 18 years.⁸³³ 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.⁸³⁴

The Labor Code prohibits forced labor.⁸³⁵ The Penal Code prohibits a person from imposing a work 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.⁸³⁶ The Penal Code prohibits slavery.⁸³⁷ The Code also prohibits procuring, as well sharing in the profits from another person's prostitution.⁸³⁸ The penalty

⁸²⁶ Ibid.

⁸²⁷ 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. See Tetchiada, *Scandal*.

⁸²⁸ U.S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1233*.

⁸²⁹ Catholic Relief Services staff, interviews, August 6, 2002.

⁸³⁰ 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>.

⁸³¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Cameroon*, Section 6d.

⁸³² *Cameroon Labor Code*, Part V, Ch. III, Section 87.

⁸³³ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Cameroon*, Section 6d.

⁸³⁴ *Cameroon Labor Code*, Part V, Chapter III, Section 87.

⁸³⁵ Ibid., Part I, Section 2.

⁸³⁶ Article 292 as cited in 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, Article 292; available from http://www.protectionproject.org/human_rights/countryreport/cameroon.htm.

⁸³⁷ Ibid.

⁸³⁸ Ibid.

includes fines and prison sentences of up to 5 years, which double if the crime involves a person less than 21 years of age, particularly in the informal sector.⁸³⁹

Cameroon does not currently have any laws forbidding trafficking as a specific crime, and often, traffickers are arrested and prosecuted under related crimes such as prostitution, slavery, bondage, etc. In 2003 several individuals were reportedly arrested, prosecuted or sued for crimes associated with their involvement in the trafficking of children, and one person was sentenced to 8 years in prison for a trafficking related crime.⁸⁴⁰

The Ministry of Labor enforces child labor laws through site inspections of registered businesses.⁸⁴¹ There were 58 general inspectors responsible for investigating child labor cases in Cameroon in 2004.⁸⁴² However, the U.S. Department of State reports that a lack of resources and inadequate legal provisions covering domestic labor hindered efforts to combat child labor.⁸⁴³

The Ministry of Social Affairs is the government agency responsible for coordinating governmental anti-trafficking efforts, including the implementation of a national strategy on child trafficking.⁸⁴⁴ In 2003, several individuals were reportedly arrested, prosecuted or sued for their involvement in the trafficking of children, and one person was sentenced to 8 years in prison for a child trafficking crime. Complete statistics on trafficking related arrests and prosecutions in 2004 are unavailable.⁸⁴⁵

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

The Government of Cameroon is collaborating with ILO-IPEC on two USDOL-funded West and Central African regional projects to combat child trafficking and child labor in the production of cocoa.⁸⁴⁶ In addition, with the support of the Department of State, the Government is participating in an ILO designed program to develop anti-trafficking legislation and train law enforcement and judicial officials on anti-trafficking strategies. One such training occurred in July 2004 in a coastal area in South Province, Cameroon, where sex tourism is prevalent.⁸⁴⁷

Selected Child Labor Measures Adopted by Governments		
Ratified Convention 138	8/13/2001	✓
Ratified Convention 182	6/5/2002	✓
ILO-IPEC Member		✓
National Plan for Children		
National Child Labor Action Plan		
Sector Action Plan (Trafficking)		✓

⁸³⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁰ U.S. Embassy- Yaounde, U.S. Embassy official, electronic communication to USDOL official, May 27, 2005.

⁸⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Cameroon*, Section 6d.

⁸⁴² U.S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1233*.

⁸⁴³ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Cameroon*, Section 6d.

⁸⁴⁴ U.S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1233*.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁶ 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.

⁸⁴⁷ U.S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1233*.

In April 2004, Cameroon ratified the U.N. Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its two protocols to prevent trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants.⁸⁴⁸ The government is drafting implementing legislation for these agreements and has developed revisions to its Family Code that would raise the minimum age for marriage from 15 to 18.⁸⁴⁹ In July 2004, the legislature strengthened the role and authority of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, which conducts investigations and implements training programs for law enforcement and judiciary officials on trafficking in persons.⁸⁵⁰ The Minister of Social Affairs has pledged support for UNICEF, which plans to conduct a sociological study on victims and perpetrators of child trafficking to help the problem in the country.⁸⁵¹ To raise awareness about the need to combat exploitive child labor, the government participated in various child labor awareness raising activities in conjunction with the ILO's World Day Against Child Labor and Red Card Against Child Labor Initiative and UN's Day of the African Child.⁸⁵²

The government developed an Education for All Plan for 2000-2009 that recognizes child labor as a barrier to education and that proposes strategies to ensure educational opportunities for children.⁸⁵³ In April 2004, the Government launched "Education for All Week"⁸⁵⁴ and in June 2004, government officials participated in a forum with other African Ministers of Education and technical experts to discuss how to expand girls' education in sub-Saharan Africa.⁸⁵⁵ In June 2004, the government collaborated with NGOs to launch several initiatives to issue birth certificates to children for school enrollment in Cameroon's northern and central provinces.⁸⁵⁶ UNICEF also announced its decision to make the Adamawa Province its focal point area for child and female literacy programs in Cameroon.⁸⁵⁷ In August 2004, WFP concluded a 4-year program to distribute food to girl students in the northern and eastern provinces.⁸⁵⁸ In 2004, the Protocol of Agreement to eradicate child labor was signed by the Government of Cameroon and the ILO.⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁴⁸ U. S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1233*.

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*

⁸⁵³ Government of Cameroon, *Plan d'Action National EPT Cameroun*, July 21, 2003, 17; available from http://portal.unesco.org/education/ev.php?URL_ID=20918&URL_DO_TOPIC&URL_SEC.

⁸⁵⁴ U.S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1233*.

⁸⁵⁵ UNICEF, *Ministers of Education and Technical Experts Meet in Nairobi to Discuss Scaling Up What Works for Girls' Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*, June 24, 2004; available from http://www.unicef.org/media/media_21926.html.

⁸⁵⁶ U.S. Embassy-Yaounde, *unclassified telegram no. 1233*.

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁹ U.S. Embassy Yaounde, electronic communication, May 27, 2005.