



POLICY OVERVIEW

# Cameroon Poverty Assessment 2024



## Working Out of Poverty: Building Resilience and Inclusive Growth for Cameroon's Future

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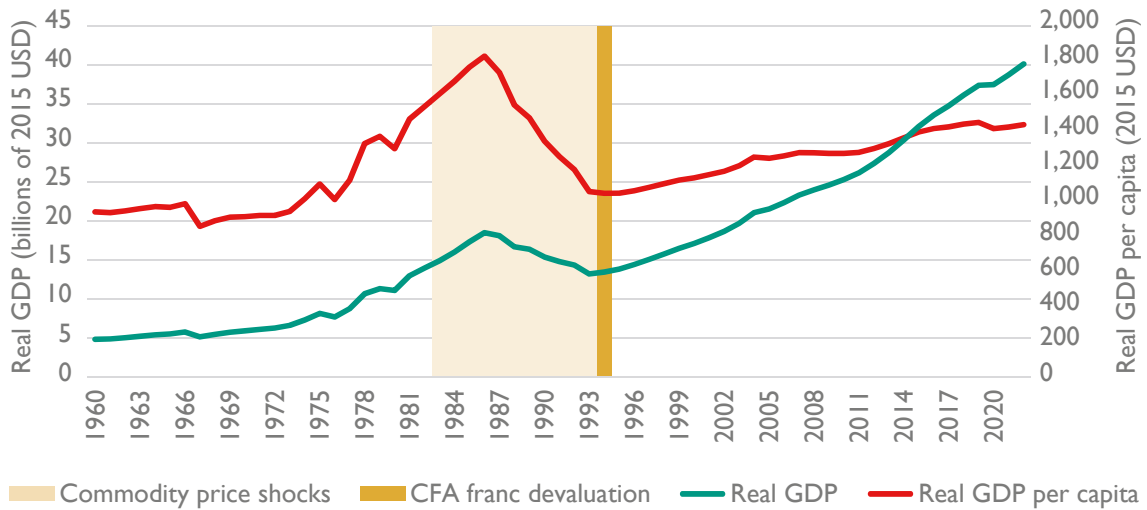
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**T**his report, Cameroon's first ever official poverty assessment, analyzes the country's latest household survey data and proposes poverty reduction policies that can effectively reduce poverty. About 4 in 10 Cameroonians live below the national poverty line – a situation that has been virtually unchanged over the past two decades. With the population continuing to grow, the number of poor Cameroonians now exceeds 10 million. While economic growth has proved stable, it has been slow, so real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita today is lower than it was in the 1980s. Furthermore, productive jobs are scarce so what growth has been achieved is not reaching the poor and vulnerable. Nevertheless, Cameroon has potential: with favorable geographical conditions, abundant natural resources, rapid urbanization, and a young population with improving human capital outcomes, the country has the opportunity to address its mounting development challenges. Yet urgent policy reform is essential to harness its potential. This report presents the most recent trends in poverty in Cameroon, assessing its key drivers, and proposing countervailing measures. Alongside core poverty and inequality diagnostics, it examines the impact of shocks, human capital, livelihoods, and access to markets and services in depth. The analysis is based on the latest microdata from the fifth *Enquête Camerounaise Auprès des Ménages* (Cameroon Household Survey, ECAM-5) conducted in 2021/22. These household data are combined with other innovative data sources, including granular geospatial data. This Policy Overview highlights the poverty assessment's key findings and outlines the policies that can help Cameroon harness its potential before its development challenges become too severe.

## **PO1. Cameroon's growth performance has been too slow to raise living standards**

**While growth in Cameroon has been positive in the last three decades, it has not been fast enough to recover from the shocks experienced in the mid-1980s.** Between 1985 and 1993, Cameroon suffered a sustained economic decline as the prices of key export commodities – especially oil, cocoa, and coffee – fell precipitously (*Figure 1*). Following this period of backsliding, the government reined in spending and the CFA franc was devalued in 1994. More stable and resilient economic growth ensued, even during the COVID-19 crisis. However, despite this stability, economic growth has been too slow, especially relative to population growth, to recoup previous losses.

Figure 1. Trends in per capita GDP in Cameroon

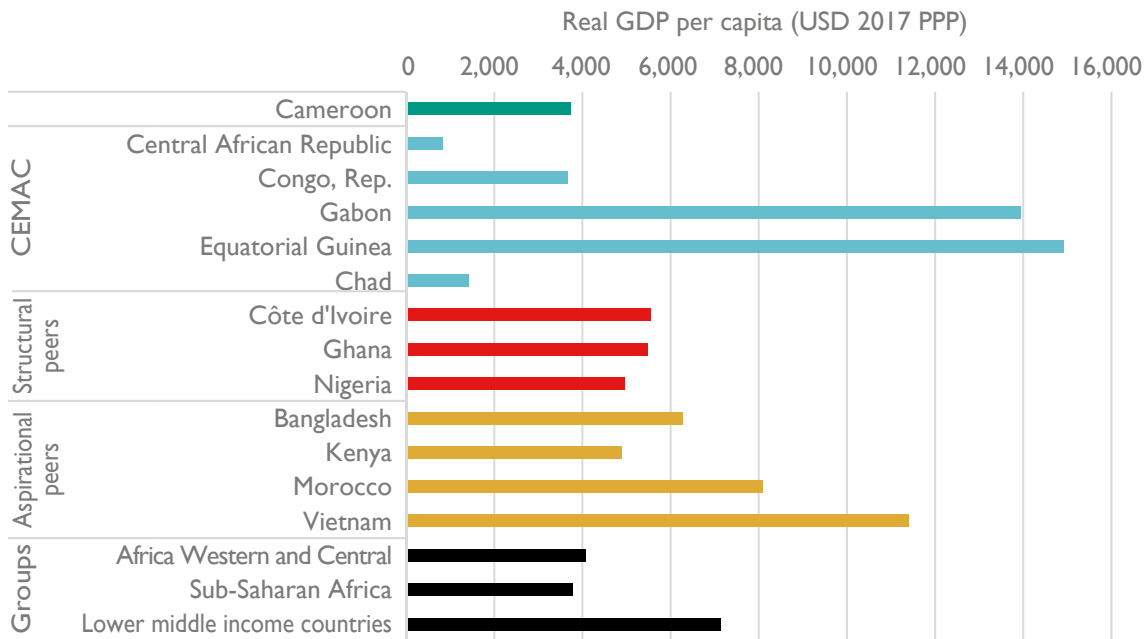


**Note:** GDP expressed in USD 2015 terms to allow for a longer time series.  
**Source:** World Development Indicators (WDIs) and World Bank estimates

**Cameroon lags peer countries in terms of GDP per capita.** With GDP per capita at 3,724 USD in 2017 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms in 2022, Cameroon is a lower middle-income country. Growth has not yet been fast enough to meet the country’s ambition to achieve upper middle-income country status. Looking across the continent, Cameroon’s GDP per capita is close to the averages for Western and Central Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and CEMAC, although it is much lower than in Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, and Nigeria – its “structural peers”, whose economies have fundamentals that are similar to the Cameroonian economy (*Figure 2*). Moreover, some “aspirational peer” countries – whose living standards were similar to Cameroon in 1990 – have enjoyed far stronger growth than Cameroon in the last three decades so in those countries GDP per capita has risen much faster.<sup>(1)</sup>

1. The aspirational peer countries are Bangladesh, Kenya, Morocco, and Vietnam. Both the structural and aspirational peers are being used for other World Bank analytical work in Cameroon, including the upcoming Country Economic Memorandum (CEM). The peer countries used in the report are not exactly the same as those included in Cameroon’s National Development Strategy (NDS30).

Figure 2. GDP per capita in Cameroon and comparator countries, 2022



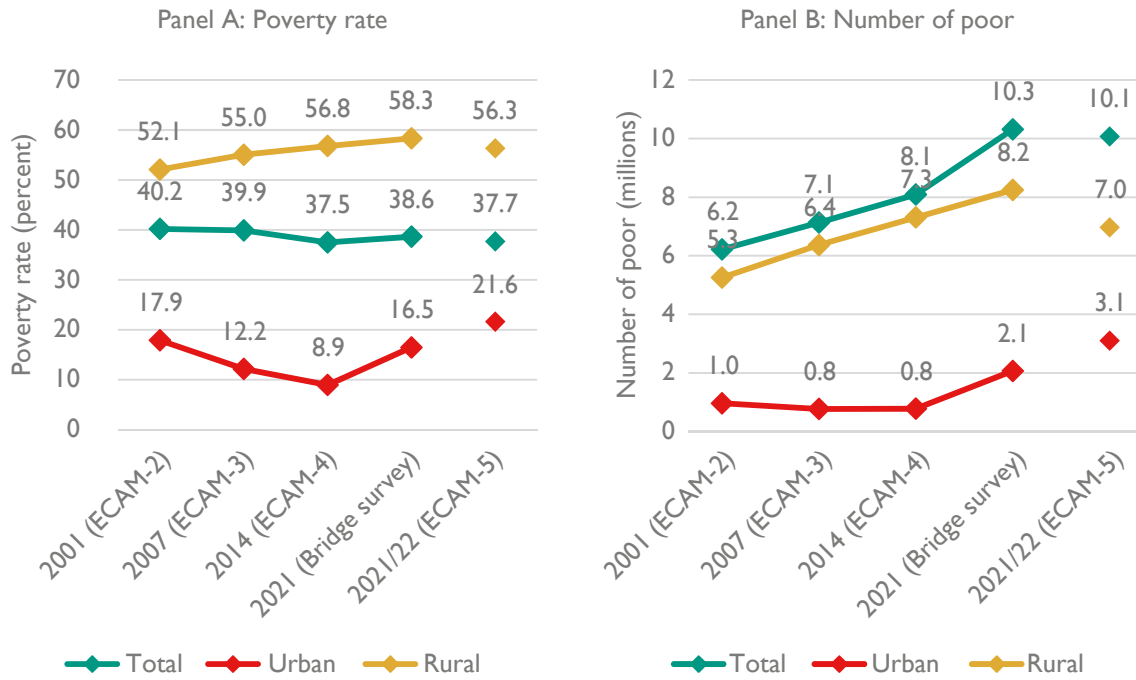
**Note :** CEMAC = *Communauté économique et monétaire de l’Afrique centrale* (Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa). GDP expressed in USD 2017 PPP terms to facilitate cross-country comparisons.  
**Source:** World Development Indicators (WDIs) and World Bank estimates.

## PO2. Given slow growth, poverty reduction in Cameroon has languished for 20 years

**Around 4 in 10 Cameroonians live below the national poverty line, and this situation has changed little in two decades.** The fifth *Enquête Camerounaise Auprès des Ménages* (Cameroon Household Survey, ECAM-5), collected between October 2021 and September 2022, reveals that 37.7 percent of Cameroonians lived below the national poverty line of 296,691 XAF per person per year, which corresponds to 3.04 USD 2017 PPP terms. ECAM-5 provides the latest snapshot of poverty and welfare in Cameroon, employing international best practices. A special “bridge survey” collected in 2021 – which employs the same poverty-measurement methodology previously applied in Cameroon – indicates that poverty has been virtually unchanged over the course of the 2000s and 2010s, moving only slightly from 40.2 percent in 2001 to 38.6 percent in 2021 (*Figure 3*).

**With rapid population growth, the number of poor Cameroonians is rising, and now exceeds more than 10 million people.** Given the pace of population growth and stagnant poverty reduction, the absolute number of people living below the national poverty line increased by about two-thirds between 2001 and 2021, rising from 6.2 million to 10.3 million. Since many of the measures put in place to curtail the COVID-19 crisis had been removed by the time data were collected in 2021, this likely reflects a continuation of long-term trends rather than a sudden and short-lived uptick in the number of poor people. The scale of Cameroon’s poverty-reduction challenge is growing year by year.

Figure 3. Poverty rate and absolute number of poor in Cameroon using national poverty line, by urban-rural, 2001-2022



**Note:** Consumption is spatially deflated and, where relevant, temporally deflated to compare with national poverty lines. Estimates from 2001, 2007, 2014, and the 2021 bridge survey are comparable. 2021/22 estimates from ECAM-5 represent latest best estimates but cannot be compared with previous surveys.  
**Source:** ECAM-2, ECAM-3, ECAM-4, ECAM-5, 2021 bridge survey, and World Bank estimates

**While poverty remains concentrated in rural areas, urban poverty is now rising.** Urban poverty in Cameroon had been gradually declining in the 2000s, but these gains have subsequently been wiped out. Between 2014 and 2021, the poverty rate and the number of poor people living in urban areas approximately doubled. Rising monetary poverty in Cameroon’s towns and cities is accompanying new urban development challenges, including pollution and overcrowding.

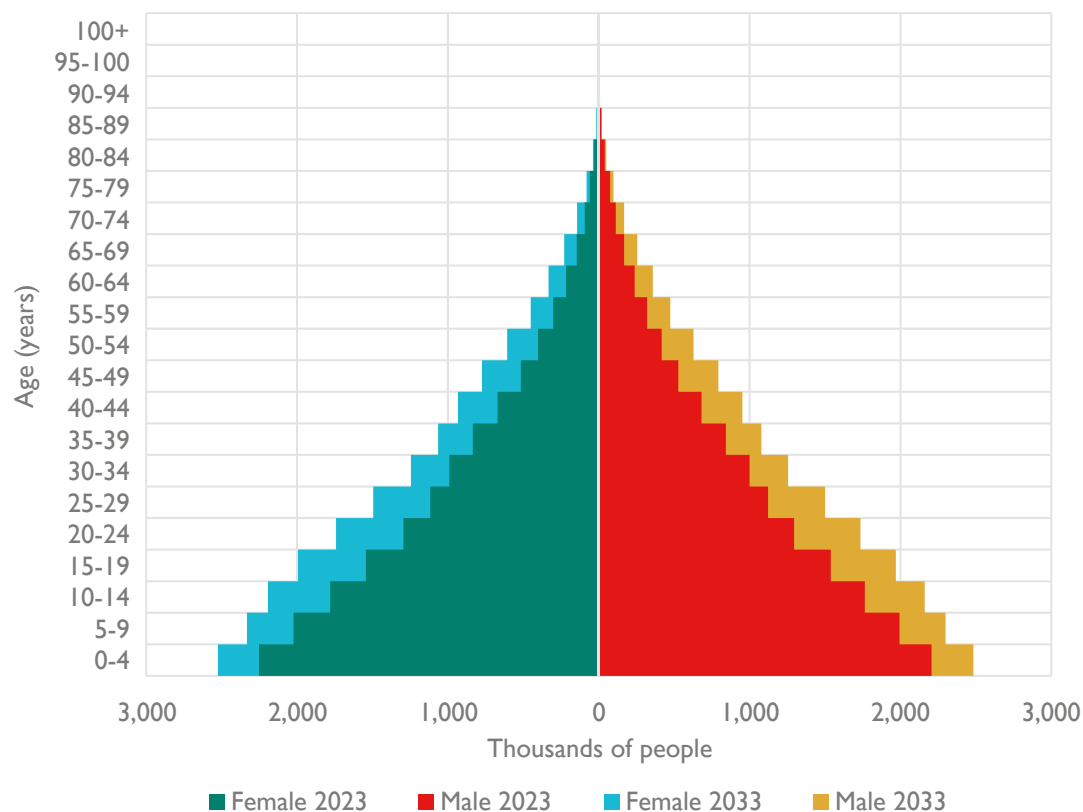
### PO3. Cameroon faces a poverty paradox: high potential, low progress

**Cameroon’s high poverty levels and low economic growth, belie its immense potential, especially in terms of natural capital – its natural resources and its geography.** Cameroon is endowed with abundant natural resources, including fertile agricultural land, minerals (including gold, iron, and manganese), and oil. Cameroon’s agro-ecology is also extremely diverse, allowing farmers to produce a variety of crops including cocoa, coffee, cotton, and cassava. The country also boasts vast forests, rich in biodiversity: it is among the 10 most forested countries in Africa. These resources could provide the foundations for economic development. Alongside its extensive natural resources, Cameroon is also situated as a potential gateway between Western and Central Africa, with a coastline that extends for more than 400 kilometers, and Douala placed as a natural economic hub. This could allow trade to flourish, a position reinforced by Cameroon’s membership of the *Communauté économique et monétaire de l’Afrique centrale* (Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa, CEMAC).

**Urbanization is advancing at pace in Cameroon, which could provide the right conditions for structural transformation, agglomeration effects, and improved service delivery.** Over the last three decades, the share of Cameroonians living in urban areas has increased by around one half, rising from 40.8 percent in 1992 to 58.7 percent in 2022 (United Nations Population Division, 2019). This leaves Cameroon as one of the most urbanized countries in the region. In theory, the growth of urban centers can accelerate growth, job creation, and poverty reduction through agglomeration effects: these include sharing public goods, knowledge spillovers, closer proximity to consumers, and better matching of workers and employers (Bolter & Robey, 2020). It may be easier for Cameroonians to reach schools, health centers, and other key services when they are physically closer. Global evidence demonstrates the potential benefits of higher density and lower distances to reach urban spaces for poverty reduction (World Bank, 2009). However, congestion and overcrowding may be hampering the economic potential of Cameroon's towns and cities, while the urban poor face additional deprivations.

**With continuing population growth, Cameroon's people – and especially its young people – present the country with a huge opportunity.** Around 7 in 10 Cameroonians are aged less than 30 (*Figure 4*). As such, the number of Cameroonians of working age, or soon to come of working age, is high relative to the number of dependents. This presents the country with a significant demographic dividend, providing young Cameroonians can find productive livelihoods to fulfil their potential.

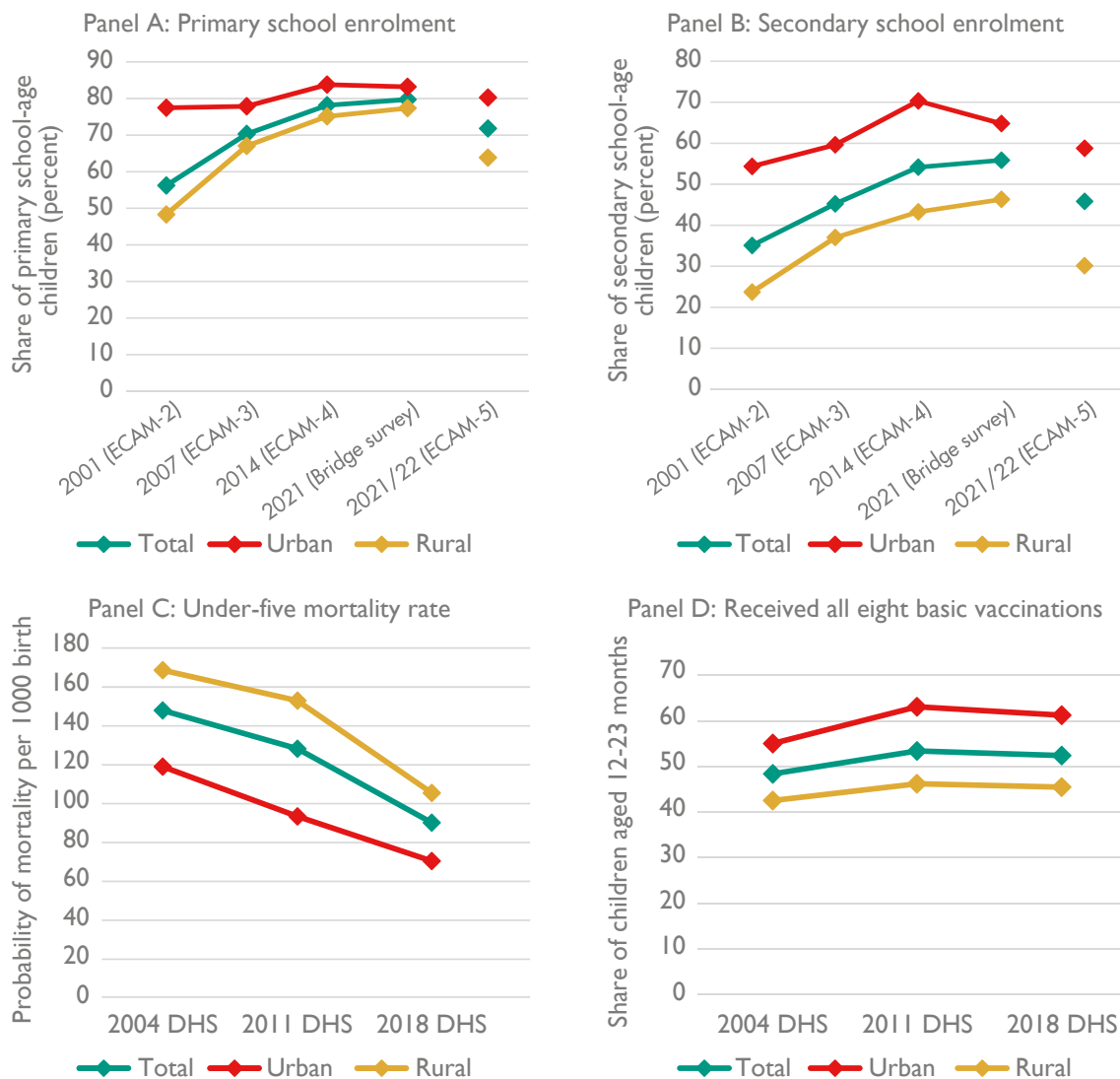
Figure 4. Population pyramids in Cameroon in 2023 and 2033



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division and World Bank estimates.

The potential of Cameroon’s people has been strengthened by steady progress on one keystone of poverty reduction: human capital. Outcomes for human capital – the knowledge, skills, and health that people accumulate throughout their lives, which enable them to “realize their potential as productive members of society” – have been improving (World Bank, 2018). While there is still a long way to go in Cameroon’s northern regions and rural areas and questions remain around the quality of schools and health facilities, educational enrolment and attainment, maternal and infant health outcomes, and access to water, sanitation, and electricity have all improved in the last two decades (Figure 5). Improving human capital can boost long-run, intergenerational prospects for inclusive growth and poverty reduction. Nevertheless, gains in human capital outcomes will not be fully realized if the livelihoods that can take advantage of growing productive potential are not available: the structure of progress in Cameroon suggests that this is not happening yet.

**Figure 5. Steady improvements in education and health indicators in Cameroon**



**Note:** For **Panels A** and **B**, estimates from 2001, 2007, 2014, and the 2021 bridge survey are comparable. 2021/22 estimates from ECAM-5 represent latest best estimates but cannot be compared with previous surveys.

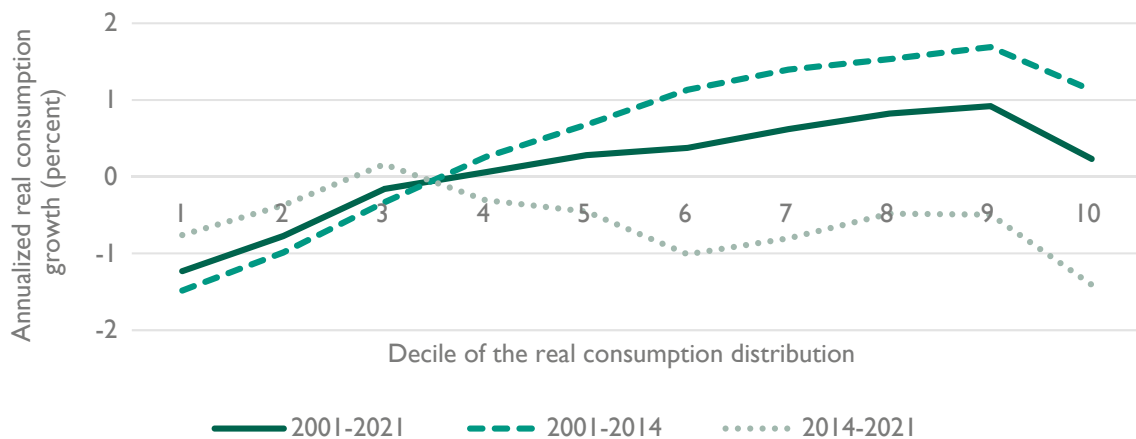
**Source:** ECAM-2, ECAM-3, ECAM-4, ECAM-5, 2021 bridge survey (for **Panels A** and **B**), 2004 DHS, 2011 DHS, and 2018 DHS (for **Panels C** and **D**), and World Bank estimates.



## PO4. Growth is not reaching the poorest Cameroonians, while urbanization is no longer a force for poverty reduction

Cameroon's economic growth has not only been slow, but also non-inclusive. Constructing "growth incidence curves", which show how much consumption changed for different deciles of the consumption distribution, the poorest third of Cameroonians have seen no consumption growth – or even negative consumption growth – since the turn of the millennium (Figure 6). Most poor Cameroonians have not experienced any improvement in their living standards.

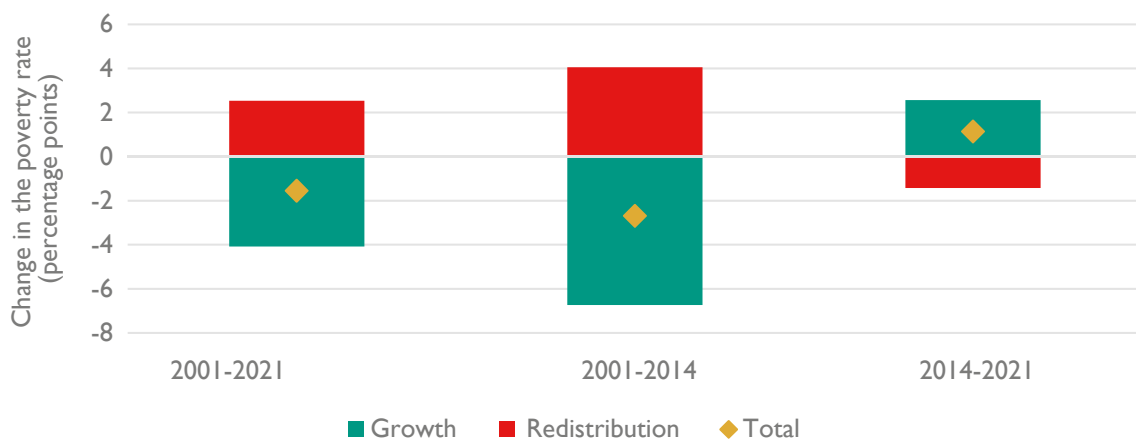
Figure 6. Growth incidence curves for Cameroon, 2001-2021



Note: Consumption deflated using national poverty lines from each survey year.  
 Source: ECAM-2, ECAM-3, ECAM-4, 2021 bridge survey, and World Bank estimates.

Rising inequality is hindering the potential for faster poverty reduction in Cameroon, despite overall growth. To see this, Datt-Ravallion decompositions can be used to separate changes in poverty into growth in average consumption and shifts in consumption distribution (Datt & Ravallion, 1992). It emerges that between 2001 and 2021, if growth had been distributed evenly, poverty at the national line would have fallen by 4.1 percentage points, but changes in the distribution of consumption alone would actually have raised poverty by 2.5 percentage points over the same period, offsetting the contribution of growth (Figure 7). Growth alone is not proving enough to lift Cameroonians out of poverty, because it is not reaching the right people.

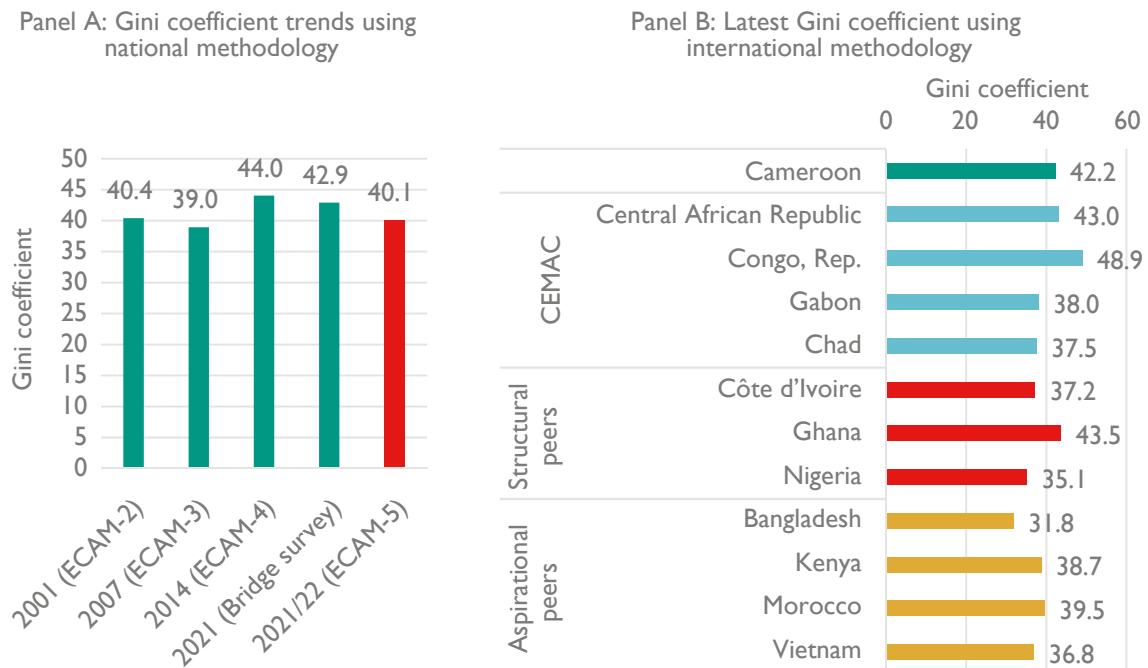
Figure 7. Datt-Ravallion decompositions for Cameroon, 2001-2021



Note: Consumption deflated using national poverty lines from each survey year.  
 Source: ECAM-2, ECAM-3, ECAM-4, 2021 bridge survey, and World Bank estimates.

The lack of inclusive growth is also reflected in overall inequality in Cameroon, as measured by the Gini coefficient, which is higher than it was two decades ago and is above the level observed in comparator countries. Applying the national methodology – where consumption is spatially deflated before calculating inequality statistics – shows that the Gini coefficient fell slightly from 44.0 in 2014 to 42.9 in 2021 (Figure 8). Yet this still marks a significant uptick in overall inequality since 2001, when the Gini coefficient was 40.4. Applying the international methodology – where consumption is not spatially deflated – suggests that Cameroon’s Gini coefficient is moderate compared with regional comparators, but well above its aspirational peers. This reinforces the idea that addressing equity will be crucial for realizing Cameroon’s hope of lifting its people out of poverty.

Figure 8. Gini coefficient in Cameroon and comparator countries



**Note:** For the national methodology applied in *Panel A*, consumption is spatially deflated before calculating the Gini coefficient. For the international methodology applied in *Panel B*, consumption is not spatially deflated before calculating the Gini coefficient. 2021/22 estimates from ECAM-5 represent latest best estimates but cannot be compared with previous surveys. For international comparisons, latest available estimates from each country are used.  
**Source:** ECAM-2, ECAM-3, ECAM-4, ECAM-5, 2021 bridge survey, Poverty and Inequality Platform, and World Bank estimates.

**Urbanization is not the poverty-reducing force it once was.** The shift in Cameroon’s population from rural to urban areas put downward pressure on poverty in the 2000s and early 2010s, but this effect has since waned. To see this, Ravallion-Huppi decompositions can break down changes in poverty into population shifts *between* different groups – which means urbanization when the groups are urban and rural areas – and changes in the poverty rate *within* those groups (Ravallion & Huppi, 1991). Between 2001 and 2014, the small amount of poverty reduction that Cameroon achieved was associated with the population shifting from rural towards urban areas: all other things equal urban areas were less poor than rural areas, so a relative increase in the urban population helped to reduce poverty (Figure 9). Yet since 2014, this has been more than outweighed by poverty within rural *and* within urban areas rising, wiping out any gains from urbanization. Rural poverty was rising anyway between 2001 and 2014 and continued to do so up to 2021; the big change was that urban poverty itself began to rise between 2014 and 2021 too.

Figure 9. Ravallion-Huppi decomposition for Cameroon, 2001-2021

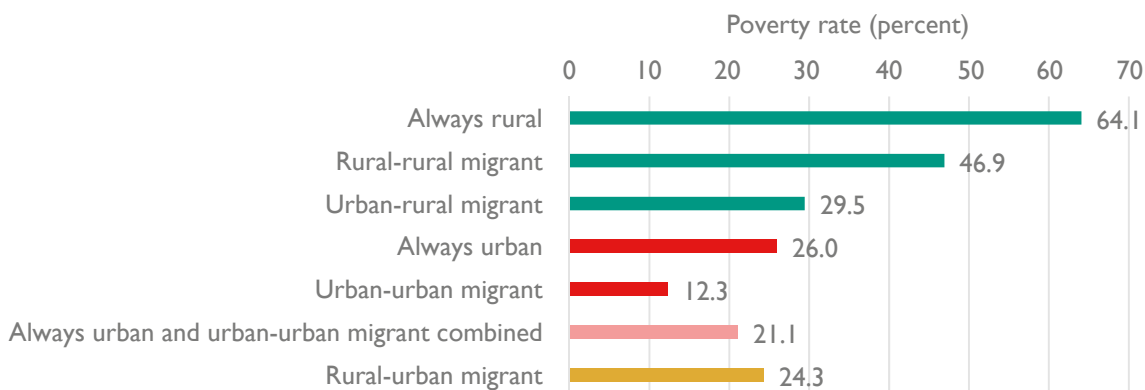


**Note:** Consumption deflated using national poverty lines from each survey year. Disaggregation splits the population by urban and rural areas.

**Source:** ECAM-2, ECAM-3, ECAM-4, 2021 bridge survey, and World Bank estimates.

**Urbanization is increasingly being driven by rural-urban migration, yet rural-urban migrants face higher poverty than other urban residents.** Using population projections and geospatial data to decompose urban population growth into (1) natural population growth, (2) reclassification of previously rural areas to urban, and (3) rural-urban migration, the latter clearly made a larger contribution in the 2010s than in the 2000s. Alongside the pursuit of economic opportunities, rising conflict and forced displacement could be pushing people to leave affected areas and move to more secure towns and cities. Rural-urban migrants in Cameroon have higher poverty rates than other urban residents, primarily because they fare worse than those who migrate from urban area to urban area. In 2021/22, 24.3 percent of rural-urban migrants were living below the poverty line, meaning that they were faring better than rural residents but worse than other urban dwellers, among whom 21.1 percent lived below the poverty line (Figure 10). However, this difference arises largely because poverty is so much lower among urban-urban migrants, of whom only 12.3 percent lived below the poverty line. Therefore, migration per se is not resulting in higher urban poverty, but rising rural-urban migration could be part of the story.

Figure 10. Poverty by migration status in Cameroon, 2021/22

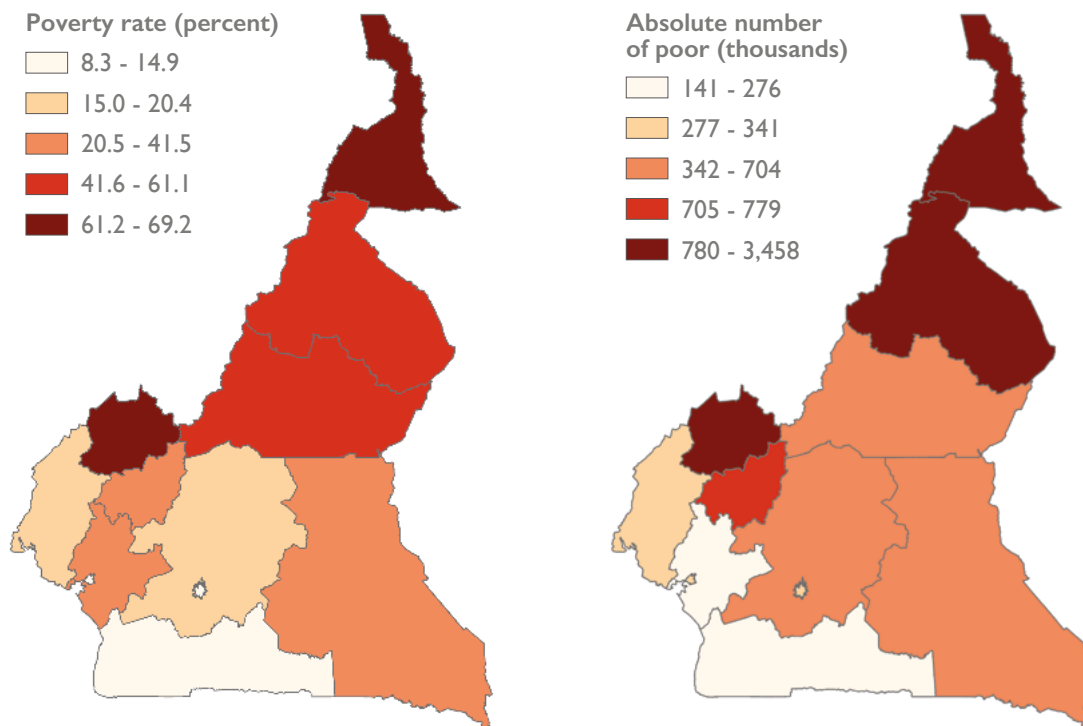


**Note:** Consumption is spatially deflated and temporally deflated to compare with the national poverty line. International migrants excluded.

**Source:** ECAM-5 and World Bank estimates.

Even with urban poverty rising, spatial inequality persists: both monetary and non-monetary poverty are disproportionately concentrated in the Extrême-Nord, Nord, and Nord-Ouest regions. In 2021/22, the share of people living below the poverty line was highest in the Extrême-Nord region, at 69.2 percent, followed closely by the Nord-Ouest region (66.8 percent) and Nord region (61.1 percent). These poverty rates are around three times higher than the rest of the country and around six times higher than in Douala and Yaoundé, where the poverty rates are 8.3 percent and 10.8 percent respectively (Figure 11). Also, despite progress in recent years, non-monetary poverty – lower human capital and weaker basic infrastructure – is more widespread in these lagging regions. This has a direct link to urbanization. Lower living standards in remote and rural areas in northern Cameroon push people to migrate to towns and cities in pursuit of a better life.

Figure 11. Poverty and the absolute number of poor in Cameroon's regions, 2012/22

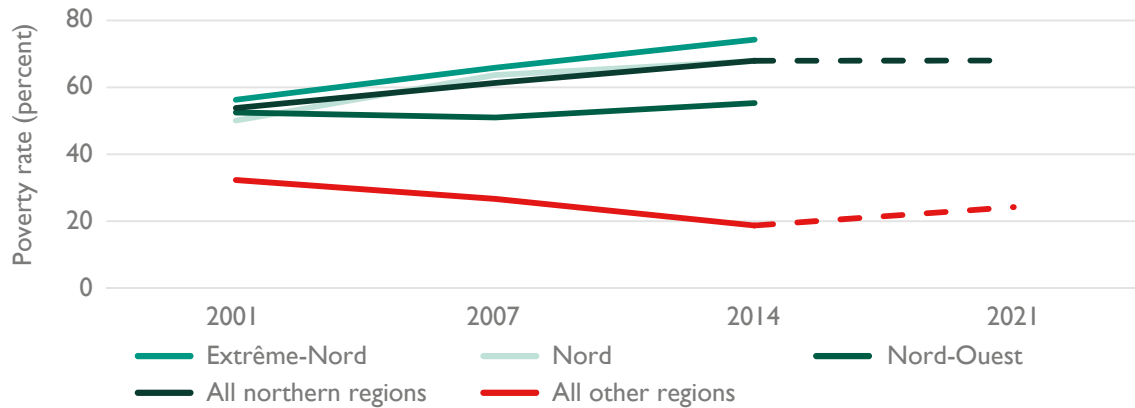


Note: Consumption is spatially deflated and temporally deflated to compare with the national poverty line.  
 Source: Humanitarian Data Exchange and GRID-3 (for shapefiles), ECAM-5, and World Bank estimates.

Over the last two decades, Cameroon's poorest regions have diverged from the rest, increasing the risk of them being left behind. While the 2021 bridge survey was not designed to produce region-level results, it is still possible to review how poverty fared in Cameroon's regions between 2001 and 2014 (Figure 12). Taking the Extrême-Nord, Nord-Ouest, and Nord regions together, it emerges that the poverty rate in Cameroon's northern regions increased by around one-third between 2001 and 2014, jumping from 53.9 percent to 67.9 percent. Over the same period, poverty fell for Cameroon's other regions, dropping from 32.3 percent in 2001 to 18.7 percent in 2014. Suggestive evidence from combining the northern regions in the 2021 bridge survey indicates that poverty may have risen faster for Cameroon's non-northern regions

between 2014 and 2021, but nowhere near enough to make up the widening gap of the last two decades.

Figure 12. Evolution of poverty in Cameroon's northern regions, 2001-2021



**Note:** Consumption is spatially deflated and temporally deflated to compare with the national poverty line. The 2021 bridge survey was not designed to be representative at the region level, so dotted lines for the 2014-2021 period are suggestive.

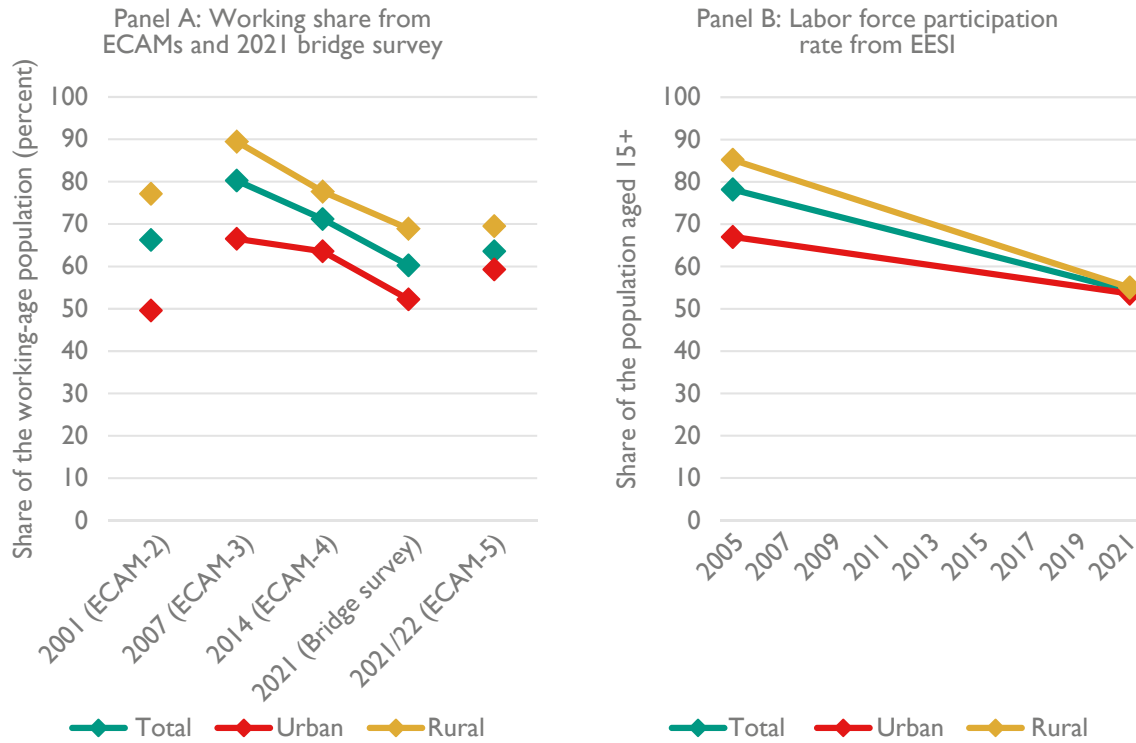
**Source:** ECAM-2, ECAM-3, ECAM-4, 2021 bridge survey, and World Bank estimates.

## PO5. Cameroon's changing labor market is not yet contributing to poverty reduction

**The challenge of creating jobs for Cameroonians – and especially young Cameroonians – is set to grow.** Cameroon's population is growing at about 2.6 percent per year and 7 in 10 Cameroonians are aged less than 30. Cameroon's working-age and youth populations are projected to keep on expanding for at least the next decade. According to the latest United Nations projections, the number of 15-64-year-olds in Cameroon is set to rise from 15.9 million to 21.4 million between 2023 and 2033, while the number of 15-24-year-olds in Cameroon is set to rise from 5.7 million to 7.4 million over the same period. Even if the share of young people who are working remains at its current low levels, this implies that 2.4 million young people will need jobs by 2033, up from 1.8 million in 2023. This demonstrates the importance of job creation for Cameroon to make the most of its demographic dividend.

**Job creation in Cameroon has not kept up with population growth, leading to a decline in the share of Cameroonians who are working.** Multiple data sources indicate this trend. According to the ECAMs and the 2021 bridge survey, the share of the working-age population who were working dropped from 80.3 percent in 2007 to 60.2 percent in 2021 (*Figure 13*). Similarly, the *Enquête sur l'Emploi et le Secteur Informel* (Survey on Employment and the Informal Sector, EESI) shows that the labor force participation rate fell from 78.2 percent in 2005 to 54.2 percent in 2021. This decline is not solely due to young people spending more time in education. Both the 2021 bridge survey and the EESI were conducted after the removal of many COVID-19 containment measures, indicating that the drop in employment from 2014 to 2021 continues a trend from 2007 to 2014. Thus, there has been a significant decline in the proportion of Cameroonians engaging in the labor market over the past two decades.

Figure 13. Cameroon's falling working share and labor force participation rate

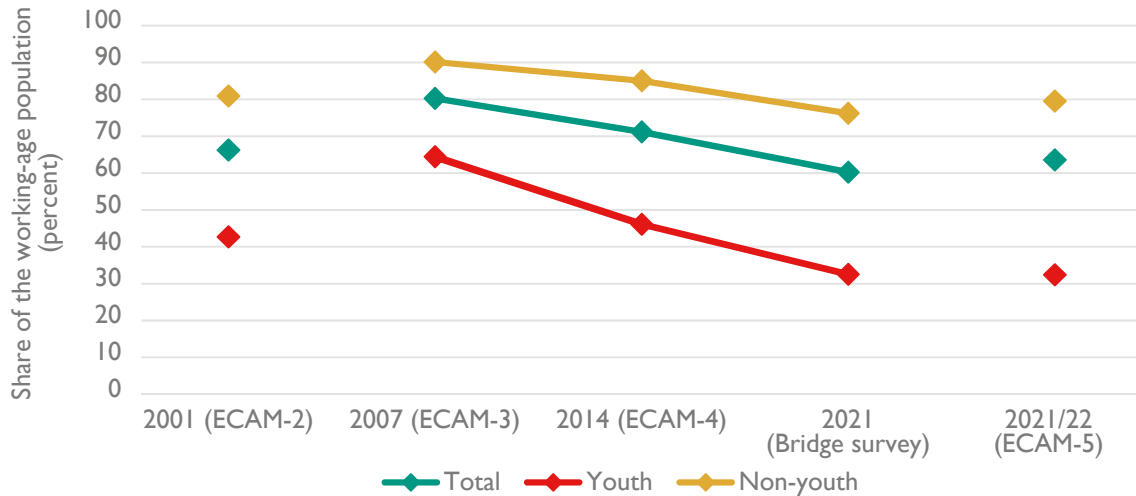


**Note:** Share of people working among working-age population (those aged 15-64 years) reported in *Panel A*. Labor force participation rate for those aged 15+ years reported in *Panel B*. In *Panel A*, comparisons are only possible between ECAM-3, ECAM-4, and the 2021 bridge survey.

**Source:** ECAM-2, ECAM-3, ECAM-4, ECAM-5, 2021 bridge survey (for *Panel A*), EESI 2005, EESI 2021 (for *Panel B*), and World Bank estimates.

**The decline in the share of people working has been particularly severe for young Cameroonians.** From 2007 to 2021, the percentage of young people who were working dropped by about half, from 64.4 percent to 32.5 percent (*Figure 14*). This indicates that the lack of job opportunities is disproportionately impacting Cameroon’s growing young population, including those seeking their first job.

Figure 14. Trends in the share of people working in Cameroon by age

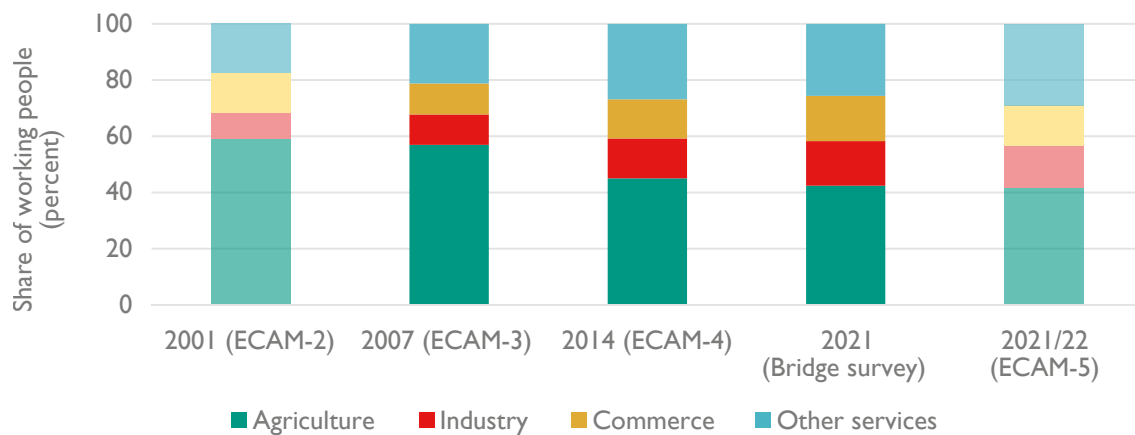


**Note:** Youth is those aged 15-24 and non-youth is those aged 25-64. Comparisons are only possible between ECAM-3, ECAM-4, and the 2021 bridge survey.

**Source:** ECAM-2, ECAM-3, ECAM-4, ECAM-5, 2021 bridge survey and World Bank estimates.

**The proportion of workers engaged in agriculture in Cameroon has significantly declined over the past two decades.** From 2007 to 2021, the share of workers primarily engaged in agriculture fell from 57.0 percent to 42.4 percent, a decrease of about one-quarter (*Figure 15*). This decline aligns with rapid urbanization during the same period, as people moving to urban areas are less likely to work in agriculture. Employment has shifted fairly evenly to industry, commerce (buying and selling), and other non-commerce services, with the share of workers in these sectors increasing by 5.1, 5.0, and 4.5 percentage points, respectively, from 2007 to 2021.

**Figure 15. Shifting primary activities among working Cameroonians**

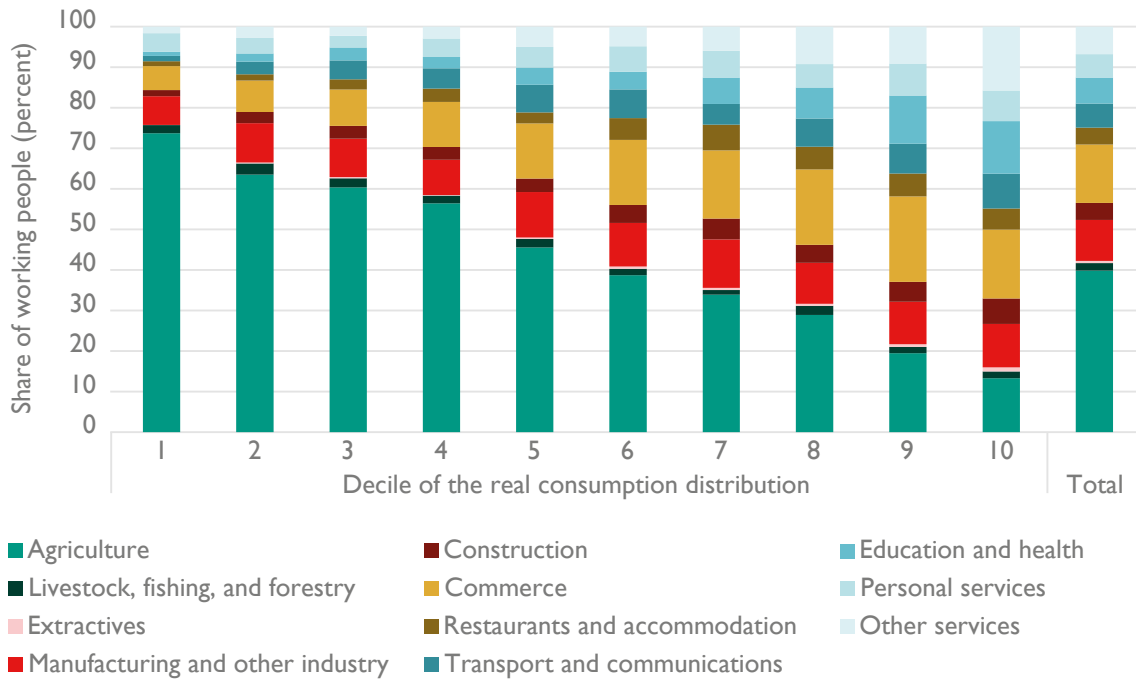


**Note:** Sample restricted to working Cameroonians aged 15-64. Comparisons are only possible between ECAM-3, ECAM-4, and the 2021 bridge survey.

**Source:** ECAM-2, ECAM-3, ECAM-4, ECAM-5, 2021 bridge survey and World Bank estimates.

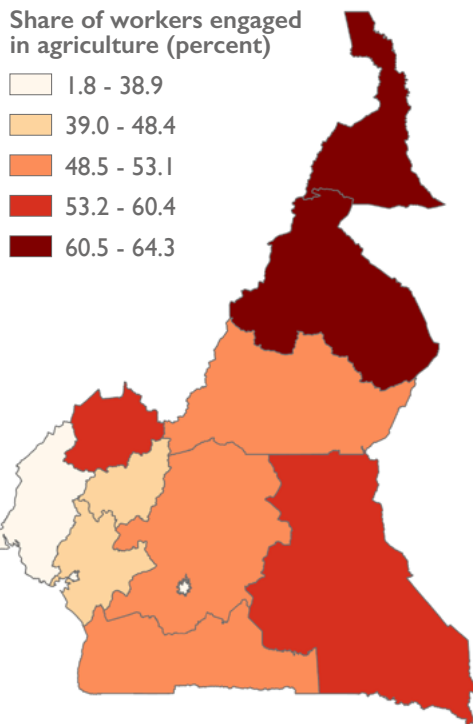
**Even though jobs outside of agriculture are predominantly held by Cameroonians from non-poor households, the shift out of agriculture has not yielded poverty reduction partly because the specific types of service-sector jobs that workers are taking on are relatively less productive.** Approximately 65.3 percent of workers from the poorest 40 percent of households work in agriculture, compared to 25.9 percent from the richest 60 percent (*Figure 16*). Macroeconomic data also indicate that average labor productivity is higher in services (including commerce and other services) and industry. All other things equal, working outside of agriculture therefore appears to be associated with escaping poverty. However, while some types of service-sector jobs – such as education and health – are clearly concentrated among those in the higher deciles, the split across the deciles is far more even for other sub-sectors, including commerce, transport and communication, and personal services. Therefore, getting a job outside of agriculture is not enough per se: workers need jobs that are productive enough to lift them out of poverty.

Figure 16. Primary labor market activity in Cameroon by consumption decile, 2021/22



**Note:** Sample restricted to working Cameroonians aged 15-64. Comparisons are only possible between ECAM-3, ECAM-4, and the 2021 bridge survey.  
**Source:** ECAM-2, ECAM-3, ECAM-4, ECAM-5, 2021 bridge survey (for *Panel A*), EESI 2005, EESI 2021 (for *Panel B*), and World Bank estimates.

Figure 17. Share of working Cameroonians primarily engaged in agriculture by region, 2021/22



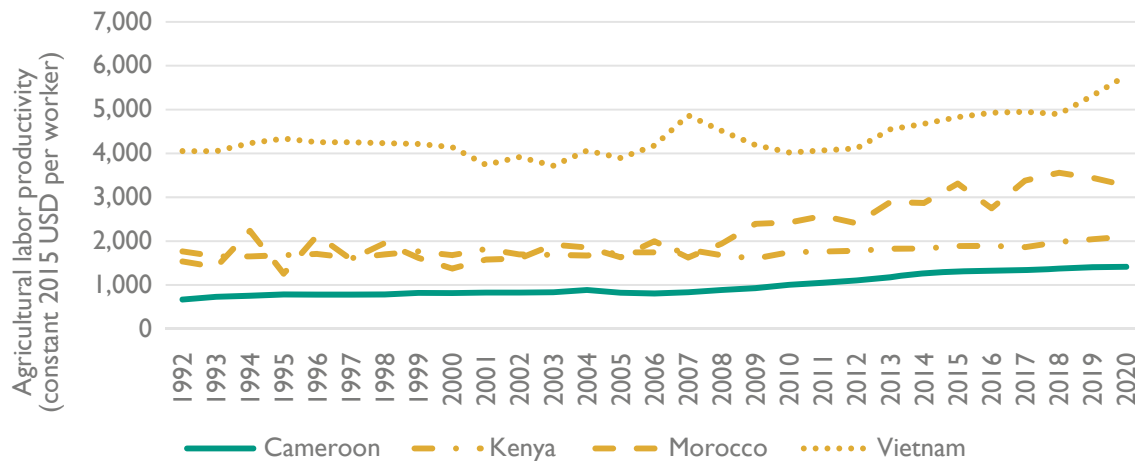
**Note:** Sample restricted to working Cameroonians aged 15-64.  
**Source:** Humanitarian Data Exchange and GRID-3 (for shapefiles), ECAM-5, and World Bank estimates.

Although work is shifting to the service sector, agriculture still has a vital role to play in reducing poverty, particularly in Cameroon’s lagging regions. Despite the rise of urban poverty and the overall shift towards services, the poor remain disproportionately concentrated in rural areas and in agricultural jobs. Moreover, agriculture is a particularly important employer in those regions that are at risk of falling behind, where conflict is proliferating, and where poverty has been getting worse, especially in the north of Cameroon (Figure 17). Therefore, policies aimed at improving agricultural productivity are essential for reducing poverty in these areas.

While agriculture in Cameroon is performing moderately, there is significant room for improvement. Agricultural labor productivity in Cameroon has risen by about three-quarters in the past two decades but it is still significantly lower than in the country’s aspirational peers (Figure 18). This partly reflects low use of inputs, including fertilizers, phytosanitary

products, tools, and labor from outside the household. Yet farmers also face difficulties in selling their output, as markets are too far away or served by bad roads. Policies to improve agricultural productivity will need to be carefully tailored for different parts of Cameroon given the huge diversity in agricultural livelihoods across the country. This is particularly important because some livelihood practices are more exposed to shocks than others. For example, climate shocks could pose a particular threat to rainfed crops in the north of the country – both staple and cash crops – as this is where the rise of extreme heat and drought is predicted to be most severe.

Figure 18. Agricultural labor productivity in Cameroon and comparator countries



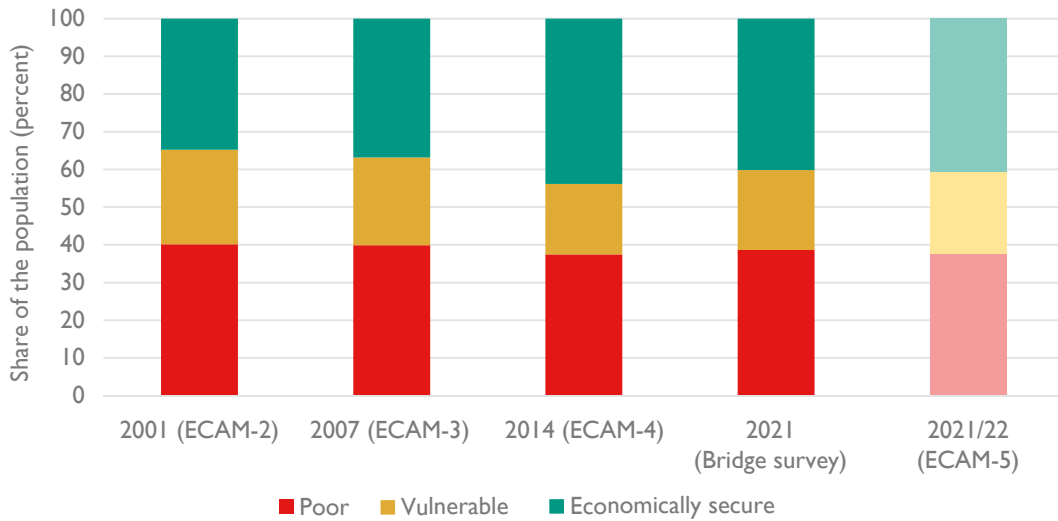
Source: WDIs and World Bank estimates.

## PO6. Conflict and climate-related shocks pose growing threats to poverty reduction

**Around 1 in 5 Cameroonians are not currently poor but are vulnerable to falling into poverty when struck by shocks.** In 2021/22, 21.6 percent of the population had consumption levels between 1 and 1.5 times the poverty line, meaning they were not poor but were vulnerable to falling into poverty (*Figure 19*). This means around one-third of non-poor Cameroonians were vulnerable. The proportion of vulnerable Cameroonians has decreased slightly more than the poverty rate over the past two decades, from 2001 to 2021, as consumption growth in the middle of the consumption distribution has outperformed consumption growth for the very poorest Cameroonians.

**Around 6 in 10 Cameroonians had experienced some form of negative shock in the past three years; poor and vulnerable households were disproportionately exposed to climate- and security-related shocks.** Taking all types of shocks together, 59.7 percent of Cameroonians lived in a households that had been affected in the three years prior to ECAM-5 (*Figure 20*). Health shocks were the most common, having been experienced by 33.2 percent of Cameroonians. However, climate shocks, food price shocks, and security shocks are also relatively widespread, having affected 10.6 percent, 14.1 percent, and 18.6 percent of Cameroonians respectively in the three years prior to the survey. Some shocks affected the population unevenly, hitting poor and vulnerable households more than those who were economically secure (those who were neither poor nor vulnerable). The share of people in poor households experiencing climate-related shocks in the three years prior to ECAM-5 was more than

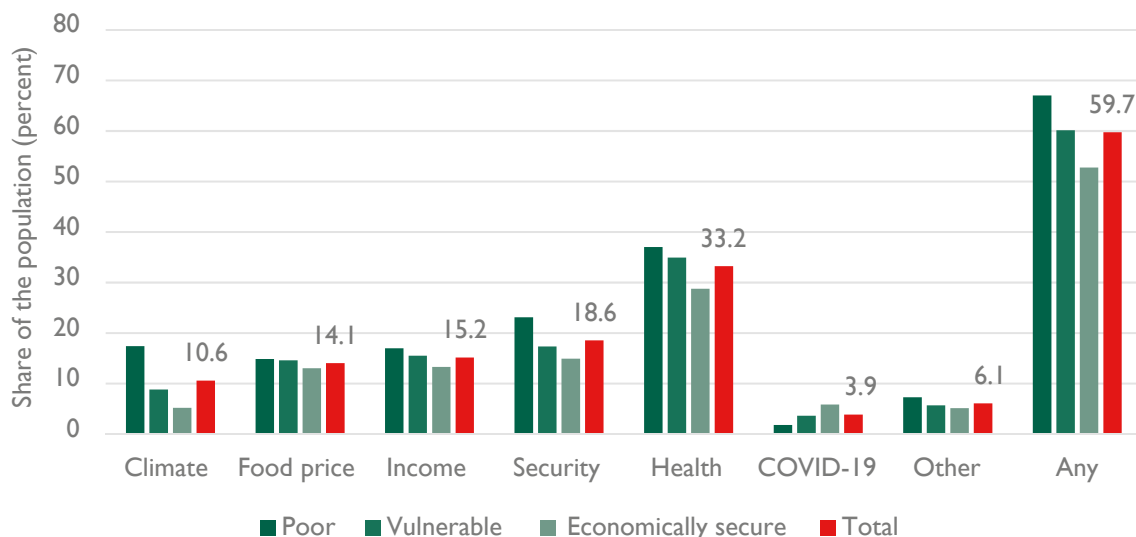
Figure 19. Poverty and vulnerability in Cameroon, 2001-2022



**Note:** Consumption is spatially deflated and, where relevant, temporally deflated to compare with the national poverty and vulnerability lines. Vulnerability line set at 1.5 times the poverty line. Estimates from 2001, 2007, 2014, and the 2021 bridge survey are comparable. 2021/22 estimates from ECAM-5 represent latest best estimates but cannot be compared with previous surveys. **Source:** ECAM-2, ECAM-3, ECAM-4, ECAM-5, 2021 bridge survey, and World Bank estimates.

three times higher than the share in economically secure households. Similarly, the share of people in poor households experiencing security-related shocks was about 1.5 times higher than the share in economically secure households. This may partly reflect the fact that climate shocks and conflict are concentrated in those regions of Cameroon where poverty is higher as well as poor Cameroonians being more likely to engage in agricultural activities.

Figure 20. Shocks experienced in Cameroon by vulnerability status, 2021/22

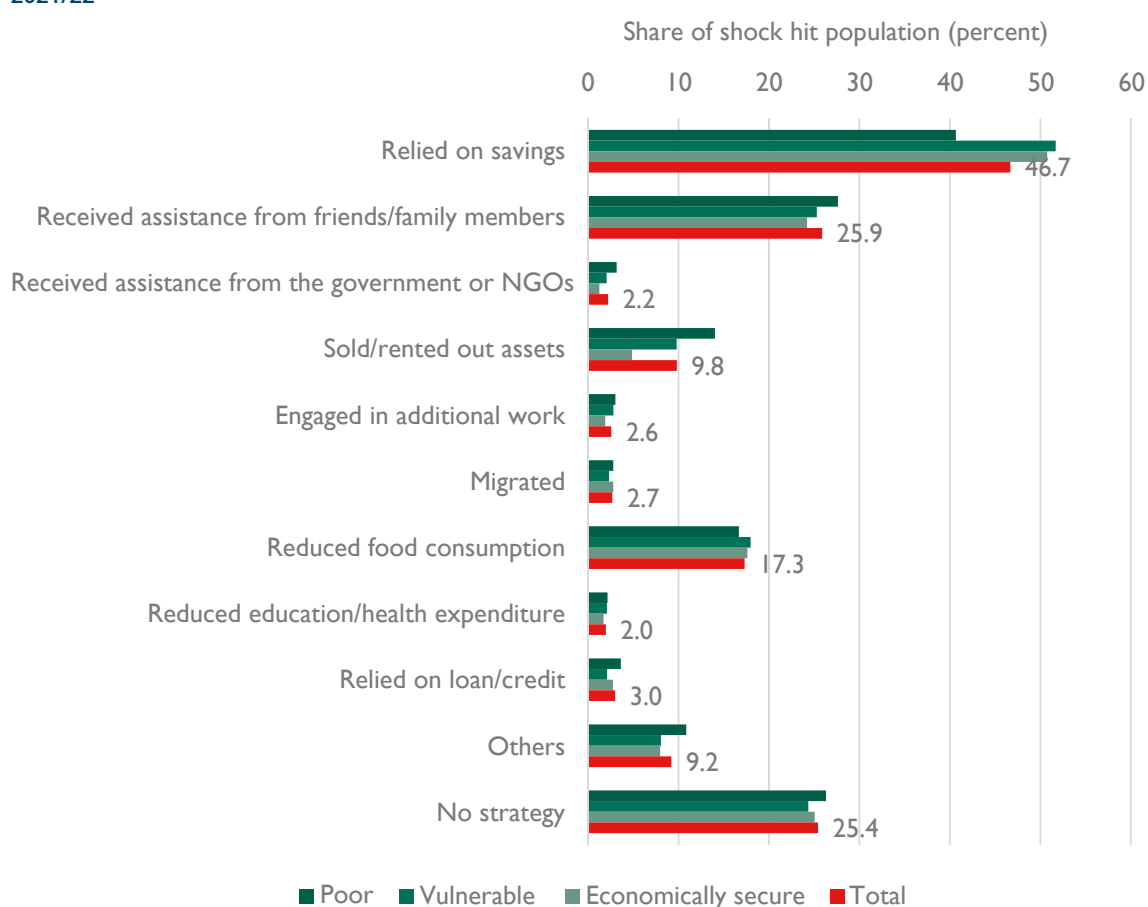


**Note:** Consumption is spatially deflated and temporally deflated to compare with national poverty line and vulnerability line to establish vulnerability status. Vulnerability line set at 1.5 times the poverty line. Shocks reported for the three years prior to ECAM-5. **Source:** ECAM-5 and World Bank estimates.

**In response to shocks, Cameroonian households commonly adopt coping strategies such as drawing down savings, selling or renting assets, and reducing food consumption, which may have long-term consequences for their welfare.**

Among Cameroonians living in shock-affected households, 46.7 percent relied on savings, 9.8 percent sold or rented assets, and 17.3 percent reduced food consumption (Figure 21). These strategies were prevalent across poor, vulnerable, and economically secure households alike. As well as impacting households in the short run, these coping strategies could have long-run effects on households' welfare too. For example, unless they can be replenished, drawing down savings and selling assets could weaken households' future financial stability, potentially limiting their investments in physical and human capital and constraining future earnings. Similarly, reduced food consumption not only marks a welfare loss today, but could lead to malnutrition and stunting, with possible repercussions for educational attainment and long-run human capital development.

Figure 21. Coping strategies deployed by shocks-affected households in Cameroon by vulnerability status, 2021/22



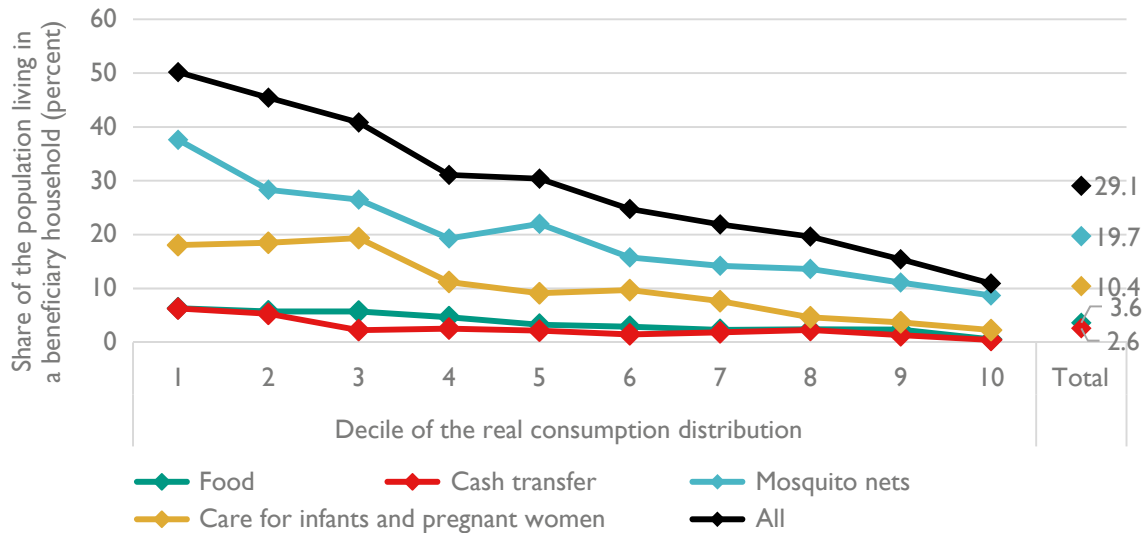
**Note:** NGOs = non-governmental organizations. Shocks reported for the three years prior to ECAM-5. Chart focuses on shock-affected households and on the primary coping strategy.

**Source:** ECAM-5 and World Bank estimates.

**Cameroonians may be turning to negative coping strategies because social assistance is so scarce; the share of cash or food assistance is dwarfed by the prevalence of poverty and vulnerability.** In 2021/22, only 3.6 percent of Cameroonians lived in households that received food assistance in the previous 12 months and 2.6 percent lived in households that received cash transfers, including those from the *Projets Filet Sociaux* (Safety Nets Project, PFS). This is far below the share of Cameroonians living in poverty (37.7 percent) and even further below the share who are poor or vulnerable (59.2 percent). Consequently, the share of Cameroonians living

below the poverty line that received such support was also low: just 5.6 percent of poor Cameroonians received food assistance and 4.2 percent of poor Cameroonians received cash transfers. The share of Cameroonians receiving other types of social assistance was higher, with 10.4 percent living in a household receiving care for infants or pregnant women and as many as 19.7 percent living in a household that had received mosquito nets. These types of in-kind transfers are important for building health and broader human capital outcomes, but they do not address poor Cameroonians’ immediate lack of access to the food and non-food items they need.

Figure 22. Receipts of social assistance programs in Cameroon by consumption decile, 2021/22

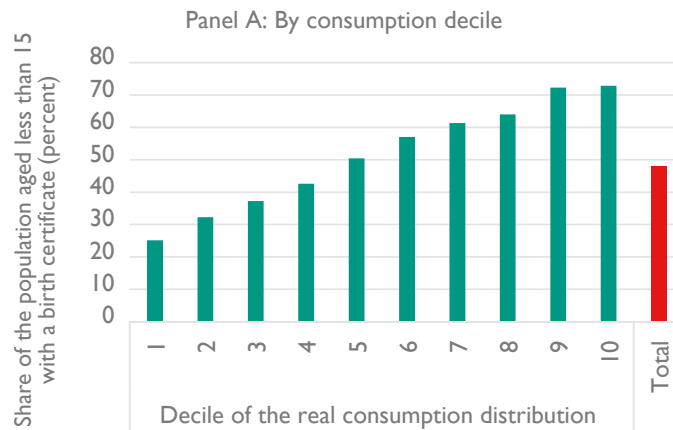


Notes: Consumption deflated spatially and temporally. “Food” category includes donations of cereals, flour or semolina, food for school children, food for work, and nutritional supplements for malnourished children. “Cash transfers” include public works program.

Source: ECAM-5 and World Bank estimates.

**Lack of formal identification may limit access to essential services – including social protection – and disproportionately affects the poor.** Government-provided services, including social protection programs, education, and health care, often require individuals to have formal identification. For instance, a birth certificate is typically necessary to obtain a primary school leaving certificate, which is required for continuing education to the secondary level. This directly impacts enrolment: even after controlling for individual characteristics and household consumption, primary-school-age children with otherwise equivalent characteristics are 15.8 percentage points more likely to be enrolled in primary school, if they hold a birth certificate. Yet less than half of Cameroonians aged less than 15 held a birth certificate in 2021/22, and the share among the bottom 40 percent of the consumption distribution was about half the share among the top 60 percent (Figure 23). The 2024 law on the Civil Status Registration (Loi sur l’organisation du système d’enregistrement des faits d’état civil au Cameroun) reforms and modernizes Cameroon’s civil registration system to align with international standards. It introduces both material and organizational improvements, including digitization and computerization. A notable feature is the establishment of a unique personal identification number—a significant step forward in improving access to identification.

Figure 23. Birth certificate ownership in Cameroon by consumption decile, 2021/22

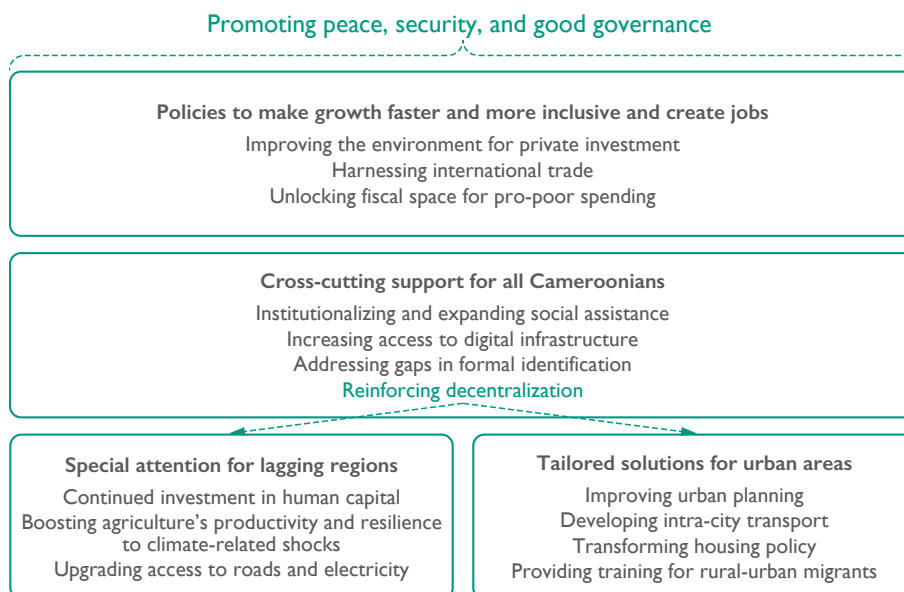


Notes: Consumption is deflated spatially and temporally.  
 Source: ECAM-5 and World Bank estimates.

## PO7. With the right mix of policies, Cameroon can harness its poverty-reducing potential

Given the diverse nature of Cameroon’s development challenges, poverty-reducing policies need to be tailored for different people in different parts of the country. Some poverty-reducing policies are cross-cutting, helping to alleviate constraints on poverty holistically, for all Cameroonians. This includes reforms to boost inclusive growth and create jobs, as well as expanding social assistance, formal identification, and digital infrastructure. Yet there are some policies that need to be tailored to the specific development challenges that different Cameroonians face. In broad terms, decentralizing policymaking can help achieve this by allowing local policies to address local issues. This report also proffers specialized measures for two particular areas: (1) lagging regions and (2) urban areas. A schematic representation of the main policy suggestions is provided in *Figure 24*.

Figure 24. Policies to harness Cameroon’s poverty-reducing potential



Source: World Bank.

***Cameroon's development challenges are longstanding and well documented, so many policy recommendations are not new***

**Cameroon's development challenges are longstanding and well documented; this means many of the policy recommendations are not new.** Several previous reports have highlighted issues such as insecurity, the need for macro-fiscal reforms, inadequate decentralization, and lack of investment in human capital and social protection. These challenges, and the countervailing policies needed to address them, are featured in previous reports by the World Bank (see the 2017 Country Economic Memorandum (World Bank, 2017)), the International Monetary Fund (IMF, see the 2018 Cameroon Staff Report (IMF, 2018)), and the African Development Bank (AfDB, see the Country Strategy Paper 2015-2020 for Cameroon (AfDB, 2015)). Despite this, progress on poverty reduction has been minimal over the past two decades indicating that the proposed solutions have yet to be effectively implemented.

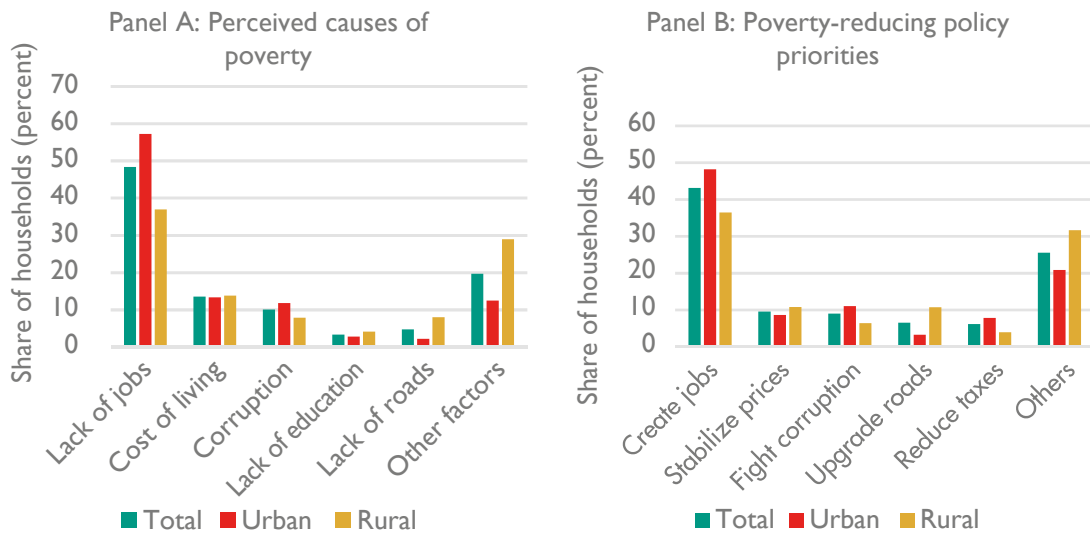
***Strengthening peace and security is vital for alleviating poverty***

**Peace and security underpin all efforts to reduce poverty in Cameroon.** Conflict and violence have intensified dramatically in Cameroon's Extrême-Nord, Nord-Ouest, and Sud-Ouest regions, and conflict has the potential to spread. These conflicts have disrupted economic activity including agriculture, driven people from their homes, and limited access to basic infrastructure and essential services like education and healthcare (International Crisis Group, 2018; Human Right Watch, 2021). The causal links between conflict, displacement, and poverty are complex, but globally, poverty is progressively becoming more concentrated in fragile and conflict-affected settings (Corral, Irwin, Krishnan, Mahler, & Vishwanath, 2020). In many parts of Cameroon, especially in the country's lagging regions, poverty and conflict clearly overlap. Progress on any poverty-reducing policies can be quickly reversed by conflict and violence. Therefore, strengthening peace and security remains critical for helping Cameroonians exit poverty.

***Job creation is essential for sustained poverty reduction in Cameroon***

**Cameroonians prioritize jobs above all other policy issues.** Around half of Cameroonians believe that lack of jobs is the primary cause of poverty in the country (**Figure 25**). Job creation also stands out as the policy that is most frequently suggested by households to combat poverty. This underscores a central message of the report: creating productive jobs is essential for distributing the benefits of economic growth and alleviating poverty in Cameroon.

Figure 25. Cameroonians' main policy priorities



**Note:** Household-level weights applied, so the results present the share of households. Results show what each household believes is the primary cause of poverty in Cameroon (*Panel A*) and their main policy priority (*Panel B*).  
**Source:** ECAM-5 and World Bank estimates.

**Job creation and inclusive growth hinge on reforms to encourage private sector investment, harness international trade, and unlock fiscal resources for pro-poor spending.** While a full diagnostic on the drivers of growth is forthcoming in the World Bank’s Country Economic Memorandum (CEM), the efficacy of several core growth-accelerating policies is already clear. First, Cameroon can build on previous efforts to improve the environment for private sector investment. This means addressing issues such as uneven application of taxes across sectors, regulatory barriers, and weak property rights, especially for land (Amoretti & Maur, 2022). Similarly, scaling back the subsidies and other support that state-owned enterprises (SOEs) receive could help private businesses expand and thrive in SOE-dominated sectors (Coulibaly, Benlamine, & Piazza, 2022). Second, Cameroon can better exploit its natural advantages for international trade. By diversifying its exports beyond oil, gas, and other primary products, value can be added and jobs can be created in Cameroon itself rather than elsewhere. This can be achieved by boosting market connectivity through investments in infrastructure and reducing both tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade, making entry and exit points like Douala more efficient. Third, Cameroon can maintain momentum on fiscal reform to unlock the resources needed for pro-poor policies. This process has already begun, with reductions in fuel subsidies in 2014, 2016, 2023, and 2024. However, efforts to cushion the effects of these subsidy reforms may not be reaching the poor and vulnerable. For example, the government’s compensatory policy of raising minimum wages and public sector pay will not be felt by most workers from poor households, as they are concentrated in informal, self-employment jobs and enforcement of minimum wages is imperfect. Maximizing the effects on inclusive growth and poverty reduction will rely on ensuring that fiscal savings are channeled towards programs that help the poorest Cameroonians.

### *Expanding social assistance, investing in digital infrastructure, and enhancing formal identification can help to reduce poverty in Cameroon in the short run*

**While generating productive jobs is the key to sustainable poverty reduction in the long run, other policy levers – including expanding social assistance, investing in digital infrastructure, and enhancing formal identification – can start lifting Cameroonians out of poverty now.** One of the most direct ways to channel fiscal savings to the poor would be to expand Cameroon’s social assistance system. Social assistance programs, including safety net initiatives under the *Projet Filets Sociaux* (Safety Nets Project, PFS), appear to be progressive, reaching poorer households. While the government’s contribution to the Safety Nets Project rose from less than 5 percent of the total PFS budget in the first phase (2013–2018) to 60 percent in the second phase (2019–2022), the project remains highly dependent on donor support and concessional lending. More work is needed to fully institutionalize these programs. Also, a unified social registry is key to institutionalizing social assistance in Cameroon, as it would streamline the delivery of support to vulnerable populations, improve targeting, and enhance coordination across programs. The government is already working closely with development partners on this initiative, aiming to establish a more efficient and sustainable social protection system. The long-run gains of social assistance can be boosted by combining cash transfers with training and support to livelihood opportunities or targeted investments in health and education services through so-called “cash plus” programs (Gentilini, 2016; Banerjee, Karlan, Darko Osei, Trachtman, & Udry, 2020; Gilligan, et al., 2020; Loeser, Özler, & Premand, 2021). This is already happening through the PFS, which not only includes a cash-for-work component but also provides support for early childhood development and climate adaptation to those receiving regular cash transfers (World Bank, 2022). Providing such programs may be easier if, in tandem, the government can address gaps in formal identification and digital infrastructure. In part, this could entail reducing bureaucratic limits linked to formal identification on who can and cannot access education, health, and other services, to prevent the poor and vulnerable being locked out. At the same time, the government can bolster access to mobile phones and the internet by simultaneously promoting private investment in telecommunications and developing the skills required to use these tools effectively (Vora & Dolan, 2022). Building these foundations stands to benefit all poor and vulnerable Cameroonians, regardless of where they live.

### *Enhancing decentralization could help tailor policies for Cameroon’s diverse development challenges*

**Reinforcing efforts to decentralize policymaking could help Cameroon meet changing local development needs.** Spurred by rising conflict in the Nord-Ouest and Sud-Ouest regions and persistent regional inequality, there has been renewed emphasis on decentralizing policy in Cameroon in recent years. To this end, Law n°2019/024 instituted the *Code Général des Collectivités Territoriales Décentralisées* (General Code of Decentralized Territorial Collectivities, CGCTD) in 2019, which extended competencies to regions and communes and set a minimum amount – 15 percent of the total budget – that should be transferred from the central government to local governments (Fall, Frisa, & Nkouna, 2021). In theory, decentralization can help ensure that provision of local services matches local needs, improve accountability, and reduce tensions between different regions, especially between anglophone regions

and the central authorities (World Bank, 2012; Myerson, 2021). In practice, however, at least three factors are constraining the success of decentralization in Cameroon. First, political constraints remain: the central government maintains tight supervision of local governments through governors and prefects (Fall, Hilger, Vaillancourt, Perrot, & Daller, 2020). Second, administrative constraints remain: the competencies devolved to local governments are only defined in very broad terms and capacity for region- and commune-level authorities is limited. Third, fiscal constraints remain: local governments' own revenue-raising powers are limited so they rely on the central government for funding, but allocations to local governments are well below the 15-percent target and the final formula that determines funding for each region and commune is unclear (Fall, Mituzani, & Vaillancourt, 2023). Addressing these issues is vital for maximizing the potential benefits from decentralization. This is especially important for preparing bespoke policies for Cameroon's lagging regions and its growing urban areas. The November 2024 local taxation law could help reduce these constraints by strengthening the financial autonomy of local authorities. This law introduces a local development tax, deducted from the base salary of workers in both the public and private sectors, ranging from 3,000 to 30,000 XAF per year. The revenue generated by this tax will bolster municipalities' capacity to deliver essential services to the population, such as public lighting, sanitation, waste collection, ambulance services, water supply, and electrification.

### ***Cameroon's lagging regions still need improvements in three basic building blocks of poverty reduction: human capital, agricultural productivity, and infrastructure***

**Cameroon's lagging regions still need investment in three basic building blocks of poverty reduction: first, there is still much room for improvement on human capital outcomes.** Improving health and education outcomes, especially in the early part of people's lives can support long-run, intergenerational poverty reduction by augmenting people's productive potential (Bhula, Mahoney, & Murphy, 2020; Holla, Bendini, Dinarte, & Trako, 2021). While some human capital outcomes in rural areas and northern Cameroon may be starting to catch up, they remain behind the rest of the country. Geospatial data reveal that many Cameroonian children in remote and rural areas simply cannot reach schools so either new facilities are needed or better roads are required to reach existing facilities. Low school quality could also inhibit learning: in rural areas, schools have higher student-teacher ratios and are less likely to have adequate water, latrines, and electricity. Additionally, technical education focused on skills that foster self-employment is crucial for equipping young people with practical skills and creating economic opportunities beyond traditional employment. In this context, the SND30 aims to expand vocational and technical training, raising the share of students from 10% to 25% at the secondary level and from 18% to 35% at the tertiary level by 2030.

**Second, boosting agricultural productivity, which has strong links to preserving and harnessing Cameroon's natural capital, remains central to poverty reduction in lagging regions.** Building human capital will only yield poverty reduction in the long run if livelihoods that can mobilize people's productive potential are available. In Cameroon's lagging regions, livelihoods are – and will continue to be – concentrated in agriculture. Cameroon can improve agriculture's productivity by enhancing access

to both input markets – for the seeds, fertilizers, tools, and labor that they need – and output markets – helping them to sell their produce both within and outside the country’s borders. Building shock resilience and helping farmers adopt technologies that could preserve natural capital will also be essential as Cameroon’s farmers grapple with the effects of climate change.

**Third, developing human capital and agricultural productivity in Cameroon’s lagging regions hinges on investing in basic infrastructure, including roads and electricity.** In some parts of Cameroon, especially in the country’s north but also in the Adamaoua and Centre regions, it can take more than an hour for people to reach the formal road network.<sup>(2)</sup> Similarly, electricity access can underpin digital infrastructure, augment the quality of care and schooling in health and education facilities, and expand people’s livelihood opportunities (Ratledge, Cadamuro, de la Cuesta, Stigler, & Burke, 2022). The need to develop human capital, agricultural productivity, and basic infrastructure is not a new policy message. However, it is becoming increasingly urgent in Cameroon’s lagging regions to stop them being left behind.

### *Cameroon’s town and cities require fresh policies to address urban poverty*

**New development challenges are growing in Cameroon’s towns and cities, which require enhancing urban planning, intra-city transport, housing policy, and the integration of rural-urban migrants.** The policies needed to combat urban poverty are not the same as those needed to combat rural poverty. Congestion is choking agglomeration effects and the potential economic gains of urbanization. Yet better urban planning could improve the organization of where people live, work, and buy goods in towns and cities. Investing in intra-city transport could also help: for example, Douala’s Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, which is set to be launched in 2024, is forecast to reduce the time that the average Douala resident spends in traffic from 88 to 71 minutes per day (Saïssset, Fouchard, & Stokenberga, 2020). To ensure the urban poor live in adequate accommodation that is not overcrowded, citywide approaches to upgrade slums, regulate land use, and increase the stock of adequate housing are also essential (PSUP, 2015). Finally, experience from other countries suggests that training and information programs have helped rural-urban migrants’ integrate into urban communities, boosting their livelihoods and their welfare – this matters in Cameroon because migration is an increasingly important source of urban growth (IOM, 2019; Zhao, Tang, & Li, 2022).

### *Cameroon’s pathway to poverty reduction will rely on strong governance and continued investments in producing and providing access to good quality data*

**In addition to sector-specific reforms, improving governance is imperative for effectively reducing poverty in Cameroon.** Strengthening governance structures will enhance accountability, transparency, and efficiency across all sectors, ensuring that resources are utilized optimally and that policies aimed at poverty reduction are implemented successfully. Without robust governance, even the best-intentioned sectoral reforms may fall short, as systemic issues such as corruption, weak institutions, and lack of public trust undermine efforts to achieve sustainable development and improve living standards for all Cameroonians.

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2. The formal road network includes motorways, primary roads, secondary roads, and tertiary roads.

**Data can be a vehicle for accountability and good governance, ensuring policies benefit the poor and sustainably lift people out of poverty.** With urbanization, climate change, and conflict, the policies that Cameroon needs to reduce poverty are in flux. This means data can rapidly go out of date, so data collection and analysis will need to keep pace and provide granular information on Cameroon's diverse and changing development challenges. As well as designing new policies, tracking the efficacy of the government's policies and programs and Cameroon's overall poverty-reducing performance helps bolster transparency and hold policymakers accountable. Data can provide a voice to the millions of Cameroonians still suffering from poverty, revealing what works and, for those policies that do not work, how to correct the course. Embracing data-driven policy will therefore be essential as Cameroon harnesses its enormous potential to generate inclusive growth and permanently lift its people out of poverty. ■

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