



COI QUERY

Country of Origin	CAMEROON
Main subject	<u>Forced recruitment</u>
Question(s)	1. <u>Forced recruitment by separatist groups, self-declared as Ambazonians, in the Anglophone regions</u>
Date of completion	29 June 2021
Query Code	Q17-2021
Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	N/A

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The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities. The answer was finalised on 29 June 2021. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.

COI QUERY RESPONSE - Cameroon

Forced recruitment

1. Forced recruitment by separatist groups, self-declared as Ambazonians, in the Anglophone regions

For the general security situation in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, it is possible to consult an [EASO COI Query Response](#), published on 14 June 2021.

Background information on the so-called Ambazonians

In October 2017, separatist groups in the Northwest and Southwest anglophone regions of Cameroon self-proclaimed independence from the Francophone Cameroon by calling the region as 'Ambazonia'. Media sources reported that, for decades, English-speaking Cameroonians have felt marginalised by the majority Francophone government.¹ The crisis started in 2016 'when lawyers and teachers went on strike over the use of French in courts and schools' and 'in October 2017, activists declared autonomy over the two English-speaking regions - a move rejected by Cameroon's President Paul Biya'.² Following this event, 'large-scale fighting broke out' between the government and the separatists. The separatist groups are called 'Ambazonians' or 'Amba-boys'. Some of these groups include the Ambazonia Defense Forces, the Tigers³, the Red Dragons⁴, the Seven Karta, the Ambazonia Restoration Forces (ARF).⁵ A source numbered these separatist groups at around 20 and named one group as AMF (Ambazonia Military Forces).⁶ The New Humanitarian described the secessionist groups as follows:

'The secessionist forces number anywhere between 2000 and 4000 armed fighters. They can be divided into two rival so-called Ambazonia interim governments (referred to as "IGs"). One is led by Sisiku, a former university administrator and engineer, who is currently facing a life sentence on terrorism and secession charges. The second is headed by Samuel Ikome Sako, a US-based former pastor. "IG Sisiku" is seen locally as the stronger of the two wings. [...]

Each IG is an umbrella group for a range of other factions. As Cameroon's war continues, a key question is how much control the diaspora-based leadership has over individual commanders and fighters on the ground.

The division has complicated humanitarian efforts, with aid workers not knowing which group they must seek permission from to access communities in need'.⁷

¹ DW, Who are Cameroon's self-named Ambazonia secessionists?, 30 September 2019, [url](#); BBC, Cameroon crisis: Ambazonia separatists get life sentences, 20 August 2019, [url](#)

² BBC, Cameroon crisis: Ambazonia separatists get life sentences, 20 August 2019, [url](#)

³ DW, Who are Cameroon's self-named Ambazonia secessionists?, 30 September 2019, [url](#)

⁴ BBC, Cameroon's Anglophone crisis: Red Dragons and Tigers - the rebels fighting for independence, 4 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵ BBC, Cameroon's Anglophone crisis: Red Dragons and Tigers - the rebels fighting for independence, 4 October 2018, [url](#)

⁶ FP, Cameroon's Separatist Movement Is Going International, 13 May 2019, [url](#)

⁷ New Humanitarian (The), Ahead of peace talks, a who's who of Cameroon's separatist movements, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

Forced recruitment

There were reports of child recruitment by separatist groups in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon in 2019⁸ and 2020⁹.

As of November 2019, the UN Security Council report on the situation in Central Africa stated that their 'concerns related to the protection of teenage boys and young men persisted, including with regard to killings, kidnappings, arbitrary detention and forced recruitment'.¹⁰ A 2019 BBC article reported that orphaned children joined the armed groups as 'they blame government troops for the deaths of their parents and have vowed to take revenge'.¹¹

The USDOS report on Human Rights Practices covering the year 2020, noted that there were reports about Anglophone separatists using children as fighters in the Southwest and Northwest regions of the country.¹² UNICEF's humanitarian report covering the period between 1-30 April 2020, noted that because of the Lake Chad Basin Crisis, children faced a 'potential recruitment into armed groups'.¹³ Reporting information gathered from UNHCR, in December 2020 UNICEF stated that 'in the Far North, isolated communities are exposed to daily killings, abductions and looting by armed groups and 150,000 children are displaced, increasing the risk of abduction and recruitment'.¹⁴ According to UNICEF's spokesperson, when children are out of school, they face a higher risk of recruitment by armed groups' whereas he called the situation (of the recruitment of children) as 'an entire generation at risk'.¹⁵

The 2021 Human Rights Watch report for Cameroon (covering 2020), recorded an increase in child recruitment number.¹⁶ OCHA stated that 'incident trends and increase of family separations in 2020 show an increase of child protection incidents with major concerns of child recruitment and use of children and youth by non-State armed groups (NSAGs)'.¹⁷ The same report described a forced recruitment as a 'phenomenon which is difficult to measure'.¹⁸

OCHA noted that the abduction and recruitment of children by Non-State Armed Actors represents a critical problem in the Northeast, Southwest and Far North regions of Cameroon, adding that mainly men and boys are at risk of recruitment into armed groups.¹⁹ The same source also reported cases of girls being forced recruited by armed groups, explaining that girls who are recruited may become fighters, sexual slaves known as 'bushwives', and messengers.²⁰ An analysis by Foreign Policy observed that separatist groups are gaining support and recruitment by the Cameroonian diaspora (mainly from Nigeria). Foreign Policy, explained how separatist group and especially the AMF recruits displaced people from diaspora:

'With many displaced people lacking documentation and out of the reach of aid organizations, the hardships of life in the bush have made English-speaking Cameroonians increasingly attuned to the separatist movements' recruiting efforts. With official estimates

⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General, The situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, 29 November 2019, [url](#), p.5; BBC, Cameroon's conflict keeps schools shut, 3 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹ USDOS, 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 30 March 2021, [url](#), pp.18-19; HRW, Cameroon, Events of 2020, 13 January 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021, Cameroon, 7 April 2021, [url](#), p.54

¹⁰ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General, The situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, 29 November 2019, [url](#), p.5

¹¹ BBC, Cameroon's conflict keeps schools shut, 3 September 2019, [url](#)

¹² USDOS, 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Cameroon, 30 March 2021, [url](#), pp.18-19

¹³ UNICEF, Cameroon, Humanitarian Situation Report No.04, Reporting Period 01-30 April 2020, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p.2

¹⁴ UNICEF, Humanitarian Action for Children 2021- Cameroon, 14 December 2020, [url](#), pp.2

¹⁵ UN News, Over 80 per cent of schools in anglophone Cameroon shut down, as conflict worsens, 21 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶ HRW, Cameroon, Events of 2020, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021, Cameroon, 7 April 2021, [url](#), p. 50

¹⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021, Cameroon, 7 April 2021, [url](#), p.54

¹⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020, Cameroon, 23 June 2020, [url](#), p.19

²⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020, Cameroon, 23 June 2020, [url](#), p.42

that 530,000 people are currently internally displaced, armed groups fighting for the creation of a new independent state of Ambazonia are unlikely to run out of new recruits anytime soon.²¹

International Crisis Group also reported information regarding recruitment from diaspora and reports that the militias group recruit 'mainly from the Anglophone community'.²²

²¹ FP, Cameroon's Separatist Movement Is Going International, 13 May 2019, [url](#)

²² International Crisis Group, Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How to Get to Talks?, 2 May 2019, [url](#)

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