

Children as Vulnerable Persons in Armed Conflicts: A Legal Analysis of the Anglophone Conflict in Cameroon

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Abstract

Armed conflicts have a disproportionate impact on civilian populations, with children being among the most vulnerable. Their physical immaturity, dependence on adults, and limited capacity for self-protection expose them to heightened risks of violence, exploitation, displacement and deprivation of their fundamental rights. This study examines the legal status of children as vulnerable persons in armed conflict, with specific focus on the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon. It adopts a qualitative research methodology and employs the doctrinal method, relying on content analysis of both primary and secondary sources of data. The study is underpinned by Martha Fineman's Vulnerability theory and the Human Rights-Based Approach, which emphasise the responsibility of the State to provide enhanced protection for inherently vulnerable groups. The study finds that the Anglophone conflict has significantly intensified violations of children's rights to health, education and overall development, while also exposing them to various forms of exploitation. Although international human rights law and international humanitarian law provide a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of children in armed conflicts, their effectiveness is undermined by weak enforcement, insecurity and socio-economic challenges. The study concludes that protecting children in armed conflicts must remain a central legal and policy priority. It therefore recommends the implementation of stronger enforcement mechanisms, targeted training programs and effective reintegration and psychosocial support systems.

Keywords: children, vulnerable, armed conflict, Anglophone, Cameroon

1. Introduction

Children occupy a unique and privileged position in society as individuals entitled to special protection under international human rights and international humanitarian law.¹ They begin life as totally dependent beings that must rely heavily on adults for nurturing, survival and development.² In situations of armed conflicts, their vulnerability is significantly exacerbated.³ Children may be separated from their families, displaced from their communities, recruited as soldiers, denied access to education and health care.⁴ Thus, conflicts not only threaten their immediate safety but also undermine the social and institutional conditions necessary for their long-term

¹ L. Muthoga. (1992). "Introducing the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child", paper presented at the International Conference of the Rights of a Child, organized by Community Law Centre at the University of Cape town, p. 123.

² Child's Rights and why they matter? Available at <https://www.unicef.org> last accessed 21st February, 2026.

³ N. Mbella & M. Mbella, (2025). Child Trafficking in Conflicts: An Appraisal of Cameroon's Legal Framework. *Journal of Tertiary and Industrial Sciences*, 5(1).

⁴ R. Sheehan. (2012). *Vulnerable Children and the Law*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, p. 42.

development.

The Anglophone conflict in Cameroon provides a significant context in which child protection concerns can be examined. What began in late 2016 as protests by lawyers and teachers in the North West and South West Regions, evolved into a protracted non-international armed conflict in 2017; resulting in widespread insecurity with children bearing a disproportionate share of the consequences. It is on this premise that the study seeks to analyse the legal protection of children in armed conflicts, with particular reference to the Anglophone conflict.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the existence of international and national instruments protecting children in armed conflicts, there are serious violations against children. The Anglophone conflict has exposed significant gaps between legal norms and their practical implementation. Children continue to experience grave violations, including loss of lives, abductions, disruption of their education, trafficking, sexual exploitation and recruitment into armed groups. Children, despite being recognized as rights-holders, remain inadequately protected in practice due to weak enforcement mechanisms and persistent insecurity.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Child

For the purpose of this study, a child is defined in accordance with Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), as any person under the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier under the applicable national law.¹ This definition is consistent with Article 2 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which adopts an absolute threshold of 18 years without exception.² This definition is significant in determining the scope of legal protection afforded to children.

2.2 Armed Conflict

In international law, the concept of armed conflict is central in determining the applicability of international humanitarian law (law of war). Armed conflicts are defined as contested incompatibilities that concern a territory and involve the use of armed force between two parties. Armed conflicts have been defined, notably by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, as situations involving the use of armed force between parties, resulting in at least 25 battle-related deaths per year.³ Applying this threshold, it is evident that the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon had attained the status of a non-international armed conflict, given the scale of intensity of violence recorded since 2017.⁴

International humanitarian law (IHL) distinguishes between two types of armed conflicts; those of an international character (across borders) and those of a non-international character (within borders). An International Armed Conflict (IAC) is a conflict involving two or more states, or where one or more states have recourse to the use of armed force against another state.⁵ Furthermore, the commentary of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 confirms any difference arising between two States and leading to the interventions of armed forces is an armed conflict within the meaning of Article 2, even if one of the parties denies the existence of a state of war. It makes no difference how long the conflict lasts, or how much slaughter takes place.⁶

The legal determination of a non-international armed conflict (NIAC) also referred to as an internal armed conflict⁷ is primarily governed by Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Article 1 of Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions.⁸ Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 provides that a non-international armed conflict exists where hostilities occur within the territory of a High

¹ UN News, Child trafficking <https://news.un.org> last accessed 20th February, 2026.

² <https://thefreedictionary.com> last accessed 23rd January, 2026.

³ The UCDP Armed Conflict Definition, www.undp.org last accessed 20th March, 2026.

⁴ Conference on Armed Conflict in the Southern Cameroons, available at www.unitiesintransition.org.

⁵ V. Sylvain. (2009). Typology of Armed Conflicts in International Humanitarian Law: Legal Concepts and Actual situations. *International Review of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*, art 5, para 2.

⁶ J. Pictet. (1952). Commentary on the Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field, ICRC, Geneva, p. 32.

⁷ L. Nagavveni. (2017). International and Non-International Armed Conflicts and Application of International Humanitarian Law as Lex Specialis. *Chotanagpur Law Journal*, 11(11), 78-91.

⁸ International Committee of Red Cross Opinion Paper, 'How is the Term Armed Conflict Defined in International Humanitarian Law?' 2008.

Contracting Party involving governmental armed forces and an organised non-State armed groups or between such groups themselves.

However, not every situation of violence within a territory is considered a non-international armed conflict. In order to distinguish a non-international armed conflict from less serious forms of violence, such as internal disturbances, tensions and riots or acts of banditry, the situation must meet certain established threshold of confrontation. Two criteria are usually used in this regard:

- First, the violence must reach a sufficient level of intensity. This may be evidenced by factors such as the frequency and severity of attacks, the use of military weapons and the involvement of armed forces rather than ordinary law enforcers (police).
- The non-governmental group involved in the conflict must be considered as ‘parties to the conflict’, meaning that they must possess an organised armed force. This means these forces must exhibit a certain command structure and have the capacity to sustain military operations.

A more restrictive definition of NIAC was adopted for the specific purpose of Additional Protocol II 1977. This instrument applies to armed conflicts ‘which takes place in the territory of a High Contracting Party between its armed forces and dissident armed forces or other organised armed groups which under responsible command, exercise such control over a part of its territory as to enable them to carry out sustained and concerted military operations and to implement this protocol’.

- It introduces a requirement of territorial control by providing that non-governmental parties must exercise such territorial control as to enable them to carry out sustained and concerted military operations.
- It expressly applies only to armed conflicts between State armed forces and organised armed groups. Contrary to common art 3, the protocol does not apply to armed conflicts occurring only between non-state armed groups.

Furthermore, the Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (herein after ‘ICTY’), in the *Tadic case* referred to non-international armed conflict as a situation of protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organised armed groups or between such groups within a state.

Applying this threshold, it is evident that the Anglophone crisis had evolved from mere internal tensions into a non-international armed conflict. The sustained use of armed force between government forces and the organised nature of non-state armed groups (Ambazonia), coupled with the scale of persistence of violence, and clearly satisfies the intensity and organisation element required in IHL. Accordingly, the classification of the Anglophone conflict as a non-international armed conflict triggers the full application of relevant IHL provisions including those relating to the protection of civilians in war and, more specifically children as vulnerable persons.

2.3 The Anglophone Conflict in Cameroon

Cameroon’s Anglophone Conflict is one of Africa’s newest struggles for liberation deeply rooted in the country’s colonial past.¹ After World War I, Cameroon was divided between Britain and France; resulting in two distinct languages and legal systems. Even after Cameroon gained independence and later became a unitary state, the English Common Law systems continued to apply in the two Anglophone Regions while the French Civil Law systems applied in the 8 French-Speaking Regions. The conflict stemmed from long-standing grievances between the English-speaking regions over economic and political marginalization by the French-speaking majority.² Anglophones constituting about 20% of the country’s population reported underdevelopment and lack of representation in top government positions.³ Tensions began in 2016 as an Anglophone crisis with protests by lawyers and teachers against the erosion of the common law system and the increasing imposition of French legal/educational systems on them. In October 2017, this eventually evolved into separatist mobilisation and a violent armed conflict for an independent state called Ambazonia.

3. Theoretical Framework

The Vulnerability theory and the Human Rights-Based Approach provide complementary lenses to this study through which the inherent vulnerabilities of children in conflicts can be understood and the normative obligations of states as primary actors in upholding fundamental rights.

¹ H. Ngenyam & R. Azibo. (2022). The Ramification of Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis: conceptual analysis of a looming Complex Disaster Emergency. *J Int Humanity Action*, 7(1), 1.

² Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads, <https://crisisgroup.org> last accessed 20th February, 2026.

³ C. Fombad. (2025). Cameroons Bicultural Conundrum: The Anglophone Special Status. *Oslo Law Review*, 11(2), 1-32.

3.1 The Vulnerability Theory

The Vulnerability Theory developed by Martha Albertson Fineman in 2008, proceeds from the idea that vulnerability is universal and inherent in the human condition.¹ By our very existence as humans, there are things we are naturally prone to experience. Although all humans are vulnerable, certain groups experience increased vulnerability because of their position, dependency or limited access to resources like infants, children, sick, the elderly and persons living with disabilities.² Vulnerability theory emphasises that the state must be responsive to the realities of human vulnerability.³ Children by virtue of their age, dependence and developmental needs, are inherently vulnerable with armed conflicts exacerbating the situation. The theory is relevant in this study as it shifts State's attention to the realities of life, urging them to create institutions capable of responding to human vulnerability.

3.2 The Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA)

The HRBA provides an additional analytical framework for understanding child protection in conflict settings. The HRBA developed and promoted by the United Nations Agencies is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. ⁴The HRBA has two objectives:

- To empower rights-holders to claim and exercise their rights
- To strengthen capacity of duty bearers who have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights

The HRBA is underpinned by key human rights principles (PANEL principles).⁵

Participation: This explains that everyone is entitled to active participation in decision-making processes which affect the enjoyment of their rights. Participation must be active, free and meaningful.

Accountability: Duty bearers (States) are to be held accountable for failing to fulfill their obligations towards rights-holders.

Non-discrimination and Equality: All individuals are entitled to their rights without discrimination of any kind. All forms of discrimination in the realisation of human rights should be prevented and eliminated.

Legality: The law recognizes human rights and freedoms as legally enforceable entitlements and the approaches adopted should be consistent with the legal rights set out in domestic and international laws.

The HRBA is suitable for this study because it requires that children's interest be taken seriously in decision making and children themselves are to directly participate in decisions concerning them. Their voices and experiences are to be heard, and they ought not to be discriminated upon on basis of their age and dependence. The HRBA safeguards the rights of children in armed conflicts by acknowledging them as rights-holders entitled to enforceable legal protections rather than merely passive victims of war.

4. Research Methodology

The study adopts the qualitative research methodology which primarily analysis non-numerical data relating to the vulnerability of children. It employs the doctrinal method of research which is content analysis of existing literature. The primary sources of data include treaties and case law while the secondary sources of data used were information obtained from textbooks, journal articles and internet sources.

To supplement the data above, interviews were conducted with personnel involved in child protection. These interviews provided practical insights into the reality on ground and the challenges faced in protecting children in conflict. The researchers equally made use of field observations in their communities.

5. Legal Framework Relating to the Protection of Children in Armed Conflicts

5.1 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948

The UDHR was a declaration proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10th December,

¹ T. Haugli and M. Martnes. (2025). *Vulnerability and Children's Rights*. Scandinavian University Press, 13-29.

² M. Mayrhofer. (2025). The Concept of vulnerability and its relation to the concepts of inequality and discrimination. *International Journal of Human Rights*, 29(9), 1589-1618.

³ M. Fineman. (2017). Vulnerability and Inevitable Inequality. *Oslo Law Review*, 4(3), 133-149.

⁴ The Human Rights Based Approach to Development: Programing HRBA, <https://www.undp.org> last accessed 24th February, 2026.

⁵ A Human Rights Based Approach to the Means of Implementing Sustainable Development Goals, <https://www.globalnaps.com> last accessed 24th February, 2026.

1948 as ‘a common human rights standard of achievement for all peoples and nations.’¹ It sets out basic civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that people ought to enjoy. The UDHR is pivotal as far as human rights are concerned as it sets the expected human rights standards to be adopted by the international community.² In fact, the UDHR serves as a foundational instrument for subsequent human rights developments. It provides that ‘all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’. Article 25(2) states that “motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance”. All children whether born in or out of wedlock shall enjoy the same social protection as those born in wedlock. Moreover, Article 26 calls for free and compulsory education for children establishing the fact that education is directed towards the full development of the human personality and serves as the foundation for strengthening the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. These provisions emphasise the need for the protection of children in conflicts as education is often disrupted in times of war. Although the UDHR itself conveyed no legal authority as it was merely a declaration of basic principles of human rights and freedoms, it is cited as evidence of the shared commitment between States to protect and promote human rights.

5.2 *The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Their Additional Protocols*

International humanitarian law (IHL) is founded on the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality, offering protection to a wide range of persons and objects during armed conflicts. Adopted on 12 August, 1949 and universally ratified, The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols protect the sick, wounded and shipwrecked persons not taking part in hostilities, prisoners of war and other detainees, civilians and civilian objects.³ Customary International humanitarian law clearly forbids the utilisation of child soldiers stating that ‘children must not be recruited into armed forces and that children must not be allowed to take part in hostilities’ in either international armed conflicts or civil wars. This therefore forbids the recruitment of child soldiers which is a prevalent form of child trafficking in conflicts.

5.2.1 The Geneva Convention IV Relating to the Protection of Civilians in Times of War 1949

The IV Geneva Convention advocates for the protection of civilian population and civilian property. The major IHL principle which makes protection of civilians possible is the fundamental distinction between civilian population and combatant population as well as between civilian objects and military objectives. The civilian population includes people who are not or are no longer taking part in hostilities (*hors de combat*). **Article 24** of the Convention explains that parties to the conflict shall take all necessary measures to ensure that children under 15, who are orphaned or are separated from their families as a result of the war, are not left to their own resources. This is a preventive action in curbing child trafficking as it ensures children stranded as a result of war be protected by states in order to reduce their vulnerability to trafficking. **Article 51 paragraph 2**, of the 1949 Geneva Convention IV provides that the occupying power may not compel or enlist children to serve in its armed or auxiliary forces. This therefore means the recruitment of child soldiers by warring parties is forbidden at all times.

5.2.2 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts 1977

It was adopted on the 8th of June, 1977 and was ratified by Cameroon in 1984. Participation of children in armed hostilities occurs too frequently and in diverse ways. This participation may range from aiding combatants (children sent to bring their weapons), to the actual recruitment of children as combatants. **Article 77(2)** of the 1977 Additional Protocol I, provides: the parties to the conflict shall take feasible measures in order that children who have not attained the age of 15 years do not take direct part in hostilities and, in particular, they shall refrain from recruiting them into their armed forces.

5.2.3 Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions Relating to the Protection of Victims in Non-International Armed Conflicts 1977

This Protocol was adopted on the 8th of June, 1977 and was ratified by Cameroon in 1984. **Article 4** of this Additional Protocol specifies that children need special care and protection. It also prohibits slavery in all its forms. Both the recruitment and the direct/indirect participation of children under the age of 15 in hostilities are condemned. This provision is therefore against the use of children as soldiers, spies, suicide bombers, and cooks during armed conflicts which are prevalent forms of child trafficking.

These instruments collectively establish that children are entitled to special protection, particularly in situations

¹ Adopted on December 10, 1948, GA Resolution 217 (III) United Nations Doc A/810, 1994.

² J. Sloth-Nielsen. (2008). A Dutiful Child: The Implications of Article 31 of the African Children’s Charter. *Journal of African Law*, 52(2), 159-189, 159.

³ Protected Persons, www.icrc.org>war-and-law last accessed 10th March, 2026.

of armed conflicts. Cameroon is a state party to these instruments and by virtue of Article 45 of the Constitution, all duly ratified international laws take precedence over national laws. The State is therefore a duty bearer in the protection of children in armed conflicts.

5.3 The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the UN in 1989, entered into force in 1990 and ratified by Cameroon on 11th January, 1993.¹ It was the first and most universally accepted human rights treaty to address specifically the legal rights of children. The CRC explains who children are, all their rights, and the responsibilities States have in the protection and promotion.

The Convention goes beyond the minimum age approach that is fundamental in the ILO's Conventions and provides a broader regulatory approach to children. Through the adoption of this Convention, the international community moved beyond the minimum age convention and established a framework that requires all signatories to look at children's rights in a more holistic manner. Whilst making provision for cultural and/or other aspects of a child's life, it establishes the "the best interest of the child" principle, and for the first time gave voice to children to participate in matters affecting them.² The CRC expressly states in all actions undertaken by States, institutions and private entities, the best interest of a child must be considered before taking any decision that concerns them. The CRC provides a rights framework for children both in times of peace and times of war.

6. The Rights of Children in Armed Conflicts

Children in armed conflicts retain all fundamental human rights; including the rights to life, health, education, family, adequate standard of living and development. These rights are interdependent and essential for the holistic development of the child. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) affirms that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, which entitles everyone, without distinction of any kind, to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the UDHR.³ The use of the term 'everyone' underscores the universality of these rights, which apply equally to children irrespective of circumstances. Thus, children have human rights not because they are 'the adults of tomorrow' or 'the future' but because they are human beings today.⁴

6.1 The Right to Life

The right to life is the most fundamental of all human rights, as it forms the basis for the enjoyment of all other rights.⁵ It is a prerequisite for the enjoyment of all other rights.⁶ In its absence, all other fundamental rights cannot be enjoyed.⁷ The Convention on the Rights of the Child per Article 6 obliges States to recognize that every child has an inherent right to life, 'and to ensure to the maximum extent possible, the survival and development of the child.'⁸ For children, the right to life is the chance to be able to live and have the possibility to grow, to develop and become adults.⁹ The right therefore encompasses not only protection from arbitrary deprivation of life but also the obligation to create conditions necessary for survival and development. This includes protection from violence and life threatening conditions. However, in the Anglophone conflict, this right has been undermined as children have been exposed to killings in crossfire.

6.2 The Right to Education

The right to education is guaranteed for all without discrimination as to race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion, political preference, age or disability.¹⁰ Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that everyone has the right to education.¹¹ Since then, the right to education has been widely recognised

¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child, New York, 20 November 1989, <https://treaties.un.org> last accessed 20th February, 2026.

² Art. 3 of the CRC 1989.

³ Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

⁴ Children in Vulnerable Situations: available at <https://archive.crin.org> last accessed 21st February, 2026.

⁵ A right to life: Implications for Public Health services, available at <https://www.lexology.com> last accessed 20th August, 2020.

⁶ UN Human Rights Committee publishes new general comment on the 'right to life', available at <https://www.ohchr.org> last accessed 20th February, 2026.

⁷ Right to Life, <https://www.humanium.org> last accessed 20th February, 2026.

⁸ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, G.A Res. 44/25, U.N. GAOR, 44th Sess, Supp. No. 49, at 167, U.N Doc. A/44/49, 1989, Art. 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ The Right to Education, www.righttoeducation.com last accessed 20th August, 2020.

¹¹ Article 26, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

and developed by a number of international normative instruments. The right to education is fundamental for human, social and economic development and a key element to achieving lasting peace and sustainable development.¹

The right to education encompasses both entitlements and freedoms, including the right to free and compulsory primary education, right to available and accessible secondary education (including technical and vocational training), right to equal access to higher education on the basis of capacity made progressively free.² In situations of armed conflict, international humanitarian law obliges parties to the conflict to respect and protect educational institutions and ensure continuity of learning.

This right has been severely disrupted due to attacks on schools, abductions and the imposition of school boycotts by non-state armed groups. This has undermined the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, endorsed by the Republic of Cameroon in 2018, for the protection and well-being of children in the country.³

6.3 Right to Health

The right of everyone to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health is recognized in Article 12 of International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights and Article 24 of CRC. Children have the right to the highest attainable standard of health.⁴ Health is vitally important for every human being in the world. Whatever our differences may be, health is our most important commodity as a person in bad health cannot enjoy life to the fullest.⁵ Article 14 (1) and (2) of the African Charter ensures that every child has the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical, mental and spiritual health as well as access to health facilities.⁶

Armed conflict significantly impairs healthcare systems by destroying infrastructure, displacing personnel and restricting access to medical supplies. The conflict has led to the destruction of health care facilities, and the obstruction of humanitarian access has greatly limited children's ability to receive adequate medical care. A number of health centers have been burnt down like the Integrated Health Center in Tole (South West), Health care facilities in Ekondo Titi (South West), Idenau (South West) and Bua-Bua (North West)⁷ and the District Hospital in Bali (North West). Moreover, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported separatists' roadblocks are hindering the transport of medical supplies to areas like Banso Baptist Hospital.⁸ In February 2021, a Doctor's without Borders ambulance was fired by armed men while responding to a duty call in Muyuka, South West Region.⁹ These have all contributed to the vulnerability of children as residents in those areas are forced to travel long distances in search of good health care.

6.4 The Right to Development

The right to development is a fundamental right enshrined in the 1986 UN Declaration on the Right to Development. It speaks of everyone's entitlement to participate in, contribute to and enjoy the benefits of development.¹⁰ All children should have the means and opportunity to develop to their full potential.¹¹ The healthy development of children is crucial to the future well-being of any society.¹² The child is seen as an 'unfinished product', a human being in the making which indicates childhood is a journey towards a destination.¹³ Child's right to development is therefore an engineered trajectory towards adulthood.¹⁴ Conflict environment hinders the realisation of this right.

¹ Right to Education, <https://theirworld.org> last accessed 20th August, 2020.

² Understanding education as a right, available at <https://www.right-to-education.org> last accessed 24th February, 2026.

³ Safe School Declaration, <https://www.protectingeducation.org>, last accessed 21st February, 2026.

⁴ Article 24, of the CRC 1989.

⁵ Understanding Children's Right to Health, available at <https://www.humanium.org> last accessed 24th February, 2026.

⁶ Human Rights and Health, available at <https://www.who.int> last accessed 24th February, 2026.

⁷ Cameroon 2019, available at www.amnesty.org last accessed 20th March, 2026

⁸ Cameroon: Civilian Killed in Anglophone Regions, www.hrw.org/news last accessed 20th March, 2026.

⁹ Doctors without Borders ambulance fired in South West Cameroon, available at www.reliefweb.int, last accessed 20th March, 2026.

¹⁰ Article 22 of the Declaration on the Right to Development, 1986.

¹¹ Each Child Development-Child Rights, available at <https://www.who.int> last accessed 24th February, 2026.

¹² Child Rights and why they matter, available at <https://www.unicef.org> last accessed 24th February, 2026.

¹³ N. Peleg. (2019). *The Child's Right to Development*. Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.

¹⁴ C. Smart et al. (2001). *The Changing Experience of Childhood: Families and Divorce*. Polity Press, Cambridge University Press, 1.

6.5 The Right to Family

The family is recognized as the fundamental unit of society and the natural environment for growth and well-being of children as emphasised by the CRC. This is out rightly expressed in the preamble of the CRC. Children have the right to live with their families and be properly cared for. Family units create a safe and essential environment for the physical, emotional and social development of children. Although every child has the right to family, armed conflicts often results in family separation due to displacement of parents, death, or abduction.

6.6 The Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

This right is guaranteed by Article 25 of the UDHR and Article 27 of the CRC. The right to an adequate standard of living requires at a minimum that everyone shall enjoy the necessary subsistence rights. It consists of adequate food and nutrition, clothing, housing and the conditions necessary for the child's development. The essential point is people should be able to enjoy their basic needs in condition of dignity and peace. However, during armed conflicts, the right is greatly violated as livelihoods are destroyed, limited access to food, children as well as adult suffer from malnutrition and many are forced to flee their homes.

7. Forms of Exploitation in Armed Conflicts

Armed conflicts create conditions that facilitate the exploitation of children in various forms such as trafficking, unlawful use and recruitment of child soldiers, domestic servitude among others.

7.1 Child Trafficking

Child Trafficking is defined under the Palermo Protocol as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons under the age of 18 for the purpose of exploitation.¹ Unlike adult trafficking, the element of coercion or deception is not required for children; the mere of trafficking.² The use of illicit means such as violence, fraud, is irrelevant. Children are trafficked for purpose of exploitation.

7.2 Unlawful Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers

One of the most deplorable developments in recent years is the use of children as soldiers.³ The recruitment and use of children in armed conflict is one of the most serious of exploitation. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict prohibits the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18 in hostilities. Children may be recruited by force or through so-called voluntary enlistment, often driven by poverty, coercion or a desire for protection or revenge. Perpetrators may be government armed forces, paramilitary organisations or rebel groups, though the latter are more likely to use child soldiers.⁴ Countless children have been taken from their homes or arbitrarily removed from the bushes where they had fled to. Child soldiers, who voluntarily decided to join in the struggle, did so out of excitement and pressures from families. For centuries children have been involved in military campaigns though they were not particularly effective as front-line fighters since most of the weapons were too heavy for them to carry.⁵

On Friday 24th July, 2020, armed separatist fighters under the leadership of self-acclaimed Field Marshall, (The Red Dragons), conducted an operation in a local market in the village of Essoh-Attah, in the Lebialem Division of the South West Region and forcefully rallied 80 boys to join the armed struggle as soldiers.⁶ On the said day, Field Marshall picked up these boys, stripped them naked in the market, poured water on them and rubbed mud on them while telling them to wave goodbye as they ran off to the bushes for war.

The reasons for the recruitment of child soldiers are often because they are more manageable, more obedient and easily manipulated than adults.⁷ They are also less likely to run away or demand for salaries. Children are also less conscious of danger, and it is harder for them to see the difference between 'absence' and 'death'. During an interview with an ex child soldier resident in Kumba, he revealed he voluntarily joined in the struggle because he wanted to revenge the death of his brother and the burning of their family house by the defense forces.⁸ He

¹ C. Beyrer. (2004). Global Child Trafficking. *The Lancet*, 364, 16-17.

² Human Trafficking-Doing business with man Goods, <https://www.humanium.org> last accessed 24th March, 2026.

³ Child Soldiers, available at <https://www.unicef.org> last accessed 24th February, 2026.

⁴ Child Soldiers, available at <https://theirworld.org> last accessed 24th February 2026.

⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶ CHRDA, A Report on Atrocities Committed against Civilians by Armed Separatist Fighters between May and August 2020, available at www.chrda.org last accessed 24th March, 2026

⁷ Child Soldiers, available at <https://www.humanium.org> last accessed 24th March, 2026.

⁸ An interview with former child soldier in Kumba-Meme Division of the South West Region done on the 24th of March, 2026.

revealed before the crisis started he was enrolled in school (Form 3) but after their home was burnt down including 11 bags of cocoa, they were left with nothing. He revealed he had decided to surrender in 2019 after the Major National Dialogue was called.

In an interview with human rights personnel at the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa-Buea, he revealed the organisation had come across two child soldiers in Molyko-Buea who had escaped from Belo in the North West Region.¹ He revealed the children were of ages 15 and 17 and had joined the struggle because their caretaker who happened to be their elder sister's husband had been killed and burnt at his compound in Belo by alleged State armed forces. Out of frustration they were coerced to join the separatist fighters in order to revenge the death of their caretaker whom they considered as their father. They were equally brainwashed into believing the people from French Speaking Regions were out to kill them, consequently taking up weapons to retaliate.

On 5th October 2021, the International Teacher's Day, a video surfaced on social media depicting child soldiers of the Ambazonian Restoration Forces in Manyu and Akwaya Subdivision being trained for combat by their senior commanders.² The self-proclaimed terrorist group said they were the Alpha Immortal Base in Akwaya. Those children who were supposed to be going to school were rather on the fields training and practicing tactics with their guns. That was clear indication of children being brainwashed and indoctrinated. Slangs were being said such as 'All for one, one for all', 'No retreat no surrender', 'We are winning fatly', 'You can kill us but cannot kill the idea'.

On the 1st of October, 2021 which happened to be the day the Ambazonian forces celebrated their acclaimed independence, a disturbing footage surfaced the internet depicting child soldiers. 9 kids were seen in the North West Region singing the Ambazonian national anthem and practicing how to use weapons with sticks in their hands. The crowd kept hailing them for their performance. Questions that kept popping up were which parent in their right frame of mind will give their children away for that? Were they kidnapped or voluntarily gave up for the fight?

7.3 Organ Harvesting and Ritual Killings

Children are often killed for the purpose of organ removal. The global demand for transplantable organs continues to increase with the development of modern transplantation procedures and immunosuppressant drugs.³ The rise of scammers and occults in the country has increased the demand for human parts for their ritual sacrifices.⁴ Within the conflict, several children have been reported missing by their families. The human to be exploited is treated as a spare part that can be bought in the market in the same way as other item.⁵ Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs defines organ harvesting as any of the following activities;

I. Illicit removal of organs.

- The removal without free, informed and specific consent of the living donor or in case of the deceased donor, without the removal of organs being authorized under its domestic law.
- Where in exchange for the removal of organs, the living donor or third party has been offered or receive a financial gain of comparable advantage.

II. The use of illicitly removed organs.

III. The illicit solicitation or recruitment of donors or recipients or the offering or requesting of undue advantages.

IV. The preparation, preservation, storage, transportation, transfer, receipt, import and export of illicitly removed organs.

V. Aiding or abetting an attempt to illicitly remove.

On 17th March, 2017, a militant whose identity was concealed for security reasons, was arrested for murdering a child and mutilating her genitals.⁶ The said child was said to be an internally displaced person from the South

¹ An Interview with Mr Akem Kelvin Nkwain, Human Rights Coordinator, Centre for Human Rights and Development in Africa, done in Buea on May 23, 2021.

² Mimi Mefo News broadcast on Facebook, available at <https://www.mmn> last accessed 24th March, 2026.

³ B. Purkayastha, and N. Yousef. (2018). *Human Trafficking: Trade for Sex, Labour and Organs*. Wiley Publishers, United Kingdom.

⁴ An Interview with an Internally Displaced Parent who had lost her child done in Buea, on the 24th of April, 2021.

⁵ S. Scarpa. (2008). *Trafficking in Human Beings: Modern Slavery*. Oxford University Press, New York, 34.

⁶ Cameroon Concord News, "Douala CPDM Man Busted with 7 female genitals in his freezer", <https://www.cameroonconcordnews.com.douala> last accessed 10th January, 2026.

West Region of Cameroon. When further investigations were carried out, the defence and security forces discovered he was a member of a gang trafficking body parts. In his freezer was found 7 female genitals.¹

In July 2020, the lifeless body of a child said to have been used for rituals was found dumped in drainage at Bonapriso District, Douala.² The said victim was one from the South West Region.

7.4 Domestic Servitude

Domestic servitude is a form of forced labour but warrants its own category of slavery because of its unique context and challenges it presents.³ Article 1 of ILO Convention No. 189 defines domestic servitude as a specific type of forced labour which takes place in a private home.⁴ It is a form of trafficking in persons found in distinct circumstances as it is work done in a private residence that creates vulnerabilities for victims. Simply put, ILO defines domestic workers as persons who work in the homes of individuals providing services such as cooking, cleaning, babysitting, gardening or driving for remuneration. Domestic workers may be trapped in servitude through the use of force or coercion, such as physical or emotional abuse.

The Beijing Declaration (1995) explains violence takes three forms: verbal or psychological abuse (includes acts such as threats, constant shouting and insults), physical abuse (any form of violent act which can result in physical harm including beatings, kicking, hitting and spitting) and sexual violence (actual and attempted rape). Domestic workers unlike other type of workers experience all three forms of violence.⁵

- Domestic workers are subject to torture and sexual abuse from their masters.
- They are given little or no food and are forced to sleep in the same place with pets (cats, dogs).
- They are often forced to work for very long hours without sleep.
- Prevented from having means of communication with their relatives or friends so as not to lay out their experiences.

With the increase in the number of internally displaced persons in the country, population pressures have increased the vulnerability of children. Traffickers posing as middlemen lure parents on a daily basis to send their children to wealthy relatives or strangers to work as domestic servants.⁶

During an interview with a 13 years child, it was discovered her parents had sent her from Donga-Mantung Division to work as a nanny for a couple in Douala. She reported her parents had never left the village to the city before and she was excited she was going to Douala for her first time.⁷ Her parents could not afford to send her to secondary school and they resorted to sending her to work as a nanny under the agreement the couple would send her to learn a trade of her choice in the course of her work. Things did not go as intended and the victim got involved in several demanding roles, besides being a nanny. She was made to babysit, cook, clean the house and also hawk food items with little or no food. Her entire stay in Douala was tough as she was beaten on a regular basis. This is the situation of many children who have not had a means of escape or a way to speak up.

In an interview with a worker at the Central Police Station in Limbe, she revealed they had found two children from Small Massaka village in Mbonge stranded in Limbe, were victims of this form of exploitation.⁸ They were taken from the village to work as house helps in Douala and had lost their way in an attempt to go to Douala. The parents of the children were called upon during social inquiry by the Ministry of Social Affairs and it was discovered their parents were not aware of the exact places the children were living in. This is one of the many cases illustrating the use of children as domestic servants are prevalent in the Anglophone conflict.

7.5 Child Sexual Exploitation

In 2009, the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Model Law against Trafficking in Persons

¹ *Ibid.*

² Money Rituals. Child Killed in Douala and Dumped in a drainage, available at www.coffeewithdillies.com last accessed 20th March, 2021.

³ <https://www.endslaverynow.org> last accessed 24th February, 2026.

⁴ Article 1 of ILO Convention 1930, No. 189.

⁵ Cameroon Postline, Cameroon Domestic Workers face awful working conditions, available at <https://www.cameroonpostline.com> last accessed 24th February, 2026.

⁶ D. Ndungana. (2018). Combatting Labour and Sex Trafficking in Cameroon. University of Applied Sciences, Published Undergraduate Thesis, 14.

⁷ Interview with a child of 13 years in Douala on 24^h March, 2026.

⁸ An Interview with a worker at the Limbe Central Police on August, 20th 2025.

defines sexual exploitation as the use of sexual services of others for financial or other benefits.¹ Child sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse where offenders use their power (physical, financial or emotional) over a child or young person or a false identity to sexually or emotionally abuse them.² Trafficking of children especially girls for sexual exploitation is widespread and encompasses all patterns of trafficking. It often involves situations and relationships where young people receive something (food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) in return for participating in sexual activities.³ Although most child sex abusers are local men, regions well known for tourism are also frequent destinations for children brought in to satisfy foreign tourist.⁴

Child Sex trafficking is often linked to domestic servitude as most of their employers take advantage of their vulnerability in the homes.⁵ Grooming acts for sexual exploitation include:

- Giving gifts or special attention to a child, or their parent or guardian, making the child feel special and/or indebted to an adult.
- Making close physical contact such as inappropriate tickling, play fighting and kissing.
- Openly or pretending to accidentally expose the victim to nudity, sexual material and sexual acts (this in itself is classified as child sexual abuse that can be a precursor to physical sexual assault).
- Controlling a child or young person through threats, force or use of authority making the child fearful to report unwanted behavior.

Groomers may rely on mobile phones, social media and the internet to interact with children in inappropriate ways and will often ask the child to keep their relationship secret.

Child sexual exploitation prevailed prior to the conflicts plaguing the nation but has regrettably escalated with the outbreak of the conflicts. Following a 2018 report by Amnesty International, the Government of Cameroon had opened investigations into the allegations of soldiers and separatist fighters accused of keeping and raping teenage girls in the bushes.⁶ Rape had actually become a weapon of war used by separatist fighters to cause terror on the population. From personal observations, child sexual exploitation is common in towns like Buea and Douala. This is because many children have been displaced as a result of conflicts and many have been sent to live with other relatives who may not be able to take care of them like their parents would have normally done.⁷ During a documentary on Equinox Television in 2020, some girls who were said to be from the North West and South West Region were seen to have been victims of this form of exploitation, selling themselves for as low as 200 XAF just to be able to eat and pay their bills. Technology provides traffickers with unlimited access to children across the globe.

Transactional sex and survival sex has also become coping mechanisms used by displaced children in order to support their households. The internet has functioned in promoting child sex trafficking via recruitment, sale and purchase.⁸ In the North West Region, children hawking could be seen giving out themselves to potential buyers who promise purchasing all the items they sell.⁹ They do this just in order to be able to feed and buy their basic needs. Child pornography has become rampant with paedophiles exposing the nudity of their victims online.

Despite the fact that sexual relations with a girl below the age of 16 years in Cameroon is considered Statutory Rape,¹⁰ General Ayike who was one of the self-acclaimed Ambazonian separatist in Lebialem had abducted three young girls for this purpose. The Cameroonian Defence Forces raided his camp to hunt him down. The

¹ UNODC, Model Law against Trafficking in Persons (2009), <https://www.un.org> last accessed 24th February, 2026.

² Child Sexual Exploitation and Grooming, <https://www.education.vic.gov.au> last accessed 24th, 2026.

³ Unraveling the stages of grooming available at www.ncptf.org last accessed 20th February, 2026

⁴ International Labour Office, Unbearable to the Human Heart: Child Trafficking and action to eliminate it, <http://www.ilo.org/ipec> last accessed 25th August, 2020.

⁵ UN Women, Exploited Domestic Workers in Cameroon organise themselves to defend their rights, <https://www.unwomen.org>.

⁶ Kindzeka Moki, Study Abortions from Rapes on Rise in Cameroon's Conflict Zones, available at www.voa.com last accessed 20th March, 2021.

⁷ J. Sher. (2011). *Somebody's Daughter: The Hidden Story of America's Prostituted Children and the Battle to Save Them*. Chicago Review Press, Chicago.

⁸ C. Murray. (2019). Technology and Child Sex Trafficking: A Comparative Study of the United States, Venezuela and the Philippines, University of Texas Libraries, 17.

⁹ Multi-Sectoral Assessment in the North West: Shelter, Livelihood, Food Security and Hygiene Practices, Catholic Relief Services.

¹⁰ Cameroon Age and Consent and Statutory Rape, available at <https://www.ageofconsent.net/world> last accessed 26th August, 2020.

operation that led to his death at Besali, Wabane, led to the rescue of his three 'bush' wives. Two of them were children of 16 and 17 years who cried out they had been held in captivity against their wish.

7.6 Illegal Child Adoption

The high requests for adoption of babies in some wealthier countries, such as the United States, Canada, or some other European States or by couples within the country who are unable to conceive have led to trafficking of children. Adoption is legal in Cameroon when the right procedures are followed to adopt a child. Thus, adoption done with the right intention and legal procedure for giving the child a better life is not considered a problem. Unfortunately, the reality of our world is that children are abducted for this process without laid down procedures.

The ongoing conflicts have increased the number of children being taken up for adoption since most of them have not been registered on their birth certificate. Children are abducted from homes, orphanages, schools, parks and other places often without the consent of their parents or guardians.¹ Babies may equally be acquired through agents and in some cases the agents buy directly from families who may not want their children or may not be able to support them with a better life. In some cases, babies may be 'produced on order' from adolescents who see it as a way to earn money or the ones who had already been stuck into sex trafficking.

In 2018 in Buea, South West Region of Cameroon, a lady was caught in church (Ark of God Covenant Ministries under the patronage of Apostle John Chi) after stealing a baby.² She was caught in taxi trying to escape by a passenger who happened to have left church upon hearing that a baby was missing. The passenger insisted they must return to church for clarification to see if the baby the suspect was carrying was truly hers. She claimed she was from Kumba and came to church that day for prayers because the baby had been terribly sick. She kept on insisting that the baby was hers and after the crowd insisted she should show proof of parentage, she was left dumbfounded. She claimed the father of the baby was of late and so she could not reveal the name. She tried proving the baby was hers by suckling the baby with breast milk that was not flowing. The man of God requested to see defence forces and some elements of the Cameroon Army came to the scene. All circumstances revealed the lady was telling lies and she was arrested.

Under Cameroonian Law, the High Court must determine that the following four criteria have been met before issuing an adoption decree:³ That every person whose consent is necessary has consented to and understands the nature and effect of the adoption. Such consent is irrevocable and permanently severs all legal ties between the biological parents. They must ensure:⁴

- The welfare of the child will be improved upon adoption.
- The adoptive parents must provide proof of what they can provide for the child in a way that others cannot.
- No payment or reward has been the reason for the adoption.
- The prospective adoptive parent is healthy.

Illegal child adoption is often done void of these procedures and the intentions of the adoptive parents are usually for exploitation.

7.7 The Use of Children for Illegal Activities

Participation in criminal activities has been mentioned often as one of the things children are forced to carry out. They are made to perform a range of illegal activities which in turn generates astonishing profits for their exploiters.⁵ Children are used for the production of weapons (like local bombs) and the trade of illegal drugs. Most of them are equally forced to act as drugs couriers or as decoys for adult drug dealers. They are also involved in petty crime that may include pickpocketing, bag snatching and counterfeit money/goods, or forced begging. They may get involved in illicit activities against their will or they may be made to believe that being

¹ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 'Tackling Illegal Adoptions and addressing the rights of victims' available at <https://www.ochchr.org> last accessed 24th August, 2020.

² Live Service at Ark of God Covenant Ministries, Buea, South West Region of Cameroon on November 11, 2018.

³ How to Adopt from Cameroon, available at <https://adoption.com> last accessed 24th March 2026.

⁴ Procedure for Child Adoption in Cameroon, Kinsman Advocates Law Firm, <https://www.kinsmenadvocates.services> last accessed 24th March, 2026.

⁵ Child Trafficking for exploitation in forced criminal activities and forced begging, available at <https://www.interpol.int> last accessed 25th August, 2020.

involved in it will give them status and money.¹ A child in Bamenda for example was apprehended because he was specialized in stealing motor bikes and selling them at a cheaper price.² Upon investigation it was discovered he was being sent to do so regularly by a self-acclaimed Ambazonia fighter popularly known as General 'Big Number'. This form of exploitation not only violates children's rights but also exposes them to criminal liability and long term social marginalization.

8. Impacts of Conflicts on Children

While all sides may commit atrocities in armed conflicts, children are the least responsible, yet suffer the most harm.³ Conflicts take a toll on children's physical, social, and mental health. These impacts are felt either immediately or experienced in the long-run.

8.1 Loss of Lives and Physical Injuries

One of the most severe consequences of armed conflicts on children is the loss of life and the infliction of physical injuries. Children are frequently being exposed to indiscriminate attacks, crossfire and excessive use of force by both state and non-state actors. In January 2026, at least 8 children were killed in a deadly attack by armed men in North West, pointing to the ongoing insecurity in the region.⁴

On February 14, 2020, government forces and armed ethnic Fulani massacred at least 21 civilians, including 13 children and a pregnant woman, in Ngarbuh in North West Region.⁵ The Ngarbuh massacre that resulted in several deaths illustrates the devastating violation of the right to life.

Similarly, on 14th October, 2021, a Gendarme officer on duty at Molyko-Bwitingi check point, South West Region, had shot at a woman driving a car with her daughter in it. Reportedly the woman was summoned to stop her moving vehicle but refused to do so because she was running late to drop her daughter at school. The shot fired at her vehicle led to the killing of her five year old child Enondiale Tchuengia Carolouise who was a class one pupil at the Catholic University Institute Academy of Talents Primary School (CUIB A & T).⁶ While the death of Carolouise was still a shock to many civilians, another incident happened in Bamenda-North West on 12th November, 2021 at about 12:30.⁷ Tataw Brandy a child of 7 years was killed through a bullet released by a Police officer. He had fired shots at a vehicle which had attempted to escape their police checkpoint and unfortunately the stray bullet had killed the little girl who was on her way back from school.

In September, 2021, the wife of a Presbyterian pastor reportedly poured hot water on their house help who she accused of allegedly stealing her 90,000 FRS.⁸ Reverend Angono Emmanuel and wife, both from the North West Region of Cameroon, were accused of constantly maltreating their house help. The child was said to be living with them as a result of the crisis that had disrupted her education. They were arrested after neighbours were alarmed and the victim was taken to the hospital where she received immediate medical attention.

8.2 Disruption of Education

In times of conflict, children's education is affected by the closures or destruction of schools, teachers being frightened and fleeing insecurity. Many schools have been forced to close due to violence and constant threats from separatists. There is a shift from formal education disrupted in most communities, many children are turning to informal education setting or learning from home which is not as effective as classroom monitoring.

In October 2020, unidentified gun men attacked the Mother Francisca International Bilingual School in Kumba-South West Region, killing 7 children and injuring 13.⁹ This is seen as a form of exploitation as the perpetrators are using it as bait to pressure governments in to meeting their demands.

¹ 'Please Save my Life.' A Bomb Specialist Defuses Explosives Strapped to Children available at www.wsj.com last accessed 24th February, 2026.

² Ambazonia Fighters in Bamenda apprehend a boy specialized in stealing bikes, www.cameroonnewsagency.com last accessed 3rd June, 2021.

³ A. Twohig et al. (2026). The Impact of armed conflict on children: A global humanitarian crisis. *J Psychol Med*.

⁴ Cameroon in shock after suspected separatist attack, <https://www.google.com/amp.dw.com> last accessed 24th February, 2026.

⁵ Cameroon Massacre Findings made Public available at www.hrw.org last accessed 20th February, 2026.

⁶ Cameroon: The Disproportionate use of force leads to the killing of a five years old girl in Buea-South West Region, available at chrda.org/Cameroon last accessed 20th February, 2026.

⁷ Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon: PCC Statement on the killing of a 7 year old child by a Police officer in Bamenda, available at www.hrlcr.org last accessed 20th February, 2026.

⁸ Live video on Egbe Mawoh's Blog, 20th February, 2026.

⁹ Cameroon sees more attacks on Schools, <https://www.voanews.com> last accessed 20th February, 2026.

On 30th January, 2020 separatist kidnapped a 17-year-old secondary school student in Buea, South West Region, and chopped off her finger with a machete for going to school.¹ The girl was released three days later following a ransom payment. On 4th November, 2020, the Suspected Anglophone separatist attacked Kulu Memorial College, a school in Limbe, South West Region.² They assaulted students, stripped them naked and drove them out of school so as to create an atmosphere of panic to prevent the children from going to school.

8.3 Disruption of Social Development

The armed conflict has disrupted the social structures meant for the full development of a child. Orphaned or separated children in times of conflict often lack stable caregivers. Children are often rotating from the hands of one family member to another. This limits their ability to learn and grow in familiar environments.

8.4 Malnutrition/Illness

Conflicts often lead to food insecurity, poor living conditions and inadequate access to clean water and health services. These conditions contribute to malnutrition and increased susceptibility to disease among children.

8.5 Psychological Trauma

Conflicts have severe impacts on the mental and emotional health of children. Children exposed to horrific war experiences are often left with enduring impacts like post-traumatic stress disorders (nightmares, flashbacks). Children suffer loneliness and depression from the loss of parents, relatives, friends and their homes; triggering prolonged sadness and fear.

9. Challenges Faced in the Protection of Children in Armed Conflicts

The protection of children in armed conflicts is hindered by several challenges. One of the major challenges is the weak enforcement of legal frameworks. Despite the fact that international human rights law and international humanitarian law provide a good framework for child protection in conflicts, the implementation remains weak. During conflicts, the state often prioritises security and military objectives over child protection. Violations often go unpunished, thereby fostering a culture of impunity among State and non-State actors.

State institutions responsible for child protection often lack adequate financial resources, trained personnel and logistical support to fully carry out projects.

The persistence of violence in affected regions severely limits access to vulnerable populations. This insecurity hampers the delivery of humanitarian assistance and restricts monitoring efforts.

The conflict has equally resulted to large-scale internal displacements and breakdown of family units. Children separated from their families and unaccompanied continue to be the most hit in the conflict.

Corruption undermines enforcement efforts as resources meant for protection and humanitarian aids are often misappropriated or diverted for personal gains.

10. Conclusion

Armed conflicts across the world today continue to have devastating consequences on the physical, mental, and social well-being of children. The destruction of homes, schools, healthcare systems and community structures undermines the conditions necessary for their survival and development. The Anglophone conflict clearly illustrates how prolonged violence, displacement and institutional breakdown have resulted in widespread violations of children's rights. Although international human rights law and international humanitarian law provide a good legal framework for the protection of children in armed conflicts, the reality on the ground reveals a persistent gap between legal norms and their effective implementation. It is against this backdrop that the study makes certain recommendations.

11. Recommendations

The Government of Cameroon should intensify efforts to investigate and prosecute grave violations against children committed by both State actors and non-State actors.

The Government should ensure that all funds released are properly audited and publicly accounted for in order to limit underfunding and misappropriation of funds.

Child protection measures should be systematically integrated into all peace building, humanitarian and security responses related to the Anglophone conflict.

Schools and healthcare facilities must be designated and effectively maintained as safe zones. The Government

¹ Cameroon Events of 2020, www.hrw.org/worldd last accessed 20th March, 2026.

² Cameroon: Gunmen attack school in Limbe (South West Region) November 4, available at www.garda.com last accessed 20th March, 2026.

should ensure the full implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and adopt concrete measures to prevent attacks on pupils/students and these institutions.

There is critical need to establish and strengthen psychosocial support services, trauma healing programs, family tracing mechanisms and rehabilitation/reintegration programs for children affected by the conflict.

Moreover, there is a need for intensified human rights and international humanitarian law training for security personnel, local authorities, community leaders and relevant actors.

The study equally recommends that social protection can be enhanced by providing livelihood support for vulnerable households to reduce the economic pressures that expose children to street life.

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