

**DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILING OF SOCIO-POLITICAL CRISIS
INDUCED INTERNAL DISPLACED PERSONS IN THE BAMENDA
URBANSCAPE, CAMEROON**

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This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Globally, reports indicate an increasing number of internally displaced persons particularly in Sub-Sahara Africa due to frequent conflicts. Despite these contributions, there has been limited research on the demographic profiling of IDPs in several parts of Cameroon especially in Bamenda characterized by the on-going socio-political crisis since 2016. Therefore, this study identifies the educational levels, age groups and employment status of IDPs in the Bamenda urbanscape. To achieve this aim, the study randomly sampled 400 IDPs in the Bamenda I, II and III municipalities. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistical tools and content analysis. The findings reveal that amongst IDPs youths (39.39%) and young adults (39.39%) are the most dominant, followed by adults (18.19%), indicating that the IDP population in Bamenda is predominantly youthful. Some 40% of IDPs have attained undergraduate or graduate-level education, while over 50% remain unemployed across the three sub-divisions. This demographic structure suggests a high dependency burden and increased vulnerability of IDPs to poverty and social challenges in Bamenda. The study recommends that decision makers should put in place strategies to absorb this youthful and learned population by creating training centers and job opportunities both for the educated and the uneducated IDPs population.

Keywords: Demography, Displaced persons, Socio-political crisis, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Bamenda.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Displacement remains the most significant humanitarian challenge globally (Nsukka et al., 2022). Internal displacement has reached unprecedented global levels in recent years, with millions of individuals uprooted by conflict, violence and disasters. The number of internally displaced persons worldwide exceeded 80 million by the end of 2024, highlighting the magnitude of humanitarian needs and associated development challenges (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2025). The demographic profiling of IDPs is indispensable for decision makers in order to design and implement the appropriate assistance

to improve upon their living standards. The global age of IDPs in 2020 was 30% for children under the age of 18 and 50% for women and girls (United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees, 2020). The majority of IDPs (approximately 60%) were under the age of 30, while children under the age of 18 made up around 40-50% of the total IDP population globally (Davis, 2019). Older persons (aged 60 and above) represented a relatively small proportion, around 5-10% of IDPs. Globally, millions of IDPs, particularly children and youth, experience significant disruptions to their schooling, resulting in gaps in enrollment, progression and educational attainment (UNICEF and IDMC, 2019). The scale of internal displacement is unprecedented. By the end of 2019, approximately 41.3 million people were internally displaced worldwide, with more than half under the age of 18 (UNESCO UIL, 2025). Internal displacement continues to grow globally, with the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) reaching high records due to conflict, violence and climate events (IDMC, 2025). The prolonged nature of displacement often results in significant disruptions to people's livelihoods, particularly employment and economic stability (IDMC, 2025; IOM, 2025).

In the developed world, children under the age of 18 make up around 22% of the total IDP population in Ukraine (Korobkova and Nikitina, 2020). Research on internal displacement in the United States following the Hurricane Katrina disaster indicates that displaced populations were largely composed of working-age adults and children, while elderly individuals constituted a smaller but highly vulnerable segment of the population (Fussell et al., 2010). Similarly, displacement patterns observed in Japan after the 2011 Tōhoku Earthquake and Tsunami demonstrated that ageing populations were particularly vulnerable to prolonged displacement due to limited mobility and health-related constraints (Matanle, 2016). Studies conducted in the United States have shown that children displaced after Hurricane Katrina experienced disruptions in schooling due to relocation, loss of school infrastructure and psychological trauma (Sacerdote, 2012). Likewise, research in Japan found that many displaced children experienced difficulties adapting to new educational environments after the 2011 disaster, particularly when relocation involved long-distance migration to unfamiliar communities (Shibata, 2015). The internally displaced populations frequently experience temporary or prolonged unemployment following displacement. Research on labour market outcomes among displaced residents in the United States indicates that many individuals lost their jobs due to the destruction of local economies and were forced to seek new employment opportunities in unfamiliar labour markets (Groen and Polivka, 2010). Similarly, displacement following the 2011 disaster in Japan led to significant job losses, particularly in coastal communities where economic activities such as fisheries, tourism and small-scale industries were severely disrupted (Matanle, 2016). Again, access to formal employment was a significant challenge for IDPs, with many relying on informal, temporary or low-skilled work, (report by the Joint Data Center, 2020).

In the developing world, according to the 2018 study by Calderón and Gáfaró on the demographic characteristics of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Colombia, children under the age of 18 made up around 45% of the total IDP population. Similarly, studies on internal displacement in Sudan revealed that a significant proportion of displaced persons fell within the economically active age group of 18–45 years, as adults often migrate to urban areas in search of safety and livelihood opportunities (Pantuliano et al., 2011). Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and a critical facilitator of social, economic and personal development. However, in contexts of internal displacement, access to and attainment

of education are frequently disrupted, especially in developing countries where conflict, instability and disaster-related displacement are most prevalent (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2022). A comprehensive overview of displacement and education points to stark contrasts in school participation. In some crisis settings, IDP children demonstrate markedly lower rates of access to formal education compared to their non-displaced peers (Cazabat et al., 2025). The IDMC and other humanitarian agencies emphasized the urgent need for improved data collection on education access, progression and outcomes for displaced children to inform planning and policy (IDMC, 2022). Without reliable educational data, national and international stakeholders face challenges in designing effective inclusion strategies, budgeting appropriately for education support and evaluating the impact of interventions that aim to increase schooling outcomes among IDPs. The 2020 report by the Joint Data Center on internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Kosovo in Serbia reveals that, many IDPs in Kosovo had previously worked in the agriculture, industry, or service sectors, with varying levels of income. Displacement had a significant impact on the economic well-being of IDPs, with a majority reporting a decline in household income and assets (Joint Data Center, 2020). Approximately 60% of IDP households in Kosovo lived below the national poverty line, with many struggling to meet their basic needs. Access to formal employment was a significant challenge for IDPs, with many relying on informal, temporary or low-skilled work. Regional evidence reinforces the trend of restricted labour market integration for IDPs (Joint Data Center, 2020). Empirical research in Colombia by Ibáñez and Moya (2010) demonstrated that internal displacement significantly reduces access to stable employment. Similarly, Ferris (2007) argued that displaced populations in developing countries often face structural barriers to employment, including limited access to land, lack of documentation and discrimination within host communities.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, children under the age of 18 make up around 40-45% of the total IDP population in Abuja (Ferris et al., 2011). Ibem (2017) argued that, the educational levels of IDPs in North-East Nigeria were generally lower than the national average. Around 45% of IDPs had only completed primary education or less, while approximately 30% had achieved secondary education. Access to higher education was limited, with only about 5% of IDPs having a tertiary education. Educational attainment among IDPs is a critical concern because displacement often disrupts formal schooling and limits access to education across age groups. Data collected through Multi-Sector Needs Assessments (MSNAs) in recent humanitarian crises indicate that displaced children frequently have lower formal education participation compared to non-displaced peers. For example, in Burkina Faso only 51 % of school-aged IDP children attended formal school during 2023–2024, much lower than the 76 % for non-displaced children; in Mali, this gap was even wider with 36 % versus 65 % respectively (Cazabat et al., 2025). Prior to displacement, many IDPs in North-East Nigeria were engaged in agricultural activities, small-scale trading or informal employment (Ibem, 2017).

In Cameroon, children under the age of 18 represent a significant proportion of the displaced population, accounting for about 54% (The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UN OCHA], 2022). Wanie and Oben (2022) stated that 60% of the IDPs in the Buea municipality are aged 18 to 37. Etchu and Funteh (2021) found that in the Far North region of Cameroon, IDPs schools face severe shortages of qualified teachers, learning materials and infrastructure. Classes are often overcrowded, and teachers lack adequate training to handle the trauma experienced by displaced children. As a result, learning outcomes are

poor, with many children unable to read or perform basic arithmetic appropriate for their age group. After displacement, a significant proportion of IDPs experienced disruptions to their livelihoods, with around 60% reporting a decline in income and economic status. Unemployment rates were higher among the IDP population, with approximately 40% lacking formal employment. The employment status of IDPs in Cameroon is characterized by high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Approximately, some 70% of IDPs in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon are unemployed (Ngum and Yuh, 2021).

In North west region of Cameroon, Mbong and Tabe (2020) reported that only 30% of school-age IDP children are currently enrolled in school. The educational level of IDPs is significantly affected by displacement, leading to reduced access to quality education, low enrollment rates, poor learning outcomes and increased gender disparities. There is limited data on the demographic profiling of IDPs in Bamenda urban. Due to this situation, this research therefore sought to examine IDPs age group, levels of education and their employment status in Bamenda urban. The findings of this study will make data available which will go a long way help decision makers, humanitarians bodies and international organizations to better plan the assistance they offer IDPs in Bamenda urban.

2.0 MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Study Area

This research was carried out in Bamenda, located between latitude 5°56' and 5°58' North of the Equator and Longitude 10°09' and 10°11' East of the Greenwich Meridian (Master Plan of Bamenda City Council, 2011-2027). Bamenda, a hub city in the North-West region of Cameroon is the capital of the North-West Region (NWR) of Cameroon. It is sub-divided into Bamenda I, II, and III municipalities. Each of these areas has a council, independent of the other. Nevertheless, they are all accountable to the Bamenda City Council (BCC) (Ngwan and Kimengsi, 2020). The town is bounded to the west by Mbengwi and Southwest Region, Momo division and Bali sub-division, to the north by Bafut sub-division, to the northeast, by Tubah sub-division and to the south by Santa sub-division. Bamenda is made up of 7 villages (Bamendakwe, Nkwen, Ndzah, Mankon, Chomba, Nsongwa and Mbatu) (Fombe and Acha, 2020). Bamenda covers a total surface area of some 3125 Km² (Chiane Beng et al., 2020) (Figure 3.1).

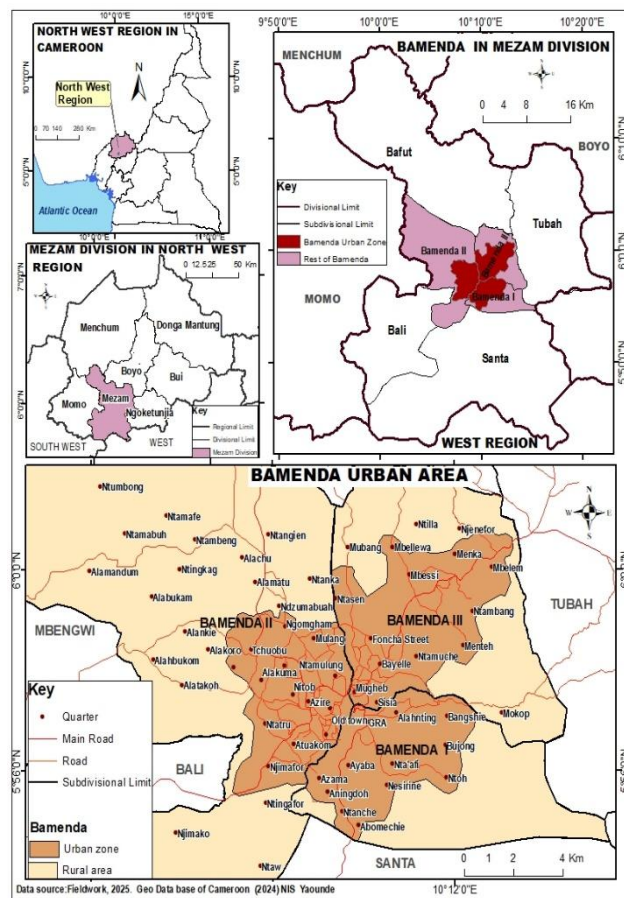


Fig .1: Location the Bamenda urbanscape

Source: Geo-database of Cameroon (2025) National Institute of Statistic

2.2 Research Methods

2.2.1 Research Design

A descriptive research design was used in this study in order to gather comprehensive data on the demographic profiling of the socio-political crisis induced IDPs in the area of study. The sample size for this research was derived from the Taro Yamane’s formula of 1967. This formula is used to calculate sample size for a finite population obtained by the following formula;

$$N = \frac{N}{(1 + N * e^2)}$$

where, n = Sample size

N = Population size

e = margin of error (as a decimal)

According to UN the population of the study area population in 2023 stand at 593,900 inhabitants with an error margin of +/- 0.5, the determined sample size of the research was calculated as follows;

$$n = \frac{593,900}{1 + 593,900 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{593,900}{1 + 593,900(0.0025)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{593,900}{1 + 1,484.75}$$

$$n = \frac{593,900}{1,485.75} = 400$$

As seen above, the calculated sample size of the research stood at some 400 IDPs within Bamenda I, II and III municipalities. It should be noted that the calculated sample size of 400 constitute only IDPs in Bamenda I, II and III urban where questionnaires were administered. Primary data was gotten through field observation and questionnaires. The main quantitative instrument used was the household structured questionnaire. The questionnaires contained 9 questions on the demographic profiling of IDPs, some 98% of the questions captured in the questionnaire were structured, only 2 % were unstructured. The questionnaires were administered randomly amongst the IDPs population of the Bamenda I, II and III municipalities (Table 1). The questionnaires were printed in the English language and in some cases interpreted into Pidgin English for better communication and comprehension. The research was carried out from the 4th of October 2024 to the 29th of January 2025, both online and face to face. Due the ongoing crisis, 70% of the questionnaires were administered online (280), and 30 % face to face (120). The online questionnaires were a Web-Based survey where questionnaire were hosted online and a link shared with participants. Observation was done in order to gain knowledge on the types of economic activities that IDP are involved in.

Descriptive and content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. Coding of IDPs age, level of education and employment status were performed. The SPSS version 16, statistical tool, Excell version 13 and Microsoft word version 16 were used to analyze questionnaire data in frequency tables, bar graphs, pie charts, histograms and cross tabulation.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 IDPs Age Group

The demographic profiling of 400 socio-political crisis-induced Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Bamenda reveals a youthful population. Age distribution shows that the majority of IDPs fall within the 15–24 and 25–34 age groups, each representing 39% of the sample. The 35–44 age group accounts for 11.44%, while older age brackets (65 and above) make up a minimal proportion (0.79%). This is demonstrated in Table 1.

3.2 Educational Level

IDPs educational attainment in the Bamenda urbanscape is varied. Findings reveal that a significant portion of IDPs across all the three sub-divisions (Bamenda I, II, III) has attained undergraduate or graduate education (40%), 11,1% have the level of primary school education and 15.2 % are post graduate. Table 2 details the results.

3.3 Employment status

Regarding the IDPs employment status, in all three sub-divisions, more than 50% of the IDPs are unemployed, with 50.51% in Bamenda I, 50.41% in Bamenda II and 50.56 % in Bamenda III. Table 3 presents the employment status of IDPs in Bamenda urban.

Table 1: Age group of IDPs in the Bamenda urbanscape.

Sub-division	Age group	Frequency	Percentage
Bamenda I	15-24	39	39.39
	25-34	39	39.39
	35-44	12	12.12
	45-54	6	6.07
	55-64	2	2.02
	65-74	1	1.01
	Sub-total	99	100.00
Bamenda II	15-24	49	39.83
	25-34	49	39.83
	35-44	14	11.39
	45-54	8	6.51
	55-64	2	1.63
	65-74	1	0.81
	Sub-total	123	100.00
Bamenda III	15-24	70	39.32
	25-34	70	39.32
	35-44	21	11.82
	45-54	12	6.74
	55-64	4	2.24
	65-74	1	0.56
	Sub-total	178	100.00
Grand Total	-	400	100

Source: Field Work (2024)

Table 1 shows that the IDP population in the Bamenda urbanscape is predominantly youthful (78%). Table 2 presents the IDPs educational level.

Table 2: Educational level of IDPs in the Bamenda urbanscape

Sub-division	Educational level	Frequency	Percentage
Bamenda I	Primary education	11	11.1
	Secondary education	33	33.3
	Undergraduate and graduate	40	40.4
	Post graduate	15	15.2
Sub-total		99	100
Bamenda II	Primary education	13	10.6
	Secondary education	42	34.1
	Undergraduate and graduate	49	39.8
	Post graduate	19	15.4
Sub-total		123	100
Bamenda III	Primary education	19	10.7
	Secondary education	60	33.7
	Undergraduate and graduate	71	39.9
	Post graduate	28	15.7
Sub-total		178	100
Grand Total		400	100%

Source: Field Work (2024)

Table 2 reveals that the IDPs population in Bamenda urban is relatively educated. Some 40% has attained undergraduate or graduate education. Table 3 presents the IDPs’ employment status.

Table 3: Employment status of IDPs in the Bamenda urbanscape

Sub-division	Employment status	Frequency	Percentage
Bamenda I	Employed	49	49.49
	Unemployed	50	50.51
	Sub-total	99	100
Bamenda II	Employed	61	49.59
	Unemployed	62	50.41
	Sub-total	123	100
Bamenda III	Employed	88	49.44
	Unemployed	90	50.56
	Sub-total	178	100
Grand Total		400	100

Source: Field Work (2024)

Table 3 shows that a significant portion of IDPs in Bamenda are unemployed (more than 50%). Table 4 presents the IDPs’ occupational status in Bamenda urban.

Table 4: Occupational status of IDPs in the Bamenda urbanscape

Sub-division	IDPs occupations	Frequency	Percentage
Bamenda I	Formal employment Civil servant	14	14.1
	Informal employment (petty business, carpenter, shoes menders, hair dressers, tailors, bike riders)	51	51.5
	Unemployment	34	34.3
Sub-Total		99	100
Bamenda II	Formal employment Civil servant	18	14.6
	Informal employment (petty business, carpenter, shoes menders, hair dressers, tailors, bike riders)	63	51.2
	Unemployment	42	34.1
Sub-total		123	100
Bamenda III	Formal employment Civil servant	26	14.6
	Informal employment (petty scale business, carpenter, shoes menders, hair dressers, tailors, bike riders)	91	51.1
	Unemployment	61	34.3
Sub- total		178	100
Grand Total	-	400	100

Source: Field Work, (2024)

Table 4 shows that more than 51 % of IDPs in Bamenda are involved in the informal sector.

From the observations done in Bamenda urban, a great number of IDPs (51 %) are involved in informal activities with low income such as shoe mending, selling of fruits, hairdressing, selling of fuel. Figure1 present some gainfully activities carried out by IDPs in the Bamenda urbanscape.

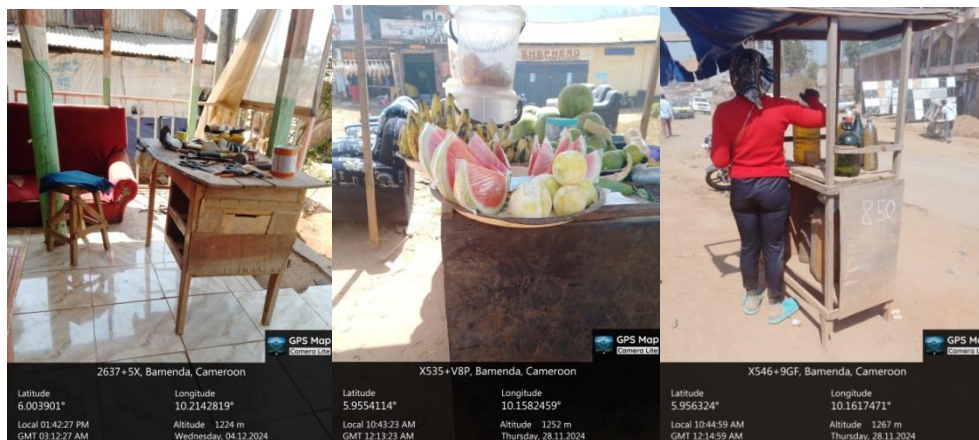


Figure 1: Occupation of gainfully employed IDPs in the Bamenda urbanscape

Source: Field Work (2024)

A: Shoe mending workshop in Bamenda III (Mile Mbellem)

B: fruits vendor in Bamenda II (Miss Gain junction)

C: fuel vendor in Bamenda II (Miss Gain junction)

Figure 1, presents some gainful activities carried out by IDPs in Bamenda urban. Photo A presents a shoe mending workshop own by an IDP in Bamenda III. Photo B presents a business own by an IDP where some fruits are being sold in Bamenda II and photo C presents an IDP in her business place selling fuel in Bamenda II.

4.0 DISCUSSION

4.1 Age of IDPs in the Bamenda urbanscape

The findings show that the dominant age group amongst IDPs across Bamenda I, II and III municipalities falls between 15 to 34 years, while the less dominant falls between 65-74. These findings indicate dominance of youth and young adults (15–34 years) among IDPs population in the Bamenda I, II and III municipalities. The 15–24 age group account for 39.39 % while the 25–34 age groups account for 39.39% of the total population, a total of 78.78% for the young and young adult age group. The vast majority (78.78 %) of IDPs in Bamenda I, II and III municipalities are young. Findings equally reveal that there is a disparity in the age group among the three municipalities with Bamenda I having 39.39 % of the age 15-24 age group, Bamenda II 39.83% and Bamenda III 39.32 %

Moreover, there is a low representation of the age group of 35 - 54 years among IDPs in the Bamenda I, II and III municipalities. The 35–44 age group makes up 12.12% and the 45–54 age group only 6.07%. These statistics indicate a significant drop in representation for these age brackets, possibly due to family obligations, health concerns, or the choice to stay behind in original localities considering the fact that at the beginning of this crisis young and young adults were the target of both state forces and separatists. Lastly, there is a minimal

representation of older adults (55+ years). The 55–64 age group accounts for 1% of the IDPs population here. This represents the age group of those who because of their age were unable to move, so the 64+ age group remains in villages.

According to the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] (2020), the global age of IDPs in 2020 was 30% for children under the age of 18 and 50% for women and girls. To Davis (2019), the majority of IDPs (approximately 60%) were under the age of 30, while children under the age of 18 make up around 40-50% of the total IDP population globally. Older persons (aged 60 and above) represented a relatively small proportion, around 5-10% of IDPs. Our findings align with the findings of Davis (2019), with a vast majority of IDPs (more than 78%) in Bamenda urban below 35, older persons represent a very small portion of the IDPs population (0.79%) in the Bamenda urbanscape.

4.2 IDP' Level of Education in The Bamenda Urbanscape

Findings reveal that a significant portion of IDPs across all the three sub-divisions (Bamenda I, II, III) has attained undergraduate or graduate education (40%), 11.1% have attained the level of primary school education and 15.2 % are post graduate. The general educational trends of IDPs in the Bamenda urbanscape discloses that a significant portion of IDPs across all sub-divisions has attained undergraduate or graduate education (40%). This is followed by those with secondary education (34%). A relatively smaller proportion has only primary education (11%), while 15% have postgraduate qualifications. This reveals a relatively educated displaced population, which is important when considering labor market integration.

IDPs in Bamenda urban are significantly educated (more than 88%). This is explained by the availability of numerous schools and higher institutions of learning in the neighborhood where young people enrolled to further their education. The results reveals that a majority of IDPs in Bamenda have secondary or higher education, with 40% holding undergraduate or graduate degrees and 15% even reaching postgraduate levels. However, despite their qualifications, many are unable to secure formal employment. Contrary to the findings of others scholars, the educational level of socio-political crisis induced IDPs in the Bamenda urbanscape are above the national average. Some 6.75 % of IDPs have the level of primary educations, 33.75 % have the level of secondary education, 22. % are under graduates and graduates from the University, 20.5 % have the level of post graduate education. According to Ibem (2017), the educational levels of IDPs in North-East Nigeria were generally lower than the national average. Around 45% of IDPs had only completed primary education or less, while approximately 30% had achieved secondary education. Access to higher education was limited with only about 5% of IDPs having a tertiary education.

4.3 IDPs' Employment Status

Findings reveal that in all three sub-divisions, the rate of unemployment is higher than the rate of employment, more than 50% of the IDPs are unemployed. The employment-to-unemployment ratio is almost evenly split (Table 3). In all three sub-divisions, more than 50% of the IDPs are unemployed, with 50.51% in Bamenda I, 50.41% in Bamenda II and 50.56 % in Bamenda III.

According to Martin and Sluga (2018), prior to displacement many IDPs in South Sudan were engaged in subsistence agriculture, animal husbandry or informal trade. After displacement, a significant proportion of IDPs experienced disruptions to their livelihoods, with around 70% reporting a decline in income and access to economic opportunities. Unemployment rates were higher among the IDP population, with approximately 50% lacking formal employment. To Ngum and Yuh (2021), the employment status of IDPs in Cameroon is characterized by high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Approximately 70% of IDPs in the North West and South West regions are unemployed, with most unable to find stable or formal employment. The employment situation of IDPs in the Bamenda urban area is not far from this reality, 34.2% of IDPs here are unemployed, just 14% are real salary earners, the rest (51.2%) are involved in low and very low-income generating activities such as selling of fruits, shoes mending which do not even guarantee them a substantial amount of money (less than 250,000 FCFA to 35,000 FCFA) which can permit them to meet up with their basic needs (Table 4)

5.0 CONCLUSION

The on-going socio-political crisis in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon since 2016 has led to a significant rise in internally displaced persons, many of whom have sought refuge in urban hubs such as Bamenda. This study profiled the demographic snapshot of socio-political crisis-induced IDPs in Bamenda, revealing that a vast majority of IDPs in Bamenda urban is made up of youths 78%, some 40% have attained undergraduate or graduate education and that more than 50% are unemployed. The findings opine a pressing need for targeted interventions in job creation, skills training, and psychosocial support, particularly for youths between 20 and 34 age group. Urban policymakers and humanitarian stakeholders must recognize the structural barriers faced by IDPs in accessing income-generating opportunities in spite of their educational qualifications. Moreover, the demographic trends underscore the importance of integrating displacement-responsive strategies into urban planning and development programs in Bamenda. Failing to address the socio-economic needs of IDPs risks establishing cycles of poverty, instability and marginalization in already fragile urban communities. Future research should incorporate qualitative methods to apprehend the lived experiences and coping mechanism of IDPs, as well as gender-sensitive analyses to better inform inclusive policy responses. The study was not without challenges. Few challenges encountered include firstly, the problem of identifying the IDPs and secondly the challenge of obtaining data from Institutions on the IDPs.

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