

# LABOUR MARKET PROFILE



# Burundi

2025

This profile brings insights to the labour market model in Burundi and its structural trends, status, and challenges.



ULANDSSEKRETARIATET – DTDA  
DANISH TRADE UNION DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

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## PREFACE

The Danish Trade Union Development Agency (DTDA) is the development organisation of the Danish trade union movement. DTDA's work aligns with the International Labour Organization's global Decent Work Agenda (DWA), based on its four pillars: creating decent jobs, guaranteeing rights at work, extending social protection, and promoting social dialogue. The overall development objective is to eradicate poverty and support the development of just and democratic societies by promoting the DWA.

The DTDA collaborates with trade union organisations in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. The programme's immediate objective is to assist the partner organisations in becoming change agents in their own national and regional labour market context, capable of achieving tangible improvements in the national DWA conditions and the labour-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This profile is prepared in collaboration with national partner organisations, providing annual narrative progress reports as part of programme implementation and monitoring. National statistical institutions and international databanks (e.g., ILOSTAT and NATLEX, World Bank Open Data, and other internationally

recognised labour-related global indexes) are also used as sources of data and information.

The profile is regularly updated to reflect the latest developments. Labour Market Profiles for more than 20 countries are available on DTDA's website, ensuring stakeholders have access to the most recent information:

<https://www.ulandssekretariatet.dk/>.

The DTDA supports development programmes in Burundi in collaboration with the *Confédération de Syndicats du Burundi* (COSYBU).

The front-page photo is an informal worker in Burundi, which was taken by REUTERS/Mike Hutchings.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Burundi's labour market development is constrained by limited structural economic reforms, vulnerability to climate change impacts, and persistent political instability.** The majority of workers are employed in the underdeveloped agricultural sector or in informal micro and small enterprises, which provide predominantly low-paying jobs. This employment structure further weakens the tax base, undermining the financial sustainability of the labour market and broader public finances.

**Although recent legal and administrative reforms, as well as greater alignment with regional integration, have been introduced, compliance with labour rights has deteriorated due to weak institutions and economic hardship.** The country ranks among the lowest on the Human Rights Index. Persistent violations of workers' rights foster mistrust among stakeholders and undermine the functioning of the labour market. These challenges are compounded by the widespread informal economy, which creates loopholes in the enforcement of labour regulations, often driven by limited awareness or inadequate incentives.

**Industrial relations in Burundi are primarily based on individual workers' rights rather than collective representation.** For example, collective bargaining at the enterprise level has limited coverage and success. The trade union movement has experienced a significant increase in membership, particularly due to an upsurge of organised workers from the informal economy. However, trade unions continue to face obstacles, including government restrictions, employer resistance, and financial constraints.

**The workforce is growing rapidly, but the anticipated 'demographic dividend' has not led to structural shifts in employment.** Official unemployment does not appear to be a major statistical problem for Burundian workers. However, this is misleading, as many face underutilisation, often due to skills shortages, which in turn result in low labour productivity. Moreover, the sharp rise in remittances in recent years, driven by labour emigration, has contributed to a brain drain.

**Burundian workers are improving their basic education, but they continue to face challenges at higher levels due to substandard infrastructure, low education quality, and high dropout rates.** The staggering child labour rate of 31% highlights the severe disconnect between the education system and the labour market. Although key technical and vocational education and training (TVET) indicators have improved, the formal sector does not generate enough jobs to absorb graduates. Additionally, the country has not fully embraced the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) or transformed its labour market to take advantage of opportunities in the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry and the gig economy.

**Persistent high poverty underscores the gap between the formal social protection system and the labour market; a situation also reflected in the limited financial capacity of the public sector.** Informal social protection plays a central role in rural areas but lacks legal recognition. Many private employers evade social contributions, leaving workers unprotected amid widespread informality.

<b>Box 1: Burundi's Labour Market Fact Sheet</b>		
<b>Workforce</b>	<b>Participation rate</b>	<b>Unemployment rate</b>
6.1 million	79%	1.0%
<b>Informal workers' share of non-agriculture employment</b>	<b>Working conditions</b>	<b>Migration</b>
89%	There is no functioning national minimum wage in Burundi. Workers in more formal employment have encountered drops in earnings, which remain very low.	Personal remittances are at 7.5% of GDP
<b>Employment by education</b>	<b>Vocational training</b>	<b>Social protection</b>
Many workers with less than basic education moved towards basic education. Those at intermediate and advanced levels grew on the margin.	The proportion of 15–24-year-olds enrolled in vocational education grew from 5.1% in 2015 to 11% in 2020.	Population covered by at least one social protection scheme reached 16% in 2022.
<b>Trade union density</b>	<b>Coverage of collective bargaining</b>	<b>Trade union rights violations</b>
Formal trade union members represent 7.2% of employees, while a broader view, including organised workers from the informal economy, reaches 5.4% of the total employment in 2024.	The National Inter-Occupational Collective Agreement of 1980, in principle, covers formal workers, but its implementation is uneven and limited. The development of collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) at the bilateral level is hindered by controversial government decisions and the prevalence of the informal economy.	Listed among the worst countries for workers, ranking 5+ out of 5 (5+ is worst) on the Global Rights Index in 2025.

### Box 2: Dynamics that generally influence the labour market

**Security:** The protection and stability provided to workers in terms of job availability, income stability, and protection from unfair treatment or dismissal.

**Stability:** Weaknesses for the consistency and resilience of employment conditions affect confidence for both workers and employers.

**Trust:** Several factors affect the confidence of workers, employers, and stakeholders in the system's fairness and reliability, such as job security concerns, workplace safety, and wage and career

**Efficiency:** The ability to allocate workers to jobs in a way that maximizes productivity, minimizes unemployment, and ensures fair wages.

**Flexibility:** The capacity to adapt quickly and efficiently to changes in the economy and business demands.

## COUNTRY MAP



Source: National Online Project.

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## ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AND THE LABOUR MARKET

**Burundi is a low-income economy, with 85% of the population employed in the agricultural sector.** The economy faces political instability, poor infrastructure, and limited industrialisation, making it one of the world's least developed countries. The current National Development Plan (NDP) aims to become an emerging country in 2040 and a developed country in 2060. The NDP vision is strong economic growth, creating decent jobs, and improving social well-being.

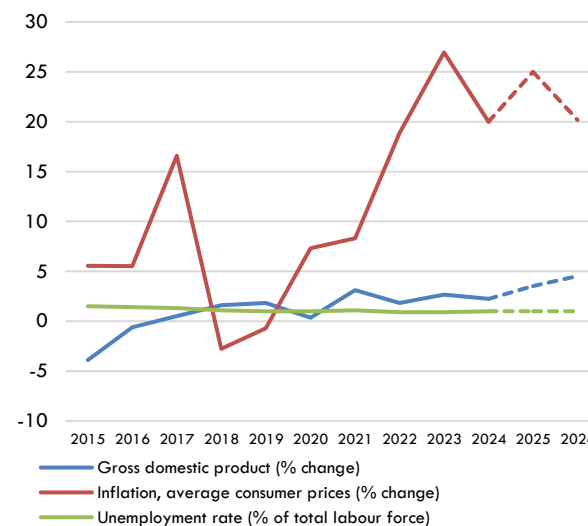
**Economic growth has been sluggish, but there are some optimistic projections for the upcoming years.** Burundi's poverty reduction has been meagre, reaching 62% of the population, and among the highest rates among sub-Saharan African countries.<sup>1</sup> This signals that the economy is not generating sufficient income or creating productive jobs.

**The very low unemployment rate of 1%** underestimates that most individuals are engaged in casual or informal activities; many work a few hours per week as a survival strategy. The intermittent nature of subsistence farming, occupied only during planting and harvesting, contributes to what is known as 'disguised' unemployment.

**The service sector is gradually expanding, making it a vital component of economic development.** Its linkage to other sectors remains underdeveloped, though, due to limited infrastructure and a small consumer market. Instead, the small industry sector slowly lost its economic pace; manufacturing employment, focusing on food processing, textiles, and construction materials, reached a rock bottom of 1.2% of total employment. As indicated, the agricultural sector experienced a

significant drop in its value-added, but it provides the highest job generation.

**Figure 1: Gross domestic product, inflation, and unemployment growth trends in Burundi, %, 2015-2026**



Source: International Monetary Fund; International Labour Organization.

**The inflation in consumer prices has alarmingly accelerated in recent years, fluctuating due to food price volatility and currency depreciation, hollowing out workers' income purchasing power** (see Figure 1 and the Working Conditions section). This situation further caused small businesses to cope with the rising cost of raw materials and transportation. Since most workers do not see wage increases that match inflation, it has forced many to take on multiple jobs or rely on remittances from family abroad (see more in the Migration sub-section). When inflation erodes real wages, worker protests and strikes become more common.

**Although Burundi implements a progressive personal income tax rate, it accounts for a small coverage of taxpayers due to the widespread informal economy.** Burundi also imposes a 10% pension contribution on employment income. The revised Labour Code 2020 has eased the cap ceiling, opening the way for informal economy workers or self-

employed to join the scheme. Employers are responsible for withholding and remitting these contributions. **The small formal sector with a narrow tax base** leads few businesses and individuals pay direct taxes like income taxes. Corruption and inefficiencies in the tax administration also reduce revenue collection, and many companies underreport earnings to avoid taxation.<sup>2</sup> This situation leads to low tax revenues and makes the country rely heavily on external aid to fund public spending to critical infrastructure projects, education reforms, and social protection and healthcare improvements.

Special economic zones (SEZs) strategically stimulate economic growth, industrialisation, and employment. **Burundi is committed to regional free trade agreements and has plans for domestic free zones**, which are designed to offer tax incentives and simplified regulatory procedures for businesses. Although the government is actively working towards establishing its first operational SEZ, the necessary initiatives to enable regulations for these zones have not been fully implemented, leading to operational free zones not yet in place.<sup>3</sup>

## THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND THE LABOUR MARKET

Labour legislation is shaping the labour market by defining the rights and responsibilities of employers and workers. It influences wages, working conditions, job security, and employment levels.

**Administrative reforms, including those in the civil service, are currently underway in Burundi.** The reforms aim to enhance professionalism and efficiency, with a particular focus on strengthening merit-based recruitment and promotion. Efforts are also being made to modernise public administration

by integrating information technology (IT) into administrative processes, including the introduction of digital systems for tax collection and social security. Legislative elections were held in June 2025, including a newly implemented administrative structure that reduced the number of provinces from 18 to 5 and the number of communes from 119 to 42. **However, the reform process faces significant challenges, including political instability, limited resources, and weak internet access.** Key aspects of the reforms are summarised in Box 3.

### Box 3: Administrative reforms in Burundi

Administrative reforms have been a part of the country's broader efforts to modernise governance, improve public sector efficiency, and promote economic development via:

- Decentralisation of governance.
- Civil service reform.
- Anti-corruption efforts.
- Public sector financial management.
- Judicial and legal reforms.
- Public administration modernisation.
- Institutional reforms in public service delivery.
- Public sector wage reform.

**Burundi's labour-related legal framework is primarily governed by the Labour Code 2020.** This law balances the interests of the employers and workers' fundamental rights. **It further introduced adaptations to align with the East African Community (EAC) regulating agenda.** The right to freedom of association and the right to strike are enshrined in the Constitution. The right to collective bargaining is recognised by law, but with excluded measures regarding public-sector wages, which were set according to fixed scales following consultation with unions. Legislation prohibits anti-union discrimination but does not provide adequate means of protection against it.<sup>4</sup>

Another central labour-related law is **the Civil Servant Code**, which regulates the right to organise and strike in public service. **The Social Protection Code of 2020** has also been considered a significant improvement, introducing no distinction between formal workers and those in the informal economy concerning labour rights, social protection, and social dialogue.

**Burundi has ratified the treaties of the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), which include labour provisions.** While the EAC's labour provisions have promoted labour mobility and economic integration, challenges persist, such as political barriers, protectionist tendencies, and social implications. Although Burundi enjoys a good relationship with its EAC neighbours, the ongoing civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has pitted the government of Burundi against the government of Rwanda, with respective heads of the two states explicitly making threats of war against each other. This stance has negatively impacted regional trade, as Burundi has moved to close its land border, leaving many families unable to make ends meet. Similarly, COMESA protocols aim to facilitate citizens' free movement and employment, as well as eliminate barriers to labour mobility. However, they encounter political barriers and protectionist tendencies among member states. **Although these regional initiatives have delivered some leverage at the policy level, it has not been translated into improvements in workers' rights in practice.**

### Observations on Labour Legislation

Although a broad legal framework protects Burundi's labour market, the implementation and enforcement remain weak due to

institutional challenges with roots in structural cultural practice and limited resources. Concerning the labour legislation applicable at the national level, Burundi's overall score on the Labour Rights Index is 72 out of 100 (100 is the best) in 2024, which was above the sub-Saharan Africa average (66) (see Appendix Table 5). **This legal framework still faces barriers and restrictions for workers to practice their rights** (see Appendix Table 3).

Reports found that Burundi's government placed excessive restrictions on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, sometimes interfering in union activities. By the same token, the government did not effectively enforce applicable laws. Resources for inspection and remediation were inadequate, and penalties were not commensurate with those under other laws involving denials of civil rights.<sup>5</sup>

Generally, while the legislation may spell out certain workers' rights in Burundi, most workers operate in the informal economy without a guarantee of rights and are exposed to unfair labour practices.

### Ratified ILO Conventions

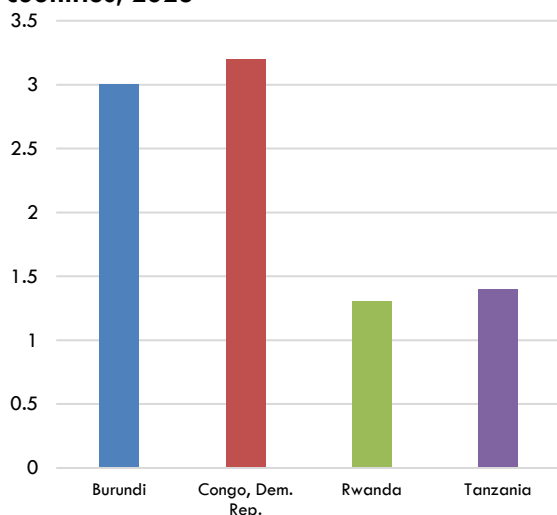
International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions enumerate international principles and rights at work. Appendix Table 4 shows that eight out of ten Fundamental Conventions and two of four Governance Conventions have been ratified, and 3 of 177 Technical Conventions are up-to-date and actively promoted. **The latest ratified convention is the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (C182) in 2002.**

The ILO's independent supervisory body, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR),

has made numerous observations and direct requests regarding conventions. For instance, the CEACR commented on the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (C087), concerning Burundi's General Civil Service Regulations hinder the exercise of the right to organise and the right to strike in the public service due to government restrictions, legal barriers, and political repression.

The Sustainable Development Goals indicator 8.8.2 measures compliance with fundamental labour rights. Based on ILO textual sources and national legislation, **Burundi's scoring has recently deteriorated, landing at a high level compared with neighbouring countries** (see more details in Figure 2). This trend suggests the country is losing pace with this specific SDG goal.

**Figure 2: Level of national compliance with labour rights among Burundi and neighbouring countries, 2023**



Note: The value ranges from 0 to 10, with 0 being the best possible score (indicating higher levels of compliance with freedom of association and collective bargaining (FACB) rights) and 10 the worst (indicating lower levels of compliance with FACB rights based on ILO textual sources and national legislation).

Sources: International Labour Organization, Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM).

## SOCIAL PARTNERS AND THE LABOUR MARKET

Social partners are central to promoting the realisation of core labour rights and social justice for workers by protecting freedom of association and collective bargaining. These organisations are usually represented as the government, trade unions, and employers' organisations.

### Government

**The Ministry of Public Service, Labour, and Employment** (*Ministère de la Fonction Publique, du Travail et de l'Emploi - MFPTSS*) is Burundi's main government body responsible for labour affairs. This institution is responsible for formulating and enforcing labour policies; it oversees labour laws, employment policies, worker protections, and social security regulations, ensuring compliance with national labour laws and international labour standards. The MFPTSS works alongside several other institutions that involve the labour market, which are summarised below:

- National Social Security Institute (INSS).
- General Labour Inspectorate (IGT).
- National Social Dialogue Commission (CNDS).
- Employment and Vocational Training Agencies.
- Local governments.

### Trade Unions

Trade unions in Burundi play a key role in advocating for workers' rights, improving labour conditions, and negotiating with employers and the government.

**Although unionism has faced economic, legal, and political challenges during the last**

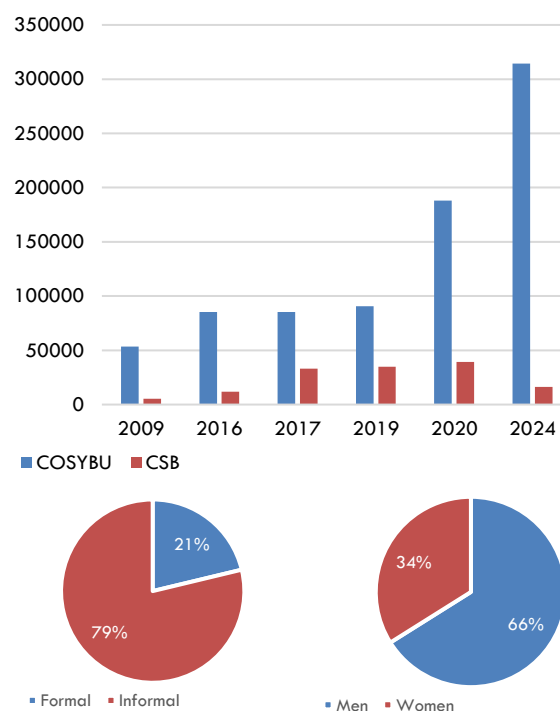
decade, efforts are in progress to strengthen labour representation and improve working conditions. Burundi's economy remains predominantly agrarian, with 85% of the workforce. Those operating in non-agricultural sectors are mainly in informal micro and small enterprises, often struggling to meet basic needs due to insufficient incomes and rising living costs.

**The Labor Law of 2020 aims to improve the status of unionism.** Union activity remained predominantly within the public sector.<sup>6</sup> Unions are often restricted, making it difficult for workers to collectively organise and advocate for their rights. Since most labourers work in the informal economy, most have no written employment contracts. Authorities refused to register a trade union formed by workers in the informal economy.<sup>7</sup> Reports found that **Burundi's government placed excessive restrictions on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining,** coupled with sometimes interfered in union activities, as these are mistakenly viewed as members of the opposition due to their strict demand for socio-economic reforms.<sup>8</sup>

Unionism's landscape is changing, generating more attention in organising workers from the informal economy (see more in the Informal Economy section). **Some improvements are being made, such as smallholder avocado farmers improving their earnings through organised collective efforts and government intervention.** Farmers increased the price per kilogram of avocados by forming cooperatives and setting terms for foreign avocado dealers from 10 cents to 70 cents. The Green Gold Burundi cooperative, representing 200,000 farmers, played a central role in this transformation, ensuring better regulation of avocado exports (see more in the Informal Economy sub-section).<sup>9</sup>

The overall trade union membership grew from 59,000 in 2009 to 330,589 in 2024, an increase of over 450%. This growth was mainly driven by an influx of organised workers from the informal economy. **Trade union density also rose, with organized workers from the informal economy accounting for an estimated 5.4% of total employment.** More strictly defined unionism among formal workers – such as paying dues and being in contractual employment – reached around 7.2% of employees in 2024. Figure 3 below shows the rising membership rate among central trade union organisations, disaggregated by formal/informal status and gender.

**Figure 3: The trend in membership rate and the status of the two trade union confederations in Burundi in 2024**



Source: DTDA data collection system.

The two main trade union confederations – **Confédération de Syndicats du Burundi (COSYBU)** and **Confédération de Syndicats Libres du Burundi (CSB)** – have representation in industrial relations via tripartite social

dialogue institutions and collective bargaining negotiations. Other essential trade unions are **the Syndicat des Travailleurs de l'Enseignement du Burundi (STEB)**, representing teachers and education sector workers; **the Syndicat des Travailleurs de la Santé (SYNAPA)**, which represents health sector workers, including doctors, nurses, and hospital staff; **the Syndicat des Travailleurs du Transport et du Commerce (SYTTCO)**, representing workers in transportation, trade, and logistics.

**Unions from parastatals and the formal private sector are emerging in the country, but they remain minimal.** “Yellow unions” – labour organisations established or influenced by employers or the government to undermine genuine union representation – are mushrooming, particularly in the health and education sectors. There are registered several so-called independent “yellow unions” operating in Burundi. These unions often lack genuine worker representation and are perceived as tools to fragment and weaken the collective bargaining power of authentic trade unions. These independent “yellow unions” represent about 5% of all trade union members.

### Employers' Organisations

**The Association of Employers of Burundi (AEB)** is the leading employer organisation. Although it participates in tripartite institutions at the national level and consults on labour issues, it lacks strength and independence compared to employer organisations in more developed economies. Government interference, weak institutional frameworks, and an overwhelming dominance of informality limit AEB's impact. **The Centrale Syndicale des Employeurs du Burundi (CESEBU)** is another organisation established by the government to

represent employers as a rival to AEB, but it has been weakening in recent years.

One of the central factors in Burundi is the disconnect between labour market needs and workforce training. Employers struggle to find skilled workers, yet the government and educational institutions do little to bridge this gap. Instead of fostering a business-friendly climate, bureaucratic red tape and inconsistent policies make it hard for businesses to thrive and engage in social dialogue, a practice often decried by trade unions.

Generally, employers' organisations in Burundi are challenged and marked by structural weaknesses, limited influence, and a difficult economic environment. While employer organisations should counterbalance trade unions, many operate in a more passive or symbolic role rather than being real advocates for a well-functioning labour market.

## SOCIAL DIALOGUE AND THE LABOUR MARKET

Across countries and irrespective of the level of development, the role of social dialogue in contributing to economic and social development is acknowledged.

Burundi has ratified central ILO conventions involving social dialogue (revisit Appendix Table 4). The Labour Law of 2020 recognises the right to collective bargaining. According to the legislation, **any company or establishment with 20 or more permanent employees should establish a labour council at the branch level, functioning as a mandatory consultative body.** This institution aims to maintain permanent contact between employers and employees and to follow up on complementary hygiene, health, and safety committees. However, considering that most Burundian firms and businesses in the private

sector operate in the informal economy with fewer than 20 employees, the coverage of these labour councils is narrow. Another influence is that **the tradition of participation by trade unions and employers' organisations to implement collective bargaining remains underdeveloped at the bipartite enterprise level.** It is hindered by relatively low trade union density and weak collective bargaining coverage, which is interlinked with the dominance of informal micro and small enterprises in the private sector and controversial government decision (see ahead).

Generally, social dialogue in Burundi faces several significant challenges concerning awareness of the formal structural dialogue mechanisms. **Persistent rights violations create an environment of mistrust among stakeholders,** undermining the foundation necessary for constructive social dialogue. Both tripartite cooperation institutions and social partners often lack the resources and expertise to facilitate and sustain meaningful dialogue processes. The widespread informal economy further limits the capacity of workers and employers to engage in structured dialogue. These deficiencies impede the development and implementation of effective policies via social dialogue. On a more positive note, **AEB and COSYBU have entered formal agreements reaffirming their commitment to spearheading bi/tripartite social dialogue processes** which stem from their direct collaboration with the Danish Labour Market Consortium (LMC).

**The National Inter-Occupational Collective Agreement (Convention Collective Interprofessionnelle, CCI) of 1980 in Burundi is in force and functions as a general framework agreement that applies across sectors.** It sets minimum standards for working

conditions in the formal economy, such as working hours, leave entitlements, and dismissal procedures. **Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) should be formed at the bipartite level** between employers and workers' representatives designed to establish employment terms and conditions that may enhance existing labour laws.

The development of CBAs has largely been hampered by **the controversial government decision in 2015 to suspend bonuses and seniority allowances linked to the economic situation.** Although the sanctions were lifted in 2021, allowing for the gradual reinstatement of these financial benefits, they have significantly impacted workers, particularly those entitled to long-service bonuses (see more in the Working Conditions section).<sup>10</sup> On the positive side, the 2024/2025 national budget included provisions for the unfreezing of civil servants' salary bonuses, considering a significant factor contributing to this budgetary expansion. **Because no new sectoral collective agreements have been concluded since 2012, this 1980 inter-occupational agreement remains the main reference for collective labour regulation in Burundi.** Its application is uneven and limited, though, as enforcement mechanisms are weak, besides it is outdated and does not fully address the current labour market realities in Burundi.

By the same token, an agreement signed with the government in February 2017 to **re-establish regulations on the exercise of freedom of association and collective bargaining has still not been applied.**<sup>11</sup>

## Central Tripartite Institutions

In Burundi, social dialogue occurs on a sectoral basis and in central tripartite institutions. These organisational structures are flexible and established in accordance with their specific characteristics and regional requirements. The leading tripartite cooperation institutions are summarised below:

**The National Labour Council** is a tripartite consultative body comprising equal representation from the government, workers, and employers. Its primary function is to advise the Minister of Public Service, Labour, and Employment on various labour-related issues and proposed legislative changes.

**The National Social Dialogue Commission (CNDS)** is chaired on a five-year rotational basis among workers, employers, and government representatives. The CNDS is a tripartite consultative body that promotes social dialogue to prevent collective conflicts, participation in the resolution of labour disputes, review of management tools in the field of health and safety at work, professional training, and social security. Since 2018, all 18 provinces of Burundi have had a provincial social dialogue committee (CPDS) dealing with localised labour and socio-economic issues. **As of 2025, the CNDS is realigning its district and provincial structures to the new administrative setup, reducing the number of provinces from 18 to 5.**

Given that the political space has been shrinking following the violent repression by the government of peaceful protesters, **triggering a deep political crisis in 2015, the CNDS has been acting as an alternative round table among workers, employers, and government representatives to discuss an array of issues.** This has contributed to not only industrial peace, but also to calming down general tensions.

**Sectoral Tripartite Committees** operate in specific industries, such as education, health, and civil service, and they engage in wage negotiations and discuss labour standards.

## Industrial relations dispute system

Burundi's industrial relations dispute system encompasses both formal and informal mechanisms to address conflicts between employers and employees.

**Concerning formal mechanisms:** The Labour Inspectorate has the authority to mediate disputes between workers and employers. Unresolved conflicts can be escalated to civil courts, where legal proceedings are conducted to resolve them. The judiciary operates under the Code of Organisation and Judicial Competence, with recent amendments aiming to enhance its effectiveness.

**Regarding informal mechanisms:** Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods, including mediation and arbitration, are employed to settle labour disputes outside the formal court system. Historically, the *Bashingantahe* – a council of community elders – has played a significant role in mediating conflicts, including labour disputes. This traditional system emphasises restorative justice and community cohesion.

Despite these dispute mechanisms, several challenges persist, such as lengthy and costly formal legal processes and the widespread informal economy, where formal dispute resolution mechanisms may be less effective or accessible. The labour dispute communication system is minimal with employers' organisations and trade unions, not to mention workers wishing to use conciliation and mediation services often lack awareness of their proceeds.

## STATUS OF TRADE UNION RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Trade union rights violations undermine both worker protection and labour market stability. This can lead to increased industrial action, low worker morale, and reduced business productivity. Moreover, it can contribute to broader economic inequality, informal employment, and social unrest.

**Burundi is among the worst countries for workers, ranked 5+, the worst rating on the Global Rights Index in 2025.** This represents “no guarantee of rights due to the breakdown of the rule of law”: Workers in countries with a rating of 5+ face legislation that may spell out certain rights; workers have effectively no access to these rights and are therefore exposed to autocratic regimes and unfair labour practices. It is further linked to dysfunctional institutions because of internal conflict. Civil rights were suppressed as the ruling party in its quest to strengthen its control over institutions and weaken political opposition.<sup>12</sup> On the positive side, this situation is often mitigated by continued bi/tripartite collaboration among social partners through the CNDS and the National Labour Council.

**Reports found that Burundi’s government placed excessive restrictions on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, sometimes interfering in union activities.** Other cases concern the Minister of Finance, who requested that private companies that had hired former public servants fired from their government jobs, terminate their contracts immediately, threatening to sever any business ties with the government for those who failed to do so. Since most traditional unions are public-employee unions, they involve government entities in almost every phase of labour negotiation, such as salary negotiations.<sup>13</sup>

## WORKING CONDITIONS AFFECTING WORKERS

Working conditions directly affect workers’ well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction. The state of these conditions also has broader implications for the labour market, influencing economic performance, employment patterns, and social stability.

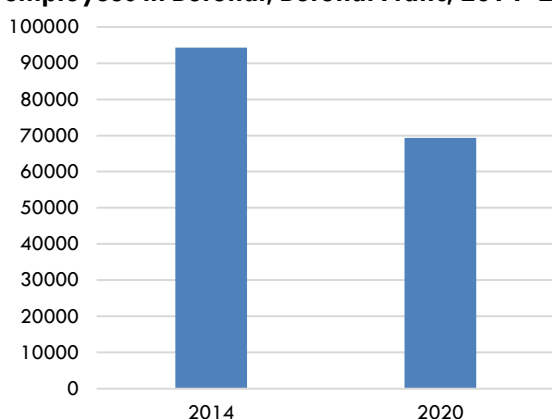
**There is no functioning national minimum wage in Burundi.** Instead, wages should be determined through negotiations between employers and workers. However, applying collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) is very limited in scope and coverage in Burundi. This is mainly because of the dominant underdeveloped agricultural sector and the informal micro- and small enterprises involved with a lack of awareness or incentives.

Burundi’s weak wage system significantly impacts its labour market in several ways, affecting workers and employers. For instance, many Burundi workers earn insufficient wages to cover basic living expenses. **Even formal employment generates low wages, reducing government tax revenue and limiting the growth of social security programmes.** Skilled workers – especially professionals like teachers, doctors, and engineers – seek better-paying opportunities abroad (see more in the Migration sub-section). Poor wages further lead to low employee morale and high absenteeism, weakening local demand for goods and services, and businesses struggle to expand due to limited consumer spending.

The median monthly earnings for non-farm wage employees were about 48,000 Burundian Francs (BIF) (US\$17) in 2025.<sup>14</sup> This factor reflects persistently low earnings, mirroring weak economic transformation, which results in limited poverty reduction. Other data revealed that **Burundian workers in more**

formal employment have encountered drops in earnings, landing at BIF 70,000 (US\$37) per month (Figure 4). This trend potentially suggests a weak coverage and impact in the application of the National Inter-Occupational Collective Agreement and CBAs. Furthermore, inflation in consumer prices has alarmingly accelerated in recent years, eroding workers' income purchasing power (revisit Figure 1 above).

**Figure 4: Monthly average earnings of employees in Burundi, Burundi Franc, 2014- 2020**



Source: Burundi Living Standards Surveys.

Another issue that challenges the labour market development is that **Burundi's labour inspection system is weak due to a limited number of labour inspectors** covering all workplaces across the country. This system lacks funding for transport, modern equipment, administrative support, and a digital tracking system for reporting violations. The weak industrial relations dispute system also leads employers to ignore regulations without facing the consequences. Since most workers are without formal contracts that makes it is hard to protect rights, and informal businesses operate without registration, making them difficult to inspect. An actual ratio of labour inspectors to total employment was 1:142,000 in 2023 (or 1:22,000 for employees).

## CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AFFECTING THE LABOUR MARKET

**Burundi's workforce reached approximately 6.1 million individuals in 2024.** The labour force participation rate measures the active portion of the working-age population at 79%. The status of Burundi's workforce trends is summarised below (see also more data in Appendix Table 6).

**The country's young and rapidly growing population** presents both opportunities and challenges regarding a demographic dividend. This refers to the economic growth potential when a country's working-age population (15-64 years) grows more significantly than the dependent population (children and elderly).

Major cities are not yet accelerating as employment hubs. **At least nine of ten jobs are in rural areas**, and most lack access to diverse job opportunities in industry, services, finance, and technology.

**Around 85% of Burundi's workforce is engaged in agriculture, mainly at the subsistence level.** Employment in the service sector is only rising slowly, reaching 12%, and the small industry sector, which is 3.1%, is falling behind.

**Burundi struggles with low labour productivity and a mismatch between workers' skills and employers' demands.** This disparity hampers economic growth and the country's aspirations to transition to an emerging country. Addressing these challenges requires substantial education and vocational training investments to align workforce capabilities with industry needs (see more in the Education and Training and the Labour Market sections).

### Burundi faces significant challenges in developing a robust middle class.

Approximately 62% of the population lived below the poverty line, with half of the non-poor population vulnerable to falling into poverty. The agricultural sector's low productivity and limited income hinder the expansion of the middle class. Labour income share as a per cent of GDP is relatively low and slowly falling, challenging the evolution of the middle class. Ongoing political unrest and weak economic development are also components for stalling middle-class expansion.

## Migration

The country's legal framework for migration is guided by several laws, including the **Labour Code of 2020, governing the rights of migrant workers and employment conditions**. Recently, the government also launched to develop Standard Operating Procedures for ethical recruitment in Burundi. This initiative seeks to regulate labour migration movements, prevent abuse, and protect workers' rights. Implementing these laws and policies is weak in practice; many migrant workers operate in the informal economy, missing legal protections. Burundi ratified the EAC Free Movement Protocol, allowing free movement of persons, labour, and services among partner states and granting residency and work rights to East African citizens without visas. However, this protocol has not been fully implemented.

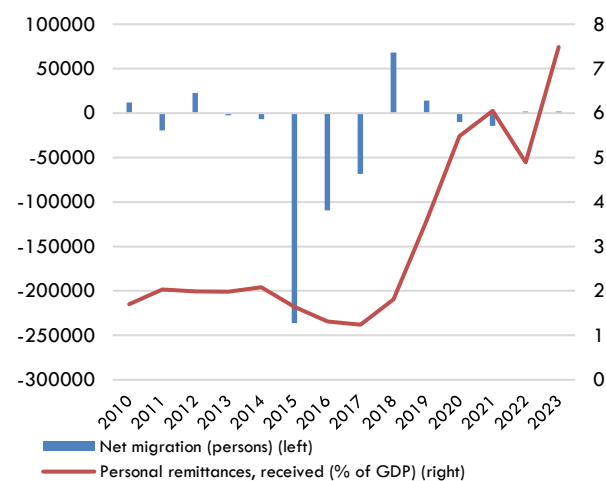
**Trade unions in Burundi play a limited but growing role in influencing migration policies.** For example, they contributed to developing a gender-sensitive National Labour Migration Policy.<sup>15</sup> Some challenges are that the government often ignores trade union recommendations in migration policy, as well as

they have limited legal power to enforce migrant protections.

**Economic hardship, political instability, labour opportunities, and regional conflicts in Burundi shape the migration flows.** The country's population in urban areas and cities slowly grew, reaching just 15%. Instead, internal migration is more of a rural-to-rural movement, especially for seasonal agricultural work.

**Burundi's diaspora is gaining more importance in the economy and labour market.** Figure 5 shows that many Burundians left the country during unrest between 2015 and 2018. It was primarily triggered by political turmoil intertwined with labour and economic issues. The flow has turned more stable in recent years.

**Figure 5: Net migration and personal remittance in Burundi, 2010-2023**



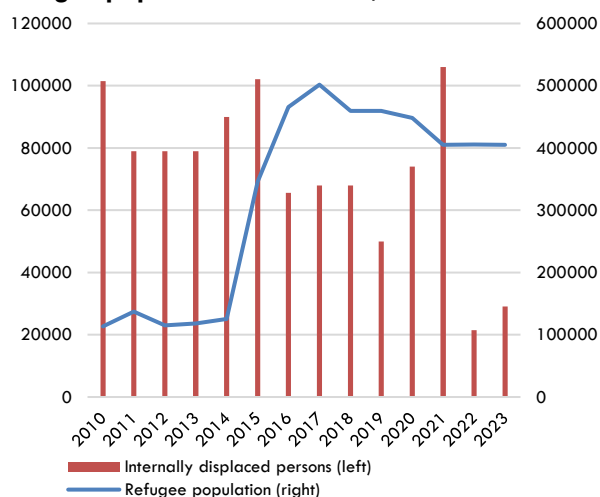
Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators.

**Another remarkable progress is the fast growth in the inflow of personal remittances** (see Figure 5 above). This latter trend could impact Burundi's socio-economic development, as sectors could benefit from diaspora investment, technology, and skills to boost productivity. On the other hand, **it triggers brain drain, which is becoming a growing**

**concern in Burundi.** It refers to the emigration of skilled professionals, such as doctors, engineers, academics, and entrepreneurs, in search of better opportunities abroad.

Figure 6 below visualises **Burundi’s experience of an upsurge in internally displaced persons (IDPs), mainly from disasters in recent years.** These factors complicate many workers’ ability to make a living and face job insecurity, lower income, poor working conditions, and increased poverty (see more in the Climate Change effect section).<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 6: Internally displaced persons and refugee population in Burundi, 2010-2023**



Note: Internally displaced persons include both from conflict/violence and disasters. Refugees include population by country of asylum and origin.  
Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators.

Burundian IDPs face numerous challenges in integrating and reintegrating into the labour market. **They often struggle with limited access to skills and education, and many IDPs lack essential documentation (ID cards, education certificates), which restricts access to formal employment and vocational programmes.** Other negative factors IDPs encounter are social stigma and discrimination, poor infrastructure and market access, and limited government support.

**Burundi also contends with the task of managing a significant population of refugees,** both Burundians abroad and refugees hosted within the country. This group is vast and rising (revisit Figure 6). Burundian refugees follow incidents of political unrest, particularly after the 2015 political crisis, civil conflict in the 1990s, and ethnic violence – hundreds of thousands of Burundians fled to neighbouring countries. The right to work for Burundian refugees depends on where they are and the host country’s policies. Burundi hosted around 86,000 refugees and asylum seekers in 2024, mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who resided in camps; some are in urban areas.<sup>17</sup> **These refugees encounter limited access to livelihoods or formal employment, and instead, heavy reliance on humanitarian aid.**

## Child Labour

**Child labour has several adverse effects on the labour market.** For instance, it provides a source of cheap labour, allowing employers to pay lower wages. This factor is often connected with a lack of decent wages and job opportunities, forcing families to rely on child labour for survival. These child labourers grow into unskilled adults and are likelier to remain in low-paying, unstable jobs.

**In Burundi, around 42% of the population is 0-14 years old, and this segment is growing fast.** The minimum age for employment is set at 16 years, and it is included in the Labour Code and the Ministerial Ordinance to Regulate Child Labour. For hazardous work, the minimum age is set at 18 years. It is worth mentioning that the enforcement of these regulations faces difficulties due to limited resources and the prevalence of informal employment. The compulsory education age in Burundi is 12 years, which is lower than the minimum

employment age, potentially leaving a gap where children might be vulnerable to labour exploitation.

**The Burundian government took steps to address child labour**, such as the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons for 2023–2027, which includes measures to combat child labour. Other initiatives via national coordinating institutions and school feeding programmes are also promoted. Challenges persist, though, such as policies that expel pregnant students hinder girls' education, increasing their vulnerability to child labour; the absence of guaranteed free basic education and a defined compulsory education age contributes to child labour; limited resources impede adequate labour inspections and criminal investigations related to child labour. Reports recorded that **the country has demonstrated minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.**<sup>18</sup>

The latest available data **registered that 31% of children (aged 5-17) were in child labour** in 2016/2017 in Burundi, which was at the high end among Eastern and Southern Africa, where the average is 28%.<sup>19</sup> This high child labour rate echoes the scale of how the labour market is not complying the laws and regulations. **Central factors stuck with persistent child labour in Burundi are linked with structural, economic, social, and institutional factors** such as widespread poverty, weak education system, cultural and social norms, lack of law enforcement and legal gaps, political and economic instability, rural dominance and informal economy, weak social protection systems, and massive migration and displacement flows. Child labour is more prevalent in rural areas, interlinking with Burundi's labour market landscape, which is dominated by the agricultural sector. These

child workers in farming face higher risks of exposure to harmful chemicals used in pesticides and fertilizers, raising concerns about their safety.

**The Burundi trade union movement is involved in eliminating child labour.** For example, the Union of Education Workers of Burundi (STEB) promotes a project that facilitates the return of over 400 children to school in the Gihanga commune. The initiative involved training, awareness campaigns, and remedial classes to support reintegration.

## Gender

Gender shapes labour market dynamics, affecting employment opportunities, wages, job security, and economic growth. **Burundi has demonstrated a political commitment to promoting gender equality through various legislative measures, policy frameworks, and institutional initiatives.** However, the country's laws and regulations around the life cycle of a working woman score 53 out of 100 (100 is best) in 2024, lower than the regional average across sub-Saharan Africa at 57. They still encounter a significantly lower ranking on several indicators, such as childcare and entrepreneurship (see more details in Appendix Table 7).<sup>20</sup>

At the policy level, there is a 30% gender quota for women's representation in governmental positions. Also, **multiple National Action Plans (NAPs), including the latest 2022–2027, emphasise promoting women's participation in decision-making, strengthening legal frameworks to prevent violence against women, and enhancing economic recovery programs for women.**

**Burundian men and women have an equally high employment-to-population ratio of**

**78%, which is linked to the dominance of the agricultural sector and high poverty.** Average hourly earnings for Burundian men were 18% higher than women's. Notably, women constitute approximately 55% of the workforce as an impact of the civil war (1993–2005), which led to significant male casualties. The underrepresentation of women in manufacturing can be attributed to limited access to relevant education and training, cultural norms, and fewer sectoral employment opportunities. Table 1 below shows the status of employed gender gaps in Burundi.

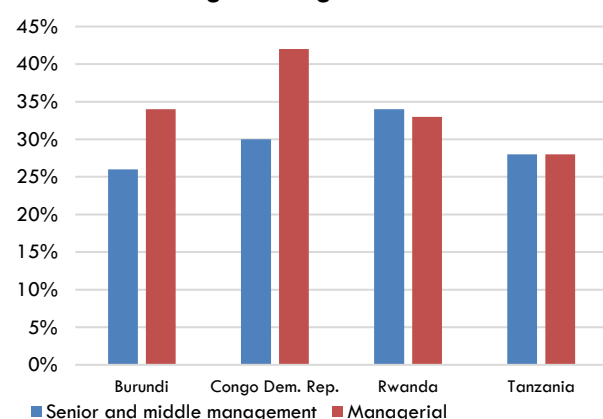
**Table 1: Key indicators for employed gender gaps in Burundi, 2020**

	Men	Women
Employment-to-population ratio	78%	78%
Employment share	45%	55%
Unemployment rate	1.1%	1.0%
Employees rate	21%	9.3%
Self-employed rate	79%	91%
Employers rate	1.9%	0.6%

Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT; The World Bank, World Development Indicators.

**Burundian women are taking some steps forward in the formal sector.** This is, among other things, reflected by the rising proportion of women in managerial positions, superseding several neighbouring countries (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Proportion of women in senior, middle management, and managerial positions in Burundi and neighbouring countries**



Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT.

On a broader view, the **global Gender Inequality Index ranked Burundi 132 out of 172 countries (1 is best) in 2023.** The country scores relatively well on the share of seats in parliament and the relatively low adolescent birth rate, while poor concerning the high maternal mortality ratio and the gender gap in the population with at least some secondary education.

To contribute to bridging the gender gaps in the labour market, **COSYBU and AEB have successfully set up a joint gender committee to spearhead gender inclusion among their affiliates and related workplaces,** hoping that the government will integrate the joint commission down the line.

## Youth

**Youth plays a central role in shaping employment trends, productivity, and economic growth.** Burundi's population structure has a 'youth bulge'. In 2020, the youth (aged 15-24 years) accounted for a substantial portion of the working-age population, reaching 2.1 million or 33% of the total working-age population.<sup>21</sup>

**The country has enacted various laws and policies to support its youth, focusing on education, protection, and health.** However, effective implementation and addressing existing gaps remain critical to fully realising Burundian youth's rights and potential.

**In 2023, the country ranked 143rd out of 183 countries (1 is best) on the Global Youth Development Index, illustrating that they combat difficulties.**<sup>22</sup> Even some relatively well-functioning factors, like political and civic participation, still struggle with most other factors, such as security, well-being, equality, and education.

**The fast-growing workforce in Burundi is supported by at least 83,000 additional new young workers entering the labour market yearly.** The youth employment-to-population ratio has been growing, reaching 55%, leading to a highly competitive job market for young individuals.<sup>23</sup> If more youth enter the workforce early, it may signal that they are dropping out of school or are unable to access further education. This situation could impact long-term human capital development. The meagre poverty reduction also indicates that new jobs for the youth are mostly informal, low-paying, or precarious work.

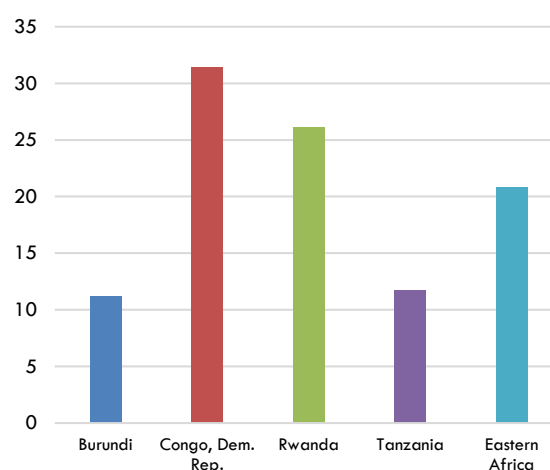
**A central challenge for many young Burundian people is their difficulties with the school-to-work transition,** which is caught by a combination of structural, economic, and social issues. As indicated, the formal job market is small, while the economy heavily relies on subsistence agriculture. Other influences are the mismatch between education and labour market needs, not to mention an underdeveloped private sector (see more in the Education and Training and Labour Market section).

**Active youth workers are mostly among informal workers or short-term labour contractors, sidelining their access to social insurance.** These groups are challenged by inadequate training and career opportunities. The high poverty rate pushes many Burundian youngsters into labour to support the family income, or, as stated differently, most cannot afford to become economically inactive in the labour market.

The not-in-education, employment, or training (NEET rate) better indicates the extent of barriers facing young people in the labour market than the unemployment rate does. **Burundi's NEET rate is 11%, the lowest**

**among the neighbouring countries** (see more in Figure 8). Burundi's NEET rate has no gender gap. The relatively low NEET rate is instead linked with high poverty, economic instability, and post-conflict challenges.

**Figure 8: Proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment or training in Burundi and other neighbouring countries, %, 2020**



Source: International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT.

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND THE LABOUR MARKET

Education and training connection to the labour market refers to the relationship between the education system, vocational training programmes, and the market's needs. It highlights how education and skills development prepare individuals to meet employers' demands, improve employability, and support economic growth.

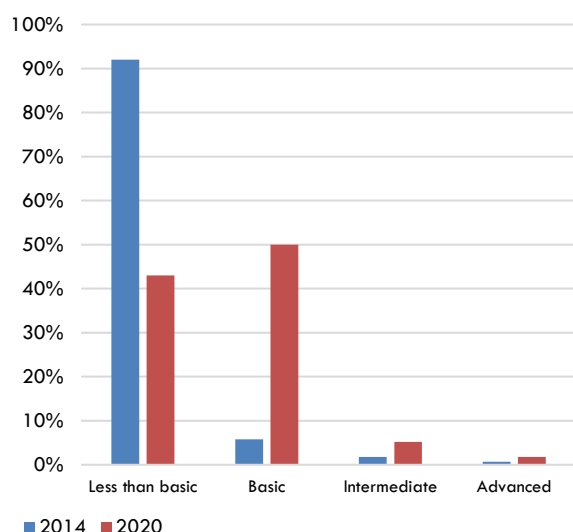
Burundi's education system is structured into primary, secondary, and higher education, with ongoing efforts to improve access and quality despite challenges. **Education reforms have focused on universal primary education and increasing secondary school enrolment.** There are also initiatives to improve teacher training, curriculum modernisation, and expand

technical and vocational training to address job market demands. **Some progress is echoed in Burundi's youth literacy rate, reaching 94% in 2022 and hovering significantly above the sub-Saharan Africa of 79%.<sup>24</sup>**

**A series of educational factors are influencing the labour market in Burundi,** including many graduates who lack the practical skills required in the job market due to an education system that emphasises theory over technical and vocational training. **The labour market especially encounters a shortage of skilled engineering, healthcare, and technology professionals.<sup>25</sup>** Even educated workers often earn low salaries, leading to brain drain as skilled professionals seek better opportunities abroad.

**Some notable shifts in employment by education are that many workers with less than basic education group moved towards basic education.** Those at intermediate and advanced levels also grew but remained underdeveloped (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Burundi's employment by education is becoming better at the basic level**



Source: Burundi Living Standards Survey; International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT.

Some of Burundi's education sector challenges are that schools often face shortages of teachers, textbooks, and facilities; French is the primary language of instruction, but many students primarily speak Kirundi; females still face barriers in completing higher education, which are rooted in social, economic, and cultural factors. For instance, **many Burundian youths do not complete secondary education due to early marriage (especially for girls) or family responsibilities.** Those without qualifications are facing more disadvantages in a job-scarce economy. Finally, few structured programmes connect education with real work experience in Burundi, making it hard for youth to build the kind of resume or network needed to land a job.

**Burundi's trade union movement plays a role in advocating for the rights and welfare of teachers, improving working conditions, and influencing education policies.** Some impacts of trade unions on the education sector are concentrated in negotiating better wages, allowances, and working conditions for teachers; pushing for better infrastructure, classroom resources, and teacher training; promoting discussions with the government to shape educational reforms and policies; support teachers fight unfair dismissals, contract violations, and other employment-related issues. However, Burundi's government sometimes limits union activities, affecting their bargaining power, and many unions struggle with financial constraints, limiting their effectiveness. Even when unions negotiate better conditions, implementation remains slow or ineffective.

## Vocational Training

**A legal and policy framework supports Burundi's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system.** It is

divided into formal and non-formal schemes involving ministries and private actors. The formal TVET system is linked with the National Qualifications Framework, which was adopted in February 2020, defining the training levels of the education system. **However, since the country has a dominating informal economy, the vocational training activities provided are often not documented.**<sup>26</sup>

**Central TVET indicators deliver improvements in Burundi;** for instance, the proportion of 15–24-year-olds enrolled in vocational education grew from 0.6% in 2010 to 2.6% in 2019, double as high as the sub-Saharan Africa average of 1.3%. Another central factor is that **Burundian firms offering formal training have delivered a relatively high rate.** They still represent a tiny segment of the dominance of informal micro and small enterprises. Additionally, many TVET graduates often lack entrepreneurship skills and access to capital, making it hard to start businesses.

**Some progress in Burundi's TVET system concerns an expansion of TVET institutions,** including specialised TVET schools in agriculture, construction, mechanics, and information and communications technology (ICT). Policy and government reforms are launched. Curriculum modernisation and digital skills training are emerging in renewable energy, tourism, and industrial maintenance to meet evolving industry demands. But the TVET system still faces limited funding for equipment and modern training facilities; a shortage of qualified trainers and instructors in technical fields; low public perception of TVET compared to general academic education; mismatch between skills taught and labour market demands, requiring stronger industry collaboration.<sup>27</sup>

## SOCIAL PROTECTION AND THE LABOUR MARKET

Social protection and the labour market are closely connected, as social protection programmes play a central role in enhancing the well-being of workers, promoting job security, and reducing poverty.

**Burundi's social protection system aims to reduce poverty, support vulnerable populations, and improve access to essential services.** This system functions with programmes for workers and vulnerable populations, which the government and public institutions primarily manage. Here are the central social insurance programmes:

- **The National Social Security Institute (INSS)** covers formal sector employees and provides old-age pensions, survivors' benefits, disability benefits, and work injury insurance.
- **Mutuelle de la Fonction Publique (MFP)** is for public-sector employees who need health insurance and family benefits, such as maternity benefits and allowances for dependents.
- **Universal Health Coverage** is in progress, with plans to expand health coverage through universal health programmes, including free healthcare for pregnant women and children under five and subsidised medical services for low-income people.
- **Community-based health insurance schemes** are voluntary health insurance schemes aimed at informal workers and rural populations. They function through collective contributions and provide access to basic healthcare services.
- **Social Assistance programmes**, such as cash transfers, food aid, and nutrition Programmes, are targeted at those who do not qualify for formal social insurance.

**The social protection system mainly covers formal sector workers, excluding the informal workforce.** Since over 90% of total employment is in informality, most Burundian workers lack access to social security benefits. These circumstances are visualised by the fact that the country has one of the world's highest poverty rates of 62%, and this rate is only meagrely falling. The stance of the Burundian population covered by social protection services is pictured in Table 2, exemplifying **an underdeveloped linkage between these services and the labour market.** This scope is similar for other Eastern African countries.

**Table 2: Proportion of population covered by social protection services in Burundi, %, 2021/22**

Indicator	Value
Population covered by at least one social protection benefit	16%
Persons above retirement age receiving a pension	13%
Persons with severe disabilities collecting disability social protection benefits	5.7%
Unemployed receiving unemployment benefits	0%
Mothers with newborns receiving maternity benefits	0.4%
Employed covered in the event of work injury	6.3%
Children/households receiving child/family cash benefits	20%
Poor persons covered by social protection systems	4.7%
Vulnerable persons covered by social assistance	12%

Source: International Labour Organisation, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM)*.

**The social protection sector faces financial hurdles because of limited domestic funding via tax collection.** It is also affected by most employers dominating informal micro and small enterprises, evading social security contributions, leaving workers unprotected.

Finances have instead heavy reliance on external assistance. Another blindsided factor is that many workers are unaware of their social protection rights or lack incentives to enter the formal social protection system.

On the positive side, **the trade union movement collectively strengthens social protection mechanisms by advocating for workers' rights and providing training and capacity-building opportunities.** It is also worth mentioning that Burundi's current health expenditure is relatively higher than the average in sub-Saharan Africa. They have further demonstrated progress on central health indicators, such as rapid growth in life expectancy and pointed drops in mortality rates for maternal and children.

Burundi's demographic landscape is characterised by a predominantly young population, with **a relatively small proportion of elderly individuals.** Projections suggest that the proportion of individuals aged 60 and over is expected to remain relatively stable at about 4% of the population. The pension system provides financial support to individuals during retirement, in cases of disability, and their survivors. Only 13% of persons above retirement age receive a pension, and in most cases, it is extremely low.

Other deficiencies of the social insurance system include the fact that if Burundian workers become unemployed, **they have no chance of receiving unemployment benefits.** Also, **extremely few mothers with newborns receive maternity benefits** (revisit Table 2). These factors reconfirm that Burundi's labour market has a dysfunctional formal social insurance system.

**Informal social protection instead plays a central role in supporting vulnerable**

**populations, particularly in rural areas and among informal workers.** These groups rely more on traditional community-based support networks to cope with economic hardships, illness, and other risks. For example, extended family networks and remittances from relatives; community-based organisations and mutual aid groups; religious and faith-based support; traditional solidarity mechanisms; informal credit and loan systems; community-led disaster response. However, this informal social protection encounters limited financial sustainability, exclusion risks (e.g., marginalised groups), and a lack of legal recognition.

## KEY FACTORS THAT FORM THE LABOUR MARKET LANDSCAPE

Cross-cutting issues notably affect the labour market when intersecting with various economic, social, and environmental dimensions, impacting workers and employers across multiple sectors. In Burundi, prominent topics influencing the labour market include the impact of the informal economy, digital transformation, climate change, and green jobs.

### Impact of the informal economy

The informal economy plays a dual role in labour markets – providing employment opportunities and creating challenges related to wages, worker protections, and economic stability.

**The informal economy dominates Burundi's labour market, with a vacuum in legal protection for informal workers.** Formal contractual employment catches just a minor group of workers, sidelining income taxes, collective bargaining agreements, and access to social security schemes. A central reason is that around 85% of Burundi's workforce is in

subsistence agriculture, and a more modern industrialised economy remains underdeveloped.

**Burundian informal workers make up over 90% of all workers.**<sup>28</sup> Due to the limited availability of formal jobs, most Burundians rely on small-scale businesses, agriculture, street vending, and informal services to earn a living. While informal work provides income, it often lacks job security and is sidelined by the industrial relations dispute system.

**A central challenge in Burundi is creating jobs in the formal sector.** Still, most new jobs are still generated in the informal economy, undermining workers' rights. High poverty and no access to unemployment benefits also make informal and casual work the only option for survival.

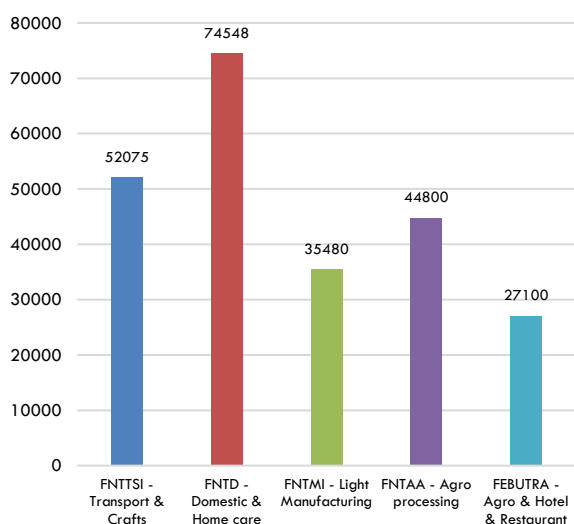
**The dominance of informal micro- or small enterprises (MSEs) in Burundi thwarts the tax system.** These MSEs mainly operate outside the labour regulations, including very little regulation regarding tax registration for informal MSE-scale retail businesses. This panorama supplementary stymies government revenues, hollowing out the financial capacity for public social services such as education, health, and social protection.

**Low education levels in Burundi have kept many workers in informality.** Although some positive shifts in employment due to education are noted (revisit Figure 9), they remain weak at the intermediate and advanced levels. Many Burundians who become better educated cannot find decent formal jobs, leading to emigration with a costly “brain drain.”

**Organising workers from the informal economy is in progress,** mainly among drivers, street vendors, hairdressers, construction

workers, domestic workers, and agricultural workers. This group rose from 32,000 members in 2013 to 234,000 in 2024.<sup>29</sup> **There are five central federations, representing organised workers from the informal economy** (Figure 10), out of which 35% are women. By affiliating informal workers, they gain greater membership and legitimacy, enhance their influence in policy negotiations, deliver social protections, build organisational capacity, and strengthen ties with global trade union networks. However, **challenges continue for these central federations**, such as lack of legal recognition for informal workers, fragmentation and diversity of informal work, financial constraints by earning very low that makes union dues unaffordable or inconsistent, unawareness of workers' rights, government and employer recognition of informal worker unions is weak that leads to excluded from national tripartite social dialogue platforms, not to mention many informal workers are women facing multiple layers of marginalisation.

**Figure 10: Trade union federations representing organised workers from the informal economy in Burundi, 2024**



Source: DTDA SRO Eastern Africa data collection tool.

To address the informality issue, COSYBU has committed five out of its six federations solely

tasked with organising and defending the informal economy workers, **and this has pushed its membership to reach a 330,000 milestone, with over 70% from the organised workers from the informal economy sector.**

**Establishing a Tripartite National Informal Economy Forum is ongoing in Burundi**, and several policy measures have been adopted to promote formalisation. An informal economy regulating bill has been in the pipeline for several years due to a lack of political will by authorities.

The government promotes implementing livelihood programmes and assistance, providing employment opportunities, and identifying measures to address the root causes of informality among workers. **The scope of these livelihood assistance programmes has been relatively high in Burundi compared with the Eastern Africa average**; for instance, vulnerable persons covered by social assistance reached 12% in 2022, while regionally, it stands at 8% (revisit Table 2).<sup>30</sup>

### Climate change effect and the just transition agenda

**Climate change is reshaping Burundi's workforce and labour market, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, health, and construction.** With approximately 85% of the population relying on agriculture, climate disruptions – such as droughts, floods, and soil degradation – significantly impact employment opportunities, productivity, and income levels. It is also one of the most densely populated countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

During the last decade, almost 270,000 people in Burundi became newly internally displaced due to disasters.<sup>31</sup> Other estimations suggest that **the effects of drought and floods resulted**

**in big economic losses.**<sup>32</sup> It is important to realise that climate change trends are expected to increase the frequency and intensity of floods and droughts, threatening the country's water availability and food security, which is already extremely fragile.

As mentioned, **agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for most Burundians, and it depends on climatic conditions.** The expected impacts of climate change negatively affect food security and rural livelihoods. Some of the leading climate change factors that challenge the labour market are related to job losses in agriculture. It makes farming and income less reliable and pushes workers to migrate or shift to precarious urban work, such as petty trade or domestic labour. **A near-future risk is overcrowded metropolitan areas, increasing pressure on limited decent job opportunities.** In addition, higher temperatures and extreme weather increase heat stress, dehydration, and disease exposure among outdoor workers. Food shortages due to climate-related crop failures increase malnutrition, weakening the workforce.

Burundi has developed several climate change policies and strategies to address its vulnerability to global warming and environmental degradation. Although these policies focus on adaptation, mitigation, and sustainable development, **they do not fully consider climate action with job security, ensuring that workers in traditional sectors are supported through skills training, green job creation, and social protection programmes.** In addition, the widespread informal economy creates deep loopholes in implementing climate change policies and strategies.

The National Committee on Climate Change (CNCC) in Burundi is a central body for

coordinating and overseeing climate change policies and strategies. **This institution is not tripartite nor includes any workers' representatives,** but COSYBU has made some inroads to lobby for social partners integration, and a draft Memorandum of Understanding with the ministry in charge of environment is underway.

A Just Transition agenda has not yet been prioritised within Burundi's policy framework. In September 2023, **the African trade union movement launched a declaration statement setting out ten demands for the Just Transition agenda** (see details in Appendix Table 8).

### **Fourth industrial revolution is reshuffling the labour market**

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is disrupting the labour market worldwide. Job displacement and gains due to digitisation are becoming more urgent, and upskilling and retooling are putting pressure on the TVET system. **Burundi actively engages with the 4IR by focusing on capacity building, digital infrastructure, and renewable energy initiatives.** Some of the positive influences of the 4IR are linked with emerging job creation in tech and digital sectors. Also, digital tools evolving to help businesses and industries, upskilling and reskilling of the workforce, including TVET programmes, are being adjusted to prepare the workforce for technology-driven industries.

**The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry is emerging in Burundi,** with companies like 2Max Group offering services such as data entry, customer support, and digital marketing. However, **revenue in this industry remains very low** at about US\$1.1

million in 2024, and this sector remains underdeveloped (see more ahead).<sup>33</sup>

**Despite these positive efforts, challenges persist in grasping the 4IR.** The country has one of the lowest urbanisation rates in the world. Only about 11% of the population had access to the internet, attributed to high costs, limited infrastructure, and a cautious approach to liberalising the telecommunications sector. As a result, it has stalled the development of the gig economy, which is characterised by short-term contracts and freelance work facilitated through digital platforms. Thus, **the gig economy remains in its nascent stages in Burundi.** In contrast, this evolving phenomenon has seen significant growth across Africa, surpassing many other regions.<sup>34</sup> **The country's overall digital readiness is low, with the 2024 Network Readiness Index ranking Burundi 132nd out of 133 economies.** Specifically, the prevalence of the gig economy in Burundi is ranked 89th, indicating limited engagement in gig-based work.<sup>35</sup>

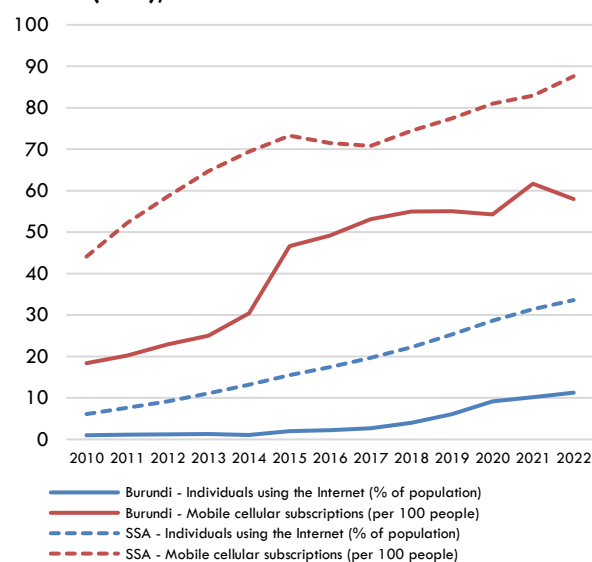
**Burundi's workforce remains concentrated in agriculture, linked with small-scale subsistence farming, which contributes to the digital divide and limited internet access.** Without adequate upskilling programmes, Burundian workers in manual and routine jobs could lose their opportunity to enter the 4IR. As indicated, the high cost of internet and ICT infrastructure remains a significant barrier.

Underdevelopment at the higher education levels haunts a mismatch between education and labour market needs. **Many graduates lack practical digital and technical skills, which could most likely lead to a rising number of youth not in education,**

**employment, or training (NEET rate) in Burundi.** This could further challenge the demand for a digitally skilled workforce. Generally, strong collaboration between educational institutions and industries still needs to align training with job market needs.

As indicated, **internet users and mobile cellular subscription applications have low coverages** (see more in Figure 11). These low penetrations rates limit digital businesses and online services, restricting innovation and economic diversification opportunities. It further reduces young people's ability to acquire digital skills essential for modern employment. Other considerations are that students and educators have limited access to online learning materials and platforms, hindering the quality of education. It also brings information gaps, affecting citizens' awareness of social, political, and economic developments, not to mention e-government limitations.

**Figure 11: Individuals using the Internet (% of population) and mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people) in Burundi and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), 2010-2022**



Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators.

## APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL DATA

**Table 3: Legal reservations in Burundi concerning the rights to organise, collective bargaining, and strikes**

<b>Right to organise</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior authorisation or approval by authorities required for the establishment of a union.</li> <li>• Restrictions on the right to elect representatives and self-administer in full freedom.</li> <li>• Excessive representativity or minimum number of members required for the establishment of a union.</li> <li>• Article 14 of the Labour Code excludes state officials and judges from the scope of its protections.</li> <li>• Administrative authorities' power to unilaterally dissolve, suspend or de-register trade union organisations.</li> <li>• Public sector unions may only join federations or confederations of public servants.</li> <li>• Workers under the age of 18 years may not join a trade union without the express consent of their parents or guardians.</li> </ul>
<b>Right to collective bargaining</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bargaining on wages in the public sector is not permitted.</li> <li>• Restrictions on the duration, scope of application or coverage of collective agreements.</li> <li>• There is no provision in the Labour Code establishing a legal mechanism by which a representative trade union can compel an employer to enter collective bargaining negotiations with it.</li> <li>• Barriers to the recognition of collective bargaining agents, including, among others, a collective agreement is subject to approval by the Minister of Labour, as well as absence of criteria or discretionary, unclear or unreasonable criteria for determining representative organisations.</li> </ul>
<b>Right to strike</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Previous authorisation or approval by authorities required to hold a lawful strike.</li> <li>• Restrictions with respect to the objective of a strike (e.g. industrial disputes, economic and social issues, political, sympathy and solidarity reasons).</li> <li>• Undue restrictions for "public servants".</li> <li>• Undue interference by authorities or employers during a strike.</li> <li>• Excessive civil or penal sanctions for workers and unions involved in non-authorised strike actions.</li> <li>• Discretionary determination or excessively long list of "services of public utility" in which a minimum operational service is can be imposed in the event of strikes.</li> <li>• Unreasonable or discretionary (i.e. without negotiation with social partners or absence of an independent authority in the event of disagreement) determination of the extent of the "minimum service" to be guaranteed during strikes in public services.</li> <li>• Absence of an independent body responsible for declaring whether a strike is legal or not.</li> </ul>

Source: International Trade Union Confederation, *Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights, Burundi: Legal*, April 2025.

**Table 4: Status of ratified ILO Conventions in Burundi**

Subject and/or right	Convention	Ratification date
<b>Fundamental Conventions</b>		
Freedom of association and collective bargaining	C087 - Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, 1948	1993
	C098 - Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949	1997
Elimination of all forms of forced labour	C029 - Forced Labour Convention, 1930	1963
	C105 - Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957	1963
Effective abolition of child labour	C138 - Minimum Age Convention, 1973	2000
	C182 - Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999	2002
Elimination of discrimination in employment	C100 - Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951	1993
	C111 - Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958	1993
Occupational safety and health	C155 - Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981	Not ratified
	C187 - Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006	Not ratified
<b>Governance Conventions</b>		
Labour inspection	C081 - Labour Inspection Convention, 1947	1971
	C129 - Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969	Not ratified
Employment policy	C122 - Employment Policy Convention, 1964	Not ratified
Tripartism	C144 - Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976	1997
<b>Technical Conventions (Up-to-date)</b>		
Working time	C014 - Weekly Rest (Industry) Convention, 1921	1963
Wages	C094 - Labour Clauses (Public Contracts) Convention, 1949	1963
Industrial relations	C135 - Workers' Representatives Convention, 1971	1979

Source: International Labour Organization, NORMLEX, Burundi, April 2025.

**Table 5: Scores for Labour Rights Index's legislative performance indicators for Burundi, 2024**

Fair wages	Decent Working Hours	Employment Security	Family Responsibilities	Maternity at Work	Safe Work	Social Security	Fair Treatment	Child & Forced Labour	Freedom of Association	Index score
80	100	60	25	40	100	80	60	100	75	72

Note: Overall scores are calculated by taking the average of each indicator, with 100 representing the highest possible score.

Source: WageIndicator.org & Centre for Labour Research, Labour Rights Index 2024: Burundi.

**Table 6: Burundi's key workforce data, 2020**

Indicator	Value
Working Age Population	6,371,400
Labour force participation rate	78%
Unemployment rate	1.0%
Employed share	
<i>Urban</i>	8.9%
<i>Rural</i>	91%
<i>Public</i>	2.9%
<i>Private</i>	97%
Employed by aggregated sector share	
<i>Agriculture</i>	85%
<i>Industry</i>	3.1%
<i>Service</i>	12%

Source: Burundi Labour Force Survey 2020.

**Table 7: Burundi – Legal framework scores for women, business and the law, 2024**

Safety	Mobility	Workplace	Pay	Marriage	Parenthood	Childcare	Entrepreneurship	Assets	Pension
50	75	50	100	50	50	0	25	50	75

Source: The World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2024*.

**Table 8: The main demands of the African trade unions in the declaration statement calling for the Just Transition agenda, 2023**

<b>Main demands in the declaration statement calling for the Just Transition agenda</b>
1. Decent work and quality jobs: Trade unions insist on the creation of quality jobs as part of climate change policies. They demand that these jobs uphold labour rights and prioritise decent working conditions for all. This includes investments in skills development and training for workers to adapt to emerging green industries.
2. Social protection: Workers adversely affected by climate change must benefit from social protection measures, including income support, access to health care, education, and training to facilitate their professional reorientation. Trade unions are committed to protecting the most vulnerable workers and communities from the potential impacts of climate policies.
3 Worker Participation: Workers must be involved in the development and implementation of climate-related policies and projects, as they have valuable insights into the realities of their industries and communities.
4. Community Engagement: Local communities and stakeholders must be involved in decision-making on climate initiatives. Priority should be given to investment in sustainable infrastructure, green technologies and community resilience.
5 Gender equity: Trade unions demand that gender considerations be integrated into climate policies, recognising that women are often the most affected by the effects of climate change. They call for the empowerment of women through training, leadership and gender-sensitive policies.
6. Investment in green jobs: Trade unions call for substantial investment in green technologies, renewable energy and sustainable agriculture. They believe this investment will boost economic growth, create jobs and help preserve the environment.
7. Labour rights and just transition plans: Trade unions demand that labour rights be enforced and upheld in the context of climate policies, including the right to organise and the right to collective bargaining. Comprehensive just transition plans must be developed to outline pathways for affected workers and communities through the transition period.
8. Reskilling and Upskilling: Trade unions call for reskilling and upskilling programmes to equip workers with the skills needed for the transition to green industries by adapting to the needs of the labour market.
9. Support for impacted industries: The industries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change policies should be given targeted support and resources to help them transform their operations while safeguarding jobs.
10. Transparency and accountability: Trade unions call for transparency in the allocation of resources and the distribution of benefits resulting from climate initiatives. They also call for accountability mechanisms to be put in place to hold stakeholders accountable for meeting their just transition commitments.

Source: ITUC-Africa, Africa Climate Summit: African trade unions call for a just transition.

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