

Cameroon

Geography

Location: Western Africa, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria

Map references: Africa

Area:

total area: 475,440 sq km

land area: 469,440 sq km

Land boundaries: total 4,591 km, Central African Republic 797 km, Chad 1,094 km, Congo 523 km, Equatorial Guinea 189 km, Gabon 298 km, Nigeria 1,690 km

Coastline: 402 km

Maritime claims:

territorial sea: 50 nm

Climate: varies with terrain, from tropical along coast to semiarid and hot in north

Terrain: diverse, with coastal plain in southwest, dissected plateau in center, mountains in west, plains in north

Natural resources: petroleum, bauxite, iron ore, timber, hydropower potential

Land use:

arable land: 13%

permanent crops: 2%

meadows and pastures: 18%

forest and woodland: 54%

other: 13%

Irrigated land: 280 sq km (1989 est.)

Environment:

current issues: water-borne diseases are prevalent; deforestation; overgrazing; desertification; poaching; overfishing

natural hazards: recent volcanic activity with release of poisonous gases

Note: sometimes referred to as the hinge of Africa

People

Population: 13.521 million (July 1995 est.)

Age structure:

0-14 years: 44% (female 2,978,216; male 3,001,487)

15-64 years: 52% (female 3,562,247; male 3,523,100)

65 years and over: 4% (female 248,314; male 207,636) (July 1995 est.)

Population growth rate: 2.92% (1995 est.)

Birth rate: 40.42 births/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Death rate: 11.19 deaths/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Net migration rate: 0 migrant(s)/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Infant mortality rate: 75.4 deaths/1,000 live births (1995 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:

total population: 57.48 years

male: 55.41 years

female: 59.6 years (1995 est.)

Total fertility rate: 5.8 children born/woman (1995 est.)

Nationality:

noun: Cameroonian(s)

adjective: Cameroonian

Ethnic divisions: Cameroon Highlanders 31%, Equatorial Bantu 19%, Kirdi 11%, Fulani 10%, Northwestern Bantu 8%, Eastern Nigritic 7%, other African 13%, non-African less than 1%

Religions: indigenous beliefs 51%, Christian 33%, Muslim 16%

Languages: 24 major African language groups, English (official), French (official)

Literacy: age 15 and over can read and write (1987)

total population: 55%

male: 66%

female: 45%

Labor force:

by occupation: agriculture 74.4%, industry and transport 11.4%, other services 14.2% (1983)

Government

Names:

conventional long form: Republic of Cameroon

conventional short form: Cameroon

former: French Cameroon

Type: unitary republic; multiparty presidential regime (opposition parties legalized 1990)

Capital: Yaounde

Administrative divisions: 10 provinces; Adamaoua, Centre, Est, Extreme-Nord, Littoral, Nord, Nord-Ouest, Ouest, Sud, Sud-Ouest

Independence: 1 January 1960 (from UN trusteeship under French administration)

National holiday: National Day, 20 May (1972)

Constitution: 20 May 1972

Legal system: based on French civil law system, with common law influence; has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction

Suffrage: 20 years of age; universal

Flag: three equal vertical bands of green (hoist side), red, and yellow with a yellow five-pointed star centered in the red band; uses the popular pan-African colors of Ethiopia

Economy

Overview: Because of its offshore oil resources and favorable agricultural conditions, Cameroon has one of the best-endowed, most diversified primary commodity economies in sub-Saharan Africa. Still, it faces many of the serious problems facing other underdeveloped countries, such as political instability, a top-heavy civil service, and a generally unfavorable climate for business enterprise. The development of the oil sector led rapid economic growth between 1970 and 1985. Growth came to an abrupt halt in 1986, precipitated by steep declines in the prices of major exports: coffee, cocoa, and petroleum. Export earnings were cut by almost one-third, and inefficiencies in fiscal management were exposed. In 1990-93, with support from the IMF and World Bank, the government began to introduce reforms designed to spur business

investment, increase efficiency in agriculture, and recapitalize the nation's banks. Political instability, following suspect elections in 1992, brought IMF/WB structural adjustment to a halt. Although the 50% devaluation of the currency in January 1994 improved the potential for export growth, mismanagement remains and is the main barrier to economic improvement.

Industries: petroleum production and refining, food processing, light consumer goods, textiles, lumber

Agriculture: the agriculture and forestry sectors provide employment for the majority of the population, contributing about 25% to GDP and providing a high degree of self-sufficiency in staple foods; commercial and food crops include coffee, cocoa, timber, cotton, rubber, bananas, oilseed, grains, livestock, root starches

Transportation

Railroads:

total: 1,111 km

Highways:

total: 65,000 km

Inland waterways: 2,090 km; of decreasing importance

Ports: Bonaberi, Douala, Garoua, Kribi, Tiko

Airports:

total: 60

Defence Forces

Branches: Army, Navy (includes Naval Infantry), Air Force, National Gendarmerie, Presidential Guard