

**CALL FOR INPUTS**  
**2025 REPORT OF THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**  
**(HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL RESOLUTION 47/21)**

Submitted by  
**AFRICAN FUTURES LAB**  
[www.afalab.org](http://www.afalab.org)

## Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Historical context.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Recognition and reparation measures implemented by the Belgian State.....</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1. Existing measures.....	5
3.2. Observed shortcomings.....	6
a) Failure to take into account the experience of Congolese, Burundian and Rwandan mothers.....	6
b) The Belgian State's separation of Métis located in former colonies.....	7
c) Absence of concrete reparation measures beyond symbolic apologies.....	8
d) Difficult access to the Belgian territory and nationality.....	8
e) Absence of access to healthcare.....	8
<b>4. Belgian State condemned for crimes against humanity.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>5. Recommendations for fair and effective reparation policies.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>6. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>10</b>

## 1. Introduction

This contribution examines how Belgium addressed one aspect of its colonial history: the systematic abduction and placement of *'Métis'*<sup>1</sup> children born to an African mother and a European father during the colonial period in its three former colonies (the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Rwanda) between 1885 and 1962. The contribution is based on the research report issued by African Futures Lab in April 2024, ["70 Years of Fighting for Justice and Reparations! Mobilizations by "Métis" People from the Great Lakes Abducted by the Belgian Colonial Administration"](#)

We analyze in this contribution the various measures of recognition and reparation taken by the Belgian state at local, regional and national level, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of these measures concerning both the Métis children of colonization and their mothers. In particular, this contribution demonstrates the lack of intersectional analysis on the part of the Belgian state in its recognition and reparation policies, given the failure to take account of the experiences of African mothers. The submission further examines the recognition and reparation measures implemented by the Belgian state at various levels, including local, regional, and national. It also assesses the effectiveness of these measures for both the affected children and their mothers. In particular, this contribution demonstrates the lack of intersectional analysis in the Belgian state's recognition and reparation policies, given the failure to take account of the experiences of African mothers.

This contribution also demonstrates the need for recognition of policies linked to colonial history, accompanied by concrete reparation measures, and the importance of efficient reparation policies, designed by and based on the experience of the victims of colonization.

While this submission focuses on a specific part of Belgian colonial history and its reparations policies, it outlines principles and guidelines that can be applied to other chapters of Belgium's colonial past.

Finally, this submission provides an outlook and concrete recommendations for just and effective reparations for the Métis children and their mothers.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term "Métis" is widely employed in the French-speaking world to refer to biracial people. Emmanuelle Saada, in her book *Les enfants de la colonie*, explains that the term *métis* was first used in the 17th century, when "(...) a lexicon was developed that borrowed from the theme of animal cross-breeding to describe the products of the meeting of populations in the New World: the most commonly used terms, 'métis', 'mulâtres' and 'sang-mêlé', are all constructed from this analogy." ( page 23)

In other words, the origins of the term *métis*, which was used during the colonial period, are racist. However, the term is commonly used and accepted in today's society, and moreover, it is how the individuals and organizations involved in the struggle we discuss in this report refer to themselves. For this reason, we use the term throughout this report, italicized to not lose sight of its contested nature. Outside of instances where individuals, groups, or institutions use the term to self-identify or to identify a person or persons born of mixed Black-white parentage, we use the term "biracial."

## 2. Historical context

The “Métis question,” as it is typically called by Belgian authorities, illustrates a central issue in Belgium's racial strategy in its colonies. The Belgian state considered that children born of an African mother and a European father represented a threat to the ideology of white supremacy. Consequently, the Belgian colonial administration proceeded with various measures of abduction, placement in religious institutions, and forced displacement of Métis children within the territory of the colonies and from the colonies to Belgium during the colonial period and at the time of Burundi, DRC, and Rwanda’s independence. While the exact number of people subjected to these criminal acts remains unknown, sources establish that by the end of the 1950s, thousands of *Métis* children had been abducted, the majority of whom were abandoned in the Great Lakes region at the time of independence.

Numerous studies have shown that Belgium’s colonial administration was based on a racist ideology that legitimized the exploitation and repression of colonized populations in the territories of Congo and Ruanda-Urundi.<sup>2</sup> Racial dichotomies such as "white/black" or "european/indigenous" were at the heart of the legislative provisions underpinning colonization, such as the 1908 Colonial Charter.<sup>3</sup> From the start of the colonial period, this racial ideology led to the establishment of specific rules for children born to a European father and a Congolese, Burundian, or Rwandan mother.<sup>4</sup> The existence of these children was perceived as a threat to the ideological foundations of colonial domination, which was based on the allegedly "natural" supremacy of the European race.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, their existence as individuals who belonged to neither of the two possible racial categories was a ‘source of complication in the day-to-day management of the colonial administration’, whose operations were based on the binary categorization of populations.<sup>6</sup>

After being removed from their families, the children were placed under state guardianship, known as "social paternity," and religious congregations and missions were financed by the state to receive them.<sup>7</sup> A 1892 decree authorized religious congregations to take in the children, and to give them a "European" education.<sup>8</sup> Several of these specialized institutions were created in the Great Lakes region during the Belgian colonial period, and biracial children were placed there after being taken away from their African families. On the eve of independence, between 1959 and 1962, three hundred children from the *Institut des mulâtres*<sup>9</sup> (Institute for “mulattoes”) in Save (Rwanda) along with others from neighboring institutions were once again displaced and shipped to Belgium by the Belgian colonial administration. After the children arrived in Belgium, a ministerial circular published on October 6,

---

<sup>2</sup> Gossiaux A., 2020, « L'Éducation permanente en lutte contre le racisme et la colonialité en Belgique francophone ? Perspectives autour de la persistance de la propagande coloniale et du racisme systémique en Belgique francophone : des enjeux et outils de décolonisation issus de secteurs socio-culturels et d'éducation permanente. », FUCID, page 5.

<sup>3</sup> Heynssens S., 2012, "Between two worlds", Revue d'histoire de l'enfance "irrégulière", OpenEditions Journals

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Virtual exhibition on the Belgian State Archives website, [Chronologie | Expo-Virtuelle \(arch.be\)](https://www.arch.be/en/chronologie), accessed on July 4th 2023

<sup>9</sup> The term “ mulatto”, was used routinely in the colonial period, and is today considered as racist. The report uses the word only in the names of entities that included the word.

1960, withdrew Belgian nationality from the children who had been brought to Belgium. Deeming most of the children illegitimate, the circular did not recognize them as Belgian.<sup>10</sup>

At independence, when Belgian colonial authorities withdrew from formerly colonized territories, they abandoned most of the children – the precise number remains unknown – in the institutions where they had been placed.

### 3. Recognition and reparation measures implemented by the Belgian State

Although the *Métis* cause has only become visible in the European public arena in recent years, it is important to note that political mobilization by this population began as early as the 1950s. The measures of recognition and reparation undertaken by the Belgian State described below are therefore the product of over 70 years of political and cultural mobilization by *Métis* children.

#### 3.1. Existing measures

In 2015, Belgian political bodies in both the Flemish- and French-speaking regions began to issue apologies to *Métis* people. Apologies were presented by the Flemish Parliament in 2015, followed by the Senate, the French Community Parliament, and the French-speaking Brussels Parliament in 2017. These bodies recognized the segregation and discrimination suffered by the *Métis* during the colonial period. In the religious sphere, the Belgian Catholic Church apologized in 2017. Two years later, on April 4, 2019, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel officially apologized to *Métis* children born during colonization to a Belgian father and an African mother, and who were victims of discrimination and segregation during and after the colonial period in the following terms:

*"The emotional abandonment experienced during childhood, uprooting, administrative difficulties and the need to assume a dual identity without knowing one's origins, have undoubtedly been a daily challenge and a real source of suffering. (...) I acknowledge the targeted segregation to which the Métis were subjected under the administration of the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi until 1962 and following decolonization, as well as the related policy of forced removals. On behalf of the Federal Government, I apologize to the Métis people of Belgian colonial origins and their families for the injustices and suffering they have endured."*<sup>11</sup>

The "*Métis* Resolution on the segregation suffered by *Métis* people since Belgian colonization in Africa"<sup>12</sup> was adopted on March 29, 2018, by the House of Representatives of the Belgian Federal Parliament. This resolution, which is a non-binding text, consists of eleven measures requested from the federal government. They include, among others:

- access to archives;

---

<sup>10</sup> Résolution relative à la ségrégation subie par les métis issus de la colonisation belge en Afrique, texte voté en séance plénière à la Chambre des représentants de Belgique, 2018 [54K29vel52007.indd \(lachambre.be\)](#), accessed on June 22nd 2023

<sup>11</sup> Article from Rtbf, 2019, [Charles Michel: 'Je présente mes excuses aux métis issus de la colonisation belge' - rtbf.be](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Résolution relative à la ségrégation subie par les métis issus de la colonisation belge en Afrique](#), accessed on June 22nd 2023

- recognition of Belgian nationality;
- collaboration on the part of Belgian embassies and diplomatic posts to ensure that *Métis* people of Belgian colonial origins can identify their biological parents;
- inclusion in history textbooks of the colonial crimes against *Métis* people during Belgian colonization;
- construction of a monument.

The resolution recognized *Métis* children as victims of colonization and called on the government to open an inquiry to repair past injustices through *moral and administrative means*.

In particular, the *Résolution Métis* provides access to the State archives, as well as to the archives of the Tervuren Museum, a process that was initiated in 2019.<sup>13</sup> Access to the archives is gradually being made possible by the research project resulting from the *Résolution Métis* at the Belgian State Archives. This project is divided into two phases. The first phase started in September 2019, and consists of building a database of the trajectories of the children, and of other available information on them. *Métis* people, their children, and grandchildren can request access to information about their family history. The second phase of the project, which started in February 2022, is a historical study of the responsibilities of the Belgian state and religious authorities in the fate of the *Métis* children. Both phases of the project are due to end in 2026.

### 3.2. Observed shortcomings

Despite the implementation of various legislative measures and symbolic declarations of recognition (apologies), several shortcomings have been identified.

#### a) Failure to take into account the experience of Congolese, Burundian and Rwandan mothers

Firstly, the experience of Congolese, Burundian, and Rwandan mothers has been largely overlooked. A significant shortcoming of the process initiated by the Belgian State is its failure to consider the experiences of mothers of *Métis* children, and to analyze them through an intersectional lens. Indeed, the African mothers of these *Métis* children are just as much victims of the removal imposed by the Belgian colonial administration. In instances where the administration did not forcibly remove children from their mothers, it lured them into relinquishing their parental authority over their children to the Belgian state.

---

<sup>13</sup> According to a member of the AMB, the collective transfer of the personal files of *Métis* of colonial origins previously held at the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren to the Belgian State's General Archives took place on March 12, 2019. The transfer was carried out under the authority of the Service Public de Programmation (SPP) Politique Scientifique. These files were thus transformed from collection items belonging to the museum into personal documents, with better privacy protection and easier access for *Métis* people born of Belgian colonization and their families. This transfer was made possible by a working group of AMB and AMR members.

Moreover, before experiencing colonial violence as mothers of Métis, these mothers also endured colonial violence as colonized black women and girls. The experience of black women and girls in the colonies is characterized by dual exposure to racial and gendered violence. A significant proportion of these women and girls functioned as "ménagères," a status assigned to colonized women, which rendered them not only domestic servants but also "concubines" for colonial agents.

Within the context of this relationship of domination, it was observed that for those who were able to give birth, the term "African mothers" in reality referred to young girls, sometimes barely 15 years old (or even younger), who were impregnated by colonial agents much older, aged of 58 years sometimes<sup>14</sup>. However, not all of them were lucky enough to be alive to give birth. It has been documented that some black women and girls pregnant with Métis children were murdered, sometimes by drowning, because the child they were carrying represented a threat to the colonial racial order<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, some of them faced violence for refusing to abandon their Métis children.

These experiences exemplify the pervasive gender-based and racial violence faced by colonized black girls and women, a reality that the Belgian state has thus far neither acknowledged nor addressed. To date, the Belgian government has not officially taken any steps to locate the surviving Burundian, Congolese, and Rwandan mothers or at least fully acknowledge their status as victims of colonization, whether deceased or alive. However, thanks to the efforts of our partners, notably the [Association des Enfants Belges Laissés au Congo](#) (AEBLC) and the Association des Métis des Grands Lacs (AMGL), and some searches, several Congolese, Burundian, and Rwandan mothers were found alive in 2024 and 2025. Aged over 80 years old, time is running out if their stories are to be heard and reparations made.

## **b) The Belgian State's separation of the Métis located in former colonies**

While the majority of Métis children are located in the former colonies, the Belgian state's official focus is on the Métis children who were forcibly displaced to Belgium and who represent a minority in terms of numbers. However, as our research report indicates, these two groups do not conceptualize the question of reparations in a similar manner, due to the difference in context and factors, particularly cultural and socio-economic.

The demands for reparations from these two groups differ significantly, yet the Belgian state has not demonstrated a commitment to addressing the long-standing demands of the Métis located in the former colonies.

---

<sup>14</sup> Arrêt Cour d'Appel de Bruxelles, 2022/AR/262, 2 décembre 2024

<sup>15</sup> Assumani BUDGAWA, Les rapports sociaux de sexe en contexte colonial belge révélé par la présence d'enfants "ni noirs, ni blancs", 2017.

**c) Absence of concrete reparation measures beyond symbolic apologies**

Although the Belgian state has issued multiple apologies regarding Métis children and African mothers within various levels of power, the matter of reparations remains unresolved and is being deliberately evaded. For instance, the text of the "Métis" resolution adopted in 2018 only mentions the term "repair" once and considers reparation only from a "moral and administrative"<sup>16</sup> perspective. Consequently, this resolution effectively precludes any other forms of reparation as envisaged by the Métis children of colonization and their mothers, be it financial for example..

**d) Difficult access to the Belgian territory and nationality**

We observe that Métis people located in the former colonies are unable to carry out DNA testing or archival research in Belgium to find their relatives or families, as stipulated in the resolution, due to the administrative complexities inherent in visa procedures. To date, no special visa arrangements have been made to facilitate their access to Belgian territory to conduct these procedures.

Moreover, the Métis residing in these former colonies, who are descended from Belgian fathers, have asserted their right to nationality. However, the Belgian state has yet to address this demand.<sup>17</sup>

**e) Absence of access to healthcare**

The Métis and their mothers, who are still alive, carry within them the trauma of the abductions of which they were victims. Physical and psychological medical support must be provided for the victims but is currently non-existent.

**f) Lack of adequate processing of acknowledgements of paternity of Métis children**

A thousand acknowledgements of paternity of Métis children from the colonial period by Belgian fathers have been found in 2024 in the Belgian archives<sup>18</sup>. To date, the number of acknowledgments relating to living Métis children is unknown, and no information is available on the outcome of this find. However, such a find once again raises the question of reparation, especially the right to Belgian nationality and all the rights attached to this nationality, of these officially recognized Métis children and de facto, their descendants.

---

<sup>16</sup> Résolution relative à la ségrégation subie par les métis issus de la colonisation belge en Afrique, texte voté en séance plénière à la Chambre des représentants de Belgique, 2018 [54K29veI52007.indd \(lachambre.be\)](#), accessed on June 22nd 2023

<sup>17</sup> "Réparation de la colonisation: des métis de RDC demandent le droit à la nationalité belge", RFI, 2024. [www.rfi.fr](http://www.rfi.fr)

<sup>18</sup> Colette Braeckman, "RD Congo : un millier de reconnaissances de paternité belge pour des enfants métis", 2024, [www.lesoir.be](http://www.lesoir.be)

#### 4. Belgian State condemned for crimes against humanity

The absence of concrete reparation measures for the Métis children of colonization is exemplified by the legal action initiated in 2020 by five Métis women against the Belgian state.

In June 2020, five Métis women living in Belgium took legal action<sup>19</sup> in Civil Court, demanding that the Belgian State pay reparations for the crimes they suffered, which they described as crimes against humanity. They also called out the fact that the 'Métis Resolution' and the Prime Minister's official apology completely ignored the issue of compensation for victims. After a first-instance judgment dismissing their claim on the grounds that the abduction and forced placement they endured were not recognized as crimes against humanity by the community of states at the time when it happened, the Brussels Court of Appeal finally acknowledged the Belgian State's responsibility and condemned the state for crimes against humanity in December 2024.

This ruling is a historic and a first in Europe. This decision highlights, beyond apologies, the importance of the right to reparations as defined by the United Nations General Assembly in 2005. While the Métis Resolution was limited to reparations 'by moral and administrative means', these five Métis women have succeeded in obtaining the reparations they considered necessary and appropriate for the harm they suffered during colonization.

---

<sup>19</sup> Find out more about the trial :

- [Because excuses are not enough - CBAI | African Futures \(mit.edu\)](#)
- [Belgium confronts its colonial past: the case of the mixed-race children and the qualification of a crime against humanity-J. Vervoort](#)
- [Belgian court dismisses five mixed-race women born in Congo \(lemonde.fr\)](#)
- [Five mixed-race women sue the Belgian state for crimes against humanity: 'They are living proof of an unconfessed state crime' - rtbf.be](#)

## 5. Recommendations for fair and effective reparation policies

The following recommendations are hereby proposed to achieve fair and efficient reparations for the Métis children of colonization and their African mothers.

1. Consider the demands for justice voiced by the African mothers and all the Metis people, especially the ones located in the DR Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda (the three former colonies)
2. Ideally, facilitate access to Belgian nationality for all Métis descendants of Belgian and their descendants located in the three former colonies and Belgium.
3. At least, facilitate access to visas (including humanitarian visas, for those who need them) for Métis people of Belgian origins living in the former colonies who wish to travel to Belgium, as well as those living in Belgium who wish to travel to Rwanda, the DRC, or Burundi.
4. Strengthen access to DNA testing for Métis people located in the three former colonies and Belgium.
5. Provide support and access to health care (physical and mental health) for all Métis people located in the three former colonies or Belgium.
6. Provide financial compensation for all victims: compensate the African mothers (from the DRC, Burundi, and Rwanda) from whom children were taken, as well as all Métis people born of Belgian colonization. The amount should be “commensurate” with the damage suffered, and determined in consultation with the affected people.
7. Teach the history of the Métis descendants of Belgian colonisation in Belgium and finance public education and remembrance policies in the three former colonies.

## 6. Conclusion

**In conclusion, Belgium has yet to adequately address its colonial past. The case of the Métis demonstrates the importance of symbolic recognition in conjunction with responsibility and concrete reparation. It also demonstrates the need to adopt a bottom-up approach, from the victims to the State, to adopt reparations measures based on the needs of the victims, and not on the political agendas at play at the time of their adoption. Finally, this case underscores the imperative for a comprehensive and nuanced examination of the victims of colonization’s experiences to formulate responses that adequately address their suffering.**