Risks and Needs for Child Protection in Cameroon – North West and South West Crisis

Secondary Data Review– April 2019

Secondary Data compiled by the Child Protection Area of Responsibility

This document has been produced based on a secondary data matrix compiled by the Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility (CP AoR) using the Minimum Standards as an analysis framework. All data points are citations from the secondary data matrix which have been compared and interpreted, but not triangulated or verified. The information presented in this document covers a period of 3 years (from 2016 to March 2019). The data collected covers mostly both Anglophone regions (North West and South West regions), where the crisis is taking place, and the Littoral and West regions. The figures mentioned include data collected by research carried out by international organizations, non-governmental organizations, academia, or by the national and regional press.

Table of Contents

RISKS AND NEEDS FOR CHILD PROTECTION IN THE ANGLOPHONE CRISIS IN CAMEROON

Since the outbreak of the crisis, more than 1,850 civilians died as a result of the conflict.

The conflict has resulted in the movement of at least 530,000 people since the end of 2017 to 2019, of which 35% are women and more than 40% are children

In February 2019, 95 cases involving Human Rights violations and abuses were reported during one week alone

300 school-age girls from the Northwest region became pregnant as a result of rape during the conflict

According to UNICEF 10 % of girls are married by the age of 15, and 31% by the age of 18

It is estimated that at least 80% of schools are closed down, affecting 609,000 school-aged children

Source: All information is based on a secondary data review made by the Child Protection Area of Responsibility - April 2019

Child Protection
Global Protection Cluster

All data are citations from secondary sources. The information submitted has not been triangulated or verified.

Introduction

In October 2016, English-speaking teachers, students and lawyers in the North West and South West regions in Cameroon took the streets in protest against the French language predominance in the educational and legal systems. As security forces responded to contain the riots, violence escalated into what we know today as the Anglophone crisis. Looking back at Cameroon's history, it is largely recognized that the source of the conflict takes roots in the Colonial era. Under European occupation, 80% of the country was administered by the French and 20% was in the hands of the British Empire.[1]French and English-speaking mandated territories were unified in 1961 to form what we know today as the Republic of Cameroon. Subsequently, the country officially adopted the two languages, two educational systems and two legal systems. [2] However, due to the disproportionate demography within the country, "the government was accused of relying heavily on people trained in the French legal and educational tradition to work in key posts and generally marginalizing Cameroon's English-speaking minority, who make up about 20% of the population".[3]

The Anglophone crisis has heavily impacted different strata of the Cameroonian society. Following the protests that emerged in October 2016 from anglophone teachers and lawyers, according to Crisis Group, "the situation escalated towards an armed insurrection at the end of 2017 and has since degenerated into a civil war".[4] According to their report, "the conflict has killed at least 1,850 people since September 2017 and has now spread to the Francophone West and Littoral regions". Resulting in dramatic consequences for the population in the affected regions, "most schools have been closed for the last two years; more than 170 villages have been destroyed; 530,000 people have been internally displaced and 35,000 have sought refuge in neighboring Nigeria".[5]

 More precisely, schools have become an important focus of the crisis due to the implementation of school boycotts, severely affecting a whole generation of children. Not only due to the intrinsic dangers and physical violence involved, but because forced absenteeism has exposed these children to significant risks of diverse forms of sexual violence, association to armed forces and armed groups, and family separation;

all leading to extended psychosocial distress and mental disorders.[6] Equally, the implementation of the "Ghost Town" days (when the population is not allowed to engage in any commercial activities), the daily nighttime curfew, and the closing and burning of schools, health centers, and other public services have critically disrupted the social stability of the region.

Ever since its outbreak in late 2017, the Anglophone crisis, contributes to aggravate the already fragile situation in Cameroon: the country has been targeted by Boko Haram in the Far North, while in the East, Adamawa and Northern regions, it is hosting thousands of Central African refugees fleeing violence in their own country.[7] Additionally, the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) resulting from the crisis is continually increasing. Strengthening immediate integrative response to the population in need stands as a priority for conflict-driven emergencies but the difficulty of physically accessing the affected areas remains an important barrier to service delivery. According to the latest humanitarian report provided by OCHA on Cameroon, 4,300,000 people have been identified as in need of humanitarian assistance of which 2,300,000 are children under 18 years old. [8]

Overall Protection

Human rights observers globally have identified Cameroon's crisis as a direct threat to protection and other sectors of the humanitarian spectrum.

Since the beginning of the conflict in 2016, population has been severely affected by the violence generated by the crisis. In February 2019, INTERSOS conducted three protection monitoring missions within one week; Resultantly, 95 cases involving human rights violations and abuses were documented; bringing the total number of protection incidents to 1,893 since mid-November 2018.[9]

An investigation conducted by Human Rights Watch in June 2018 showed, through satellite imagery, the burning of 20 villages in the South West region only.[10] Further interviews with the witnesses concluded that the attacks had been perpetrated by security forces.[11]

Another report, describes abuses committed by security forces in at least nine villages in both the South West and North West regions. The attacks, which took place between October 2018 and March 2019, involve violence towards civilians and infrastructure, ultimately forcing survivors to flee into the woods.[12]

These figures reflect the considerable impact of the conflict on affected populations and needs to be understood as evolving and expanding as the conflict persists. According to OCHA, the growing insecurity in the North West and South West regions stands as a result of different factors experienced by the most vulnerable populations. Namely, the presence of armed belligerents, institutional repression, shootings, arbitrary arrests, family separation and GBV, remain periodic and directly impact the sense of insecurity experienced by Cameroonians.[13]

Victims and witnesses have described several incidents in which brutal attacks or use of excessive physical force were applied against demonstrators, bystanders and other civilians.[14] Some of their statements read as follows: "On March 2, around 6 a.m., the Ambazonia boys came to Wone, put fire to a timber truck going to Kumba and kidnapped the driver. I immediately returned home and left with my children and husband to the bush. As we ran, we heard gunshots and loud detonations. When in the bush, we saw a big fire, the whole place was red with fire and then we realized that [security forces] had put fire to our houses."[15] In a different episode: "The morning after the white people were here, I heard a big BOOM – the noise was too much. So, I ran to the bush with my children until my mouth was dry. Then around 2 p.m., other people in the forest began to say that the houses were burned. When we went back to the village. Everything was burned to ashes, (a resident) was burned inside her home. She had diabetes and couldn't walk very far. Everybody was just crying."[16]

As of May 2019, 444,213 people have been displaced in the South West and the North West regions, including 86,434 to the neighboring Littoral and West regions.[17] Among IDPs, destruction of/to property, attacks on villages, shootings, violation of the right to life and physical integrity, as well as SGVB, remain the practices most commonly reported. [18] Many people have lost their identity cards and birth certificates due to displacement or after the burning of their homes, and the replacement of these documents is now even more challenging than ever, given the rising instability in the region [19].

Overall Child Protection

Ever since 2016, civil disobedience operations, school boycotts following the "No School" policy" – including the destruction and closure of schools - have particularly affected children.[20] Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand that school closure is a direct consequence of the reasons shaping the conflict in the anglophone region. As described by reports from 2018, "most parents stopped sending their children to school in October 2016 as part of the protests against the government, and the various attempts to re-open have failed as teachers and students wishing to attend school continue to be threatened.''[21] Indeed, parents are either afraid of the threats or sympathize with the cause; leading school enrollment levels to drop precipitously during the crisis. In fact, the 2016-2017 academic year witnessed the closure of most of the schools in the North-West and South-West regions. As of February 2019, it has been estimated that 609,000 children were affected by school closure.[22]

A school administrator of a combined nursery and primary school in Kumbo described how the boycott was enforced through printed notices (locally known as tracts) in the first week of November 2017. The flyers read "Fire! Fire! Fire!" as a threat to the school in case they continued operating. Consequently, the school administration decided to "close the gate, and did not open again until January [2018]. Some students still haven't come back."[23]

Looking at the example of the Baptist Comprehensive High School in Njinikejem (North West Region), the school hosted approximately 950 students and provided education based on the government's programs to its students. Following an attack by armed groups, only 75 students remained.[24] One of the student's father commented the situation experienced by the population in this very region: "You hear of a child killed somewhere, of a teacher killed somewhere, of a school burned somewhere. You are not sure of the house you are living." As a result of the experiences faced by the population throughout the region, his daughter has now been out of school for two years.[25]

The risks of sexual and gender-based violence and child protection violations have particularly increased in the North West and South West region. Essentially due to forced displacement, seizure of daily activities for adults and children out of school;[26] young girls and boys have become considerably more vulnerable, and the crisis has distanced them from education and employment opportunities, making them more

likely to be instrumentalised.[27] Displacements, violations of Human Rights and Children's Rights, family and community dislocation, have become normalized in Cameroonian's daily lives. [28]

Additionally, the destruction of infrastructure has implied further risks to children. Materializing as a direct consequence of the conflict, vital infrastructures throughout the two regions have been destroyed, closed or abandoned. Hospitals, markets, schools, roads and other key facilities have experienced the violent repercussions of the crisis. In fact, the destruction of infrastructure is a direct factor in the increased levels of insecurity in the country.[29]

Since access to water has substantially decreased, and there are areas with little to no electricity at all, women and children have been impelled to cover greater distances for firewood and water collection.[30] The necessity of travelling long distances for women and children expand the different possibilities of risks exposure in doing so (physical attacks, abuses, theft, etc.). The scarcity of essential resources such as water, food or electricity is a growing concern for humanitarian actors in general and reflects the consequences of the crisis on the population.

Only in the Littoral region (adjacent to the South West region), there are currently 54,000 IDPs[31]; More precisely, when looking at the Littoral and Western region, the UNHCR reported a total of 86,434 IDPs.[32] Over a thousand of which are self-settled and have been identified as living in the bushes, with seven hundred are women and children.[33] IDP parents reported that they do not have enough money to send their children to school as they have lost all their livelihood assets. As a result, more children have been observed loitering the streets instead of being in school.[34] The situation has led displaced families to adopt negative coping mechanisms directly affecting children. In Santa, (North West region) the most common coping strategy to reduce expenses was to withdraw children from school (47.1% of IDP households), while in Bamenda (North West region) people mostly reduced non-food expenses (56.4%). [35]

Additionally, by July 2018, 90% of households were estimated to have experienced a birth certificate loss in the South West region.[36] Some reports, seconded by the declaration of a traditional leader, described that children have lost their birth certificates because their houses were burnt.[37] Moreover, according to International Medical Corps (IMC), "only 6% of women are now giving birth at a health facility, compared to 93% before the crisis".[38]

In the same report, we find evidence of lost identity cards and birth certificates during displacement or after the burning of homes. As described by the NGO, "the replacement of these documents is now even more challenging than ever. Likewise, as many women are now giving birth in the bush, children are being left without proper registration".[39] The lack of a birth certificate entails a greater vulnerability to children, who consequently become institutionally invisible.

On this regard, the Multi-Sector Rapid Assessment conducted by OCHA in the West and Littoral Regions in September 2018 recommended advocacy to the government authorities to extend the period in which parents could declare the birth of their children, with the aim of prolonging their chances to be documented. [40] Consistently, the development and reconstitution of birth certificates for children should also be prioritized.[41] This follows a previous assessment by IMC, which outlined the urge of establishing a protection referral pathway for children and survivors including protection stakeholders and community-based organizations. Furthermore, assessments by the NGO strongly emphasizes on the need for advocacy as a means of reaching a more in-depth assessment of the needs of children, women and men.[42]

It is worth mentioning that, in September 2018, Cameroon endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. It is an inter-governmental commitment aiming at better protecting students, teachers, schools and universities during times of conflict.[43] The ratification of this declaration is a first step towards an elaboration of effective child protection mechanisms. It is thus in the interest of all to ensure its implementation and its continuity on the long run.

By December 2018, UNICEF had activated three of the clusters they lead including the Child Protection Area of Responsibility, in response to the crisis in the North West and South West. [44]

Dangers and Injuries

Human rights organizations and local media have exposed that dozens of villagers have been killed by armed forces as a response to the civilian protests and the growing insurgency spreading throughout the country. [45] Altogether, the rise of extrajudicial executions, unjustified use of weapons and excessive use

of force against civilians, feeds into the insecurity and fear experienced by Cameroonians on a daily basis.
[46]

On November 27, 2016, Buea University students joined the teacher's strike in Bamenda claiming the recognition of English as an official language. Records of the event are proof of the violent response displayed by security forces, whose operation was extended off campus.[47] As exposed by reports from 2018, during another public manifestation, armed forces arrested hundreds of demonstrators, including children, and reportedly used unnecessary levels of violence against protesters, killing at least four of them. [48]

Abusive counterinsurgency operations led by security forces on villages have raised major concerns among observers. [49]Attacks on children, women and men, as well as burning and destruction of property are recurrent practices according to local inhabitants' testimonies. [50] Similarly, worrying reports from health professionals reported that the hospital where they work received several people wounded by bullets following the October 1st demonstration: "we received a young girl, who got a bullet in her eye when she was in her room," they said[51]. Correspondingly, according to human rights observers, "most homes are now experiencing emotional violence especially because our adolescents and children are frequently murdered (…) above all, food and medication have been seized". [52] Equally, as reported by a resident of a village in the North-West region, "you could see the bullets passing in front of you, staying in the bush with the kids is not easy. There are mosquitos, there is hunger."[53] In an attempt of retrieving their belongings from their house, they were received by armed groups who opened fire.

The impact of the crisis on population's livelihoods is undeniable. Following risk assessments operations conducted by NGOs in 2018, hundreds of homes have been identified as destroyed as a direct consequence of the conflict.[54] Recurrent attacks in the South West region have greatly affected families and raised the insecurity levels experienced by the population. As reported by Amnesty International, teachers and students who have been accused of not participating in the boycott have experienced violent repercussions, including on their families.[55] Following an attack at the Presbyterian Secondary School (Bafut) in November 2017, three girl's dormitories were set on fire as a result of intimidatory practices. As expressed by a local resident, "people saw [the Ambazonian groups] come to the village that night. They went to the school because they had given information [to close the school] by dropping a note two month

earlier. They came and went there and started shooting their guns. One child was shot."[56] A female IDP declared to Catholic Relief Services in September 2018: "before we ran for our dear lives, they had shot two of my children to death and the next was going to be me."[57]

As movements have been restricted, reports have denounced the recurrent harassment that they experience at checkpoints (by both parties of the conflict).[58]

Characterized by the ongoing peaks of violence and arbitral arrests, Cameroon is experiencing a complex and severe humanitarian crisis. During 2018, at least 400 civilians and more than 160 Cameroonian troops were killed as a direct result of conflict-driven violence.[59] As of May 2019, the number of death casualties has risen to 1,850.[60] It is worth noting that specific data with precise indications on how children are affected by dangers and injuries is lacking and would need to be provided to enhance Child Protection mechanisms in the affected regions.

Gender-Based Violence

Women, girls and boys stand as the most vulnerable individuals to sexual violence. Considering that these issues prevailed prior to the crisis, they have regrettably escalated and expanded following the emergency outbreak. Following a report by Amnesty International criticizing both parties of the conflict for abuses of civilians, in October 2018, the government of Cameroon said it had opened investigations into allegations of police officers and soldiers raping teenage girls and young women.[61] As of February 2019, a study confirmed that rape had become a weapon of war in Cameroon's separatist conflict. [62]

Additionally, as previously mentioned in this report, the conflict has resulted in the displacement of at least 437,000 people from the end of 2017, of which 35% of women and more than 40% are children. According to OCHA's 2019 HNO, these groups are particularly at risk of being confronted with sexual incidents and gender-based violence, as well as situations of abuse, negligence and exploitation.[63] Reports from 2018 have "insisted on the real risk of survival sex and an increase in prostitution amongst displaced women and girls, given their vulnerability and the difficult living conditions they face"[64].

Looking at different examples, some internally displaced women were reportedly forced into taking traditional male jobs, such as working as security guards. On the other hand, other women have had to

engage in transactional sex as a coping mechanism for supporting the household. For example, many girls have been forced to move from one bar to the other selling groundnuts due to school closure. As it was described by an informant from Bamenda (North-West region), "if you see one of the girls selling groundnuts and want to have sex with her, just call her and promise to buy all her groundnuts for sex, she will not refuse. I am a living witness to what am saying".[65]

Traditionally, Cameroonian families are more likely to be controlled by men, and gendered roles within households are commonly accepted. The present societal gender division, together with the increased levels of insecurity, have led victims to refuse to denounce cases of sexual violence and GBV, due to fear of repercussions on them and their families.[66] In fact, a 2018 report from the North West region raised concerns on sexual exploitation and sexual abuses, showing that neither men nor women directly reported any of their cases. However, the media exposed the rise in cases of sexual abuse in the area.[67] Panje Roland, of Cameroon's Ministry of Women Empowerment added that many more women and girls in the Northwest and Southwest regions have been victims of sexual exploitation, but it is difficult to know their numbers because many are hiding.[68]

Similarly, as of 2017, following UNICEF's researches, 10 % of girls under 18 years old are married by the age of 15, and 31% by the age of 18 [69]. According to a survey conducted in 2018 in the Fontem, Mamfe and Kumba districts (South West Region), an estimated 58% of households have knowledge of early and forced marriages having taken place within the community.[70] This figure represents a significant step backwards in a country which in 2016 had its Penal Code modified in order to prevent this practice. The new regulation included a shift in girls' legal age to marry from 15 to 18 years old, and the establishment of a 10-year prison penalty for perpetrators of child marriage.[71] The sudden outburst of the crisis did not allow this new regulation to settle and to be adequately enforced, thus allowing rooted cultural habits to persist.

In the same vein, various reports have alerted that pregnancy rates among teenage girls are sharply rising and that school absenteeism could be identified as the primary cause of this augmentation.[72] Child pregnancy has been an issue in the past for Cameroon, but the significant rise observed in the last years can only be understood as a direct consequence of the conflict. As a teacher from a rural government school reported to HRW, "I saw six of my students are pregnant, they're aged between 13 and 16".[73]

All data are citations from secondary sources. The information submitted has not been triangulated or verified.

Drawing from previous experiences, early pregnancy is an issue that affects different sectors of the humanitarian response. Consequently, the 2019 HNO report also details the health risks that early pregnancy entails, such as difficult deliveries and the risk of obstetric fistula.[74] Early pregnancy also has detrimental social and economic repercussions on the family as a whole. For example, teenage mothers cannot attend school, nor can they easily access jobs as their familial occupation demands time. On this regard, the Multi-Sector Rapid Assessment undertaken by OCHA in the West and Littoral Regions in September 2018, encourages the provision of family planning services and prevention activities aiming to reduce undesired pregnancies, specially targeting school-age children.[75]

As a result of these practices, many victims are terminating pregnancies with crude, unsafe abortion techniques.[76] The Rural Women Centre for Education and Development is a Cameroonian non-profit organization that keeps track of 300 school-age girls from the North West region who became pregnant as a result of rape from armed forces.[77] The center's lead coordinator, stated that the organization was motivated to carry out its work after a 14-year-old rape victim came to a hospital in the North West region and asked for an abortion following a six-month pregnancy.[78] Equally, a sixteen-year-old reported having been raped while hiding in a farm after her parents were killed in April 2018. According to the organization, 130 of the 300 girls they met had already had abortions, with most of the victims using hazardous traditional methods that strongly jeopardized their life. Experts denounce and recognize these atrocities as having a detrimental impact on the integrity, fulfilment and well-being of the victims.[79]

In light of these elements, in 2018, observers reported that people fear walking alone in the streets, especially at night when they are more likely to be victims of rape, assault, or abduction.[80] As noted by a local leader, "girls and women need to be protected from sexual assault, physical and emotional violence especially rape; pregnant women need to be given birth care, and sanitary pads".[81] Communities, service providers and humanitarian actors can facilitate the implementation of protection services, psychosocial support and accessible health care systems. However, the population needs to reach unanimity on the causes and consequences relating to GBV and thus, men and boys need to be equally considered and involved in the process.

The Humanitarian Coordinator in Cameroon, Allegra Baiocchi, urged for the protection of women and girls in conflict-affected areas and demand a stop to what she named as "humiliating practices".[82]

Psychosocial Distress and Mental Health Concerns

Violent conflicts have a direct and negative impact on individuals; whether victim or perpetrator. On the long term, traumas and sequels of conflicts can irreversibly affect individuals and more so children. The repercussions of conflict-related mental shocks can greatly affect personal life, career, family relations and even act upon day-to-day behavior. Often leading to violent conduct, isolation or drug consumption, psychological traumas stand as a primary concern for humanitarian actors. In this sense, the necessity of providing friendly integrative support and care for those affected is a fundamental element to a holistic humanitarian response.[83]

Children continue to be one of the most affected population groups suffering severe deterioration of emotional wellbeing, and both teachers and pupils have been reported to be under great fear and panic. By opposing the boycott, their lives are constantly endangered, and threats materialize in multiple forms exacerbating unrest even outside of the school's compounds. Notably, some of the threats are circulated via social media, text messages, and printed notices.[84] As reported by Human Rights Watch, as an example of the violent online threats, on September 5, 2017, a photo of five identifiable children sitting at school desks was posted on Facebook, calling them "betrayals," and urging followers to "stone them."[85] This line of action, consisting of threatening non-followers of the movement, has heavy consequences on the mental conditions of children and their families.

Correspondingly, it has been reported that children suffering mental health distress turn to negative coping mechanisms, such as taking drugs, theft or enrollment in armed factions[86]. A head of quarter declared that "people are afraid to walk alone, and our young boys and girls now have changed behaviors with many of them taking drugs. Most often, children are frightened with constant nightmares due to excessive gunshots."[87]

Equally, severe concerns have emerged resulting from the deep psychosocial traumas affecting children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG). The long-term repercussions on their mental health reveal the critical need of an integrated approach towards their full reintegration in society. As described in the section below, children associated with armed groups greatly suffer from stigmas inflicted by children in other regions, thus making sensitization to host communities essential for their fully reintegration to society.[88]

The 2019 HNO has identified the most urgent needs for school-age children. Along with the lack of a safe and secure learning environment, such as classrooms and secure buildings, there is a specific mention to the lack of teachers with knowledge and skills to support and manage children traumatized by conflict and violence.[89]

Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups

Because of school boycotts, children are facing serious long-term consequences for their development, and have become extremely vulnerable in the short term. In particular, young men and boys who have been targeted by armed forces and armed groups[90] are often forced to flee their homes to avoid being recruited, yet voluntary enrollment has also been reported to be a coping mechanism adopted by many of them. A traditional leader interviewed by International Medical Corps in July 2018 alerted of the risks to which men and boys were being subjected. Specifically, he warned the organization that in order to avoid more cases of crime and drug consumption, urgent needs for sensitization are required and the incentivization for creating new jobs could prevent enrolment in armed groups.[91]

Numerous violent incidents reported by interviewees described the perpetrators as "boys", all episodes involving alarming levels of violence. For example, in April 2018, one teacher at a government secondary school in Mezam, North West region, told HRW how the principal had received a visit from "some boys" who threatened him and told him to close the schools.[92] In the Meme division, South West region, a member of the Bamileke francophone tribe reported: "These youths took me to their chief and he asked if I was Bamileke. I said yes and then he said that they would kill us all. They beat me with their guns and

the flat side of a machete. I was on the ground and bleeding. They wanted me to confess that I was a traitor. I refused so they let me go after I gave them money."[93] A report from September 2018 also captures an interview in which key sources informed that a minor had been detained in possession of ammunition.[94]

The lack of deeper information or data related to this phenomenon reveals a need for a more in-depth assessment on the issue of children suspected of being associated with armed forces or armed groups.[95] As previously advised by various sources within this report, CAAFAG require psychosocial support, and further reintegration approaches, such as the sensitization of other children towards de-stigmatization.

No direct allusion to any particular case of recruitment of girls by armed forces or armed groups was found across this research. Only the 2019 HNO declares that "girls and boys are also exposed to the risk of violations, child labor, or recruitment by the armed groups".[96]

Child Labor

As published in a 2015 report, 56.2% of children between 5 and 14 years old in Cameroon are considered as working. 79.7% of Cameroonian children were attending school, and 52.7% of children between 7 and 14 combined school and work.[97] The same report highlights that these children were often engaged in the worst forms of child labor as defined by the ILO Convention no. 182 under its article 3, including commercial sexual exploitation and the use of children in illegal activities, such as drug production and trafficking.

Although some efforts were reported to have been undertaken, the outbreak of the crisis in the anglophone regions has weakened any advancement on this regard. As described by different sources, the cultural acceptance of children's contribution to daily duties in Cameroon is often encouraged by parents in order to contribute to household expenses.[98] The same report reflects a direct relation between child labor and their access to education, which suggests that the current restrictions over children attending school would only aggravate the rate of children engaging into the workforce, and vice versa.

As a matter of fact, the 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview indicates that forced labor is one of the immediate risks that school absenteeism entails.[99] As a practice that is commonly used, its adoption as a coping mechanism is making child labor more rooted into the affected regions and therefore can only increase.

Unaccompanied and Separated Children

Due to the great reduction of educational services, risks faced by children have increased, and additionally, many boys and girls have been left unaccompanied or have been separated from their parents[100]; and family integrity has been severely impacted. Many parents have declared to ignore the location of their children, or whether they are still alive.[101] Many children are also being supported by other members of the community or have been accommodated with other relatives in the North West region in order to pursue their education.[102] The situation of separation directly affects children's access to basic services. The January 2019 HNO addresses the need for support and reunification with the families for unaccompanied girls and boys and urges for the identification of the separated ones.[103] Various reports have seconded this analysis[104] and have requested the provision of the appropriate support.[105]

The January OCHA situation report accounted for around 150 Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) who had been identified and/or placed in alternative care arrangements. Out of them, 80 were girls, and at least 3 children were reunified with their families. Finally, more than 600 children affected by the humanitarian crisis were registered in a database and benefited from advocacy for the establishment or re-establishment of birth certificates and or identification documents.[106]

Yet, as of January 2019, about 3,700 unaccompanied or separated children were reported to still be in need of urgent psycho-social care and reunification support.[107]

Justice for Children

Overall, arbitrary arrests and detentions have been observed in Cameroon since the outburst of the crisis.[108] The provisions that guarantee the rights of the detainees are often disrespected, including the excess of detention time and the denial of a fair public trial. Although prisons generally separate men, women, and children; overcrowding remains a challenge in the Cameroonian penitentiary system, with the number of inmates exceeding up to ten times their capacity.[109]

The initial demonstrations that took place between October and December 2016 were led not only by lawyers and teachers, but also by students, and the arrest of hundreds of demonstrators, including children, were then denounced by HRW.[110]

As an example of the events that took place in December 2016, a 24-year-old driver described how he, and the dozen others detained at the time of their arrest had been beaten, including three teenagers aged between 14 and 16. "They told us to come out [of the building] and lie down on the ground. Then, they started to hit all of us with a black stick all over our body. The children too," he said.[111]

As expressed by UNICEF, there is an urgent need to conduct an in-depth assessment of child protection risks and monitoring of detention centers in the short term; while monitoring and reporting on the child rights violations is highly recommended in the medium term. The Child Protection AoR will also advocate for children in detention and provide integrated support for children who were detained, in the form of psychosocial support and reintegration services.[112]

Abduction and Trafficking

Since the beginning of the crisis in 2016, reports on abduction and trafficking have become common in both North West and South West regions, often targeting women, young girls and boys. The imposition of Ghost town days and the night curfew have inevitably affected the daily lives of civilians. Most vulnerable groups have expressed their fear of walking alone, especially at night, as previously mentioned, when they face greater risk of assault, sexual violence and abduction[113]. With a lack of safe space due to the school closure, children are more prone to spend the days loitering the streets.

The lack or loss of birth certificates is also a hazard to children's integrity. Parents hold the ultimate responsibility of registering the births of their children, and the current scenario is placing many challenges for them to fulfill this duty: primarily, because many of these births do not happen in health facilities, and additionally, because local government offices have become less and less accessible.[114] Abandonment and separation also contribute to the perpetration of these practices[115].

In the South West region, the deterioration of water sources has also been reported to force women and children to travel longer distances to fetch water, making them more vulnerable to abduction.[116]

While there are no figures with the total number of people and children having been subjected to abduction and trafficking, there is evidence of three mass abductions having taken place in the North West region. In October 2018, five students from the Atiela Bilingual School were taken by unidentified men; In November of the same year, 79 students aged 10 to 14 were abducted from a Secondary School in Bamenda. One of the victims recalls the violent episode as follows: "One of my friends, they beat him mercilessly. All I could think about was to just stay quiet. They threatened to shoot some people... all the big boys they rounded up, and the small ones they left them behind."[117] In February 2019, 170 underaged female students from a boarding school were kidnapped, together with a teacher and two guards, in Kumbo. Although they were all released the day after, the school was closed after the incident. [118]

Information Gaps

In general terms, the information about the Anglophone crisis is consistent yet scarce. The main information gaps are:

- Overall Protection and Overall Child Protection are lacking further disaggregation by age and gender, and specifications on people with other vulnerabilities, such as persons with disabilities.
- There is a lack of data concerning people in danger and injured due to violence.
- Detailed information on how and to which scale children are specifically being affected by dangers and injuries.
- Sexual violence needs to be further disaggregated by age and gender. More information on child marriage and child pregnancy, disaggregated by age, is necessary, as data are lacking.
- Specific data on children suffering from psychological distress and other mental concerns.
- Information and data on children associated with armed forces and armed groups, including specific number of children disaggregated by age and gender, specifically addressing the role that girls are playing in this crisis. In-depth analysis of reasons and forms in which children associate is also necessary.
- Tendencies regarding child labor and its worst forms need further elaboration, including to what point the crisis influenced the situation of children in this regard.
- Information on unaccompanied and separated children lacks details on geographical localization, specific number and disaggregation by age and gender.
- Information regarding justice for children is scarce. Number of children detained, conditions, and age and gender disaggregation are necessary. An in-depth assessment would include monitoring of detention centers and reporting on the Child Rights violations.
- In terms of abduction and child trafficking, individual cases need to be noted, since only numbers for mass abductions have been reported.
- A detailed assessment on children who lack/lost their identification documents/birth certificates is needed, disaggregated by age, gender and reason.

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