The UK’s new trade agreements

with Ghana and Cameroon

June 2021

**TOP LINES**

* **The UK has signed ‘rollover’ trade agreements with Ghana and Cameroon respectively. These are largely based on the EU’s agreements with these countries.**
* **MPs have a 21 sitting day window during which these deals can be debated. Although a Lords debate was sought during this period, it is now too late to delay the deal.**
* **The UK has not published full impact assessments for the deals, and scrutiny is very limited. This must be changed before ratification.**
* **There are specific concerns around human rights in Cameroon, where the government has cracked down on separatists in the Anglophone region.**
* **Ghana’s requests for a deal which better supported regional integration have been rebuffed. These deals must be designed to support regional trade.**
* **The Ghana and Cameroon agreements contain rendez-vous clauses, which means certain issues will be revisited in the future. It is important that these clauses are not used to insert controversial provisions below the radar, such as public services liberalisation.**

**Background**

The UK has signed ‘rollover’ trade agreements with Ghana and Cameroon respectively. These are largely based on the EU’s agreements with these countries, though there are some differences in the text of the deals.

MPs had a 21 sitting day window during which these deals can be debated. No debate was granted by the Government, though there was a Westminster Hall debate in the House of Commons. There is no guaranteed vote on the deals.

Ghana and Cameroon are both in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) trade bloc. The UK is an important export destination for producers in both these countries.

At the start of 2021, when rollover deals had still not been agreed, the UK imposed tariffs on imports from Ghana and Cameroon. This led to extra costs for importers, and would have had a knock on effect for producers in these countries.

**Key issues**

**1. Impact assessments and scrutiny**

There has been a lack of thorough impact assessment for these deals. Unlike for new trade agreements, the Government has not published ‘scoping assessments’, or any detail about the effect of these new deals on the economy, the environment or international development.

There is also a lack of scrutiny. MPs were not involved with setting the mandate for negotiations and have no guaranteed vote or debate on the final deal. In general, these sorts of ‘rollover’ deals have received very little public or parliamentary attention, despite their importance for developing partners.

The original EU deals, on which these ‘rollover’ deals are based, included mechanisms for ongoing parliamentary dialogue between the EU Parliament and their Ghanaian and Cameroonian counterparts. These have not been replicated in the new deal, which means there is no ongoing scrutiny of the deal for UK MPs.

**2. Human rights**

Parliament’s International Trade Committee asked the Government to consider withdrawing trade preferences from Cameroon in light of human rights abuses in the country.[[1]](#footnote-0) The deal includes reference to human rights, outlining a process for dealing with human rights abuses.

In particular, there has been violence in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon as a result of the government forces’ large-scale security operations and attacks from armed separatists. According to a US Senate resolution, this has included “the burning of villages, the use of live ammunition against protestors, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, sexual abuse, and killing of civilians, including women, children, and the elderly” from the government’s forces.[[2]](#footnote-1)

**3. Regional trade and ECOWAS**

The Ghana and Cameroon deals allow for duty-free trade with the UK to resume and is (despite considerable reluctance from UK) based on text from regional trade agreements. However, the liberalisation schedule will see Ghana begin to open its markets to UK goods immediately on a timetable that is at odds with its neighbours in the ECOWAS customs union. This undermines the functioning of the ECOWAS customs union, with nothing stopping UK goods entering Ghana duty free and leaking into neighbouring countries.

Ghana's requests for an alternative approach, which would not cut across its ECOWAS commitments (such as transitional protection mechanism or for amendments to the UK's GSP scheme), were rebuffed.

**4. Rendez-vous clauses**

The Ghana and Cameroon agreements contain rendez-vous clauses, which means that specific issues are scheduled for future negotiation. There are two issues with these clauses. One is that adding further areas of negotiation to a deal after it has been signed raises questions about how it can be effectively scrutinised, and how the Government can be held to account.

Another concern is the substance of these future negotiations. Historically, the UK has used these negotiations to encourage liberalisation of public services and regulations. This can limit the policy space available to governments in developing countries, and prevents them from regulating their economies in the public and democratic interest.

**For more information or further briefing, please contact:**

David Lawrence, Senior Political Adviser

david@tjm.org.uk | 07769665187

1. International Trade Committee, [Letter to Liz Truss](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5814/documents/66335/default/), 12 May 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. US Senate, [S.Res.684 — 116th Congress (2019-2020)](https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-resolution/684/text), accessed June 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)