COI QUERY

Country of Origin	**Democratic Republic of the Congo**
Title	**Situation of women without a support network in Kinshasa and South Kivu**
Reference period	January 2024 to 30 June 2026
Topic(s)	1. Background information 2. Treatment by society 3. Access to housing 4. Access to employment 5. Access to social services 6. Access to healthcare
Date of completion	30 June 2026
Query Code	Q22-2026
Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	**N/A**

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Situation of women without a support network in Kinshasa and South Kivu

1. Background information

Throughout 2025, the security, humanitarian and human rights situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to deteriorate. Escalating violence involving the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an armed group linked to the Islamic State, and renewed confrontations between the Rwandan-backed M23 movement and government forces had a severe impact on the civilian population.[1] The provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri were particularly affected, with the conflict resulting in increasing civilian casualties and large-scale displacement. Human Rights Watch (HRW) also reported numerous abuses by armed groups, including conflict-related sexual violence.[2] According to UN women, women and girls were 'disproportionately' affected.[3]

In June 2026, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported Ebola cases in South Kivu and noted challenges related to surveillance and testing. According to MSF, communities in the province have long faced 'chronic gaps in healthcare and a limited humanitarian response', which have hindered efforts to control the outbreak.[4]

This query is an update of two previously published EUAA queries: Situation of women without a support network in South Kivu, published on 2 September 2024, and Situation of women without a support network in Kinshasa, published on 25 August 2023.

Additionally, information on gender-based violence against women in the DRC can be found in the EUAA query, Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women, published in June 2025. Information on the situation of women who have children out of wedlock 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 in February 2024.

2. Treatment by society

[1] HRW, World Report 2026; Democratic Republic of Congo, 4 February 2026, url; Amnesty International, The State of the World's Human Rights; Democratic Republic of the Congo 2025, 21 April 2026, url
[2] HRW, World Report 2026; Democratic Republic of Congo, 4 February 2026, url
[3] UN Women, Press briefing by UN Women on the situation of women and girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 4 February 2025, url
[4] MSF, DRC: One month on, MSF warns dangerous gaps persist in Ebola disease response, 15 June 2026, url

A September 2024 report commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), under the DRC Mission Strategic Support Program (MSSP), based on interviews and focus groups with women and relevant organisations in the Kinshasa area, described that a woman's social value was reported to have been closely tied to her marital status, and single women beyond the typical marrying age reportedly faced mockery and significant stigma.[5] In relation to single mothers in Kinshasa, the same source stated that they had faced a range of barriers, including 'harmful social norms, challenging family dynamics, heightened vulnerability to sexual violence, challenging income situation, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient institutional setups, lack of access to health and safety', which impacted their ability to achieve economic stability and provide for their families. Furthermore, young single mothers faced multiple forms of stigma, including 'social, familial, institutional, self, and class-based'. As highlighted by the same source, single mothers faced 'moral judgments and prejudices from society, leading to discriminatory attitudes and exclusionary behaviors' due to social stigma, while institutional stigma also occurred in schools, workplaces, and healthcare services, where they 'encountered limitations on opportunities and condescending treatment'.[6]

Further information on the treatment by society towards women without a support network in Kinshasa and South Kivu could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints of this query response.

3. Access to housing

Information on access to housing for women without a support network in Kinshasa and South Kivu was scarce among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints of this query response. However, the following information may be relevant.

Kinshasa

Sources reported that renting in Kinshasa is generally difficult, mainly because of high rents, shortage of affordable housing,[7] and increasing financial requirements such as excessive advance payments.[8] According to a 2025 report published by New York University (NYU) on housing inequality in Kinshasa, an estimated 75 % of the city's population lives in informal settlements. These settlements are often located in flood-prone areas and were characterised by limited tenure security, exposing residents to risks of eviction and displacement. The report further noted that existing housing finance mechanisms mainly benefit people employed in the formal sector, while much of Kinshasa's population, who work in the informal economy, remained unable to access affordable housing.[9] According to a survey conducted by the local

[5] USAID, DRC MSSP, Landscape Study on Skills, Training and Livelihood Pathways for Marginalized Young Women, 25 September 2024, url, pp. 34, 35
[6] USAID DRC MSSP, Landscape Study on Skills, Training and Livelihood Pathways for Marginalized Young Women, 25 September 2024, url, p. 33
[7] ACP, Hausse des prix de maisons en location observée dans des communes de Kinshasa, 23 July 2025, url; NYU, CIC, Une urbanisation excluante L'inégalité croissante du logement à Kinshasa, February 2025, url, p. 14
[8] Radio Okapi, Location immobilière à Kinshasa : certains bailleurs exigent jusqu'à 9 mois de garantie locative, 15 January 2026, url
[9] NYU, CIC, Une urbanisation excluante L'inégalité croissante du logement à Kinshasa, February 2025, url, pp. 13, 14

news source, the Agence Congolaise de Presse (ACP), published on 23 July 2025, rental prices increased significantly between March and July 2025 in several communes of Kinshasa, particularly Limete, Lemba and Ngaliema. A housing commissioner interviewed by ACP stated that rents for residential properties increased by approximately 33 % during the reporting period.[10]

Similarly, Radio Okapi reported that finding decent housing in Kinshasa has become a challenging process; some landlords demand 9 to 12 months of rent in advance, although the legal guarantee is limited to three months. The same source stated that many candidates cannot afford these amounts and may have to go into debt, give up essential needs, or accept precarious housing.[11]

The September 2024 report by the USAID/DRC MSSP described that access to housing in Kinshasa was a significant issue for marginalized women,[12] considered in the report as single mothers, women with disabilities, and survivors of sexual violence.[13]

South Kivu

Large-scale displacement continued to affect South Kivu.[14] Mercy Corps reported that the province recorded 42 063 displaced households in April 2026.[15] Among those affected, female-headed households were identified as particularly vulnerable, facing challenges including domestic violence, forced eviction and restricted access to property.[16]

Further information on access to housing in South Kivu could not be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this query response.

4. Access to employment

Kinshasa

A 2025 academic study on single-parent households in Kinshasa found that persons raising children alone faced a greater risk of economic hardship or remaining in poverty than couples without children.[17] The study further reported that some single mothers with limited education relied on precarious employment, frequently sought assistance from relatives or engaged in

[10] ACP, Hausse des prix de maisons en location observée dans des communes de Kinshasa, 23 July 2025, url;
[11] Radio Okapi, Location immobilière à Kinshasa : certains bailleurs exigent jusqu'à 9 mois de garantie locative, 15 January 2026, url
[12] USAID, DRC MSSP, Landscape Study on Skills, Training and Livelihood Pathways for Marginalized Young Women, 25 September 2024, url, p. 26
[13] USAID, DRC MSSP, Landscape Study on Skills, Training and Livelihood Pathways for Marginalized Young Women, 25 September 2024, url, p. 2
[14] Mercy Corps, Crisis Analysis - DR Congo: Monthly Displacement Report, February 2026, 18 March 2026, url, p. 2; Mercy Corps, Crisis Analysis - DR Congo: Monthly Displacement Report, April 2026, 30 April 2026, url, p. 2; Sida, Humanitarian Crisis Analysis 2026: Democratic Republic of the Congo, 31 March 2026, url, p. 1
[15] Mercy Corps, Crisis Analysis - DR Congo: Monthly Displacement Report, April 2026, 30 April 2026, url, p. 5
[16] IFRC, DRC: Population Movement, Operational Update No. 5, 12 November 2025, url, pp. 6, 7
[17] Mpwo, L. and Longe Okoto, F., La monoparentalité à Kinshasa : analyse de la construction sociale, de la perception et des effets d'un format des familles amputee, RECOSH, 10 August 2024, url, p. 8

petty trade.[18] Similarly, the September 2024 report by the USAID/DRC MSSP described the informal sector in Kinshasa constituted one of the few accessible means of earning a living for many women, including for single mothers. The 'flexibility' of the informal economy was particularly important for single mothers balancing making an income with childcare responsibilities. However, it was also characterized by 'less stability', 'lower income', and 'no benefits or social protections', leaving women exposed to 'greater vulnerability to economic shocks and crises' and 'precarious work conditions', including a lack of access to healthcare, maternity leave, and safe work environments.[19]

South Kivu

A 2025 study by the World Food Programme (WFP) on South Kivu found that women faced 'significant barriers to economic opportunities and empowerment'.[20]

A 2025 report by an independent research institute, the International Peace Information Service (IPIS), noted that many women in South Kivu depended on artisanal and small-scale mining and related activities to earn an income. The report found that women working in mining areas faced risks linked to the presence of armed groups, insecurity, displacement and economic exploitation. The same source also reported an increase in sexual and gender-based violence in conflict-affected mining areas, while women without family or community support may be particularly exposed to these risks, due to limited livelihood options outside the mining sector.[21]

5. Access to social services

Information on access to social services for women without a support network in Kinshasa and South Kivu could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints of this query response. However, the following information may be relevant.

According to Bertelsmann Stiftung, rural areas in the DRC have 'remained largely beyond government presence, with little or no access to public services'.[22] The same report described a 'culture of patronage' which 'prioritizes political survival over public service, diverting resource revenues to elites'.[23]

An April 2026 study by the WFP found that female-headed households faced 'structural disadvantages', noting that they showed 'systematically poorer outcomes in education, land access, agricultural capacity, asset ownership, and food security indicators'.[24] The same report further observed that across all provinces female-headed households were 'more likely to be

[18] Mpwo, L. and Longe Okoto, F., La monoparentalité à Kinshasa : analyse de la construction sociale, de la perception et des effets d'un format des familles amputee, RECOSH, 10 August 2024, url, p. 6
[19] USAID, DRC MSSP, Landscape Study on Skills, Training and Livelihood Pathways for Marginalized Young Women, 25 September 2024, url, p. 10
[20] WFP, Diagnostic report on Gender, Social Cohesion & Socio-Economic Resilience: evidence from South Kivu, url, p. 7
[21] IPIS, Militarization, gender, and resource extraction in the Kivus post-January 2025, 30 October 2025, url
[22] Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI, 2026 Country Report Congo, DR, 2026, url, p. 7
[23] Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI, 2026 Country Report Congo, DR, 2026, url, p. 28
[24] WFP, Gendered Dynamics of Food Security, Conflict, and Resilience in Eastern DRC, 21 April 2026, url, p. 2

moderately or severely food insecure, to rely on crisis or emergency coping strategies, and to register lower dietary diversity in children'.[25]

6. Access to healthcare

Information on access to healthcare for women without a support network in Kinshasa and South Kivu was scarce among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints of this query response. However, the following information may be relevant.

Kinshasa
The September 2024 report by the USAID/DRC MSSP concerning marginalized women in Kinshasa, described that access to healthcare was a 'significant' issue, as women lacked 'appropriate clothing or hygienic products during menstruation' and reported difficulties in accessing medical care.[26]

South Kivu
Access to maternal, reproductive and general healthcare deteriorated during 2025 and early 2026.[27] According to MSF, reductions in international funding and the withdrawal of healthcare providers have limited women's access to maternal and reproductive healthcare in parts of South Kivu. Health centres reportedly lacked paid staff and essential medicines, while free maternal care was available at only a small number of facilities. Some pregnant women were therefore required to walk for several hours, including through insecure areas, to obtain free treatment.[28]

Following an assessment of 109 health centres in North and South Kivu conducted between April and May 2025, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) stated that the healthcare system in the two provinces was 'on verge of collapse'.[29] The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that many health centres in Kalehe, South Kivu, no longer received medicines or supplies for the treatment of rape survivors and that facilities lacked qualified providers, including midwives, for the provision of medical and psychosocial care.[30] According to a mapping completed in May 2025 by UNFPA, only 19 of South Kivu's 34 health zones reported having minimal quantities of post-rape kits in some health facilities and pharmacies.[31]

An International Rescue Committee (IRC) article published by the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) on 7 April 2026 described that some women whose pregnancies resulted from rape arrived at the Numbi Health Centre, in South Kivu, already in labour, without food, newborn

[25] WFP, Gendered Dynamics of Food Security, Conflict, and Resilience in Eastern DRC, 21 April 2026, url, p. 2
[26] USAID, DRC MSSP, Landscape Study on Skills, Training and Livelihood Pathways for Marginalized Young Women, 25 September 2024, url, p. 26
[27] UNFPA, Situation Report: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 16 July 2025, url, p. 2; MSF, DRC: Minova is on the brink of a healthcare crisis, 8 May 2026, url
[28] MSF, DRC: Minova is on the brink of a healthcare crisis, 8 May 2026, url
[29] ICRC, DRC: Health-care system on verge of collapse in North and South Kivu, 16 June 2026, url
[30] UNFPA, Situation Report: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 16 July 2025, url, p. 2
[31] UNFPA, Situation Report: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 16 July 2025, url, p. 5

supplies or anyone to support them. The centre reportedly lacked the resources to provide follow-up care, while access was further hindered by the absence of electricity and a poorly constructed bridge.[32]

[32] European Commission, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, Protecting women's health amid crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 7 April 2026, url

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