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COI QUERY

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Democratic Republic of the Congo

Situation of women without a support network in South Kivu

1. Background and prevalence

Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), including South Kivu province, has been facing conflict for almost three decades¹, while approximately 120 armed groups were reported to be operating in eastern regions of the country, according to 2023 and 2024 sources.² The conflict between the Rwanda-backed M23 armed group and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo – FARDC) and its allied armed groups³, has intensified since the end of 2023⁴, involving human rights violations⁵, large-scale displacement of populations,⁶ and deterioration of the humanitarian crisis in the region.⁷

Additional information on the security situation in South Kivu can be found in the EUAA Query [Security situation in North Kivu and South Kivu](#), published on 5 March 2024.

According to an article published in August 2024, Radio France Internationale (RFI) reported that in the DRC, one family in three is a single-parent family.⁸ The same source also reported that, according to Congolese authorities' data, approximately 36 % of women, including divorced women and widows, raise children alone.⁹

¹ CFR, Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, last updated 20 June 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, A guide to the decades-long conflict in DR Congo, 21 February 2024, [url](#); UN News, DR Congo: Fighting threatens stability of entire region, envoy warns, 20 February 2024, [url](#)

² Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Democratic Republic of the Congo, 31 May 2024, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2024 - Democratic Republic of Congo, 11 January 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Five key issues at stake in the DR Congo's crucial election, 11 December 2023, [url](#)

³ UN Security Council, Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 4 June 2024, [url](#), p. 2; AI, The State of the World's Human Rights: Democratic Republic of the Congo 2023, 24 April 2024, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2024 - Democratic Republic of Congo, 11 January 2024, [url](#)

⁴ WPF, Humanitarian emergency in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu (DRC): A worsening crisis in 2024, 27 February 2024, [url](#), p. 1; UN News, DR Congo: Fighting threatens stability of entire region, envoy warns, 20 February 2024, [url](#)

⁵ AI, The State of the World's Human Rights: Democratic Republic of the Congo 2023, 24 April 2024, [url](#); UN News, DR Congo: Fighting threatens stability of entire region, envoy warns, 20 February 2024, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2024 - Democratic Republic of Congo, 11 January 2024, [url](#)

⁶ CFR, Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, last updated 20 June 2024, [url](#); UNOCHA, UN deputy relief chief appeals to the Security Council to resolve the conflict in the DRC, 24 April 2024, [url](#)

⁷ CFR, Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, last updated 20 June 2024, [url](#); UN Security Council, Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 4 June 2024, [url](#), p. 2; WPF, Humanitarian emergency in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu (DRC): A worsening crisis in 2024, 27 February 2024, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 5

⁸ RFI, En RDC, la précarité des familles monoparentales, 11 August 2024, [url](#)

⁹ RFI, En RDC, la précarité des familles monoparentales, 11 August 2024, [url](#)

2. Constitutional legal framework

Information on the treatment by society of women without a support network, including female-headed households, single mothers, divorced women and widows, in South Kivu was scarce among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints. However, the following information may be relevant.

The Constitution of the DRC in article 14 stipulates that:

‘[informal translation] The public authorities shall ensure the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the protection and promotion of their rights.

They shall take all appropriate measures in all fields, particularly in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural fields, to ensure the full realization and full participation of women in the development of the nation.

They shall take measures to combat all forms of violence against women in public and private life.

Women have the right to equitable representation in national, provincial and local institutions.

The State guarantees the implementation of parity between men and women in these institutions.’¹⁰

3. Societal attitude

Sources reported that despite the constitutional prohibition of discrimination against women, they faced discrimination in all aspects of their lives.¹¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung’s country report on the DRC, covering the period from 1 February 2021 to 31 January 2023, noted that the country ‘is characterized by a deeply embedded patriarchal culture that includes laws and traditional customs that discriminate against women’.¹² According to Freedom House annual report covering 2023, ‘[t]he family code obliges wives to obey their husbands, who are designated as the heads of their households’, assigning them ‘a subordinate role in the household’, as married women are under ‘the legal guardianship of their husbands’.¹³

¹⁰ DRC, Constitution de la République Démocratique du Congo, 2011, [url](#)

¹¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report: Congo, DR, 19 March 2024, [url](#), p. 23; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024: Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2024, [url](#)

¹² Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report: Congo, DR, 19 March 2024, [url](#), p. 23

¹³ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024: Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2024, [url](#)

Bertelsmann Stiftung also reported that, although in the DRC women were ‘increasingly becoming major providers for their families’, they continued to ‘suffer rapes and violations of their civic rights, particularly in the war-torn regions’, including in South Kivu.¹⁴

Furthermore, sources reported a surge in gender-based violence in eastern regions of the DRC, including South Kivu province.¹⁵ The higher rates of gender-based violence were attributed to conflict-related reasons,¹⁶ the presence of armed actors,¹⁷ lack of access to basic resources, such as access to food,¹⁸ and ‘unsafe living conditions’.¹⁹ Women and girls were reported to resort to prostitution,²⁰ and begging for food for survival.²¹ Particularly, in South Kivu women and children were reported to be [informal translation] ‘deeply affected by insecurity and poverty’.²² An increase in sexual and gender-based violence, perpetuated by armed actors and civilians in the province, was also noted.²³

In a report and gender analysis based on findings from three IDP camps in North Kivu, Care International, a humanitarian organization focusing on the issues of global poverty and social injustice²⁴, reported that the number of female-headed households is increasing because of the conflict.²⁵ The same source also noted that female-headed households are more negatively affected by poverty and the humanitarian situation in contrast to male-headed households, due to the conflict and other ‘cultural and political barriers to participation and access’.²⁶

Within this general context, the United States Department of State (USDOS) annual report on human rights practices, covering 2023, noted that young single mothers frequently faced

¹⁴ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report: Congo, DR, 19 March 2024, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁵ UNOCHA, UN deputy relief chief appeals to the Security Council to resolve the conflict in the DRC, 24 April 2024, [url](#); Care International, Humanitarian crisis escalates in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo due to renewed clashes and flooding, 19 February 2024, [url](#); Actualite.cd, RDC : les organisations de femmes s'inquiètent des nombreux cas de violences sexuelles enregistrés au Sud-Kivu, 21 January 2024, [url](#); WPF, In eastern DRC, women and girls pay a high price in ongoing conflict, 28 November 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶ UNOCHA, UN deputy relief chief appeals to the Security Council to resolve the conflict in the DRC, 24 April 2024, [url](#); UNFPA, Gender-Based Violence continues to surge in eastern DRC, 8 September 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷ UNFPA, Gender-Based Violence continues to surge in eastern DRC, 8 September 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁸ Care International, Humanitarian crisis escalates in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo due to renewed clashes and flooding, 19 February 2024, [url](#); UNFPA, Gender-Based Violence continues to surge in eastern DRC, 8 September 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁹ UNFPA, Gender-Based Violence continues to surge in eastern DRC, 8 September 2023, [url](#), p. 1

²⁰ Care International, Humanitarian crisis escalates in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo due to renewed clashes and flooding, 19 February 2024, [url](#); UNFPA, Gender-Based Violence continues to surge in eastern DRC, 8 September 2023, [url](#), p. 1

²¹ Care International, Humanitarian crisis escalates in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo due to renewed clashes and flooding, 19 February 2024, [url](#)

²² RFI, Journée mondiale de l'aide humanitaire: alerte pour les enfants et les femmes du Sud-Kivu, 19 August 2024, [url](#)

²³ Actualite.cd, RDC : les organisations de femmes s'inquiètent des nombreux cas de violences sexuelles enregistrés au Sud-Kivu, 21 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁴ Care International, About us, n.d., [url](#)

²⁵ Care International, CARE Rapid Gender Analysis: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) - Mudja, Munigi and Kanyaruchinya IDP camps in North Kivu province, March 2023, [url](#), p. 10

²⁶ Care International, CARE Rapid Gender Analysis: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) - Mudja, Munigi and Kanyaruchinya IDP camps in North Kivu province, March 2023, [url](#), p. 10

‘societal stigma’, while unmarried girls who became pregnant were also ‘pressured to drop out of school’.²⁷

An article reporting specifically on young single mothers in South Kivu, published in June 2023 by Debout RDC, a local news website, referred to the issue of single mothers as ‘a taboo subject’.²⁸ According to the same article, in the eastern regions of the DRC, including in South Kivu, social attitudes related to single mothers involved [informal translation] ‘prejudice, discrimination, family rejection, exclusion from school and church’.²⁹ Citing testimonies of young single mothers, the same article noted that they did not always receive support from their families.³⁰ Furthermore, those particularly in rural areas, had to move to relatives residing in cities, due to the stigma.³¹ The same source described that [informal translation] ‘many public and private primary and secondary schools exclude girls who, willingly or unwillingly, become pregnant’.³²

Moreover, reporting about single-parent families in Kinshasa, an article published in August 2024 by RFI noted that they faced ‘extreme precariousness’, especially in the case of female-headed families, working in the informal sector.³³ The same source also reported that, no system of child support exists in the country for single mothers.³⁴

Detailed information on sexual and gender-based violence in the DRC, including in South Kivu province, can be found in the EUAA Query [Sexual and gender-based violence \(SGBV\) against women, including sexual and domestic violence, conflict-related sexual violence, trafficking for sexual exploitation, traditional harmful practices, and early and forced marriage; legislation; social attitudes; availability of state protection; access to support services](#), published on 7 February 2024.

Additional information on the situation of women who have children out of wedlock in the DRC can be found in the EUAA Query [Situation of women who have children out of wedlock, including legal framework, treatment by society, and access to support services](#), published on 12 February 2024.

Additional information on the situation of women without a support network in Kinshasa can be found in the EUAA Query [Situation of women without a support network in Kinshasa](#), published on 25 August 2023.

²⁷ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Democratic Republic of the Congo, 23 April 2024, [url](#), p. 44

²⁸ Debout RDC, BUKAVU: Quand les filles-mères défient préjugés et stigmatisations, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

²⁹ Debout RDC, BUKAVU: Quand les filles-mères défient préjugés et stigmatisations, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁰ Debout RDC, BUKAVU: Quand les filles-mères défient préjugés et stigmatisations, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

³¹ Debout RDC, BUKAVU: Quand les filles-mères défient préjugés et stigmatisations, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

³² Debout RDC, BUKAVU: Quand les filles-mères défient préjugés et stigmatisations, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

³³ RFI, En RDC, la précarité des familles monoparentales, 11 August 2024, [url](#)

³⁴ RFI, En RDC, la précarité des familles monoparentales, 11 August 2024, [url](#)

4. Access to housing

Information on access to housing for women without a support network, including female-headed households, single mothers, divorced women and widows, in South Kivu could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints.

5. Access to employment

Information on access to employment for women without a support network, including female-headed households, single mothers, divorced women and widows, in South Kivu was scarce among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints. However, the following information may be relevant.

Women were reported to face economic discrimination in the DRC.³⁵ Specifically, although women were reported to represent the majority of the country's workforce³⁶, Bertelsmann Stiftung indicated that women earned 'considerably less than men and own fewer assets'.³⁷ Citing the International Labor Organization (ILO), USDOS further noted that in the private sector women frequently received less remuneration than the equivalent received by men in the same employment.³⁸ According to the same source, while '[t]he law permitted women to participate in economic domains without approval of male relatives', legal restrictions were in place concerning women's employment, 'including limitations on occupations considered dangerous, but no restrictions on women's working hours'.³⁹ Women in the DRC were also reported to be 'disproportionately engaged in unpaid domestic work and informal sectors'.⁴⁰

Furthermore, a 2024 article published by a local news source called Actualite, noted that according to women's rights organizations in Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province, women faced many economic challenges.⁴¹ Concerning employment, the same source reported that despite the DRC constitutional provision of article 14 stipulating [informal translation] 'that women must be present at all levels', it was observed that in South Kivu, [informal translation] 'this article has never been respected'.⁴²

³⁵ Mercy Corps, Rapid Gender Analysis: Kanyaruchina Displacement Site, Goma, North Kivu, 29 March 2024, [url](#), p. 5; USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Democratic Republic of the Congo, 23 April 2024, [url](#), p. 42

³⁶ UN News, En RDC, une association aide des femmes à devenir indépendantes grâce à l'agriculture, 11 September 2022, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI (Bertelsmann Transformation Index) 2024 Country Report: Congo, DR, 19 March 2024, [url](#), p. 16

³⁷ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report: Congo, DR, 19 March 2024, [url](#), p. 16

³⁸ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Democratic Republic of the Congo, 23 April 2024, [url](#), pp. 42-43

³⁹ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Democratic Republic of the Congo, 23 April 2024, [url](#), p. 42

⁴⁰ Mercy Corps, Rapid Gender Analysis: Kanyaruchina Displacement Site, Goma, North Kivu, 29 March 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁴¹ Actualite.cd, RDC : les organisations de femmes s'inquiètent des nombreux cas de violences sexuelles enregistrés au Sud-Kivu, 21 January 2024, [url](#)

⁴² Actualite.cd, RDC : les organisations de femmes s'inquiètent des nombreux cas de violences sexuelles enregistrés au Sud-Kivu, 21 January 2024, [url](#)

Moreover, Freedom House noted that ‘some laws and customary practices put women at a disadvantage with respect to inheritance and land ownership’.⁴³ An article by United Nations (UN) News in September 2022 also noted that, due to the legal and traditional practices, rural women could [informal translation] ‘only own a small proportion of agricultural land’.⁴⁴ In the same article, UN News reported that, access to land and cultivation space was one of the main obstacles for rural women in South Kivu, who were either dependent on land owned by their husbands or families, or had to work in private fields.⁴⁵

Against this general backdrop, Freedom House reported that women were also ‘politically underrepresented’ in the DRC.⁴⁶ USDOS also noted that particularly in the eastern provinces, ‘insecurity’ was reported as the main obstacle for women’s participation in politics, as ‘the risk of rape and other sexual violence forced them to limit activities and public exposure’.⁴⁷ In July 2024, it was reported by Radio Okapi, a local radio and news source, that only two of the 13 members of the South Kivu provincial government were women.⁴⁸

6. Access to social services

Information on access to social services for women without a support network, including female-headed households, single mothers, divorced women and widows, in South Kivu could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints. However, the following information may be relevant.

According to an article by Equal Times, the existing legal framework on social security in the DRC remained ‘largely theoretical’ because the significant proportion of the population that worked in the informal economy do not contribute to the National Social Security Fund (CNSS), namely the country’s social protection, and therefore do not receive any support.⁴⁹ The 2024 Bertelsmann Stiftung’s BTI report also noted that, as a significant percentage of the population relied on subsistence agriculture and the informal sector, such as small-scale trading, for survival.⁵⁰ The CNSS covered approximately 20 % of the country’s workforce, which included workers in the formal sector, however the same source indicated that the CNSS did not provide them adequate protection.⁵¹ Provision of services was reported to be limited mostly in major cities, while sources indicated that rural populations faced lack of basic

⁴³ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024: Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁴ UN News, En RDC, une association aide des femmes à devenir indépendantes grâce à l’agriculture, 11 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵ UN News, En RDC, une association aide des femmes à devenir indépendantes grâce à l’agriculture, 11 September 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024: Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁷ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Democratic Republic of the Congo, 23 April 2024, [url](#), p. 35

⁴⁸ Radio Okapi, Le RFG/ Sud-Kivu dénonce la faible représentativité des femmes au gouvernement provincial, 4 July 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁹ Equal Times, The Democratic Republic of Congo is searching for solutions to its health and social security shortcomings, 22 May 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁰ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report: Congo, DR, 19 March 2024, [url](#), pp. 16, 22

⁵¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report: Congo, DR, 19 March 2024, [url](#), p. 16

social services.⁵² Furthermore, according to the 2024 Bertelsmann Stiftung's BTI report most of the population 'rely heavily on their family and community structures as the primary social foundation for survival', while churches and family members often provided social assistance.⁵³

Reporting on the issue of young single mothers in South Kivu, the June 2023 article by Debout RDC, noted that in the DRC [informal translation] 'there are no laws, either at provincial or national level, specifically designed to support girl mothers', with non-governmental organizations having a major role in the support of girl mothers.⁵⁴ The same article also indicated that in South Kivu [informal translation] 'the efforts of the public authorities are far from responding effectively to the educational and empowerment needs of girl-mothers, and to the fight against stigmatization and discrimination'.⁵⁵ Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints.

7. Access to health care

Information on access to health care for women without a support network, including female-headed households, single mothers, divorced women and widows, in South Kivu could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints. However, the following information may be relevant.

Sources reported that in eastern regions of the DRC, including South Kivu province, women and girls faced restrictions to access healthcare services and facilities due to conflict-related reasons,⁵⁶ particularly maternal health services.⁵⁷ Looting of healthcare centres,⁵⁸ and attacks on health facilities, healthcare personnel, and patients, were also reported in these regions.⁵⁹

⁵² Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report: Congo, DR, 19 March 2024, [url](#), p. 16; FAO, République démocratique du Congo: Analyse de conflits dans les provinces du Nord-Kivu et Sud-Kivu, 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁵³ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report: Congo, DR, 19 March 2024, [url](#), pp. 16, 22

⁵⁴ Debout RDC, BUKAVU: Quand les filles-mères défient préjugés et stigmatisations, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵ Debout RDC, BUKAVU: Quand les filles-mères défient préjugés et stigmatisations, 13 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶ Mercy Corps, Rapid Gender Analysis: Kanyaruchina Displacement Site, Goma, North Kivu, 29 March 2024, [url](#), p. 6; Care International, Humanitarian crisis escalates in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo due to renewed clashes and flooding, 19 February 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁷ Insecurity Insight and IRC, the impact of violence against health care on the health of children and mothers: A case study in three health zones in Eastern DRC, 21 April 2024, [url](#), pp. 4, 28, 39

⁵⁸ UN News, Le HCR met en garde contre la montée de la violence envers les femmes dans l'est de la RDC, 14 July 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁹ Insecurity Insight and IRC, the impact of violence against health care on the health of children and mothers: A case study in three health zones in Eastern DRC, 21 April 2024, [url](#), p. 10

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