



COI QUERY

Country of Origin	CAMEROON
Title	Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women, including prevalence, legislation, availability of state protection, access to support services, in particular in Yaoundé
Reference period	1 January 2021 to 28 November 2023
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Date of completion	4 December 2023
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All sources used are referenced and cited in the bibliography section. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned COI methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive or conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Cameroon

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women, including prevalence, legislation, availability of state protection, access to support services, in particular in Yaoundé

1. Prevalence

According to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) annual report on Cameroon covering 2021, ‘discrimination against women is prevalent within Cameroonian society’ and ‘domestic violence is endemic’.¹ Sexual violence was also used against women and girls in the context of conflict in Cameroon, according to 2021 reports.² In November 2021, Silomag, a France-based magazine, reported that gender-based violence (GBV) was increasing in Cameroon ‘in recent years’³, and in May 2022, France24 reported that domestic violence and femicides were ‘on the rise, but under-reported’⁴. The 2022 Human Rights Report by the US Department of State (USDOS) noted that ‘sexual harassment was widespread’ in the country.⁵

Although prior to the reference period of the present query, the most recent available report [informal translation] on the state of play of human rights in Cameroon with disaggregated data on GBV gathered by the Cameroonian authorities, covering year 2020, recorded 9 292 cases of GBV: 2 443 cases of physical violence, 3 426 cases of psychological or emotional violence, 2 009 cases of economic violence, 856 cases of rape, 100 cases of widow rites, 257 child marriages, 101 female genital mutilation (FGM) cases, and 100 cases of political or institutional violence.⁶

The Humanitarian Needs Overview report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), published in April 2022, estimated that 979 000 people were ‘in need of protection from GBV’ in 2022, 94 % of whom were women.⁷

A coalition of 17 civil society organisations working on women’s rights in Cameroon known as #Stopfemicides237⁸ registered 59 femicides from January 2023 to November 2023.⁹

Information on FGM in Cameroon can be found in the [EUAA Query Response Q48, Cameroon: Female Genital Mutilation \(FGM\): legislation; prevalence; societal attitudes; possibility to refuse](#)

¹ HRW, World Report 2022 – Cameroon, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

² The Gender Security Project, CRSV: Anglophone Conflict in Cameroon, 26 October 2021, [url](#); AlJazeera, Sexual violence pervasive in Cameroon’s Anglophone regions, 29 April 2021, [url](#)

³ Silomag, La lutte contre les violences basées sur le genre au Cameroun, November 2021, [url](#)

⁴ France24, Femicides on the rise in Cameroon: women’s rights activists blame culture of impunity, 3 May 2022, [url](#)

⁵ USDOS, Cameroon 2022 Human Rights Report, 21 March 2023, [url](#), p. 37

⁶ Cameroon, Ministry of Justice, Rapport du Ministère de la Justice sur l’état des droits de l’homme au Cameroun en 2020, February 2022, [url](#), p. 290

⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, 14 April 2022, [url](#), p. 57

⁸ DW, "Notre objectif n'est pas de diviser hommes et femmes", 10 May 2023, [url](#)

⁹ NewsduCamer, Violences basées sur le genre : Déjà 59 femmes tuées en 2023, 23 November 2023, [url](#)



[FGM and consequences for refusal; availability of state protection; access to support services](#), published on 5 October 2023.

Information on single women in Yaoundé and Douala can be found in the [EUAA Query Response Q2, Cameroon: Situation of single women in Yaoundé and Douala](#), published on 26 January 2022.

2. Legislation

Cameroon ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, so-called Maputo Protocol, in 2012.¹⁰

As of 2022, there was no specific domestic legislation tackling violence against women.¹¹ In the absence of such legislation, Baker McKenzie, a global law firm providing pro bono work on domestic violence,¹² noted in a report from 2021 that victims could file a case under the 'assault provision' of the penal code.¹³ In November 2023, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family of Cameroon launched a process to draft a bill meant to address GBV.¹⁴

The Law 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 relating to the Penal Code penalises rape and sexual harassment as follows:

'SECTION 296: Rape

Whoever by force or moral ascendancy compels any person, whether above or below the age of puberty, to have sexual Intercourse with him shall be punished with imprisonment for from 5 (five) to 10 (ten) years.

SECTION 297: Subsequent Marriage

Marriage freely consented between the offender and the victim, even where she is over puberty at the time of commission of the offence provided for in Sections 295 and 296 above, shall have no effect on the prosecution and conviction.

[...]

¹⁰ AU, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, 11 July 2003, [url](#)

¹¹ HRW, World Report 2022 – Cameroon, 13 January 2022, [url](#); Baker McKenzie, Fighting Domestic Violence: Africa, 2021, [url](#); Silo, La lutte contre les violences basées sur le genre au Cameroun, November 2021, [url](#)

¹² Baker McKenzie is a global law firm working pro bono along two NGOs, Global Rights for Women and Every Woman Treaty, and together with over 500 volunteers on the project Fighting Domestic Violence to produce a comprehensive and updated overview of domestic violence legislation around the world. Baker McKenzie's Resource Hub, Fighting Domestic Violence, About, n.d., [url](#)

¹³ Baker McKenzie, Fighting Domestic Violence: Africa, 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴ Actu Cameroun, Le Cameroun prépare une loi contre les violences basées sur le genre, 8 November 2023, [url](#); Cameroun Actu Online, La Ministre De La Femme Et De La Famille Prépare Un Avant-Projet De Loi Contre Les Violences Basées Sur Le Genre, 9 November 2023, [url](#)



SECTION 302-1: Sexual Harassment

(1) Whoever takes advantage of the authority conferred on him by his position to harass another using orders, threats, constraints or pressure in order to obtain sexual favours, shall be punished with imprisonment for from 6 (six) months to 1 (one) year and with fine of from CFAF (one hundred thousand) [about EUR 152.4] to CFAF 1 000 000 (one million) [about EUR 1 524.4].

(2) The penalty shall be imprisonment for from one to 3 (three) years where the victim is a minor.

(3) The penalty shall be imprisonment for from 3 (three) to 5 (five) years where the offender is in charge of the education of the victim.¹⁵

3. Availability of state protection

Baker McKenzie noted in 2021 that due to the lack of a specific legislation to address domestic violence, victims had ‘little recourse for protection’ and there were no provisions to issue orders against abusers. Furthermore, police tended to see domestic violence as a ‘private matter’.¹⁶

In a report covering 2022, Freedom House noted that, in spite of gender equality provided for by the Constitution, women were not always granted their full rights due to ‘traditional legal values and practices’.¹⁷ Sources reported that perpetrators of domestic violence and rape were ‘rarely prosecuted’.¹⁸ According to the Association of Jurists for Social Integrity, an organisation providing free legal advice to victims, as quoted by France24 in 2022, ‘husbands and partners [of the victims] are allowed to act with judicial impunity’.¹⁹

USDOS reported that victims were reluctant ‘to file official complaints due to fear of reprisal and or stigmatization’.²⁰ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN) gathered in 2023 the statements of the United Youths Organization (UYO)’s Chief of Administration who mentioned that ‘fear of retaliation by their [victims] husbands’ hold victims back from reporting GBV.²¹ Sources also reported that the consideration of GBV by law enforcement agents made victims reluctant to report the abuses.²² The NKafu Policy Institute, a think-tank based in Yaoundé, commented that the fear of not being believed and ‘losing custody of their children is another concern that may keep women from disclosing their experiences’.²³

¹⁵ Cameroon, Law 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 relating to the Penal Code, 12 July 2016, [url](#)

¹⁶ Baker McKenzie, Fighting Domestic Violence: Africa, 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Cameroon, 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Cameroon, 2023, [url](#); USDOS, Cameroon 2022 Human Rights Report, 21 March 2023, [url](#), p. 37

¹⁹ France24, Femicides on the rise in Cameroon: women’s rights activists blame culture of impunity, 3 May 2022, [url](#)

²⁰ USDOS, Cameroon 2022 Human Rights Report, 21 March 2023, [url](#), p. 37

²¹ UNWOMEN, Tackling discriminatory gender norms in Cameroon, 17 August 2023, [url](#)

²² Baker McKenzie, Fighting Domestic Violence: Africa, 2021, [url](#); UNWOMEN, Tackling discriminatory gender norms in Cameroon, 17 August 2023, [url](#)

²³ NKafu Policy Institute, Gender-Based Violence: Beyond the Crises in Cameroon and Effects on Mental Well-Being, 12 July 2022, [url](#)



4. Access to support services

USDOS reported in 2022 that the government set up mechanisms such as ‘legal support to survivors via the judiciary network, general clinical care offered in health facilities, and collection of data through the District Health Information System and provision of situational analysis’ to support victims of sexual violence.²⁴ The same source added that there was no provision of emergency contraception for victims of sexual violence by the government.²⁵

According to the 2022 USDOS report on Cameroon, ‘community-based organisations’ were responsible for implementing ‘many of the prevention and basic support programs’.²⁶

In 2023, the Association pour la Dignité de la Femme (ADF) opened a shelter for victims of GBV in Yaoundé.²⁷ The online newspaper OCamer quoted the president of ADF who declared that the government did not provide any support despite the attempts by ADF to contact different ministries and authorities.²⁸ The association Sourires de femmes (ASDF), based in Yaoundé, provided support to victims of violence and recorded that in 2021, the association provided support to 113 cases of GBV: 54 psychological violence, 18 physical violence, 18 incest cases, 37 cases of rape, and 6 cases of sexual harassment.²⁹ Association de Lutte contre les Violences faites aux Femmes (ALVF) had also a center in Yaoundé to provide support for victims of GBV such as psychological support in person or via phone.³⁰

The Advocates for Human Rights cited the Inter-agency GenCap advisor for Cameroon,³¹ in 2023 to report the limitation that victims faced to access support due to the lack of a formal referral mechanism.³² Health centers, which were more accessible, did not offer the adequate privacy and confidentiality to victims nor store safely the information about cases.³³

Families of victims have been reported as interfering in the process of accessing justice.³⁴ Furthermore, a source interviewed by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) in April 2022 stated that “most” family members “blame them [victims] for disgracing their families or for exposing their families to public stigma”; these reactions “support the

²⁴ USDOS, Cameroon 2022 Human Rights Report, 21 March 2023, [url](#), p. 36

²⁵ USDOS, Cameroon 2022 Human Rights Report, 21 March 2023, [url](#), p. 37

²⁶ USDOS, Cameroon 2022 Human Rights Report, 21 March 2023, [url](#), p. 37

²⁷ A.D.F Association pour la Dignité de la Femme [Facebook], posted on: 18 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁸ OCamer, Yaoundé: les femmes victimes de violence ont désormais un centre de refuge, 4 July 2023, [url](#)

²⁹ ASDF, Rapport d’activités 2022, n.d., [url](#), p. 6

³⁰ ALVF, Services, n.d., [url](#)

³¹ GenCap deploys Senior Gender Advisers (SGAs) to humanitarian field operations, as well as at the global and regional levels, to help ensure that gender equality and women’s empowerment are placed at the centre of humanitarian action. Inter-Agency Standing Committee, About (GenCap), n.d., [url](#)

³² The Advocates for Human Rights, Cameroon: Stakeholder Report for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review, 5 April 2023, [url](#), p. 6

³³ The Advocates for Human Rights, Cameroon: Stakeholder Report for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review, 5 April 2023, [url](#), p. 6

³⁴ HumAngle, Women Break Silence Over Abuse With An App In Cameroon, 22 February 2023, [url](#)



perpetrator" and prompt survivors to accept that violence is "normal".³⁵ The CEO of UYO also told UNWOMEN that "[i]f a man violates a woman physically or sexually, it's because communities believe that men are more powerful than women. And these beliefs perpetuate GBV."³⁶ The NKafu Policy Institute also reported that 'the stigma associated with gender-based violence and mental health concerns can stop women from sharing their experiences, reporting the incidents, and accessing support.'³⁷

According to a report by the Cameroonian government, covering 2019, [informal translation] '18 safe spaces were set up in the problematic regions (Bamenda, Buéa and Maroua), accommodating 583 people. It also noted that 1 150 women received support in the Adamaoua, East and Far-North regions through the call centers and gender desks located in police stations. [...] In total, 1 000 survivors received holistic support (psychosocial, legal, and medical guidance).'³⁸

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints.

³⁵ Canada, IRB, Cameroon: Domestic violence, including legislation; support services available to victims, including mental health services; the impact of COVID19; state protection (2020–April 2022), 1 June 2022, [url](#)

³⁶ UNWOMEN, Tackling discriminatory gender norms in Cameroon, 17 August 2023, [url](#)

³⁷ NKafu Policy Institute, Gender-Based Violence: Beyond the Crises in Cameroon and Effects on Mental Well-Being, 12 July 2022, [url](#)

³⁸ Cameroon, Ministry of Justice, Rapport du Ministère de la Justice sur l'état des droits de l'homme au Cameroun en 2019, June 2021, [url](#), p. 296



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28 Too Many; ACAPS; AlertGbv; Care; Ecoi.Net; European Union – EUAA COI Portal; International Women’s Health Coalition; United Nations – United Nations Sexual and



Reproductive Health Agency (UNFPA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP);
Women For A Change, Cameroon; World Organisation Against Torture