



## COI QUERY

<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Situation of women without a support network in Kinshasa</b>
<b>Reference period</b>	July 2021 – 23 August 2023
<b>Topic(s)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <a href="#">Treatment by society</a></li><li>2. <a href="#">Access to housing</a></li><li>3. <a href="#">Access to employment</a></li><li>4. <a href="#">Access to social services</a></li><li>5. <a href="#">Access to health care</a></li></ol>
<b>Date of completion</b>	25 August 2023
<b>Query Code</b>	Q28-2023
<b>Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)</b>	N/A

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## COI QUERY RESPONSE - Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

### Situation of women without a support network in Kinshasa

Information on the situation of women without a support network in Kinshasa was scarce among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints. However, the following information may be relevant.

#### 1. Treatment by society

For information on the situation of different profiles related to women in the DRC, see:

- EASO, Situation of single women, 25 June 2021, [url](#)
- EASO, Information on the situation of women without a male support network in Kinshasa (2017-2019), 5 December 2019, [url](#)
- EASO, Current information on the situation of widows and single women accused of causing death of their husbands through witchcraft in Kinshasa, 7 November 2019, [url](#)
- EASO, Sexual and gender-based violence, 10 July 2019, [url](#)

In a response to an information request published by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) in September 2019, a lawyer interviewed by the IRB stated that despite improvements in the position of women in the country, ‘the situation remains difficult for most women without male support, particularly where respect of their human dignity is concerned’.<sup>1</sup>

Sources indicated that despite guarantees for equality between women and men in the DRC, discrimination against women continued.<sup>2</sup> According to a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), traditional societal norms in DRC see women as ‘inferior to men’ and, despite the enactment of laws to promote equality, economic discrimination persists<sup>3</sup>, and the husband remained defined as ‘the head of the household’.<sup>4</sup> Amendments to the Family Code in 2016 removed a legal requirement that married women needed their husbands’ permission to do various legal acts including signing an employment

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<sup>1</sup> Canada, IRB, Democratic Republic of Congo: Ability to resettle in Kinshasa, particularly for women without male support, including access to housing, jobs and public services (2016-August 2019), 3 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report, Congo, DR, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2023, [url](#); IDRC, New Faces New Voices, Women’s financial inclusion in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Final report, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 10; USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Democratic Republic of the Congo, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 29, 36-37, 51

<sup>3</sup> OECD, Democratic Republic of the Congo, SIGI, 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 6

<sup>4</sup> Canada, IRB, Democratic Republic of Congo: Ability to resettle in Kinshasa, particularly for women without male support, including access to housing, jobs and public services (2016-August 2019), 3 September 2019, [url](#); CEDAW, Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 6 August 2019, [url](#), para. 52; Equality Now, DR Congo – Law 87-010 On The Family Code, 5 November 2021, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2023, [url](#); Denmark, DIS, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Socioeconomic conditions in Kinshasa, 7 October 2022, [url](#), p. 28



contract, opening a bank account, or obtaining a loan.<sup>5</sup> According to the annual Freedom House report covering 2022, women in the DRC faced discrimination ‘in nearly every aspect of their lives’ and married women had to obey their husbands who also acted as their legal guardians.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Access to housing

According to José Bazonzi, professor at the University of Kinshasa, interviewed by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) on 8 August 2022, factors that can help a newly-arrived person to integrate in Kinshasa include the relevant language skills (Lingala and French), good relationships with family members in the place of residence, and a connection to the church.<sup>7</sup> The same source noted that someone without such a network would face several difficulties when moving in Kinshasa, including when searching for housing.<sup>8</sup>

A report by the Centre for Affordable Housing Finance in Africa (CAHF), a think tank focusing on housing finance markets in Africa, covering the situation in 2022, indicated that ‘the average Congolese has not much chance of being able to afford a formal house’.<sup>9</sup> According to the same source, the rental price for ‘the cheapest, newly built house’ was around 107 497 CDF [approximately 40 EUR] in 2020.<sup>10</sup> A report funded by the German government in a context of voluntary returns from Germany and published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in February 2022, indicated that a two-bedroom apartment in central Kinshasa can cost 300-400 USD [approximately 275-367 EUR] per month in the working-class areas, while an apartment in more upscale areas can cost around 1 500 EUR per month.<sup>11</sup> Information on shelters for single women without a support network in Kinshasa could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this query.

The 2022 DIS report quoted a representative from Afia Mama, a DRC-based NGO, who indicated that women lack resources to access housing and, in particular, women without an academic degree.<sup>12</sup> According to the same source, for such women housing options are limited to living in family houses, with many people sharing the same room, or in temporary shelters or shacks, and that some single women could be subjected to trafficking, sex exploitation and prostitution if unable to find housing.<sup>13</sup> Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this query. The lawyer

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<sup>5</sup> OECD, Democratic Republic of the Congo, SIGI, 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>6</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> Denmark, DIS, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Socioeconomic conditions in Kinshasa, 7 October 2022, [url](#), pp. 47-48

<sup>8</sup> Denmark, DIS, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Socioeconomic conditions in Kinshasa, 7 October 2022, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>9</sup> CAHF, Africa Housing Finance Yearbook 2022, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), n.d., [url](#), p. 78

<sup>10</sup> CAHF, Africa Housing Finance Yearbook 2022, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), n.d., [url](#), p. 77

<sup>11</sup> IOM, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Country Fact Sheet 2021, February 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>12</sup> Denmark, DIS, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Socioeconomic conditions in Kinshasa, 7 October 2022, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>13</sup> Denmark, DIS, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Socioeconomic conditions in Kinshasa, 7 October 2022, [url](#), p. 45



interviewed by the IRB indicated that ‘social housing is not available to women living alone but is reserved for people with political or social support’.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding property ownership, Freedom House reported that the housing system is exposed to ‘pervasive corruption’ and the tax system in place ‘encourages bribery’.<sup>15</sup> Sources also indicated that women have been traditionally disadvantaged in access to family property because of discrimination in inheritance.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Access to employment

According to the 2022 USDOS annual human rights report, women do not need approval of male relatives to work, but economic discrimination and some legal restrictions on their employment remained in force.<sup>17</sup> A 2021 report about challenges faced by young women when starting a business in Kinshasa indicated that, while average job opportunities in the city are aimed at men, young women are subjected to unemployment, discrimination, and sexual harassment.<sup>18</sup>

A case study by the World Bank reported that despite legal amendments to increase gender equality, men continued to be perceived as the ‘breadwinners’ and ‘women working outside the home’ is not well-regarded by society.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the 2022 USDOS report noted that despite legislation on equal pay for women and men, the state did not enforce this provision effectively in practice.<sup>20</sup>

Sources indicated that job informality is common in DRC.<sup>21</sup> According to the Trade Union Confederation of Congo (La Confédération Syndicale du Congo, or CSC), in 2022 informal workers comprise 97.5 per cent of the workforce.<sup>22</sup> According to the National Bureau of Statistics, as quoted by the 2022 BTI report, more than 80 % of the workforce is employed in the informal sector.<sup>23</sup> The 2022 DIS report noted that, according to the organization Afia Mama, ‘[t]he majority of women in Kinshasa work in the informal sector with small trade at the

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<sup>14</sup> Canada, IRB, Democratic Republic of Congo: Ability to resettle in Kinshasa, particularly for women without male support, including access to housing, jobs and public services (2016-August 2019), 3 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>15</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> CEDAW, Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 6 August 2019, [url](#), para. 52; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 - Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2023, [url](#); OECD, Democratic Republic of the Congo, SIGI, 2019, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>17</sup> USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Democratic Republic of the Congo, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 36-37

<sup>18</sup> Lipoko, D. U. D., et al., Gender discrepancy in economic participation: the case of young women in the Democratic Republic of Congo. EUREKA: Social and Humanities, 2021, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>19</sup> The World Bank, Reforms to Enhance Gender Equality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: From Advocacy to Implementation, 14 March 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>20</sup> USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2022 - Democratic Republic of the Congo, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 51

<sup>21</sup> ISS, Waking the sleeping giant: Development pathways for the Democratic Republic of the Congo to 2050, February 2021, [url](#), p. 28; Equal Times, Congolese trade unionist Joséphine Shimbi Umba: “We say ‘protect the workers’, but which workers are we talking about if only 2.5 per cent have formal jobs?”, 10 October 2018, [url](#)

<sup>22</sup> Equal Times, Faced with the difficulty of organising in the informal sector, trade unions in the Democratic Republic of Congo are taking a step-by-step approach, 31 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> In Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report, Congo, DR, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 17



markets, in the fields or at the farms'.<sup>24</sup> The same source reported that 'a smaller group of academically educated women work in the formal sector'.<sup>25</sup>

In January 2023, an article by UN Women noted that over 99 % of business in the DRC were not officially registered, leading to high transportation costs of goods, risk of violence, and exclusion from social security benefits or bank loans.<sup>26</sup> According to the 2022 DIS report on DRC, single female vendors were in a vulnerable position where they had to face informal taxation by the police or other officials to be able to sell produce at the market.<sup>27</sup> Additional information on women-owned businesses in Kinshasa could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this query.

According to the 2022 DIS report, women experienced 'a high degree of sexual harassment in the labour market', which often stopped them from getting formally employed or being promoted.<sup>28</sup> The same source noted that single and educated women 'would be more 'emancipated than many married women in the DRC', but also that single women are 'often assumed to be prostitutes in Kinshasa and sexual transaction is therefore expected of them'.<sup>29</sup>

#### **4. Access to social services**

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) provides the following categories of social protection in the DRC, as updated in March 2023:

- National Social Security Fund (CNSS)<sup>30</sup>: A general social security scheme for salaried employees in the formal economy if they are not covered by another scheme<sup>31</sup>. CNSS covers occupational risks, family allowances, pensions, and some health and social benefits. It covered around 3.3 million employees in 2021.
- National Social Security Fund for Public Servants (CNSSAP)<sup>32</sup>: A social security scheme for state employees. CNSSAP covers occupational risks, retirement, and pensions for disabled persons and survivors. It covered around 192 000 people in 2016.

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<sup>24</sup> Denmark, DIS, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Socioeconomic conditions in Kinshasa, 7 October 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>25</sup> Denmark, DIS, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Socioeconomic conditions in Kinshasa, 7 October 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>26</sup> UN Women, Women vendors register businesses, and hope, in DRC, 17 January 2023, [url](#)

<sup>27</sup> Denmark, DIS, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Socioeconomic conditions in Kinshasa, 7 October 2022, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>28</sup> Denmark, DIS, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Socioeconomic conditions in Kinshasa, 7 October 2022, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>29</sup> Denmark, DIS, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Socioeconomic conditions in Kinshasa, 7 October 2022, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>30</sup> The official website of the CNSS can be accessed at: [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> The law on CNSS can be accessed at: Congo, Democratic republic of Decret n°18/027 du 14 juillet 2018 portant creation, organisation et fonctionnement d'un etablissement public Denomme caisse nationale de securite sociale, en sigle « cnss », 2018, available at: [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> The official website of the CNSSAP can be accessed at: [url](#)



- Company schemes: Collective agreements set up between employers and employees. These schemes cover health care, sickness benefits, and family and maternity allowances.
- Social mutuels: Cover health care, family, maternity, old age, and death allowances. They covered around 1.09 million persons in 2015.
- Social assistance to ‘vulnerable people’ provided by other actors such NGOs and churches.<sup>33</sup>

Information on the implementation of the CNSS for women without social network in Kinshasa could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this query.

According to 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 CNSS and, therefore, do not receive any support.<sup>34</sup> The 2022 Bertelsmann Stiftung’s BTI report noted that the CNSS covers less than 20 % of workers and the majority relies on family support and other informal networks.<sup>35</sup> The same source reported that most social services in the DRC are provided by churches.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, according to the professor at the University of Kinshasa who was interviewed by the DIS, ‘the family and the church constitute or practically play the role of informal social security’.<sup>37</sup> The lawyer interviewed by the IRB in July 2019 stated that ‘being a woman without male support does not entitle you to basic social services’.<sup>38</sup>

## 5. Access to health care

According to the professor at the University of Kinshasa interviewed by the DIS, women without a social network in Kinshasa would face difficulties in accessing healthcare, including reproductive health and HIV treatment due to stigmatisation.<sup>39</sup> Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted within the time constraints of this query.

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<sup>33</sup> ILO, République Démocratique Du Congo, Situation et prioritiés, Situation de la protection sociale, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>34</sup> Equal Times, The Democratic Republic of Congo is searching for solutions to its health and social security shortcomings, 22 May 2023, [url](#)

<sup>35</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report, Congo, DR, 23 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 22-23

<sup>36</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report, Congo, DR, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>37</sup> Denmark, DIS, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Socioeconomic conditions in Kinshasa, 7 October 2022, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>38</sup> Canada, IRB, Democratic Republic of Congo: Ability to resettle in Kinshasa, particularly for women without male support, including access to housing, jobs and public services (2016-August 2019), 3 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>39</sup> Denmark, DIS, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Socioeconomic conditions in Kinshasa, 7 October 2022, [url](#), pp. 45, 48

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## **ADDITIONAL SOURCES CONSULTED**

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD); African Development Fund; Alternatives Humanitaires; Amnesty International; Belgium - Cedoca; Bergen Project; Care International; ECOL.net; European Union - EUAA COI Portal; International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH); France – OFPRA; Germany - BAMF; Girls Not Brides; Human Rights Watch; Insecurity Insight; International Crisis Group; The Netherlands - Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Norwegian Refugee Council; United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); Poverty Action Lab; Pulitzer Center; Switzerland – SEM; Transnational Figurations of Displacement (TRAFIG); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Security Council; The United States Agency for International Development (USAID); Vision Fund; World Food Programme (WFP)