



COI QUERY

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Burundi

Situation of women without a support network in Burundi

1. Prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence

According to the World Bank Group, 40 % of Burundian women aged 15 to 49 have experienced intimate partner violence, compared to the global average of 27 %. Additionally, 23.1 % have suffered sexual violence from any perpetrator, regardless of their marital status.¹

In its 2024 Annual Country Report on Burundi, the World Food Programme (WFP) described gender-based violence (GBV) and particularly intimate partner violence as a ‘pervasive problem’.² Similarly, the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) reported that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) continued to affect women and girls, and remained a major challenge in the country.³ Ligue Iteka, a local non-profit organisation, reported there were 129 GBV cases between July 2023 and April 2024.⁴

Additional information on women in Burundi can be found in the EUAA Query [Situation of women in Burundi](#), published on 30 March 2023.

2. Legislation

The 2016 Law on Prevention, Protection of Victims and Repression of Gender-Based Violence (2016 GBV Law)⁵ provides a comprehensive definition of gender-based violence, establishes victim support measures,⁶ and introduces ‘important improvements, including a consent-based definition of rape and the prohibition of harmful traditional practices’.⁷

However, sources reported a lack of implementation to prevent acts of gender-based violence,⁸ the introduction of discriminatory provisions,⁹ and inconsistencies between the 2016 GBV law and the 2017 Penal Code and the Constitution.¹⁰ The Special Rapporteur on the

¹ World Bank Group – Gender data portal, Burundi, n.d., [url](#)

² WFP, Annual Country Reports – Burundi, 27 March 2025, [url](#), p. 28

³ IFRC, Burundi, 30 August 2024, [url](#), p. 9

⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Burundi; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi, Fortuné Gaetan Zongo, 23 July 2024, [url](#), para. 44

⁵ Republic of Burundi, Loi n°1/13 du 22 septembre 2016 portant prévention, protection des victimes et répression des violences basées sur le genre, 22 September 2016, [url](#)

⁶ Mouvement de solidarité pour les droits des femmes Africaines, Protocol Watch: Burundi, n.d., [url](#)

⁷ AI, Burundi: Landmark law on gender-based violence must be strengthened to meet regional and international standards, 6 December 2023, [url](#)

⁸ HRW, World Report 2025 - Burundi, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

⁹ AI, Burundi: Landmark law on gender-based violence must be strengthened to meet regional and international standards, 6 December 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰ AI, Burundi: Landmark law on gender-based violence must be strengthened to meet regional and international standards, 6 December 2023, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Burundi; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi, Fortuné Gaetan Zongo, 23 July 2024, [url](#), para. 60



situation of human rights in Burundi suggested that ‘some provisions of the 2016 law should be repealed, including the provision on incitement to gender-based violence, in particular references to “indecent attire”, and provisions dealing with false accusations, de facto unions and extramarital relationships’.¹¹ Furthermore, the same source noted that ‘the definition of rape should be harmonized across Burundian law to include the lack of consent, provide penalties for harmful traditional practices and clarify women’s reproductive health rights’.¹²

Burundi’s legal framework combines codified civil statutes and customary law, each playing a role in the formal courts’ decisions.¹³ According to UN Women, customary law, administered by the *Bashingantahe*¹⁴, is frequently used for civil and family-level cases, while state courts often handle criminal matters.¹⁵

3. Treatment by society

WFP described Burundi as a ‘patriarchal society where gender-based violence and discrimination against women are rooted in sociocultural norms’.¹⁶

According to the UN Committee Against Torture, SGBV offenders continued to act with impunity and the fear of retaliation deterred victims from lodging complaints against their assailants.¹⁷ As a result, a small number of victims obtained effective remedies, reparations or access to rehabilitation and reintegration services.¹⁸ Similarly, in humanitarian settings, many cases of gender-based violence were unreported ‘due to fear of reprisal, limited access to justice, stigma, discrimination and a culture of impunity’.¹⁹

In July 2023, after proposing to prohibit the civil registration of children born to ‘unknown fathers,’ the Interior Minister directed threatening and derogatory comments towards single mothers.²⁰

¹¹ UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Burundi; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi, Fortuné Gaetan Zongo, 23 July 2024, [url](#), para. 61

¹² UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Burundi; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi, Fortuné Gaetan Zongo, 23 July 2024, [url](#), para. 61

¹³ UN Women, Situational analysis of access to justice for victims and survivors of violence against women and girls in east and southern Africa, 2023, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁴ The Bashingantahe are traditional authorities that hold juridical competencies in some contexts. See Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report Burundi, 19 March 2024, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁵ UN Women, Situational analysis of access to justice for victims and survivors of violence against women and girls in east and southern Africa, 2023, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁶ WFP, Annual Country Reports – Burundi, 27 March 2025, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁷ UN Committee Against Torture, Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Burundi, 11 December 2023, [url](#), para. 18

¹⁸ UN Committee Against Torture, Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Burundi, 11 December 2023, [url](#), para. 18

¹⁹ UNHCR, Country Summary as at 30 June 2023 (Update of 30 June 2020 summary), 13 March 2024, [url](#), p. 7

²⁰ Amnesty International, The State of the World's Human Rights; Burundi 2023, 24 April 2024, [url](#)



4. Access to housing, healthcare, education, employment and support services

Freedom House reported that ‘discrimination against women is common in access to education, healthcare, and employment’.²¹

Housing and land

According to Burundian lawyer and gender specialist Nijimbere Aline, the absence of any legislation governing inheritance and matrimonial property deepens social inequalities to the detriment of women and girls and is ‘an ultimate cause of GBV’.²² For example, under customary law, women are often prohibited from inheriting property.²³ The Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burundi reported that women’s entitlement to land inheritance ‘remains a taboo issue’ and is determined by marital status.²⁴ Furthermore, the same source stated that judicial rulings are inconsistent, as some courts invoke national, regional or international statutes, while others apply a variety of unwritten customary norms.²⁵

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), access to land is important as households without it face restricted livelihood options and greater vulnerability to eviction, which in turn increases their exposure to protection threats such as human trafficking and GBV.²⁶

Employment

Data from the World Bank noted that in 2024, 79.9 % of women aged 15 and over in Burundi were economically active, slightly above the 77.3 % rate for men. However, in 2023, 89.8 % of employed women were in vulnerable (often informal or subsistence) work, compared with 76.9 % of employed men.²⁷ For example, according to a sociologist interviewed by a local newspaper, rising socioeconomic insecurity is driving men to abandon their families, leaving women as unprepared ‘social actors’ to head households alone and, in some cases, resort to prostitution.²⁸

Education

Since the introduction of free primary education, Burundi has reached gender parity and in 2023, girls outnumbered boys in school, completed more years of schooling, and outperformed them academically. Burundi’s progress in girls’ education extends beyond the

²¹ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 - Burundi, 2024, [url](#)

²² INADES, Burundi: 16-day campaign against VBG, legal aid is an option, 4 December 2023, [url](#)

²³ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 - Burundi, 2024, [url](#)

²⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Burundi; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi, Fortuné Gaetan Zongo, 11 August 2023, [url](#), para. 90

²⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Burundi; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi, Fortuné Gaetan Zongo, 11 August 2023, [url](#), para. 90

²⁶ IOM, Regional Office for East and Horn of Africa, Blog, 8 November 2023, [url](#)

²⁷ World Bank, Gender Data Portal – Burundi, n.d., [url](#)

²⁸ IWACU, Bujumbura/Abandon de famille un sociologue, explique, 12 July 2024, [url](#)



classroom, with an increase in female literacy (nearly 75 % for ages 15–24), later marriage (around age 23), and lower adolescent fertility (54 births per 1,000).²⁹ However, the same source indicated that significant barriers remained for girls: only 41 % of primary schools have reliable water access, sanitation is inadequate, with one latrine serving 76 girls on average and one-third of schools lacking any girls’ toilets.³⁰ As a result, over 70 % of girls miss about five school days each month during menstruation, undermining their performance in early secondary grade.³¹ UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) indicated that 96% of 10-year-olds in Burundi were ‘learning poor’, unable to read and understand a simple text, a situation driven by both, high enrollment and low learning quality.³² While 57% of girls completed primary school compared to 49% of boys, completion rates dropped significantly at the lower secondary level: to 33.8% for girls and 26.1% for boys.³³ Only around 5% of young women progressed to tertiary education.³⁴

In December 2024, Burundi convened its first national forum on girls’ and women’s education, launching the “Africa Educates Its Girls and Women” campaign to promote equitable, life-long learning opportunities and address GBV in educational settings.³⁵

Healthcare

In August 2023, the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burundi reported that the country lacked adequate facilities, essential equipment (post-rape and dignity kits), and qualified staff for the comprehensive management of gender-based violence cases.³⁶ The World Health Organization (WHO) also highlighted serious gaps in women’s healthcare, including inadequate provision of both basic and comprehensive emergency obstetric and newborn care, insufficient and uneven distribution of qualified healthcare personnel, a weak maternal and perinatal death surveillance system, and a high unmet need for family planning.³⁷

Support services

Between January and June 2024, the Burundi Red Cross implemented policies to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, developed staff capacity in Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI), and integrated PGI measures into all interventions.³⁸ Humanitarian officers referred 2 057 SGBV victims to specialised care facilities and mainstreamed SGBV prevention across

²⁹ M. Sallami, T. Rukungama, Empowering Burundian girls: Leading the way in education [Blog], 23 February 2024, [url](#)

³⁰ M. Sallami, T. Rukungama, Empowering Burundian girls: Leading the way in education [Blog], 23 February 2024, [url](#)

³¹ M. Sallami, T. Rukungama, Empowering Burundian girls: Leading the way in education [Blog], 23 February 2024, [url](#)

³² UNESCO IICBA, Burundi: Education Country Brief, January 2024, [url](#)

³³ UNESCO IICBA, Burundi: Education Country Brief, January 2024, [url](#)

³⁴ UNESCO IICBA, Burundi: Education Country Brief, January 2024, [url](#)

³⁵ UNICEF, Burundi organised the first national forum for girls’ and women’s education, 09 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Burundi; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi, Fortuné Gaetan Zongo, 11 August 2023, [url](#), para. 89

³⁷ WHO, Burundi: Public Health Situation Analysis (PHSA) (29 November 2024), 29 November 2024, [url](#), p. 5

³⁸ IFRC, Burundi: 2024 IFRC Network Mid-Year Report, January – June, 15 April 2025, [url](#), p. 6



community activities.³⁹ The updated Emergency Response Plan (ERP) strategy institutionalised Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA), mandating SGBV prevention in every project and involving marginalised individuals in support committees.⁴⁰

As of November 2024, Cordaid, an emergency relief and development organization, operated a legal assistance programme for women and girls, extending its services from the capital, Bujumbura, to isolated communities and remote villages in five of the country's 18 provinces.⁴¹ The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) provided assistance to 14 019 individuals victim of GBV between May to November 2024 in 5 health facilities and 3 centres specialising in GBV.⁴² In June 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that a strategic partnership with the National Independent Commission for Human Rights exists for increased advocacy in GBV prevention and response, and to improve access to justice.⁴³

5. Access to justice

Access to justice in Burundi has generally remained 'a significant challenge'⁴⁴ for both nationals and refugees,⁴⁵ with limited resources, lengthy legal proceedings, low awareness of legal rights,⁴⁶ and language barriers among the key obstacles.⁴⁷ UNHCR reported that limited access to formal or informal justice mechanisms for women victims of GBV was also exacerbated by cultural attitudes and moral norms.⁴⁸ For instance, Amnesty International reported that the prosecution of marital rape in Burundi is hindered by cultural taboos, which led judges to attenuate the offence on the premise that a wife could not legitimately decline sexual relations with her husband.⁴⁹ The same source added that the terms, marital rape and conjugal duties, were often erroneously equated, even though the Personal and Family Code, while requiring spouses to live together, contains no explicit requirement to engage in sexual intercourse.⁵⁰

³⁹ IFRC, Burundi: 2024 IFRC Network Mid-Year Report, January – June, 15 April 2025, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁰ IFRC, Burundi: 2024 IFRC Network Mid-Year Report, January – June, 15 April 2025, [url](#), p. 9

⁴¹ Cordaid, Legal clinics successfully support women in opposing gender-based violence, 29 November 2024, [url](#)

⁴² UNFPA, Project CERF Factsheet (May 2024 - November 2024), 11 March 2025, [url](#), p. 1

⁴³ UNHCR, Country Summary as at 30 June 2023 (Update of 30 June 2020 summary), 13 March 2024, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁴ Cordaid, Enhancing access to justice in Burundi through digital innovation, 18 March 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁵ UNHCR, Country Summary as at 30 June 2023 (Update of 30 June 2020 summary), 13 March 2024, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁶ UNHCR, Country Summary as at 30 June 2023 (Update of 30 June 2020 summary), 13 March 2024, [url](#), p. 7;

Cordaid, Enhancing access to justice in Burundi through digital innovation, 18 March 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁷ UNHCR, Country Summary as at 30 June 2023 (Update of 30 June 2020 summary), 13 March 2024, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁸ UNHCR, Country Summary as at 30 June 2023 (Update of 30 June 2020 summary), 13 March 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁹ AI, Burundi: Amend gender-based violence law, December 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁵⁰ AI, Burundi: Amend gender-based violence law, December 2023, [url](#), p. 8



6. Treatment of returnees

According to an April 2023 survey by the Mixed Migration Centre⁵¹ on returnees in Muyinga, Ruyigi and Makamba provinces,⁵² most report feeling physically safe yet remain economically vulnerable.⁵³ The greatest challenge cited across all three provinces was securing adequate housing, followed by access to food and clean water.⁵⁴ The survey also indicated the need for targeted programming that addresses the specific stigma faced by women upon returning.⁵⁵

Natural disasters and the influx of asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have contributed to a housing shortage for female returnees in Burundi whilst increasing their exposure to negative coping mechanisms, such as the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian settings, and a rise in GBV.⁵⁶ Similarly, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi reported that female returnees faced difficulties securing land plots because of limited arable land per capita, land appropriation by the elite, natural disasters, and structural inequalities.⁵⁷

In its 2024 human rights report on Burundi, Amnesty International noted that returnees account for 7 % of the country's internally displaced population, and that as of December 2024, 20 081 Burundian refugees had returned home.⁵⁸ In May 2024, 3 059 Burundian refugees were voluntarily repatriated from Tanzania, including 17 GBV victims.⁵⁹ According to UNHCR, 'returnees were welcomed safely and with dignity by Burundian authorities'.⁶⁰ For instance, all returnees received upon arrival a certificate recognising their repatriation status, cash assistance and in some cases, secondary transport to reach their communities.⁶¹

⁵¹ Mixed Migration Centre is 's a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels.' See Mixed Migration Centre, Who are we?, n.d., [url](#)

⁵² Located in the far northeast of the country, Muyinga Province borders Rwanda to the north and Tanzania to the east; Ruyigi Province lies in east-central Burundi, adjoining Tanzania on its eastern flank; and Makamba Province occupies the southernmost corner of Burundi, bordering Lake Tanganyika to the west and Tanzania to the south and east.

⁵³ Mixed Migration Centre, Reintegration experiences of Burundi returnees, September 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁴ Mixed Migration Centre, Reintegration experiences of Burundi returnees, September 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁵ Mixed Migration Centre, Reintegration experiences of Burundi returnees, September 2023, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁶ WFP, Annual Country Reports – Burundi, 27 March 2025, [url](#), p. 28

⁵⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Situation of human rights in Burundi; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi, Fortuné Gaetan Zongo, 23 July 2024, [url](#), para. 62

⁵⁸ Amnesty International, The State of the World's Human Rights; Burundi 2024, 29 April 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁹ UNHCR, Operational Update – Burundi, May 2024, [url](#), pp. 5, 6

⁶⁰ UNHCR, Operational Update – Burundi, May 2024, [url](#), pp. 5, 6

⁶¹ UNHCR, Operational Update – Burundi, May 2024, [url](#), pp. 5, 6



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