



Redesignate and Extend Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Cameroon

This new policy brief from the Cameroon Advocacy Network and FWD.us calls on the Biden administration to redesignate and extend TPS for Cameroon.

The West African nation of Cameroon faces multiple, worsening conflicts that have created a dire humanitarian crisis. Internal sociopolitical struggles that have devolved into armed conflict, the constant threat of violent attacks from extremist group Boko Haram, and a growing refugee crisis in the broader Central African region have undermined the political stability in Cameroon and left [more than 4.7 million people](#) in the country in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. More than [2 million people](#) have been forcibly displaced and [thousands of people](#) have died.

The Biden Administration should not only extend [Temporary Protected Status \(TPS\)](#) for Cameroon but also **redesignate** the country for TPS to ensure that more individuals are not returned to deadly conditions in a country facing such violence and instability. While an extension would continue to provide protections for current TPS holders, a redesignation would allow all eligible Cameroonians in the U.S. to have access to this lifesaving form of humanitarian relief.

In April 2022, the Department of Homeland Security announced the [initial designation of TPS](#) for Cameroon, citing “the extreme violence perpetrated by government forces and armed separatists, and a rise in attacks led by Boko Haram.” Since then, the situation has only worsened: armed violence persists and the [latest peace process](#) is completely stalled. Human rights abuses against civilians continue to be widespread from all sides of the conflict, including [violations of press freedom](#), [arbitrary arrests](#), [torture](#), [sexual violence](#), [kidnappings](#), and even [extrajudicial killings](#). At the same time, essential infrastructure like hospitals and schools have been [devastated](#).

“On 3 September 2021, they came to the village and started committing atrocities. When I saw them, I quickly grabbed my daughter, and we went into the house. We closed the door, but they broke it down.”

—Resident of Cameroon’s Northwest Region

Given these compounding crises, it is impossible for Cameroonian nationals who are currently in the U.S. to return safely to their home country. Congress created [TPS](#) in 1990 and [authorized administrative officials](#) to grant relief from deportation and provide work authorization to TPS holders in cases where violent conflict and other crises make returning to their country of origin unsafe.

Redesignating Cameroon for TPS would also benefit American families and communities.

FWD.us estimates that [21,000 individuals from Cameroon](#) are potentially TPS-eligible with a redesignation. TPS-eligible Cameroonians have lived in the U.S. for six years on average, and have built families that include 22,000 U.S. citizens. These community members already contribute \$460 million to the U.S. economy each year, and 78% are in the labor force, providing essential services. Renewing and extending TPS protections would ensure that families can remain together and allow more Cameroonians in the U.S. to more fully contribute their skills and talents to the U.S. economy.

Sociopolitical Struggle and Armed Conflict

Cameroon's English-speaking regions remain embroiled in a protracted sociopolitical and armed conflict. These two Anglophone regions were former British colonies, while the rest of Cameroon was colonized by the French. Since independence, [questions over the integration](#) of culturally and linguistically diverse communities continued, coming to a head in 2016 with large-scale protests and strikes over the claims of marginalization and unfair treatment of the Anglophone population.

The calls for change from English-speaking Cameroonians, however, were [violently repressed](#) by the government. While Anglophone teachers, lawyers, and civil society [began with calls for constitutional reforms](#), federalism, and greater autonomy for their regions, the government's brutal response, in part, led to the formation of non-state armed groups, escalating the conflict from a political struggle to [an armed conflict](#) in 2017.

Since then, this conflict has resulted in a [death toll of 6,000 people](#) and has [forcibly displaced over 750,000 individuals](#). The situation has driven more than [86,000 people to seek refuge](#) in neighboring countries to escape the escalating violence.

“We are simply fighting for our rights, but the military, which is supposed to protect lives and property, has turned into our greatest nightmare.”

—Resident of Buea, Cameroon

Both non-state armed groups and government forces have carried out [violent attacks and human rights violations](#) throughout this conflict. The [escalating targeting of schools](#) is particularly alarming, depriving access to a proper education for approximately 600,000 children. [Less than half of all schools](#) in the region are operational, and the enrollment rate for the 2022-2023 school year stands at a mere 54%.

The conflict has left [2 million people in the Anglophone regions](#) in dire need of humanitarian assistance—equivalent to half of the entire population of these regions. Efforts to broker peace between the armed groups and the government have faced significant challenges. In early 2023, an initiative [sought to facilitate](#) dialogue. Progress, however, has stalled, and [prospects for imminent peace appear bleak](#). The U.S. must redesignate TPS to ensure that Cameroonians in the U.S. are not forcibly returned to these life-threatening conditions.

Political Repression and Human Rights Abuses

Amid this backdrop, the Cameroonian government's repressive actions persist, marked by a [wave of arbitrary](#) and [politically motivated arrests](#). This crackdown has [extended to journalists](#) and [prominent human rights defenders](#), who face relentless [harassment](#), [death threats](#), and [incommunicado detention](#).

For years, elections in Cameroon have been marked by [allegations of fraud](#), as [opposition parties](#) as well as the [U.S. State Department](#) point to intimidation of voters and other irregularities. Protests and peaceful demonstrations against these elections and the ruling party, which has been in power since the 1960s, have been [met with harsh repression](#) by the government. Hundreds of opposition [activists have been arrested](#), and the main opposition leader was jailed twice without charges. Overall, human rights and democracy experts [squarely categorize Cameroon](#) as “not free,” underscoring its lack of fair elections and lack of civil liberties.

Violent Extremism in the Far North

The Far North region of the country continues to grapple with constant attacks from [active and violent extremist groups](#). Militants from Boko Haram routinely [attack civilians](#), destroying homes, looting markets, ranches, and farms, and driving thousands from their homes. These attacks have resulted in a staggering loss of human lives, with a reported [death toll of 3,000 people](#), and the [displacement of over 385,000](#) more.

“The people we met in Cameroon’s Far North are living in terror. They no longer ask whether there will be further attacks but when they will take place—they feel completely abandoned by the authorities.”

—[Samira Daoud, Amnesty International’s Acting Regional Director for West and Central Africa](#)

Despite the gravity of the situation, the government’s efforts to safeguard its citizens have proven insufficient in the face of the escalating wave of violence. In May 2023, regional officials [formally requested additional military](#) assistance from both the national government and neighboring countries, Nigeria and Chad, to defend against these attacks.

The escalating violence, mounting casualties, and the mass displacement of civilians all underscore the severity of the situation in a country already facing active conflict and strained for resources.

Increase of Refugees and a Humanitarian Crisis

Cameroon currently hosts almost [half a million refugees](#), the majority of whom are fleeing decades-long internal [conflicts in the Central African Republic](#). At the same time, the conflict within Cameroon continues to drive people from their homes, leaving [more than 2 million people forcibly displaced](#) in Cameroon, which include internally displaced individuals as well as refugees from neighboring nations.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the total number of [people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection](#) in Cameroon has reached a staggering 4.7 million this year, representing a 20% increase over the last year alone. In practical

terms, this means that approximately one out of every six individuals in the country is in need of urgent assistance. Regrettably, both the Anglophone regions and the Far North region face significant [obstacles to humanitarian access](#), as [violent attacks on aid workers](#) by multiple parties in the conflict have severely hampered relief efforts.

The Biden Administration Should Not Return People to Danger

By **redesignating** and extending Cameroon for TPS, the Biden Administration can ensure that nationals from Cameroon are not sent back to deadly conditions, and instead are able to remain with their families and contribute to their communities in the U.S. If deported to Cameroon, individuals would face armed violence, human rights abuses, and even death. Human rights experts have [documented the abuses that individuals who are deported](#) and members of their families face, including extortion, torture, sexual violence, and physical abuse.

The Biden Administration has repeatedly and publicly acknowledged that conditions in Cameroon are not safe for return. In its most recent [report on the state of human rights in Cameroon](#), the U.S. State Department not only acknowledged the ongoing conflict, but also pointed to egregious human rights abuses by government forces and non-state armed groups, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, forced disappearances, and torture. It also highlighted documented cases of “physical abuse or assault of individuals who have been deported” to Cameroon. The Biden Administration has issued the [highest-level warning against travel](#) to most of Cameroon due to extremist violence and the ongoing armed conflict.

The [TPS program](#) was created precisely to prevent individuals from being returned to such conditions. Tragedies like those detailed in the State Department report can be avoided if the Administration redesignates and extends Cameroon for TPS. Numerous Members of Congress have repeatedly pointed out the ongoing crises in the country, including the [mass displacement](#) as a result of the conflict and the [attacks on human rights defenders](#). For years, [lawmakers have called for TPS protections for Cameroon](#), and [many have recently called on the Administration to redesignate TPS](#) for Cameroon.

To date, the Biden Administration has successfully taken steps to extend TPS and Deferred Enforced Departure protections for thousands of individuals from countries devastated by natural disaster, war, and other humanitarian and security crises, including the initial TPS designation for Cameroon. They should expand on these successes and redesignate Cameroon for TPS. Doing so would be in line with the [Administration's goals](#) of realizing a more humane, safe, and orderly immigration system, **while keeping families and communities safe and together.**