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1. Co-operation on Migration

According to the website of the Communauté économique des pays des grands lacs (CEPGL), which is composed of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and Burundi (Rwanda n.d.c.; *The New Times* 16 Nov. 2011), an arrangement to establish freedom of movement among the three member states for all citizens was first adopted in 1980 and amended in 2011 (CEPGL n.d.). Media articles indicate that migration officials of the three countries met to discuss policies on intra-CEPGL travel in 2009 (*Digital Congo* 19 June 2009; Radio Okapi 11 June 2009), 2010 (*ibid.* 20 Apr. 2010), and 2011 (*The New Times* 12 May 2011).

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, an official at the Embassy of Rwanda in Washington, DC, said that there is coordination at the borders between the immigration officials of Rwanda and the immigration officials of the other two countries (Rwanda 29 Feb. 2012). Similarly, the permanent executive secretary of the CEPGL said, in an interview with Radio Okapi, a UN radio station and news source in the DRC (n.d.), that the three countries cooperate on security issues, including the joint surveillance of shared borders (20 Apr. 2010).

The official at the Rwandan embassy in Washington also said that the border crossing process for Rwandan citizens travelling to Burundi and the DRC and for citizens of Burundi and the DRC travelling to Rwanda is the same (Rwanda 29 Feb. 2012).

2. Border-Crossing Conditions

Radio Okapi reports that, in April 2010, the La Corniche border crossing between Gisenyi, Rwanda, and Goma, RDC, became the first CEPGL border point to be open 24 hours a day (20 Apr. 2010). The Kigali-based English-language newspaper the *New Times* reported in May 2011 that the Nemba border crossing between Rwanda and Burundi would follow suit (12 May 2011). The official at the Embassy of Rwanda in Washington said in his 29 February 2012 telephone interview that the borders between East African Community member states [Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda (ORINFOR 19 July 2010)] were

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open 24 hours a day, although, in previous years, they used to close at night (Rwanda 29 Feb. 2012).

The Rwandan embassy official also indicated that undocumented migration or crossing the border at points other than border controls is illegal, but can occur (ibid.). Similarly, an article published by Uhaki News, the website of the Collective of Female Journalists (Collectif des Femmes Journalistes), a group of Congolese journalists supported by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (n.d.), states that the estimated 200 women a day who cross the border between Goma and Gisenyi are a [translation] "tiny" fraction of the total number of women who make the trip, the majority of whom cross illegally (18 Jan. 2012).

According to a travel report on the DRC published by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada in February 2012, DRC border points with Burundi and Rwanda, with the exception of the city of Bukavu, face "continuing insecurity and lawlessness" and borders can be closed "on short notice" (Canada 13 Feb. 2012). A travel report on Burundi from the same source in November 2011 indicates that "border security [near the DRC border] is still a concern given ... violent clashes ... and occasional cross-border movement by armed groups," and that closure of the border can occur "without notice" (ibid. 30 Nov. 2011).

3. General Admission Requirements

The official at the Rwandan embassy in Washington, DC, stated that citizens of the DRG and Burundi travelling to Rwanda are not required to be in possession of a passport if they are carrying a laissez-passer [see Section 4.1] (Rwanda 13 Mar. 2012). According to the website of the Rwanda Directorate General of Immigration and Emigration, citizens of Burundi and the DRC may enter Rwanda without a visa for stays of up to 90 days (ibid. n.d.d). The website also states that citizens of EAC member states may stay in Rwanda without a visa for up to six months (ibid. n.d.a). A news release published by ORINFOR, the Rwanda Bureau of Information and Broadcasting, Rwanda's state-owned media organization, which produces Radio Rwanda, Rwanda Television and two national newspapers (n.d.), indicates that the maximum length of stay for EAC citizens in any EAC member state was raised to six months from three months in July 2010 (19 July 2010). However, in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the official at the Embassy of Rwanda in Washington, DC, explained that the maximum length of stay for foreigners in Rwanda is determined by Rwanda's bilateral agreements with the traveller's country of origin, but added that the actual length of stay granted is at the discretion of the immigration officer at the border (Rwanda 29 Feb. 2012). The official explained that the immigration officer interviews travellers about the intended purpose and length of their trip in order to determine the permitted duration of their stay in the country (ibid.).

The official at the Embassy of Rwanda in Washington, DC, said that citizens of Rwanda were able to enter the DRC or Burundi with only a laissez-passer (ibid. 13 Mar. 2012). The website of the Ministry of the Interior and Security's Migration Directorate of the DRC indicates as well that, for citizens of adjacent countries that have existing migration arrangements with the DRC, it is possible to enter or leave the country without a visa or a passport, on the condition that the visitor is making a short trip, has proof of residence within the border zone, and obtains a laissez-passer travel document (DRC n.d.b). Information on Burundian admission requirements, in addition to that provided by the Rwandan embassy official in this paragraph and in Section 1, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Travel Documents other than Passports

4.1 Laissez-passer

According to the 2011 Law on Immigration and Emigration in Rwanda, a laissez-passer is a "travel document issued in lieu of [a] passport to any Rwandan wishing to travel to any of the countries in the subregion and in accordance with existing agreements among the countries" (Rwanda 2011a, Art. 2, No. 17). The law states that the laissez-passer is valid for travel to the DRC, Burundi, and the other EAC states (Rwanda 2011a, Art. 25). The laissez-passer costs 10,000 Rwandan francs (RWF) [C\$17 (XE 6 Mar. 2012a)] (*The New Times* 4 Jan. 2012; Rwanda 2011b, Annex A) and is valid for two years (*ibid.* n.d.b; *The New Times* 4 Jan. 2012). According to the *New Times*, machine-readable laissez-passer documents came into use in January 2012 (4 Jan. 2012). The previously issued versions of the laissez-passer, which were valid for one year and cost 3,000 RWF each [C\$5 (XE 6 Mar. 2012b)], will reportedly continue to be accepted until they expire (*The New Times* 4 Jan. 2012).

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the official at the embassy of Rwanda in Washington, DC, said that the laissez-passer is used more commonly than a passport for regional travel (Rwanda 29 Feb. 2012). The official explained that this is because laissez-passer documents are less expensive and take less time to obtain than passports, and, unlike passports, can be issued directly by the immigration division of each district office (*ibid.*). He also noted that Rwandan citizens who are already in possession of a passport, and therefore registered in the national database, are not eligible to obtain a laissez-passer (*ibid.*).

Sources also indicate that Rwanda issues a collective laissez-passer for people travelling as a group, primarily for social activities (*New Times* 4 Jan. 2012; Rwanda n.d.a). The Rwanda Development Board indicates on its website that the collective laissez-passer, which costs 10,000 RWF, was introduced by the Rwandan Law on Immigration and Emigration of 21 March 2011 (*ibid.*).

According to the website of the DRC Migration Directorate, there are five types of laissez-passer: individual, group, vehicle, special, and a laissez-passer replacing a passport (DRC n.d.c).

An article published by Panapress, the Pan African News Agency, indicated in March 2011 that the price of the laissez-passer in Burundi had been increased from 1,500 Burundian francs (BIF) [C\$1.15 (XE 6 Mar. 2012c)] to 35,000 BIF [C\$27 (*ibid.* 6 Mar. 2012d)] (Panapress 5 Mar. 2011). The same article indicated that the laissez-passer is used primarily by "ordinary citizens" who make daily trips between Burundi, Rwanda, and the DRC (*ibid.*). An article published by *Iwacu*, a Burundian French-language online newspaper, indicates that travel documents are issued by the Police for Air, Borders, and Foreigners (PAFE) (20 Sept. 2011). According to a representative of the PAFE interviewed by *Iwacu*, an average of 350 requests per day are received by the PAFE and the waiting period is one week, rather than the two days reportedly mandated by law (*Iwacu* 20 Sept. 2011).

4.2 Border Passes

According to the 2011 Law on Immigration and Emigration in Rwanda, a border pass can be issued to "persons living near the border ... to allow him/her to conduct daily cross-border activities in accordance with bilateral or multilateral agreements between Rwanda and neighbouring countries and regional organizations" (Rwanda 2011a, Art. 30). The border pass was reportedly introduced by the 2011 law and is issued free of charge (*ibid.* n.d.a). According to the official at the embassy of Rwanda in Washington, DC, border passes are temporary travel documents issued by immigration officials at border controls (*ibid.* 29 Feb. 2012). These passes permit entry into a neighbouring country for "a day or two, or no more than a week" for shopping and personal business purposes (*ibid.*). The official indicated that travellers who wish to obtain a border pass would most likely have to reside in the districts close to the border, and are also subject to an interview by an immigration officer at the border crossing (*ibid.*).

A news article published in March 2011 by the Rwanda News Agency, a non-governmental, Kigali-based newswire, reports that, at the Ruzizi II border crossing between Rwanda and the DRC [at Bukavu (DRC n.d.a)], Rwandan citizens from the Bugarama district adjacent to the border use their national identity cards to obtain border passes (Rwanda News Agency 4 Mar. 2011). The same source indicates that, according to a local immigration officer, Rwandans from other districts require a laissez-passer (ibid.).

According to the website of the Migration Directorate of the DRC, there are two types of border passes: *jeton de visite frontalière* [border visit token] and *jeton de marché frontalier* [border market token] (DRC n.d.c). Further information about these passes could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

4.3 CEPGL Travel Document

A Rwandan newspaper indicates that CEPGL countries use a common travel document, the CEPGL card (*The New Times* 10 May 2011). According to the 2011 Law on Immigration and Emigration in Rwanda, the document known as the *Autorisation spéciale de circulation CEPGL* (ASC/CEPGL), available to Rwandan nationals or foreigners with residence permits, allows travel to member states of the CEPGL (Rwanda 2011a, Art. 27). The website of the Rwanda Directorate General of Immigration and Emigration states that the ASC/CEPGL document costs 6,000 RFW [C\$10 (XE 6 Mar. 2012e)], allows travel for up to one month, and is renewable (Rwanda n.d.c). Applications, which are said to take one day to process, must be made in person at the headquarters of the Directorate General of Immigration and Emigration or at any district immigration office (ibid.). The official at the Embassy of Rwanda in Washington, DC, while acknowledging that he did not know much about it, indicated that the CEPGL document performs the same function as a laissez-passer (ibid. 29 Feb. 2012).

Two Congolese media sources indicated in 2009 that the CEPGL travel document would be available to citizens of all three CEPGL member states and that the validity period would be one year (*Digital Congo* 19 June 2009; Radio Okapi 11 June 2009). The Kinshasa-based online newspaper *Digital Congo* added that the CEPGL document would be used in conjunction with the traveller's national identity card; it noted, however, that numerous Congolese citizens do not possess a national identity card because they use their voter's card as an identity document (19 June 2009).

The website of the DRC Migration Directorate lists, in addition to the *Carte d'autorisation spéciale de circulation (CEPGL)*, a second CEPGL document known as the *Carte spéciale CEPGL* (n.d.c). Further information on this document could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Representatives of the embassies of Burundi in Ottawa and Washington, DC, and the High Commission of Rwanda in Ottawa were unable to provide information for this Response. An official at the embassy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Brussels was unable to provide information within the time constraints of this Response. Attempts to contact the embassies of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Ottawa and Paris, the embassies of Burundi in Brussels and Paris, and the Communauté Economique des Pays des Grands-Lacs were unsuccessful.

Internet sites, including: AllAfrica; Amnesty International; Government of Burundi; Democratic Republic of the Congo — Portail officiel du Président de la RDC; *East African Business Week*; East African Community; International Crisis Group; International Organization for Migration; *Jeune Afrique*; *Le Potentiel*; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; United States Department of State.


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