

## COI QUERY

Country of Origin

**CAMEROON**

Title

**Situation of lesbian women, including legislation, treatment by the state, treatment by society, availability of state protection, access to support services**

Reference period

January 2021 to December 2023

Topic(s)

1. [Legislation](#)
2. [Treatment by the state](#)
3. [Treatment by society](#)
4. [Availability of state protection](#)
5. [Access to support services](#)

Date of completion

9 January 2024

Query Code

Q73-2023

Contributing EU+ COI  
units (if applicable)

N/A

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All sources used are referenced and cited in the bibliography section. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned COI methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive or conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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## COI QUERY RESPONSE – Cameroon

### **Situation of lesbian women, including legislation, treatment by the state, treatment by society, availability of state protection, access to support services**

The information provided in the query concerns the situation of lesbian women and has been quoted as such when sources specifically used the term. However, sources might often use LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, intersex and queer) or any other variations of the term due to the diverse terminology used across sources.

For further information see EUAA's Practical Guide, [COI Research guide on LGBTIQ](#).

#### **1. Legislation**

In Cameroon, same-sex relations are forbidden and penalised by law<sup>1</sup> in the Penal Code amended in 2016 as Law 2016/007,<sup>2</sup> which establishes the penalties:

‘Whoever has sexual relations with a person of the same sex shall be punished with imprisonment for from 6 (six) months to 5 (five) years and a fine of from CFAF 20 000 (twenty thousand) [about EUR 30.5] to CFAF 200 000 (two hundred thousand) [about EUR 305]’.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, the Law 2010/012 of 21 December 2010 Relating to Cybersecurity and Cybercriminality in Cameroon states in Section 83 (1) that:

‘Whoever uses electronic communication devices to make sexual proposal to a person of the same sex shall be punished with imprisonment for from 01 (one) to 02 (two) years or a fine of from 500,000 (five hundred thousand) [about EUR 762.24] to 1,000,000 (one million) [about EUR 1 524.49] CFA francs or both of such fine and imprisonment.’<sup>4</sup>

The law prohibiting same-sex sexual relations was enforced according to the 2022 Country report on Human Rights practices published by the US Department of State (USDOS).<sup>5</sup> USDOS noted that ‘LGBTQI+’ identity was not explicitly penalised by law.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>2</sup> ILGA, State-sponsored homophobia, December 2020, [url](#) p. 114

<sup>3</sup> Cameroon, Law No. 2016/007 Relating to the Penal Code, 2016, [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> Cameroon, Law No. 2010/012 relating to Cybersecurity and Cybercriminality in Cameroon, 2010, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>6</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 45

## 2. Treatment by the state

According to a May 2022 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, authorities did not protect ‘lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people’ and security forces arrested them arbitrarily.<sup>7</sup> In Bertoua, East Region, on 14 February 2021, 12 people were arrested on ‘homosexuality-related charges’ and one woman among those arrested denounced the violence they suffered at the gendarmerie station where they were brought.<sup>8</sup> The same source reported that the offices of Colibri, an organisation working on HIV prevention and treatment services, located in Bafoussam, West Region, were raided by police officers in February 2021 and 13 people were arrested on ‘homosexuality charges’.<sup>9</sup>

USDOS noted that state authorities, including government officials and law enforcement forces discriminated against LGBT people.<sup>10</sup> According to a Bertelsmann Stiftung's (BT) BTI (Bertelsmann Transformation Index) report from 2022, there was evidence of ‘significant discrimination and unequal access to justice’ for LGBTIQ people in Cameroon.<sup>11</sup> There was impunity in violence committed against LGBTIQ people according to the statements of Advocates for Human Rights and Alternatives Cameroon gathered by the Belgian Documentation and Research Department (CEDOCA) for a report published in July 2023.<sup>12</sup>

Organisations working on LGBTIQ topics could not register as such, despite no legislation prohibiting that registration explicitly, and had to declare to be focused on human rights at large or health-related issues.<sup>13</sup> They were also targeted by law enforcement forces.<sup>14</sup> The Association for the Advancement of Women (AVAF, Association pour la Valorisation de la Femme), an organisation based in Yaoundé that works to empower the lesbian community,<sup>15</sup> denounced in July 2021 an attack on their offices.<sup>16</sup> Freedom House added that LGBTIQ people, just like women and ethnic minorities, did not see their interests duly represented by elected politicians and were usually excluded from ‘positions of political influence’.<sup>17</sup> The criminalisation and social stigma in Cameroon on LGBTIQ people were deterrents to their active involvement in politics.<sup>18</sup>

The visit of the French ambassador for the rights of LGBTIQ people, scheduled for the end of June 2023, was cancelled after Cameroon reiterated that homosexuality was a crime and

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<sup>7</sup> HRW, Cameroon: Rising Violence Against LGBTI People, 11 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> HRW, Cameroon: Wave of Arrests, Abuse Against LGBT People, 14 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> HRW, Cameroon: Wave of Arrests, Abuse Against LGBT People, 14 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 45-46

<sup>11</sup> BT, BTI, 2022 Country Report – Cameroon, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>12</sup> Belgium, CEDOCA, COI Focus – Cameroun: L’homosexualité, 28 July 2023, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>13</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>14</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Cameroon, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>15</sup> Girls Not Brides, Association pour la Valorisation de la Femme (AVAF), n.d., [url](#); Planet Romeo Foundation, AVAF, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> Erasing 76 crimes, Vandalism of another LGBT center in Cameroon, 26 July 2023, [url](#); ProtectDefenders.eu, Success Story | Trainings of HRDs from AVAF in Cameroon, 10 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Cameroon, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>18</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 32

[informal translation] ‘it was not possible talking about LGBT+ in Cameroon’.<sup>19</sup> HRW reported that ‘government and political officials’ said about LGBTIQ people that they were “‘against nature”, “an anomaly,” “vampire citizens,” “destructive of the family,” “destructive of the state,” or as using “satanic and demonic practices”’.<sup>20</sup>

In June 2023, the National Communication Council (NCC), the Cameroon’s regulatory media organ, issued a statement addressed to the media emphasising that homosexuality was prohibited and penalised by virtue of the Cameroonian law.<sup>21</sup> The same statement called on the media and journalists to withdraw [informal translation] ‘programs that break the law, the good traditions and customs of the country’.<sup>22</sup> In case of non-compliance with the requirement, they would face suspension.<sup>23</sup> On 22 September 2023, the NCC also suspended the TV station Canal+ *Elles* for broadcasting ‘scenes with homosexual people’.<sup>24</sup> The NCC decided to lift the suspension of the TV station on 9 October 2023 when Canal+ *Elles* discontinued the emission of the programme at stake and committed to avoiding future situations.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Treatment by society

LGBTIQ people suffered violence and discrimination in Cameroon.<sup>26</sup> USDOS noted that families and communities discriminated against LGBT people.<sup>27</sup>

Erasing 76 crimes, a website that focuses on news in the countries with anti-LGBTI laws,<sup>28</sup> reported in December 2023 that a school in Mbalmayo expelled two girls when the teacher intercepted a love message that one of them sent to the other.<sup>29</sup> The article informed that both girls were ‘violently abused’ when their families learnt about the incident.<sup>30</sup> The same source informed about a previous case in which two lesbians could no longer continue their education because their families refused to continue funding them when they learnt about their sexual orientation.<sup>31</sup> Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints.

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<sup>19</sup> Mimi Mefo Info, Cameroon: Government challenges French LGBTQ Ambassador’s visit, tells him he’s ‘NOT welcome’, 21 June 2023, [url](#); RFI, Cameroon says French ambassador for LGBT rights isn't welcome, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>20</sup> HRW, Online Incitement Against LGBT People in Cameroon, 11 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>21</sup> Cameroon, CNC, Communiqué du 12 juin 2023, 12 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>22</sup> Cameroon, CNC, Communiqué du 12 juin 2023, 12 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> VOA News, Cameroon Communication Council Prohibits LGBTI Scenes on TV, 16 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>24</sup> Mimi Mefo Info, Ban on Canal+ Elles for airing gay contents lifted, 12 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>25</sup> Mimi Mefo Info, Ban on Canal+ Elles for airing gay contents lifted, 12 October 2023, [url](#); Actu Cameroun, Médias: le CNC lève la suspension de Canal+ Elles, 9 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>26</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Cameroon, 2023, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 45; BT, BTI, 2022 Country Report – Cameroon, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>27</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 45-46

<sup>28</sup> Erasing 76 crimes, About, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> Erasing 76 crimes, Cameroon: Two school girls lose their right to education because of a lesbian love note, 1 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>30</sup> Erasing 76 crimes, Cameroon: Two school girls lose their right to education because of a lesbian love note, 1 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> Erasing 76 crimes, Cameroon punishment for being lesbian: No school — unless you help, 1 September 2022, [url](#)

Washington Blade, a US news outlet on LGBT topics,<sup>32</sup> gathered the statements of the director of a Cameroonian NGO about the influence of religion, stating that: “[religion] is strongly against the LGBT community as most religious leaders here abhor the practice and discourage believers to associate or accept identifying as LGBT as being normal”.<sup>33</sup> Sources interviewed by the CEDOCA between June and July 2021 confirmed the opposition of religious leaders to ‘homosexuals’.<sup>34</sup> The nomination of an openly homosexual US ambassador to Cameroon provoked the public opposition from a religious leader<sup>35</sup> and a political scientist.<sup>36</sup>

Fair Planet, a non-profit organisation reporting on human rights and environmental justice,<sup>37</sup> noted that some Cameroonians considered homosexuality as ‘occultism’ because they did not understand romantic feelings between people of the same gender.<sup>38</sup> The Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) interviewed a representative of the organisation Colibri, working to defend rights of sexual minorities, who said that [informal translation] ‘homosexuality is perceived as a curse, a sin, a cult, a dishonour, a mental trouble, witchcraft. It is used to obtain favours, a position, a public contract or power. This perception prevents homosexuals from ‘coming out’. Most use ‘*façade* marriages’ to hide and go on with their lives’.<sup>39</sup> Homosexuality was considered as something foreign, a feature imported from the West and alien to local cultures according to the statements of Alexandre Marcel, president of the French International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) Committee, gathered by France24 in February 2021.<sup>40</sup> In February 2021 FiLiA, a women-led volunteer organisation promoting women’s human rights and based in the United Kingdom (UK),<sup>41</sup> published an interview with Tua, a lesbian from Cameroon who talked about the discrimination she suffered due to her sexual orientation and how her mother forced her into a marriage.<sup>42</sup>

Sources reported that LGBTIQ people were forced to live their identity in secret.<sup>43</sup> According to Erasing 76 crimes, in November 2021 discrimination increased after a video of sexual content was shared online showing the footballer Gaëlle Enaganouit with another woman.<sup>44</sup>

The Executive Director of Humanity First Cameroon, an organisation that works to fight HIV/AIDS and defends the rights of vulnerable people and LGBTIQ,<sup>45</sup> noted that society had

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<sup>32</sup> Washington Blade, About, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>33</sup> Washington Blade, Report documents continued persecution of LGBTQ, intersex people in Cameroon, 24 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>34</sup> CEDOCA, COI Focus – Cameroun: L’homosexualité, 28 July 2023, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>35</sup> Actu Cameroun, Un prêtre catholique demande au Cameroun de refuser l’accréditation du nouvel ambassadeur des Etats-Unis, 12 June 2023, [url](#)

<sup>36</sup> Actu Cameroun, Njoya Moussa (politologue): « les USA veulent amener le Cameroun à lever l’interdiction de l’homosexualité », 25 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>37</sup> Fair Planet, About, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>38</sup> Fair Planet, Behind Closed Doors: Lgbtq+ People Struggle In Cameroon's Shadows, 25 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>39</sup> Switzerland, SEM, Focus Cameroun - Minorités sexuelles, 15 October 2021, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>40</sup> France24, Au Cameroun, l’homophobie continue de faire des victimes, 23 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>41</sup> FiLiA, About, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>42</sup> FiLiA, #127 Tua: Journey to Asylum, 1 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>43</sup> Fair Planet, Behind Closed Doors: Lgbtq+ People Struggle In Cameroon's Shadows, 25 July 2023, [url](#); CEDOCA, COI Focus – Cameroun: L’homosexualité, 28 July 2023, [url](#), pp. 18-19

<sup>44</sup> Erasing 76 crimes, Lesbian sex tape boosts human rights abuses in Cameroon, 16 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>45</sup> Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, Stories, Humanity First Cameroon, n.d., [url](#)

different views on homosexuals depending on their financial situation.<sup>46</sup> In the same interview with the CEDOCA, he emphasised that families could pretend to accept homosexuals who were well-off but they still needed to hide their identity publicly due to the [informal translation] ‘intolerance at the core of Cameroonian society’.<sup>47</sup> The differentiated treatment based on financial resources was also corroborated by the Swiss SEM.<sup>48</sup> Families were reported as pressuring LGBTIQ people to change and particularly in the case of lesbians some families arranged [informal translation] ‘corrective rapes or non-consensual marriage’.<sup>49</sup>

A Cameroonian LGBTIQ rights activist told the BBC News in November 2023 that she ‘was threatened with “corrective rape” for being gay in Cameroon’.<sup>50</sup> USDOS mentioned that ‘anecdotal reports’ referred to ‘corrective rape’ suffered by LGBTIQ people during the year 2022.<sup>51</sup>

The founder of the first anti-homophobia NGO in Cameroon, the Association for the Defence of Homosexual Rights (Adefho), told France24 in 2021 that the more she was talking publicly about her work, the more threats she was receiving and was called ‘a witch’ for her activities.<sup>52</sup> She also mentioned that despite the fact that attacks and arrests increased, ‘on a positive note, attitudes are starting to change in Cameroonian civil society’.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4. Availability of state protection

Information on the availability of state protection for lesbian women was scarce among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints. However, the following information may be relevant.

The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) noted in the 2020 State-sponsored homophobia report that there was no constitutional nor broad protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation available in Cameroon.<sup>54</sup> The Advocates for Human Rights and Alternatives Cameroon in 2023 stated that Cameroon failed to respond accurately to violence by officials and private individuals against LGBTIQ people.<sup>55</sup> The same source claimed that authorities did not proceed with prompt or impartial enquiries into ‘allegations on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics, including acts of torture, ill-treatment, and “corrective rape.”’<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Belgium, CEDOCA, COI Focus – Cameroun: L’homosexualité, 28 July 2023, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>47</sup> Belgium, CEDOCA, COI Focus – Cameroun: L’homosexualité, 28 July 2023, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>48</sup> Switzerland, SEM, Focus Cameroun - Minorités sexuelles, 15 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>49</sup> Switzerland, SEM, Focus Cameroun - Minorités sexuelles, 15 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>50</sup> BBC News, LGBT rights: I was threatened with “corrective rape” for being gay in Cameroon, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>51</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>52</sup> France 24, Alice Nkom, Cameroon’s tireless defender of LGBTQ rights, 8 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>53</sup> France 24, Alice Nkom, Cameroon’s tireless defender of LGBTQ rights, 8 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>54</sup> ILGA, State-sponsored homophobia, December 2020, [url](#) p. 325

<sup>55</sup> The Advocates for Human Rights and Alternatives Cameroon, Cameroon Stakeholder Report for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review, 5 April 2023, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>56</sup> Advocates for Human Rights and Alternatives Cameroon (The), Cameroon Stakeholder Report for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review, 5 April 2023, [url](#), p. 2

Following a court decision at the end of February 2022 to sentence one of the perpetrators of an attack to an intersex person, HRW acknowledged that it meant ‘growing recognition of the fundamental rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people in Cameroon, including their right to be protected from violence’.<sup>57</sup>

## 5. Access to support services

According to the submission by the Advocates for Human Rights and Alternatives Cameroon, accessing healthcare treatments for ‘LGBTIQ+’ people in Cameroon was challenging.<sup>58</sup> The Swiss SEM collected the views of a local organisation that stated that [informal translation] ‘a lesbian [...] cannot disclose to medical personnel that she has sexual relations with another woman’.<sup>59</sup> The fear of being exposed had an impact on individuals’ disposition to access HIV and AIDS health services.<sup>60</sup>

The CEDOCA informed in its COI Focus report that there were organisations that have the capacity to temporarily shelter people who have been expelled from their houses and rejected by their families due to their sexual orientation.<sup>61</sup> The source mentioned the shelters managed by the organisations the Cameroonian Foundation for Aids (CAMFAIDS) and Humanity First Cameroon in Yaoundé, the organisation Health and Human Rights Cameroon (2HRC)<sup>62</sup> in Bertoua, Alcondoms in Doula, and the organisation Colibri in Bafoussam.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> HRW, Cameroon Court Punishes Anti-LGBTI Violence, 3 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>58</sup> Advocates for Human Rights and Alternatives Cameroon (The), Cameroon Stakeholder Report for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review, 5 April 2023, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>59</sup> Switzerland, SEM, Focus Cameroun - Minorités sexuelles, 15 October 2021, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>60</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Cameroon, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 46-47

<sup>61</sup> Belgium, CEDOCA, COI Focus – Cameroun: L’homosexualité, 28 July 2023, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>62</sup> DEF12, Présentation des organisation, 2HRC, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>63</sup> Belgium, CEDOCA, COI Focus – Cameroun: L’homosexualité, 28 July 2023, [url](#), p. 23



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