

2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Burundi

BURUNDI (Tier 2)

The Government of Burundi does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore, Burundi remained on Tier 2. These efforts included increasing investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of traffickers and identifying significantly more victims. The government increased its funding for anti-trafficking efforts this year and awarded restitution from traffickers in criminal cases. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government continued to refer only a small proportion of identified victims to protective services. The labor inspectorate severely lacked resources, hampering its ability to detect trafficking crimes. Concerns of official complicity in trafficking crimes remained.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Proactively identify trafficking victims by screening for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations, refer all victims to appropriate care, and train officials on the existing SOPs.
- Investigate and prosecute traffickers, including complicit officials, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Train law enforcement and judicial officials on the trafficking law, trafficking indicators, victim-centered and trauma-informed investigation techniques, the difference between human trafficking and other crimes, and ordering restitution in criminal cases.
- Increase the availability of protection services for all trafficking victims, including by partnering with civil society service providers.
- Increase resources and training for labor inspectors to conduct regular inspections and identify potential trafficking victims.
- Continue training users of data collection systems on law enforcement efforts, victim identification, and referrals to care.
- Consistently enforce regulations and oversight of labor recruitment agencies and hold fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable.
- Ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

PROSECUTION

The government increased law enforcement efforts.

Burundi's 2014 Counter-Trafficking Law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking. The law prescribed penalties of five to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 to 500,000 Burundian francs (\$34 to \$ 172), and in cases involving children, the law prescribed penalties of 10 to 15 years' imprisonment and a fine of 500,000 to two million Burundian francs (\$172 to \$690). These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape.

In 2024, the government investigated 279 cases (277 for labor trafficking, one for sex trafficking, and one for an unspecified form of trafficking) involving 408 suspects, compared with 169 cases involving 190 suspects investigated in 2023. The government initiated prosecutions of 318 alleged traffickers compared with 184 alleged traffickers prosecuted in 2023. The government convicted 47

labor traffickers compared with 39 in 2023. The government reported courts sentenced 27 out of 47 traffickers to terms of imprisonment ranging from six months to 10 years, plus fines ranging from 50,000 to 1,000,000 Burundian francs (\$17 to \$345), and acquitted one defendant. In one investigation, officials arrested two suspects in a potential labor trafficking case involving 100 Burundian women fraudulently recruited to work in drone factories in Russia. Three of the 47 convictions involved traffickers who exploited children from Tanzania in forced labor.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns. The government arrested a police officer allegedly complicit in a child sex trafficking case, which remained pending at the end of the reporting period. Observers reported instances when allegedly complicit officials released suspected traffickers from jail to evade prosecution. Observers reported many arrests did not result in prosecutions for trafficking crimes due to officials deliberately reclassifying trafficking crimes to reduce the penalties, insufficient evidence, corruption, and interference of high-ranking officials.

The government maintained a data collection system on anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts, which included information compiled from courts, magistrates, and prosecutors from all 18 provinces. Ministry of Justice anti-trafficking coordinators located throughout the country oversaw communication between government agencies and coordinated law enforcement procedures on trafficking cases. The government trained immigration officials on the anti-trafficking law and differences between migrant smuggling and human trafficking. However, officials continued to conflate trafficking crimes with other crimes, impeding law enforcement efforts.

PROTECTION

The government increased protection efforts.

The government identified 1,186 trafficking victims, (five sex trafficking victims, 989 labor trafficking victims, and 192 victims of unspecified forms of trafficking) compared with 396 victims identified in 2023. International organizations identified an additional 392 potential trafficking victims. The government collaborated with foreign governments to support the repatriation of 66 Burundian trafficking victims and referred them to NGO-run shelters for socio-economic support and family reunification assistance. However, media reports indicated the government reportedly did not provide support to repatriate a Burundian trafficking victim exploited in Saudi Arabia.

The government had SOPs for victim identification and referral to care and trained officials on their implementation. The government, in partnership with an international organization, launched an additional set of SOPs to identify and refer to care women and girls who were victims of violence, including sex trafficking. The government reported it referred 280 victims to government and NGO-run shelters for assistance, compared with 21 victims referred in the previous reporting period.

The government, in collaboration with international organizations and NGOs, continued to offer comprehensive care services for trafficking victims, including temporary shelter, medical and psychosocial care, financial reintegration support, and legal assistance, to both foreign and domestic victims at five centers located in Makamba, Muyinga, Rumonge, Gitega, and Cibitoke provinces. The government previously operated an additional center in Bujumbura, which closed during the reporting period. The government did not provide comprehensive data on how many victims were assisted at the centers but reported 20 child trafficking victims received services in Gitega and Rumonge. The government allocated 269 million Burundian francs (\$92,800) to fund the centers, compared with 206 million Burundian francs (\$72,280) in the previous year. The government used additional centers, including IDP sites, as temporary shelters for trafficking victims repatriated from abroad. The government continued to operate four shelters specifically dedicated to vulnerable children, including trafficking victims – three in Bujumbura and one in Ngozi province. The government had a foster care system comprised of host families to provide assistance to vulnerable children, including trafficking victims.

The 2016 law for the Protection of Witnesses, Victims, and the Vulnerable outlined provisions for the protection of victim-witnesses. The government did not require victims to participate in criminal justice proceedings to receive protection services and provided victims alternatives to testifying in person – via video or written statements – and continued to protect victims’ confidentiality. The government reported 33 victims voluntarily participated in investigations and prosecutions of potential traffickers. Observers reported some victims refrained from participating due to distrust in the judicial system and lengthy investigations and prosecutions. Burundian law allowed prosecutors to request restitution in trafficking cases. Observers reported when restitution was ordered, traffickers must pay the full amount before being released from prison upon completion of their sentences. In 2024, the government reported courts ordered six convicted traffickers pay 7.5 million Burundian francs (\$259) in restitution to each victim.

Due to inconsistent screening among vulnerable populations, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. The law provided foreign trafficking victims with legal alternatives to their removal to countries where they may face hardship or retribution, subject to judicial decision, and allowed the government to grant temporary residency; the government did not report providing this protection.

PREVENTION

The government maintained prevention efforts.

The Anti-Trafficking Commission led anti-trafficking efforts and convened regularly. The government allocated 975 million Burundian francs (\$336,209) to support implementation of the 2023–2027 NAP, a notable increase compared with 138 million (\$48,420) in the previous year. The government allocated 198 million Burundian francs (\$68,310) to fund anti-trafficking trainings and awareness campaigns, compared with 206 million Burundian francs (\$72,280) in 2023. The government, in collaboration with an international organization and civil society organizations, conducted awareness campaigns and trained officials on effective awareness-raising strategies. The government provided anti-trafficking trainings to 60 local administrators and 60 youth leaders from Ruyigi and Mwaro Provinces. The government operated hotlines for crime victims, including victims of human trafficking, that could accommodate callers in Kirundi and French; it reported identifying and referring to services 49 victims following hotline calls.

The government had regulations for labor recruitment agencies to prevent exploitation of Burundians seeking employment abroad and prohibited worker-paid recruitment fees. The government had an inter-ministerial committee to coordinate and monitor recruitment agency activities. The committee included representatives of trade unions and officials from relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Labor, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and met regularly, including with Burundian consulate officials in Saudi Arabia. The government, in partnership with an international organization, trained Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, representatives of recruitment agencies, and local NGOs on the anti-trafficking law, trafficking indicators, and victim identification and referral to care procedures.

The government had an identification form for departing migrant workers, which required both employee information and employer contact information in the destination country, and continued to share these forms with Burundian consulate authorities and recruitment agencies in Burundi. Authorities issued warning letters to three recruitment agencies for charging recruitment fees. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in partnership with an international organization, validated a manual to strengthen the migrant worker recruitment process. In 2020, the Council of Ministers announced recommendations to prosecute labor recruitment agencies complicit in human trafficking; the government again did not report prosecuting such agencies. The government signed a bilateral labor agreement with the Government of Gabon to enhance oversight of labor recruitment.

The government trained labor inspectors on the SOPs and proactive victim identification. Labor inspectors initiated 183 criminal investigations of child labor, but observers reported inspectors focused on formal and semi-formal sectors, where child labor is less common. Observers reported labor inspectors continued to lack adequate resources and equipment, hindering overall effectiveness. The government finalized and implemented a revised mining code to align with international labor laws and improve labor standards for workers. The government established a new code of conduct for border officials to prevent violence against women and girls. The government had an online border management system, established in the previous reporting period, to improve processes for officials to validate travel documents and identify potential trafficking victims; however, the system remained inoperable at the end of the reporting period.

The government made some efforts to reduce the demand for sex trafficking, including by inspecting bars and hotels where officials suspected trafficking may be occurring, resulting in the closure of some establishments. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel. The government provided anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers; however, media reports indicated Burundian peacekeepers did not receive adequate training and were severely under-resourced. Although not explicitly reported as human trafficking, there was one open case of alleged sexual exploitation with trafficking indicators by Burundian peacekeepers deployed to the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2022; the government did not report accountability measures taken, if any, for this case by the end of the reporting period.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking as reported over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Burundi, and traffickers exploit Burundian victims abroad. Burundi is a source country for victims who are subjected to labor and sex trafficking, both within the country and in destinations in East Africa, particularly Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, or in Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. NGOs report fishermen exploit some boys in Lake Tanganyika fisheries in forced labor and some girls and young women in domestic servitude and sex trafficking in restaurants and bars around the lake. Traffickers, particularly in Ngozi and Kayanza provinces, may coerce children who are homeless or use the streets as a source of livelihood into forced criminality or forced begging. International organizations report an increase in domestic trafficking, especially of children, exploited in domestic servitude and child sex trafficking. Burundian children as young as 15 years old are at risk for forced labor primarily in the informal sector and industries such as brick making. Children are subjected to trafficking in the domestic, manufacturing, construction, agriculture, forestry, fishery, and charcoal sectors. Observers report some women heads of household who rely on “survival sex” are at risk of trafficking. Observers report sudden-onset disasters like severe droughts, floods, and landslides have led to the mass internal displacement of vulnerable populations, increasing trafficking vulnerabilities.

Due to regional instability, observers sporadically report recruitment of children as young as 15 years old by foreign armed groups that force them to participate in anti-government activities. Media reported authorities, in one instance in February 2023, mobilized a small number of citizens for forced labor in public works, such as hauling construction supplies for the beautification of the Intwari National Stadium. Traffickers recruit victims from their hometowns and are paid commissions upon successful recruitment; recruiters often are Burundians, but handlers, guides, and receiving personnel have been foreigners. Some families are complicit in the exploitation of children and adults with disabilities, accepting payment from traffickers who run forced street vending and begging operations. Traffickers operate as networks and coordinate transnationally with victims’ relatives, neighbors, and friends, who recruit them under false pretenses to exploit them in labor and sex trafficking.

Burundi hosts more than 60,000 Congolese refugees since the upsurge in fighting in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2025. An international organization reported trafficking vulnerabilities among thousands of Congolese children separated from their parents while fleeing to Burundi.

Traffickers fraudulently recruit women and girls from poverty-stricken rural communities, particularly border provinces such as Cankuzo, Cibitoke, Kayanza, Kirundo, and Muyinga, for work in the Middle East, Tanzania, or Kenya as domestic servants. Traffickers exploit Burundian adults and children in forced labor in agricultural work, particularly in Tanzania. Observers report children are fraudulently recruited to work in Tanzania and often expelled prior to receiving any wages for their work.

Media sources reported some Burundian students who received government scholarships to study abroad in Algeria may be vulnerable to trafficking. Observers report traffickers are increasingly using technology, such as WhatsApp and Facebook, to fraudulently recruit and subsequently exploit victims in sex trafficking. Reports show an increase in child marriage and children illegally migrating to Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania in search of work, where they may be exploited in domestic servitude or sex trafficking. Skilled Burundian men are recruited using fraudulent advertisements for jobs in Nigeria and Ghana. Some Burundian migrants illegally transit Comoros seeking to reach the French Overseas Department of Mayotte in search of work, where they may be exploited in labor trafficking. As a result of a complex political, economic, and security crisis that began in 2015, by February 2025, nearly 256,811 Burundians remained in neighboring countries as refugees, including but not limited to Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi, and South Africa. Observers report traffickers recruit Burundian refugees in Rwanda, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo for sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Orphans are particularly at risk of labor trafficking in Burundi and in neighboring countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda.