# ABI

## Working Paper

## No. 22

# Internally Displaced Anglophones in the Far North of Cameroon: Displacement Trajectories, Coping Strategies and Education

Adama Ousmanou

## Cameroon: Legacies of violence and prospects for peace. New impulses from research

Responding to a growing need to anchor the analysis of current violent crises in historical perspectives, the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute (ABI) in Freiburg organized a workshop on 16 and 17 June 2021 that had to be held as a webinar due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Studies on Cameroon slowly begin to expand (again). Academic and non-academic interest has been growing recently - mostly due to the "Anglopone crisis" which is clearly the focus of the mini-series of Working Papers proposed here. During the workshop, eight papers were presented and discussed; offering food for thought to a broad audience of quite different disciplinary backgrounds.

Compared to other African countries of approximately the same size, Cameroon's violent history has for a long time received at best a fair share, but certainly not high scholarly attention. Recently, a good number of Ph.D. and larger research projects have been started and some of the webinar's participants are themselves active in creating international networks of researchers. Some of those individuals, both senior and junior, used the opportunity to share their research results and discuss promising avenues for further research.

The conference organizers identified a number of gaps in the academic literature on Cameroon's legacy of violence. These include e.g., the general lack of a gender-lens on violence and contestation; the underrepresentation of the British UN mandate period, although more archival material should be available today; and the absence of a comparative perspective on Cameroon as an example of 'state failure', arguably because the current violence is still regarded as below the level of a 'major crisis'.

Other under-researched angles to the current Anglophone conflict have been addressed by the papers in this mini-series – all inspired by the 2021 workshop at ABI. These include the underrepresented perspectives of the pastoralist Mbororo ethnic minority (Pelican et al.); the situation of Anglophone youths displaced to the Far North, which in itself is a conflict region due to persistent insurgencies of Boko Haram (Adama); and the little-known self-perception of the separatist fighters and their emic understanding of the rightful use of force (Willis et al.). Digging deeper into the history, consequences and lateral aspects of the current violent conflict between Anglophone separatists and the government remains an important task, and the contributions of the mini-series provide exactly this.

**Internally Displaced Anglophones in the Far North of Cameroon: Displacement Trajectories, Coping Strategies and Education**

Adama Ousmanou[1]

**Abstract**

Cameroon's Anglophone regions have been in a state of violent unrest since October 2016. This began with lawyers and teachers protesting against the erosion of the special status for law and education in the Anglophone regions. Subsequently, the conflict turned violent, with military forces and rebel groups fighting in the hinterlands, displacing more than 765,000 civilians, who fled to the Francophone parts of the country or to neighbouring Nigeria. In this paper, I consider the situation of Anglophone Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who fled to the Far North of the country, a region that since 2013 has been significantly affected by violence perpetrated by the Islamic terrorist organisation Boko Haram. In particular, I explore the IDPs' motivations for moving to this region, their reception and their coping strategies. Importantly, this study reflects on the effects of the Anglophone conflict on youth and their visions of the future, as many have not been able to return to school for several years.

**Introduction**

By early 2018, Maroua, a city in Cameroon's Far North victimised by the Islamic terrorist organisation Boko Haram, was also facing mass arrivals of people displaced from the Anglophone regions in the Southwest and Northwest regions, where violence had broken out a year previously. The arrival of these newcomers prompted me to question how their situation was being managed in comparison to that of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) fleeing the Boko Haram security crisis in the region. How many IDPs from Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions were taking refuge in the Far North? Neither the government nor humanitarian organisations could reliably answer this question. According to

the security forces and the regional administrative bureau for IDPs in 2019, there were over 2000 recorded persons who fled from all over Anglophone Cameroon in order to seek refuge in the Far North Region.[2] In addition, a significant number of undocumented persons had reached Maroua (the regional capital of the Far North) by the end of 2017. The lack of official statistics on Anglophone IDPs in Maroua speaks volumes about the political burden of the issue, providing insight into the reluctance of humanitarian organisations to take charge and provide assistance similar to that offered to IDPs from the Boko Haram crisis. The humanitarian organisations I met during a workshop on the Anglophone IDPs in Maroua in May 2022, most of which had already been present in Maroua and in the region at least from 2013–2014, mentioned political restrictions that prevented them from managing these IDPs, in contrast to those fleeing the Boko Haram security crisis in the region. A large number of the English-speaking Cameroonians living in Maroua are from the regions affected by the conflict between separatist groups and government forces. The protracted nature of the violent conflict and the obstacles to reconstruction in the Anglophone region will likely mean a prolonged settlement of IDPs in Maroua without or with only limited humanitarian assistance. It is thus important to gain an informed understanding of Anglophone IDPs' capacities and strategies to establish themselves in Maroua.

The ongoing conflict is deeply devastating for the young generation of Anglophones. As noted by critical observers and human rights activists, schools, teachers and schoolchildren have been prime targets of separatist violence. "One alleged strategy of extremist groups in the secessionist movement has been to shut down local schools to prevent Anglophone children from learning French, with numerous militia groups having declared that schools should remain closed and have enforced these dictums with force" (Willis et al. 2019: 26). This study focuses mainly on young Anglophone IDPs living in Maroua urban area. Based on qualitative field research in Maroua in 2018–2020, it investigates their deprivation of education and their coping strategies.

IDPs fleeing the Southwest and Northwest regions have been flocking to northern Cameroon since September 2017 despite the lack of government or humanitarian facilities in place to help them. In fact, the Cameroonian government has not allowed humanitarian intervention to care for these IDPs, as this could subsequently be considered as an acknowledgement that a war is taking place in the country. The government has continuously

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[2] Interview with the Far North region governor secretary, Maroua 30 August 2019.

denied any internal crisis other than that of the Boko Haram insurgencies in the Far North, which in their view has nothing to do with Cameroon's domestic agenda. As I show in this paper, the lack of basic material aid from the government has been partly compensated for by social networks that provide necessities such as food and shelter. At the same time, the preoccupation of most young Anglophone IDPs with earning money to cover their basic needs has hindered them from returning to school.

The paper is structured as follows. After introducing the research methods and conceptual approach, I will return to the question of why Anglophone IDPs have been attracted to the Far North despite the Boko Haram security crisis there. I will then examine the educational situation of young IDPs, followed by the presentation of five IDP portraits. In the final section, I will discuss some of the central themes emerging from the portraits, including the effects of emotional distress, the role of support networks and the IDPs' cultural adaptation strategies.

## 1.  Research methods and conceptual approach

As a researcher from Maroua, I initially shared the scepticism of local people towards the Anglophone IDPs in the city. In fact, the local population is aware of the fact that Cameroon's English-speaking population would never have been willing to live in the Far North before the violent outbreak in their home regions. Previously, if they were to be sent to the north for work, for example, they always found an excuse to be relocated elsewhere in the country, for they were unable to bear the high temperatures. Since there was not much information from official mainstream media on the crisis in the Anglophone regions, the local population only found out what was really going on in the Northwest and Southwest while interacting with their fellow Cameroonians. Neither the climate nor the proximity of the Boko Haram could now deter Anglophones from seeking refuge in Maroua.

This paper is based on data collected in the city of Maroua between September 2018 and September 2020. 53 young men and women and 12 Anglophone IDP families were interviewed about their reasons and routes for escaping from their homes to Maroua and the difficulties they were facing in their new environment. Data was gathered through participant observation and qualitative interviews, which allowed me to observe the Anglophone IDPs' situation in Maroua while also listening to their stories. To safeguard the identity of the informants, pseudonyms have been used. In addition, documents were analysed and

information gained from these different sources was triangulated in order to identify possible inaccuracies and distortions.

I pursue an empirical and descriptive approach that focuses on experiences and interpretations, and that makes it possible to analyse the situation, behaviour and emotions of Anglophones displaced to Maroua, the capital of the Far North region. My motivation for studying Anglophone IDPs in Maroua is rooted in my interest in the Far North region's history of mobility and my previous work on the humanitarian situation of persons displaced by Boko Haram (Ousmanou 2019, Kendhammer and Ousmanou 2019). Furthermore, as a bilingual Cameroonian from the Far North, a region that has experienced the effects of structural violence and political insecurity, I have sympathy for the plight of young Anglophones displaced by the conflict in the English-speaking regions. The following concepts are central to the analysis: forced migration, internal displacement, vulnerability and coping strategies.

## 2. Forced migration and internal displacement

Since October 2017, Cameroon has been in the grip of a deadly conflict that pits the military against separatist forces in the two English-speaking regions of the Northwest and Southwest.[3] Its origins date back to the colonisation of the country by the French and British governments between 1919 and 1961. These two regions, then under British colonial administration, were known as British Southern Cameroon. After a United Nations referendum on 11 February 1961, their inhabitants opted for reunification with French Cameroon on 1 October 1961. Subsequently, the two English-speaking regions, which account for 20 per cent of the population, felt that they were not benefitting from sharing equally in the nation's development and they have repeatedly complained of discrimination and exclusion. Protests throughout 2016 in the English-speaking regions escalated into civil war in 2017. To date, the ongoing conflict has resulted in the death and displacement of more than 712,000 people, with an urgent need for humanitarian assistance. The news media has reported the deaths of some 4,000 civilians in the Anglophone regions, "a toll that surpasses that of the country's Far North region where Boko Haram has been waging an armed campaign

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[3] For more information on the Anglophone conflict and its historical and political roots, see Awasom (2020), Pelican (2022), Konings and Nyamnjoh (1997).

since 2014".[4] Over 73,000 Cameroonian refugees were living in Southeastern Nigeria as of January 2022.[5]

The immediate origins of the crisis can be traced to the government's violent repression of protests in 2016 by lawyers' and teachers' unions expressing their opposition to the gradual process of the Francophonisation of the state. Their linguistic minority status confines them to a second-class citizen status that contradicts Cameroon's official status as a bilingual state. Added to this linguistic discrimination is their marginalisation in the process of resource allocation for economic development. Neither the Major National Dialogue that grants special status to the regions nor the government's use of the military has been able to end the conflict between the Ambazonian[6] separatists and the Cameroonian defence and security forces.

Cameroon hosts about two million persons of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), including one million internally displaced persons, 460,000 refugees and asylum-seekers and 466,000 IDP returnees. The refugees are predominantly from the Central African Republic and Nigeria, while the internally displaced persons mainly come from Cameroon's Far North, Northwest and Southwest regions. The Boko Haram security crisis along the border between Cameroon and Nigeria has led to mass displacement in the Far North of Cameroon since 2013. In line with the Geneva Convention, the Far North region is currently hosting some 89,000 Nigerian refugees and 236,000 IDPs, but in vulnerable and fragile conditions in high need of assistance. The vast majority of IDPs and 30,000 out-of-camp refugees have found refuge in host communities. [7] The Anglophone IDPs in Maroua fall into this last category because, for political reasons, they are not recorded or managed by international humanitarian organisations.

While Cameroon has a long history of internal and international labour migration (see Ardener et al. 1960, Pelican 2013), my focus in this article is on forced migration. Forced migration is involuntary migratory movement, whatever the root cause, that involves the use

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[4]Aljazeera. 2021. Violence in Cameroon's Anglophone crisis takes high civilian toll.
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/1/violence-in-cameroon-anglophone-crisis-takes-high-civilian-toll
[5] Nigeria, crisis update, https://www.achttps://www.acaps.org/country/nigeria/crisis/cameroonian-refugeesaps.org/country/nigeria/crisis/cameroonian-refugees.
[6] Ambazonia, officially the Federal Republic of Ambazonia, also referred to as Amba Land, is an unrecognized breakaway state in the West Africa which claims the Northwest Region and Southwest Region of Cameroon, though it currently controls almost none of the claimed territory. No country has formally recognized Ambazonia's independence, and it is currently the site of an armed conflict between Ambazonian separatist guerrillas and the Cameroonian military known as the Anglophone Crisis. Ambazonia is located in the west of Cameroon and southeast of Nigeria on the Gulf of Guinea.
[7] The full report can be found at: https://www.unhcr.org/cameroon.html.

of force or coercion (Wood 1994). William Wood's definition includes a note specifying that while the term is not an international legal concept, it has been used to describe the movements of refugees, displaced persons and, in some cases, victims of trafficking. Internationally, the use of this term is the subject of debate, as it is generally recognised that there are several degrees of autonomy rather than a simple dichotomy between voluntary or forced migration, and that the concept may conflict with legal provisions (ibid.).

Anglophones who have taken refuge in Maroua are considered here to be IDPs according to the definition of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. These are persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee their homes or habitual place of residence as a result of the armed conflict and the human rights violations in the Anglophone region.[8] This definition also takes into consideration the fact that the IDPs have not crossed the internationally recognised borders of Cameroon, which would qualify them as refugees.

The legislative context covering the issue of refugees, unlike IDPs, is clarified in the United Nations Convention of 1951 relating to the Status of Refugees.[9] Although the distinction between refugees and IDPs is not the subject of this study, I am interested in how it has framed institutional responsibilities, particularly with regard to Anglophone IDPs. Though Cameroon is among the African countries that ratified the 2009 Kampala convention on IDPs, the Anglophone IDPs in Maroua have not been officially granted this status because of the Cameroonian government's denial of the Anglophone separatists' insurgency as a crisis or war. The Biya regime has instead framed the conflict as a domestic affair since 2016–2017. In this regard, any government acknowledgment of the IDPs' status might be tacitly considered as recognition of a civil war or separatist war in Cameroon. Such recognition could be an excuse for the United Nations to intervene or send peacekeeping forces. A UN Peacekeeping mission for the prevention, containment, reduction or cessation of hostilities could be viewed domestically as foreign intervention to overthrow the regime. Therefore, the qualification of the Anglophone conflict as a purely domestic affair would thus label any foreign intervention as interference in internal affairs and serve to delegitimise any UN peacekeeping mission in the country. The International Crisis Group summarised the situation in 2017:

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[8] Adapted from Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, annexed to United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr Francis M. Deng, Submitted Pursuant to Commission Resolution 1997/39, Addendum (11 February 1998) UN Doc. E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, para. 2 of the introduction.
[9] The 1951 Refugee Convention, https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html.

> A year ago, the Cameroonian government held the view that the Anglophone problem did not exist. Ten months ago, radicals within government believed that the crisis would be solved by arresting the federalist movement's leaders. Instead it has worsened. Today this same radical wing is betting on war, despite the cost in terms of human lives (…). This bet could prove counterproductive, because the military response will only feed the cycle of violence, make the population more receptive to separatist ideas, and strengthen the position of supporters of the armed struggle at the core of the secessionist movement.[10]

This is the main political reason why humanitarian organisations in Maroua have not dared to register or provide Anglophone IDPs with assistance and/or any form of aid. Anglophone IDPs have not officially been recognised as such by government institutions. As a result, Anglophone IDPs in the Far North have largely been excluded from the humanitarian aid provided by the government and international institutions, in contrast to the support offered to the refugees and internally displaced persons fleeing Boko Haram cross-border terrorism. Consequently, government institutions have made little attempt to attend to the needs of Anglophone IDPs and expect that they will return to the Anglophone regions in the near future. Given the protracted nature of the violent conflict and the obstacles to the reconstruction in the Anglophone region, this scenario is unlikely. It is thus important to gain an informed understanding of Anglophone IDPs' capacities and strategies to establish themselves in Maroua.

## 3. Vulnerability and coping strategies

The common denominator of Anglophone IDPs in Maroua is their vulnerability. By vulnerability I mean the characteristics of a person or group in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a human or natural hazard. This involves a combination of factors that determine the degree to which someone's life and livelihood are put at risk by a discrete and identifiable event in nature or in society (Levine 2004) – in this case, the ongoing conflict in the Anglophone regions. Anglophone IDPs are deemed to be vulnerable due to the violence and insecurity that threatened their physical and emotional well-being as individuals, households or communities in the Anglophone region as well as the challenges to their welfare upon displacement to Maroua. The Anglophone IDPs

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[10] International Crisis Group (2017): Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: Dialogue Remains the Only Viable Solution https://icg-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/21dec17-cameroon-statement.pdf.

meet the criteria of vulnerability as described in the IOM conceptual approach of determining factors: "The concept of vulnerability can be understood to mean that some people are more susceptible to harm, relative to others, as a result of exposure to some form of risk. The type of harm to which they are more susceptible varies: it may be psychological, physical, environmental, etc. Risk factors depend on the type of harm being examined and may or may not overlap."[11]

In this paper, I use the concept of coping to refer to the cognitive and behavioural strategies to manage specific stressful and violent situations (Billings and Moos 1981). I am interested in understanding how Anglophone IDPs manage the effects of the emotional and physical distress incurred in the violent conflict that forced them to leave behind their families and properties. The notion of cultural adaptation (or acculturation) is used to refer to the IDPs' medium and long-term strategies of adjusting their social and cultural practices in response to their new environment in Maroua. Acculturation was originally defined as "phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield et al. 1936: 149). Although acculturation is usually in the direction of the minority group adopting the habits and language patterns of the dominant group, the level of exchange can also be reciprocal (see Phillimore 2011, Smokowski et al. 2017). Apart from acculturation, the most common coping strategy observed was to rely on less preferred and less expensive food. The reduction in the number of meals per day and the restriction of adult consumption so that children could eat were also evident. Since the number of the Anglophone IDPs households are limited in Maroua, and consist primarily of individuals living together, I focus more on acculturation than on other coping strategies in order to determine how they are managing in their new environment. In the present case study, I am particularly interested in the ways Anglophone IDPs respond to the new religious and linguistic environment in Maroua and in the role played by social networks and education in smoothing their life transition in Maroua.

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[11] The determinants of migrant vulnerability,
http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iom_handbook_assistance.pdf.

## 4.  Maroua: city of refuge for Anglophone IDPs

The Far North Region of Cameroon has been exposed to Boko Haram insurgencies since 2013 as a result of its cross-border environmental, ethnic and religious similarities with neighbouring northeast Nigeria, where Boko Haram is based. Maroua was the first city in Cameroon to be affected by Boko Haram's suicide bombers, abductions of girls and kidnapping of foreigners for ransom. It has also received a large influx of Nigerian refugees and Cameroonian IDPs displaced from border villages victimised by Boko Haram. For these reasons it is astonishing that by 2017, Maroua had also become a destination for Anglophone IDPs after the outbreak of separatist violence in their home regions. Given the distance between Maroua and the English-speaking regions, as well as the reputation of the Far North for its particularly hot climate and limited agricultural food supply, it was not foreseeable that this city would become a destination for IDPs from the Northwest and Southwest regions. Yet these factors did not discourage English-speaking Cameroonians. As this study has shown, the flight of displaced Anglophones to Maroua was predicated by certain factors: the creation of bilingual schools, the opening of Maroua University and the subsequent employment of English speakers among the teaching staff. These teachers were the first circle of Anglophones that provided shelter to displaced relatives and friends. The first waves of Anglophone IDPs to reach Maroua were from family networks, which then paved the way for students, qualified workers and others to relocate to Maroua. At least in the initial phase of forced displacement, this encouraged a certain class selection bias; it was mostly IDPs with relatives in the educational profession and/or those with a certain level of education who relocated to Maroua.[12]

Since its creation in 2008, the University of Maroua has profoundly marked the life of Cameroon's English speakers. More than 92 out of 496 teaching staff members, along with other administrative staff members, are from the Anglophone regions.[13] The Anglophones who settled in Maroua with their families encouraged their friends and relatives to visit them during holidays. For the majority of them, this was their first time visiting the Far North region. In addition, the pressing need to enhance bilingualism – the use of both French and English as official languages – in the country triggered the transfer and recruitment of many Anglophones to the Far North. About 50 Anglophone teachers work in primary schools, while

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[12] I thank Laura Lambert for drawing my attention to the class selection effect.
[13] 2008–2018 annual reports, Maroua University.

the Government Bilingual High School in Maroua alone hosts 20 Anglophone teachers and over 10 part-timers. Their presence increased the number of Anglophones in Maroua years before the current conflict. Consequently, the Anglophones who settled in the Far North opened up the possibility for Anglophone IDPs to later seek shelter and join their relatives, friends or classmates in Maroua. As we will see in the IDP portraits introduced in the later section of this paper, most informants confirmed this motivation and mentioned that they had been invited by a relative or acquaintance to escape to Maroua. Compared to Yaoundé and Douala, Cameroon's mega cities, life in Maroua is relatively inexpensive (rent, daily commodities) and above all offers solidarity. In fact, the Anglophone IDPs were aware of the fact that there were no refuges or camps provided for them by the government or by the UN Humanitarian agencies in contrast to facilities for displaced persons from the Boko Haram security crisis.

## 5. Educational situation of young IDPs

The security crisis in the Anglophone regions beginning in October 2016 resulted in the closure of many schools in the areas prone to attacks. There are thousands of out-of-school children and displaced students who are now struggling to enjoy their right to an education in the Far North of the country.[14]

Noticing young Anglophones wandering around in Maroua during school hours was the starting point for this research.[15] Education is one among other essential needs of Anglophone IDPs in Maroua, as evidenced by the visibility of school-age children out on the streets. These are children and young people who were forced to abandon their studies in their home regions when fleeing for their lives to the Far North. Many of them have had no education since 2016/17 and have faced difficulties in returning to school. According to the 2018 school year report of the Ministry of Secondary Education, 8253 students displaced from the Anglophone regions were recorded in northern Cameroon: 416 in the Adamawa region and 7837 in the North and Far North regions. These numbers have likely increased from the 2019 school year to the present due to the ongoing violence that has prevented children from returning to their home schools.[16] Despite the government's back-to-school campaign and its "safe school"

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[14] Œil du Sahel N0 1259, 30 August 2019.
[15] In our research we did not take into consideration school-age children in general, but focused on Anglophone IDP youths and children of school age in Maroua.
[16] Œil du Sahel N0 1259, 30 August 2019.

declaration,[17] violence resurged in the Anglophone regions in 2020 with the firm intent of paralysing state institutions. Nonetheless, Cameroon endorsed the Safe School Declaration (SSD) in September 2018. Recent school massacres would have never happened if only the SSD measures had been able to protect education facilities during the armed conflict, as promised in the declaration: "Cameroon's endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration signals the government's commitment to better safeguard learning and mitigate the devastating damage caused by attacks on education and military use of schools."[18] The continuing attacks on schools and kidnapping of teachers with huge ransom demands convey the ineffectiveness of the SSD so far in the Anglophone regions.

In the so-called Kumba massacre, gunmen stormed a private school in Cameroon's Anglophone Southwest region in October 2020; they killed 7 children and injured at least 13 others. No one claimed responsibility for the killings, but the government accused armed separatists, who had called for a boycott of education in the Anglophone regions until the conflict is resolved. As noted by Human Rights Watch: "What happened in Kumba is the latest in a series of shocking attacks on children and education in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon. […] The government needs to do more to ensure that children can study safely. The authorities should ensure that those responsible for the Kumba massacres are held to account, deter further attacks, and secure children's fundamental right to education."[19]

While schools in Maroua are functioning regularly and offer a safe environment for school-age children, our research showed that young Anglophone IDPs still face significant challenges in attempting to continue their education. Many IDP families were torn apart by the conflict and teenagers found themselves struggling alone in Maroua city. This situation affects both girls and boys and is caused by the general lack of money and resources to finance the displaced children's education. While boys are sent to work to earn money (in agriculture, fishing, retail/services, transportation (motorbike taxis), mobile phone services,[20] arts and crafts, selling black market drugs, as secretaries or as waiters in restaurants and bars), girls are

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[17] https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/utvikling/safe_schools_declaration.pdf.

[18] Diya Nijhowne, director of Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), Cameroon is 81st Country to Endorse Safe Schools Declaration, September 10, 2018, https://protectingeducation.org/news/cameroon-is-81st-country-to-endorse-safe-schools-declaration/.

[19] Cameroon: Gunmen Massacre School Children, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/02/cameroon-gunmen-massacre-school-children

[20] A salesperson offers mobile phone minutes or telephone calls, internet recharge bundles and mobile money transactions to customers. Sometimes, an umbrella and a chair are enough to establish such a business under a tree or right on the pedestrian path.

often encouraged to get married. Other factors mentioned in interviews with IDP youths include a lack of interest in schooling and a general feeling of insecurity.

The majority of IDP students who were integrated into schools in Maroua were obliged to repeat classes.[21] Even though there are bilingual primary and secondary schools in Maroua, IDP students were mostly accepted in the French section rather than in schools following the Anglophone system. Many IDP youths explained that they did not attend school because of their lack of school supplies and inability to pay the fees levied by parents' associations (A.P.E. Association des parents d'élèves). Furthermore, several mentioned an irregular food supply and the need to work to earn money as reasons for dropping out of school. During the evaluation period (2019/2020), all households interviewed named at least one survival strategy to cope with the lack of money or food:

- reduction in the number of meals per day (e.g. from three meals a day to just one)
- reduction in the adult's consumption of food
- reduction in the size of meal portions
- borrowing money or obtaining assistance
- child and family labour.

The conflict and displacement have also caused changes in livelihoods. Before the crisis, household incomes were mainly derived from agriculture and trade. At the time of the research (2019), most English-speaking IDP households in Maroua had no source of income and very few engaged in economic activities. Furthermore, the parents' contribution to the household income had fallen dramatically, and was partly replaced by children's involvement in income-generating activities that prevented them from attending regular schooling. This decline in income, compounded by the fact that families generally live in rented housing, has created additional pressures on available resources.

While on the national level, the government has refrained from recognising Anglophones as IDPs, there have been moderate attempts at the local level to ameliorate the IDPs' educational situation, with some administrative measures being taken to facilitate the reintegration of IDP children in local schools in northern Cameroon. With regard to the 2018/19 academic year, the governors of the northern regions recommended to the heads of secondary and training schools to allow displaced students to join schools in Ngaoundéré,

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[21] Interview with John Brake, discipline Master, Government Bilingual High School, Maroua, 5 May 2019.

Garoua and Maroua without being required to replace their school uniforms and to allow them to use the learning materials from their original schools in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon.[22] This announcement could have been seen as a tacit recognition of the state of war in the Anglophone regions, but rather, it was just a local decision and not a mandatory declaration on the part of the state. The governors had taken what they called conservatives measures to deal with the growing number of school-age young people on the streets.

In Maroua, for example, displaced students training in the zootechnics and veterinary centre were able to reintegrate into school thanks to this intervention by the governor. The veterinary centre accepted displaced students who, before the crisis, were taking the same training in their region of origin before fleeing to Maroua. They were allowed to complete their training and be integrated into the civil service, just as if they had completed their training in the Northwest region.[23] Similarly, in ordinary and technical schools in Maroua, displaced English-speaking students were able to finish their school year without having to change their classes and without paying extra tuition fees. However, for the subsequent school year (2019/2020), no reintegration measures were announced by the administrative authorities on behalf of Anglophone IDP students in Maroua.

Our research suggests that in the absence of humanitarian support by the government and international organisations, some goodwill organisations, including ethnic and religious associations, have made efforts to support the well-being and education of young Anglophone IDPs in Maroua. Yet their means are limited, and cannot replace the government's responsibility to ensure the right to education for internally displaced children and youths.

## 6. Selected portraits of Anglophone IDPs

In the following, I will present a selection of five portraits of young Anglophone IDPs (aged 21 to 40) who were interviewed in 2019/20. There are several other stories that could not be taken into consideration in this focus on IDPs' motivations for coming to Maroua and their coping strategies. While several portraits point towards a supportive environment and successful integration, others talk of destitution and emotional distress. The IDP portraits

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[22] Press release by the Far North Governor, February 2019.

[23] For example, the National Training Center for Zootechnical, Veterinary and Fisheries (CNFZVH) in Jakiri was forced to close down due to the violent conflict and students had no prospect of continuing their training. When their situation was brought to the attention of the Minister of Livestock and Animal Industries, he instructed his colleagues and the competent authorities to transfer the students from Jakiri to the CNFZVH in Maroua. A total of 175 arrived in two batches in December and January 2018 (Œil du Sahel n0 1193, 18 March 2019).

emphasise the priority given to making a living and supporting their own education in Maroua. Indeed, the interviewees were aware of the relevance of social networks (such as regional and ethnic associations) and language acquisition for a successful adaption process.

**6. a. Dennis** was born on 2 March 1989 in Mamfe and belongs to a family of two children. He relocated to Maroua eight months ago. He left Mamfe for security reasons, as the Amba boys (separatist fighters) were actively recruiting fighters in his village. Those who refused to join the fight against the "Yaoundé terrorist government" were killed, their houses burnt down, their farms destroyed and their family members taken hostage. He came to Maroua upon the invitation from his relatives who were employed at Maroua University. The journey to Maroua was not easy, as he had no money when he escaped from Mamfe. Upon arrival in Maroua, his relatives opened a small shop for him with the ambition to expand it so that he could meet the economic needs of the rest of his family and help them to relocate to northern Cameroon. As for now, his brother and mother are "somewhere in the bush" (deep in the countryside) and he has not heard from them since the day they left the village in panic at the Amba boys' invasion. Dennis names as his main challenges the hot weather in Maroua and learning Fulfulde, the lingua franca of the region. Once he is proficient in the language, he intends to organise his future life in Maroua.

**6. b. Nico**, the only boy in his family, escaped English-speaking Cameroon with three of his sisters. Having been a student in form one in Kumba during the 2017 school year,[24] he was unable to attend any school to complete his classes by the time he reached Maroua at the end of that school year. Insecurity was the only reason that he and his sisters fled their home and family. His neighbourhood was attacked by the Amba boys on a daily basis, and his relatives and friends were taken hostage and killed: "We lived in total fear." Kumba became a ghost city; no schools, hospitals or administrative services continued to function. His family's financial resources came from agricultural activities. But since 2018, no one has dared to carry out any farming. Farms are generally located in the bush and thus exposed to attacks by Amba boys. Life was no longer possible there and they had to escape: "We cannot wait for death," he explained to his sisters. One of his classmates was already living in Maroua with his family. Nico followed the classmate's advice on how to reach Maroua and how much money they

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[24] Form one is the first year of secondary school after six years of primary school.

should take along for their transportation needs. To survive, Nico and his sisters are now working as street vendors selling drugs and cosmetics in Maroua. None of them can afford to go back to school as there is not a single franc to sustain their daily life. The back-to-school campaign is not even a dream for them. They have lost any confidence in their future. So far, they have not received any support, be it from the government or from any humanitarian organisation. As they explain, they cannot deny that Maroua's population is very welcoming and concerned about the ongoing war in the English-speaking part of Cameroon. But the communication problem (English to Fulfulde) remains challenging for them. Moreover, housing is an urgent concern as they are sleeping on the floor in a common room with exposure to mosquitos and the risk of malaria. The Maroua climate is very hot and they are facing a food shortage; bread and tea are the only meal they take a day.

**6. c. Anthony** arrived in Maroua in 2017. Living in a ghost town and surrounded by dead bodies he decided to save his own life by escaping from his house. He was traumatised by the level of human atrocities he witnessed and continues to live with the memories of this dramatic experience. More than one year after the killings in his village, he cannot sleep at night and can only find peace during the day. He is a jobless and homeless person. His daily meal is ensured by good-willed neighbours. He is living and sleeping in the main Maroua market. According to him, there are about 35 homeless Anglophone IDPs who are living in the same conditions in the market. He is not aware of what they do during the day. But in the evening, they gather around the Ecobank area before looking for a veranda to set up the cartons they use as beds and to sleep there.

**6. d. Ignatius** reached Maroua five months ago. The killing of his father by the separatist forces forced him from the English-speaking region in fear for his life. At the time, he was in the process of applying for a position in an NGO based in Maroua, as he intended to join some members of his family working at the University. He decided to escape with or without the expected position. Ultimately, he failed to get the job but saved his life. He joined a group of school friends who had reached Maroua a long time ago before him. He found out that Maroua was relatively calm compared to the news he used to hear about the attacks of Boko Haram. And compared to Kumba, where he came from, he felt secure and safe, far from the skirmishes he used to hear on a daily basis. He came to Maroua by road after crossing Yaoundé,

Ngaoundéré and Garoua. He is currently working as a commercial agent with a company that sells toiletries and daily necessities. The company is new in Maroua and seems to belong to a rich person from the Anglophone region who relocated to Maroua and is now offering day work to English-speaking people who escaped to Maroua. We were not able to interview the owner to verify the information, and the workers were not really aware of the company's recruitment strategies. At the time of our research, about 50 students from English-speaking Cameroon were working as commercial agents, being paid on the basis of their daily sales. We interviewed a group of five boys and girls who jointly rented a room and shared the cost. The survival struggles they mentioned indicate that they were on their own without any family support. As former students, almost all of them can express themselves in French for daily life and commercial purposes.

**6. e. Simon** is a father of three children. The family moved to Maroua in December 2017. Their relocation was gradual and purposeful. With the ongoing insecurity in Bamenda, they preferred to join their relatives working in Maroua rather than waiting for further causalities before leaving. The first year, Simon sent his wife and children ahead to Maroua while he was gradually selling off their property and belongings in Bamenda, as he deemed life in Maroua cheaper and more affordable. He supported his wife in opening a restaurant next to the university campus. By early 2019, he joined his family in Maroua after selling their house and property for a price three times lower than its real value. They established a well-known Anglophone restaurant in Maroua and succeeding in sending their children back to school without external support. This family business is one of the success stories we encountered, as the father and children serve food in the restaurant while the mother is the professional chef. Within a short period of time, the mother learned basic Fulfulde, and they are already interacting with the local and host community as if they were born in Maroua. This distinguished family enjoys high esteem among the local Fulani community in Maroua, and keep their neighbourhood informed about what is really going on in the English-speaking regions. The support of the host community is a significant help to Simon and his family, and their integration has been facilitated by their learning of Fulfulde.

## 7. Anglophone IDP adaptation strategies

The subsequent analysis focused on three major themes that emerged from these portraits: IDPs' emotional distress; the role of networks; resilience and cultural adaptation strategies. All three are relevant to understanding the young Anglophone IDPs' coping strategies and their ability to process the transition to life in Maroua.

### 7. a. Emotional distress

All five portraits attest to IDPs' experiences of extreme violence exerted by the warring parties (both the military and separatists) in the Anglophone conflict. Several are still struggling with these experiences and the effects on their well-being, which is illustrated, among other things, in restlessness and sleeplessness (as in the case of Anthony), or the absence of hope and confidence in the future (as in the case of Nico and his sisters).

According to Barry et al. (2018), life skills are a blend of social, personal and cognitive skills, which include the abilities to peacefully resolve conflict, manage and cope with stress efficiently, and develop a work-life balance. By improving the set of skills that fall under these categories, one can become more emotionally resilient. Most IDPs we interviewed have faced traumatic events. As transpires in several of the portraits, having lost a close person or not knowing their whereabouts during the conflict is difficult to bear and may generate health challenges, such as loneliness and depression. In addition, some bereaved individuals and families find it very difficult to cope materially. In some cases, the dead/missing family member was the sole breadwinner and now the children are stranded in a new city without an income. This can lead to poverty and a struggle for survival, as in the case of Nico and his sisters, and can be further compounded by unemployment and dependency on the goodwill of strangers, as Anthony reports.

As conversations with supportive host families and teachers suggest, many of the IDPs would benefit from the availability of professional psychological-social support structures, which have been limited to refugees seeking shelter from Boko Haram operations and counter-insurgency operations by the government (e.g. Kaiser et al. 2020).

## 7. b. Support networks

As reflected in several of the portraits, the presence of Anglophones who successfully established themselves in Maroua has been a key factor in facilitating the arrival and settling in of Anglophone IDPs. In Dennis's case, for example, it is his relatives working at the University who helped him come to Maroua and open a shop. Similarly, Ignatius followed a group of school friends who had settled in Maroua long before him, who guided him to a job as a commercial agent. There are also instances in which groups of IDPs organise themselves and support each other, for example by sharing accommodation.

In addition, the research showed that there are two major support networks that Anglophone IDPs tap into: regional and ethnic associations (also called family meetings) and religious communities. Anglophones in Maroua have organised themselves into ethnic and subethnic groups united by common bonds of language and ethnic origin. These family meetings include Donga Mantung, Ngemba, Bali, Menchum, Ngoketunja and Bafut from the Northwest and Manyu and Bakossi from the Southwest. In addition, there are regional umbrella associations, such as the North West Solidarity Fund (NWSF) and the South West General Meeting (SWGM), which promote the well-being of their members and have reached out to Anglophone IDPs to help them settle in Maroua.

Based on the idea of ethnic solidarity, these associations provide orientation to newcomers and can mobilise financial and emotional support for members in situations of need. The family meetings also organise cultural activities that include the performance of regional songs and dances and the serving of traditional dishes. Anglophone IDPs generally appreciate these opportunities, as they can enjoy a taste of home and find solace in the company of their co-ethnics. For many, coping with nostalgia does not necessarily mean a longing to return to their home regions under fire, but rather finding ethnic commonalities that help them to cope with their lost past and to appreciate their survival and their integration process in Maroua.

## 7. c. Cultural adaptation strategies

The portraits of the five IDPs also tell us about the cultural and health challenges they face. These include the hot weather in the Far North, which differs considerably from the moderate climate of the Anglophone regions and requires gradual adaptation. Another challenge identified by most IDPs we spoke to refers to communication. The Far North region, like other

parts of Cameroon, is a multilingual environment. Fulfulde is a vernacular language widely spoken in Northern Cameroon. In addition, there are several minority languages spoken in different parts of the Far North. French is the language of instruction in school and is preferred in public and administrative services, whereas English, the country's second official language, is hardly used. Most Anglophone IDPs have at least a basic mastery of French, which is part of the regular Anglophone school curriculum. As the case of Ignatius and his co-workers shows, knowing French is helpful for their commercial activities. However, in order to socialise in their new environment, Anglophone IDPs in Maroua must shift to Fulfulde rather than French. Fulfulde is not used in administration and at school but dominates in the informal and private domains.

Almost all IDPs encountered during the research are interested in learning Fulfulde, particularly those who wish to stay long-term in the Far North region. For many, in fact, Maroua is no longer a place of transition in their forced migration route but rather a final destination. As one of our interview partners noted: "It is very true that whoever knows how to speak Fulfulde in Maroua is more likely to be regarded as a brother or sister and is treated in a nicer manner than whoever cannot." For example, for those who speak Fulfulde, commodities and transport by motorbike taxi are less expensive than for those who communicate in English or French. Thus, learning Fulfulde is part and parcel of the cultural adaptation process and facilitates communication and long-term integration. As the example of Simon and his wife attest, they quickly understood this, which has helped their restaurant business to thrive.

Conversely, those who fail to learn Fulfulde are generally referred to as *gadamayo* in Fulfulde, meaning someone who comes from the other side of the Sanaga River, i.e. a southerner. Usually, this term is used in a pejorative manner and is not welcomed by the person addressed. Anglophones are aware of the term's derogatory connotation, which compares to a similar phenomenon in the Northwest and Southwest, whereby Francophones and mainly northerners are portrayed in Pidgin English, the lingua franca of the Northwest and Southwest regions, as "come-no-go", i.e. those who have come to stay.[25] Even though host and guest communities manifest a sense of humour when using those derogative appellations, the terms attest to the ongoing dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the Far North and the Anglophone regions.

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[25] For more details on this issue, see Kah (2019).

In addition to the ethnic associations previously mentioned, religious communities have been an important source of support and cultural accommodation. Anglophone IDPs of Muslim background find it relatively easy to identify with the Muslim Fulani community of Maroua. Based on the Islamic teaching of the unity of the Muslim community (*ummah*), they see each other as brothers and sisters, which facilitates their social integration. Some IDPs, while in Maroua, have decided to embrace Islam, even though they originated from a Christian family background. This circumstantial change of faith is generally not appreciated by other Christians. Yet in order to defend their new faith, some of the newly converted argued that "if Islam would make it possible for them to be accepted into the society of Maroua, then why not embrace it, since after all, they were still serving the same God".[26] Respect for Islam as the dominant religion of the region is also practiced by Christian IDPs who adjust their habits in response to Islamic norms. For example, women veil their heads, sit down when talking to men and remove their shoes before passing where men are gathered.

Furthermore, while Christianity has long been popular among local population groups in the Far North, the presence of Anglophones has strengthened Christian churches (e.g. the Catholic Church, the Cameroon Baptist Church, *Union des Eglises du Cameroun*, the Apostolic Church, the Lutherans and Full Gospel Mission), several of which have established purely Anglophone congregations in Maroua. As we learned from a Christian missionary, the arrival of Anglophone IDPs since the start of the conflict has swelled the Christian communities by more than 1500 persons every year and has spurred Christian proselytisation in the Far North region.

Importantly, religious networks provide spiritual consolation and pastoral care as well as a social arena for members to support each other. For example, during church services Anglophone IDPs have the opportunity to share and discuss their differences itineraries, grievances and challenges, which also helps them to overcome the trauma they experienced in their home regions. The IDPS are not bad people trying to be good. They are wounded people trying to heal through their shared experience and in a lack of psychological support, group discussions are significant opportunities to easy themselves. Religious Leaders were aware of the life event or series of life events the IDPS went through that create a negative impact on their life by changing or distorting their future vision in Maroua.

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[26] Focus group discussions, Maroua May 10 2019.

**Conclusion**

In this working paper, I have shown that most Anglophone IDPs were attracted to the Far North region by relatives and friends, many of whom had been working in bilingual schools and at Maroua University. I also noted that displaced Anglophone children and youths in Maroua have been facing educational disruption, which harms their well-being and impacts their future livelihood opportunities, with long-term consequences for themselves, their families and communities. Since Anglophone IDPs receive inadequate support from the government, other agents, including ethnic associations and religious communities, have stepped in to help Anglophone IDPs manage the transition to life in Maroua.

The majority of Anglophone IDPs in Maroua wish eventually to return to their original environment. Those who have been able to draw on social support networks and culturally adapt to the host community are the least vulnerable. As for most of them, local integration is imperfect – in particular, because of the lack of available support and increasing pressure on limited resources, as well as limited facility in the local language. Nevertheless, social integration in Maroua enables the displaced to strengthen their coping strategies, without eliminating the prospect of a return in the future.[27]

Two main recommendations that can be made in order to improve the management of Anglophone IDPs and accelerate their socioeconomic integration in Maroua are:

➢ Facilitate exchange and collaboration among institutions providing humanitarian aid, for synchronised approaches to tackling the urgent needs of the IDPs to promote their resilience, training and self-sustainability in a short period of time.

➢ Strengthen educational opportunities for IDP children by financially supporting their school fees wherever necessary, pending the stabilisation and peaceful resolution of the conflict.

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[27] Nele Wolter (2022) Doing nothing? Dynamics of waiting among ageing internally displaced Cameroonians during the anglophone crisis, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2022.2115631.

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