



KEY FIGURES

700,000

CHILDREN AFFECTED BY SCHOOL CLOSURES

Less than 30%

OF SCHOOLS ARE OPERATIONAL IN THE NWSW REGIONS

3 million

PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THE ANGLOPHONE CRISIS

+700,000

PEOPLE ARE INTERNALLY DISPLACED AS A RESULT OF THE ANGLOPHONE CRISIS (MOST OF WHOM ARE IN THE NWSW, WEST, AND LITTORAL REGIONS, BUT ALSO IN THE CENTRE AND ADAMAWA REGIONS)

* This was the latest data available before publication.

CRISIS OVERVIEW



700,000 children have been affected by school closures in Cameroon's Northwest (NW) and Southwest (SW) regions (referred to from now on as the NWSW regions), as a result of the Anglophone crisis that began in 2016 (key informant interview 16/11/2020; OCHA 31/05/2019). Some separatist armed groups are protesting against the Government of Cameroon's (GoC) education system by forcing schools to close and attacking students, teachers, and education facilities. In 2017, the separatists imposed a boycott on formal education that uses the GoC's curriculum, and most schools in the NWSW regions are closed for the fourth consecutive year (IFRI 06/2020; ICG 02/08/2017; BBC 02/09/2019; The Guardian 03/09/2019; AI 12/06/2018; key informant interview 03/02/2021).

Education is a key component of the Anglophone crisis: on the one hand it has been significantly affected by the crisis; on the other hand, strikes related to education issues have been a driver of the conflict. Since the independence of Cameroon in 1961, the government's focus on the Francophone regions over the Anglophone ones has translated into the perceived marginalisation of the NWSW regions, gaps in governance, and dual systems, including education. Because of a lack of harmonisation in the education system, weak nationwide promotion of bilingualism, and undiversified allocation of resources, children and adults have started experiencing increased constraints to studying under the English education system in the NWSW regions, contributing to the current crisis. The armed groups' boycott of formal education in the NWSW regions has prevented children from attending school and has led to a learning impasse (IFRI 06/2020; ICG 02/08/2017; OCHA 31/10/2020; DW 06/11/2020).

Children and teachers have been threatened, kidnapped, harassed, and killed for going to school. This violence, stress, and fear can cause both visible and invisible health and mental health effects in the long and short term (Protection Cluster 04/2019; Cameroon Education Cluster 04/09/2020).

Children affected by the Anglophone crisis face an increased risk of child recruitment, gender-based violence (GBV), child abuse, and child labour. Some parents rely on child labour to help support their families, including sending their children to work as domestic workers, to work on farms, harvest bitter leaf, beg, and – for adolescent girls – engage in survival sex work (Protection Cluster 04/2019; DRC 11/2020; OCHA 06/2020).

Some community members, including retired teachers and members of churches, have discreetly offered non-formal education, though this is limited (IFRI 06/2020).

Prolonged school closures will worsen the loss of human capital and economic opportunities in the long term (OCHA 24/07/2020).

The most pressing concerns are lack of safe and secure learning environments, lack of trained and skilled teachers (including teachers trained in basic skills in psychological support services), and lack of teaching and learning materials (UNICEF Cameroon accessed 01/02/2021).

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

Some separatists claim that a political agreement is required between the separatists and the GoC to end the Anglophone and education crises. There is also the increasing challenge of finding common political agendas and ideologies among the armed groups. Children are only likely to gain full and safe access to education after a political solution is achieved.

A continued boycott on education is likely to lead to more children being forced out of school and facing long-term future challenges in securing livelihoods that provide them with adequate income to meet their needs.

In the long term, the lack of education is likely to have a negative impact on the economic development of the NWSW regions and the whole of Cameroon. The lack of education may also perpetuate inequalities and poverty – because of the limited access to job opportunities – leading to lower earnings (Theirworld 20/02/2017; UN 08/2020; OECD 29/05/2018; World Bank 2018).

Exposure to violence and abuse in and outside of school could lead to long-term impacts on mental wellbeing, including symptoms of trauma (Protection Cluster 04/2019). The consequences of lower educational levels in the NWSW regions will take generations to resolve (OCHA 06/2020).

Information on the number of school-aged children living in the NWSW regions is needed to inform the scale of the education crisis in these regions.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This report consolidates information from a wide range of available secondary data sources on the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon, including UN agencies, NGOs, the World Bank, media, and key informant interviews conducted in November 2020 and February 2021. Prior to publication, the report was shared with external partners working in Cameroon to cross-check information. The main challenge was a lack of precise and updated information on the number of children affected by the crisis and in need of education, as well as information related to the protection issues that they face.

¹ Separatists are organised around two main political bodies: the Interim Government of the Federal Republic of Ambazonia and the Ambazonia Governing Council. Both have armed wings. Other, smaller separatist organisations exist. The separatist movement and ideologies are varied. Separatist organisations and armed groups do not always share the same political demands and operational strategies. While a significant portion of the Anglophone population is believed to favour federalism, support for the armed struggle has decreased (ICG 02/05/2019).

CURRENT SITUATION

Demographic profile

The Anglophone population of Cameroon is about 5 million, equivalent to 20% of the country's total population of 24 million. Almost all Anglophones reside in the NWSW regions (Willis et al. 30/10/2019; ICG 02/08/2017; ID4D 15/07/2020).

Almost half of Cameroon's population is under the age of 18, and 42% of the population are children under the age of 14 (CIA 16/02/2021; OCHA 01/2019). The number of children residing in the NWSW regions is unknown.

Literacy levels: 77% of people in Cameroon aged 15 and older are literate (83% of men and 72% of women) (CIA 16/02/2021; UNDP accessed 16/12/2020).

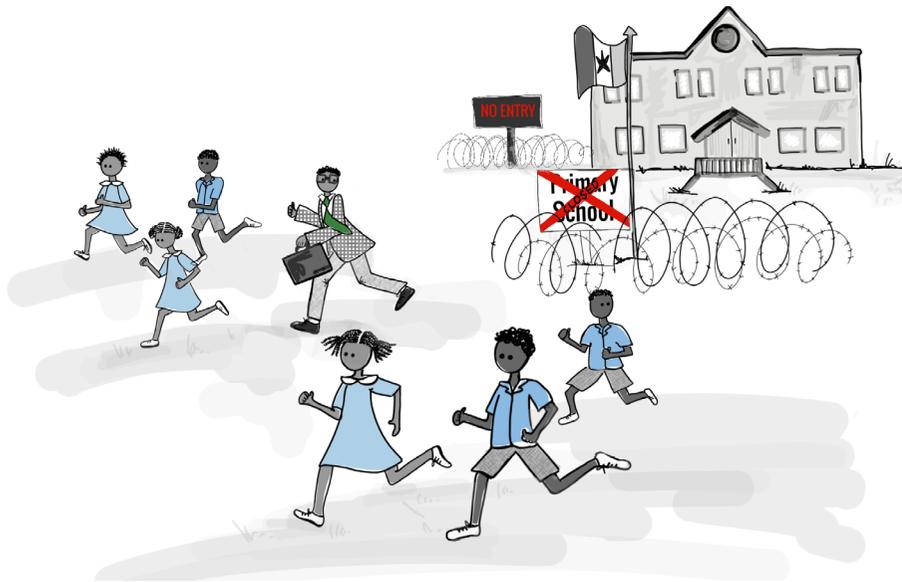
Anglophone crisis

The majority of Cameroon has its roots in Francophone traditions and the Francophone judicial system, while the minority NWSW regions have roots in Anglophone traditions and judicial system and have long viewed the Francophone influence as a threat to their way of life (IPSS 03/2020; The Conversation 15/10/2017). The current 'Anglophone crisis' began in 2016, when strikes and protests were organised in the English-speaking NWSW regions denouncing the dominance of the French language and traditions in the education and judicial systems. The situation escalated into armed conflict between a separatist¹ independence movement and the GoC, driven by political and cultural ideologies (IPSS 03/2020). Violent campaigns instigated by the separatists and the Cameroonian military forces in the NWSW regions have led to major humanitarian needs, especially food and healthcare, and affected at least 3 million people (OCHA 26/01/2021). 705,800 people are internally displaced, 360,500 are returnees, and 61,300 Cameroonian refugees are hosted in Nigeria (OCHA accessed 30/12/2020; OCHA 02/02/2021). Over 3,000 people are estimated to have been killed since the beginning of the conflict (The New Humanitarian 08/07/2020).

Attacks on education

Since 2016, schools have been closed in the NWSW regions as part of the boycott against education, and most of them cannot reopen because of threats of violent attacks. Separatist armed groups and unknown assailants have damaged, destroyed, or burnt down at least 74 schools in the NWSW regions since the beginning of the conflict in June 2019 (UN News 21/06/2019; HRW 20/02/2019; SODEI 08/02/2021). Between January–September 2020 in Nchum and Bafut (in the Mezam division, NW region), at least two incidents involved military

occupation and the alleged burning and damaging of two non-operational primary school buildings. The schools were non-operational because of COVID-19 school closures and regional school boycotts (OCHA 02/11/2020).



OCHA reports that between 1 October–10 December 2020, there were 35 attacks on education facilities in the NWSW regions (OCHA 02/02/2021).

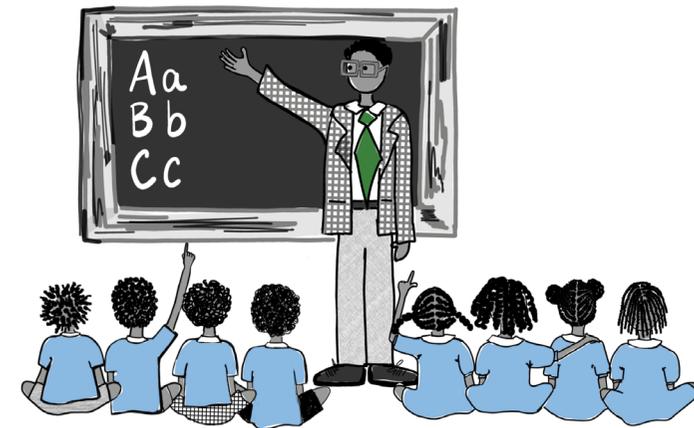
Children began the 2020–2021 school year in October 2020 with in-person classes, but attacks on schools have continued. During the first week of the new school year and prior to the 35 attacks, for the first time since the beginning of the conflict two key separatist leaders called for schools to be reopened in the NWSW regions. They stressed that school boycotts were no longer a weapon against the GoC (Atlantic Chronicles 03/12/2020).

By early November, however, at least six students and 11 teachers had been kidnapped, and school premises set on fire (OCHA 30/11/2020). Students and education staff reported harassment and intimidation in various schools across Kumbo (Bui division in NW), Fundong (Boyo division in NW), and Limbe (Fako division in SW). Threats and attacks were also reported throughout November, including the killing of two teachers and the kidnapping of a third former teacher (UNICEF 06/11/2020; Cameroon Education Cluster 04/09/2020; OCHA 30/11/2020; key informant interview 05/02/2021). Three notable attacks took place on 23 and 24 October and in November which led to the abduction, injury, and death of children and teachers across the NWSW regions (DW 06/11/2020; GCR2P 15/01/2021; The Africa Report 25/10/2020; UNICEF 06/11/2020; HRW 02/11/2020; UN News 26/10/2020). Thousands of students have not returned to school since the attacks in late October, with nervous parents increasingly reluctant to send their children to school as they fear for their safety (OCHA 31/10/2020; DW 06/12/2020).

The GoC controls less than half of the territories in the NWSW regions, while the separatist armed groups – who have better control of the NW region – are predominant in rural areas. The Education Cluster reports that formal education is considered safe only in certain parts of main urban centres that remain predominately under government control (IFRI 06/2020; Cameroon Education Cluster 04/09/2020).

CURRENT EDUCATION NEEDS

Access to school and education



Since 2016, access to schools and education in the NWSW regions has been challenging, amid the violence instigated by both separatists and the Cameroonian military forces against each other and against civilians. The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the situation, forcing Cameroon to shut schools temporarily from March–October 2020 – with an exception for students taking their final year exams in June, who were allowed to enter school facilities.

The 2020–2021 school year for primary and secondary students began in-person on 5 October amid the easing of COVID-19 restrictions (OCHA 15/09/2020). The 2019–2020 academic year began on 2 September 2019, and was expected to end on 31 July (CRTV 22/07/2019).

In the first month of the 2020–2021 new school year, less than 30% of schools in the NWSW regions were operational. In January 2021, 40% of primary school students in the SW region were attending school – compared to 42% in October 2020 – while secondary school enrolment dropped from 72% to 57% (by 13,000 students) between October 2020–January 2021 in the SW region. In the NW region, primary school student attendance increased from 79% to 83% from October 2020–January 2021 (key informant interview 05/02/2021).

Despite the lack of operational schools at the beginning of the new academic year and the lack of teachers in classrooms, a higher concentration of children receive



education in urban centres. Urban centres controlled by the GoC military are considered to be safe, so many children either travel or permanently move to urban areas where they can access safe education (OCHA 31/10/2020; key informant interview 03/02/2021). OCHA reports that schools in urban centres in the NWSW regions have become overcrowded however, as only some schools are functional and students from other areas are attending the few schools that are operating (OCHA 02/02/2021).

	NUMBER OF OPERATIONAL SCHOOLS OCTOBER–NOVEMBER 2020	NUMBER OF EXISTING SCHOOLS	% OF OPERATIONAL SCHOOLS
Primary schools in NW	730	3,127	23%
Secondary schools in NW	143	558	26%
Total schools in NW region	873	3,685	24%
Primary schools in SW	837	2,185	38%
Secondary schools in SW	89	352	25%
Total schools in SW region	926	2,537	37%
Total schools in NWSW regions	1,799	6,222	29%

Table 1: Operational schools in the NWSW regions (OCHA 02/02/2021; OCHA 31/10/2020).²

Because of the widespread school closures and attacks on school buildings, teachers, and students, schools in the NWSW regions lack basic learning and teaching materials, including textbooks, desks, and writing materials. This is coupled with a disparity in resources between different education programmes and between private and public education (Cameroon Education Cluster 04/09/2020; key informant interview 03/02/2021).

Most schools lack electricity, computers, and laptops, meaning that children are unable to learn skills that are critical in today's digital world. These digital skills, including information and communications technologies, could improve children's future access to a wider range of job opportunities.

² Please note that there may be discrepancies in the exact number of currently operational schools in the NWSW regions.

³ In 1884, the German government established a protectorate called Kameroun. It was split between France and Great Britain after the defeat of Germany in the First World War.

The number of teachers has diminished in the NWSW regions, as teachers fear reprisals from the separatists who oppose education and learning. Many teachers fled to other regions of the country or were forced to not teach. In the NW region, 33% of primary school teachers and 78% of secondary school teachers were not working during the period of October 2020–January 2021 (OCHA 31/10/2020; key informant interview 05/02/2021).

There is also a lack of qualified teachers, particularly in rural areas, as many Cameroonian teachers are undertrained. Research conducted in the NW region showed that many teachers have only one year of teacher training or none at all (*The Conversation* 18/09/2018). There is therefore a need to train educational staff.

Education needs influence other aspects of the lives of those affected by the Anglophone crisis, namely safety and security, health – including psychosocial support – and WASH. Children both in and out of school are vulnerable to violence and abuse that affect their health and mental wellbeing. Children and teachers are in need of safe spaces for learning and interaction. More protection-related training and plans, including evacuation, first aid, and emergency preparedness in case of armed attacks, are needed. Children affected by the conflict, including displaced children and children in host communities, need access to a secure educational environment and psychosocial support as well as protection from human rights violations and abuse. Equitable access to services and assistance should be guaranteed for everyone in need (key informant interview 03/02/2021).

Without functioning schools, children might not have access to secure learning environments that provide them not only with a space to learn but also protection, access to basic health services, and school meal programmes.



CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

History of conflict and relevant stakeholders

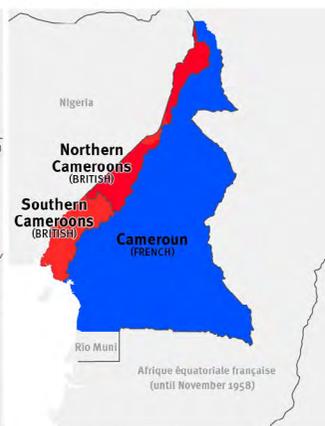
The origin of the Anglophone crisis is rooted in the colonial period (1919–1960/1961)³ and the process of unification and centralisation of Cameroon (1961–mid-1990s). The area now known as the NWSW regions was under British administrative control during the colonial period, while the rest of the country was administrated by France. This resulted not only in language differences but also in cultural and administrative differences, mainly related to the existence of two judicial and educational systems implemented in post-colonial Cameroon. Following the independence of the Francophone regions in 1960 and the independence of

the NWSW regions (formerly known as the Southern Cameroons) in 1961, a reunification took place in 1961, resulting in the establishment of a federal republic. Federalism has been suppressed since a referendum in 1972, which has further centralised the political system. The newly formed central government gave particular attention to the development of the Francophone regions and standardised the country's administrative structure. These factors led to the current economic, social, and political marginalisation of the NWSW regions (ICG 02/08/2017; ID4D 15/07/2020; SODEI 08/02/2021).

1901 – 1918
German Colony



1919 – 1960
British and French mandates



January 1960
French-administered Cameroon gains independence



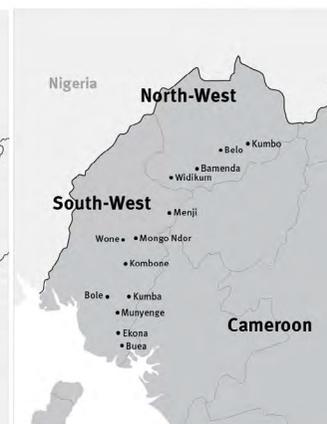
June 1961
British-administered Northern Cameroons joins Nigeria



October 1961
British-administered Southern Cameroons joins Cameroon



Detail:
North-West and South-West regions



Source: HRW 2018

The current crisis began in October 2016, when lawyers from the NWSW regions went on strike because of a lack of implementation of the (English) common law system in the two regions, a lack of translation of legal documents into English, and the continued appointment of French-speaking magistrates in the NWSW regions. This was followed by teachers going on strike to denounce the lack of English-speaking teachers and the failure of the GoC to respect the Anglo-Saxon model of regional school and university systems. Security forces reacted to mostly peaceful protests with force, resulting in injuries, arrests, and casualties (ICG 02/08/2017; Kouega 01/2018; AI 12/06/2018; HRW 2019; The Guardian 03/01/2018).

The GoC created a committee that was tasked with negotiating with the striking unions, but this had poor results – with a lack of trust between the two parties making negotiations difficult. In a climate of increasing violent repression by security forces, the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium – created by the unions – called for a two-day 'Operation Ghost Town' in the NWSW regions, meaning that all businesses and activities were to be halted, including school activities, and the entire population was instructed to stay at home. The GoC reacted by arresting prominent leaders of the movement and shutting down the internet in the NWSW regions. The crisis and the willingness of a large portion of the Anglophone population to get involved in strikes and boycotts reinforced their support of federalism and secessionism (ICG 02/08/2017; ACCORD 21/07/2017). One year after the start of the crisis, on 1 October 2017, secessionist militants symbolically proclaimed the independence of the NWSW regions, calling it Ambazonia. Manifestations surrounding this event were counteracted by security forces and the crisis escalated into a violent conflict between security forces and some of the separatist armed groups, impacting the civilian population (ICG 19/10/2017; ICG 26/04/2018; Kouega 01/2018). As the positions of separatist armed groups become more diversified, some have become more violent, pursuing the boycott of the GoC educational system and conducting attacks on schools. Despite some attempts to negotiate between the GoC and the separatist armed groups – including mediation by third parties – the crisis remains unresolved, and violence continues (The Africa Report 09/09/2020).

Education system in Cameroon

The educational system in the NWSW regions consists of two subsystems that are based on French and English education structures. These two education traditions help shape children's perception of themselves as Anglophones or Francophones. The education system in Cameroon is still centralised, meaning that the Ministry of Basic Education oversees and manages both subsystems (Ministry of Basic Education of Cameroon accessed 16/02/2021).

Primary education is compulsory in all regions of Cameroon. It begins at the age of six and lasts for six years. Secondary education is divided into two levels – lower secondary and upper secondary (high school). Lower secondary lasts for four years in the French system and for five in the Anglophone system. Upper secondary lasts for three years in the Francophone system and for two years in the Anglophone system. English is a compulsory school subject in the French system from the first year of primary school to the end of high school (upper

secondary). In the English system, French is compulsory from the first year of primary school to the end of lower secondary school.

Most schools based on the English system are located in the NWSW regions, while French schools are located mainly in the other eight regions that are predominantly French speaking (World Bank 30/04/2019).

The Anglophone crisis in the education sector

As the education system in the NWSW regions reflects the British and Anglophone system, it is meant to teach children technical skills that will help them access the English-speaking labour market. Education has not only been one of the sectors most affected by the Anglophone crisis, but the education system and discussions around it are also among the major drivers of the conflict (The Guardian 03/09/2019; IFRI 06/2020). A few months after the crisis began in October 2016, the GoC tried to set up certain measures in both the educational and judicial sectors – including hiring 1,000 bilingual teachers and creating a national commission on bilingualism and multiculturalism. For Anglophone militants these measures were not adequate however, and were not seen as addressing their political concerns related to a lack of political and administrative power (ICG 02/08/2017). Schools in the NWSW regions have been closed since the beginning of the crisis as part of the ‘Ghost Town’ operations and lockdown days periodically led by the separatists. The boycott is seen by the separatists as a means of pressuring the government, justified by their broad rejection of governmental institutions (IFRI 06/2020; SODEI 08/02/2021). Some schools have not reopened because of the threat of attacks from the violent separatists against both people and education facilities (The New Humanitarian 16/02/2021; OCHA 02/02/2021).

Bilingualism

The two official languages of Cameroon are English and French. The education policies agreed during the postcolonial unification of Cameroon implied that Cameroonians should learn and use both English and French. The majority of official documents are only published in French, however (Theirworld 20/02/2017; Takam, Fassé 21/03/2019). While bilingualism is officially promoted by the constitution, analysts have highlighted a policy of assimilation of the linguistic and cultural characteristics of English-speaking Cameroonians into the Francophone system. Public bilingual schools are rare, and bilingualism is neither encouraged nor implemented, which has been perceived as leading to the marginalisation of English-speaking people – who face decreased access to public jobs and challenges in managing administration with authorities (IFRI 06/2020).

HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES

Short-term consequences



The risks of violence against children, including sexual and gender-based violence, have increased in the NWSW regions as the conflict has escalated. Education in these regions is treacherous for children. Both children attending school and children out of school face security threats. Children attending school have an increased risk of experiencing attacks, harassment, kidnapping, or being killed, as they are not respecting the boycott of formal education. Children who are out of school face a different set of risks including sexual violence, child labour, child marriage, forced recruitment, and arbitrary detention and arrest. Protection is a priority need for children both in and out of school (Protection Cluster 04/2019; key informant interview 03/02/2021).

Impacts on children in schools

Teachers and students in the NWSW regions are constantly under threat of violence and attacks, which results in fear and which has consequences for the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children, educational staff, and their families. There have also been threats of violence online. For example, in September 2017, a picture was posted online labelling five identifiable children in a classroom as ‘betrayals’ and appealing to social media users to ‘stone them’ (Protection Cluster 04/2019).

Children suffering from mental distress sometimes adopt negative coping mechanisms, such as drug consumption, theft, and enrollment in armed groups (Protection Cluster 04/2019). Children affected by the conflict are therefore in need of mental health support.

Impacts on children out of school

Child recruitment: Child recruitment into armed groups in the NWSW regions has taken place in recent years. Once they are recruited, most children in armed groups do not have access to any form of education. Out-of-school children are more vulnerable to recruitment, particularly orphaned and separated children. Children are often recruited with false promises of education, security, and money (BBC 02/09/2019). Children in armed groups are often abused, exploited, and sometimes killed, and may be forced to take part in or observe atrocities (Cameroon Education Cluster 04/09/2020). Despite the lack of information on forced recruitment, it is known that some girls are also part of armed groups and have various roles, including as fighters, sexual slaves known as 'bushwives', and messengers (OCHA 03/2020; IFRI 06/2020).

GBV: Sexual exploitation and GBV targeting women, girls, and boys took place prior to the conflict but have increased since 2017 in the NWSW regions (Protection Cluster 04/2019; IASC 23/10/2019). GBV and abuse have been committed by all parties to the conflict (IFRI 06/2020; VoA 20/02/2019). The most recent data on GBV is from November and December 2020; 798 GBV incidents were reported in November 2020 with 61% of all survivors being children. 42% of the total cases consist of sexual violence. In the same month, an increase in GBV against children and adolescents was observed, including early pregnancies and forced and early marriages (OCHA 30/11/2020). In December 2020, 245 GBV incidents were reported, with children comprising 37% of all survivors. This number represents cases reported to OCHA's GBV partners while implementing activities, and does not represent all the GBV cases in the NWSW regions (OCHA 02/02/2021).

Pregnancy rates among teenagers have increased over the last years, and absences from school have been identified as the primary driver. As a result of early pregnancies, some girls resort to unsafe abortion practices (Protection Cluster 04/2019; UN Women 05/2019; IASC 17/10/2019; OCHA 03/2020).

Child abuse: While all children affected by the crisis are victims of insecurity and human rights violations – including trafficking, child labour, and child abuse both at home as well as in orphanages – out-of-school children in the NWSW regions face an increased risk. Without the 'safe space' that schools would normally provide, children are more likely to spend time on the streets,



where they are at risk of being abducted and trafficked. The abduction of children has increased since 2016 (Protection Cluster 04/2019; Cameroon Education Cluster 04/09/2020; OCHA 06/2020).

Children who are not in school face arbitrary arrests and detainment – they are assumed to be members of separatist armed groups by the security forces. This is a concern that is faced by children in the NW region in particular (key informant interview 03/02/2021).

Child labour: There is a direct link in Cameroon between access to education and child labour, and they mutually influence each other. In the NWSW regions, child labour is an immediate risk resulting from absences from school (Protection Cluster 04/2019; U.S Department of Labor 2015). According to the latest available data, 39% of children between five and 17 years old are involved in child labour in Cameroon (40% of Cameroonian boys and 38% of Cameroonian girls) (UNICEF 10/2019). Children and adolescents are mainly supporting their families by working as domestic workers or are involved in agricultural activities. Despite a lack of specific data for the NWSW regions, child labour has been reported. In these regions, girls separated from their families – sometimes as a result of displacement – are likely to work as salespeople, tailors, or domestic workers (IASC 17/10/2019). Children have an increased risk of adopting negative coping strategies to sustain their livelihoods, such as cross-border trade, kidnapping, theft, and prostitution (ID4D 15/07/2020).

Impacts on population movements

The violence has forced children and their families to flee their homes and become displaced. In October 2020 alone, more than 150 children and their families fled from lower Ndungated in Lebialem department in the SW region to Fongo Tongo and Dschang in the West region, in search of opportunities for the children to go to school safely (OCHA 31/10/2020).

Thousands of Anglophone families have resorted to sending their children to bilingual schools in Francophone areas (ICG 19/10/2017). In October 2019, 30,000 children were estimated to have integrated into primary schools in Littoral and West regions, overloading already stretched regional educational capacities (OCHA 06/2020). According to Street Child, over 100,000 Anglophone children are believed to live in the neighbouring Francophone regions. The majority do not speak French and lack civil documents. They are often unaccompanied and separated from their parents. Many rely on sex work to survive (Street Child 10/02/2020).

Long-term consequences

Increase in psychosocial needs

The pressure of the Anglophone crisis, long-term absences from school, and family economic pressures all have the potential to lead to extended and long-term psychosocial distress

and mental health issues. When children are exposed to severe and constant violence there can be several long-term consequences for their psychosocial development. Such experiences have the potential to result in long-term mental and physical health issues (War Child 04/04/2018). The conflict in the NWSW regions is a traumatic experience that children must cope with in the short term. An increase in drug abuse and suicide among adolescents has been reported (OCHA 06/2020). To avoid long-term impacts, psychosocial assistance for school-aged children and a safe and secure learning environment are needed (OCHA 06/2020; Protection Cluster 04/2019). OECD found that, in general, people with more years of education are more likely to have better health, healthy behaviours, and overall better wellbeing (OECD 2006). This may be because more years of education often lead to a wider variety of job opportunities and better income.

Increase in economic and social marginalisation

Children who join armed forces are unable to attend school, resulting in illiteracy, limiting their future job opportunities, and leaving them financially insecure (Blattman 2006; Cameroon Education Cluster 04/09/2020). If children fail to reintegrate economically and socially into their communities after leaving armed forces or groups, then the risk of re-recruitment is high, continuing the cycle of violence and poverty. The children's own families or communities may also reject children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, especially girls who have had babies with soldiers, leaving them marginalised and stigmatised.

Access to education is linked to advantageous economic gains, including higher lifetime earnings and more job prospects (World Bank 2018). Students who experience a significant decline in education are more likely to face lower lifetime productivity and earnings, as well as less job prospects. This could lead to the perpetuation of intergenerational poverty and inequality, especially for children who are already economically vulnerable. Students might fall behind in their learning because of prolonged school closures, leading to inequalities among peers at school and also later in life. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to the effects of school closures (UN 08/2020; OECD 29/05/2018). This could translate into challenges in productivity and growth for the whole of society (European Commission 30/09/2020). If children do not learn in their native language, this can also lead to exclusion from education, which in turn can cause delays in economic growth and opportunities (Theirworld 20/02/2017).

Children taught in the Anglophone system who then transition to the Francophone system through migration, displacement, or continuation of higher education studies – which are predominantly taught in French in Cameroon – often face language challenges. Learning in a different language can be time-consuming and affects children's academic performance because they have to study twice as much as their Francophone peers. Some students pay translators to translate their education materials in order to progress through their courses (Theirworld 20/02/2017; Gonondo, Djiraro Mangué 01/2016).

Increase in dropouts

Globally, research has shown that children who are out of school for longer periods are more likely to drop out, particularly those who are at critical transitions between educational levels, students who are older, and students whose families may be struggling with household financial issues and health shocks (UNICEF 15/09/2020; Save the Children 13/07/2020). Lost school time is correlated with lower test scores and weaker or fewer skills including reading, writing, and mathematics – skills that are critical to supporting students' future professional lives (World Bank 2018; European Commission 30/09/2020).

Humanitarian and operational constraints

Humanitarian access is limited in the NWSW regions because of violence and insecurity. Areas controlled by armed separatist groups are more isolated and harder to reach, further constraining the access of populations to basic services.

Road checkpoints mounted by both separatist armed groups and government security forces have resulted in kidnapping attempts and demands for payments, leading to insecurity and delays in humanitarian operations and activities. 'Lockdown' days promoted by some separatist groups have resulted in movement restrictions for both humanitarian organisations and people living in affected areas (OCHA 07/12/2020; OCHA 06/2020; ACAPS 12/2020).

The GoC is campaigning for formal education activities to be resumed, while some separatist groups continue to implement the boycott. This could lead to a different level of humanitarian access, as access to education activities and programmes depends on who is in control of the region (IFRI 06/2020; Cameroon Education Cluster 04/09/2020).

Limited partnerships between local authorities and humanitarian actors to work on education programmes hampers the operations of aid organisations. The targeting of humanitarian staff and health and education facilities further impacts access to people in need (OCHA 07/12/2020; OCHA 06/2020; ACAPS 12/2020).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

COVID-19

As at 16 February 2021, Cameroon had reported 31,394 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 474 deaths (WHO accessed 16/02/2021).

Schools were closed nationwide from March–October 2020 to help curb the transmission of the virus. In the current academic year – and despite efforts to reduce the number of students in each class – cases of COVID-19 in schools have been increasing in all ten regions of

Cameroon. In response, the disinfection of some schools in the Far North and NWSW regions has been planned or has taken place (OCHA 30/11/2020; key informant interview 03/02/2021).

The pandemic and the conflict forced an estimated 1 million children out of school in the NWSW regions in 2020, and directly impacted more than 575,000 school-aged children (Cameroon Education Cluster 04/2020).

COVID-19 has forced humanitarian assistance to be allocated towards pandemic relief efforts, placing education activities to one side (Cameroon Education Cluster 01/04/2020).

Multiple crises in Cameroon

Cameroon is facing multiple humanitarian crises, which limits the capacities of national and international stakeholders to address educational needs in the NWSW regions. As well as the Anglophone crisis and the COVID-19 outbreak, the Far North region has been affected by a surge of violence and insecurity related to the activities of Boko Haram. Adamawa, North, and East regions host almost 315,000 refugees from the Central African Republic, which puts pressure on already limited natural resources and basic social services (OCHA 06/2020; UNHCR 10/12/2020).

RESPONSE CAPACITY

Local and national response capacity

Local members of civil society are working to depoliticise education, by organising public demonstrations and campaigns and publicly calling for ceasefires. They face threats of violence, however. A limited number of initiatives have been organised by communities with the aim of creating clandestine classes (IFRI 06/2020; *The Guardian* 03/09/2019). The GoC advocates for school attendance and provides initiatives that aim to improve conditions for students and teachers, including encouraging the creation of militias to inform the security forces of the suspected movements of armed groups and ensuring transportation for education staff to schools (IFRI 06/2020; VoA 28/09/2020; VoA 11/10/2020; DW 06/11/2020).

International response capacity

In late 2020, the Education Cluster, in collaboration with other partners, started work on a harmonised advocacy plan to counter violent attacks that target education (OCHA 30/11/2020). According to OCHA, 16 operational partners – including INGOs, local NGOs, and UN agencies (UNICEF and UNESCO) – are implementing a total of 12 education projects in the NWSW regions. The highest number of projects are being implemented in Fako division, in the SW region (OCHA 12/09/2020). As at 30 November 2020, Education Cluster members were providing access to education to 71,731 children (32,022 boys and 39,709 girls). Activities include community sensitisation on safe and protective learning, distance learning, and provision of teaching and learning materials, as well as grants for school fees (OCHA 30/11/2020). Despite

this presence, ongoing violence constrains operational activities, particularly limiting the capacity of the Education Cluster's partners to access areas to collect data (HRW 04/06/2020; Cameroon Education Cluster 04/09/2020).

In response to the closure of all educational facilities because of COVID-19, the Education Cluster partners – including national NGOs – implemented distance learning activities in the NWSW regions. This was mostly conducted through radio education, and comprised literacy and mathematics sessions. Radio learning sessions were organised in small groups or in community centres. Some aid organisations in the NWSW regions organised computer, TV, and tablet-based learning (Cameroon Education Cluster 01/04/2020).

Local coping capacity

Communities and the GoC have limited capacity to address educational needs, mainly because of the ongoing conflict, population displacements, and disruptions to essential services (Cameroon Education Cluster 04/09/2020). Communities have tried to organise non-formal classes as discreetly as possible. Non-formal education aims to continue teaching children how to read and write as well as protect them from abuse, violence, and forced recruitment (IFRI 06/2020).

INFORMATION GAPS AND NEEDS

- Detailed information on the current education situation and needs in the NWSW regions is limited, including:
 - data on student attendance rates for the 2019–2020 academic year
 - literacy rates for 2019 and 2020.
- Detailed information on attendance and literacy rates prior to the conflict is lacking.
- Information related to children with disabilities, including their specific needs and access to education in the NWSW regions, is lacking.
- There is a lack of information on school meal programmes in the NWSW regions. This information is important because it would provide a better understanding of the impact of school closures on the food security, nutrition, and health of out-of-school children.
- There is insufficient data on children who suffer from psychological distress and mental health as a result of the conflict, and on children who are victims of human rights violations, abuse, and child labour.
- There is limited information on non-formal education: how it has been provided to children, what subjects/content children are learning, and under which circumstances it has been provided (in community centres or in other educational spaces).
- Data and studies analysing the child labour situation in the NWSW regions are lacking, and would be helpful to better plan the child protection response.