

Cameroon

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

An estimated 15.9 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years were working in Cameroon in 2001. Approximately 14.5 percent of all boys 10 to 14 were working compared to 17.4 percent of girls in the same age group. The majority of working children were found in the agricultural sector (88.2 percent), followed by services (7.1 percent), manufacturing (2.1 percent), and other sectors (2.6 percent).⁹⁰¹ Only 5 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years worked for wages.⁹⁰² Of those children who performed domestic work, 11 percent work more than 4 hours a day on these tasks.⁹⁰³ According to a study conducted jointly 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.⁹⁰⁴ The ILO found that 7 percent of working children in the cities of Yaoundé, Douala, and Bamenda were less than 12 years of age, and 60 percent of these had dropped out of primary school.⁹⁰⁵ Children employed in the cocoa industry engage in hazardous tasks such as application of pesticides and use of machetes.⁹⁰⁶ Child labor is one of many problems associated with poverty. In 2001, 17.1 percent of the population of Cameroon were living on less than USD 1 a day.⁹⁰⁷

Cameroon is a source, transit, and destination country for the trafficking of women and children for forced labor and sexual exploitation. While most of the trafficking occurs within the country, children are also trafficked to the United Kingdom for commercial sexual exploitation. Girls in particular are trafficked from Anglophone areas to the Francophone cities of Yaoundé and Douala to work as domestics, street vendors or prostitutes.⁹⁰⁸ Children are also trafficked internally to work in forced labor in the production of cocoa.⁹⁰⁹ Cameroon is a destination country for children trafficked from Nigeria and Benin and a transit country for the movement of children between Nigeria, Gabon, Togo, Chad, Niger, the Central African Republic, and the Republic of Congo, to work as indentured or domestic servants, on farms, and for sexual exploitation.⁹¹⁰ 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,

⁹⁰¹ UCW analysis of ILO SIMPOC, UNICEF MICS, and World Bank surveys, *Child Economic Activity and School Attendance Rates*, October 7, 2005. Reliable data on the worst forms of child labor are especially difficult to collect given the often hidden or illegal nature of the worst forms, such as the use of children in the illegal drug trade, prostitution, pornography, and trafficking. As a result, statistics and information on children's work in general are reported in this section. Such statistics and information may or may not include the worst forms of child labor. For more information on the definition of working children and other indicators used in this report, please see the section in the front of the report titled "Data Sources and Definitions."

⁹⁰² Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances, *Rapport Principal. Enquête à Indicateurs Multiples (MICS) au Cameroun 2000*, Yaoundé, 2000, 11.

⁹⁰³ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2004: Cameroon*, Washington, DC, February 25, 2005, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41592.htm>.

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid. The 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.

⁹⁰⁶ International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, *Child Labor in the Cocoa Sector of West Africa: A Synthesis of Findings in Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Nigeria*, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, [online] n.d. [cited December 8, 2005]; available from <http://www.iita.org/news/cocoa.pdf>.

⁹⁰⁷ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2005* [CD-ROM], Washington, DC, 2005.

⁹⁰⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Washington, DC, June 10, 2005; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2005/>.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Cameroon*, Section 5.

⁹¹⁰ U.S. Embassy- Yaounde, *reporting*, March 2, 2005. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Cameroon*, Section 5.

sweatshops, bars and restaurants, and in prostitution.⁹¹¹ 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.⁹¹² The Ministry of Social Affairs also reports that children of some large rural families are “loaned” to work as domestic servants, baby sitters, vendors, or prostitutes in urban areas in exchange for monetary compensation.⁹¹³

Education is compulsory through the age of 14 years.⁹¹⁴ Primary school education has been free since 2000,⁹¹⁵ however, families must pay for uniforms and book fees.⁹¹⁶ Tuition and fees at the secondary school level remain unaffordable for many families.⁹¹⁷

In 2002, the gross primary enrollment rate was 108 percent.⁹¹⁸ Gross enrollment ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. In 2001, 84.6 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years were attending school.⁹¹⁹ As of 2001, 64 percent of children who started primary school were likely to reach grade 5.⁹²⁰

Fewer girls enroll in primary school in Cameroon than boys.⁹²¹ In 2001, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child identified 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.⁹²² Early marriage, unwanted pregnancy, domestic chores and certain socio-cultural biases also contribute to low education rates.⁹²³ Domestic workers are generally not permitted by their employers to attend school.⁹²⁴

⁹¹¹ According to reports, traffickers beat and starve children and threaten to leave them destitute. See U.S. Embassy- Yaounde, *reporting*, March 2, 2005. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Cameroon*.

⁹¹² U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Cameroon*, Section 5.

⁹¹³ U.S. Embassy- Yaounde, *reporting*, March 2, 2005.

⁹¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Cameroon*, Section 5.

⁹¹⁵ U.S. Embassy – Yaounde Official, email correspondence to USDOL Official, August 17, 2006

⁹¹⁶ Ibid. Government of Cameroon, *Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon*, Law no. 96-06, (January 18, 1996); available from <http://www.right-to-education.org>. See also Sylvestre Tetchiada, *Schools for Scandal*, February 24, 2004 [cited June 23, 2005]; available from <http://www.ipsnews.net/africa/interna.asp?idnews=22537>.

⁹¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Cameroon*, Section 5.

⁹¹⁸ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=51> (Gross and Net Enrollment Ratios, Primary; accessed December 2005). 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 rates in the “Data Sources and Definitions” section of this report.

⁹¹⁹ UCW analysis of ILO SIMPOC, UNICEF MICS, and World Bank surveys, *Child Economic Activity and School Attendance Rates*. Attendance figures do not necessarily indicate that a child is progressing through various grade levels and thus may exceed statistics on persistence to grade 5.

⁹²⁰ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=55> (School life expectancy, % of repeaters, survival rates; accessed December 2005).

⁹²¹ Ministère de l’Economie et des Finances, *Rapport Principal. Enquête à Indicateurs Multiples (MICS) au Cameroun 2000*, 26.

⁹²² 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*.

⁹²³ U.S. Embassy- Yaounde, *reporting*, August 24, 2004.

⁹²⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Cameroon*.

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Code sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years.⁹²⁵ The law prohibits youths between the ages of 14 to 18 from moving heavy weights, performing dangerous and unhealthy tasks, and working in confined areas.⁹²⁶ The Labor Code also specifies that children cannot work in any job that exceeds their physical capacity.⁹²⁷ Labor law also requires that employers provide training to children between 14 and 18 years.⁹²⁸ Under the Labor Code, the Labor Inspectorate may require women and children to be examined by a medical professional to make sure their work does not exceed their physical capacity.⁹²⁹

The worst forms of child labor may be prosecuted under different statutes in Cameroon. The government does not explicitly prohibit forced or compulsory labor by children.⁹³⁰ The Penal Code prohibits a person from requiring another person to perform work for which they have not freely applied. Violation of this law is punishable by imprisonment of 5 to 10 years and/or a fine.⁹³¹ The Penal Code prohibits slavery.⁹³² The Code also prohibits procuring, as well sharing in the profits from another person's prostitution.⁹³³ 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.⁹³⁴ In December 2005, the National Assembly passed legislation prohibiting child trafficking.⁹³⁵ Military conscription is not compulsory in Cameroon, and the voluntary recruitment age is 18. Enlistment under age 18 is permitted with parental consent.⁹³⁶ Since 1999, the Government of Cameroon has submitted to the ILO a list or an equivalent document identifying the types of work that it has determined are harmful to the health, safety or morals of children under Convention 182 or Convention 138.⁹³⁷

The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Labor enforce child labor laws through site inspections of registered businesses.⁹³⁸ In 2004, 58 labor inspectors were responsible for investigating child labor cases in Cameroon. 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.⁹³⁹

The Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Insurance (Ministry of Labor), is the government agency responsible for anti-trafficking efforts,⁹⁴⁰ including the implementation of a national strategy on child trafficking which involves the participation of 10 governmental agencies.⁹⁴¹

⁹²⁵ 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>. See also U. S. Embassy-Yaounde, *reporting*, August 29, 2005.

⁹²⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Cameroon*, Section 6d.

⁹²⁷ *Cameroon Labor Code*, Part V, Ch. III, Section 87.

⁹²⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Cameroon*, Section 6d.

⁹²⁹ *Cameroon Labor Code*, Part V, Chapter III, Section 87.

⁹³⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Cameroon*, Section 6c.

⁹³¹ 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.

⁹³² *Ibid.*

⁹³³ *Ibid.*

⁹³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹³⁵ U.S. Embassy – Yaounde Official, email correspondence to USDOL Official, August 17, 2006

⁹³⁶ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers Global Report 2004*, November 17, 2004; available from http://www.child-soldiers.org/document_get.php?id=966.

⁹³⁷ ILO-IPEC Geneva official, email communication to USDOL official, November 14, 2005.

⁹³⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Cameroon*, Section 6d. See also U. S. Embassy-Yaounde, *reporting*, August 29, 2005.

⁹³⁹ U. S. Embassy-Yaounde, *reporting*, August 29, 2005.

⁹⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Cameroon*.

⁹⁴¹ U. S. Embassy-Yaounde, *reporting*, August 29, 2005.

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

Cameroon is one of five countries collaborating with ILO-IPEC on a USDOL-funded West African regional project to combat hazardous and exploitative child labor in the production of cocoa.⁹⁴² 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.

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

The Government of Cameroon has worked over the past year to raise awareness of and working to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government has worked closely with the International Labor Organization, UNICEF, and Plan International to better understand the causes of child labor and to find long-term solutions to the problem. The government has also developed revisions to its Family Code that would raise the minimum age for marriage from 15 to 18.⁹⁴³ Since early marriage is a common threat to girl's completion of education, this can be regarded as a positive government action to support education and anti-child labor efforts.

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 address the problem in the country.⁹⁴⁴ To raise awareness about the need to combat exploitative 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.⁹⁴⁵

In June 2004, the government collaborated with NGOs to launch several initiatives to issue birth certificates to children to enable school enrollment in Cameroon's northern and central provinces.⁹⁴⁶ In August 2004, WFP began a 3-year program to distribute food to female students and their families in the northern and eastern provinces. This program not only helps to mitigate food insecurity in the region, but also encourages girls to attend school in areas with particularly low rates of attendance.⁹⁴⁷

⁹⁴² ILO-IPEC, *West Africa Cocoa/Commercial Agriculture Program to Combat Hazardous and Exploitative Child Labor* project document RAF.02.P50.USA, Geneva, 2002.

⁹⁴³ U. S. Embassy-Yaounde, *reporting*, August 29, 2005.

⁹⁴⁴ U.S. Embassy- Yaounde, *reporting*, August 24, 2004.

⁹⁴⁵ U. S. Embassy-Yaounde, *reporting*, August 29, 2005.

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid.