

HIGHLIGHTS

- **COVID-19 pandemic:** As of 24 February 2021, the Ministry of Health reported 35,714 cumulative cases and 551 deaths in Cameroon. Case fatality rate is 1.5 per cent.
- **Population Displacement:** More than 700,000 people are internally displaced because of the North-West and South-West crisis.
- **Education:** 700,000 children in the North-West and South-West regions need educational support.
- 5,000 CAR refugees arrived in Cameroon between December 2020 and January 2021.

FIGURES

(UNHCR FEBRUARY 2021,
IOM JUNE 2020, OCHA
AUGUST 2020)

1,032,942

Internally displaced people

448,052

Refugees and asylum seekers

465,757

Returnees (previously IDPs)



In this issue

- P.1 [A failure to address the vulnerability of men and boys.](#)
- P.3 [A high level mission in the East region.](#)
- P.4 [Continuity of education in time of crisis.](#)
- P.4-5 [Voluntary repatriation of Nigerian refugees.](#)
- P.5 [More than 900,000 people received WFP's food assistance in 2020.](#)

A FAILURE TO ADDRESS THE VULNERABILITY OF MEN AND BOYS

The irregular attention given to adolescent boys and men has hindered the thorough understanding of the gendered impact that the crisis in the North-West and South-West regions has on them. We need to expand our vision of who are "people of concern", writes Delphine Brun, interagencies senior GenCap adviser – hosted by OCHA Cameroon.



Credit: Delphine Brun

Every year, events such as the International Women's Day rightfully shed light on the structural gender-based discriminations that girls and women bear, and that are exacerbated in times of crises.

In the North-West and South-West regions, the socio-political crisis is now entering its fifth year and has led to the internal displacement of over 700,000 people. Women and girls struggle to make ends meet, face violence and often lack access to essential services such as education and healthcare. With the killing or exile of their husbands, they often must navigate an unnerving new reality, where all responsibilities lie on their shoulders.

While there is an undisputed need for the humanitarian response to address the risks affecting women and girls, the patchy attention that has been given to adolescent boys and men has hindered the understanding of the gendered impact that the crisis has on them.

What is it like being a young man affected by crises?



North-West region, Cameroon - Credit: OCHA/Bibiane Mouangue

Adolescent boys and men face specific threats and circumstances that leave them vulnerable. Analysis of protection incidents in the South-West region demonstrates that while girls and women are exposed to heightened risks of gender-based violence, more than nine out of ten people exposed to arbitrary arrests, beating, illegal detention, torture, kidnapping, extra-judicial executions, and disappearance are males.

Being a man or a boy also means being more exposed to targeted armed attacks, with greater risks of injury or death directly related to the conflict. This peculiar exposure to threats is explained by the specific forms of discrimination, harassment and violence they face, from the military and from the non-State armed groups.

“When the crisis metamorphosed into armed clashes, the youth was a target for armed groups. They wanted us to join them. At the same time, the militaries could not think that a young man could be neutral.

Women and girls didn’t face this suspicion, as they were not seen as fighters. All the young men had to flee,” explains Firmin, a 24-year-old man, who sought refuge in Yaounde.

This prevalent atmosphere of insecurity is aggravated by the absence of identity documents which have been lost, ceased or destroyed. While women and girls can usually manage to move around and cross check points without carrying proper documentation, men and boys face tremendous arrest risks.

Caught in a spiral of fear, the male population who has not fled has often reduced its economic and social life to the bare minimum, limiting movement and avoiding gatherings. For the younger men and boys, loss of employment and increased poverty often combine with attacks on education, further reinforcing their isolation and lack of prospects.

If vulnerability is defined by both the external threats characterizing a specific environment, and by the coping capacity of those experiencing that environment, adolescent boys and men can clearly be described as a vulnerable group.

With no immediate solution foreseen to the ongoing crisis, adolescent boys and men feel dispossessed of control over their lives and their future: restricted mobility, stigmatization, targeted violence, lack of proper documentation, and lack of work and income, all contribute to a sense of helplessness, high amounts of anxiety, stress, frustration, anger, and ultimately a loss of self-esteem. Emotions can remain ‘locked inside’ due to the prevailing view that being a real man is about being tough and not showing fear or sadness.

Failing to adequately acknowledge the devastating implications the crisis has had on boys and men in terms of protection, socioeconomic wellbeing and identity, prevents us from addressing their needs and the impact in the wider community.

The gendered dimension of crises, including an understanding of how the lives of men, women, girls, and boys interact, their needs and realities affecting each other, need to be analyzed to develop responses that are truly evidence-based, inclusive and in accordance with needs.

Complete article available on [Norwegian Refugee Council’s website](#)

A HIGH-LEVEL MISSION TO THE EAST REGION



The Humanitarian Coordinator Mr. Mathias Z. Naab and the delegation, welcomed by the leaders of Central African Republic refugee communities in Gado site, East region. Credit: UNRCO/Eleanor Galabe

The Humanitarian Coordinator in Cameroon, Mr. Mathias Z. Naab, conducted a mission with representatives of United Nations agencies and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) to the East region from 3 to 5 February 2021.

The Eastern regions of Cameroon are home to over 300,000 refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR), dispersed over hundreds of sites and villages, mainly in East and Adamawa regions

The mission followed the arrival of around 5,000 Central African Republic (CAR) refugees in eastern regions of Cameroon between December 2020 and January 2021, due to the tension and hostilities before, during and after the 27 December 2020 Presidential elections in CAR. The mission aimed to increase programmatic and financial support to affected populations in the region and strengthen partnerships with authorities, humanitarian, and development partners.

The delegation met with the refugees and host communities in Gado site, and the Government, development and humanitarian partners based in Bertoua, in the East region, in order to understand and identify the main needs and challenges, as well as the way forward to strengthen collaboration and coordination between actors.

Due to the political and security situation in CAR, the Eastern regions of Cameroon are home to over 300,000 refugees from CAR, dispersed over hundreds of sites and villages, mainly in the East and Adamawa regions. Most of them live in poverty and have limited access to basic social services such as food, water, shelter, and healthcare. Results from vulnerability analysis indicate alarming levels of poverty among the CAR refugee population, showing that over 80 per cent are considered extremely vulnerable and need assistance; yet current levels of aid are not sufficient to address the needs of all vulnerable population in the region. Due to continuing instability in CAR, approximately 15,000 new refugees are expected to arrive in Cameroon in 2021. The refugee presence also exerts significant pressure on natural resources and basic social services in host areas and exacerbates pre-existing vulnerabilities.

Participants in the mission called to join efforts of humanitarian and development actors in the region, to improve refugees' access to land and employment opportunities, ensure better access to healthcare, education, and advocate for and monitor refugee inclusion into national social protection systems, among other initiatives.

CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION IN TIME OF CRISIS



Nursery school in a learning community space in Bamenda- Credit: OCHA/Bibiane Mouangue

Over 80 per cent of schools are closed in the North-West and South-West (NWSW) regions of Cameroon. The socio-political crisis in the two regions is now entering its fifth year and has put an estimated 2.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.

To cope with the closure of schools, some parents have sent their children to education establishments in the neighbouring regions, while others with less financial means jointly set up community learning spaces.

The community learning space facilitated by Hendreta, a teacher working with COHESODEC, a community organization based in Bamenda, in the North-West region receives more than 300 children aged from 3 to 17 years old.

“The attendance is not regular because we used to have shootout in this place, fighting between security forces and non-State armed groups,” Hendreta said. “But with the engagement of parents, classes resume when there is a lull,” she added.

Community learning spaces are supported by the local community, and teachers supervise children on a voluntary basis. “We don’t have financial means to send our children to Douala, Bafoussam or other safer towns. This is the solution we found and we had to negotiate with the fighters to continue the education of our children in this informal form,” said Emmanuel, the Secretary General of the community group.

Going to school remains risky for children as well as for teachers in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon. In 2020, violent attacks on education have been perpetrated and children and teachers were killed, and school facilities destroyed. Some areas have become more prone to kidnapping for ransom, with school children and teachers particularly at risk of being abducted. The targeted violence had severe impacts on children’s ability to attend school and learn.

In November 2020, following a chain of violent attacks against education, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Cameroon, Mr. Matthias Z. Naab, reminded that “education is a fundamental right and children should not be prevented from going to school. It should be a place of safety and learning, not one where children are in fear.” He called for an immediate end of violence against schools.

Increased awareness of the importance of education among stakeholders in the NWSW regions was reflected in a decrease in attacks for the school year 2020-2021, especially in February 2021. However, more than 700,000 children are deprived of education in the two regions.

The increase in the number of COVID-19 cases has also affected students and teachers especially in the North-West region, where 30 per cent of functional schools have recorded over 300 positive cases from 18 to 28 February. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommended systematic screening for COVID-19 in schools.

Humanitarian education actors are providing alternative educational resources to fill the gap left by traditional schooling options. They provide psychological support to children as well as books and learning materials for children’s use at home, in community learning spaces, and distance learning through the radio and COVID-19 sensitization. The Education Cluster reached more than 41,600 students, including 22,713 girls with these adapted response interventions.

VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION OF NIGERIAN REFUGEES IN CAMEROON

On 10 February 2021, the Tripartite Commission for the voluntary repatriation of Nigerian refugees living in Cameroon met in Maroua, in the Far North region of Cameroon, to discuss modalities for the implementation of the voluntary repatriation.

The meeting was hosted by the Minister of Territorial Administration, Mr. Paul Atanga Nji, the Executive Governor of Borno State in Nigeria, Mr. Babagana Umara Zulum and the Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Cameroon (UNHCR), Mr. Olivier Beer.



Nigerian refugees in Minawao camp, Far North region, Cameroon –
Credit: UNHCR/Xavier Bourgeois

refugees (751 households) who were pre-identified by the Borno State Government as owning houses in Bama and Banki towns in north-east Nigeria and to follow UNHCR voluntary repatriation procedures. They also agreed to facilitate the safe and dignified return movement using buses for individuals, with social distancing and trucks for luggage by road, with secure and medical escorts.

The voluntary repatriation is being conducted in adherence to the agreed COVID-19 protocols in both countries.

MORE THAN 900,000 PEOPLE RECEIVED WFP'S FOOD ASSISTANCE IN 2020

In 2020, COVID-19 mitigation measures and security and access related issues in the North-West and South-West regions affected World Food Programme (WFP) assistance operations. Activities slowed down in order to adopt prevention measures and limit the spread of the virus. School feeding activities were particularly affected by the pandemic as schools closed down as a containment measure.

Despite the challenges, WFP provided food and nutrition assistance to over 912,000 crisis-affected and vulnerable people in Cameroon in 2020. The organisation disbursed more than \$US10 million through cash-based transfers and distributed 47,000 metric tons (mt) of food, to address the acute needs of vulnerable households. Despite the closure of schools, WFP assisted nearly 77,000 schoolchildren with nutritious meals through alternative solutions.



Credit: WFP

In a bid to continue activities while respecting COVID-19 preventive measures, WFP developed alternative ways of working to ensure that the affected population continued to be reached with assistance while minimizing the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for beneficiaries, partners, and staff. The organization in collaboration with Food Security Cluster partners developed standard operating procedures to ensure preventive measures were taken into account during distributions in the field.

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