

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN
Paix –Travail- Patrie

MINISTERE DE LA PROMOTION
DE LA FEMME ET DE LA FAMILLE

REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON
Peace- Work-Fatherland

MINISTRY OF WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT AND THE FAMILY

**32ND EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL
DAY OF FAMILIES**

15 May 2026

THEME: “Families, Inequalities and Child Wellbeing”

TERMS OF REFERENCE

April 2026

I. CONTEXT AND JUSTIFICATION

The International Day of Families has its origin from a major United Nations initiative, which has long recognised the pivotal role of the family as the basic unit of society and a key driver for social, economic, and cultural development. Thus, on 20 September 1993, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 47/237, proclaiming May 15 of each year as the International Day of Families. Its primary objective is to raise awareness among governments, institutions and citizens worldwide of family-related issues, particularly with regard to poverty, education, gender equality, social protection and the well-being of children.

This resolution is part of a broader effort that began in the 1980s, when the UN started to pay more attention to changes in family structures due to globalisation, urbanisation, migration and economic changes, which led to the proclamation of the International Year of the Family in 1994, a key milestone aimed at strengthening international cooperation on these issues.

The celebration of the International Day of Families is therefore an opportunity to promote inclusive public policies, capable of reducing inequalities within families and guaranteeing decent and equitable living conditions for every child, regardless of their social or geographical background. It also encourages the sharing of best practices between States and mobilises civil society around contemporary challenges, such as fighting against child poverty, protecting children from domestic violence, access to quality education and promoting equal opportunities from an early age.

Under the theme "*Families, inequalities and child wellbeing*", this year's edition is fully aligned with the priorities defined by the UN. It highlights social, economic, and regional disparities that deeply affect families' quality of life and, consequently, the harmonious development of children.

II. EXPLANATION OF THE THEME

In Cameroon, the issue of families, inequalities and child well-being is a key concern at the core of the country's social and economic transformations. While the family is universally recognised as a space for protection, personal development and socialisation, it is clear that many Cameroonian families continue to face growing economic, social and gender inequalities that compromise their ability to guarantee the wellbeing of their children.

These social ills do not only affect the direct wellbeing of children, but also perpetuate cycles of inequality from one generation to the next. It is therefore urgent to strengthen support mechanisms for families and to promote inclusive

approaches that guarantee equitable conditions for the development and wellbeing of every child.

2.1. Clarification of Concepts

The key concepts of this year's theme, namely families, inequalities, well-being of the child, are closely linked and require clarification in order to understand how they are connected.

- **Family** in social sciences refers to a social group united by bonds of kinship, alliances, or affection. It may include parents, children, grandparents, siblings, and other members related by blood, marriage, or adoption.
- **Inequalities** refer to differences, injustices, or imbalances, and the inequitable distribution of resources between individuals or groups in a society.
- **Wellbeing of the child** can be considered as a dynamic state of physical, cognitive, emotional, spiritual and social health; a subjective and objective setting in which children:
 - are protected from ill-treatment, neglect, exploitation, and violence;
 - have their basic needs, including their survival and development;
 - are in contact with people taking care of them and are supported by these people;
 - have the opportunity to build supportive relationships with their loved ones, peers, teachers, members of the community and society as a whole; and
 - have the necessary resources and tools to exercise their power to act in line with the evolution of their abilities.

2.2. Inequalities within the Family

In terms of inequalities, we can identify three main groups including: economic, social and gender inequalities.

- Economic inequalities play a decisive role in the quality of life of families. Poverty, unemployment and precarious housing conditions undermine family relationships. Under pressure, some parents may develop violent behaviour, as they are unable to deal with the stress and frustrations of daily life. Children then become direct victims of this instability: neglect,

abuse, or deprivation of education or healthcare. Such violence has lasting consequences on their emotional, cognitive and social development.

- Social inequalities including unequal access to social services and justice, exacerbate family vulnerability in a context where child protection mechanisms are insufficient or ineffective.
- Gender inequalities in access to education and the gendered division of labour within the family also contribute to perpetuating patterns of violence. Although education is recognised as a fundamental right, many children do not have regular access to it. School fees, even at modest levels, represent a barrier for low-income families, leading to discrimination in children's education, particularly for girls, who are often forced to drop out of school to contribute to domestic chores, economic activities, family responsibilities, or to get married. This situation perpetuates a cycle of intergenerational inequality, limiting the future prospects of children from underprivileged backgrounds, and especially girls.

In societies where power dynamics are unbalanced, women are often the primary victims of domestic violence, which can go as far as the most heinous crimes. In certain contexts, these tensions translate into violence, ranging from physical and psychological abuse to femicide, infanticide and parricide. This violence does not affect only women: children who witness them or are indirect victims suffer deep trauma, growing up in an environment marked by fear and violence that distorts their perception and can perpetuate an intergenerational cycle of violence.

2.3. Other Social Ills

Child abuse, whether physical, sexual, or psychological, is particularly alarming when perpetrated by parents or relatives. The persistence of harmful cultural practices exposes children to neglect, violence and reduces their life opportunities.

Moreover, crises and instability in certain regions further weaken the family structure and increase children's vulnerability to abuse and exploitation. The family, which is supposed to be a safe haven, then becomes a place of danger. The silence often imposed by fear or dependency prevents these children from denouncing their situation.

Growing urbanisation and internal or international migration are changing traditional patterns. As a result, there has been an increase in single-parent families, or where children are entrusted to relatives, sometimes without adequate guidance. In some cases, the breakdown of the family can lead to a reduction in the emotional and material support that is essential for a child's harmonious development.

III. RESPONSE

In response to these difficulties, efforts are being made by the Government with the support of technical and financial partners to support families and combat the inequalities inherent to families and children. For instance, the State is strengthening social protection by ratifying international and regional legal instruments (CRC, ACRWC), adopting Law No. 2024/016 of 23 December 2024, to organise the civil status registration system in Cameroon, Law No. 2023/009 of 25 July 2023, and establishing the Online Child Protection Charter.

At a strategic level, the drafting and implementation of the National Gender Policy document, the Positive Parenting Programme, the Multi-sector Action Plan to combat child marriage, Assistance Strategy for Families in Distress and in Humanitarian Context, the Child Social Protection document, the setting up of a helpline for children victims of violence on the toll-free number 116, all contribute to strengthening existing measures. Moreover, the economic empowerment of parents, particularly mothers, and local partnerships are sustainably improving children's living conditions and well-being through Social Safety Nets, aid and support families, the promotion of female entrepreneurship. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives remains limited by structural constraints (poverty, harmful practices, security crises, child marriage and shortage of resources)

Finally, the well-being of children is inextricably linked to that of families, and investing in reducing family inequalities means investing in a fairer, more inclusive and more sustainable future for all societies.

IV. OBJECTIVES

4.1. General objective

Promoting the role of the family in reducing inequalities and enhancing the wellbeing of children.

4.2. Specific objectives

- Raising awareness of communities and decision-makers on the impact of inequalities on families and children;
- Popularising strategies to support vulnerable families;
- advocating for the adoption of policies and programmes that promote social equity;
- strengthening families' capacities to ensure the physical, emotional and social wellbeing of children;
- strengthening multi-stakeholder dialogue on family-related issues around exchanges dubbed: "Family Forum";
- strengthening the establishment of Parents' School.

EXPECTED RESULTS

- communities and decision-makers are sensitised to the effects of inequality on families and children;
- strategies to support vulnerable families are better known and disseminated among stakeholders;
- advocacy for the adoption of policies and programmes to promote social equity is carried out;
- families' capacities to ensure the physical, emotional and social wellbeing of children are strengthened
- a dynamic multi-stakeholder dialogue is established and consolidated around family-related issues through the 'Family Forum';
- the process of setting up and strengthening the Parents' School is effective.

VI. MAIN ACTIVITIES

- organising workshops and panel discussions;
- awareness-raising campaigns (media, social media, communities);
- public conferences and round-tables;
- community activities (caravans, educational talks, open door days);
- production and dissemination of communication materials (posters, leaflets, videos);
- testimonies and sharing of family experiences;
- setting up the Parents' School.

VII. SUB-THEMES

- Economic inequalities and families' living conditions.
- Gender inequality and the family.
- Family and the best interests of the child.
- Equal access to education for all children.
- Family and nutrition.

- Children's health and well-being.
- Family and mental health.
- Protecting children in vulnerable situations.
- Role of social policies in reducing inequalities.
- Positive parenting and family support.
- Inclusion of children with disabilities.
- Impact of crises (economic, health and climate) on families.
- Combating domestic violence and families.
- Positive masculinity and families.

VIII. METHODOLOGY

The celebration of the IDF 2026 will be based on a participatory and inclusive approach, taking into account gender issues, children's rights and positive masculinity with the drafting of a final report.

IX. COMMUNICATION PLAN

- Drafting an integrated communication strategy;
- Production of contents tailored to various targets.

X. STAKEHOLDERS

- Public administrations;
- International organisations;
- community-based organisations;
- Civil society;
- Private sector;
- Communities.

XI. TARGET GROUP

- Families (particularly the most vulnerable);
- Children and adolescents;
- Policy-makers;
- Professionals in education, health and social sectors;
- The general public.

XII. DATE AND VENUE

- Date: 15 May 2026
- Venue: to be determined (at national, regional and local level).