

Situation of Angolan Street Vendors (Zungueiras) in the Last Four Years (2021–2025)



By Friends of Angola (FOA)
Luanda, October 22, 2025

Summary

The **Friends of Angola (FOA)** report examines the reality of women street vendors — known as **zungueiras** — in Angola between 2021 and 2025, highlighting their economic and social importance as well as the serious human rights violations they continue to face.

Zungueiras are an **essential pillar of the informal economy**, sustaining thousands of families amid widespread unemployment and poverty. However, they remain **marginalized, criminalized, and exposed to institutional violence**, particularly in Luanda and other major cities.

During the period under review, there was a **worrying increase in repression**, including **physical assaults, sexual abuse, extortion, and arbitrary confiscation of goods** by municipal inspectors and National Police agents. Notable cases, such as the **killing of Raquel Kalupe in 2023**, illustrate the climate of impunity and lack of accountability by the State.

The report identifies violations of **Angolan national law**, particularly the Penal Code (Law No. 38/20), as well as multiple **international human rights instruments**, including **CEDAW**, the **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights**, **ILO Convention No. 190**, and the **Maputo Protocol**.

FOA recommends:

- Permanent dialogue between the Government and zungueira associations
- Human rights training for public officials
- Creation of safe and dignified market zones
- Investigation and punishment of abuses
- Socioeconomic integration of zungueiras into credit and social protection programs

The report concludes that **zungueiras are the invisible protagonists of Angola's economy**, yet continue to be treated as offenders. Social peace and justice will only be

achieved when the State recognizes their value, regulates informal trade fairly, and ensures respect for human dignity.

1. Introduction

The term “**zungueira**” comes from the Bantu verb *zungar*, meaning “to go back and forth selling.” In Angola, it refers to women engaged in **informal street trading**, selling various products in markets, streets, and public squares — especially in Luanda.

Over the past decades, street vending has become a **vital part of Angola’s popular economy**, sustaining thousands of households and contributing to community livelihoods. However, despite this socioeconomic importance, zungueiras continue to face **institutional violence, gender discrimination, and police repression**, often being treated as a “public order problem” instead of **legitimate economic actors**.

2. Historical Background

Following the end of the civil war, informal trade emerged as a **survival strategy** amid structural unemployment and social exclusion.

The absence of effective public employment and social protection policies led thousands of women — mostly heads of household aged 25 to 50, with low educational levels — to depend on street vending as their only source of income.

These women work in **extremely precarious conditions**, exposed to sun and rain, without proper infrastructure, legal protection, or social security.

Worse still, they face **systematic persecution** from municipal inspectors and National Police officers, who

often **confiscate goods, impose arbitrary fines, and commit physical and verbal assaults.**

3. Current Situation (2021–2025)

Although the Angolan Minister of Justice and Human Rights, **Marcy Lopes**, claimed before the UN Human Rights Council that human rights had improved between 2020 and 2024, the reality experienced by zungueiras **contradicts these official statements.**

Between 2021 and 2025, **state repression intensified**, and the working conditions of zungueiras worsened.

Documented cases include:

- **March 2023:** Activist **Laurinda Gouveia** denounced the killing of **Raquel Kalupe**, a zungueira shot by police during an operation in Luanda.
- **December 2022:** The NGO **Mãos Livres** demanded an investigation into the same case, noting that “the use of excessive force reflects the State’s inability to structure the informal economy.”
- **2022–2024:** The **Movement of Women for Civil and Political Rights (MMDCP)** reported recurring abuse, including **physical, verbal, and sexual violence** against street vendors.
- **2024: Presidential Decree No. 111/24**, ostensibly intended to regulate vending, instead **increased repression**, leading to widespread reports of **extortion and excessive force.**

According to **José Ambrósio Cassoma**, President of the **National Association of Street Vendors of Angola (ANAVA)**, many zungueiras are victims of **sexual blackmail and psychological torture**, often forced to **bribe inspectors** to avoid losing their goods.

4. Violations of National and International Instruments

The repression against zungueiras constitutes a **serious violation of human and labor rights**, under both **Angolan law** and **international treaties** ratified by Angola.

National Legislation Violated

- **Article 144** – Bodily harm
- **Article 150** – Abuse of authority
- **Article 154** – Sexual coercion
(*Penal Code of Angola, Law No. 38/20*)

International Instruments Violated

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights:**
 - Art. 3 – Right to security and human dignity
 - Art. 23 – Right to work and fair conditions
- **CEDAW:**
 - Arts. 11 & 14 – Protection of women workers, including in the informal sector
- **African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights:**
 - Art. 15 – Right to work
 - Art. 18(3) – Protection of women
- **ILO Convention No. 190:** Protection against violence and harassment in the world of work
- **Maputo Protocol:** Right of African women to physical integrity, dignity, and economic inclusion

These violations reflect a **systemic pattern of neglect and impunity**, inconsistent with Angola’s international obligations.

5. Testimonies of Zungueiras

Isabel Barbosa:

“Inspectors take our basins and never return them. It’s causing huge losses. Working like this is nearly impossible.”

Dana Bem-vinda:

“Inspectors harass us, seize our goods, and only return them if we pay. Some even demand sexual favors. It’s humiliating.”

Anonymous (São Paulo Market):

“We spend the whole day running. If we don’t pay a bribe, we are beaten. Even when we pay, we often lose everything.”

Anonymous:

“I’ve fled with pots still on the fire. Inspectors eat our goods and are never held accountable for the damage.”

Anonymous:

“I have constant pain in my feet and have been assaulted several times. They even drink the sodas we sell. It’s a daily struggle.”

6. Recommendations

To the Government of Angola

- 1. Establish permanent dialogue** with zungueira associations and civil society.
- 2. Provide human rights and ethics training** for public officials and police.
- 3. Create safe and regulated trading zones** with adequate infrastructure and hygiene.
- 4. Investigate and sanction abuses** committed by State agents.
- 5. Integrate zungueiras into programs on microcredit, social protection, and professional training.**
- 6. Decentralize economic opportunities** to reduce migration of women to major cities.

To the International Community

- Urge Angola to **implement CEDAW and UN UPR recommendations.**
- **Support programs** that empower women in the informal economy.
- Promote **regional awareness campaigns** against institutional and gender-based violence.

Conclusion

Zungueiras form the **invisible backbone of Angola's economy**, sustaining countless families and communities. Yet, they remain **criminalized and victimized** for merely exercising their right to work and survive.

The last four years have revealed a **worsening trend** in their treatment, marked by violence, repression, and lack of legal protection.

Social peace and justice will only be possible when the Angolan State formally recognizes their economic and social value, **fairly regulates informal trade**, and **ensures dignity and human rights for all women.**

About Friends of Angola (FOA)

Friends of Angola (FoA) is an international non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., dedicated to promoting **democracy, human rights, and good governance** in Angola and Central Africa.

Recognized for its commitment to **transparency, social justice, and civic engagement**, FoA implements programs that empower youth and women, strengthen civil society, and promote accountability and citizen participation.

The organization holds **Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** and **Observer Status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights**, underscoring its active and credible role in advancing human rights in Africa.