

# Pathways to Employment

## Cameroon Report



# About the Authors

---

## About the RLRH

The Refugee-Led Research Hub (RLRH) is an initiative of the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) at the University of Oxford. The RLRH is based in the UK and Kenya, with a research office located in Nairobi at the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA). We create opportunities for researchers with a displacement background to lead primary and secondary research studies in the field of forced migration, from start to finish. Our main thematic interests in Refugee Studies relate to 1) livelihoods and self-reliance; and 2) leadership and participation of displaced populations in humanitarian response and policymaking. RLRH also offers a series of academic programmes which support graduate access and professional development for students with lived experiences of displacement. Visit [our website](#) for more information.

## Acknowledgements

Buhendwa Iragi and Fardosa Salah are the lead authors of the Cameroon report. Juliet Frimpomaa Kodua collected the data in Cameroon.

The authors are grateful for the support provided by the Refugee-Led Research Hub during data collection and report writing, in particular Mohamed Hassan, Uwezo Ramazani, and Grace Isimbi and Juliet Frimpomaa Kodua. Pauline Vidal and Winnie Makau provided feedback on early stages of the draft.

The team benefited greatly from the support provided by the Amahoro Coalition. In particular, we thank Nada Abshir.

Most of all, we are grateful to fellow refugees and stakeholders who took the time to engage with us as respondents in Cameroon.

# About the Authors

---

## About the Author

**Buhendwa Iragi** is a researcher and advocate for the rights of refugees, with lived experience of displacement. He is currently a Research Officer at the Refugee-led Research Hub (RLRH). His background is in International Relations and Security Studies from Daystar University, Nairobi, Kenya. Prior to RLRH, he worked for Amnesty International-Great Lakes, East and Horn of Africa Region, focusing on advocacy, campaigning and research on refugees and migrants. He is the co-founder of RUSEP, a refugee-Kenyan led organisation that promotes youth innovation, arts, talent, entrepreneurship and research. You can reach him at [buhendwa.iragi@refugeeledresearch.org](mailto:buhendwa.iragi@refugeeledresearch.org).

**Fardosa Salah** is a Research Officer at the Refugee-Led Research Hub and a graduate of the 2021-2022 RSC-BIEA fellowship. She previously worked for six years as a community case worker with HIAS Refugee Trust of Kenya, where a key focus of her work was advocacy for gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response in urban refugee assistance programs. Fardosa also served as a paralegal with Kituo cha Sheria, providing legal aid to refugees and asylum seekers. She holds a double BA in sociology & social work, and peace & conflict studies from the University of Nairobi. You can reach her at [fardosa.salah@refugeeledresearch.org](mailto:fardosa.salah@refugeeledresearch.org).

## About the Research Assistant

**Juliet Frimpomaa Kodua** is a consultant specialising in humanitarian response and programme facilitation. Juliet has a master's degree in political science and has gained experience working with leading organisations such as UNICEF. She has served as the CEO of the Youth Empowerment and Self-Sustainability (YESS) initiative. You can reach her at [julietfonya2015@gmail.com](mailto:julietfonya2015@gmail.com).

## How to Cite

Salah, F. and Iragi, B. (2025). 'Pathways to formal employment in Cameroon.' Amahoro Coalition and the Refugee-Led Research Hub, April 2025.

# Table of Contents

---

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| <b>Introduction</b>  | <b>5</b>      |
| Executive summary  | 6             |
| Acronyms   | 8             |
| Cameroon Situation Snapshot  | 9             |
| Objectives   | 10            |
| Research Methods   | 11            |
| <br><b>1. Policies and Legal Frameworks in Cameroon</b>              | <br><b>12</b> |
| Overview of Policies and Legal Frameworks in Cameroon                | 13            |
| Gaps in Practice   | 15            |
| <br><b>2. Processes to Access Formal Work in Cameroon</b>            | <br><b>16</b> |
| <br><b>3. Challenges Faced by Refugees and Private Sector Actors</b> | <br><b>22</b> |
| Refugee Challenges   | 23            |
| Employer Challenges  | 25            |
| <br><b>4. Collaborations and Partnerships</b>                        | <br><b>26</b> |
| <br><b>5. Recommendations</b>  | <br><b>28</b> |

# Introduction



# Executive Summary

---

- Cameroon has an open legal and policy environment for refugees, guided by the Refugee Act No. 2005/2006 and its subsequent implementing Decree No. 2011/389 of 2011. Refugees have the same access to work, education, housing, banking services and social assistance as Cameroonian citizens.
- Refugees are legally allowed to move in and out of camps and to settle in urban areas. However, since 2015, the government has increasingly sought to restrict refugees' movement by requiring them to obtain travel permits to leave the camps.
- Refugees are legally entitled to identity and travel documents issued by the Cameroonian government and the UNHCR. Historically, the UNHCR has been responsible for issuing refugee identity cards, which were for five years. However, under government decree 2016/373, responsibility for issuing biometric identity cards has been transferred to the government. These cards have the same format as Cameroonian identity cards, but are only valid for two years. UNHCR-issued ID cards are not considered valid by employers, which limits refugees' access to employment and business registration. A government pilot initiative funded by the World Bank to begin biometric registration in 2022 had registered 4,258 refugees by June 2023 and issued them with biometric IDs. More refugees are yet to be registered.<sup>1</sup>
- Refugees in Cameroon do not need a work permit to engage in formal employment. The law does not explicitly state what documents refugees need, only that they have the same right to work as Cameroonian nationals. In practice, however, most employers require refugees to present a government-issued biometric refugee card in order to access the labor market. Despite various biometric identification programs that have issued 25,000 cards as of March 2025, less than 5% of refugees have received these government-issued biometric IDs.<sup>2</sup>
- According to the UNHCR, only 4.3% of refugees in Cameroon are formally employed.<sup>3</sup> The high unemployment rate in Cameroon is one of the main reasons for the low unemployment rate among refugees. Employers requiring refugees to have a biometric identity card, coupled with a lack of awareness of refugees' rights to access formal employment, also contribute to low unemployment rates among refugees.
- Refugees in Cameroon are limited in their ability to engage in formal business activities. The limitations of the refugee card, which is not one of the required documents for business registration, prevent most refugees from formally registering their businesses.

---

1. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Cameroon: Refugee Policy Review Framework update as at 30 June 2023, March 2024, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/unhcr/2024/en/147864>

2. UNHCR. "UNHCR Applauds Cameroon's Inclusive Approach to Displacement and Calls for Increased Global Support." March 26, 2025. <https://www.unhcr.org/africa/news/press-releases/unhcr-applauds-cameroons-inclusive-approach-displacement-and-calls-increased>

3. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Cameroon: Refugee Policy Review Framework update as at 30 June 2023, March 2024, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/unhcr/2024/en/147864>.

# Executive Summary

---

- Private sector involvement in refugee employment in Cameroon is still limited. Only a few companies have started employing refugees through partnership placement programmes with humanitarian organisations, or by recruiting them to work in agriculture.
- The report recommends that the government collaborate with the UNHCR to carry out a mass registration of refugees, with the aim of issuing them with biometric identity cards. These cards would serve as valid documents enabling refugees to access the labour market and other services, in the same way as Cameroonians. It also suggests that NGOs could begin providing training to refugees, taking into account the differences between the education systems of Cameroon and the Central African Republic. This would provide refugees with the appropriate and competitive skills required for the Cameroonian labour market.



Photo by Ryan Brown, UN Women

# Acronyms

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>AHR</b>     | Africa Hope Refugees  |
| <b>CAR</b>     | Central African Republic                                      |
| <b>CAYSTI</b>  | Cameroon Youth School Tech Incubator                          |
| <b>CV</b>      | Curriculum Vitae  |
| <b>DAFI</b>    | Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative            |
| <b>DRC</b>     | Democratic Republic of the Congo                              |
| <b>ICESCR</b>  | International Covenant on Economic and Social Cultural Rights |
| <b>ID</b>      | Identity Document   |
| <b>IDPs</b>    | Internally Displaced Persons                                  |
| <b>ILO</b>     | International Labour Organization                             |
| <b>JRS</b>     | Jesuit Refugee Services                                       |
| <b>MINEFOP</b> | Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training                |
| <b>MINREX</b>  | Ministry of External Relations                                |
| <b>MINESUP</b> | Ministry of Higher Education                                  |
| <b>NEF</b>     | National Employment Fund                                      |
| <b>NGO</b>     | Non-governmental organisation                                 |
| <b>OAU</b>     | Organisation of African Unity                                 |
| <b>RSD</b>     | Refugee Status Determination                                  |
| <b>UNHCR</b>   | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees                 |
| <b>UNV</b>     | United Nations Volunteers                                     |



# Cameroon Situation Snapshot

## Country assessment:

- Open legal environment, but significant restrictions remain at the implementation stage
- Limited literature available publicly, several gaps in knowledge



Photo by Egin Akyurt

**As of June 2024, Cameroon hosted 472,499 registered refugees, 11,606 asylum seekers and 1,036,774 internally displaced persons.**<sup>4</sup>

The majority of refugees and asylum-seekers (346,061) come from the Central African Republic (CAR) and “live in the seven planned settlements (“managed sites”) in the East, North and Adamawa regions, as well as in 300 host villages.”<sup>5</sup> Nigerian refugees account for 123,341, and mostly reside in one designated camp, Minawao,<sup>6</sup> which is located in Cameroon’s northern border. Other refugees come from Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, Burundi, and Côte d’Ivoire.<sup>7</sup>

**As of March 2024, there were about 28,637 urban refugees in Cameroon.**<sup>8</sup> Most of them are concentrated in the capital, Yaoundé, and the port city of Douala.<sup>9</sup> The number of unregistered urban refugees may be higher due to an increase in refugees from the Central African Republic following the 2020 general elections.<sup>10</sup>

4. UNHCR. “Cameroon: Operational Data Portal.” Accessed on 09 May. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/cmr>

5. UNHCR, “Cameroon Country summary” 30 June 2023. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/107253>

6. IRC, “New Responses to the Refugee Crisis: Promises & Challenges in Cameroon; A case study of World Bank financing for refugee-hosting nations.” International Rescue Committee, 2017:

<https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/4344/camerooncasestudyfinal.pdf>

7. UNHCR. “Cameroon: Operational Data Portal.” Accessed on 09 May. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/cm>

8. UNHCR. “Cameroon: Operational Data Portal.” Accessed on 09 May. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107823>

9. The New Humanitarian, “Urban refugees: A decade on the margins in Cameroon.” 2019.

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/photo-feature/2019/04/24/urban-refugees-decade-margins-cameroon>

10. Patricia and Bayang, “A journey to a renewed identity.” Norwegian Refugee council, 2023.

<https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2023/a-journey-to-a-renewed-identity/>

# Objectives

**Refugees both in urban and in refugee camps engage in various socio-economic activities to support themselves in Cameroon.** These activities include, “farming, cattle herding, trading (selling and buying condiments, doughnuts, fruit and vegetables, fuel, bread), gold mining, services (transport, hair dressing, hospitality), collecting and selling firewood and religious teaching.”<sup>11</sup> According to UNHCR, 43% of the refugee women in Cameroon are traders and 42% are farmers.<sup>12</sup>

**However, only 4.3% of refugees are engaged in formal employment according to UNHCR.**<sup>13</sup>

This low number is also explained by discrimination among employers, limited work opportunities, and generally high unemployment in Cameroon. In addition, internal conflict and insecurity threats posed by Boko Haram, have led to increased forced repatriation. Government authorities have forcefully repatriated thousands of Nigerian refugees and asylum seekers since 2015.<sup>15</sup> Despite signing a Tripartite Agreement in 2017 committing to ensure Nigerian refugees return back to their country voluntarily, thousands continue to be deported.<sup>16</sup> Refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) in the North, East, or Adamawa regions have not reported this practice.<sup>17</sup>

This study aims to examine the process of hiring refugees, with a focus on the gaps that exist between policy and practice in Cameroon, and on how the private sector can be meaningfully engaged in this process, by asking:

1. What policies and legal frameworks govern refugees' access to employment in Cameroon?
2. What processes do refugees need to follow to find employment in Cameroon? What challenges do refugees face in following the required steps to employment in Cameroon?
3. What are the challenges private sector actors face in order to employ refugees in Cameroon?
4. How can collaboration and partnerships between stakeholders be improved to create a more enabling environment for refugee employment in Cameroon?

**This study, conducted in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, supports the Amahoro Coalition's mission to promote dignified and fulfilling livelihoods for refugees and displaced persons across Africa through multi-sectoral collaboration. It aligns with the Foundation's strategic objective of enabling 2.5 million young refugees and displaced individuals to access meaningful employment by 2030.**

**The research examines current policies, challenges, and opportunities affecting refugees' access to formal employment in host countries, identifying key barriers and recommending strategies to strengthen employment pathways and promote socio-economic integration into host communities. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the Mastercard Foundation, its staff, or its Board of Directors.**

11. Veronique Barbelet, “Livelihood strategies of Central African refugees in Cameroon.” March 2017. <https://odi.cdn.ngo/media/documents/11371.pdf>: JRS, “Refugees and local communities live peacefully together in Cameroon,” 26 June 2023.

<https://irs.net/en/story/refugees-and-local-communities-live-peacefully-together-in-cameroon/>

12. UNHCR, “Showcasing the potential of refugee women to contribute to economic growth in Cameroon,” 10 October 2023.

<https://www.unhcr.org/africa/news/stories/showcasing-potential-refugee-women-contribute-economic-growth-cameroon>

13. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Cameroon: Refugee Policy Review Framework baseline as at 30 June 2020, September 2021, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/unhcr/2021/en/147848>

14. Ibid.

15. Ginn, Thomas, Reva Resstack, Helen Dempster, Emily Arnold-Fernández, Sarah Miller, Martha Guerrero Ble, and Bahati Kanyamanza. “Global Refugee Work Rights Report.” Center for Global Development, 2022. [www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/2022-global-refugee-work-rights-report.pdf](http://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/2022-global-refugee-work-rights-report.pdf).

16. HRW, “They Forced Us Onto Trucks-Like Animals Cameroon's Mass Forced Return and Abuse of Nigerian Refugees” Jane Hahn/Washington Post, 2017. [www.hrw.org/report/2017/09/27/they-forced-us-trucks-animals/cameroons-mass-forced-return-and-abuse-nigerian](http://www.hrw.org/report/2017/09/27/they-forced-us-trucks-animals/cameroons-mass-forced-return-and-abuse-nigerian)

17. IRC, “New Responses to the Refugee Crisis: Promises & Challenges in Cameroon; A case study of World Bank financing for refugee-hosting nations.” International Rescue Committee, 2017: [www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/4344/camerooncasestudyfinal.pdf](http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/4344/camerooncasestudyfinal.pdf)

# Research Methods

---

This Cameroon report is part of a 15-country study on hiring refugees, conducted by the Refugee-Led Research Hub, on behalf of the Amahoro Coalition. Data was collected both remotely and in-person in June 2024.<sup>18</sup>

Data collection focused primarily on Yaoundé (in-person), where there is more potential for refugees to access formal employment. The team conducted sixteen (16) interviews with refugees and stakeholders in Cameroon, including:

- **Three (3) Government officials** from the Ministry of External Relations, the National Employment Fund (NEF), and the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MENOP);
- **Eight (8) refugees.** Refugees interviewed worked in a range of sectors, including as interpreters, administrative assistant, and security personnel.
- **One (1) Private Sector company** which has employed refugees
- **Four (4) non governmental organisations** including: the UNHCR, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), Respect Cameroon, and Africa Hope Refugees (AHR).

**We acknowledge that due to the limited scope and budget of the study, the sampling strategy is neither systematic nor representative of the refugee population in Cameroon. To reduce bias, we have attempted to triangulate the data with the literature as much as possible. However, there was little literature available, in particular peer-reviewed sources. As a result, this report does not provide a complete picture of refugee employment across Cameroon, but is intended to be useful as a basis for discussion and advocacy.**

---

18. This study is covered by University of Oxford Project clearance [SSH/ODID DREC: C1A\_23\_083].

# **1. Policies and Legal Frameworks in Cameroon**

# Overview of Policies and Legal Frameworks in Cameroon

**Cameroon has ratified several international and regional instruments pertaining to refugee protection.** It is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, its 1967 Protocol, the International Covenant on Economic and Social Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the 1969 Regional Convention of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).<sup>19</sup>

**Cameroon's refugee policy grants refugees the same rights as Cameroonians.** In 2005, the government enacted the Refugee Law No. 2005/006<sup>20</sup> which is implemented through Decree No. 2011/389 of 2011.<sup>22</sup> According to Article 9 of the 2005 Refugee Law, refugees have the right to work, access to education and freedom of movement in Cameroon, as well as the right to apply for citizenship through naturalisation. However, the procedure for obtaining citizenship is not explicitly outlined in the legislation, and there is a lack of empirical data on the number of refugees who have successfully obtained citizenship through naturalisation in Cameroon. The Law No. 2005/006 also grants refugees access to housing, social assistance, property, and justice.<sup>23</sup>

**All refugees are entitled to identity cards and travel documents, issued by the Cameroonian government to allow refugees to move within the country.**<sup>24</sup> The issuance of refugee identity cards is regulated by Decree 2016/373 of August 4, 2016 and Decree 2007/ 255 of September 4, 2007.<sup>25</sup> The Ministry of External Relations (MINREX) is responsible for ensuring refugee integration in Cameroon. It supervises the eligibility procedures and the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process undertaken by UNHCR and issues relevant documents. The RSD process establishes whether individuals claiming asylum should be granted refugee status.<sup>26</sup>

19. Ginn, Thomas, Reva Resstack, Helen Dempster, Emily Arnold-Fernández, Sarah Miller, Martha Guerrero Ble, and Bahati Kanyamanza. "Global Refugee Work Rights Report." Center for Global Development, 2022.

<https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/2022-global-refugee-work-rights-report.pdf>

20. IRC, "New Responses to the Refugee Crisis: Promises & Challenges in Cameroon; A case study of World Bank financing for refugee-hosting nations." International Rescue Committee, 2017:

<https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/4344/camerooncasestudyfinal.pdf>; Cameroon: Loi No. 2005/006 du 2005, Portant statut des réfugiés au Cameroun, 27 July 2005, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2005/fr/20920>

21. Cameroon: Décret No. 2011/389 du 2011, Organisation et fonctionnement des organes de gestion du statut des réfugiés au Cameroun., 29 November 2011, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/decrees/natlegbod/2011/fr/83800>

22. Cameroon: Loi No. 2005/006 du 2005, Portant statut des réfugiés au Cameroun, 27 July 2005,

<https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2005/fr/20920>

23. IRC, "New Responses to the Refugee Crisis: Promises & Challenges in Cameroon; A case study of World Bank financing for refugee-hosting nations." International Rescue Committee, 2017:

<https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/4344/camerooncasestudyfinal.pdf>; Ginn, Thomas, Reva Resstack, Helen Dempster, Emily Arnold-Fernández, Sarah Miller, Martha Guerrero Ble, and Bahati Kanyamanza. "Global Refugee Work Rights Report." Center for Global Development, 2022. <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/2022-global-refugee-work-rights-report.pdf>.

24. Emmanuel Eloundou Mbua, "Law No. 2005/006 of 27 July 2005 Relating to the Status of Refugees in Cameroon: An Additional Hurdle or a Major Step Forward to Refugee Protection?" 2015. <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JLPG/article/download/23516/23922>;

Cameroon: Loi No. 2005/006 du 2005, Portant statut des réfugiés au Cameroun, 27 July 2005,

<https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2005/fr/20920>

25. UNHCR, "Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees For the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Compilation Report Universal Periodic Review: 3rd Cycle, 30th Session-Cameroon Republic," October 2017.

<https://www.refworld.org/en/download/120812>

26. UNHCR, "Emergency Handbook-Refugee Status Determination (RSD),"

<https://emergency.unhcr.org/protection/legal-framework/refugee-status-determination-rsd>



# Overview of Policies and Legal Frameworks in Cameroon

In 2018, Cameroon enacted Law 2018/010. Section 39 of this legislation enables the government to verify refugees' qualifications and facilitates the certification of foreign educational qualifications.<sup>27</sup> It also makes it easier for refugees to access equal vocational training platforms alongside nationals by authenticating diplomas and certificates obtained abroad.<sup>28</sup> The general procedure provided to foreign nationals by the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) in Cameroon for recognition of their certificates is as follows:

1. Request for equivalence (free form available at the Ministry of Higher Education and on the website <https://www.minesup.gov.cm>)
2. Authentication by the competent services
3. Examination by the National Commission for The Evaluation of Training domains Offered Abroad
4. Issue of equivalence

**Refugees can access banking and credit services**, according to Law No. 2019/021 which provides the guidelines on financial services within Cameroon.<sup>30</sup> Banks require refugees to have the biometric refugee ID, which has the same numerical format as a Cameroonian national ID, in order to open a bank account.<sup>31</sup> However, only a few refugees are able to access financial services including opening bank accounts and credit services, since the majority are still holders of the UNHCR-issued refugee card, largely disregarded by service providers.<sup>32</sup> This also makes it difficult for most refugees to access loans or credit, which are also highly conditional and require collateral or a co-signer. Additionally, refugee status does not facilitate access to credit for refugees, as financial institutions consider them to be temporary residents who could leave Cameroon at any time. According to a refugee interviewee, Western Union also does not allow refugees to receive or send money using their UNHCR refugee cards, forcing them to carry out these transactions through Cameroonian nationals.

**Refugees are able to use their UNHCR-issued ID to register SIM cards and access mobile money services** with telcos like MTN, Momo, and Orange. Many refugees receive payments through these digital platforms or in cash.

27. Ginn, Thomas, Reva Resstack, Helen Dempster, Emily Arnold-Fernández, Sarah Miller, Martha Guerrero Ble, and Bahati Kanyamanza. "Global Refugee Work Rights Report." Center for Global Development, 2022.

<https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/2022-global-refugee-work-rights-report.pdf>

28. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Cameroon: Refugee Policy Review Framework baseline as at 30 June 2020, September 2021, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/unhcr/2021/en/147848>.

29. MINESUP, "Information notice about the procedures for issuing an attestation of recognition of a foreign certificate."

<https://www.minesup.gov.cm/index.php/2023/07/14/information-notice-about-the-procedures-for-issuing-an-attestation-of-recognition-of-a-foreign-certificate/>

30. Republic of Cameroon, "Law N° 2019/021 of 24 December 2019,"

<https://www.prc.cm/en/news/the-acts/laws/4043-law-n-2019-021-of-24-december-2019-to-lay-down-some-rules-governing-credit-activities-in-the-banking-and-micro-finance-sectors-in-cameroon>

31. UNHCR, "Cameroon Country summary" 30 June 2023. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/107253>

32. Ibid.



# Gaps in Practice

**There are increasing restrictions on refugees' freedom of movement.** Until mid-2015, refugees were allowed to move freely in and out of settlements.<sup>36</sup> However, a set of unwritten policies have restricted refugees' freedom of movement: namely "the internment of Nigerian refugees in closed camps, a refusal to grant legal recognition to Nigerian refugees who do not submit to internment, and administrative practices requiring refugees to obtain a permit for travel outside the district where they have been authorized to reside."<sup>36</sup>

**There are still significant challenges obtaining documentation** like birth certificates, identification cards which enable the facilitation for various basic necessities.<sup>35</sup> While the government has committed to registering refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and conducting refugee status determination as well as issuing documentation, it has not taken ownership of this process, and UNHCR is left to implement these registration processes.<sup>36</sup> As of March 2025, the UNHCR reported that a total of 25,000 biometric IDs had been issued to refugees (this is only 6% of the entire refugee population in Cameroon).<sup>37</sup> UNHCR states that the issuance of the biometric IDs requires more funding.<sup>38</sup>

## Policy Gaps

**There is also disparity in the execution of the government's registration policy where CAR refugees and Nigerian refugees are located.**<sup>39</sup>

Refugees from the CAR residing in settlements and urban settings can register and be recognised as refugees, and have the same access to services as the nationals. However, due to government restrictions, the UNHCR has encountered challenges registering Nigerian refugees.<sup>40</sup> According to the government's declaration, only Nigerians residing in camps are considered refugees, and UNHCR has been blocked from identifying and relocating asylum applicants from border areas to the camp.<sup>41</sup>



Douala, Cameroon. Photo by Edouard Tamba

33. HRW, "They Forced Us Onto Trucks-Like Animals Cameroon's Mass Forced Return and Abuse of Nigerian Refugees" Jane Hahn/Washington Post, 2017.

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/09/27/they-forced-us-trucks-animals/cameroons-mass-forced-return-and-abuse-nigerian>

34. Ginn, Thomas, Reva Resstack, Helen Dempster, Emily Arnold-Fernández, Sarah Miller, Martha Guerrero Ble, and Bahati Kanyamanza. "Global Refugee Work Rights Report." Center for Global Development, 2022.

<https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/2022-global-refugee-work-rights-report.pdf>

35. Ginn, Thomas, Reva Resstack, Helen Dempster, Emily Arnold-Fernández, Sarah Miller, Martha Guerrero Ble, and Bahati Kanyamanza. "Global Refugee Work Rights Report." Center for Global Development, 2022.

<https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/2022-global-refugee-work-rights-report.pdf>

36. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Cameroon: Refugee Policy Review Framework baseline as at 30 June 2020, September 2021, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/unhcr/2021/en/147848>

37. UNHCR. "UNHCR Applauds Cameroon's Inclusive Approach to Displacement and Calls for Increased Global Support." March 26, 2025.

<https://www.unhcr.org/africa/news/press-releases/unhcr-applauds-cameroons-inclusive-approach-displacement-and-calls-increased>

38. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Cameroon: Refugee Policy Review Framework update as at 30 June 2023, March 2024, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/unhcr/2024/en/147864>

39. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Cameroon: Refugee Policy Review Framework baseline as at 30 June 2020, September 2021, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/unhcr/2021/en/147848>

40. Ibid.

41. HRW, "They Forced Us Onto Trucks-Like Animals Cameroon's Mass Forced Return and Abuse of Nigerian Refugees" Jane Hahn/Washington Post, 2017.

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/09/27/they-forced-us-trucks-animals/cameroons-mass-forced-return-and-abuse-nigeria>

## **2. Processes to Access Formal Work in Cameroon**

# Processes to Access Formal Work in Cameroon

**Cameroon does not impose a work permit requirement on refugees;** however, many employers require refugees who wish to engage in gainful employment to be in possession of a government-issued biometric Refugee ID. This follows the August 2016 Protocol for the transfer of RSD processing from UNHCR to the Cameroonian government.<sup>42</sup> However, some refugee respondents reported that disclosing their status resulted in the rejection of job opportunities. Some employers require refugees to present a residence permit or passport.

Some of the refugees who gained access to formal employment received education and training in Cameroon, which enabled them to progress from lower-level roles, such as internships, into professional positions.

## Box 1. Access to Formal Employment

"I started as a cleaner, it was while working that my boss understood that I had greater capabilities and she proposed to the administrative council that I should be trained as a bookbinder. That was how I received intensive training on book-binding and that was how I was able to be recruited formally." – Male refugee respondent, Chad

"I saw a job advert that needed interns, so I applied and started as an Intern. During my internship, I impressed them, and easily adapted to the role. After the internship, I was retained and put on a period of probation. After the period of probation, I was later recruited formally." – Female refugee respondent, Rwanda



Yaoundé, Cameroon. Photo by Ariel Nathan Ada Mbita

42. UNHCR, "Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees For the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Compilation Report Universal Periodic Review: 3rd Cycle, 30th Session-Cameroon Republic," October 2017. <https://www.refworld.org/en/download/120812>



# Processes to Access Formal Work in Cameroon

**In Cameroon, two types of refugee identification documents are issued to refugees.** The government issues biometric identification documents (IDs) with a two-year validity period, while the UNHCR issues identification documents with a five-year validity period. Most of the refugees have a UNHCR ID. Six (6) of the eight (8) refugee respondents indicated that the UNHCR-issued identification documents are not recognised by potential employers or service providers, such as banks. The government and the UNHCR conduct separate registration processes that are not interconnected; getting the UNHCR-issued ID is not a stepping stone to registering for the government-issued biometric ID. An applicant for biometric ID was however required by the government to present an attestation of asylum from the UNHCR.

**Picture 1.** Refugee ID issued by Government <sup>43</sup>



## Box 2. New Refugee IDs

"Although the issuing of the refugee card is being done by the UNHCR, there is a progressive transition of this process from the UNHCR to the government. Henceforth, it would be the State of Cameroon that would issue the refugee ID to refugees." – Key Informant

43. Pictures were taken by the research assistant

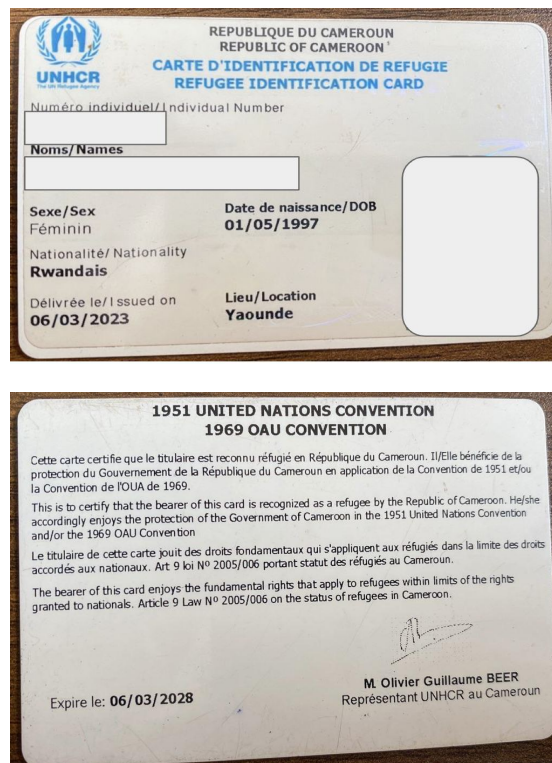
# Processes to Access Formal Work in Cameroon

## UNHCR-Issued Refugee IDs

Recognised refugees in Cameroon automatically obtain an attestation for asylum once their asylum request is approved. At this point, refugees do not need to provide additional documentation, and will be invited by the UNHCR to collect the ID within 2 to 6 months. The refugee ID is free of charge. To renew the ID, refugees must approach the UNHCR and present their expired IDs and are then given an appointment date for when the renewed ID will be ready for collection. The process can take between 2 to 6 weeks. Refugee respondents did not report any challenges with the process for obtaining the UNHCR-issued ID.

The UNHCR Refugee Identity Card is intended solely for identification purposes to ensure protection in Cameroon, but it's not accepted for accessing certain services, including applying for work and university.<sup>44</sup>

*Picture 2. Refugee ID issued by UNHCR*



44. Aljazeera, "In Cameroon, refugees get a new lease of life with digital IDs." 29 August 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/29/in-cameroon-refugees-get-a-new-lease-of-life-with-digital-ids#:~:text=In%20Cameroon%2C%20the%20UNHCR%20issues,or%20undertake%20other%20everyday%20tasks.>

# Processes to Access Formal Work in Cameroon

## Government-Issued Biometric IDs

The government first issued biometric IDs to refugees during a pilot phase in 2022. Biometric IDs were provided to refugees living in a few urban areas such as Douala and Mandjou and some camps including Gado-Badzéré camp in the East Region.<sup>45</sup> Since then, 25,000 refugees have been registered, as of March 2025.<sup>46</sup>

However, there is a general lack of awareness and recognition of UNHCR-issued IDs by local authorities and law enforcement, despite this being the common form of ID most refugees possess.<sup>47</sup> Refugee respondents indicated that delays with the processing of refugee biometric IDs present a significant obstacle to their ability to submit work applications. Some refugees also raised concerns about the travel costs to the various administrative services in pursuit of the biometric ID.

The government-issued biometric ID enables refugees to access fundamental services that would not have been accessible to them using the UNHCR-issued ID, as it is regarded as a legitimate government document. The biometric ID facilitates access to financial services for refugees, including banking and mobile money, as well as the ability to apply for employment and register businesses.<sup>48</sup> With the biometric ID, refugees can access services without relying on local Cameroonians as intermediaries.

### Box 3. Overview of the pilot process in 2022 to obtain biometric ID

1. Applicants were required to visit the Ministry of External Relations in person, presenting their UNHCR ID and attestation of asylum, after which the Ministry would issue them with an attestation of refugee status.
2. The Ministry of External Relations then referred the refugee to the General Delegation for National Security for processing of the biometric refugee card. Refugees were required to provide their UNHCR ID and attestation of refugee status.
3. The General Delegation for National Security then collected the applicant's personal information and captured their fingerprints and passport photo.
4. The applicant was then issued a waiting receipt, which served as proof of enrollment with the government.
5. The applicant was then contacted to collect their biometric ID. It took between one and three months for refugees to receive their biometric IDs, which was similar to the process for Cameroonian nationals.

45. Biometric Update. "Cameroon Begins Pilot to Issue 6k Biometric ID Cards to CAR Refugees." Last modified July 2022.

<https://www.biometricupdate.com/202207/cameroon-begins-pilot-to-issue-6k-biometric-id-cards-to-car-refugees>.

46. UNHCR, "UNHCR applauds Cameroon's inclusive approach to displacement and calls for increased global support," 26 March 2025

<https://www.unhcr.org/africa/news/press-releases/unhcr-applauds-camerouns-inclusive-approach-displacement-and-calls-increased>

47. UNHCR, "Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees For the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Compilation Report Universal Periodic Review: 3rd Cycle, 30th Session-Cameroon Republic," October 2017.

<https://www.refworld.org/en/download/120812>

48. Aljazeera, "In Cameroon, refugees get a new lease of life with digital IDs." 29 August 2022.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/29/in-cameroon-refugees-get-a-new-lease-of-life-with-digital-ids#:~:text=In%20Cameroon%2C%20the%20UNHCR%20issues,or%20undertake%20other%20everyday%20tasks>.



# Processes to Access Formal Work in Cameroon

---

## Business Licences

**Refugees in Cameroon are mostly involved in small income-generating activities which are not formally registered.** Most refugees do not formalise their businesses because of the restrictions associated with the UNHCR-issued refugee card as well as the complex process of registering a business in Cameroon.

In order to establish a formal business, individuals are required to submit a site plan signed by the developer, as well as identity documents for nationals or a residence permit or passport for foreigners.<sup>49</sup> The refugee ID is not listed among the document requirements for business licence applications in Cameroon. Sources do not mention any formally registered businesses by refugees in Cameroon.



Workers in Douala, Cameroon. Photo by Xavier Messina

---

49. Cameroon, "Portal on Investment Procedures," <https://cameroun.eregulations.org/#>

### **3. Challenges Faced by Refugees and Private Sector Actors**

# Challenges Faced by Refugees and Private Sector Actors

**Refugees in Cameroon take on various roles, both informal and formal.** In the informal sector, some refugees engage in activities like wood splitting and street tea selling to meet basic needs such as food and shelter. Incentive work also persists in Cameroon. Refugee respondents have expressed concern that the majority of organisations supporting refugees, including the UNHCR, employ them as incentive workers. Incentive work is a practice employed by UN or NGO agencies whereby refugees are recruited to work in exchange for a monthly incentive payment that is substantially lower than the monthly wages of non-refugee staff.<sup>50</sup> Refugee respondents indicated that they were recruited on a temporary basis and were employed in a variety of roles, including community monitors and interpreters. Moreover, some refugees have obtained employment in the private sector and humanitarian organisations as security guards, while others have secured more engaging roles as United Nations Volunteers (UNV). More skilled refugees are employed in public sector roles like healthcare and architecture, while others earn a living as tailors or teachers in private schools.

## Box 4. Refugees Share Employment Concerns

"I know many refugees that are in the private sector. For example, a private Protestant University that has recruited two refugees...a fabric house called Stradel in Longkak. In addition, many refugees are employed in hotels and restaurants as cooks and waiters."  
– Refugee male respondent, Chad

"The different profiles that I am aware of are interpreters, secretaries, security guards, facilitators, protection monitors, and vigilant committees." – Refugee male respondent, Chad

"We work in line with the national refugee law of 2005 which states that refugees are equal to Cameroon nationals. This permitted us to accept refugee applicants to work on the condition that they provide their refugee documents and also take part in the professional training we offer." – Respondent Employer, Cameroon

50. Laura-Ashley Wright and Robyn Plasterer, "Beyond basic education: Exploring opportunities for higher learning in Kenyan refugee camps." 2010. <https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/view/34721>.

# Challenges Faced by Refugees and Private Sector Actors

---

**The two refugee identity cards available create confusion and limit opportunities in the formal sector.** Some employers are not aware that refugees have the same right to work as Cameroonian nationals and are therefore not proactive in hiring them. In addition, employers' willingness to hire refugees can be limited by a lack of clarity in the law on what documents refugees need to apply for employment. According to a UNHCR report, some employers in urban areas occasionally refuse to accept the refugee card as proof of refugees' eligibility to work.<sup>51</sup>

**Access to formal employment is also constrained by differences in the education systems.** According to the UNHCR, a significant proportion of refugee adults in Cameroon (34%) have not received any form of education.<sup>52</sup> Cameroonians tend to have higher levels of education than Central African Republic (CAR) refugees, so their skills do not match the demands of the Cameroonian labour market. According to a 2017 research by the Humanitarian Policy Group, "the adult literacy rate in Cameroon is 71.3%, and primary school net enrolment is 93.5%, compared to 56.6% and 68.9% respectively in CAR."<sup>54</sup> Some relatively low level jobs in Cameroon require qualifications like a high school diploma, while in CAR would not require one.<sup>55</sup>

**A lack of employment opportunities in Cameroon means that refugees compete with nationals for scarce job opportunities.** A combination of limited job opportunities, a high unemployment rate among the national population, and a generally constrained socio-economic environment limits refugees' access to gainful employment.<sup>56</sup> Refugees also tend to have less competitive educational qualifications than Cameroonian nationals, which further impedes their access to formal employment. Additionally, most employers prefer to hire locals over refugees, citing the scarcity of jobs for nationals.

**The pervasive stigma and discrimination associated with refugee status limits refugees' access to employment opportunities.** Companies sometimes take advantage of refugees' unstable socio-economic conditions by avoiding giving them formal written contracts,<sup>57</sup> and there is a prevailing stereotype that refugees are illiterate, which further hampers their chances of employment. This perception can lead to discrimination, with refugees being regarded as less valuable than nationals or other foreigners with residence permits, and as a result, many may feel compelled to hide their nationality and refugee status when applying for jobs.

---

51. UNHCR, "Cameroon Country summary" 30 June 2023. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/107253>.

52. UNHCR, "MCO Cameroon-Socio Economic living conditions of refugees in Cameroon." 2022. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/97091>.

53. Veronique Barbelet, "Livelihood strategies of Central African refugees in Cameroon." March 2017. <https://odi.cdn.ngo/media/documents/11371.pdf>.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. UNHCR, "Cameroon Country summary" 30 June 2023. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/107253>.

57. Ibid.



# Employer Challenges

## **Some companies are reluctant to hire refugees due to security concerns.**

Specifically, these businesses fear that refugees might pose a risk of theft. This perception of refugees as a potential security threat creates a barrier to their employment. Consequently, these concerns hinder efforts to convince enterprises to employ refugees. This issue reflects underlying prejudices and a lack of trust in refugees, which can further marginalize refugees and limit their economic integration.

## **Employers are also concerned about the transient nature of refugees,**

reporting that some may leave at any time. This uncertainty about the long-term availability of refugees causes employers to worry about the stability of their workforce.



Douala, Cameroon. Photo by Edouard Tamba

## **Box 5. Discrimination of Refugees in Employment**

"To find this present job was not easy because there are many Cameroonians without jobs. It is the first big challenge as a foreigner and a bigger challenge as a refugee because there is a certain stereotype towards refugees. I did not declare my nationality and refugee status in my application, it's later that people will realise my status." – Female Rwandese Refugee

"...what hinders you from getting the job, is the fact that you state in your Curriculum Vitae (CV) that you are a refugee. When recruiters see this information, your value drops and you do not have the same value as other candidates who are nationals or foreigners who possess a resident permit document." – Male DRC Refugee

## **Box 6. Employers Challenges**

"We find it difficult to convince enterprises to employ refugees because some enterprises are reluctant to employ refugees for security reasons. They are scared that refugees can run away with their valuable items." – Key Informant

"Some employers are reluctant to employ refugees and sign work contracts because they believe that refugees can leave at any time." – Key Informant

## **4. Collaborations and Partnerships**



# Collaborations and Partnerships

There have been a number of collaborations and partnerships with respect to self-reliance and access to livelihood opportunities for refugees in Cameroon.

**The government, UNHCR and ILO are working together to improve access to jobs.** The Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MINEFOP) signed a partnership agreement with the UNHCR and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to improve refugees' access to formal employment. This collaboration is a five year plan (2021-2026), and prioritises refugee "training, apprenticeship and professional integration"<sup>58</sup> to reduce refugee unemployment rates and improve their access to the job market.

**The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), collaborates with private enterprise to provide job placements and training opportunities.** With financial support from JRS, one private company has agreed to hire refugees for a six-month trial period. The company trains refugees and offers them a permanent position if they perform well during the trial period. In addition, NGOs, including JRS and Africa Hope Refugees (AHR), provide vocational training in various fields such as carpentry, agriculture, and tailoring, thereby increasing the skills and employability of refugees.

**The collaboration between government, business enterprises and NGOs is facilitating the expansion of self-reliance opportunities in the agricultural sector.** The government has made partnerships with MaisCam and with small scale businesses such as FRUITCAM. This initiative is underway to promote the economic inclusion of refugees, particularly in value chain agriculture.<sup>59</sup> Additionally Africa Hope Refugees (AHR), in partnership with Gic-AgroPack, has provided land in Mbandjock for refugees to practise agriculture. This initiative allows refugees to become self-employed by cultivating cocoa and other crops on over 40,000 hectares of land, promoting self-reliance through value chain agriculture. According to AHR, this initiative targets refugees "who lack formal education that would allow them to work in large companies".

**A digital platform was launched to connect and help refugee graduates get jobs.** In 2023, UNHCR, in collaboration with Plan International, the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI), and the Cameroon Youth School Tech Incubator (CAYSTI), launched an online platform with the objective of enhancing the access of young refugee graduates resident in Cameroon to employment opportunities within the country.<sup>60</sup> The platform aims to provide refugee graduates with job vacancies, networking opportunities with potential employers and funding opportunities.<sup>61</sup> Data collected on refugee graduates in Cameroon in 2022 depicted that only 16% of 115 refugee graduates had secured contract employment.<sup>62</sup>

58. UNHCR, "Cameroon Country summary" 30 June 2023. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/107253>.

59. Global Compact on Refugees, "An overview of how the Global Compact on Refugees is being turned into action in Cameroon." UNHCR, accessed on 06 February 2024. <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/gcr-action/countries/cameroon>.

60. Doh Bertrand Nua, "Yaounde: Digital platform to facilitate access to jobs for refugee graduates launched." 21 November 2023. The Guardian Post. <https://theguardianpostcameroon.com/post/1907/en/yaounde-digital-platform-facilitate-access-jobs-for-refugee-graduates-launched>.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

## 5. Recommendations

# Recommendations

---

- 1. The government should improve access to biometric IDs.** Currently, only a small proportion of refugees have biometric IDs, despite them being considered critical for accessing work opportunities and other services in Cameroon. Donors should support the government by providing the necessary funding and resources to process refugee biometric IDs. Currently, some refugees in Cameroon have biometric IDs and others have UNHCR-issued IDs, which causes confusion over documentation. It would be more efficient to provide refugees with a single recognised form of ID. The UNHCR should support the government in registering refugees by providing funding to facilitate the issuance of biometric IDs. Biometric services should be made available in all areas where refugees reside in Cameroon.
- 2. In order to adapt their skills to the needs of the Cameroonian labour market, the government and NGOs need to improve access to higher education and vocational training for refugees.** Currently, many refugees have skills that do not match market needs, making it difficult for them to secure employment. The UNHCR and its partners must increase their efforts to provide education and training that focuses on marketable skills, giving refugees a better chance of competing in the labour market. This can be achieved by collaborating with employers to identify in-demand skills and by expanding partnerships with local universities and vocational training centres to provide refugees with the necessary qualifications.
- 3. Organisations assisting refugees with skills development and training should set up job placement schemes within the private sector, offering incentives to encourage companies to create additional employment opportunities for refugees.** In light of the high unemployment rate in Cameroon, it would be beneficial for humanitarian organisations, the UN and their partners to provide private companies with incentives to facilitate the training and recruitment of refugees. Organisations such as JRS are already doing this, and this approach could be scaled up to reach more refugees. This approach will help integrate refugees into the private sector, offering them the potential for long-term employment with these companies.