



COI QUERY

Country of Origin	CAMEROON
Title	Women who have undergone abortion: legislation, treatment by the state and by society, particularly in Yaoundé
Reference period	January 2021 – 29 November 2023
Topic(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Legislation2. Treatment by the State3. Societal attitudes
Date of completion	1 December 2023
Query Code	Q66-2023
Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	N/A

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Cameroon

Women who have undergone abortion: legislation, treatment by the state and by society, particularly in Yaoundé

1. Legislation

In Cameroon, according to Section 337 (1) of the Penal Code, ‘any woman procuring or consenting to her own abortion’ is punished with 15 days to one year imprisonment, or a fine ranging from 5 000 to 200 000 FCFA (8 to 305 EUR) or with both the fine and the imprisonment.¹ The Penal Code also indicates in Section 337 (2) that ‘[w]however procures the abortion of a woman, notwithstanding her consent, shall be punished with imprisonment for from 1 (one) to 5 (five) years and with fine of from CFAF 100 000 (one hundred thousand) to CFAF 2 000 000 (two million) [152 to 3 050 EUR].²

Section 339 includes two provisions where abortion is not penalised. The law states, in Section 339 (1), that abortions are allowed if they are ‘performed by a qualified person and proved necessary for the saving of the mother from grave danger to her health’. In Section 339 (2) it is stated that ‘In case of pregnancy resulting from rape, abortion by a qualified medical practitioner after certificate by the prosecution of a good case shall constitute no offense’.³

2. Treatment by the state

No information specifically for Yaoundé on the treatment by the state of women who have undergone abortion could be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints. However, the following information may be relevant.

The USDOS report on human rights practices in Cameroon covering 2022 indicated that women ‘had access to emergency care, including services for the management of complications arising from abortion regardless of whether abortion was legally permitted.’⁴ Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints.

Sources reported on the administrative procedure to authorise the abortion in case of rape or if the pregnancy endangers the woman’s life. A Cameroonian barrister, in an article by an online news platform⁵, explained that ‘legal abortion is complicated, long and cumbersome as

¹ Cameroon, Law 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 relating to the Penal Code, 2016, [url](#)

² Cameroon, Law 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 relating to the Penal Code, 2016, [url](#)

³ Cameroon, Law 2016/007 of 12 July 2016 relating to the Penal Code, 2016, [url](#)

⁴ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 37

⁵ FactFinder is an online news platform that publish general news. It is part of Yeewong Media Group. Source: factFinder, Home, n.d., [url](#)



the court needs to establish that a survivor was raped, and a court judgment delivered to attest rape. It is the judgment which authorizes the medical professional to carry out an abortion'. The same source specified that this legal procedure could take between three and six months.⁶ According to the Secretary General of the Society of Gynecologists of Cameroon (SOGOC), the application of the law on abortion in case of rape is challenging, as the procedure to determine whether someone has been raped is not based on a medical diagnosis but on a judicial decision. The lengthy legal procedures often result in delays, and 'sometimes women die or give birth while the procedure is still in court'.⁷ In a blog addressing violence against women in Cameroon, an international law expert observed that the legal provisions for conducting abortions involve 'many medical and administrative hurdles and fail to consider women's varied circumstances and inequalities'.⁸

Regarding prosecution by the state for illegal abortion, in an interview with the newspaper HumAngle⁹, a woman who had an abortion in a private clinic said that it was likely that she would have been prosecuted if she had gone to a public hospital.¹⁰ Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints.

3. Societal attitudes

No information specifically for Yaoundé on the treatment by society of women who have undergone abortion could be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints. However, the following information may be relevant.

According to Vision in Action Cameroon¹¹, high levels of stigma and discrimination against those who seek abortion services, 'restrictive' laws, and lack of access to health facilities lead women 'to self-managed abortion'.¹²

In an article published by the Al Jazeera Journalism Review¹³, a journalist explained that the issue of unsafe abortion is underreported because abortion is a taboo in Cameroon and 'It may be a no-go zone in daily conversations'.¹⁴ On the same issue, a gender activist shared her

⁶ FactFider, Safe Abortion Chained in Cameroon, 28 September 2021, [url](#)

⁷ HumAngle, Doctors in Cameroon Want Law on Abortion Changed, 9 May 2023, [url](#)

⁸ Moussi C. A., Violence against women in Cameroon: The Maputo protocol and Cameroon's human rights obligations, SVRI [Blog], 26 June 2023, [url](#)

⁹ HumAngle is a media platform documenting African conflicts, humanitarian and development issues. Source: HumAngle, About us, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰ HumAngle, Doctors in Cameroon Want Law on Abortion Changed, 9 May 2023, [url](#)

¹¹ Vision in Action Cameroon is a non- profit organisation supporting adolescent girls and young women through advocacy, creative activism, research, and development. Source: Vision in Action Cameroon, About us, n.d., [url](#)

¹² Vision in Action Cameroon, A summary report on the knowledge and practice of friendly pharmacies and drug stores on the WHO protocol on self-manage abortion with pills in Buea, Southwest Region of Cameroon, June 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹³ Aljazeera Media Institute is a knowledge and training centre covering various disciplines in the communication field. Source: Aljazeera Media Institute, About us, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴ Aljazeera Media Institute, 'If women are dying as a result of it, then I should report about it' - telling the untold stories of Cameroon, 10 March 2022, [url](#)



experience explaining the following: ‘25 years after I had a crude abortion at the backside of a drugstore, many in Cameroon are still going through that. The silence or pretence on this crucial issue by parents, some health practitioners, as well as policy and lawmakers, is appalling.’¹⁵

Similarly, a scientific study describing the morbidity and mortality linked to unsafe abortion and the difficulties in accessing safe abortions in Cameroon explained that most abortions took place in secret. According to the source, the societal stigma attached to abortion, at various levels, resulted in the underreporting of unsafe procedures and a reluctance to support safe abortion services. This stigma affected not only individuals but also healthcare providers, leading to the concealment or misreporting of legal abortions due to fear and legal constraints. As a consequence, there was a ‘deep reluctance’ to advocate for improved access to safe abortion services.¹⁶ A news article reporting on a women campaign for safe abortions in Cameroon mentioned that community engagement on matters related to abortion continued to be limited, due to socio-cultural barriers, legal constraints, and political and legislative hurdles, creating challenges in the effective implementation of advocacy efforts.¹⁷

A research article on the effect of the Anglophone crisis on youth sexual and reproductive health in the Northwest region of Cameroon reported that pressured by social norms, pregnant girls were either influenced to have the baby or forced to terminate the pregnancy. Consequences included cases of death during childbirth, unsafe abortion, or the socially derived shame and burden of mothering out of wedlock in a region of crisis, leading to emotional and mental distress.¹⁸ The International Labour Association (ILA)¹⁹ in an article on the violation of women's rights in Cameroon, noted that the challenges arising from unlawful abortions remain significant, particularly for adolescents and married women whose husbands ‘refuse to use contraceptives’. Most traditional beliefs in Cameroon emphasise the sanctity and preciousness of life, frequently leading to very significant mental distress experienced by adolescents who undergo illegal abortions, with enduring impacts on their well-being.²⁰

¹⁵ HumAngle, Doctors in Cameroon Want Law on Abortion Changed, 9 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶ Fouelifack F.Y. et al., Morbi-Mortality Linked to Unsafe Abortions—Difficulties in Accessing Safe Abortions in Cameroon, February 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷ Le Jour, Santé de reproduction: des femmes militent pour les avortements sécurisés, 3 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸ Fonkwo J. et al., The effect of the anglophone crisis on youth sexual and reproductive health in the Northwest region of Cameroon: a qualitative study, 16 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁹ The ILA is an NGO working to support youth's personal and social development. Source: ILA, About us, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰ ILA, In the Heart Of Africa: The Violation Of Women Rights In Cameroon And Its Impacts On Modern Society, 21 October 2021, [url](#)



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