

Research Article

# Migrants from the Central African Republic, a War Country, Living in Douala, Cameroon (2020)

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## Abstract

The African continent, the sub-Saharan region, has been confronted since its accession to independence with several challenges: getting rid of neocolonialism, creating regional economic communities, implementing the free movement of people, goods and services to establish a common market. It is in this context that CEMAC (Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa) was created on March 16, 1994, made up of the following states: Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo Brazzaville, Chad and Central African Republic. Cameroon, until the recent conflicts in the western and northern regions, was considered a country of peace and as such welcomes many Central African nationals on its territory. These Central African nationals are seeking to improve their well-being. Thus, the city of Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon, renowned for offering economic opportunities, was chosen as the destination city by many of these migrants. This analysis of the problem of socio-economic integration of these Central Africans in Douala took place in a socio-historical context, adopting the mixed method which includes both quantitative and qualitative data. Four groups of Central African nationals were the subject of this analysis: legal residents, refugees, asylum seekers and students. Their experience during the period 2003 to 2020 through labor market institutions, housing, health and education was assessed in comparison with that of Cameroonian urban dwellers in the light of CEMAC public integration policies. Cameroon and the urban community of Douala. No evidence of xenophobia on the part of Douala city dwellers was found.

## Keywords

Regional Economic Communities, Urban Community of Douala, Socio-economic Integration, Xenophobia, CEMAC, Migrants

## 1. Introduction

This work assesses the question of socio-economic integration in the CEMAC zone (Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States), based on the example of Central Africans living in the city of Douala. Indeed, CEMAC was created with the aim of promoting socio-economic integration in Central Africa, by defining and guaranteeing its economic and social policies. It is therefore an effective instrument both for solutions for non-nationals in a member state, but also for

the development of states and socio-economic integration [1]. Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon, with its main port and headquarters of stock exchanges in the CEMAC zone, has become not only a hub in the country's economy, but also a pole of attraction for many migrants such as those from West and Central Africa, in particular nationals of the Central African Republic, who for more than a decade have been prey to the various political crises taking place in the Central African Re-

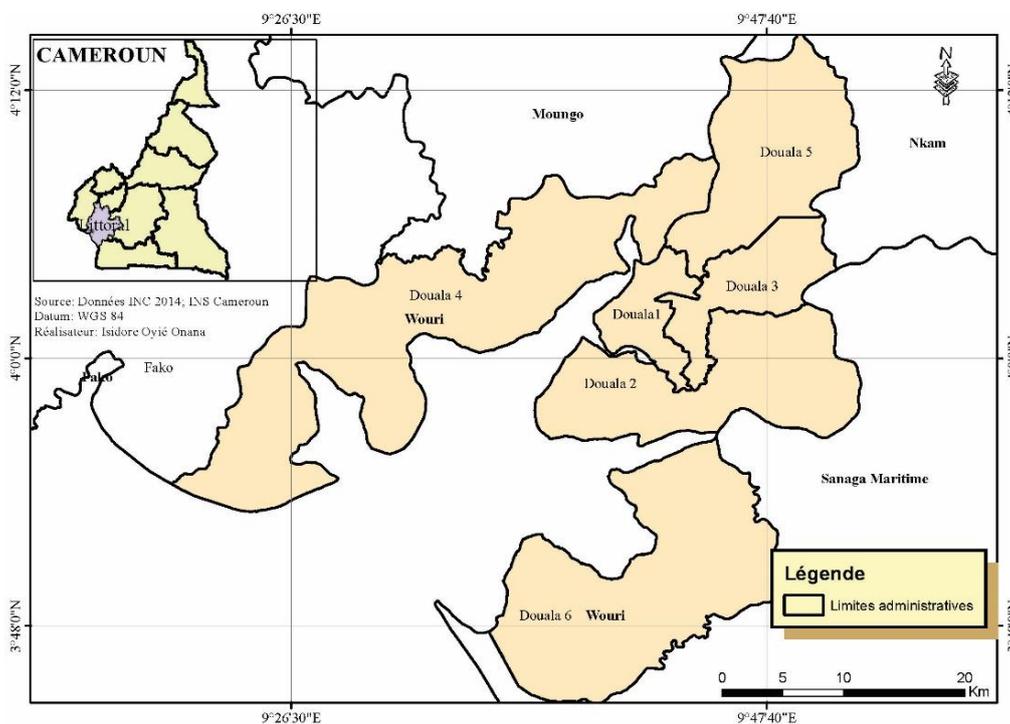
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public, and with the main motivation being the improvement of their living conditions [8]. To carry out this analysis and understand it, a methodology was adopted. This study draws on

quantitative and qualitative research methods. Finally, their experience in the Cameroonian economic capital could be described as a successful integration.



Source: Isidore Oyi éOnana, based on data from the Cameroon Institute of Cartography

**Figure 1.** Administrative division of the city of Douala.

## 2. Conflicts in the Central African Republic and Migration

Most Central African migrations to other parts of Africa and even outside the continent have been motivated by the conflict situation prevailing in this country. Since colonization, the Central African Republic has been plagued by spatial and political conflicts, causing vast migratory movements towards neighboring countries, notably Cameroon.

### 2.1. The Settling of Mbororo Pastoralists and the Inertia of the Colonial Administration as Causes of Conflicts

The arrival of Mbororo migrants in the Central African Republic aroused interest from the French colonial administration, which considered it an economic asset through the supply of livestock on the local market. The Central African climate favorable to livestock breeding has allowed these nomadic breeders to settle on land suitable for pastoral activities<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, a rush for these spaces followed and gener-

1 These nomadic breeders who arrived in the Central African Republic discovered

ated a violent territorial crisis between sedentary Gbaya farmers who saw their arrival as a threat to their territory [3]. Thus, during the reign of Bokassa, important agrarian reforms were undertaken to return the lands which had been ceded by the French administration [17].

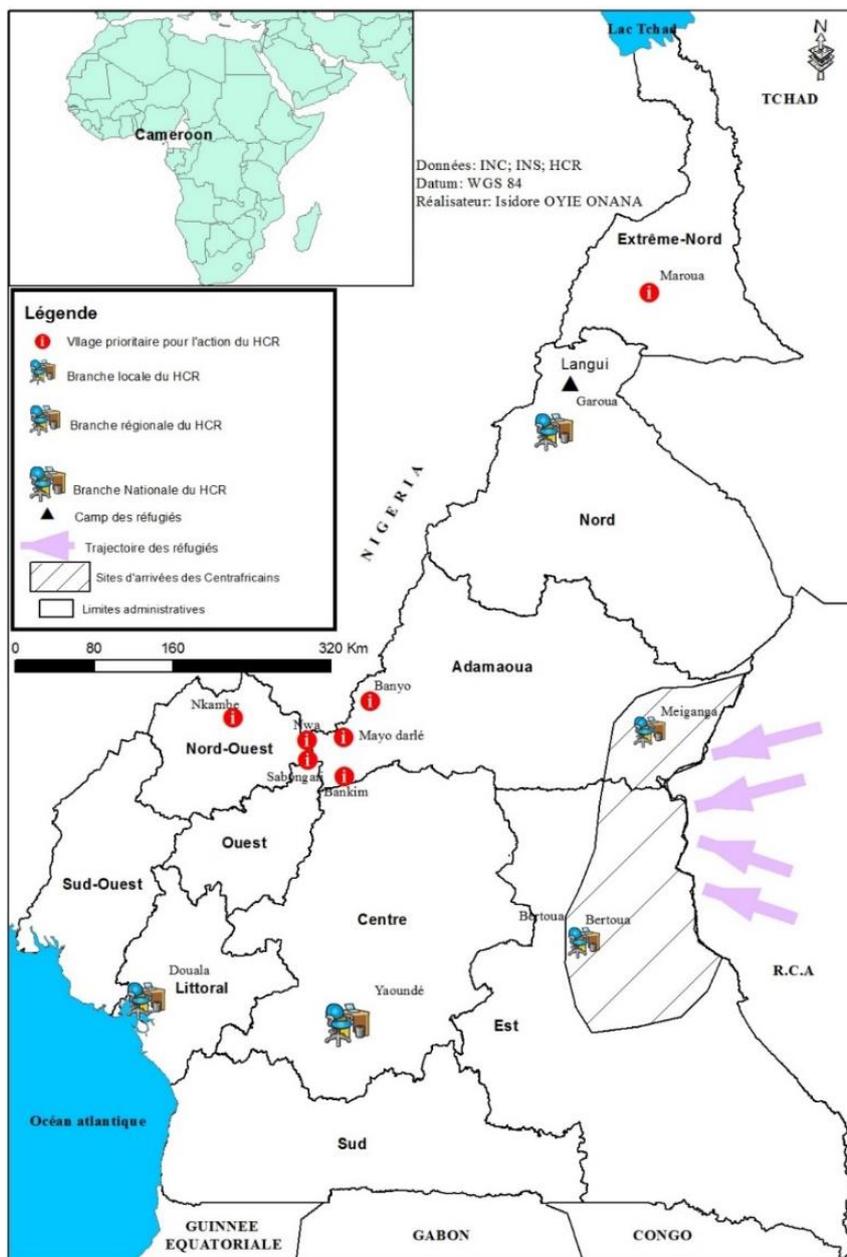
### 2.2. The Different Itineraries of Central African Nationals in Cameroon and Their Places of Establishment in the City of Douala

Reliable and quantified data on international migration issues in Cameroon are difficult to compile, and the State still cannot carry out adequate controls on entry flows across its borders. It is not always easy to accurately identify the different preferred routes of Central African nationals to Cameroon. Humanitarian organizations further specify that almost on all the Cameroon-Central African borders, more than thirty route and entry points have been identified, thus demarcating an area of nearly 50,000 square kilometers<sup>2</sup>. Central African nationals therefore officially entered Cameroon via three land

extraordinary vegetation growing in the rainy season, devoid of insects and where the livestock live peacefully. What caused the occupation of space by the latter (Chauvin & Seignobos, 2013:123).

2 Care International counted 28 in 2014.

routes, namely Kentzou in eastern Cameroon, Garoua-Boulai via eastern Cameroon and Ngaoui via Adamaoua [4, 5].



Source: Isidore OyiéOnana based on data from the Cameroon Institute of Cartography, the Cameroon Institute of Statistics and in [10]

**Figure 2.** Itineraries, facilities of UNHCR and Central African offices in Cameroon.

Many Central African nationals have found refuge in cities in CEMAC countries following the various conflicts in the Central African Republic. Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon, is considered by some authors as the Central African asylum capital in Cameroon. Thus, Cameroon has since become a preferred destination for Central African nationals. There are almost 9,871 Central African refugees and asylum seekers<sup>3</sup>. They very often succeed in establishing themselves

in difficult conditions and much more in precarious neighborhoods [12]. To manage to pay the rent, they come together to pay their bill. This is how a student confirms this information through an interview.

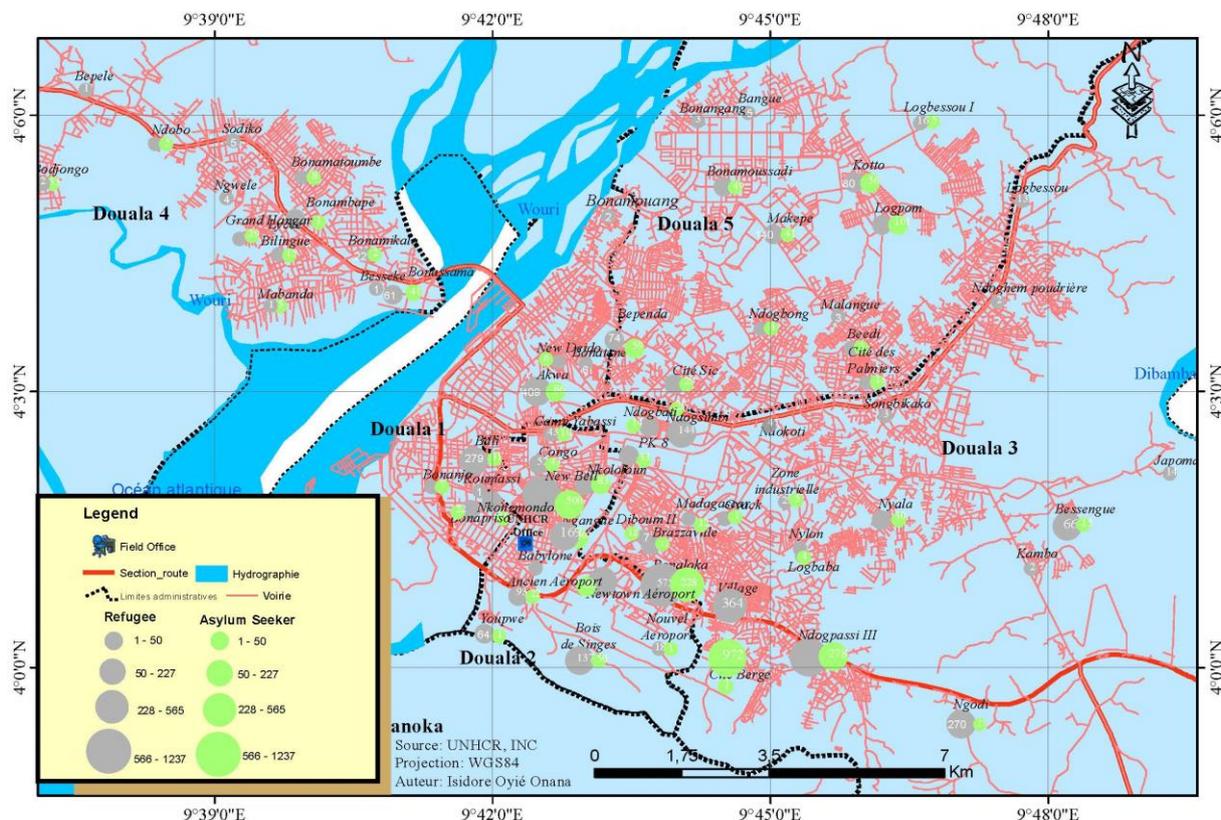
*“...I am a student in the legal sciences department at the University of Douala. I have been in the city for four years. We share a studio here in Ange Raphael, my cousins and me. We are three. The studio has one bedroom but there are*

<sup>3</sup> See the statistics of foreigners supported by the UNHCR in Cameroon from February 2021, online, available:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroun-statistiques-des-personnel-relevant-de-la-comp-tence-du-hcr-ao-t-2021>, accessed August 12, 2021.

three of us in the studio. We decided to share the studio so that everyone bears the cost of the rent. The price of this

studio is 35,000 FCFA. The three of us manage to pay” (A student, 2020).



Source: Isidore Oyi é Onana based on data [19]

Figure 3. Settlement of refugees and asylum seekers in the city of Douala in 2019.

The figure above shows the different refugee and asylum seeker facilities in the city of Douala. As the economic capital, Douala is divided into five administrative units commonly called districts. In each district, there is a presence of refugees and asylum seekers. As the map shows, there is a high concentration of refugees and asylum seekers in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd districts of Douala.

### 3. The Harmonization of Public Policies for the Integration of Migrants from CEMAC

To highlight sub-regional integration in Central Africa, CEMAC and the State of Cameroon have established socio-economic integration policies to integrate the people.

#### 3.1. National Employment Strategies Defining Integration

One of the objectives of CEMAC is to create closer links between different nationals to homogenize the geographical

space and the human links of the different States which have made a commitment to facilitate travel as well as the rights of establishment, Cameroon is therefore counting on small and medium-sized businesses to develop socio-economic integration strategies for all nationals present on its territory. It is also a way to develop the issue of job creation for all [2, 7].

#### 3.2. Public Policies for the Integration of the Urban Community of Douala

Douala is one of the most important cities in Cameroon. Due to its economic activity, it is the most important business center in Cameroon with its multiple businesses. By its opening to the Atlantic Ocean, the city of Douala has a port which previously was the main port of Cameroon. Through these different characteristics, several companies have settled, which gives it the title of economic capital. The municipality of Douala, to promote socio-economic integration policies for its population, through their different origins, is developing certain social policies with the aim of integrating social cohesion between the different migrant communities with a view to promoting live together while respecting the principles of peace [6, 11].

## 4. The Socio-economic Integration of Central African Migrants in the City of Douala

The experience of Central African nationals in the city of Douala considers four closely linked institutions: employment, housing, health and education. The city of Douala can be a good example of the integration of CEMAC nationals, as the

main economic capital of Cameroon, thus teeming with the country's main activities.

### 4.1. Demographic and Economic Profile

We cannot carry out a study of the socio-economic integration of a population without first presenting their demographic and economic profiles as indicated in the table below.

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of Central African nationals in the city of Douala by interview.

Statuts	Legal	Refugees	Asylum seekers	Students	Total
Number	30	45	10	15	100
Gender	18 men	17 men	2 men	10 men	47 men
	12 women	28 women	8 women	5 women	53 women
Household size	22 with children	39 with children	10 with children	No children	71 with children
	08 without children	6 without children			29 without children
Age	18 M=30+	15 M=30+	2 M= 30+	10 M= 30-	35 M = 30+
	09 W= 30+	10 W= 30+	2 W= 30+	05 W = 30-	21 W = 30+
				03 M before 2016	12 M = 30-
				02 W before 2016	32 W = 30-
Arrival date	13 M before 2016	28 W before 2016	08 W after 2016	07 M after 2016	33 M before 2016
	05 M after 2016			02 M after 2016	14 M after 2016
	12 W after 2016	17 M before 2016	02 M after 2016	07 M after 2016	30 W before 2016
				03 F after 2016	23 W after 2016

**Source:** Author based on interview data

The number of respondents who constitute our study is one hundred, distributed by age, sex, household size and date of arrival, as indicated in [Table 1](#). In this section, gender and ages are presented. Thus, women are in the majority than men. The Central African nationals who constitute our samples and present in the city of Douala, mostly have families. Like the students, all have children. Thus, among legal immigrants and

refugees, the majority have children, while a minority is childless [13]. However, among asylum seekers, all have children. Furthermore, regarding the dates of arrival, more than half of these Central African nationals arrived in the city before 2016, while the rest of this population arrived after 2016.

**Table 2.** Economic profile of Central African nationals in the city of Douala by sex and interview.

Branch of activities	Legal		Refugees		Asylum seekes		Total/85	
	Masculin	Feminine	Masculin	Feminine	Masculin	Feminine	Masculin	Feminine
Primary	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture		Agriculture	04	16
Indus-try/buildin gs	02- Wood sawmills		07-Masonry		02 Ma-sonry		18	00
	02- Masonry		01-Pastry					
	01- Soapworks		01-printing					

Branch of activities	Legal	Refugees	Asylum seekes	Total/85
	01- Pastry	house		
		01-Wood sawmills		
Trade	03-Clothing sale	02-Sale of food	01-Shopkeeper	07-Sale of peanuts
	02-Sale of alcoholic beverages	05-Clothing sale	01-Sale of local drinks	03-Sale of food
Services	02- Handlers at the port			05-Maintenance workers
	01-Baker	04- Vigils		03-Housekeepes
	01-Maintenance agent			02-Vigils
				07
				22
				08
				10

Source: Author based on interview data

The activity situation materialized through this study (Table 2) reveals that the activity carried out in the primary sector is agriculture. It is occupied by both sexes. Furthermore, in the industry or construction sector, only men work in the field and it largely concerns construction. While the trade sector is predominantly women and concerns much more the sale of roasted peanuts and corn or quite simply the sale of peanuts on the roadsides of the capital city. However, in the services, there is a slight domination of men. However, many workers in this sector are cleaning technicians and security guards.

#### 4.2. The Institutional Living Conditions of Central Africans and Cameroonians in the City of Douala

The integration of Central African nationals into the Cameroonian economic capital is carried out by institutions, considered as measures of the socio-economic integration of this group. To use North's definition of institutions, they are rules of the game in a society. More precisely, they are constraints that man has put in place to govern interactions between people. Thus, they structure the incentives in exchange, whether political, social or economic [14].

##### 1. Access to employment for Central African and Cameroonian nationals

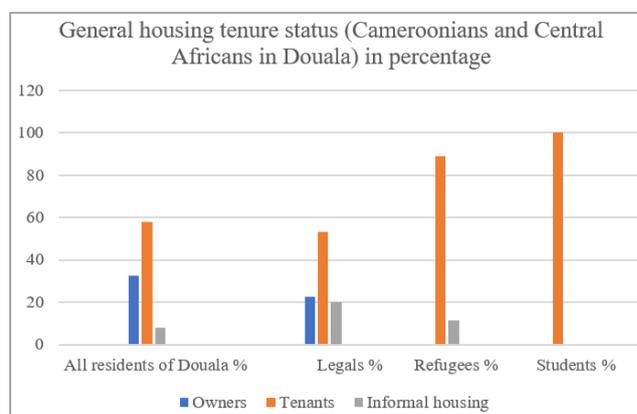
Access to employment for Central African nationals is a reality. These Central African nationals, although employment is difficult to obtain, still manage to find employment as indicated below for a small sample. Furthermore, a difference is made on gender regarding access to employment. If they are not allowed into public service [15], however, the informal sector through small trades and the private sector are open to them.

##### 2. Access to housing for Central African and Cameroonian nationals

Access to housing by Central Africans in Douala is an

important issue in the study of the socio-economic integration of these foreigners. Integrating through housing allows you to better judge your standard of living. While it is true that most Central African nationals are renting, some have integrated well to the point of owning houses.

The status of housing occupancy by the Central Africans surveyed was materialized in histogram. Thus, a comparison is made between Cameroonians and Central African nationals to evaluate their level of integration into the economic capital city by the housing.



Source: [9] Author based on interview data

Figure 4. General housing tenure status (Cameroonians and Central Africans in Douala) in percentage.

##### 3. Access to health care

Access to health care by Central African nationals in the city of Douala is a reality, as much as the right to health is an inalienable right for every human being<sup>4</sup>. All participants in the

4 This is a right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 25 of 1948. Online. Available: [https://www.un.org/fr/udhrbook/pdf/udhr\\_booklet\\_fr\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/fr/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_fr_web.pdf) Accessed January

study testified that they benefited from treatment in the city's health facilities in the same way as Cameroonian nationals. However, a comparison is necessary in the present case.

#### 4. Access to education and social relations with Cameroonians

By the fundamental principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right to education is an inalienable right for every human being [18]. In Cameroon, CEMAC nationals benefit from the same right to education as nationals in accordance with certain legal provisions [16].

## 5. Conclusion

The Central African nationals who received the attention of this study have successful socio-economic integration. They are integrating well into the city of Douala despite some difficulties. The experience of Central African nationals can be considered as an in-depth analysis of the nature of their integration into Douala society. It thus emerges that on the labor market, all Central Africans who participated in the study are employed in all institutional sectors of activity. The occupancy rates recorded in these sectors of activity differ not only between nationals and Central Africans, but also between Central African genders. There are also differences in the question of housing in the city between Central Africans and Cameroonians. Can we observe a difference about informal housing where Central African nationals are in the majority than Cameroonians? However, some Central Africans own houses even though they are a minority.

## Abbreviations

CAN	Central African Nationals
CEMAC	Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa
CIC	Cameroon Institute of Cartography
EC	Echo Crisis
UCD	Urban Community of Douala
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## Author Contributions

**Serge Sabine Ntsama Onana:** Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

**Simon Bekker:** Supervision

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts interest.

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