

Cameroon

Country Overview

Politics

Cameroon is a presidential republic in Central Africa which is characterized politically by a single dominant party within the multiparty system of government. President Paul Biya, a member of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), has remained in power since 1982. He was reelected for his seventh term in 2018.¹ Presidential elections were characterized by low voter turnout, insignificant opposition from other parties, and suspicious irregularities in election procedure. Parliamentary elections were set to be held in 2018 but were delayed twice.² These elections eventually took place in 2020, with the CPDM winning over 80 percent of seats.³

In recent years, the terrorist group, Boko Haram, has killed thousands of Cameroonian people and displaced more than 270,000. Attacks by the group are concentrated in northern Cameroon.⁴

Economy

Cameroon is classified by the World Bank as having a lower-middle-income economy.⁵ In 2018, Cameroon had a GDP of USD 38.7 billion and GDP growth of 4.1 percent.⁶ Oil is the country's main export commodity, and it currently accounts for nearly 40 percent of export earnings, despite falling global oil prices. Approximately 70 percent of Cameroon's 9.9 million laborers were employed in agriculture in 2017. Cameroon produces agricultural goods such as coffee, cocoa, cotton, tea, rubber, livestock, and timber.⁷

The Cameroonian government has increased its investments in agriculture, communication technology, and transportation infrastructure in recent years. Chinese companies have also invested in Cameroon's transportation sector. The U.S. Department of State reports that Cameroon struggles to attract foreign investment due to widespread corruption and "dysfunctions within public administration." However, they suggest that Cameroon has a wealth of untapped natural resources that could eventually contribute to substantial economic growth.⁸

Social/Human Development

Cameroon is a relatively young country, and 60 percent of the population is under the age of 25.⁹ The country has experienced rising rates of poverty, particularly in rural areas. In 2019, the



UN reported that 23.8 percent of the Cameroonian population lived below the income poverty line of USD 1.90 per day.¹⁰

Cameroon currently hosts 415,186 refugees and asylum-seekers, with the vast majority coming from nearby Central African Republic and Nigeria. Many have fled to Cameroon to escape violence from Boko Haram in their home countries.¹¹ Boko Haram attacks have also displaced hundreds of thousands of people within Cameroon as well.¹²

Cameroon's population of approximately 27,744,989 people is comprised of over 275 ethnic groups. The groups are not equally represented in government and business, and minority groups, particularly the Baka and Mbororo, are often subjected to discrimination and harassment. The Baka are indigenous to the forested areas of the South and East, and the Mbororo are pastoralists who typically live in the North, East, Adamawa, and Northwest Regions.¹³

Cameroon's UN Human Development Index score for 2019 was 0.563, ranking it 150 out of 189 countries.¹⁴ Cameroon ranks ahead of three neighboring countries: Nigeria (158); Chad (187); and the Central African Republic (188).¹⁵

TIP Report Summary

US Department of State TIP Ranking: Tier 2 Watch List

According to the *Trafficking in Persons Report*, trafficking risk may be found among Cameroonian children in export supply chains in agriculture, including the cotton, tea, and cocoa sectors. Additionally, Cameroonian children are vulnerable to trafficking in sectors including artisanal gold mining, gravel, fishing, and construction.

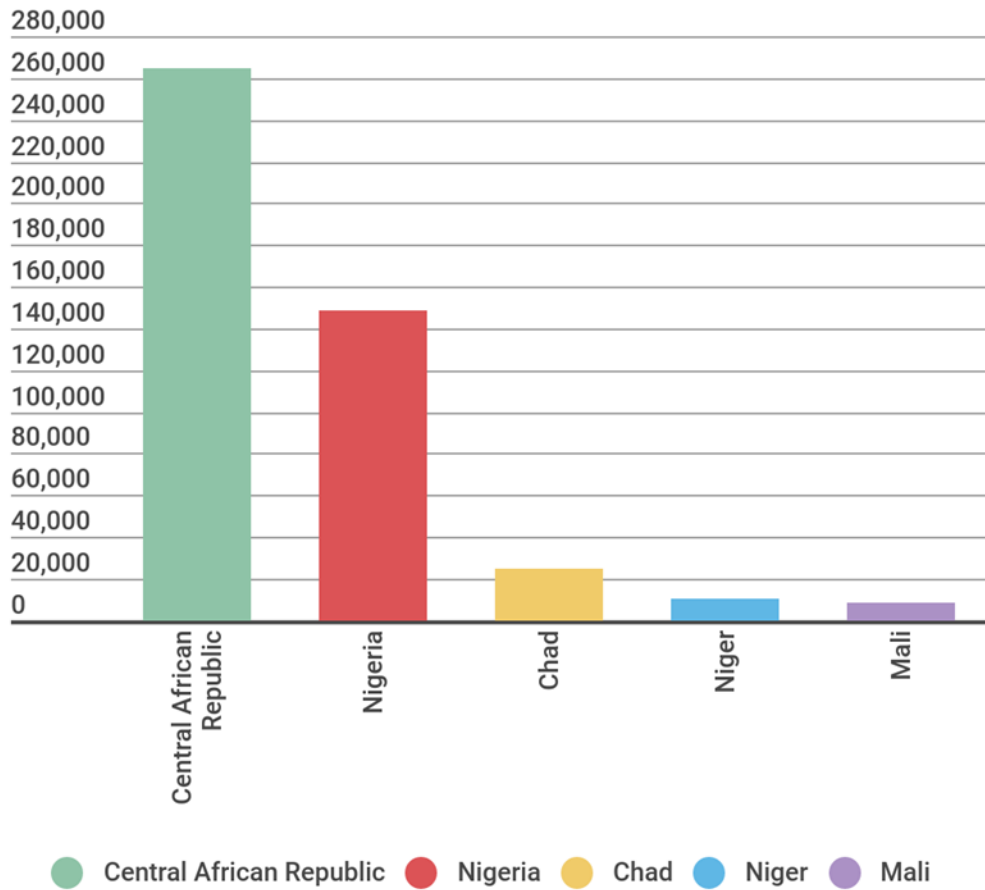
Read the full TIP Report at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf>

Migration

Cameroon has experienced longstanding negative net migration, but the rate of emigration has declined; in 2012, net immigration was estimated at -36,000, while in 2017, it was estimated at -24,000.¹⁶ International migration to Cameroon has risen slightly but is still relatively uncommon; international migrants accounted for 2.0 percent of the country's population in 2019.¹⁷ The largest source country for migrants in 2019 was the Central African Republic, followed by Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Mali.¹⁸ There were an estimated 1.37 million persons of concern in Cameroon in 2019. Internally displaced persons accounted for 69.5 percent of all persons of concern, and refugees comprised another 29.7 percent.¹⁹



Migrants to Cameroon

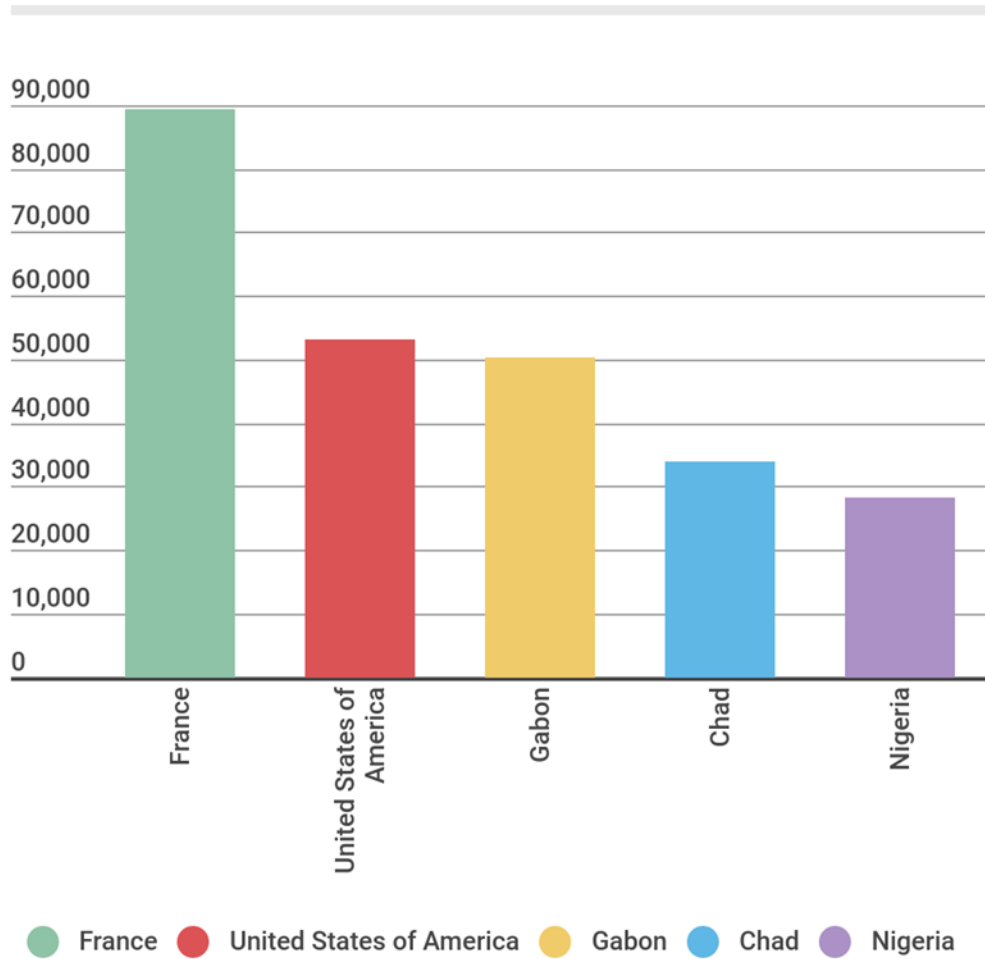


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The top destination countries for migrants from Cameroon include France, the United States of America, Gabon, Chad, and Nigeria.²¹



Migrants from Cameroon



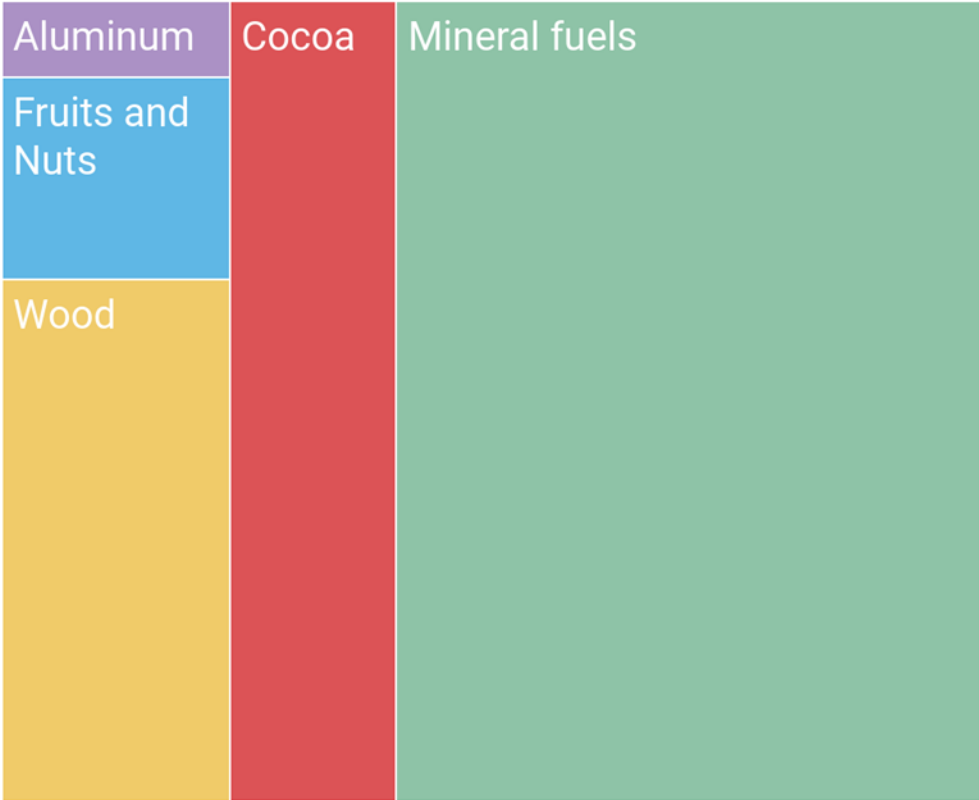
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Exports and Trade

Cameroon's top exports in 2019 were mineral fuels, cocoa, wood, fruits and nuts, and aluminum.²³



Top Commodity Exports (USD/Thousands)

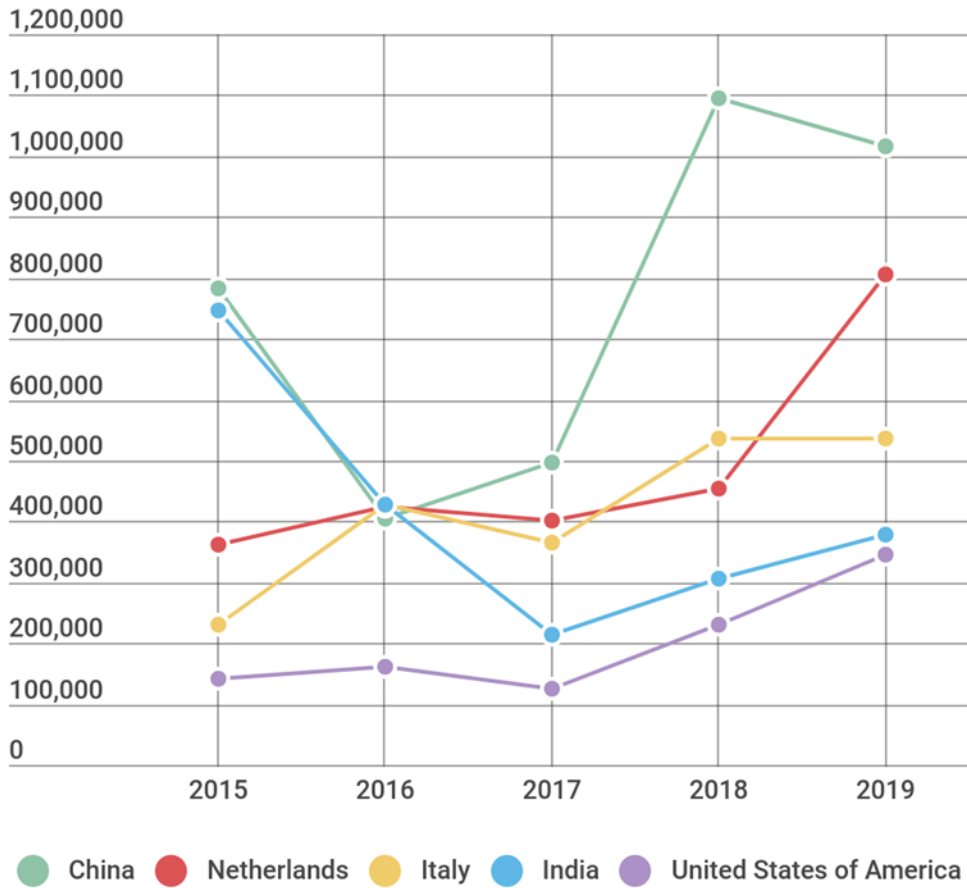


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The top importers of goods from Cameroon in 2019 were China, the Netherlands, Italy, India, and the United States of America.²⁵



Cameroon Export Partners (USD/Thousands)



TIP Risk Factors Analysis

Legal/Policy Risk Factors

Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers' Rights

Freedom of Association

Cameroonian law provides for limited freedom of association. Rights to form and join unions, legally strike, and collectively bargain are provided, but they are subject to statutory limitations and other substantial restrictions. The ability to freely associate may be further limited by unclear, delayed, and unevenly enforced conditions for operating as a legal, government-recognized organization. Notably, collective bargaining rights do not apply to the informal sector. This includes agriculture, where most of the country's workforce is employed.²⁷

In 2019, a union of dockworkers engaged in a peaceful strike for improved working conditions. Government officials arrested several union leaders and threatened to fire all participating workers.²⁸

The ITUC ranked Cameroon as a 4 out of 5 in its 2019 Annual Global Rights Index, indicating that Cameroon is the site of "systemic violation of rights."²⁹

Working Conditions

The minimum wage for all sectors has been set at CFA 36,270, which is above the World Bank's international poverty line. However, the U.S. Department of State reports that the minimum wage is not enforced.³⁰ The legal workweek in the formal sector is 40 hours per week, while in agricultural and related sectors, it is set at 48 hours per week. There are also exceptions for certain formal sectors, such as a limit of 54 hours per week for household and restaurant staff. Workers must receive at least one day of rest per week. They may work overtime hours beyond these weekly limits. The law provides health and safety standards and requires all establishments to provide health and medical services for their employees. However, these standards are not enforced within the informal sector.³¹

Discrimination

The constitution affirms that all individuals have the right and the obligation to work, but it does not prohibit specific types of discrimination. The U.S. Department of State has reported that individuals experience employment-related discrimination based on their gender, ethnicity, HIV status, disability, and sexual orientation. Legal requirements have been difficult to enforce because the majority of work takes place in the informal sector.³²



Forced Labor

Several laws prohibit forced labor in the country including sections of the Law Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery, the Penal Code, and the Labor Code.³³ Cameroon's government has made increased efforts to eliminate human trafficking in recent years. However, the government has failed to disseminate information on key anti-trafficking procedures and has yet to pass drafted anti-trafficking legislation.³⁴

Child Labor

The law sets the minimum working age at 14 and requires that children between ages 14 and 18 receive skills training from their employers. Children under 18 are also prohibited from performing hazardous work, working at night, or working for more than eight hours per day. Education is only compulsory until age 12, so children under 14 who are not in school are often recruited for child labor. Many children perform hazardous work in the mining, agriculture, and fishing sectors, while others are forced to work as child soldiers.³⁵

Civil Society Organizations

The U.S. Department of State has reported that human rights groups operate in the country, but are obstructed by uncooperative, critical, and hostile officials within the government. Human rights activists have received anonymous threats, and there have been several reports of intimidation and attacks on individual human rights activists. The government did not conduct investigations or other activities to halt these incidents.³⁶

Immigration Policies Limiting the Employment Options or Movement of Migrants

Foreign nationals are automatically issued work permits if they are hired to work for a company under the industrial free zone (IFZ) regime; however, foreign nationals may not exceed 20 percent of the company's total workforce if the company has operated under the IFZ regime for five years.³⁷



Ratification of ILO Conventions Related to Human Trafficking or Rights of Workers and Migrants

Conventions	Status
ILO 29 Forced Labor	In force
ILO 87 Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize	In force
ILO 98 Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining	In force
ILO 100 Equal Remuneration	In force
ILO 105 Abolition of Forced Labor	In force
ILO 111 Discrimination	In force
ILO 138 Minimum Age	In force
ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies	Not ratified
ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor	In force
ILO 97 Migration for Employment	In force

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Use of Export Processing Zones (EPZs)

Cameroon has an Industrial Free Zone (IFZ) regime which is applicable at any industrial park or ‘single-factory’ zone, and the U.S. Department of State reports that labor laws have been waived throughout the IFZs to attract or retain investment. The 1990 law establishing IFZs includes several noteworthy exceptions to the Labor Code regulations; in IFZs, the employer has the right to alter salaries according to worker productivity, freely negotiate work contracts, and automatically issue work permits for foreign workers.³⁹

Political Risk Factors

Political Instability or Conflict

Cameroon scored 97.0 in the 2019 Fragile States Index, placing it in the “Alert” category. Cameroon ranked 16 out of 178 countries on the index, where a lower rank indicates a greater degree of political instability.⁴⁰

Since the 2018 presidential election, the Cameroonian government has taken actions to eliminate political opposition. During 2019 protests, security forces arrested more than 500 members of the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC), a party that opposes the CPDM. The



government also banned a series of protests and meetings planned by the MRC. When members of that party held a demonstration in defiance of this policy, government security forces violently dispersed protesters, injuring at least ten.⁴¹

Level of Crime and Violence

The U.S. Department of State has rated the crime level in Cameroon as critical.⁴² The World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report gave Cameroon a score of 48.4 out of 100 for organized crime, where a lower score indicates a greater degree of organized crime. Cameroon ranked 108 out of 141 countries for that category.⁴³

The U.S. Department of State reports that Cameroon has faced violence from the Nigeria-based terrorist group Boko Haram. Towns in the Far North Region which border Nigeria are particularly dangerous. Armed banditry and other forms of crime also occur frequently in these regions.⁴⁴

State Persecution

Human Rights Watch reports that Cameroonian security forces responded violently to separatist groups in 2019, killing and torturing dozens of civilians with suspected ties to these groups. Security forces also burned down at least 70 homes in the north-west region of Cameroon. The government has failed to investigate these incidents and punish the officers involved.⁴⁵

Residents in Cameroon's Anglophone regions have been protesting their perceived marginalization by the central government since 2016, and security forces have killed over 3,000 civilians in Anglophone regions since this conflict began. This crisis has also displaced more than 500,000 people in those regions.⁴⁶

Level of Corruption

The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index scores Cameroon 25 out of 100, where a 0 signals "Highly Corrupt" and 100 signals "Very Clean." Cameroon is ranked 153 out of 198 countries on that index.⁴⁷ The U.S Department of State reports that corruption is a severe problem throughout the government and that bribes are frequently requested by government officials. Widespread corruption has also deterred potential foreign investors from doing business in Cameroon.⁴⁸

In recent years, a number of high-ranking Cameroonian government officials have been prosecuted for corruption. However, Freedom House suggests that most of these arrests are politically motivated. In 2019, for example, the government arrested a former defense minister on corruption charges. He had previously been considered a promising presidential contender.⁴⁹



Socio-Economic Risk Factors

Level of National Economic Development

In 2019, the UN Human Development Index ranked Cameroon 150 out of 189 countries, with a score of 0.563. This score represents significant recent improvement; Cameroon scored 0.471 on the index in 2010, and its score has improved in each of the years since.⁵⁰

Level and Extent of Poverty

Cameroon's score on the UN Human Development Index drops to 0.371 when adjusted for inequality, indicating a loss of 34.1 percent. According to the UN, 45.3 percent of the Cameroonian population currently lives in multidimensional poverty.⁵¹ The CIA reports that poverty is particularly prevalent among rural communities due to job shortages, lack of schooling, poor sanitation, and weak health care infrastructure.⁵²

Degree of Gender Inequality

The UNDP Gender Inequality Index gives Cameroon a score of 0.566 for 2018, ranking it 150 out of 189 countries.⁵³

The government has drafted a law on the prevention and suppression of gender-based discrimination, but other laws such as those regulating property ownership discriminate against women. Many women experience discrimination based on their gender, and rural and indigenous women are especially vulnerable to discrimination.⁵⁴ Many women in Cameroon are also victims of targeted violence; according to the U.S. Department of State, there were 785 recorded cases of gender-based violence in July of 2019 alone.⁵⁵

The UN reports that males in Cameroon attend school for 7.8 years on average, while females attend for 4.8 years on average.⁵⁶

Landlessness and Dispossession

OCHA estimated that there were approximately 680,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Cameroon at the end of 2019. Roughly 46 percent of these people were children.⁵⁷

Many people have fled to escape violent attacks from Boko Haram in northern Cameroon. The group carried out more than 100 attacks throughout that region in 2019.⁵⁸ Others have left their homes to avoid violence from armed separatist groups and violent counterattacks from government security forces. Those groups have been most active in the north-western and south-western regions.⁵⁹ More than 50,000 residents in these areas have fled to nearby Nigeria for refuge.⁶⁰



Environmental Factors

According to the CIA, current environmental issues in Cameroon include deforestation, erosion, desertification, poaching, and overfishing.⁶¹

To improve disaster-preparedness in the Far North region, the World Bank recently funded a Flood Emergency Project for Cameroon. The project aimed to rehabilitate infrastructure for flood protection and rice production, and it included repairs to the Maga dam.⁶²

Documented Trafficking Risk in Key Commodity Supply Chains

Cocoa

Cocoa Overview

Cameroon is currently Africa's third largest exporter of cocoa,⁶³ and the nation is home to approximately 600,000 cocoa farmers.⁶⁴ In the 2017-2018 growing season, Cameroon's cocoa production rose by 9.5 percent, with a total output of 253,510 tons.⁶⁵

Documented TIP Risk in Cocoa

According to the U.S. Department of State, cocoa in Cameroon is produced with child labor, including forced child labor in some cases.⁶⁶ Little updated information on the nature of the forced and child labor risk in the Cameroonian cocoa sector is available. A 2002 study found that children in the Cameroonian cocoa sector used dangerous tools and were exposed to pesticides, but the study did not find evidence of compensated/non-family child workers or of children who were recruited by intermediaries.⁶⁷

In 2018, a number of cocoa producing firms moved their workers out of southwestern Cameroon to avoid violent conflict between separatist groups and security forces. A number of individual cocoa farmers also abandoned their farms.⁶⁸

Forestry/Wood

Forestry/Wood Overview

Nearly 40 percent of Cameroonian land (18.8 million hectares) is forested. The country has one of the highest deforestation rates in the Congo basin, losing forest cover at a rate of one percent a year for the past 25 years. There are protected lands in Cameroon on which timber exploitation is prohibited, and they cover roughly 4.7 million hectares, or 10 percent of land area. The logging industry produced 3.2 million cubic meters of logs in 2015, with primary



timber products accounting for a total export value of USD 900.4 million.⁶⁹ The government has made an effort to increase the in-country share of the value chain by limiting exports of unprocessed wood.⁷⁰ In 2019, the top countries receiving Cameroonian timber exports were China, Belgium, Italy, and the United States of America.⁷¹

Documented TIP Risk in Forestry/Wood

Illegal logging reportedly deprives Cameroon of over USD 5 million annually in tax revenue.⁷² Reporting by Global Witness has documented how the use of “shadow permits” in Cameroon have allowed logging operations to function outside adequate government oversight.⁷³ This practice can deprive local communities of their livelihoods.⁷⁴

Oil and Gas

Oil and Gas Overview

The Cameroonian oil industry is experiencing a decades-long slump in oil production. Peak production occurred in 1988, when the country produced roughly 180,000 barrels of crude oil per day.⁷⁵ In 2018, production was estimated at 68,000 barrels per day.⁷⁶

Cameroon has a single oil refinery with a refining capacity of 42,000 barrels per day.⁷⁷ However, the refinery was shut down in 2019 after an explosion that destroyed multiple production units and burnt more than ten million liters of oil. Repairs to the facility are expected to cost more than USD 400 million, and the facility will reopen in 2021, at the earliest. Currently, Cameroon must import all of the refined oil it consumes.⁷⁸

Documented TIP Risk in Oil and Gas

The Chad-Cameroon pipeline has been documented to contribute to environmental degradation in both nations, with water supplies being contaminated, indigenous peoples being restricted from traditional hunting and agricultural lands, and farmers returning decreased yields and losing access to land.⁷⁹ There are anecdotal reports from local people that the pipeline has had leakage problems which have affected farmlands, runoff, and the water quality of rivers and streams in the vicinity of the infrastructure.⁸⁰ The pipeline’s endpoint in the town of Kribi in Cameroon is also the sight of oil related pollution which affects the fishing industry and access to clean water resources. There was a major spill associated with the endpoint terminal of the pipeline in 2013, with no repercussions for the companies operating the pipeline.⁸¹



Cotton

Cotton Overview

Cotton is the most important agricultural product for communities in the country's northern region, and it is estimated to be directly responsible for the employment of roughly 3 million people. The state-owned cotton processing company Sodecoton purchases 100 percent of Cameroonian cotton.⁸² Sodecoton processed 309,000 tons of cotton in the 2018-2019 season, a new record for the company. Cameroon has seen recent investment in its cotton sector; the Islamic Development Bank loaned Sodecoton roughly USD 110 million for use during the 2019-2020 season.⁸³

Documented TIP Risk in Cotton

According to the U.S. Department of State, Cameroonian children are exploited on cotton farms.⁸⁴ Many children employed in the Cameroonian cotton sector work on smallholder family farms that rely on family labor.⁸⁵ Child labor is reportedly most common during the labor-intensive harvest period. The presence of migrants has been noted anecdotally as well – specifically, casual migrant workers from Chad – but demographic information on the workforce is not available.⁸⁶

Tea

Tea Overview

The Cameroonian tea sector has experienced sales growth in recent years. Black tea is the primary variety grown, but companies have started producing a number of other tea flavors to appeal to wealthier consumers. Unilever has increased its presence in the Cameroonian tea sector, as have the brands Lipton, Twinings, and Victoria. The Cameroon Tea Estate, a local company, continues to play a dominant role in the sector.⁸⁷

Documented TIP Risk in Tea

According to the U.S. Department of State, Cameroonian children are exploited on tea plantations.⁸⁸



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