

THE URGENT NEED TO DELIVER QUALITY EDUCATION FOR 1,4 MILLION SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN IN CAMEROON

Education in Cameroon remains a sector in crisis, as schools continue to be under attack in many parts of the country while over 1.4 million children are cramped in poorly maintained and overcrowded classrooms.^[1] Although Cameroon continues to experience multiple unique crises, there are several overarching challenges that children face when accessing education.

As of 2022, attacks on schools and educational infrastructure continued at a similar pace compared to previous years, severely compromising the functioning of the education system in key hotspots throughout the country. Attacks, which often involve gun shooting, killing, arson, and abductions, resulted in 3,285 schools being closed across Cameroon.^[2] This is particularly concerning in regions such as the Northwest and Southwest regions, where 68 per cent and 39 per cent of schools are non-operational. A total of 2,245 schools are thus still not functioning in just these two regions.^[3]

Insecurity and violent attacks have also resulted in massive population movements, with over 900,000 people being displaced in the country in 2023. As people seek refuge in urban centres which they deem safer, this constant influx of school-aged children is putting a severe strain on education infrastructure. While the highest teacher/pupil ratio allowed by government regulations is 1/60, the average ratio is 1/149 in the Far North and North, with many schools experiencing over 200 children in a single classroom.

In the Far North region, more than 42,000 internally displaced children are attending primary schools, while 1,560 internally displaced children have attended secondary school services in the 2021/22 school year. In addition, in the Northwest and Southwest regions, an estimated 667,000 school-aged children need humanitarian assistance, including 367,000 IDPs.

Driven by insecurity and attacks on schools, access to quality education in Cameroon is being impacted across four key areas

- **Limited and poorly maintained infrastructures:** As many schools remain closed or destroyed, children often find themselves in aging classrooms that are in dire need of maintenance and renovations to provide a safe and secure learning environment. Often, schools are also deprived of recreational spaces which are crucial in developing healthy behaviors in children.

[1] - [2] HNO 2022: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2022>

[3] <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-march-2023>

- **Shortage of qualified teachers:** The most remote and insecure areas of Cameroon continue to face a critical shortage of qualified teachers, and need to rely on community teachers, which are often lacking the necessary training and knowledge to provide the required standard of learning. As most qualified teachers refuse to travel to insecure areas, this gap continues to contribute to extremely high teacher/pupil ratios.
- **Unaffordable school fees:** One of the reasons for which many children remain out of school across Cameroon is that school fees are often unaffordable for parents. This is often the case for displaced children, and even more so for Central African refugees in the east of the country, most of which remain outside of the formal system.
- **Need for Psychosocial Support (PSS):** Many displaced children and youth have experienced extremely traumatic events in their lives and require psychosocial services to rebuild a sense of stability and safety in schools.

On top of that, violence perpetrated in schools results in children feeling increasingly unsafe and unable to concentrate on their schoolwork. This has led to an urgent need for building more resilient communities of teachers, parents, and pupils. However, needs remain extremely high and current resources allow for limited capacity building and implementation of quality Psychosocial support (PSS) services such as the Better Learning Programme (BLP).

The BLP helps some Internally Displaced Pupils who were formerly timid or not able to open-up about their worries, to become more confident of themselves. Boys and girls are more able to share their feelings about various topics such as the death of loved ones, their traumas, fears, and frustrations with teachers as well as some of their friends. Moreover, the BLP helps children to manage negative emotions through calming down exercise, thereby improving social cohesion in school and their.

In line with the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 2601 on the protection of schools in armed conflict, we call on governments, all parties to conflict and the international community to:

- Adopt holistic, integrated and multisectoral approaches to the implementation of the Safe School Declaration;
- Develop and implement response plans based on quantitative & qualitative data, prioritizing the most at risk;
- Reinforce alternative, innovative, accelerated, and flexible learning solutions for educational continuity;
- Expand and improve psychosocial support to children, their teachers, and caregivers;
- Increase predictable flexible and long-term financing for education in emergencies.

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