

# Education on pause

High education assistance needs are exacerbating the learning gap in Cameroon

## Background

Cameroon faces an array of challenges inclusive of educational barriers, high poverty, inequality, political instability, and environmental degradation. Despite these challenges, the country has made significant progress in recent years, and is working towards achieving sustainable development, and economic stability overall.

However, due to the impact of the three humanitarian crises affecting Cameroon, **1.4 million school-aged children need humanitarian assistance in education in 2024**<sup>1</sup>. These needs are caused and exacerbated primarily by violence and insecurity, and by structural challenges of the education sector, including inadequate infrastructure and resources, gender inequalities, lack of access to civil documentation, etc.

The situation is even more critical in crisis affected areas, and more specifically in Northwest and Southwest regions, where 41% of schools (i.e 6,970) and community learning spaces have been closed, exposing children and youth to idleness and other protection risks such as child marriage, juvenile criminality, violence, abuse, enrolment in armed groups and drug use<sup>2</sup>.

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

**Cultural beliefs:** In some communities, particularly among herding families, children are expected to help with household chores and animal management from a young age. Traditional beliefs also may discourage girls' education, particularly during menstruation, improving absenteeism for a significant portion of the school year (around 27 days per year). Furthermore, as local communities may view education as less valuable than skills needed for manual labour or traditional occupation, thousands of children are not given the opportunity to access quality education.

**Limited and poor infrastructures:** As many schools remain closed damaged or destroyed, children often find themselves in aging classrooms that are in dire need of maintenance and renovations to provide a safe protective and inclusive learning environment. Furthermore, the lack of WASH facilities in learning spaces and schools hinders the quality of education services, particularly for girls' attendance and hygiene management. Often, schools are also deprived of recreational spaces which are crucial in developing healthy behaviours in children. Poor infrastructures also reinforce the non-compliance of teacher-pupil ratios prescribed by the government. For instance, while the highest teacher/pupil ratio allowed by government regulations was 1/60, the average ratio was 1/149 in the Far North and North regions, with

<sup>1</sup> [HNO Cameroon 2024](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Education Under Attack Northwest & Southwest Regions Updates \(January 2024\)](#)

many schools experiencing over 200 children in a single classroom in 2022<sup>3</sup>.

**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 and poor learning outcomes.

**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 for host community children from poor households, most of which remain outside of the formal system.

**Lack of Psychosocial Support (PSS) service provision:** 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 their lives. Unfortunately, schools have inadequate psychosocial support services and children are not referred to mental health or psychosocial support services for necessary care and treatment<sup>4</sup>.

## Humanitarian funding gap

In 2023, the education sector was the least funded - with only 8,1%<sup>5</sup> of the humanitarian response covered by international donors, the lowest coverage rate after the critical coverage of 7,9%<sup>6</sup> in 2020.

According to HNO 2024, 625,737 school-aged children, including 248,461 internally displaced children in the Far North region, and 596,000 including 156,000 IDPs in the Northwest and Southwest regions are currently in need of humanitarian assistance related to education services. As of April 2024, only 12% of the US\$371 million required according to the 2024 HRP have been secured. (OCHA, FTS, April 2024).



A recent rapid protection assessment carried by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in the Northwest and Southwest regions shows that the destruction of school infrastructure, attacks on educational personnel, and the displacement of communities have resulted in a significant decline in school attendance and overall educational quality, as the crisis has led to the burning of schools, and abduction of students and teachers, depriving children and young people of their right to education<sup>7</sup>. In fact, the hostile environments of both regions have gravely affected both formal and non-formal education activities. About **2,106 children of age 3-17 years are out of school** due to lack of books and learning materials, lack of school/learning space, distance to school, lack of teachers in the schools and poor school facilities<sup>8</sup>.

In the Far North region, clashes between armed groups resulted over the years in the destruction or closure of 119 schools<sup>9</sup>, leading 34,600 children (41% girls) in a struggle to resume and/or attend formal education programs. This has made access to education even more difficult for thousands of children, whose future is already jeopardized by challenges linked to cultural norms and beliefs, deficit of qualified teachers or lack of civil documentation, for example. Indeed, according to the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB) **46% of students enrolled in primary school in the Far North region do not possess a birth certificate**, leading to almost half of the students in last grade of primary school not being allowed to take the end-of-cycle examinations each year<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> [HNO Cameroon 2022](#)

<sup>4</sup> Joint Education Need Assessment (JENA), 2024, p.40

<sup>5</sup> <https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1115/clusters>

<sup>6</sup> <https://fts.unocha.org/plans/927/clusters>

<sup>7</sup> [DRC Rapid Protection Assessment Report](#)

<sup>8</sup> [JENA, March 2024](#)

<sup>9</sup> MINEDUB, 2022

<sup>10</sup> MINEDUB, 2021 Statistical Yearbook.

As of 30 March 2024, more than 2,000 schools were reported closed in Cameroon, affecting over 246,400 children, of whom 69% are internally displaced. (West and Central Africa - Education in Emergencies, Regional Situation – Q1 – 2024).

Inclusive education is another challenge for education in Cameroon. In Cameroon 9 out of 10 children with disabilities are out of school. Even if they go to school,

they are more likely to leave before finishing their primary education because of lack of finances to acquire assistive devices and unadopted structures limiting access, especially to those with mobility; mental or and vision impairments. As a matter of fact, in 2021/22 only 12,321 children with disabilities (including 51% physically impaired, 30% visually and 19% hearing impaired children) attended primary education services.<sup>11</sup>

## NRC recommendations:

- 1. Government and its partners should reinforce alternative, innovative, and flexible learning solutions for educational continuity**, by introducing or expanding initiatives (such as Accelerated Learning Program) that promote continued and safe learning for children who have had to drop out of school or those that have had long interruptions in their learning. This requires ministries in charge of education to develop Accelerated Education Curricula for Anglophone sub system, be flexible in their approaches and requires partners to be innovative and experiment with various alternative education options including distance learning.
- 2. Government and its partners should support the transition and retention of out-of-school children and vulnerable children (including those living with disabilities) to the formal education system**, by providing gender sensitive classrooms, safe and inclusive learning spaces, and gender sensitive equipments and facilities. Furthermore, the provision of birth certificates and school fees will increase school enrolment and completion rate among children of ages 3-17 especially among girls.
- 3. Government and its partners should address shortage of qualified teachers** through continuous professional development and initial training sessions tailored to new teachers, “maîtres des parents” working in crisis affected zones, hard to reach areas.
- 4. Donors should increase funds on civil documentation**, for humanitarian actors to reinforce the provision of assistance in the aspect of civil documentation, to enhance access to education and completion.
- 5. Donors should increase predictable flexible and long-term financing for education in emergencies**, to support schools with adequate teaching/learning materials, and trainings for teachers and school authorities and communities’ members on psycho-social Support Services and Referrals.
- 6. Humanitarian and development actors should reinforce advocacy on children’s right to education and safe school declaration**, by taking concrete measures - for example, through legislation, standing orders, and training - to end the military use of schools, and at a minimum, implement the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict.

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