



Home Office

Country Information Note

Rwanda: Human rights

Version 2.0

January 2024

Contents

Country information on human rights in Rwanda	6
1. About this note.....	6
2. Glossary	6
3. Geographical context.....	8
3.1 Map of Rwanda	8
3.2 Demography and language	8
4. Political context.....	9
4.1 The 1994 genocide.....	9
4.2 Post-genocide governance and development	9
4.3 Political system.....	11
4.4 Operation of political parties	12
5. Human rights framework.....	13
5.1 Human rights instruments.....	13
5.2 Human rights oversight bodies	14
6. Government critics and opponents	16
6.1 Interpretation and application of law	16
6.2 Treatment of political opponents and activists in Rwanda	17
6.3 Treatment of journalists and social media commentators	21
6.4 Treatment of critics in the diaspora	23
6.5 Electronic surveillance.....	25
7. Freedom of assembly	26
7.1 Law – general.....	26
7.2 Data on protests	27
7.3 Assembly and association of refugees	30
7.4 Refugee protests at Kiziba in 2018.....	31
8. Law and order.....	34
8.1 Legal provisions	34
8.2 Criminal justice system: police and judiciary	35
8.3 Rule of law.....	36
8.4 Access to justice.....	39
8.5 Judicial independence and fair trial	40
8.6 State response to police misconduct.....	42
8.7 Complaints about the police	44
8.8 Death penalty	45
9. Transit and rehabilitation centres.....	45

9.1	Structure and function	45
9.2	Law.....	46
9.3	Number and characteristics of detainees	47
9.4	Treatment and conditions	48
10.	Police custody, prison and unofficial detention centres	49
10.1	Treatment.....	49
10.2	Conditions	50
11.	Security situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	51
11.1	Maps	51
11.2	Conflict in eastern DRC.....	52
11.3	History, goals, and composition of the March 23 Movement (M23).....	53
11.4	Activities of M23	54
11.5	Recruitment of children into regional conflicts	56
12.	Women’s rights and status	58
12.1	Legal rights.....	58
12.2	Gender equality: policy and practice	59
12.3	Freedom of movement	60
13.	Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)	61
13.1	Legal context.....	61
13.2	Domestic abuse, and physical and sexual violence	61
13.3	SGBV against asylum seekers and refugees	63
13.4	Policies and programmes.....	64
13.5	Protection and support	66
13.6	Arrest, prosecution and conviction	69
14.	Modern slavery/trafficking.....	70
14.1	Legal context.....	70
14.2	Prevalence and profile.....	70
14.3	Refugee victims of trafficking.....	71
14.4	Protection and support	72
15.	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) persons	74
15.1	Demography.....	74
15.2	Legal context.....	74
15.3	State attitudes	76
15.4	Policies and strategies	79
15.5	Arrest, prosecution, and detention of LGBTI persons.....	79
15.6	Societal attitudes	81

15.7 Societal treatment	83
15.8 Treatment of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees	87
15.9 State protection	87
15.10 Healthcare.....	90
15.11 Employment and education.....	91
15.12 Housing.....	92
15.13 Civil society support	93
15.14 Organisations supporting LGBTI persons	94
16. Religious groups	96
16.1 Legal rights.....	96
16.2 Places of worship	97
16.3 Treatment.....	98
17. Persons with disabilities.....	99
17.1 Legal and policy framework.....	99
17.2 Treatment and access to services and assistance	100
18. Migrants.....	101
19. Ethnic groups.....	103
20. Healthcare	103
20.1 Community Based Health Insurance scheme (CBHI).....	103
20.2 Health facilities	104
20.3 Treatment of mental health.....	105
20.4 Availability and affordability of medication	105
21. Non-governmental organisations	106
21.1 Legal rights and registration	106
21.2 Operation and restrictions	107
21.3 NGOs involved with refugees and asylum seekers	109
22. Umuganda (community work).....	111
22.1 Background	111
22.2 Law.....	112
22.3 Requirement to participate	112
22.4 Non-participation	113
22.5 Refugees and asylum seekers	114
Research methodology.....	115
Bibliography	116
Sources cited	116
Sources consulted but not cited.....	134

Version control and feedback 137
Feedback to the Home Office 137
Independent Advisory Group on Country Information..... 137

Country information on human rights in Rwanda

Section updated: 7 December 2023

1. About this note

- 1.1.1 This Country Information Note (CIN) contains publicly available country information about human rights in Rwanda which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the [Research methodology](#).
- 1.1.2 The CIN forms part of the evidence base for the Home Office's assessment of whether Rwanda can be considered safe for persons relocated from the UK (Relocated Individuals).
- 1.1.3 The CIN should be read together with:
- [Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Republic of Rwanda for the provision of an asylum partnership to strengthen shared international commitments on the protection of refugees and migrants \(the Treaty\)](#)
 - [Safety of Rwanda \(Asylum and Immigration\) Proposed Draft Bill](#)
 - [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Asylum system](#)
 - [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Annex 1 Government of Rwanda \(GoR\) evidence](#)
 - [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Annex 2 UNHCR evidence](#)
 - [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Annex 3 Other material](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

2. Glossary

2.1.1 Common acronyms or terms used in this CIN are set out below.

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
AI	Amnesty International
APHRC	African Population and Health Research Centre
BTI	Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index
CBHI	Community Based Health Insurance
DGIE	(Rwandan) Directorate General of Immigration/Emigration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FDLR	Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda
FH	Freedom House
GANHRI	Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions

GoR	Government of Rwanda
HDI	Health Development Initiative
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ILGA	International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association
IRB	Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
LAF	Legal Aid Forum
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (persons)
MEDP	Migration and Economic Development Partnership
MIGEPROF	(Rwandan) Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion
MINALOC	(Rwandan) Ministry of Local Government
MINEMA	(Rwandan) Ministry in Charge of Emergency Management
MoH	(Rwandan) Ministry of Health
NCHR	National Commission for Human Rights
NGO	Non-government organisation
NISR	National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda
NPPA	National Public Prosecution Authority
NRS	National Rehabilitation Service
RDF	Rwanda Defence Force
RDHS	Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey
RGB	Rwanda Governance Board
RNP	Rwanda National Police
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
SGBV	Sexual and/or gender-based violence
TiP	Trafficking in Persons
UKHO	UK Home Office
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (United Nations Refugee Agency)
UNHRC	The UN Human Rights Council
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USSD	U.S. Department of State
VoT	Victims of Trafficking

[Back to Contents](#)

3. Geographical context

3.1 Map of Rwanda



[Back to Contents](#)

3.2 Demography and language

- 3.2.1 The 2022 Population and Housing Census counted 13.2 million residents in Rwanda as of 15 August 2022².
- 3.2.2 Kinyarwanda, French, English and Swahili/Kiswahili are official languages³.
- 3.2.3 The 2022 Population and Housing Census indicated that a large minority of Rwandan residents are literate in more than one language. In Kigali, 43% of residents aged 15 and above were literate in Kinyarwanda plus one or more additional language (English, French or Swahili). English was the most common additional language, with a literacy level in Kigali of 38% (in Rwanda as a whole the figure is 21%). ‘Literacy’ was defined as the ability to read, write, and understand a language⁴.
- 3.2.4 The 2022 Population and Housing Census provided the breakdown of religious affiliation in Rwanda:
 - Catholic 40%
 - Pentecostal 21%

¹ UN Geospatial, ‘[Rwanda](#)’, 1 September 2018

² MFEP and NISR, ‘[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)’ (Table 1), Feb 2023

³ CIA, ‘[World factbook: Rwanda](#)’ (People and Society – Languages), 14 November 2023

⁴ MFEP and NISR, ‘[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)’ (Table 8), Feb 2023

- Protestant 15%
- Adventist 12%
- Other Christians 4%
- Muslim 2%
- Other 3%
- No religion 3%⁵

- 3.2.5 The US State Department's report, 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom (USSD 2022 Religious Freedom report) noted: 'While there are generally no concentrations of religious groups in specific geographic areas, a significant number of Muslims live in the Nyamirambo neighborhood of Kigali.'⁶
- 3.2.6 The majority of the population are either ethnic Hutu (85%) or ethnic Tutsi (14%), with a much smaller third ethnic group, the Batwa (1%), although these estimates are from 1994⁷. (See Ethnic groups)
- 3.2.7 The 2022 Population and Housing Census recorded 391,775 persons (age 5 and above) with a disability in Rwanda, approximately 3.4% of the population⁸.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 8 January 2024

4. Political context

4.1 The 1994 genocide

- 4.1.1 Approximately 800,000 Rwandans were killed during a genocide which took place over several months in 1994. Most of those who died were from the minority Tutsi ethnic group, and most of the perpetrators of the violence were from the majority Hutu ethnic group. Civilians participated in the killings alongside soldiers and police officers. The genocide ended when Kigali was captured by a Tutsi rebel group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), led by Paul Kagame. Mr Kagame became Rwandan President in 2000 and remains the country's leader^{9 10}.

[Back to Contents](#)

4.2 Post-genocide governance and development

- 4.2.1 Chapter 10, Article 3 of the Rwandan Constitution states that the Government of Rwanda are committed to upholding the principle of the 'eradication of discrimination and divisionism based on ethnicity, region or any other ground as well as promotion of national unity.'¹¹

⁵ MFEP and NISR, '[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)' (Table 7), Feb 2023

⁶ USSD, '[2022 report on international religious freedom: Rwanda](#)', (section 1), 15 May 2023

⁷ UN Outreach Programme on the Rwanda genocide, '[Rwanda: A brief history...](#)', no date

⁸ MFEP and NISR, '[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)' (Table 54), Feb 2023

⁹ BBC, '[Rwanda: How the genocide happened](#)', 17 May 2011

¹⁰ Al Jazeera, '[Kagame's Rwanda is still Africa's most inspiring success story](#)', 21 October 2019

¹¹ GoR, '[Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda revised in 2015](#)' 24 Dec 2015

- 4.2.2 The World Bank's Country Partnership Framework for the period 2021 to 2026, published in October 2020 noted: 'The Genocide against the Tutsi in 1994 is the inescapable backdrop to the remarkable achievements of the country since that time... The new leadership that ended the Genocide and the military conflict in 1994 prioritized peace and national reconciliation. Among young people, identification with the Rwandan nation is growing, strengthening the country's prospects for social cohesion and unity.'¹²
- 4.2.3 Minority Rights Group International (MRGI), an international NGO focused on minorities and disadvantaged communities, highlighted in October 2020: 'The country has also avoided renewed outbreaks of large-scale ethnic violence, due in part to the restrictions placed on discussions around ethnicity in the wake of the genocide, and important social measures such as those promoting gender equity have been put in place.'¹³
- 4.2.4 The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) noted on an undated website page: 'Rwanda has made remarkable progress in rebuilding institutions of government, maintaining security, and promoting reconciliation since the 1994 genocide. However, concerns about democracy and governance remain, including highly centralized political power, non-existent political opposition, weak civil society, and limited media freedom.'¹⁴
- 4.2.5 UNHCR's 'Annual Results Report' for Rwanda, dated 28 April 2023, covering events in 2022, stated: 'Rwanda continued to demonstrate a sustained economic growth during 2022, despite the increase in market prices of food and other commodities. The country pursued the implementation of the National Strategic Transformation (NST1) for accelerated transformation in economy, social protection and governance, while emphasizing sustainability of results and inclusiveness of development for all.'¹⁵
- 4.2.6 Figures from the Rwanda Development Board (RDB), a government institution with a mandate to accelerate economic development, indicated that the Rwandan economy grew by 8.2% in 2022, with 46% of the growth accounted for by the services sector, including tourism¹⁶.
- 4.2.7 The 2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) assesses governance performance in 54 African countries from 2012 to 2021. Four categories make up the overall governance score: Security and Rule of Law; Participation, Rights and Inclusion; Foundations for Economic Opportunity; and Human Development, with each of these divided into 16 further sub-categories¹⁷. Rwanda scored 59.1 out of 100 overall (0 indicating poorest governance and 100 being optimal governance), for comparison the African average was 48.9. Rwanda ranked 12th out of 54 countries¹⁸.
- 4.2.8 Rwanda's performance in the various subcategories was:

¹² World Bank, '[Country partnership framework... Rwanda FY21 to FY26](#)' (page 6), 22 October 2020

¹³ MRGI, '[Rwanda](#)' (Current issues), October 2020

¹⁴ USAID, '[Democracy, human rights and governance](#)', no date

¹⁵ UNHCR, '[Annual results report 2022 Rwanda](#)' (page 4), 28 April 2023

¹⁶ RDB, '[Annual report 2022](#)' (page 3), 3 May 2023

¹⁷ IIAG, '[Rwanda: 2012-2021 Governance Results, 2022](#)' (page 3), January 2023

¹⁸ IIAG, '[Rwanda: 2012-2021 Governance Results, 2022](#)' (page 7), January 2023

- Foundations for Economic Opportunity, score 63.4, ranked 9th
- Security and rule of law: score 66.2, rank 9th
- Participation rights and inclusion: score 44.0, rank 30th
- Human development: score 62.2, rank 10th¹⁹

4.2.9 The IIAG 2022 Rwanda report noted Rwanda had improved in 3 out of 4 categories since 2012, namely Security and Rule of Law, Foundations for Economic Opportunity, and Human Development. Rwanda's score decreased in the category Participation, Rights and Inclusion from 45.9 to 44.8 out of 100²⁰.

[Back to Contents](#)

4.3 Political system

4.3.1 The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index 2022 on Rwanda, covering the period 1 February 2019 to 31 January 2021 (BTI 2022 report), which assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries²¹, noted in its executive summary that:

'Rwanda continued to enjoy political stability and general security, low levels of corruption with liberal legal frameworks in place. The ruling Rwanda Patriotic Front Party continued to dominate the country with robust authority and tight control over civil society. These factors along with Rwanda's weak opposition indicate that significant political and social unrest remains unlikely in the foreseeable future. The president and the circle of his top aides stand for an authoritarian developmental state. The ruling team is kept together by unquestioning loyalty and discipline in the tradition of the rebel movement, with which they once gained power. Defectors are not tolerated. There is generally very little room for power-sharing, an independent and vital civil society and freedom of expression.'²²

4.3.2 The US State Department's report, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda (2022 USSD human rights report) summarised Rwanda's political structure and most recent election results:

'Rwanda is a constitutional republic dominated by a strong presidency. The ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front party leads a governing coalition that includes four smaller parties. In 2017 voters elected President Paul Kagame to a third seven-year term with a reported 99 percent of the vote. One independent candidate and one candidate from an opposition political party participated in the presidential election, but authorities disqualified three other candidates. In the 2018 elections for parliament's lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, candidates from the Rwandan Patriotic Front coalition and two other parties supporting Rwandan Patriotic Front policies won all but four of the open seats. For the first time, independent parties won seats in the chamber, with the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda and the Social Party Imberakuri

¹⁹ IIAG, '[Rwanda: 2012-2021 Governance Results, 2022](#)' (page 16), January 2023

²⁰ IIAG, '[Rwanda: 2012-2021 Governance Results, 2022](#)' (page 9), January 2023

²¹ BTI, '[Methodology](#)', no date

²² BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)' (Executive summary), 23 February 2022

winning two seats each. In both the 2017 and 2018 elections, international monitors reported numerous flaws, including irregularities in the vote tabulation process.²³

- 4.3.3 On 12 December 2023, the New Times website reported that Rwanda's National Electoral Commission had set dates for presidential and parliamentary elections, which will be held on 14 and 15 July 2024²⁴.

[Back to Contents](#)

4.4 Operation of political parties

- 4.4.1 Freedom House (FH) in its March 2023 report - Freedom in the World 2023 – Rwanda, covering events in 2022, (FH report 2023) noted 'The RPF has ruled Rwanda without interruption since 1994, banning and repressing any opposition group that could mount a serious challenge to its leadership. All registered parties currently belong to the NCFPO [National Consultative Forum for Political Organizations, a public body intended to promote political consensus], which the RPF dominates.'²⁵
- 4.4.2 The BTI 2022 report commented: 'At the national level, all registered [political] parties are obliged to take part in the consultations of the NFPO [or NCFPO]. The forum is an instrument of control, to avoid open confrontation between the parties and in the parliament.'²⁶ BTI scored Rwanda 2 out of 10 under the criteria 'Free and fair elections'²⁷. According to BTI indicators, a score less than 6 means that 'Free elections are not held or are marked by serious irregularities and restrictions.'²⁸
- 4.4.3 The FH report 2023, described Rwanda as 'not free', with a total score of 23 out of 100 (8 out of 40 on Political Rights and 15 out of 60 on Civil Liberties)²⁹. In its methodology, FH noted that 'A country or territory's Freedom in the World status depends on its aggregate Political Rights score, on a scale of 0–40, and its aggregate Civil Liberties score, on a scale of 0–60.' The total scores are weighted to calculate the Freedom in the World status³⁰. The FH report 2023 noted, 'The government-controlled Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) is responsible for registering political parties, and in practice it can deny registration at its discretion without proper justification.'³¹
- 4.4.4 The Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) published a list of 11 registered political parties and noted the criteria for registration, 'For a political party to be established, it must have at least two hundred (200) founding members in the whole country, with at least five (5) people having their domicile in each district.'³²

²³ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (Exec Summary), 20 March 2023

²⁴ The New Times, '[Electoral commission sets date...](#)', 12 December 2023

²⁵ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)' (B2), March 2023

²⁶ BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)' (Political and social integration), 23 February 2022

²⁷ BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)' (Political participation), 23 February 2022

²⁸ BTI, '[Methodology](#)' (Democracies and autocracies), no date

²⁹ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)', March 2023

³⁰ FH, '[Freedom in the World Research Methodology](#)' (Keys to scores and status), no date

³¹ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)' (B1), March 2023

³² RGB, '[Political organisations](#)', no date

- 4.4.5 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted: ‘... [the government] impeded the formation of political parties, restricted political party activities, and delayed or denied registration to local and international NGOs seeking to work on human rights, media freedom, or political advocacy.’³³
- 4.4.6 Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2023 report, covering the events of 2022, stated: ‘Political space in Rwanda remains closed. Opposition parties face administrative obstacles to registration and political pressure to toe the government line.’³⁴
- 4.4.7 The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC)’s Stakeholders’ Submissions report, published November 2020, with contributions from various NGOs³⁵ noted ‘Although the 2017 election was declared free and fair by the National Electoral Commission, independent election observers had disagreed, citing a climate of fear and intimidation of several independent candidates. [Stakeholder] JS7 [The Ecumenical Network Central Africa, Berlin (Germany)] stated that the 2017 election had taken place in a context of closed political space.’³⁶
- 4.4.8 The BTI 2022 report provided detail about the electoral system³⁷ and explained that:

‘There are no more relevant actors to contest the current authoritarian rule. The president is formally and de facto the most powerful actor. Possible opponents of the power base are co-opted or coerced into the system so that they have no actual influence on decision-making. If they become too outspoken or are simply no longer useful to the system, they are removed. ... The inclusion of two new parties in the last parliamentary elections took place because it did not pose any threat to the power of the system, although it is significant that the Democratic Green Party – which the government had previously tried to thwart – secured its first ever parliamentary seats in the 2017 elections.’³⁸

See also [Treatment of political opponents and activists](#) and [NGO operations and restrictions](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

5. Human rights framework

5.1 Human rights instruments

- 5.1.1 There are 9 international human rights instruments, of which Rwanda is a state party to 8³⁹ 40.

International human rights instrument	Ratification/
---------------------------------------	---------------

³³ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 2B), 20 March 2023

³⁴ HRW, ‘[World Report 2023: Rwanda – events of 2022](#)’, 13 January 2023

³⁵ UNHRC, ‘[Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions](#)’ (page 10 to 12), 16 November 2020

³⁶ UNHRC, ‘[Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions](#)’ (page 6), 16 November 2020

³⁷ BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Political participation), 23 February 2022

³⁸ BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Stability of institutions), 23 February 2022

³⁹ OHCHR, ‘[The Core International Human Rights Instruments and their monitoring bodies](#)’, no date

⁴⁰ OHCHR, ‘[Status of ratification interactive dashboard](#)’ (Rwanda), no date

	Accession
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	1975
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	1975
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	1975
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	1981
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	2008
Convention on the Rights of the Child	1991
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families	2008
International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance	-
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	2008

5.1.2 Rwanda is one of the 55 Member States of the African Union (AU) and is a signatory to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights⁴¹ ⁴².

5.1.3 Rwanda's national human rights institution, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), outlined the status of ratification of these instruments in a May 2023 report⁴³.

[Back to Contents](#)

5.2 Human rights oversight bodies

5.2.1 Claiming Human Rights, which is a joint project of the National Commissions for UNESCO of France and Germany, noted that 'Since Rwanda is an [African Union] AU member, its citizens and NGOs may file complaints to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights [[ACHPR](#)]...' and that 'They may also file complaints according to the [European Union] EU guidelines (on Human Rights Defenders, Death Penalty and Torture) to Embassies of EU Member States and the Delegations of the European Commission.'⁴⁴

5.2.2 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted:

'Mechanisms exist for citizens to file lawsuits in civil matters, including for abuses of human rights. The judiciary was generally independent and impartial in civil matters, with some exceptions involving state interests. The Office of the Ombudsman processed claims of judicial wrongdoing on an administrative basis. Individuals may submit cases to the East African Court

⁴¹ AU, '[Member states](#)', no date

⁴² AU, '[African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights](#)', no date

⁴³ NCHR, '[Status of Submission...to International and Regional Treaty Monitoring Bodies](#)', May 2023

⁴⁴ Claiming Human Rights, '[Claiming Human Rights - in Rwanda](#)', undated

of Justice and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, although these courts lacked mechanisms to enforce their judgments in Rwanda.⁴⁵

5.2.3 Rwanda's National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), was:

'... created by the Law n° 04/99 of 12th March 1999 modified and complemented by the Law n° 35/2002 of 31st December 2002. This Law was replaced by the Law n° 30/2007 of 6th July 2007 determining the organization and functioning of the National Commission for Human Rights based on the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda of 4th June 2003 as amended to date. Recently, so as to comply with the Paris Principles, the Law n° 30/2007 of 6th July 2007 has been replaced by Law n° 19/2013 of 25/03/2013 determining mission, organization and functioning of the National Commission for Human Rights.

'... the Law n° 19/2013 of 25/03/2013 determining mission, organization and functioning of the National Commission for Human Rights was modified by the Law N° 61/2018 of 24/08/2018 determining missions, organisation and functioning of the National Commission for Human Rights. This new law confers to the Commission powers and Special responsibilities as regards to the prevention of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.'⁴⁶

5.2.4 The NCHR has been accredited by the [Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions](#) (GANHRI) as being fully compliant with the [Paris Principles](#), which set out the internationally agreed minimum standards that national human rights institutions must meet^{47 48}. GANHRI is a worldwide network which represents over 110 national human rights institutions⁴⁹.

5.2.5 In a meeting with the UK Home Office (UKHO) on 22 March 2022, representatives from NCHR set out the Commission's mandate and described its structure (see [Annex 3, A7. Meeting with NCHR, 22 March 2022](#)).

5.2.6 The NCHR noted on its website: '...the Commission has powers to file legal proceedings in civil, commercial, labor and administrative matters for violation of human rights provided by the Constitution, international treaties ratified by Rwanda and other laws.'⁵⁰

5.2.7 The NCHR investigates complaints about human rights violations and monitors the treatment of different categories of persons including persons with disabilities, the elderly, children, and refugees⁵¹. CPIT has compiled data from NCHR's annual reports, showing the number and outcome of complaints, into the table below. The NCHR data did not provide a breakdown of complainants by profile:

	July 2019	July 2020	July 2021
--	-----------	-----------	-----------

⁴⁵ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1E), 20 March 2023

⁴⁶ NCHR, '[About](#)' (Overview), no date

⁴⁷ GANHRI, '[Accreditation](#)', no date

⁴⁸ GANHRI, '[Status accreditation chart as of 26.04.2023](#)', 26 April 2023

⁴⁹ GANHRI, '[Home page](#)', no date

⁵⁰ NCHR, '[About](#)' (Powers of NCHR)', no date

⁵¹ NCHR, '[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)' (pages 5 to 6), September 2022

	to June 2020	to June 2021	to June 2022
Total complaints processed	763	597	519
Of which:			
• Resolved	368	415	370
• Referred to other authorities	109	42	15
• No human rights abuse identified	28	6	-
• Pending	258	134	134

52 53 54

- 5.2.8 A complaint is categorised as ‘resolved’ when the NCHR has fully analysed and investigated the complaint, has referred it to the institution concerned and the relevant institution has ‘solved’ the complaint⁵⁵.
- 5.2.9 In 2016 the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern that members of the NCHR were selected by a committee appointed by the President and called upon the Rwandan government to ensure that the selection process was transparent and independent⁵⁶. The 2016 Human Rights Committee report was also cited in the November 2020 UN compilation report submitted as part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process of Rwanda⁵⁷.
- 5.2.10 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted:
‘The government funded and cooperated with the NCHR. According to many observers, the NCHR did not have adequate resources or independence to investigate and act on reported abuses and remained biased in favor of the government. The NCHR performed investigations on human rights matters and drafted annual reports with their findings, but these reports usually found the government met standards for human rights protections in various fields, even when other organizations disagreed.’⁵⁸

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

6. Government critics and opponents

6.1 Interpretation and application of law

- 6.1.1 A submission by the Rwandan Government’s Ministry of Justice to the UPR Working Group on 25 January 2021 stated:

‘... there are no prosecutions that target persons simply because they are

⁵² NCHR, [‘Annual activity report, July 2019 to June 2020’](#) (page 9), no date

⁵³ NCHR, [‘Annual activity report, July 2020 to June 2021’](#) (page 14), September 2021

⁵⁴ NCHR, [‘Annual activity report July 2021 to June 2022’](#), (page 14), September 2022

⁵⁵ NCHR, [‘Annual activity report, July 2020 to June 2021’](#) (pages 14 and 15), September 2021

⁵⁶ UNHRC, [‘Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of ...’](#) (paras 9 to 10), 2 May 2016

⁵⁷ UNHRC, [‘Working group on the UPR 37th session, compilation ...’](#) (para 15), 13 November 2020

⁵⁸ USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 5), 20 March 2023

politicians or journalists or human rights defenders, and the so-called political trials do not exist, nor are trials against journalists or human rights defenders just for being journalists or human rights defenders. A person can only be prosecuted based on his/her act which is prohibited and punishable by law. One's freedom to express his/her opinion is guaranteed by the law and as such is protected and respected...'⁵⁹

6.1.2 However, the BTI 2022 report, covering the period 1 February 2019 to 31 January 2021, noted: 'The regime has sufficient legal and forceful means to silence any open critics.'⁶⁰ The report also noted, 'Critics and opponents considered dangerous by the regime are prosecuted on fabricated charges of genocide revisionism, corruption, terrorism, and immoral behavior. The judiciary is the tool by which the government perpetuates authoritarian rule by prosecuting opponents and critics of the state.'⁶¹

6.1.3 The 2022 USSD human rights report stated:

'There were no official restrictions on individuals' right to criticize the government publicly or privately on policy implementation and other topics, but broad interpretation of provisions in the law had a chilling effect on such criticism. The government generally did not tolerate criticism of the presidency and government policy on security, human rights, and other matters it deemed sensitive.

'Laws prohibiting divisionism, genocide ideology, and genocide denial were broadly applied and discouraged citizens, residents, and visitors to the country from expressing viewpoints that could be construed as promoting societal divisions.'⁶²

6.1.4 In March 2022, HRW published an article on the 'politically motivated prosecutions' of opposition members, journalists, and social media commentators stating: 'The Rwandan government may have legitimate grounds to seek to restrict the kind of dangerous, vitriolic speech that led to the deaths of over half a million people in 1994, but current laws and practices go far beyond this purpose – creating fear and effectively stifling opinions, debate, and criticism of the government.'⁶³

[Back to Contents](#)

6.2 Treatment of political opponents and activists in Rwanda

6.2.1 The Summary of Stakeholders' submission to the UPR noted, in the context of the 2017 election, 'Opposition candidates had reported harassment, threats, and intimidation. Government authorities had arrested, forcibly disappeared, or threatened political opponents.'⁶⁴

6.2.2 In 2017 HRW reported on the existence of unofficial detention centres, specifically the treatment of detainees 'suspected of collaborating with "enemies" of the Rwandan government'. HRW reported 104 cases of illegal

⁵⁹ MoJ, '[Introduction to the third Universal Periodic...](#)' (page 7), 25 January 2021

⁶⁰ BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)' (Political participation), 23 February 2022

⁶¹ BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)' (Rule of law), 23 February 2022

⁶² USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 2A), 20 March 2023

⁶³ HRW, '[Rwanda: Wave of free speech prosecutions](#)', 16 March 2022

⁶⁴ UNHRC, '[Summary of Stakeholders' submissions](#)' (page 6), 16 November 2020

detentions over the 7-year period between 2010 and 2017⁶⁵.

- 6.2.3 The 2017 HRW report was based upon interviews with over 230 people, including 61 detainees, and described incidents of torture, enforced disappearance, forced confession, illegal detention, and unfair trial proceedings. Most of the cases documented in the report occurred between 2010 and 2014⁶⁶ and involved actual or suspected members or sympathizers of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) or the Rwanda National Congress (RNC). HRW described the FDLR as, ‘an armed group based in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, some of whose members took part in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda’ and described the RNC as, ‘an opposition group in exile.’⁶⁷
- 6.2.4 In August 2021, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), based on information from various sources, provided examples of critics of the government, as well as family members of opponents, who had been targeted by the authorities, including Paul Rusesabagina and his daughter⁶⁸. Rusesabagina was arrested in August 2020 for alleged ties to an opposition organisation and was released in March 2023 after his sentence was commuted⁶⁹.
- 6.2.5 The IRB cited one source who indicated ‘... known critics of the RPF, these individuals faced difficulties accessing employment, education and health care resources, and were “constantly harassed” by authorities...’. Another source said ‘... the treatment depends on whether the person remains in opposition and continues to publicly criticize the Rwandan government, how they opposed the government in the past, and whether they maintain a high profile...’ The same source also observed that the person may still be kept under surveillance⁷⁰.
- 6.2.6 In correspondence with the IRB, a professor of African History and Political Studies, who was retired from France's Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) but a fellow of the Atlantic Council, stated:
‘... physical violence including “murder, beatings and detention” against political opponents is “now more rare” than before, and that common treatment includes confiscations of property... harassment (physical and via phone or internet), financial prosecution, harassment of relatives, deprivation [sic] of legal documents, temporary detention without causes followed by release without explanation, prosecution for non-existent crimes, spying on mail and e-mail correspondence, threats to relatives living abroad ... housebreaking, stalking and other general measures designed to make... life difficult.’⁷¹
- 6.2.7 The BTI 2022 report stated: ‘Critics and opponents considered dangerous by the regime are prosecuted on fabricated charges of genocide revisionism,

⁶⁵ HRW, [‘We will force you to confess: torture and unlawful...’](#) (page 1 and 2), 10 October 2017

⁶⁶ HRW, [‘We will force you to confess: torture and unlawful...’](#) (page 2), 10 October 2017

⁶⁷ HRW, [‘We will force you to confess: torture and unlawful...’](#) (summary), 10 October 2017

⁶⁸ IRB, [‘Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...’](#), 26 August 2021

⁶⁹ The Guardian, [‘Hotel Rwanda’s Paul Rusesabagina released from prison’](#), 25 March 2023

⁷⁰ IRB, [‘Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...’](#), 26 August 2021

⁷¹ IRB, [‘Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...’](#), 26 August 2021

corruption, terrorism and immoral behavior. The judiciary is the tool by which the government perpetuates authoritarian rule by prosecuting opponents and critics of the state.⁷²

6.2.8 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted:

‘Local officials and state security forces continued to detain and imprison some individuals who had previously disagreed with government decisions or policies. Some government critics faced indictment under broadly applied charges of genocide incitement, genocide denial, inciting insurrection, rebellion, or attempting to overthrow the government. Others faced apparently unrelated criminal charges. Political prisoners were generally afforded the same protections, including visitation rights, access to lawyers and doctors, and access to family members, as other detainees.’⁷³

6.2.9 The 2022 USSD report added:

‘International and domestic human rights groups reported the government held a small number of political prisoners in custody, including Christopher Kayumba... Deo Mushayidi, Theoneste Niyitegeka, and eight individuals affiliated with the unregistered political opposition party DALFA-Umurinzi who were on trial during the year. Five FDU-Inkingi party leaders also remained in prison after being arrested in 2017 and convicted in 2020 on various charges that they alleged were a result of their political activities.’⁷⁴

6.2.10 The FH report 2022 gave the example of Diane Rwigara, ‘... who sought to contest the 2017 presidential election, was arrested and imprisoned that year, along with her mother and sister, on multiple charges. The charges against her sister were dropped; Rwigara and her mother were released on bail in 2018 and acquitted later that year.’⁷⁵

6.2.11 The FH report 2023 noted: ‘The government has a long history of repressing its political opponents, and members of opposition parties face the threat of disappearance, arbitrary arrest and detention, and assassination.’⁷⁶ The report did not indicate how many or the extent to which each of these measures were implemented but provided one example from 2020: ‘Several members of the Dalfa-Umurinzi party, led by 2010 presidential candidate Victoire Ingabire, were convicted in 2020 of involvement with an “irregular armed force” and “offenses against the state,” receiving prison terms ranging from 7 to 10 years. One defendant who was acquitted, Venant Abayisenga, was reported missing later that year and was believed to have been forcibly disappeared or killed.’⁷⁷

6.2.12 HRW also mentioned ill-treatment of Victoire Ingabire and members of the Dalfa-Umurinzi party in articles dated September 2019⁷⁸ and March 2022⁷⁹. In a January 2023 update, HRW reported the ongoing trial of 9 Dalfa-

⁷² BTI, [‘Rwanda Country Report 2022’](#) (Rule of law), 23 February 2022

⁷³ USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 1E), 20 March 2023

⁷⁴ USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 1E), 20 March 2023

⁷⁵ FH, [‘Freedom in the World 2022’](#) (B1), 28 February 2022

⁷⁶ FH, [‘Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda’](#) (B1), March 2023

⁷⁷ FH, [‘Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda’](#) (B1), March 2023

⁷⁸ HRW, [‘Rwanda: Killing Is Latest Attack on Opponents’](#), 24 September 2019

⁷⁹ HRW, [‘Rwanda: Wave of Free Speech Prosecutions’](#), 16 March 2022

Umurinzi party members and a journalist and noted ‘The prosecution contends that a discussion to distribute texts denouncing killings, kidnappings, and beatings was an attempt to overthrow the government, and is seeking life sentences for eight defendants.’⁸⁰

- 6.2.13 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted: ‘The government did not follow through on conducting full, timely, and transparent investigations... [into] the killings of several political opponents in previous years, such as the 2019 killing of Anselme Mutuyimana, a member of the unregistered United Democratic Forces-Inkingi (FDU-Inkingi) opposition party.’⁸¹ (FDU-Inkingi was also led by Victoire Ingabire before it was replaced by Dalfa-Umurinzi⁸².)
- 6.2.14 In September 2021, Deutsche Welle (DW), a German news and current affairs media outlet, compiled a list of ‘mysterious deaths’ of people critical of the Rwandan government. The list, covering the period 1996 to September 2021, included the names of 14 opposition politicians and activists, journalists, businessmen and members of the diaspora. No information was provided about how the list was compiled⁸³.
- 6.2.15 In July 2022 HRW provided an indication of the cumulative number and type of incidents documented by the organisation since 2019, although the figures related to government critics generally, rather than political opponents specifically. HRW reported: ‘Between 2019 and 2022, Human Rights Watch documented over 30 cases of opposition members, journalists, critics, and activists who have died, disappeared, or ended up in jail.’⁸⁴
- 6.2.16 HRW also provided a snapshot of documented incidents involving government critics in June 2022: ‘At least... 16 opposition activists are currently behind bars in Rwanda. Most have been convicted after politically motivated trials... In some cases, they have been arrested for speaking out about security force abuses – including unlawful and arbitrary detention, torture and extrajudicial killings – or for criticizing the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and its human rights record.’⁸⁵
- 6.2.17 A website called ‘Rwandan Lives Matter’, which describes itself as an initiative set up by Rwandan human rights campaigners, has compiled a list ‘of all the victims of human rights violations at the hands of the RPF.’ The website went public on 28 June 2019 however the list covers cases between 28 July 1994 to 6 February 2023⁸⁶. No methodology is provided to explain how the cases included on the list have been identified or verified. The list categorises victims using 2 criteria: type of incident and profile of victim (including ‘politicians’ and ‘human rights defenders’). The categorisation used by the website is not exclusive, with some incidents included in more than one category and double-counted. CPIT has therefore been unable to

⁸⁰ HRW, ‘[Politician Convicted for Harming Rwanda’s Image](#)’, 18 January 2023

⁸¹ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1A), 20 March 2023

⁸² Al Jazeera, ‘[My story: Being an opposition figure in Rwanda](#)’, 20 April 2022

⁸³ DW, ‘[Rwanda: The mysterious deaths of political opponents](#)’, 15 September 2021

⁸⁴ HRW, ‘[The cost of speaking up in Rwanda](#)’, 7 July 2022

⁸⁵ HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Jailed Critic Denounces Torture in Prison](#)’, 13 June 2022

⁸⁶ Rwandan Lives Matter, ‘[All forgotten victims](#)’, no date

provide more detail on the number and type of recorded incidents ⁸⁷.

(See also [Police custody, prison and unofficial detention centres](#)).

[Back to Contents](#)

6.3 Treatment of journalists and social media commentators

6.3.1 BTI's 2022 report scored Rwanda 3 out of 10 under the criteria 'Freedom of expression.'⁸⁸ (0 meaning freedom of expression or media freedom does not exist, or severe restrictions are in place and 10 meaning there are no restrictions)⁸⁹.

6.3.2 DW reported on 3 May 2022:

'Only a few journalists are prepared to openly argue that the government of Rwanda is controlling the media to advance its own narrative. Most confide that they know they cannot express such views freely and are better off leaving a good impression on the government. Rwanda's major media houses favor the government, and are funded by the government. Independent reporters who use YouTube as their platform have been arrested, silenced and jailed.'⁹⁰

6.3.3 In June 2022 HRW reported: 'At least 2 journalists [and] 3 commentators... are currently behind bars in Rwanda.'⁹¹

6.3.4 HRW's annual report, covering events of 2021, described the cases of online commentators, Yvonne Idamange and Aimable Karasira, who used their platforms to discuss the 1994 genocide and its aftermath, including criticism of the actions of the RPF. Idamange received a 15-year sentence⁹²; Karasira was imprisoned in May 2021 and his trial was ongoing as of 23 November 2023^{93 94 95}.

6.3.5 The FH report 2022 cited the case of 'Innocent Bahati, a poet known for reciting his social commentary on YouTube [who] went missing in February 2021.'⁹⁶ Bahati's location and condition remained unknown as of 27 March 2023⁹⁷. In sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)) CPIT could find no further update on Bahati as of 24 November 2023.

6.3.6 The 2022 USSD human rights report stated: 'Authorities reportedly sometimes subjected prisoners to torture,' and gave the examples of ill-treatment of Aimable Karasira and Dieudonne Niyonsenga (the owner of YouTube channel Ishema TV, which covers politics and human rights⁹⁸).⁹⁹

⁸⁷ Rwandan Lives Matter, '[About this initiative](#)', no date

⁸⁸ BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)' (Political participation), 23 February 2022

⁸⁹ BTI, '[Methodology](#)' no date

⁹⁰ DW, '[Where is Africa's media freedom under threat?](#)', 3 May 2022

⁹¹ HRW, '[Rwanda: Jailed Critic Denounces Torture in Prison](#)', 13 June 2022

⁹² HRW, '[World Report 2022 – Rwanda](#)', 13 January 2022

⁹³ Afro America Network, '[Rwanda... Aimable Karasira in a high security detention](#)', 10 August 2021

⁹⁴ KT Press, '[Court recommends medical test for Aimable Karasira](#)', 7 April 2023

⁹⁵ BBC News, '[Aimable Karasira 'nta bushobozi' afite bwo kuburana...](#)', 23 November 2023

⁹⁶ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2022](#)' (D4), 28 February 2022

⁹⁷ AI, '[Amnesty International Report 2022/23](#)' (page 312), 27 March 2023

⁹⁸ CPJ, '[Dieudonné Niyonsenga](#)', no date

⁹⁹ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1C), 20 March 2023

6.3.7 The FH report 2023 report commented:

‘Authorities continued to target journalists and bloggers—particularly those broadcasting via the online video platform YouTube—for intimidation, arrest, or prosecution during 2022, using a broad interpretation of media laws that allow them to restrict content that is deemed offensive, false, or contrary to public safety and public morals. While three journalists with the YouTube-based outlet Iwacu TV were acquitted of several charges and released in October 2022, they had already spent four years in detention.’¹⁰⁰

6.3.8 The table below, compiled by CPIT, is based on the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ‘Barometer’. RSF’s methodology¹⁰¹ provided no details of the sources used to populate the Barometer.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023*
Journalists killed (during the year or part year)	0	0	0	0	0	1
Media workers killed (during the year or part year)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Journalists detained (on 1 January of given year)	0	0	0	0	2	2
Media workers detained (on 1 January of given year)	0	0	0	0	0	0

102

*Part-year 2023 covers the period 1 January 2023 to 24 November 2023

6.3.9 The table below, compiled by CPIT, shows comparable data from the Committee to Protect Journalists’ (CPJ) database, documented over the same period (2018 to 2023). The CPJ data makes no distinction between journalists and media workers and the data shown is a record of incidents of detention during a particular period, rather than the number of detainees at a point in time.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023*
Journalists killed (during the year or part year*)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Journalists detained (incidents during the year or part year*)	4	0	1	3	0	0

103

* Part-year 2023 covers the period 1 January 2023 to 24 November 2023

6.3.10 RSF also produces an annual World Press Freedom Index: ‘...to compare the level of freedom enjoyed by journalists and media in 180 countries and

¹⁰⁰ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)’ (D1), March 2023

¹⁰¹ RSF, ‘[Methodology used for compiling the World Press Freedom Index 2023](#)’, no date

¹⁰² RSF, ‘[Barometer](#)’, no date

¹⁰³ CPJ, ‘[Explore CPJ’s database of attacks on the press: journalists attacked in Rwanda](#)’, no date

territories.’ The index uses 5 indicators: ‘political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context and safety’ and scores countries from 0 (minimum) to 100 (maximum)¹⁰⁴. In the 2023 index, Rwanda scored 46.58 – categorised by RSF as ‘difficult’ – ranking it 131st out of 180 countries¹⁰⁵.

6.3.11 In January 2023, HRW called for an ‘effective, independent, and transparent investigation into the suspicious death of John Williams Ntwali, a leading investigative journalist and editor of the newspaper The Chronicles.’¹⁰⁶ The New Times, a Rwandan English language online news site, reported Ntwali’s death as the result of a motorcycle accident¹⁰⁷. In July 2023, HRW updated that a ‘hasty trial was held in the absence of independent observers and the driver convicted of manslaughter and unintentional bodily harm... the lack of details in the verdict suggests there was no effective investigation into Ntwali’s death, despite Rwanda’s legal obligation to ensure one was conducted.’¹⁰⁸

6.3.12 The Freedom House report, Freedom on the Net 2023 (FH FonN report 2023), released in October 2023, citing various sources, in its unsourced summary noted

‘Internet freedoms remained highly restricted in Rwanda during the coverage period: the government continued imprisoning and intimidating online journalists and critics, as well as subjecting them to harassment and violence while in detention. Self-censorship online remains common as the government increasingly tightens its control of the online media environment. Over the past several years, evidence has implicated Rwandan authorities in the widespread use of commercial surveillance tools against journalists, activists, and opposition leaders.’¹⁰⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

6.4 Treatment of critics in the diaspora

6.4.1 In November 2022, the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), an international network of investigative journalists, obtained a leaked 2015 US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) report. The FBI report covered cases of Rwandan-born US residents, considered to be critics of the Rwandan government, including members of the opposition group Rwanda National Congress and Paul Rusesabagina. OCCRP noted that the report:

‘... warned top American diplomats that Rwanda was using its intelligence services to spread disinformation in the U.S. about Rwandan asylum seekers and opposition members. Its tactics included “providing poison pen [intentionally false or misleading] information to U.S. law enforcement agencies concerning alleged criminal violations through the use of double agents, as well as attempting to manipulate U.S. government immigration

¹⁰⁴ RSF, ‘[Methodology used for compiling the World Press Freedom Index 2023](#)’, no date

¹⁰⁵ RSF, ‘[Index 2023](#)’, no date

¹⁰⁶ HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Suspicious death of investigative journalist](#)’, 20 January 2023

¹⁰⁷ The New Times, ‘[Local journalist dies in car accident](#)’, 19 January 2023

¹⁰⁸ HRW, ‘[Questions Remain Over Rwandan Journalist’s Suspicious Death](#)’, 18 July 2023

¹⁰⁹ FH, ‘[Freedom on the Net 2023 – Rwanda](#)’ (Overview), 4 October 2023

law and the Interpol Red Notice System,” the FBI concluded.’¹¹⁰ (Square brackets are source’s own)

6.4.2 In November 2020 the BBC reported on leaked video footage from 2017 in which:

‘... more than 30 individuals can be seen standing in a crowded conference room at the Rwandan embassy in the UK, raising their hands and pledging loyalty to the governing party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)... while some of those attending the ceremony - understood to have taken place in 2017 - may well have been genuine supporters of the governing party, now living abroad, others have told the BBC that many attendees were there under duress.’¹¹¹

6.4.3 In January 2020 the pro-government KT Press news website reported that Rwanda welcomed a new South African law, which banned asylum seekers and refugees in South Africa from engaging in political activities related to their countries of origin. The article noted, ‘Rwanda says the law could go a long way in halting activities of groups such as Rwanda National Congress (RNC) and other individuals who use their refugee and asylum status in South Africa to engage in terrorism activities and anti-Rwandan government propaganda.’¹¹²

6.4.4 In August 2021 the IRB, based on information from various sources, noted that political opponents abroad had been targeted and that it was possible they could be targeted or viewed with suspicion on return to Rwanda¹¹³. Sources also indicated that family members of political opponents abroad faced harassment and intimidation¹¹⁴.

6.4.5 The 2021 USSD human rights report noted: ‘There were numerous reports the government attempted to pursue political opponents abroad.’ The report provided details of 3 incidents during 2021 – 2 deaths and one disappearance – allegedly linked to the Rwandan government. One of the incidents took place in South Africa and 2 in Mozambique¹¹⁵. The 2022 USSD report referenced the same 3 incidents from 2021¹¹⁶.

6.4.6 HRW’s report covering the events of 2022 stated:

‘Attacks and threats by Rwandan government agents or their proxies on Rwandan refugees living abroad, including in Uganda, Mozambique, South Africa, and Kenya, continued. The victims have tended to be political opponents or critics of the Rwandan government or of President Paul Kagame.’ The example provided by HRW did not relate to the 4 countries mentioned, instead HRW referred to harassment and threats against a Rwandan refugee living in Australia¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁰ OCCRP, ‘[Rwanda fed false intelligence to US and Interpol...](#)’, 4 November 2022

¹¹¹ BBC, ‘[The loyalty oath keeping Rwandans abroad in check](#)’, 18 November 2020

¹¹² KT Press, ‘[Rwanda Welcomes S. Africa Law...](#)’ 6 January 2020

¹¹³ IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...](#)’, 26 August 2021

¹¹⁴ IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...](#)’, 26 August 2021

¹¹⁵ USSD, ‘[2021 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1E), 12 April 2022

¹¹⁶ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1E), 20 March 2023

¹¹⁷ HRW, ‘[World Report 2023: Rwanda – events of 2022](#)’, 13 January 2023

- 6.4.7 In October 2023, HRW reported on ‘extranational repression’ committed by the Rwandan government, specifically the ‘control, surveillance, and intimidation of Rwandan refugee and diaspora communities and others abroad.’ The report was based on interviews with over 150 people between October 2021 and December 2022. Interviewees included victims of abuse, relatives, lawyers, NGOs, journalists and government officials¹¹⁸.
- 6.4.8 HRW reported that ‘Rwandan embassy officials or members of the Rwandan Community Abroad (RCA), a global network of diaspora associations tied to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, have monitored and pressured Rwandan asylum seekers and refugees to return to Rwanda or stop their criticism of the government.’¹¹⁹
- 6.4.9 The HRW report of October 2023 documented 5 killings, 3 kidnappings and attempted kidnappings, and at least 6 incidents of physical assaults and beatings of Rwandan permanent residents, refugees, and asylum seekers in Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda¹²⁰.
- 6.4.10 HRW noted regarding victims:
 ‘In some cases, the perpetrators spoke Kinyarwanda, Rwanda’s national language, or were suspected of working for the Rwandan government. Some of the victims were told they would be handed over to Rwanda or were accused of working against the Rwandan government. As critics or opponents, perceived or real, of the government, the victims all share a certain profile; prior to these attacks many had been threatened by individuals who were part of, or close to, the Rwandan government.’¹²¹

[Back to Contents](#)

6.5 Electronic surveillance

- 6.5.1 Amnesty International (AI) reported in July 2021 that ‘New evidence uncovered by Amnesty International and Forbidden Stories has revealed that Rwandan authorities used NSO Group’s spyware to potentially target more than 3,500 activists, journalists and politicians. It was also used to infect the phone of Carine Kanimba, Paul Rusesabagina’s daughter, of Hotel Rwanda fame.’¹²²
- 6.5.2 The FH report 2023 report stated: ‘The practical space for free private discussion is limited in part by indications that the government monitors personal communications. Social media are heavily monitored, and the law allows for government hacking of telecommunications networks.’¹²³
- 6.5.3 The FH FonN report 2023 noted:
 ‘The full extent of the authorities’ surveillance capabilities is unknown, though the government is known to use commercial spyware tools and there is a strong sense among observers that surveillance is pervasive. The

¹¹⁸ HRW, “[Join us or die” Rwanda’s extraterritorial repression](#)’, (page 1 & 11) 10 October 2023

¹¹⁹ HRW, “[Join us or die” Rwanda’s extraterritorial repression](#)’, (page 7) 10 October 2023

¹²⁰ HRW, “[Join us or die” Rwanda’s extraterritorial repression](#)’, (page 7 & 61), 10 October 2023

¹²¹ HRW, “[Join us or die” Rwanda’s extraterritorial repression](#)’, (page 7), 10 October 2023

¹²² AI, ‘[Pegasus Project: Rwandan authorities chose thousands...](#)’, 19 July 2021

¹²³ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)’ (D4), March 2023

government closely monitors social media discussions, as evidenced by the prevalence of progovernment commenters that frequently appear on social media platforms....

'The Rwandan government is known to use Pegasus, a surveillance software developed by Israeli technology firm NSO Group, against opposition figures, journalists, and human rights defenders. In September 2021 Belgium's military intelligence service assessed that a Belgian journalist and his wife's devices were likely targeted by Pegasus software, and that the attack was probably initiated by Rwandan authorities.' ¹²⁴

- 6.5.4 The FH FonN report 2023 highlighted: 'Rwandan authorities are presumed to compel service providers to assist in monitoring and surveillance...In 2018, interviews with anonymous local sources confirmed that government representatives are systematically embedded within the operations of telecommunications companies for the purposes of surveillance. Telecommunications technicians also routinely intercept communications on behalf of the military.' ¹²⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

7. Freedom of assembly

7.1 Law – general

- 7.1.1 A website covering the law on the right to peaceful assembly, managed by the Centre for Human Rights of the University of Pretoria, referred to the international, regional, and domestic laws that Rwanda is party to:

'Rwanda is a State Party to the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Article 21 governs the right of peaceful assembly...

'At regional level, Rwanda is a State Party to the 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Article 11 provides as follows:

'Every individual shall have the right to assemble freely with others. The exercise of this right shall be subject only to necessary restrictions provided for by law in particular those enacted in the interest of national security, the safety, health, ethics and rights and freedoms of others.

'Rwanda is also a party to the 1998 Protocol on the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, but has withdrawn the possibility of individuals and NGOs to bring cases before the Court...

'The 1991 Law on Public Demonstrations and Public Gatherings is the primary legislation governing assembly. Article 5 of the Law requires notification to the authorities of an assembly 30 days in advance. The authorities must respond at least six days before the assembly. There is no exception made for spontaneous demonstrations, and there is no specific provision to address counter-demonstrations.' ¹²⁶

¹²⁴ FH, '[Freedom on the Net 2023 – Rwanda](#)' (C5), 4 October 2023

¹²⁵ FH, '[Freedom on the Net 2023 – Rwanda](#)' (C6), 4 October 2023

¹²⁶ Laws on The Right of Peaceful Assembly, '[Rwanda](#)', July 2022

- 7.1.2 In a July 2020 submission during Rwanda’s UPR, human rights organisations CIVICUS and Defend Defenders stated:
- ‘While the Constitution recognises the right to peaceful assembly, Law No. 68/2018 Determining Offences and Penalties in General regulates this right and requires that organisers give the authorities a month’s notice of their intention to gather. The law does not provide for spontaneous demonstrations. As a result, protests in Rwanda are rare... When protestors in Rwanda fall foul of the rules governing public assemblies, they are liable to be punished with imprisonment or harsh fines. Further, Article 225 of Law No. 68/2018 prescribes that if a protest “threatens” security, public order, or health, the penalty upon conviction is a term of imprisonment of between six months and a year and a fine of between 3,000,000 Rwandan francs... [£1,992¹²⁷] and 5,000,000 Rwandan francs... [£3,319¹²⁸].’¹²⁹
- 7.1.3 In its submission to the UPR, CIVICUS/Defend Defenders provided one specific example in its discussion of ‘Freedom of peaceful assembly’, the 2018 Kiziba refugee protests. For more information see [Refugee protests at Kiziba in 2018](#).
- 7.1.4 The BTI 2022 report noted ‘The constitution guarantees freedom of assembly... however, assemblies require police permits and are subject to government restrictions. Opposition, groups or people suspected of not supporting the government rarely are accorded the rights to exercise freedom of assembly.’¹³⁰
- 7.1.5 The FH report 2023 noted: ‘Although the constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, this right is sharply limited and rarely exercised in practice. Fear of arrest or police violence serves as a deterrent to protests, and gatherings are sometimes disrupted even when organizers obtain official authorization.’¹³¹

See also [Non-governmental organisations](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

7.2 Data on protests

- 7.2.1 There is limited reporting on the number of protests occurring in Rwanda. The most complete data has been gathered by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). ACLED is a US non-profit organisation which collects information on political violence and demonstrations. ACLED data is publicly available and is ‘... collected in real time and published on a weekly basis according to well developed methodological principles, resulting in current, reliable, and comparable data. Data go through multiple rounds of review prior to publication.’¹³² ACLED researchers ‘collect and review the latest reports from selected local, national and international sources, including media, vetted social media accounts, government and

¹²⁷ Xe.com, ‘[3,000,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British Pounds](#)’, 2 November 2023

¹²⁸ Xe.com, ‘[5,000,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British Pounds](#)’, 2 November 2023

¹²⁹ CIVICUS and other, ‘[Submission to the UN UPR, 37th Session...Rwanda](#)’ (page 10), 9 July 2020

¹³⁰ BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Political participation), 23 February 2022

¹³¹ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)’ (E1), March 2023

¹³² ACLED, ‘[Quick guide to ACLED data](#)’ (page 3), June 2022

NGO reports, and partner organizations. ACLED researchers work to triangulate reports when and where possible, but they do not independently verify events or gather first-hand information on the ground.’¹³³

7.2.2 ACLED collects information on 6 types of events that constitute political disorder:

- battles
- explosions/ remote violence
- violence against civilians
- protests
- riots
- strategic developments¹³⁴.

7.2.3 ACLED defines a ‘protest’ as: ‘A public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them.’¹³⁵

7.2.4 ACLED splits the category of ‘protests’ into 3 sub-categories:

- Peaceful protest: ‘[W]hen demonstrators are engaged in a protest while not engaging in violence or other forms of rioting behaviour and are not faced with any sort of force or engagement.’¹³⁶
- Protest with intervention: ‘[W]hen individuals are engaged in a peaceful protest during which there is an attempt to disperse or suppress the protest without serious/lethal injuries being reported or the targeting of protesters with lethal weapons.’¹³⁷
- Excessive force against protesters: ‘[W]hen individuals are engaged in a peaceful protest and are targeted with violence by an actor leading to (or if it could lead to) serious/lethal injuries.’¹³⁸

7.2.5 ACLED defines ‘riots’ as: “[V]iolent events where demonstrators or mobs engage in disruptive acts, including but not limited to rock throwing, property destruction, etc... Rioters may begin as peaceful protesters, or may be intent on engaging in spontaneous and disorganized violence from the beginning of their actions.’¹³⁹

7.2.6 The table below, compiled by CPIT, provides a summary of documented incidents of protests and riots in Rwanda between 1 January 2017 and 23 November 2023, using data downloaded from the ACLED website

Event type	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 (part)	Total

¹³³ ACLED, [‘Quick Guide to ACLED Data’](#), June 2022

¹³⁴ ACLED, [‘Quick guide to ACLED data’](#) (page 6), June 2022

¹³⁵ ACLED, [‘Codebook’](#) (page 13), no date

¹³⁶ ACLED, [‘Codebook’](#) (page 14), no date

¹³⁷ ACLED, [‘Codebook’](#) (page 14), no date

¹³⁸ ACLED, [‘Codebook’](#) (page 14), no date

¹³⁹ ACLED, [‘Codebook’](#) (page 14), no date

Protest	0	3	2	1	1	3	1	11
Riot	1	2	0	1	2	2	2	10

140

7.2.7 ACLED's dataset detailed information about the location and circumstances of each protest. ACLED's notes on the protests, together with sub-category, have been reproduced in the table below.

Date of protest and sub-category	ACLED notes on event and location
21 February 2018 (peaceful protest)	'Congolese refugees in the Karongi Refugee Camp held a two-day sit-in outside the UN offices in Kiziba/Karongi refugee camp. They are angry about a recent reduction in food assistance and are demanding resettlement.'
3 June 2018 (peaceful protest)	'... hundreds of Rwandans marched in Kigali to encourage the public to address plastic pollution. The march was organised by the Ministry of Environment.'
26 November 2018 (peaceful protest)	'... thousands of protesters marched in Kigali against gender-based violence. The march was part of state-organized days against gender-based violence.'
4 June 2019 (excessive force against protesters)	'... prisoners demonstrated in Mageragere prison (Rutsiro, West), for unknown reasons. The guards shot dead two prisoners and seriously injured some others.'
9 July 2019 (peaceful protest)	'... prisoners at Nyarugenge (Kigali) demonstrated against community services activities. Authorities reported a small number of protesters (who have subsequently been charged) were attempting to incite other prisoners.'
15 April 2020 (protest with intervention)	'... refugees that had recently been transferred from Libya [sic] refugee camps demonstrated against living conditions due to coronavirus restrictions at the Gashora refugee camp outside Kigali.... Police intervened to stop the demonstration.'
8 October 2021 (peaceful protest)	'... construction workers demonstrated against the lack of payment for their work on a road connecting Nyamyumba and Brasserie Sector in Rubavu District (Rubavu, West).'
30 September 2022 (peaceful protest)	'... Gashanja residents held a peaceful protest in front of Kivuye Health Center in Kivuye (Burera, North) to show their discontent following the killing of a man by police forces.'
12 December 2022	'... Congolese refugees protested against killings of

¹⁴⁰ ACLED, '[Data export tool](#)', data downloaded 23 November 2023

(peaceful protest)	Tutsi families ongoing in their home country, in Kigeme (Nyamagabe, South). They say that they are tired of living in exile and want to return home.'
12 December 2022 (peaceful protest)	'... Congolese refugees protested against killings of Tutsi families ongoing in their home country, in Mahama (Kirehe, East). They demanded that the international community intervenes.'
7 February 2023 (excessive force against protesters)	'... locals protested the arrest of a trader in Nyamirama (Nyaruguru, South)... When police tried to arrest the victim and her sister, locals protested and this prompted the police to shoot, killing the victim and injuring another person. Police claimed they were prompted to shoot after residents started throwing stones at them.'

141

7.2.8 For more information on the 2018 Kiziba refugee protests see [Refugee protests at Kiziba in 2018](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

7.3 Assembly and association of refugees

7.3.1 In 2016 the Rwandan Government's Ministry in Charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA) published Ministerial Instructions determining the management of refugees and refugee camps. Article 2 refers to 'Prohibited acts and behaviors for refugees' including 'Political activities', 'Gatherings based on ethnicity, nationality, or any other sectarian ground' and 'Participating or inciting others into unlawful riots'¹⁴².

7.3.2 Article 12 of the Ministerial Instructions refers to refugees' rights and freedoms and states that they have the right to 'Membership to association of forums with non-political orientation...'¹⁴³

7.3.3 An undated article by UNHCR-Rwanda noted 'Across the five refugee camps, UNHCR and partners have set up refugee leadership and representation committees and continue to train community mobilizers to provide a structure for the community to voice their concerns and identify challenges.'¹⁴⁴

7.3.4 A UNHCR operational update from September 2022 mentioned '54 refugee led committees and support groups.' The groups were mentioned in relation to a refugee-led approach to tackling SGBV, no further information was provided about the groups' other functions or roles¹⁴⁵.

[Back to Contents](#)

¹⁴¹ ACLED, '[Data export tool](#)', data downloaded 25 June 2023

¹⁴² MINEMA, '[Ministerial instructions determining the management of...](#)' (Article 2), June 2016

¹⁴³ MINEMA, '[Ministerial instructions determining the management of...](#)' (Article 12e), June 2016

¹⁴⁴ UNHCR, '[Protection](#)', no date

¹⁴⁵ UNHCR, '[Operational update: Rwanda September 2022](#)', 17 October 2022

7.4 Refugee protests at Kiziba in 2018

7.4.1 In a press statement on 4 May 2018, UNHCR described how ‘dwindling assistance levels and food ration reductions’ had resulted in a series of confrontations between residents of Kiziba refugee camp and the Rwandan National Police. The statement documented the start of the protests in February 2018 and mentioned specific incidents on 22 February and the week of 29 April 2018¹⁴⁶.

7.4.2 A UNHCR press statement on 23 February 2018 described how the Kiziba protests unfolded:

‘... protests led to the tragic deaths of at least five refugees and the injury of many others – including the members of the police force – on Thursday [22 February]...

‘Around 700 Congolese refugees from Kiziba refugee camp were demonstrating outside the UNHCR field office in Karongi, in western Rwanda. The protests, ongoing since February 20, were related to food ration cuts that have added to the refugees’ sense of despair and lack of long-term prospective [sic]. Police were reported to have used teargas to disperse the protestors, after attempts to resolve the situation had failed. Clashes were reported before the police fired shots at angry protestors...

‘This tragedy should have been avoided and disproportionate use of force against desperate refugees is not acceptable.’¹⁴⁷

7.4.3 In an update on 26 February 2018, UNHCR revised the number of refugee deaths which resulted from the 22 February protests to 11¹⁴⁸.

7.4.4 The New Humanitarian, an independent non-profit news organisation, also reported on the February 2018 incident. The article opined that one of the reasons for the protests was a belief that humanitarian aid distribution to refugees would be changed to reflect Rwanda’s existing social protection system (‘Ubudehe’). The concern of one refugee leader was that the Ubudehe system was less substantial than humanitarian aid. The article noted the Rwandan government stated there were no plans to integrate refugees into the Ubudehe system¹⁴⁹.

7.4.5 KT Press reported on 30 April 2018:

‘The government has disbanded the executive committee members at Kiziba refugee camp in Karongi district, Western Province – following investigations that they are behind the ongoing violent unrest at the camp hosting Congolese refugees...

‘To halt further revolts incited by the executive committee heads, Midimar [Ministry of Emergency Management now MINEMA] said that; it “has, pursuant to Ministerial instructions NO 01/2017 of 3 November 2017 on conduct of elections in refugee settings, decided to dissolve the refugees’ executive committee with immediate effect, as one of the measures to

¹⁴⁶ UNHCR, ‘[Clashes in Rwanda camp lead to tragic refugee death](#)’, 4 May 2018

¹⁴⁷ UNHCR, ‘[UNHCR shocked over reports of refugee deaths in Rwanda](#)’, 23 February 2018

¹⁴⁸ UNHCR, ‘[UNHCR shocked over refugee deaths in Rwanda](#)’, 26 February 2018

¹⁴⁹ The New Humanitarian, ‘[Please Tell Us Where We Belong...](#)’, 4 April 2018

restore law and order in the camp and its surroundings.”¹⁵⁰

7.4.6 The New Times, a Rwandan English language online news site, reported on 2 May 2018:

‘National Police say 23 Congolese refugees from Kiziba refugee camp in the Western Province, were arrested on Tuesday [1 May 2018] for throwing stones and attacking police officers with sharp objects.’ According to the New Times, a Rwandan English language online news site, the incident followed a decision by MINEMA a few days earlier:

‘... to dissolve the refugees’ executive committee as one of the measures to restore law and order in the camp and its surroundings. The decision was taken after findings by the ministry have established that a core issue causing unrest in the Kiziba Camp was the refugees’ executive committee, which was established to help in the management of the camp, but has instead been mobilising refugees to revolt against government officials and partner institutions, denying them access to the camp, and causing disorder among the refugees, thereby rendering the camp and its surroundings unsafe.’¹⁵¹

7.4.7 Reporting on the same incident, Reuters commented on 2 May 2018: ‘It was not immediately clear what triggered the latest flare up, but some refugees said it stemmed from violence in February when police killed at least five refugees and injured 20 others after protests over cuts in food rations.’¹⁵²

7.4.8 In a press briefing following the May incident, a UNHCR spokesperson said:

‘UNHCR... is reiterating its call on the Rwandan authorities and Congolese refugees in Rwanda for restraint and calm, after recent clashes left one refugee dead and others injured at the Kiziba refugee camp in western Rwanda. The full circumstances surrounding this incident are still unclear, but we understand that the death of the refugee followed a stand-off between the Rwandan National Police and a crowd of refugee youths on Tuesday.’¹⁵³

7.4.9 In a follow-up article published a year after the Kiziba protests, HRW noted: ‘Rwandan National Police arrested over 60 refugees between February and May 2018 and charged them with participating in illegal demonstrations, violence against public authorities, rebellion, and disobeying enforcement of law. Some were also charged with “spreading false information with intent to create a hostile international opinion against the Rwandan state.”’¹⁵⁴

7.4.10 In the same article, HRW interviewed 6 refugees who witnessed the 22 February protest: ‘They [the interviewees] said the police were quick to use lethal force in circumstances that were wholly unjustified by the protesters’ actions.’¹⁵⁵

7.4.11 In response to the incident at Kiziba refugee camp, the National Commission

¹⁵⁰ KT Press, ‘[Kiziba camp leaders behind violent unrest – gov’t](#)’, 30 April 2018

¹⁵¹ The New Times, ‘[Congolese refugees arrested for attacking police officers](#)’, 2 May 2018

¹⁵² Reuters, ‘[Rwanda police arrest 23 Congolese refugees after violence in camp](#)’, 2 May 2018

¹⁵³ UNHCR, ‘[Clashes in Rwanda camp lead to tragic refugee death](#)’, 4 May 2018

¹⁵⁴ HRW, ‘[Rwanda: A Year On, No Justice for Refugee Killings](#)’, 23 February 2019

¹⁵⁵ HRW, ‘[Rwanda: A Year On, No Justice for Refugee Killings](#)’, 23 February 2019

on Human Rights (NCHR) investigated. The NCHR's conclusions included, 'live ammunition was used as the last resort after violent and organized attack was launched by a group of demonstrators against [the] Police.'¹⁵⁶. For more information on the function and independence of the NCHR see [Human rights oversight bodies](#).

- 7.4.12 At a meeting on 21 March 2022 between the Home Office (UKHO) and the Legal Aid Forum (LAF), a network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which advocate for access to legal services, a LAF representative commented on the events at Kiziba: 'There was an incident in 2018 in the Kiziba camp in the west. There was refugee rioting and the police used force. The case is pending before the Court. LAF handled the case first and were involved (representing the refugees). They left the case to a partner in 2020. Police alleged that they were attacked by rioting refugees. Some refugees have been charged with incitement to commit a crime. Not heard of any other incidents since.'¹⁵⁷
- 7.4.13 At a meeting with UKHO officials on 21 March 2022, UNHCR commented: '[The] Impact [of the events at Kiziba is] still being felt at [the] camp – people were very upset at the length of sentences.
- 'However, [UNHCR] are not aware of any other similar incidents. Occasionally people (1 or 2) sit in front of [UNHCR's] offices, but security remove [them] peacefully. Students demonstrate in secondary school, smashing windows. Now lots of care about how these are handled, refugees also more careful since...
- 'UNHCR also added that arrest and detention for unauthorized demonstrations is in the law in Rwanda and would apply equally to nationals.'¹⁵⁸
- 7.4.14 In May 2022 HRW provided additional information on the sentencing of those arrested. HRW stated: '...between October 2018 and September 2019, at least 35 refugees were sentenced to between 3 months and 15 years in prison. One refugee was accused of sharing information with us, and the communications were used as evidence against him during trial. He is currently serving a 15-year sentence.'¹⁵⁹
- 7.4.15 In a June 2022 statement following the announcement of the MEDP, UNHCR citing, the Kiziba protests as an example, commented: 'UNHCR is concerned that persons of concern relocated from the UK to Rwanda may be at significant risk of detention and treatment not in accordance with international standards should they express dissatisfaction through protests after arrival.'¹⁶⁰
- 7.4.16 ACLED documented 3 events related to the Kiziba protests. The ACLED categories and notes on each event have been reproduced in the table

¹⁵⁶ NCHR, '[Summary of the NCHR Report on Kiziba Refugee Camp Incident](#)', no date

¹⁵⁷ Annex 3, '[A6. Meeting with Legal Aid Forum \(LAF\)](#)', 21 March 2022

¹⁵⁸ Annex 2, '[A1. Meeting with UNHCR](#)', 21 March 2022

¹⁵⁹ HRW, '[UK's Rights Assessment of Rwanda Not Based on Facts](#)', 12 May 2022

¹⁶⁰ UNHCR, '[UNHCR analysis of the legality and appropriateness...](#)' (paragraph 20), 8 June 2022

below.

Date of event and category	ACLED notes on event
21 February 2018 (peaceful protest)	'Congolese refugees in the Karongi Refugee Camp held a two-day sit-in outside the UN offices in Kiziba/Karongi refugee camp. They are angry about a recent reduction in food assistance and are demanding resettlement.'
22 February 2018 (riot)	'... a group of Congolese refugees demonstrated outside the UN offices in Kiziba/Karongi Refugee Camp.... The police and military forces opened fire on them, killing 11 refugees and injuring another 20. 7 police officers were injured by the demonstrators. 63 refugees have been arrested for staging illegal demonstrations.'
1 May 2018 (riot)	'... 23 Congolese refugees from Kiziba refugee camp were arrested for throwing stones and attacking police officers. One refugee was reported killed by UNHCR.'

161

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

8. Law and order

8.1 Legal provisions

8.1.1 Article 29 of the 2015 Constitution covers the 'Right to due process of law', including the right:

- '[T]o be informed of the nature and cause of charges and the right to defence and legal representation.'
- '[T]o be presumed innocent until proved guilty.'
- '[T]o appear before a competent Court'.¹⁶²

8.1.2 The 2019 'Law relating to the criminal procedure' sets out the trial process including:

- Timeframe and content of the judgement (Articles 138 and 139)
- Right to appeal (Article 180)¹⁶³

8.1.3 The legal basis for and operation of the judiciary is set out in Article 151 of the Constitution, Principles of the judicial system, which states:

'The judicial system is governed by the following principles:

'1° justice is rendered in the name of the people and nobody may be a judge in his or her own cause;

¹⁶¹ ACLED, '[Data export tool](#)', data downloaded 17 August 2022

¹⁶² GoR, '[Constitution](#)' (Article 29), 24 December 2015

¹⁶³ GoR, '[Law relating to the criminal procedure Number 027/2019 of 19/09/2019](#)', 8 November 2019

'2° Court proceedings are conducted in public unless the Court determines that proceedings be held in camera in circumstances provided for by law;

'3° every judgment must indicate its basis, be written in its entirety, and delivered in public together with the grounds and the decision taken;

'4° Court rulings are binding on all parties concerned, be they public authorities or individuals. They cannot be challenged except through procedures determined by law;

'5° in exercising their judicial functions, judges at all times do it in accordance with the law and are independent from any power or authority.

'The code of conduct and integrity of Judges is determined by specific laws.'¹⁶⁴

[Back to Contents](#)

8.2 Criminal justice system: police and judiciary

8.2.1 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted:

'The Rwanda National Police, under the Ministry of Internal Security, is responsible for domestic security. The Rwanda Defense Force, under the Ministry of Defense, also works on internal security and intelligence matters alongside the Rwanda National Police. The Rwanda Investigation Bureau is responsible for investigative functions formerly performed by the Rwanda National Police, including counterterrorism investigations, investigation of economic and financial crimes, and judicial police functions. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over state security forces.'¹⁶⁵

8.2.2 The Rwanda National Police website explained in an undated entry: '[Law No 09/2000 of June 16, 2000](#) determines the powers, responsibilities, organization and functioning of the institution as amended later by the law [No 46/2010 of 14th December, 2010](#). The RNP as a proactive force is built on the core values of professionalism, patriotism, integrity and high level of discipline...'¹⁶⁶

8.2.3 Regarding the judiciary, Article 152 of the Constitution states: '[The] Courts consist of ordinary and specialised Courts. Ordinary Courts are comprised of the Supreme Court, the High Court, Intermediate Courts and Primary Courts. Specialised Courts are comprised of Commercial Courts and Military Courts [...] An organic law may establish or remove an ordinary or a specialised Court. A law determines the organisation, functioning and jurisdiction of Courts.'¹⁶⁷

8.2.4 The functioning of the courts is regulated by a number of laws:

¹⁶⁴ GoR, '[Constitution](#)' (Article 151), 24 December 2015

¹⁶⁵ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices...](#)' (Executive summary), 20 March 2023

¹⁶⁶ RNP, '[About us](#)' (History), no date

¹⁶⁷ GoR, '[Constitution](#)' (Article 152), 24 December 2015

- Law no 012/2018 of 4 April 2018 determines the organisation and functioning of the judiciary¹⁶⁸
- Law No 09/2004 of 29 April 2004 which provides a Code of Ethics for judges¹⁶⁹
- Law No 22/2018 of 29 April 2018 provides for appeal / review of court decisions / judgments¹⁷⁰

8.2.5 The US CIA World Factbook provided background on the structure of the judiciary: '[The] Supreme Court (consists of the chief and deputy chief justices and 15 judges; normally organized into 3-judge panels); High Court (consists of the court president, vice president, and a minimum of 24 judges and organized into 5 chambers)... subordinate courts: High Court of the Republic; commercial courts including the High Commercial Court; intermediate courts; primary courts; and military specialized courts'¹⁷¹

8.2.6 The High Court of the Judiciary explained on its website in an undated entry: 'As stipulated by the [Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda](#) of 2003 revised in 2015, especially in article 149, and in accordance to article 5 and 6 of the Law n° 012/2018 of 04/04/2018 determining the organisation and functioning of the Judiciary... The High Council of the Judiciary Court is the supreme governing organ of the Judiciary. It sets general guidelines governing the organisation of the Judiciary.'¹⁷²

[Back to Contents](#)

8.3 Rule of law

8.3.1 Polling company Gallup provides a worldwide gauge of people's sense of personal security and their personal experiences with crime and law enforcement. Their 2020 Global Law and Order report (the most recent version to include Rwanda), scored Rwanda at 80 (out of 100), higher than the regional average (67). The results were based on interviews with nearly 175,000 adults in 144 countries and areas in 2019. Respondents were asked 4 questions:

- In the city or area where you live, do you have confidence in the local police force?
- Do you feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where you live?
- Within the last 12 months, have you had money or property stolen from you or another household member?
- Within the past 12 months, have you been assaulted or mugged?¹⁷³

8.3.2 Dr Hazel Cameron, an academic researcher from Pearl International Insights in oral evidence at the Joint Committee on Human Rights in June 2022

¹⁶⁸ GoR, '[Law no 012/2018](#)', 4 April 2018

¹⁶⁹ GoR, '[Law No 09/2004](#)', 29 April 2004

¹⁷⁰ GoR, Ministry of Justice, '[Official Gazette](#)' (Law No 22/2018), 29 April 2018

¹⁷¹ US CIA, '[World Factbook](#)' (Rwanda), updated 6 December 2023

¹⁷² GoR, '[The Judiciary](#)' (High Council of the Judiciary), no date

¹⁷³ Gallup, '[2020 Global Law and Order Report](#)' (pages 7 and 16), 2020

noted:

'The World Economic Forum report of 2021 states that Rwanda has the most reliable police service in Africa...[and] is the number one country where citizens trust and rely on police services to enforce law and order, and it is the 13th country globally.... Rwanda has low levels of corruption and there is zero tolerance for corruption in the Rwanda National Police force.

Presidential orders dismissing police officers for acts of corruption and other forms of misconduct are available online on the website of the Ministry of Justice.'¹⁷⁴

8.3.3 The FH report covering events in 2022, attributes scores of 0 to 4 points for each of 10 political rights indicators and 15 civil liberties indicators, which take the form of questions. A score of 0 represents the minimal right / civil liberty and 4 the maximum¹⁷⁵

8.3.4 Rwanda's scores on the Rule of Law are summarised in the table below¹⁷⁶:

Rule of Law	Score 0- 4
Is there an independent judiciary?	0/4
Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	1/4
Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?	1/4
Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?	1/4

8.3.5 The World Justice Project's (WJP) 'Rule of Law' index is a composite of 8 separate elements. The 2023 index is built from 'more than 500 variables drawn from the assessments of over 149,000 households and 3,400 legal practitioners and experts in 142 countries and jurisdictions.'¹⁷⁷ The household survey in Rwanda was conducted in 2018 and had a sample size of 316¹⁷⁸.

8.3.6 Rwanda's global rank in the 2023 index was 41st out of 142 countries and 1st in the region¹⁷⁹.

8.3.7 Since 2019, Rwanda's overall Rule of Law index score has increased from 0.61 to 0.63 (where 1 indicates the strongest adherence to the rule of law)¹⁸⁰

8.3.8 Rwanda's score on each element, plus the country's global and regional rank (within sub-Saharan Africa), is summarised in the table below¹⁸¹.

Factor	Score	Regional	Global rank
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¹⁷⁴ Joint Committee on Human Rights, '[Oral evidence: The UK-Rwanda Migration ...](#)', 8 June 2022

¹⁷⁵ FH, '[Freedom in the World Research Methodology](#)', 2023

¹⁷⁶ FH '[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)' (section F), March 2023

¹⁷⁷ WJP, '[Methodology Snapshot](#)', (page 2), 25 October 2023

¹⁷⁸ WJP, '[Methodology Snapshot](#)', (page 5) 25 October 2023

¹⁷⁹ WJP, '[Rwanda](#)', 25 October 2023

¹⁸⁰ WJP, '[Rwanda](#)', 25 October 2023

¹⁸¹ WJP, '[Rule of Law Index 2023](#)' (page 148), 25 October 2023

	(Scale 0 to 1*)	rank (out of 34)	(out of 142)
Constraints on government powers	0.60	5	45
Absence of corruption	0.68	1	32
Open government	0.57	3	51
Fundamental rights	0.52	9	76
Order and security	0.85	1	27
Regulatory enforcement	0.60	2	41
Civil justice	0.65	1	31
Criminal justice	0.56	3	43
Overall	0.63	1	41

* 1 indicates the strongest adherence to the rule of law

8.3.9 Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), which ranks 180 countries and territories around the world by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, scoring on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean), ranked Rwanda 54th (out of 180 countries) ahead of a number of EU nations, giving it a score of 51 out of 100. This is a slight fall since 2021¹⁸². Transparency International Rwanda Bribery Index, based on a survey of 2,475 respondents, showed perception of the GoR's effectiveness on the fight against corruption fell from 81.9% in 2019 to 70.2% in 2022¹⁸³.

8.3.10 On whether safeguards against official corruption are strong and effective, the FH Report 2023 stated:

'The government takes measures to limit corruption, including regular dismissals and prosecutions of officials who are suspected of malfeasance. In 2018, Parliament passed penal code revisions that expanded the list of corruption-related crimes and increased penalties for those convicted. Among other high-profile cases in recent years, a state minister responsible for cultural affairs at the Ministry of Youth and Culture was sentenced to four years in prison on corruption charges in September 2022. A lack of transparency surrounding such prosecutions makes it difficult to assess whether they are politically motivated.

'There are a number of institutions dedicated to detecting and punishing misuse of public funds, including the Rwanda Public Procurement Authority, the Office of the Auditor General, the Office of the Ombudsman, and specialized chambers for economic crimes. Nevertheless, graft remains a problem, and few independent organizations or media outlets are able to investigate or report on corruption issues due to the risk of government reprisals.'¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Transparency International, '[Corruption Perceptions Index 2022](#)', January 2023

¹⁸³ Transparency International Rwanda, '[Rwanda Bribery Index 2022](#)' (page 6), 2022

¹⁸⁴ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)' (C2), March 2023

8.4 Access to justice

- 8.4.1 In an undated article on its website, the Government of Rwanda provided information about the availability of legal aid services: ‘The Ministry of Justice has established Access to Justice Bureaus (MAJ) at every District level (3 lawyers per District) as decentralized service to assist citizens to access legal aid at free cost.’ The responsibilities of MAJ are listed on the website and include: ‘To provide legal assistance and legal representation in Courts for poor and vulnerable people’ and ‘To handle all issues related to GBV.’¹⁸⁵
- 8.4.2 In an undated article on its website, the Center for Rule of Law Rwanda (CERULAR), a national non-governmental organisation, noted ‘Access to justice challenges in Rwanda include but [are] not limited to; limited access to legal aid services especially legal representation in criminal, civil and administrative matters; low level of enforcement of court decisions; arbitrary application of the law and/or limited respect of due process rights especially in criminal matters by some law enforcers, as well as low uptake of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms leading to high backlog of cases in formal courts.’¹⁸⁶
- 8.4.3 A spokesperson for the courts, cited in The New Times, a Rwandan English language online news site, in September 2023, said that despite an increase in judges and registrars since 2004 (318 judges and 235 registrars nationwide as of September 2023), the backlog of cases continued to rise, from 37,116 in 2005 to 91,381 in 2022. According to the Ministry of Justice, ‘despite the shortage, the number of resolved cases has continued to increase’, and there were ‘strategies in place to ensure quality justice is delivered.’¹⁸⁷
- 8.4.4 CERULAR also discussed the provision of legal aid services: ‘Through CERULAR’s legal aid clinic, vulnerable persons are provided with various legal aid services namely; verbal legal advice and coaching for legal representation, preparation and filing written court submissions, legal representation, orientation and accompaniment, mediation, legal representation, evidence recovery and enforcement of judgments. Between 2018/2019 and 2019/2020, CERULAR provided legal aid services to 75 poor and vulnerable persons of whom 69.3% were women. Most of the cases received included; divorce, property especially land, alimony, Gender Based Violence.’¹⁸⁸
- 8.4.5 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted: ‘By law detainees are allowed access to lawyers, but the expense and scarcity of lawyers limited access to legal representation... The RBA [Rwanda Bar Association] and member organizations of the Legal Aid Forum provided legal assistance to some indigent [very poor] defendants but lacked the resources to provide defense

¹⁸⁵ GoR, ‘[Legal aid services](#)’, no date

¹⁸⁶ CERULAR, ‘[Access to Justice](#)’, no date

¹⁸⁷ The New Times, ‘[How judiciary is tackling case backlog, maintaining quality...](#)’, 5 September 2023

¹⁸⁸ CERULAR, ‘[Provision of a legal aid service](#)’, no date

counsel to all in need.’¹⁸⁹

- 8.4.6 During the period July 2021 to March 2022, the National Public Prosecution Authority (NPPA) reported it had received and resolved 66 complaints from members of the public¹⁹⁰. No further details were provided about the nature of the complaints.

[Back to Contents](#)

8.5 Judicial independence and fair trial

- 8.5.1 Article 150 of the Constitution states ‘The Judiciary is independent and exercises financial and administrative autonomy.’¹⁹¹
- 8.5.2 The Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), which describes itself as ‘a public institution... generally mandated to promote good governance principles and monitor service delivery across public and private sector institutions as well as Civil Society Organizations. RGB is independent and doesn't receive instructions from any other institution in exercising its mission’¹⁹² produces an annual ‘governance scorecard’. This is based on 8 ‘pillars’, 35 indicators and 151 variables; one of the pillars is ‘Rule of law’. The data is drawn from ‘various data sources capturing institutional and sectorial performance, governance assessments, civil society organisations... public and private sector organisations’ and public perception surveys¹⁹³.
- 8.5.3 In its annual scorecard for 2023, the RGB assessed Rwanda’s rule of law performance overall as 88.89% (a high score indicating effective performance). The sub-category for the performance of the judiciary was 79.55% which in turn was broken down into the following sub-categories:

Category	Score
Trust in the judiciary	90.7%
Percentage of backlog cases in the judiciary	(data 59%) 22.54%
Independence of courts	95.50%
Percentage of cases filed online in courts	100%
Clearance rate	89%

¹⁹⁴

- 8.5.4 The BTI 2022 report scored Rwanda 4 out of 10 under the criteria ‘Independent judiciary’ and stated: ‘The Rwandan judiciary has an important political function. The judiciary is perceived as largely independent and fair, pro-poor and inclusive, with the ability to interpret laws and to review legislation and policies. However, there are signs of political influence, which

¹⁸⁹ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1E), 20 March 2023

¹⁹⁰ NPPA, ‘[NPPA quarterly progress report, July 2021 to March 2022](#)’ (page 30), June 2022

¹⁹¹ GoR, ‘[Constitution](#)’ (Article 150), 24 December 2015

¹⁹² RGB, ‘[About RGB](#)’, no date

¹⁹³ RGB, ‘[Rwanda Governance Scorecard 10th Edition](#)’ (page 3), 31 October 2023

¹⁹⁴ RGB, ‘[Rwanda Governance Scorecard 10th Edition](#)’ (page 20), 31 October 2023

may indicate that the judiciary's apparent independence is not calculated for effect.'¹⁹⁵

- 8.5.5 On the independence of the judiciary, the FH report 2023 noted that, 'Despite constitutional provisions that declare its independence, the Rwandan judiciary lacks autonomy from the executive in practice. Top judicial officials are appointed by the president and confirmed by the RPF-dominated Senate. Judges rarely rule against the government, especially in politically sensitive cases.'¹⁹⁶
- 8.5.6 The 2022 USSD human rights report also noted: 'The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.'¹⁹⁷
- 8.5.7 The same USSD report added: 'Domestic and international observers noted outcomes in high-profile genocide, security, and politically sensitive cases appeared predetermined.'¹⁹⁸ The report mentioned Paul Rusesabagina's court case as one where 'many observers concluded his fair trial guarantees had not been respected.'¹⁹⁹
- 8.5.8 The same USSD report also noted: '... previous reports indicated state security forces coerced suspects into confessing guilt in security-related cases and judges tended to accept confessions allegedly obtained through torture, failing to order investigations of alleged torture.'²⁰⁰
- 8.5.9 HRW's World Report 2022, covering events in 2021, stated: '...[F]air trial standards were routinely flouted in cases deemed sensitive.' HRW cited 3 examples: political opponent Paul Rusesabagina; and two cases of people extradited or deported to Rwanda and tried for genocide-related crimes²⁰¹.
- 8.5.10 HRW's World Report covering events in 2022 noted '...there are persistent concerns about failure to uphold fair trial standards in domestic atrocity trials' but provided no examples unlike the previous year²⁰².
- 8.5.11 In May 2022, the Guardian reported: 'British judges have blocked extradition on the grounds the suspects would not receive a fair trial in Rwanda.' The extradition requests related to persons suspected of involvement in the 1994 genocide²⁰³.
- 8.5.12 The Government of Netherlands (GoN) 2023 country of origin information report on Rwanda provided information obtained from a confidential source, noted '...political pressure could also be exerted through the public prosecutor and the clerk of court. For example, critics of the authorities who

¹⁹⁵ BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)' (Rule of law), 23 February 2022

¹⁹⁶ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)' (F1), March 2023

¹⁹⁷ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1E), 20 March 2023

¹⁹⁸ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1E), 20 March 2023

¹⁹⁹ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1E), 20 March 2023

²⁰⁰ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1E), 20 March 2023

²⁰¹ HRW, '[World report 2022: Rwanda](#)', 13 January 2022

²⁰² HRW, '[World report 2023: Rwanda](#)', 12 January 2023

²⁰³ The Guardian, '[Rwanda president suggests UK extradite genocide suspects...](#)', 16 May 2022

had attracted a lot of public or international attention might spend a long time in pre-trial detention, even if they were eventually acquitted by the judge.²⁰⁴

- 8.5.13 For further information on refugees' access to justice see the section on Justice and Protection in the [Country Information Note Rwanda: Asylum system](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

8.6 State response to police misconduct

- 8.6.1 On 27 April 2020, the Guardian published an article about a Rwandan police chief accused of sexually assaulting a child refugee at the Gashora Transit Centre. The Guardian article noted 'The Rwandan government did not respond to requests for comment, but confirmed an investigation is underway.'²⁰⁵ For more information of the Gashora-based Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) see section on the ETM in the [Country Information Note on Rwanda: Asylum system](#).
- 8.6.2 In an update on 29 April 2020, the New Times, a Rwandan English language online news site, reported: '[the] Rwanda Investigation Bureau ...concluded that allegations of sexual assault by a minor refugee at the Gashora Emergency Transit Centre against a Rwanda National Police commander at the centre in Bugesera district are unfounded.' It cited a press statement issued by the Ministry of Emergency Management which stated "'The Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) has thoroughly investigated this allegation and determined that it was unfounded".²⁰⁶ CPIT found no other examples of similar incidents in the sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)).
- 8.6.3 On 1 September 2020, African Press Agency News (APA) reported: 'Rwanda National Police on Monday confirmed the arrest [of] one of its officers for allegedly shooting dead a civilian over the weekend during an operation to enforce directives against the spread of Covid-19 in Ngoma a district in Eastern Rwanda... Investigations to establish circumstances of the shooting are underway, said the police.'²⁰⁷
- 8.6.4 On 6 September 2020 APA News published a follow-up article: 'Rwandan Minister of Justice Johnston Busingye on Saturday condemned the use of excessive and at times deadly force by some police personnel while on duty during COVID-19 lockdown, saying this is not part of the operational guidelines of Rwanda National Police...

'In recent months, there have been incidents where police have been seen to have used unnecessarily excessive force in some instances, with some resulting in the death of detainees.

'The Minister of Justice made assurances that any of the incidents witnessed in the recent months of excessive force on unarmed suspects and detainees was not part of operational guidelines of the police or under instruction.'²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ GoN, '[Country of origin information report on human rights...](#) (page 44), 30 June 2023

²⁰⁵ The Guardian, '[Rwandan police chief accused of sexual assault of child refugee...](#)', 27 April 2020

²⁰⁶ The New Times, '[RIB dismisses abuse allegations at Gashora Transit Centre](#)', 29 April 2020

²⁰⁷ APA News, '[Rwandan Police officer arrested over killing resident...](#)', 1 September 2020

²⁰⁸ APA News, '[Rwanda's police condemned over use of excessive force...](#)', 6 September 2020

- 8.6.5 On 7 September 2020 KT Press reported ‘President Paul Kagame has spoken out on an ongoing debate on police brutality following recent incidents in which Rwandan National Police (RNP) officers have been on the spot for using excessive force in apprehending errant suspects, resulting into [sic] fatalities - something he attributed to individuals.’²⁰⁹
- 8.6.6 The article cited Mr Kagame as having said:
 ‘... while the Government will work closely with the police leadership to address the issue, it would be unfair to institutionalize individual actions of excessive force, by putting... [the blame] on the entire police force...
 “When people talk about Police brutality, I think it would be a mistake to have an image as if it is widespread or as if it is encouraged by anyone,” President Kagame said, adding that even going back in history, the country’s police force has been rated among the best national police forces around and beyond...
 “I want to assure you that we will rein it in and the leadership of the police is aware. I think the police force is [a] very good force otherwise.”²¹⁰
- 8.6.7 A December 2020 report by the NCHR noted allegations that some police officers had been involved in incidents which led to the deaths of citizens while enforcing anti -COVID-19 measures. The NCHR noted on-going criminal proceedings²¹¹. The 2022 NCHR annual report did not provide an update on these criminal proceedings.
- 8.6.8 The NCHR’s December 2020 report also stated ‘that some of the local leaders and night patrol agents... abused power during the enforcement of COVID-19 pandemic preventive measures. Positively, the Commission noted the prosecution of those who were involved.’²¹²
- 8.6.9 On 25 February 2021, The East African, a Kenyan newspaper, reported:
 ‘Rwanda National Police (RNP) has dismissed about 386 police officers over gross misconduct in its latest bid to clean up law enforcement, The EastAfrican has learnt. The officers, including 18 senior sergeants, 104 sergeants, corporals, and constables were sacked through a ministerial order published on February 16.
 ‘The number is more than six times the total number of police officers the force dismissed between January and October last year, signaling the ongoing quiet cleaning-up of the force...However, the force is still considered one of the most corrupt institutions.
 ‘The dismissals come in the wake of growing reports of police officers’ exploitation of lockdown and travel restriction measures put in place to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic since March last year.’²¹³
- 8.6.10 During a meeting between UKHO and NCHR on 22 March 2022, a HO official asked whether the NCHR had any concerns about the police using

²⁰⁹ KT Press [“We Will Rein It In” – President Kagame Weighs In On Police...](#), 7 September 2020

²¹⁰ KT Press [“We Will Rein It In” – President Kagame Weighs In On Police...](#), 7 September 2020

²¹¹ NCHR, [‘Assessment of the impact of anti Covid-19 pandemic ...’](#) (Section 3.1), December 2020

²¹² NCHR, [‘Assessment of the impact of anti Covid-19 pandemic ...’](#) (Section 3.2), December 2020

²¹³ The East African, [‘Rwanda kicks out 386 officers from police force’](#), 25 February 2021

excessive force and the representative commented:

‘Sometimes NCHR hear about it in [the] news and conducts an investigation and comes up with recommendations for relevant institutions. It is not something that occurs frequently, for example... restrictions/curfew in 2020 during COVID (for example if not home in time) police may have used excessive force. A policeman has been charged due to that (see NCHR’s report) However this was at the beginning (of Covid restrictions) and NCHR and other institutions intervened and this has been decreasing.’²¹⁴

8.6.11 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted: ‘The Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) is responsible for conducting investigations into [arbitrary or unlawful] killings. Under the Ministry of Justice, the National Public Prosecution Authority is responsible for prosecuting abuse cases involving police, while the Rwanda National Police (RNP) Inspectorate of Services investigates cases of police misconduct.’²¹⁵

8.6.12 The USSD also stated:

‘The constitution and law prohibit [torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment]... but there were reports of abuse of detainees by police and corrections service officials. The law prescribes 20 to 25 years’ imprisonment for any person convicted of torture and lifetime imprisonment for public officials who commit torture in the course of their official duties. There were no known cases where authorities applied this statute throughout the year.’²¹⁶

8.6.13 The 2022 USSD human rights report also noted: ‘...The RNP institutionalized community relations training that included appropriate use of force and respect for human rights, although arbitrary arrests and beatings remained problems.’²¹⁷

8.6.14 In February 2023, the New Times, Rwandan English language online news site, highlighted the Rwandan Investigation Bureau fired over 88 of its personnel due to corruption and other professional malpractices and some, particularly those who took bribes, were prosecuted ²¹⁸.

8.6.15 In June 2023, CGTN Africa reported over 200 Rwandan police officers were dismissed by the government after being implicated in corruption as part of Rwanda’s national policy to ‘ensure zero tolerance to graft [corruption].’ ²¹⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

8.7 Complaints about the police

8.7.1 The Rwandan National Police website has a section where citizens can lodge complaints against officers. The website contains a form which can be filled out anonymously, with a response expected within 7 days. The site

²¹⁴ Annex 3, ‘[A7. Meeting with NCHR](#)’, 22 March 2022

²¹⁵ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1A), 20 March 2023

²¹⁶ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1C), 20 March 2023

²¹⁷ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1D), 20 March 2023

²¹⁸ The New Times, ‘[Over 80 RIB investigators sacked over corruption](#)’, 7 February 2023

²¹⁹ CGTN Africa, ‘[200 Rwandan police officers fired after they were...](#)’, 15 June 2023

includes a helpline number for following up on complaints²²⁰.

8.7.2 In a meeting between the UKHO and LAF on 21 March 2022, UKHO officials asked about protection for victims of police mistreatment and the LAF representative commented: 'Yes, people know they can challenge this [mistreatment by the police]. The law provides for complaints about the police by the aggrieved. Suggest requesting the statistics from the police. The police are challenged a lot and can (and have been) charged with offences. Every police sector has figures of police who have been dismissed on these charges. Big numbers of police officers have been sent away from the police.'²²¹

8.7.3 In a meeting between HO and NCHR on 22 March 2022, a NCHR representative commented: 'People can complain to NCHR if they feel they've been mistreated [by the police], there is a toll-free line and electronic complaint management system through which people can send their complaints; NCHR then investigates (not every complaint may be true), advise [the] concerned party; if NCHR finds a human rights violation, [the NCHR] ask[s] [the] institution to address [the] issue.'²²²

[Back to Contents](#)

8.8 Death penalty

8.8.1 Rwanda abolished the death penalty for all crimes in 2007²²³.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

9. Transit and rehabilitation centres

9.1 Structure and function

9.1.1 The National Rehabilitation Service (NRS) was established in 2017 with the mission 'to eradicate all forms of deviant behaviors by instilling positive behaviors, educating and providing professional skills.'²²⁴ NRS responsibilities include overseeing the operation of rehabilitation and transit centres²²⁵.

9.1.2 The NRS stated in an undated article on its website: 'To date, every district of Rwanda has a transit centre except districts comprising the City of Kigali which share one transit centre. Therefore, a total of 28 district transit centres are now established all over the country.'²²⁶

9.1.3 In 2018, 3 rehabilitation centres were established under Presidential Order. The centres admit persons transferred from transit centres:

- Iwawa (Rutsiro District, Western Province), admits adult males

²²⁰ RNP, '[Citizen Complaint](#)', undated

²²¹ Annex 3, '[A6. Meeting with LAF](#)', 21 March 2022

²²² Annex 3, '[A7. Meeting with NCHR](#)', 22 March 2022

²²³ AI, '[Rwanda: Abolition of the death penalty](#)', 27 July 2007

²²⁴ GoR, '[Law N°17/2017 of 28/04/2017...](#)' (Article 7), 15 May 2017

²²⁵ GoR, '[Law N°17/2017 of 28/04/2017...](#)' (Article 7), 15 May 2017

²²⁶ GoR NRS, '[District transit centers](#)', no date

- Gitagata (Bugesera District, Eastern Province), admits adult females plus male and female children ages 10 to 17.
- Nyamagabe (Nyamagabe District, Southern Province), admits adult males²²⁷.

9.1.4 NCHR's 2022 annual report, published in March 2023, identified 8 Rehabilitation Centres²²⁸.

9.1.5 In April 2022, the NRS described the function of Rehabilitation Centres: 'These centers offer a range of services including Psycho-social rehabilitation, health care, educational programs and TVET [technical and vocational courses], which help trainees in behavior change and acquisition of skills that enable them to identify opportunities for gainful and meaningful economic integration within their communities and elsewhere in the country.'²²⁹

9.1.6 The 2022 USSD human rights report stated, 'As in previous years, authorities held detainees without charge at district transit centers for weeks or months at a time before either transferring them to a National Rehabilitation Service rehabilitation center without judicial review or forcibly returning them to their home areas.'²³⁰

9.1.7 A 27 September 2021 HRW article noted:

'Since 2017, legislation and policies under the government's strategy to "eradicate delinquency" have sought to legitimize and regulate so-called transit centers, presenting them as part of a "rehabilitation" process aimed at supporting poor and marginalized people...

See also [Arrest, prosecution, and detention of LGBTI persons](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

9.2 Law

9.2.1 The law on the mission, organisation and functioning of transit centres is set out in Ministerial Order Number 001/07.01²³¹.

9.2.2 Article 2 of the law includes the following definitions:

- '**transit center**: a local center used for accommodating on a temporary basis the people exhibiting deviant acts or behaviors, before their selection and placement to a rehabilitation center or their being rehabilitated at the transit center, or placement to another premise according to their behavior.'
- '**deviant acts or behaviors**: actions or bad behavior such as prostitution, drug use, begging, vagrancy, informal street vending, or any other deviant behavior that is harmful to the public.'²³²

²²⁷ GoR, '[Official Gazette n° Special of 07/06/2018](#)', 7 June 2018

²²⁸ NCHR, '[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)' (page 84), September 2022

²²⁹ GoR NRS, '[A 5- Year Strategic Plan 2022-2027](#)' (page 3), 22 April 2022

²³⁰ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1D), 20 March 2023

²³¹ GoR, '[Ministerial Order... No.001/07.01 of 19/04/2018](#)', 26 April 2018

²³² GoR, '[Ministerial Order... No.001/07.01 of 19/04/2018](#)' (Article 2 - pages 18-19), 26 April 2018

9.2.3 The NCHR 2022 annual report noted that the law stipulates a person cannot exceed a period of 2 months in a transit centre but that this period can be extended by up to one month if the person ‘has not changed his or her behavior’²³³.

9.2.4 The maximum period of stay in a rehabilitation centre is not specified in the law. The 2018 Presidential Order states: ‘The management of the [rehabilitation] Center determines the period a person spends in the Center depending on the short or medium term training program and the type of rehabilitation program he or she receives.’²³⁴ Persons are released either upon completion of his/her rehabilitation programme or before the end of the programme if he/she ‘shows tangible signs of change of conduct’²³⁵. The NCHR carried out a monitoring review of Gitagata and Nyamagabe Rehabilitation Centres in February and May 2022 and found that ‘persons in Gitagata and Nyamagabe Rehabilitation Centers spend a period of up to one year, which can be reduced due to the fact that the person changes his or her behavior quickly.’²³⁶

9.2.5 A September 2021 HRW article reported:

‘A January 2020 Human Rights Watch report [found](#) that the 2017 legislation provides cover for the police to round up and arbitrarily detain people accused of so-called “deviant behaviors” at Gikondo [transit centre] in deplorable and degrading conditions, and without due process or judicial oversight. Detainees are released with very little formal procedure, reflecting the arbitrary manner in which they were initially arrested.

‘... Round-ups by police or officers from the District Administration Security Support Organ (DASSO), a local state security body, are often the first step toward arbitrary detention at Gikondo [transit centre]. The arbitrary nature of the detention is reflected in the complete absence of due process once people are taken to Gikondo... None of the interviewees were taken before a judge or given access to a lawyer before being transferred to Gikondo.’²³⁷

For more information on Gikondo transit centre, see [Arrest, prosecution, and detention of LGBTI persons](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

9.3 Number and characteristics of detainees

9.3.1 The 2022 USSD human rights report stated:

‘Although there is no requirement for individuals to carry an identification document (ID), police and the District Administration Security Support Organ regularly detained street children, vendors, suspected petty criminals, and beggars without IDs and sometimes charged them with illegal street vending or vagrancy. Authorities released adults who could produce an ID and transported street children to their home districts, to shelters, or for

²³³ NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)’ (page 80), September 2022

²³⁴ GoR, ‘[Official Gazette n° Special of 07/06/2018](#)’ (Article 12), 7 June 2018

²³⁵ GoR, ‘[Official Gazette n° Special of 07/06/2018](#)’ (Article 17 – page 36), 7 June 2018

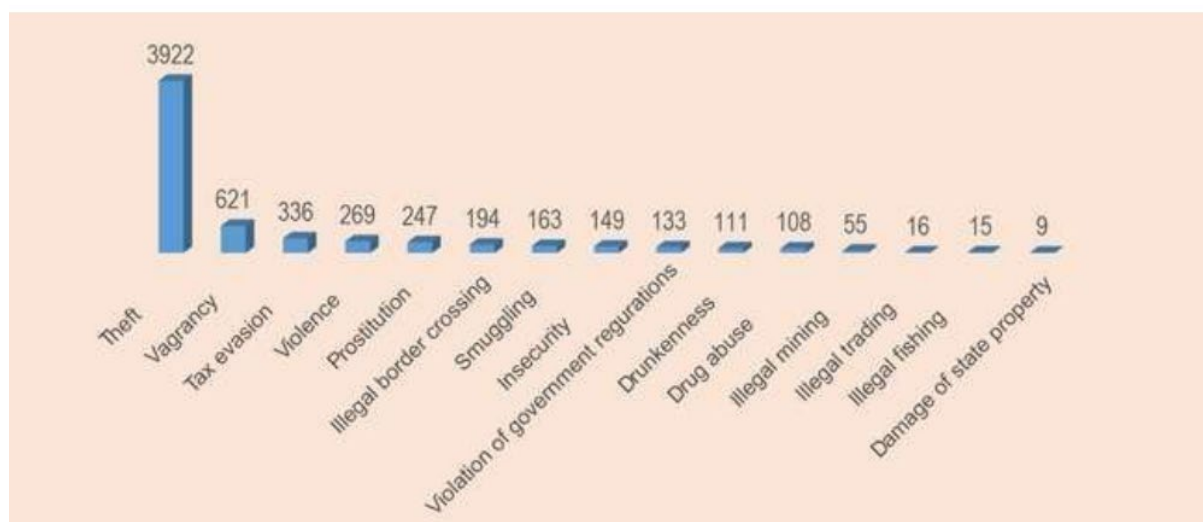
²³⁶ NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)’ (page 85), September 2022

²³⁷ HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting](#)’, 27 September 2021

processing into vocational and educational programs.²³⁸

9.3.2 Between February and March 2022, the NCHR visited all 28 transit centres. NCHR data indicated the centres held a combined total of 6,348 people (88% men, 6% women, 3.4% boys and less than 1% girls).

9.3.3 The NCHR provided a breakdown of the reasons people had been brought to the transit centres between July 2021 and June 2022. A total of 6,348 reasons were recorded, the predominant reason for transfer to a transit centre was suspected theft (61.7% of cases).



239

9.3.4 NCHR monitored 2 of the 3 rehabilitation centres holding 1,653 persons (1,072 men, 284 boys, 94 women and 23 girls)²⁴⁰.

9.3.5 The NCHR report did not provide a comparable breakdown of the reasons people were transferred to a rehabilitation centre.

For more information on Gikondo transit centre, see [Arrest, prosecution, and detention of LGBTI persons](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

9.4 Treatment and conditions

9.4.1 The 2021-2022 NCHR's review of 28 transit centres and 2 rehabilitation centres looked at living conditions, including food, health care and accommodation. The NCHR found that '...the rights of rehabilitated persons [in rehabilitation centres] were respected'²⁴¹. The NCHR's review of transit centres described a range of conditions across the 28 centres and identified where standards were or were not met. The review highlighted instances where conditions should be improved for example, in 5 transit centres insufficient bedding was identified as an issue²⁴².

²³⁸ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1D), 20 March 2023

²³⁹ NCHR, '[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)' (page 79), September 2022

²⁴⁰ NCHR, '[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)' (page 78 and 84), September 2022

²⁴¹ NCHR, '[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)' (page 86-88), September 2022

²⁴² NCHR, '[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)' (page 82), September 2022

9.4.2 The September 2021 HRW article stated: ‘Between April and June 2021, Human Rights Watch interviewed via telephone 17 former detainees from Gikondo.... [who] said they have [sic] inadequate food, water, and health care; suffer frequent beatings; and are rarely allowed to leave filthy, overcrowded rooms.’²⁴³

9.4.3 The 2022 USSD human rights report stated:

‘Conditions were often harsh and life threatening at National Rehabilitation Service-operated district transit centers holding street children, street vendors, suspected drug abusers, persons engaged in commercial sex, homeless persons, and suspected petty criminals. Overcrowding was common in police stations and district transit centers. Human rights advocates reported local law enforcement officials regularly cleared the streets of homeless and other needy individuals and subjected them to abusive treatment and unsanitary conditions in transit centers before major international events or conferences in the country.’²⁴⁴

For more information on Gikondo transit centre see [Arrest, prosecution, and detention of LGBTI persons.](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

10. Police custody, prison and unofficial detention centres

10.1 Treatment

10.1.1 A 2017 HRW report, which had a primary focus on treatment in unofficial detention centres, also commented on conditions in official detention centres: ‘Since around 2005, conditions in Rwanda’s official civilian prisons have improved considerably... Allegations of torture and ill-treatment in official civilian prisons have become rare since the mid-2000s.’²⁴⁵

10.1.2 A compilation of UN information published in November 2020 as part of the UPR noted that Rwanda had not implemented recommendations made in 2017 by the UN Committee against Torture (UNCAT). The 2017 UNCAT report cited, noted instances of deaths during arrest and while in police custody, and raised concerns about unofficial detention facilities. A 2017 visit to Rwanda by the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture was suspended when the authorities obstructed the Committee’s access to detention facilities and due to concerns that detainees could face reprisals for participating in interviews^{246 247}.

10.1.3 The BTI 2022 report noted ‘There have been accusations of the police torturing people in so-called safe houses [unofficial detention centres] across Kigali. Despite the outcry over their existence, the government has never admitted they exist or addressed the violations committed in them.’²⁴⁸

²⁴³ HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting](#)’, 27 September 2021

²⁴⁴ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1C), 20 March 2023

²⁴⁵ HRW, ‘[We will force you to confess: torture and unlawful...](#)’ (page 4), 10 October 2017

²⁴⁶ UNHRC, ‘[Compilation on Rwanda A/HRC/WG.6/37/RWA/2](#)’ (paras 23 and 25), 13 November 2020

²⁴⁷ UNCAT, ‘[Concluding observations on the second ...](#)’ (paras 16 and 40), 21 December 2017

²⁴⁸ BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Rule of law), 23 February 2022

- 10.1.4 The UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights provided a statement on 8 July 2021 during the UN UPR Adoption for Rwanda which stated 'The United Kingdom welcomes Rwanda's engagement with the UPR, including collaboration between the Government and civil society on human rights... We regret that Rwanda did not support our recommendation, which was also made by other States, to conduct transparent, credible and independent investigations into allegations of human rights violations including deaths in custody and torture.'²⁴⁹
- 10.1.5 In a meeting on 21 March 2022, between the UKHO and LAF, UKHO officials asked about reports of excessive force being used by the police generally, not solely in respect of asylum seekers or refugees. 'The LAF representative commented that although the President has declared it should not occur, it is reported. LAF had no cases at present and had not been approached for representation, possibly because there was a degree of acceptance that [the use of excessive force] could occur.'²⁵⁰
- 10.1.6 The 2022 USSD human rights report stated: 'There were local press and social media reports that police killed several persons while in custody or while attempting to resist arrest or escape police custody.'²⁵¹
- 10.1.7 The same USSD report added: 'Observers and human rights advocates continued to report police used torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment to intimidate or obtain information from individuals in unofficial detention centers.'²⁵²
- 10.1.8 The FH 2022 report noted: 'Both ordinary criminal suspects and political detainees are routinely subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in custody.'

[Back to Contents](#)

10.2 Conditions

- 10.2.1 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted:

'Physical conditions in some prisons operated by the Rwanda Correctional Service (RCS) approached international standards in certain respects, but there were also reports of overcrowding and food shortages...

'Reports from previous years indicated conditions were generally harsh and life threatening in unofficial or intelligence service-related detention centers, where individuals suffered from limited access to food, water, and health care.'²⁵³

- 10.2.2 Guidance on FCDO's website (updated on 9 May 2022) stated: 'Prison conditions in Rwanda can be very challenging. Overcrowding and poor sanitation are a major problem in all prisons and detention centres.'²⁵⁴

²⁴⁹ FCDO, '[UN Human Rights Council: Universal Periodic Review Adoption – Rwanda](#)', 8 July 2021

²⁵⁰ Annex 3, '[A6. Meeting with LAF](#)', 21 March 2022

²⁵¹ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1A), 20 March 2023

²⁵² USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1C), 20 March 2023

²⁵³ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1C), 20 March 2023

²⁵⁴ FCDO, '[Guidance: Rwanda prisoner pack](#)' (3.3), 9 May 2022

See also [opponents](#) and activists and [Transit and rehabilitation centres](#)

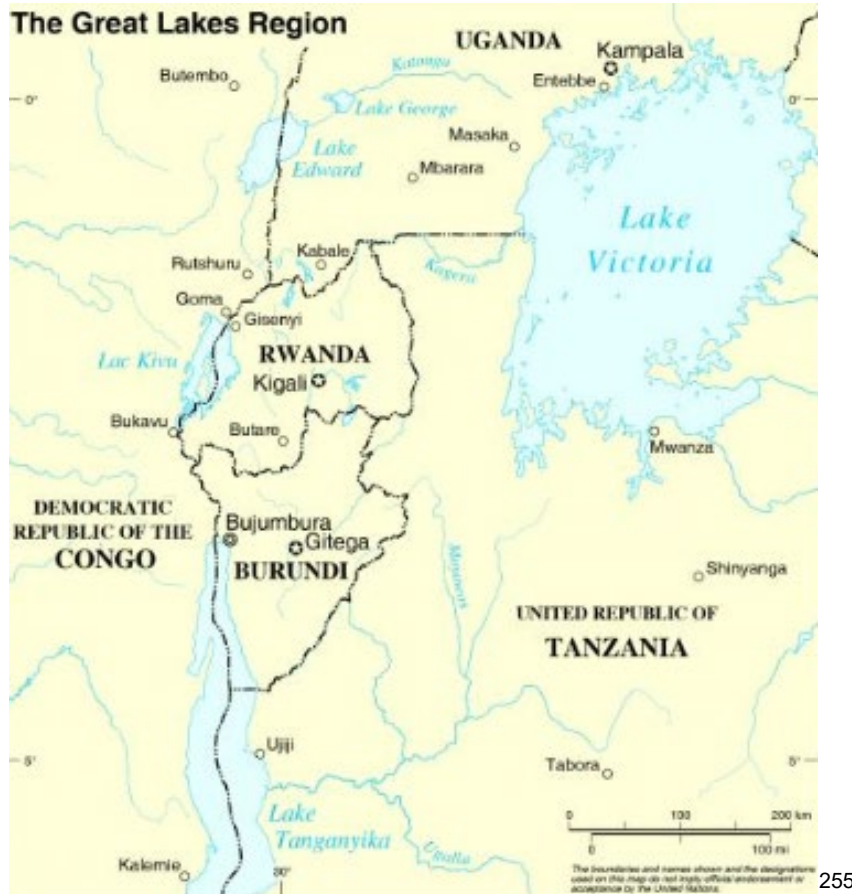
[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 8 January 2024

11. Security situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

11.1 Maps

11.1.1 The UN provided a map of the Great Lakes Region.



255

11.1.2 New Humanitarian provided a map, which highlights the DRC's Kivu Province and shows the location of Goma and Bunagana on Rwanda's western and northern borders. A Google Maps search indicated that Goma is approximately 110 km from Kigali²⁵⁶.

²⁵⁵ UN Geospatial, '[Great lakes region](#)', 1 October 2019

²⁵⁶ Google Maps, '[Goma + DRC](#)', no date



[Back to Contents](#)

11.2 Conflict in eastern DRC

- 11.2.1 More than 100 armed groups are active in eastern DRC, many of which have links to DRC's neighbours, including Rwanda. The UN has had a peacekeeping presence in eastern DRC for more than 2 decades^{258 259}.
- 11.2.2 In June 2022, the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) discussed the drivers of the 'worsening security situation' in eastern DRC, which included: a resurgence in activity of the M23 militant group (see [Activities of M23](#)); mistrust between the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi; competing economic interests and influence in the mineral-rich eastern DRC region; and an increase in historically-rooted ethnic tensions and xenophobic violence linked to the 1994 Rwandan genocide²⁶⁰.
- 11.2.3 International Crisis Group (ICG) observed in an August 2022 paper:
- 'Rwanda has long played a controversial role in the eastern DRC, which it considers a strategic backyard tightly linked to its own security. The region is also a source of gold and other minerals of keen interest to a variety of Rwandan actors. The country has meddled in Congolese politics for years and backed successive rebellions, some of which inflicted huge suffering on the Congolese population. About a decade ago, together with Uganda, Rwanda backed the Tutsi-led [March 23 Movement] M23, which led the last major rebellion on Congolese soil. Kigali provided the insurgents with enough money and weapons to capture parts of the east, with the group briefly taking Goma before UN and Congolese forces defeated it...

²⁵⁷ The New Humanitarian, '[Revived M23 rebellion worsens DR Congo's security ...](#)', 7 July 2022

²⁵⁸ The New Humanitarian, '[Revived M23 rebellion worsens DR Congo's security ...](#)', 7 July 2022

²⁵⁹ BBC, '[DR Congo protests: Anti-UN anger rages amid war crime warning](#)', 28 July 2022

²⁶⁰ ACSS, '[Rwanda and the DRC at Risk of War as New M23 Rebellion Emerges...](#)', 29 June 2022

'... Rwanda has also long asserted it perceives a threat from within the DRC, principally from the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), a remnant of the Hutu militia responsible for the 1994 Rwandan genocide. In a belligerent speech in February [2022], Kagame made clear that he was ready to send soldiers across the border to fight the FDLR, whether [DRC President Felix] Tshisekedi agreed or not.'²⁶¹

11.2.4 A letter from the UN Group of Experts (GoE) to the UN Security Council, dated 16 December 2022, provided examples of hate speech and violence targeting 'Rwandophone' (Kinyarwanda-speaking) civilians perceived as supporting M23 including members of the Banyamulenge community (Congolese Tutsis)²⁶².

11.2.5 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted:

'In March, violence escalated in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) along the Rwandan and Ugandan border between the DRC armed forces (FARDC) and the March 23 Movement (M23)... There were reports that some units of the FARDC collaborated with the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), an armed group which had previously carried out attacks against Rwanda and had long been linked to genocide crimes which occurred in Rwanda in 1994.

'There were reports of Rwanda Defense Force incursions into DRC territory ostensibly to take actions against the FDLR, although there were no indications of deliberate killings of civilians or noncombatants.'²⁶³

11.2.6 In February 2023, ACLED described 'escalating tensions between the DRC and Rwanda' and placed DRC on its '[Conflict Watchlist 2023](#)'²⁶⁴.

11.2.7 On 24 October 2023, the New Times, a Rwandan English language online news site, reported an incident in which a Rwandan citizen sustained injuries from a stray bullet originating from clashes between armed groups in eastern DRC, close to the Rwandan border²⁶⁵.

11.2.8 A December 2023 report by the Group of Experts on the DRC to the UN Security Council noted 'At the time of drafting heavy fighting in Kibumba [eastern DRC] and its surroundings along the Rwandan border mounted the pressure on Goma.'²⁶⁶

[Back to Contents](#)

11.3 History, goals, and composition of the March 23 Movement (M23)

11.3.1 DW, a German online newspaper, described M23 as an '... ethnic Tutsi militia [which] originated after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda to hunt down Rwandan ethnic Hutus, who had fled to eastern DRC...'²⁶⁷

²⁶¹ ICG, '[East Africa's DR Congo Force: The Case for Caution](#)', 25 August 2022

²⁶² UN Security Council, '[Letter dated 16 December 2022... S/2022/967](#)' (Annex 53&54), 16 Dec 2022

²⁶³ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1), 20 March 2023

²⁶⁴ ACLED, '[DRC: Rising Tensions with Rwanda Amid Escalating Violence...](#)', 8 February 2023

²⁶⁵ The New Times, '[Rwanda spokesperson explains Rubavu border incident](#)', 24 October 2023

²⁶⁶ UN Security Council, '[Letter dated 15 December 2023... S/2023/990](#)' (Para 26), 30 Dec 2023

²⁶⁷ DW, '[DR Congo: Vague prospects for peace](#)', 15 December 2022

11.3.2 On 7 July 2022, the New Humanitarian described M23 as:

‘... descended from a line of Congolese rebel groups that chart a course back to the 1990s, when genocide in neighbouring Rwanda spilled over the border, triggering regional conflicts in DRC... Rwanda has a long history of intervening in DRC. It backed rebellions and sent troops across the border in search of the Hutu militias that carried out the 1994 genocide of Tutsis...

‘Analysts say the M23 should not be understood solely as a Rwandan pawn. The group, and its antecedents, have all been led by Tutsi officers, whose mobilising power draws on the discrimination North Kivu’s Tutsis [Banyamulenge] have faced due to their Rwandan roots.’²⁶⁸

11.3.3 On 31 May 2022, Afro Impact, a Benin-based media site, reported that M23 is ‘...mainly made up of Congolese Tutsis.’²⁶⁹

11.3.4 VoA reported that M23 ‘...claims to fight against persecution of Congolese of Tutsi origin.’²⁷⁰

11.3.5 The New Humanitarian also reported that: ‘UN experts say [M23] has several hundred fighters.’²⁷¹.

11.3.6 A December 2023 report by the Group of Experts on the DRC to the UN Security Council noted that sources including surrendered M23 combatants, the M23 military spokesperson and intelligence sources, reported that the military objective of M23 was ‘to take control of Kavumu airport, Goma and Bukavu, including through infiltrating the towns.’²⁷²

[Back to Contents](#)

11.4 Activities of M23

11.4.1 After a long period of dormancy, a resurgence of M23 activity in eastern DRC was reported in November 2021 with fighting between the group and the Congolese army taking place in North Kivu province, including battles around the border towns of Goma and Bunagana^{273 274}. M23 have been sanctioned by the UN since 2012 and have been accused of abuses against civilians, including abduction, rape and summary executions^{275 276 277 278 279}.

11.4.2 A March 2023 ACLED profile noted, ‘Amidst the myriad conflicts across DRC, the M23 became the second most active non-state armed group in 2022, behind the Allied Democratic Forces, and the most active non-state armed group in Nord Kivu province.’²⁸⁰

²⁶⁸ The New Humanitarian, ‘[Revived M23 rebellion worsens DR Congo’s security ...](#)’, 7 July 2022

²⁶⁹ Afro Impact, ‘[DRC-Rwanda conflicts...](#)’, 31 May 2022

²⁷⁰ VoA, ‘[Rwandan President Threatens to Evict Congolese Refugees](#)’, 9 January 2023

²⁷¹ The New Humanitarian, ‘[Revived M23 rebellion worsens DR Congo’s security ...](#)’, 7 July 2022

²⁷² UN Security Council, ‘[Letter dated 15 December 2023... S/2023/990](#)’ (Para 27), 30 Dec 2023

²⁷³ The New Humanitarian, ‘[Revived M23 rebellion worsens DR Congo’s security ...](#)’, 7 July 2022

²⁷⁴ Reuters, ‘[Congo accuses Rwanda of sending disguised troops across border](#)’, 9 June 2022

²⁷⁵ United Nations Security Council, ‘[M23](#)’, no date

²⁷⁶ HRW, ‘[DR Congo: Resurgent M23 Rebels Target Civilians](#)’, 25 July 2022

²⁷⁷ UN Security Council, ‘[Letter dated 16 December 2022... S/2022/967](#)’ (Annex 36), 16 Dec 2022

²⁷⁸ HRW, ‘[DR Congo: Atrocities by Rwanda-backed M23 rebels](#)’, 6 February 2023

²⁷⁹ HRW, ‘[DR Congo: Killings, Rapes by Rwanda-Backed M23 Rebels](#)’, 13 June 2023

²⁸⁰ ACLED, ‘[Actor Profile: The March 23 Movement \(M23\)](#)’, 23 March 2023

- 11.4.3 Reuters reported on 9 June 2022: ‘The armed forces of Democratic Republic of Congo have accused Rwanda of sending 500 special forces in disguise into Congolese territory... Rwanda’s army spokesman said it was a fake story.... [T]he Congolese military said 500 Rwandan special forces, wearing a green-black uniform that is different from their regular uniform, had been deployed in the Tshanzu area in North Kivu province, which borders Rwanda.’²⁸¹
- 11.4.4 In an update to the story on 13 June 2022, Reuters reported: ‘Regional authorities in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo said Rwandan soldiers and artillery had supported attacks by the M23 rebel group on Sunday, accusing Rwanda of seeking to occupy the Congolese border town of Bunagana.’²⁸²
- 11.4.5 BBC Monitoring provided a translation of a report dated 4 July 2022 on Virunga Business Radio, a DRC-based, privately-owned radio station: ‘...[T]he M23 insurgents who have just received fresh backup from the RDF [Rwanda Defence Force]. Fifty military trucks full of men [RDF soldiers] crossed the border in the zones occupied by the enemy.’²⁸³
- 11.4.6 The DRC has accused Rwanda of backing M23, which the Rwandan government has denied²⁸⁴. A December 2022 report by the UN Group of Experts on the DRC provided evidence of RDF operations in DRC and of RDF support for M23, although the Government of Rwanda refuted the UN’s findings²⁸⁵. The final report of the Group of Experts on the DRC for the UN Security Council, dated 13 June 2023, noted that it had obtained ‘further evidence of direct interventions by the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) on Democratic Republic of the Congo territory, either to reinforce M23 combatants or to conduct military operations against the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and local armed groups. The Group identified several RDF commanders and officials coordinating RDF operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.’²⁸⁶
- 11.4.7 A December 2023 report by the Group of Experts on the DRC noted – according to one RDF officer, security, and intelligence sources – M23 were trained at the RDF Military Academy in Gako (Rwanda) from early May to early June 2023²⁸⁷.
- 11.4.8 The December 2023 report by the UN Group of Experts reported, based on information from former M23 combatants and intelligence sources, that since early October 2023, RDF soldiers from 5 different battalions were deployed in the eastern DRC territories of Nyiragongo, Rutushuru and Masisi²⁸⁸.

[Back to Contents](#)

²⁸¹ Reuters, ‘[Congo accuses Rwanda of sending disguised troops across border](#)’, 9 June 2022

²⁸² Reuters, ‘[Congo says Rwandan forces supported latest rebel attacks...](#)’, 13 June 2022

²⁸³ Virunga Business Radio, ‘[DR Congo rebels 'receive Rwanda army reinforcements'](#)’, 6 July 2022

²⁸⁴ The New Humanitarian, ‘[Revived M23 rebellion worsens DR Congo’s security ...](#)’, 7 July 2022

²⁸⁵ UN Security Council, ‘[Letter dated 16 December 2022... S/2022/967](#)’ (Paras 47-51), 16 Dec 2022

²⁸⁶ UN Security Council, ‘[Final report... S/2023/431](#)’ (page 2), 13 June 2023

²⁸⁷ UN Security Council, ‘[Letter dated 15 December 2023... S/2023/990](#)’ (Para 28), 30 Dec 2023

²⁸⁸ UN Security Council, ‘[Letter dated 15 December 2023... S/2023/990](#)’ (Para 30), 30 Dec 2023

11.5 Recruitment of children into regional conflicts

11.5.1 The CIA's World Factbook noted that military service (in the Rwanda Defence Force – RDF) is voluntary, with no conscription and a minimum age of 18, and that Rwandan citizenship is required to enlist²⁸⁹.

11.5.2 The UN's Report of the Secretary-General dated 5 June 2023, covering the period January to December 2022, considered the impact of armed conflict on children. The table below has been compiled by CPIT using data provided by the UN, relating to the armed conflict in the DRC:

	Girls	Boys	Total
Children recruited during reporting period	57	335	392
Children abducted during reporting period	261	469	730

290

11.5.3 The USSD's 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report (TiP) for Rwanda, published 15 June 2023, noted: 'In previous years, international organizations reported concerns that children in refugee camps [in Rwanda] were vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and noted Rwandan children were among those demobilized from armed groups in the DRC.'²⁹¹

11.5.4 The only specific mention of Rwandan children being recruited in 'previous years' relates to the 2016 TiP report which noted:

'During the reporting period [1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016], Burundian men and some children in Rwanda were recruited and used in armed groups; though some recruitment was reportedly voluntary, some were reportedly coerced through physical and verbal threats. Between May and September 2015, Burundian refugees residing in Mahama refugee camp in Rwanda were recruited into non-state armed groups supporting the Burundian opposition; Rwandan security forces charged to protect the camp population reportedly facilitated or tolerated the recruitment activity. Many refugees alleged that recruiters—including both Rwandan officials and other refugees—threatened, intimidated, harassed, and physically assaulted those who refused recruitment attempts. Most recruits were adult males, but in three verified cases, Burundian refugee children were also identified as recruits from Mahama refugee camp. Refugees reported that Burundian recruits, including women and children, were trained in weaponry by Rwandan military personnel at a training camp in southwestern Rwanda.'²⁹²

11.5.5 The 2022 USSD TiP report observed: 'There were no reports of forcible or coerced recruitment out of the Mahama refugee camp by Rwandan government officials since 2015.'²⁹³ The 2023 USSD TiP report made no reference to the Mahama refugee camp²⁹⁴.

²⁸⁹ CIA, '[World Factbook: Rwanda](#)' (Military and Security), 8 November 2022

²⁹⁰ UN Security Council, '[Children and armed conflict... A/77/895](#)' (pages 9-10), 5 June 2023

²⁹¹ USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)' (Trafficking Profile), 15 June 2023

²⁹² USSD, '[2016 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)' (page 318), June 2016

²⁹³ USSD, '[2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)' (Trafficking Profile), 19 July 2022

²⁹⁴ USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)', 15 June 2023

- 11.5.6 The US Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008 (CSPA) requires the US Secretary of State to publish an annual list of countries which recruited or used child soldiers, either within the military or within government-supported armed groups. In the 14-year period between 2010 and 2023 (inclusive), Rwanda appeared on the list 4 times: 2013, 2014, 2016 and 2023^{295 296 297 298}.
- 11.5.7 The CSPA list is published within the annual TiP report. Relevant content from the 2013, 2014, 2016 and 2023 reports has been summarised by CPIT in the table below to provide background to Rwanda’s inclusion on the list for the 4 identified years.

TiP report	Evidence of use or recruitment of child soldiers
2013	Reported cases from 2012 of refugee children recruited from Kigeme camp (which houses over 14,000 Congolese refugees ²⁹⁹) by, and on behalf of, M23 ³⁰⁰
2014	Reported cases from 2013 of children recruited by, and on behalf of, M23 ³⁰¹
2016	Reported cases from 2015 of Burundian refugee children recruited from Mahama refugee camp (which houses 58,000 refugees, 90% Burundian) ^{302 303} into Burundian armed groups ³⁰⁴
2023	The government provided material support to, and coordinated with, M23 a non-state armed group that forcibly recruited and used children ³⁰⁵

- 11.5.8 A letter from the Group of Experts (GoE) - on the DRC - to the UN Security Council, dated 10 June 2022, stated:
- ‘From November 2021, M23/ARC started to recruit in Bihanga camp [Uganda], and from January 2022, in Masisi and Rutshuru territories and in Kitshanga, Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as in Rwanda, to rapidly boost its troops. As a result, whereas the attacks between November 2021 and January 2022 had involved an estimated 100 to 200 combatants, at least 400 combatants were observed during the attack on Bunangana on 29 March 2022, with other combatants being observed close to Matebe and on the Rugari-Kibumba road that same day.’³⁰⁶

²⁹⁵ CRS, ‘[Child Soldiers Prevention Act: security assistance restrictions](#)’, 31 October 2022

²⁹⁶ Stimson, ‘[Tracking CSPA Implementation](#)’, 19 November 2021

²⁹⁷ USSD, ‘[2022 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’ (page 51), July 2022

²⁹⁸ USSD, ‘[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’ (Child Soldiers Prevention Act List), 15 June 2023

²⁹⁹ UNHCR, ‘[Rwanda: where we work](#)’, 31 August 2022

³⁰⁰ USSD, ‘[2013 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’, (page 312) June 2013

³⁰¹ USSD, ‘[2014 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’, June 2014

³⁰² UNHCR, ‘[Rwanda: where we work](#)’, 31 August 2022

³⁰³ UNHCR, ‘[Rwanda: Mahama Refugee Camp Profile \(as of 09 April 2021\)](#)’, 5 May 2021

³⁰⁴ USSD, ‘[2016 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’ (page 318), June 2016

³⁰⁵ USSD, ‘[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’, (Prosecution), 15 June 2023

³⁰⁶ UN Security Council, ‘[Letter dated 10 June 2022... S/2022/479](#)’ (para 66), 14 June 2022

11.5.9 The same GoE report noted:

‘While the majority of the M23/ARC combatants in the [M23] camps had originated from Masisi [in eastern DRC], some were Banyamulenge [Congolese Tutsi], Lingala speakers [spoken in western DRC, around Kinshasa] and/or Rwandan nationals. The armed forces and security forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo reported the presence of individuals wearing uniforms of the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) in M23/ARC camps located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was confirmed by aerial footage and photographic evidence. However, the Government of Rwanda categorically denied either active or passive RDF support to M23/ARC.’³⁰⁷

11.5.10 The June 2022 GoE report did not specify the number of M23 combatants who were recruited in Rwanda. However, the GoE also reported to the Security Council in December 2022. The December report described the recruitment to M23 of approximately 30 ‘civilians and RDF soldiers on 10 November 2021 in Rwanda’³⁰⁸ (The split of civilians and RDF soldiers among the 30 recruits was not provided).

11.5.11 The December 2022 GoE report commented on M23’s recruitment strategy:

‘The M23/ARC recruitments targeted former Congrès national pour la défense du peuple (CNDP) members and former M23 combatants, unemployed youth and children.’ The GoE described how ‘several minors, were lured into M23/ARC with false employment promises’ and how the recruiter paid for the recruits’ transport to Goma (DRC) or Gisenyi (Rwanda) before subsequently moving them to M23-controlled areas of the DRC where they received military training³⁰⁹.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

12. Women’s rights and status

12.1 Legal rights

12.1.1 The [Constitution](#) of the Republic of Rwanda (2003, revised in 2015) states that all Rwandans are equal in rights and freedoms and prohibits discrimination based on sex³¹⁰.

12.1.2 A 2016 law gave spouses of both sexes equal rights and obligations, and made husband and wife joint heads of the household. Either spouse can apply for a divorce^{311 312}.

12.1.3 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted: ‘Women have the same legal status and are entitled to the same rights as men, including under family, labor, nationality, and inheritance laws... The law requires equal pay for

³⁰⁷ UN Security Council, ‘[Letter dated 10 June 2022... S/2022/479](#)’ (para 67), 14 June 2022

³⁰⁸ UN Security Council, ‘[Letter dated 16 December 2022... S/2022/967](#)’ (Annex 28), 16 Dec 2022

³⁰⁹ UN Security Council, ‘[Letter dated 16 December 2022... S/2022/967](#)’ (Annex 24), 16 Dec 2022

³¹⁰ GoR, ‘[Constitution](#)’ (Articles 10 and 16), 24 December 2015

³¹¹ GoR, ‘[Official Gazette 37](#)’ (Articles 206, 209 and 218), 12 September 2016

³¹² MIGEPROF, ‘[Tenth Periodic Report of the Republic of Rwanda on the ...](#)’ (page 7), May 2021

equal work and prohibits discrimination in hiring decisions.’³¹³

[Back to Contents](#)

12.2 Gender equality: policy and practice

12.2.1 The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) website outlined the policies in place to ensure gender equality³¹⁴:

- [‘Revised National Gender Policy’](#) (2021) under revision³¹⁵
- [‘National Policy against Gender Based Violence’](#) (2011)³¹⁶
- [‘National Policy for Family Promotion’](#) (2005)... developed to ensure that the principle of gender equality is mainstreamed across sectors³¹⁷
- [‘National Strategy for Transformation \(NST1\)’](#) sets to strengthen and promote gender equality and ensure equal opportunities for all Rwandans...³¹⁸

12.2.2 The World Bank’s Country Partnership Framework for the period 2021 to 2026, published in October 2020, noted:

‘The Government of Rwanda has long been a global leader on the issue of gender equality and has put in place a strong legal and policy framework... These efforts have born impressive fruits over recent years, including gender equality in primary and secondary enrollments [sic], a sharp reduction in fertility, large improvements in maternal health outcomes, women’s greater access to land and therefore to finance which requires land as collateral, and the world’s highest representation of women in parliament.’³¹⁹

12.2.3 The Rwandan government’s November 2020 submission to the Universal Periodic Review explained that the Constitution sets a minimum quota of 30% for female representation in decision-making positions, and which had been exceeded. As of November 2020, women held senior decision-making positions at all levels of government, making up 52% of the Cabinet, 61% of members of the lower chamber of Parliament, 38% of the Senate, 30% of District Mayors and 45% of District Councils³²⁰.

12.2.4 A government submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2021 described the 3 main bodies involved in promoting and upholding women’s rights³²¹:

- [Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion \(MIGEPROF\)](#): coordinates policy implementation for women’s and children’s issues³²²
- [Gender Monitoring Office](#): monitors progress towards the goal of gender

³¹³ USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

³¹⁴ MIGEPROF, [‘Directorate General of Gender ...’](#) (Enabling legal framework), no date

³¹⁵ MIGEPROF, [‘Revised National Gender Policy’](#), February 2021

³¹⁶ MIGEPROF, [‘National Policy against Gender Based Violence’](#), July 2011

³¹⁷ MIGEPROF, [‘National Policy for Family Promotion’](#), December 2005

³¹⁸ GoR., [‘National Strategy for Transformation \(NST1\)’](#) 1 January 2017

³¹⁹ World Bank, [‘Country partnership framework... Rwanda FY21 to FY26’](#) (page 7), 22 October 2020

³²⁰ UNHRC, [‘National report submitted in accordance with paragraph ...’](#) (page 9), 9 November 2020

³²¹ MIGEPROF, [‘Tenth Periodic Report of the Republic of Rwanda on the ...’](#), May 2021

³²² MIGEPROF, [‘About’](#), undated

equality and the fight against gender-based violence³²³

- [National Women's Council](#): advocacy to increase women's participation in society³²⁴

- 12.2.5 In January 2022, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) noted: '[Rwanda has] become a pioneer and a role model for its dedication to, and progress made on gender equality and women's empowerment. In fact, Rwanda is one of the global leaders in gender equality progress.'³²⁵
- 12.2.6 The World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index 2023 measures gender-based gaps in economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment, and tracks progress towards closing these gaps over time. The 2023 index ranked Rwanda 12th most gender-equal country in the world (out of 146) and 2nd in Africa (the UK was 15th in the world)^{326 327}.
- 12.2.7 The Rwandan government's November 2020 contribution to the UPR explained that there is gender parity in education, with girls accounting for 49.7% and 53.2% of enrolments in primary and secondary education, respectively in 2020³²⁸.
- 12.2.8 The FH report 2023 report stated: 'While women enjoy broad legal equality and have a significant presence in the economy as workers and business owners, gender-based discrimination persists, especially in rural areas, and gender-equality measures have largely favored English-speaking Tutsis in urban areas.'³²⁹
- 12.2.9 The 2022 Population and Housing Census indicated that among the female population (age 12 and above), 20% were head of household³³⁰.
- 12.2.10 The annual report of the Rwanda Development Board noted that in 2022 50% of individual enterprises were owned by women and '39% of companies had at least one female company director.'³³¹

[Back to Contents](#)

12.3 Freedom of movement

- 12.3.1 The 2022 USSD human rights report stated, not specifically about women: 'The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.'³³²
- 12.3.2 An April 2023 BBC Travel article examined safe destinations for sole female

³²³ GMO, '[Key responsibilities](#)' undated

³²⁴ NWC, '[About us](#)', undated

³²⁵ UNDP, '[Gender Equality Strategy: UNDP Rwanda \(2019-2022\)](#)' (pages 5-6), 19 January 2022

³²⁶ WEF, '[Global Gender Gap report 2023](#)' (page 62), 20 June 2023

³²⁷ WEF, '[Global Gender Gap report 2023](#)' (page 26), 20 June 2023

³²⁸ UNHRC, '[National report submitted in accordance with paragraph ...](#)' (page 11), 9 November 2020

³²⁹ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)' (F4), March 2023

³³⁰ MFEP and NISR, '[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)' (Table 48), Feb 2023

³³¹ RDB, '[Annual report 2022](#)' (pages 30 and 31), 3 May 2023

³³² USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 2D), 20 March 2023

travellers and ranked Rwanda among the top 5 countries in the world³³³.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

13. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

13.1 Legal context

13.1.1 The government has legislated to protect women from SGBV:

- [Law N° 68/2018 of 30/08/2018](#) criminalizes offences including human trafficking, rape, marital rape and forced marriage³³⁴
- [Law N° 66/2018 of 30/08/2018](#) protects workers against SGBV and harassment in the workplace³³⁵
- [Law N° 59/2008 of 10/09/2008](#) contains provisions for the prevention and punishment of gender-based violence³³⁶

13.1.2 Rwanda's submission to CEDAW in 2021 noted that under Article 137 of Law N°68/2018 the crime of 'sexual violence against a spouse' carried a penalty of 3 to 5 years imprisonment³³⁷.

13.1.3 The 2022 USSD human rights report stated: 'The law criminalizes rape of men and women... Penalties for conviction of rape range from 10 years' to life imprisonment with substantial fines.'³³⁸

13.1.4 The same report noted: 'The law prohibits sexual harassment and provides for penalties of six months' to one year's imprisonment and fines... Nevertheless, advocacy organizations reported sexual harassment remained common, and enforcement was lax.'³³⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

13.2 Domestic abuse, and physical and sexual violence

13.2.1 The 2022 USSD human rights report stated: 'Domestic violence against women... remained common... Authorities encouraged reporting of domestic violence cases, although most incidents remained within the extended family and were not reported or prosecuted.'³⁴⁰

13.2.2 The Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey (RDHS) 2019-20, implemented by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) in partnership with the Ministry of Health (MoH) reported on women's experience of physical violence:

- 'Thirty-seven percent of women [including both ever-married and never-married]... age 15-49 have ever experienced physical violence [committed by a spouse or anyone else], and 16%... experienced

³³³ BBC Travel, '[Five countries that are safer for women](#)', 3 April 2023

³³⁴ MIGEPROF, '[Directorate General of Gender ...](#)' (Enabling legal framework), no date

³³⁵ MIGEPROF, '[Directorate General of Gender ...](#)' (Enabling legal framework), no date

³³⁶ Land Portal Foundation, '[Law N° 59/2008 of 10/09/2008 on Prevention and ...](#)', no date

³³⁷ GoR, '[UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#)' (para 98), 4 October 2021

³³⁸ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

³³⁹ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

³⁴⁰ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

physical violence in the 12 months preceding the survey.³⁴¹

- ‘Respondents who are divorced, separated, or widowed are most likely to have experienced physical violence (64%...) followed by currently married respondents (42%...). Never-married respondents are least likely (23%...) to report having experienced physical violence.’³⁴²

13.2.3 The RDHS 2019-20 also reported on women’s experience of sexual violence:

- ‘Twenty-three percent of women [including both ever-married and never-married]... age 15-49 reported that they had ever experienced sexual violence [committed by a spouse or anyone else], and 8%... said that they had experienced sexual violence in the past 12 months.’³⁴³
- ‘... divorced, separated, or widowed women... are more likely (42%...) to have experienced sexual violence than currently married women... (22%...) and never-married women... (19%...)’³⁴⁴

13.2.4 The RDHS 2019-20 recorded the perpetrator of acts of physical and sexual violence against women aged 15-49. The table below includes data on the percentage of victims for the groups lists who experienced physical and/or sexual violence who reported a specific perpetrator:

Perpetrator	Victims of physical violence		Victims of sexual violence	
	Ever-married	Never-married	Ever-married	Never-married
Current/former husband/partner	86.8	n/a	69.9	n/a
Current/former boyfriend	1.4	5.3	-	5.1
Parent/ step-parent	10.7	43.3	0.9	2.3
Other family member	9.4	24.4	3.2	7.1
Friend/ acquaintance	-	-	24.7	60.2
Teacher	2.6	23.4	1.1	1.6
Someone at work	0.3	0.1	2.7	4.3
Police/ soldier	0.1	0.6	2.6	1.2
Stranger	-	-	9.3	17.6
Other	7.0	12.9	1.6	1.5
Missing	-	-	0.7	0.9
Sample size	770	254	425	202

³⁴¹ NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 287), September 2021

³⁴² NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 287), September 2021

³⁴³ NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 288), September 2021

³⁴⁴ NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 288), September 2021

[Back to Contents](#)

13.3 SGBV against asylum seekers and refugees

13.3.1 UNHCR noted in April 2021 that refugee camps provide SGBV prevention and response services, but their effectiveness is limited by factors such as funding and underreporting³⁴⁷.

13.3.2 The government's submission to the CEDAW 10th periodic report in 2021 stated with regard refugee women and girls:

'Concerning legal services, non-state actors have greatly contributed to the free legal aid services to refugees. Legal officers and lawyers are deployed in different camps with the mandate to provide legal support to refugees daily. This service includes legal advice, legal orientation and legal assistance before court of law and other administrative entities. As a result, lawyers have intervened in 154 cases, most of them being GBV related. Lawyers are requested to manage GBV cases in an ethical manner with confidentiality of the victim's identity.'³⁴⁸

13.3.3 During a meeting on 21 March 2022, UKHO officials asked the UNHCR about the relative risk of SGBV for camp and urban refugees, and a representative replied that the SGBV risk was the same. The representative added: 'Urban refugees can report to the office and community centre via walk-in or using the helpline. But if they don't make [the] effort... to make [a] complaint, [UNHCR] don't have information about them.'³⁴⁹

13.3.4 The representative also said: '...[T]here is always a gap between what the refugees want, what they need and what [the UNHCR] can provide, but particularly a gap in legal assistance – not enough lawyers, in some locations, only one lawyer deals for all cases in one location including for SGBV.'³⁵⁰

13.3.5 UKHO officials met with representatives of Alight on 23 March 2022. Alight is an international NGO which provides a range of services to both camp-based and urban refugees, see ([NGOs involved with refugees and asylum seekers in Rwanda](#)). On the extent of the SGBV problem, Alight commented:

'SGBV [is] a particular problem for refugees given their vulnerability... SGBV [is] happening daily at household level but [the] extent to which this is reported is low. Alight [is] adopting [an] integrated approach that is anchored on community-based structure and SASA (Community Activists... [who] live and work in [the] community, [and are] responsible for awareness, identifying cases, helping to guide [victims] where to seek [the] support they require). GBV... remains [a] problem in RWA... need extra resources like advocacy

³⁴⁵ NISR, '[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)' (page 298), September 2021

³⁴⁶ NISR, '[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)' (page 301), September 2021

³⁴⁷ UNHCR, '[Rwanda country refugee response plan Jan to Dec 2021](#)' (page 11), 19 April 2021

³⁴⁸ GoR, '[UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#)' (paragraphs 271 to 275), 4 October 2021

³⁴⁹ Annex 2, '[A1. Meeting with UNHCR](#)', 21 March 2022

³⁵⁰ Annex 2, '[A1. Meeting with UNHCR](#)', 21 March 2022

and funding.’³⁵¹

13.3.6 Alight was unable to provide information on whether the risk of SGBV differed between camp-based refugees and urban refugees. Alight's estimates for camp-based cases was 400 to 500 cases a year³⁵².

13.3.7 Alight described the support available to refugees and asylum seekers who experience SGBV:

‘Alight... tries to run awareness campaigns to advise [persons of concern] POCs on how to prevent SGBV and where to find help when they become victims of domestic violence. Police and Alight medical staff have been trained on how to spot victims of SGBV and how to refer to Alight for assistance.

‘Alight does provide support to urban based asylum seekers – targeting them with awareness campaigns. Not aware of which organisations are also [available to] support urban based asylum seekers. Alight is specifically assigned to provide protection services - other organisations provide support in other areas (medical, food, shelter etc)...

‘Alight has a hotline, if you call, someone will revert back to caller immediate[ly] and the person will receive services within 24 hours.

‘Asylum seekers newly arrived into the country are aware of Alight protection services as they pass through transit camps that are inside country borders. Alight usually receives referrals from different stakeholders including those from UNHCR and [International Organisation for Migration] IOM...

‘The police are one of Alight’s partners in prevention of SGBV. The police have been trained and are aware of how to manage people who have been sexually abused, including referral of victims to Alight and particularly those who have suffered sexual abuse at the camps and they don’t know where to seek assistance.

‘Alight also receive referrals from health/ medical centres at the camp level...

‘...”safe spaces” [are] for people who prefer not to go home [and are] based on [a] survivor centred approach. Refugee Camps also have “safe spaces”, as do urban areas - run by the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF).

‘There is no discrimination in who can receive support – asylum seekers, refugees and nationals receive the same support.’³⁵³

See also the section on Camp based refugees in the [Country Information Note on Rwanda: Asylum system](#) and [Protection and support](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

13.4 Policies and programmes

13.4.1 Rwanda’s submission to the CEDAW in 2021 stated: ‘In 2018–2019, mass community awareness was conducted in more than 1,291 secondary

³⁵¹ Annex 3, ‘[A8. Meeting with Alight](#)’, 23 March 2022

³⁵² Annex 3, ‘[A8. Meeting with Alight](#)’, 23 March 2022

³⁵³ Annex 3, ‘[A8. Meeting with Alight](#)’, 23 March 2022

schools and 38 High Learning Institutions in Rwanda...'³⁵⁴

- 13.4.2 The same submission noted: 'In collaboration with... stakeholders, different outreach activities were organized on GBV prevention, response and access to justice where approximately 17,228 people were reached; [this] equipped women with knowledge and information on GBV policy, GBV law, GBV referral mechanisms.'³⁵⁵
- 13.4.3 The submission added: 'Through the Indashyikirwa Program, 640 couples have been trained as agents of change in the framework of empowering women & men towards the prevention of GBV in communities.'³⁵⁶
- 13.4.4 And: '[A] Regional Centre of Excellence on Gender Based Violence and Child abuse... [provides] high quality research and statistics related to SGBV, child abuse and other forms of violence to the public, policy makers, law enforcement personnel and other SGBV practitioners in the region.'³⁵⁷
- 13.4.5 As part of efforts to raise awareness of SGBV response and prevention, the Rwanda National Police - in collaboration with the Rwanda Media Commission (RMC) - held a one-day workshop in September 2021 for media practitioners and youth volunteers in community policing. The Inspector General of police appealed to attendees and the public to report all SGBV³⁵⁸.
- 13.4.6 MIGEPROF in an update on its website taking stock of what the country had achieved in countering gender-based violence commented in December 2021:
- '... government institutions are working jointly and tirelessly to prevent violence and seek justice for victims. The most crucial step is preventing [gender-based] violence and [for] achieving this, education is vital. Beyond schools, community education and participative sensitisation campaigns are key pillars of the government's strategy. Grassroots, community-based initiatives like the Umugoroba w'Imiryango (Families Evening Forum), Inteko z'abaturage, and Umuganda, help spread messages to breakdown stigmas around GBV and its warning signs.
- 'There have been anti-GBV campaigns in the media, including on TV and Radio, and it helped bring the topic into everyday discussions. In addition, religious leaders and non-governmental institutions are important partners in the fight against GBV.'³⁵⁹
- 13.4.7 The 2022 USSD human rights report stated: 'The government continued its whole-of-government, multistakeholder campaign against gender-based violence, child abuse, and other types of domestic violence. Gender-based violence was a required training module for police and military at all levels...'³⁶⁰

See also [Annex 3, A4. Meeting with Isange One Stop Centre, 19 January](#)

³⁵⁴ GoR, [UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#) (paragraph 73), 4 October 2021

³⁵⁵ GoR, [UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#) (paragraph 31), 4 October 2021

³⁵⁶ GoR, [UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#) (paragraph 67), 4 October 2021

³⁵⁷ GoR, [UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#) (paragraph 90), 4 October 2021

³⁵⁸ RNP, '[RNP conducts workshop for media practitioners, youth volunteers ...](#)', 28 September 2021

³⁵⁹ MIGEPROF, '[The fight against GBV concerns every Rwandan](#)', 10 December 2021

³⁶⁰ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

13.5 Protection and support

- 13.5.1 The [Rwanda National Police](#) (RNP) enforces criminal laws related to SGBV. Established by the RNP in 2009 the ‘Isange one stop centre’ (IOSC) model was recognised by the INTERPOL General Assembly as an example of best practice for preventing and responding to gender-based violence and child domestic abuse^{361 362}.
- 13.5.2 The [Rwanda Investigation Bureau](#) (RIB) is mandated to prevent, suppress and investigate GBV. RIB has an emergency toll-free number to report domestic and/or GBV³⁶³.
- 13.5.1 The [National Public Prosecution Authority](#) (NPPA) is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of crimes³⁶⁴.
- 13.5.2 The RDHS 2019-20 reported: ‘Forty-three percent of women... who have ever experienced physical or sexual violence have sought help to stop the violence.’³⁶⁵ The most common sources of help were:

Source of help	Percentage
Neighbours	40%
Own family	33%
Friend	7%
Husband/partner’s family	18%
Local authorities	18%
Police	11%

366

- 13.5.3 The 2022 USSD human rights report stated ‘... the government handled rape cases as a judicial priority.’³⁶⁷

- 13.5.4 The same report noted:

‘Police headquarters in Kigali had a hotline for domestic violence. Several other ministries also had free gender-based violence hotlines. Each of the 78 police stations nationwide had its own gender desk, an average of three officers trained in handling domestic violence and gender-based violence cases, and a public outreach program. The government operated 44 one-stop centers [IOSC] throughout the country, providing free medical, psychological, legal, and police assistance to survivors of domestic

³⁶¹ RNP, [website](#), no date

³⁶² RNP, ‘[Rwandan Isange One Stop model to tackle gender based violence ...](#)’, 5 November 2015

³⁶³ RIB, ‘[What we investigate](#)’, no date

³⁶⁴ NPPA, ‘[About us – background](#)’, no date

³⁶⁵ NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 294), September 2021

³⁶⁶ NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 294), September 2021

³⁶⁷ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

violence.’³⁶⁸

13.5.5 In December 2021, MIGEPROF commented on SGBV initiatives:

‘Since their inception in 2009, there are now 44 Isange One Stop Centres (IOSC) around the country – one in each district hospital... [IOSC] provide 24/7, free support to victims and recognise their wide-ranging needs, including medical, psychological, legal, investigation, and accommodation support and ensure the smooth community reintegration of victims because victims should not be defined by their experience [of] violence.

‘The government has also put in place a concept of safe shelter for GBV victims, which further expands the available protective options for victims and those at risk.’³⁶⁹

13.5.6 A UKHO team visited the IOSC in Kigali on 19 January 2022. The centre’s manager and co-ordinator provided an overview of the IOSC’s function and purpose:

‘[The] Centre manages victims of Gender-based violence (GBV) and child abuse (CA) in general, not specifically asylum seekers or refugees. [It is a] one-stop centre model with a holistic approach.

‘Est[ablished in] 2009 in this hospital as a response to GBV. Multi-sectoral (ministries of justice, health and institutions such as Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) and police) are involved. It is a multi-disciplinary approach providing a comprehensive service of different experts from different disciplines, such as doctors, psychologists, counsellors, investigators and legal support from [Ministry of Justice] MoJ under one roof – 24/7 and is free (to the victim, as [it] is paid by the gov[ernment] and partners).

‘Keeping services together in one place:

- ‘Address the multiple needs of victims (risk of pregnancy/[sexually transmitted diseases] STD resulting from sexual violence, health, social needs)
- ‘Provide comprehensive services
- ‘Reduces risk of losing evidence [because all service providers are in one place]...
- ‘Reduces re-victimisation. If moving and having to re-tell the story
- ‘Reduces risk of victims giving up (if for example, they had to travel long distances between different service providers).
- ‘Basic services under one roof

‘No single institution can effectively manage GBV and [child abuse] CA.

‘Services provided - Investigations, psychosocial, counselling, medical treatment, medical legal examination, temporary shelter.

‘Operational framework exists to move a victim through the process:

³⁶⁸ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

³⁶⁹ MIGEPROF, ‘[The fight against GBV concerns every Rwandan](#)’, 10 December 2021

reception (referral) – investigation (judicial support) – medical (examination/treatment) – psychosocial support – safe room (temp[orary] shelter) - counsellors.

'44 IOSC in all 30 districts, all district hospitals, referral and specialised hospitals. Mobile van (1) with a[n] investigators room, Dr's room etc.

'Refugee camps tend to be close to the hospitals to access services. One-Stops are not in refugee camps, but the mobile van can go there.

'... IOSC is for anyone who has experienced GBV and child abuse (male and female). Service covers both RWA nationals and non-nationals.'³⁷⁰

13.5.7 UKHO officials asked what type of documentation is needed to access IOSC's services and whether a lack of ID prevents access. The centre manager explained: 'In general we ask for ID and where the person is from... this is all done at the reception.'³⁷¹

13.5.8 And: 'If they don't have ID, usually someone knows them. Treatment is first and verification of ID later. The one service that might be an issue is the termination of pregnancy, especially if a minor. But it is rare that no one has ID or we are not able to identify.'³⁷²

13.5.9 UKHO officials asked about the referral process. The manager explained about referrals to the centre and what happens when a person leaves: 'We get referrals from friends, community, schools, employers (anyone can refer). The entry point is free. At exit the referral onward will depend on where they are based and the circumstances of their case. We use existing community structures to provide services (ie counselling). We carry out home visits and follow-up phone calls to monitor progress of cases.'³⁷³

13.5.10 UKHO officials asked what happens if a woman doesn't want to return home after visiting the Centre. The manager explained:

'We have not experienced that circumstance. We have a safe space at the centre which is based on immediate security. We have safe houses that can be used for long-term accommodation, until the woman starts to be self-reliant.

'The longest we have had someone stay in a safe house is 3 months. We had a victim of child abuse who came and she stayed in the safe room before she was relocated with her parents to another district. She would have been victimised in the community by the perpetrators.

'A person can stay in a safe house for as long as they still have the problem. Once there is not a problem it becomes the problem of the state to care for that person.'³⁷⁴

13.5.11 The Centre Manager gave the UKHO team a tour of the facility and explained: 'We have a children's counselling room, medical-legal examination room, children's interview room, adult counselling room.

³⁷⁰ Annex 3, '[A4. Isange One Stop Centre, meeting at the hospital](#)', 19 January 2022

³⁷¹ Annex 3, '[A4. Isange One Stop Centre, meeting at the hospital](#)', 19 January 2022

³⁷² Annex 3, '[A4. Isange One Stop Centre, meeting at the hospital](#)', 19 January 2022

³⁷³ Annex 3, '[A4. Isange One Stop Centre, meeting at the hospital](#)', 19 January 2022

³⁷⁴ Annex 3, '[A4. Isange One Stop Centre, meeting at the hospital](#)', 19 January 2022

Samples are taken on site.³⁷⁵

For further information on the Kigali ISOC and photographs, see [Annex 3, A4. Isange One Stop Centre, meeting 19 January 2022](#)

See also [Annex 3, A8. Meeting with Aight, 23 March 2022](#) and [SGBV against asylum seekers and refugees](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

13.6 Arrest, prosecution and conviction

13.6.1 CPIT has compiled the table below using data from a December 2022 National Public Prosecution Authority (NPPA) report covering cases of rape and 'harassment of spouse' handled during the period July 2022 to September 2022. The NPPA report does not specify the gender of the victim but does provide the gender of the suspect. In cases of both rape and harassment of spouse, the accused were predominantly male (94.7%).

	Rape	Harassment of spouse
Received cases	265	869
Filed	74	453
Closed	143	286
Pending	48	130
Pronounced cases	81	432
Won by prosecution	54	418
Lost by prosecution	27	14
Conviction rate	67%	97%

376

13.6.2 While acknowledging the continued problem of GBV, MIGEPROF reported on the country's achievements in December 2021: '[Government] initiatives are producing results. Notably, the GBV statistics generally show increases in the number of cases reported, which reflects that victims are becoming less likely to hide their abuses – a positive step in the road to eliminating abuse.'³⁷⁷

13.6.3 The same source stated: 'The Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) and Legal System is investing considerable resources to ensure that the perpetrators of GBV are dealt with appropriately. This includes using new technologies to detect, facilitate investigative processes, and respond to emerging threats. In 2020 alone, the RIB investigated 12,715 cases of GBV.'³⁷⁸

13.6.4 The RNP stated in a September 2021 news report on their website, without specifying the gender of the persons affected: 'Between January and August 2021, a total of 11046 cases related to sexual and gender-based violence

³⁷⁵ Annex 3, '[A4. Isange One Stop Centre, meeting at the hospital](#)', 19 January 2022

³⁷⁶ NPPA, '[NPPA quarterly progress report, July 2022 to September 2022](#)' (page 24), December 2022

³⁷⁷ MIGEPROF, '[The fight against GBV concerns every Rwandan](#)', 10 December 2021

³⁷⁸ MIGEPROF, '[The fight against GBV concerns every Rwandan](#)', 10 December 2021

were recorded. They include 3877 cases of defilement, 2350 spousal harassment, 1195 of battery, 954 of rape and 813 cases of fraudulent use of family property.³⁷⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

14. Modern slavery/trafficking

14.1 Legal context

14.1.1 [Law \(No 51/2018\)](#) is designed to prevent and punish human trafficking and exploitation³⁸⁰.

14.1.2 The USSD's 2023 Trafficking in Person (TiP) report, covering events between April 2022 and March 2023, noted that the 2018 anti-trafficking law: '... prescribed penalties of 10 to 15 years' imprisonment and a fine of 10 million to 15 million Rwandan francs... [£6,642³⁸¹ to £9,964³⁸²], which increased to 20 to 25 years' imprisonment and a fine of 20 million to 25 million Rwandan francs... [£13,282³⁸³ to £16,603³⁸⁴] if the crime was transnational in nature. The law prescribed penalties of five to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine of 5 million to 10 million Rwandan francs... [£3,320³⁸⁵ to £ 6,641³⁸⁶] for labor trafficking crimes.'³⁸⁷

[Back to Contents](#)

14.2 Prevalence and profile

14.2.1 The 2023 Global Slavery Index, compiled by the Walk Free Foundation, estimates the scale of modern slavery in 160 countries using individual and country-level risk factors, creating national estimates per 1000 people³⁸⁸. The 2023 index estimated the prevalence of modern slavery in Rwanda at 4.3 victims per 1,000 population.³⁸⁹ for comparison, the prevalence in Africa was 5.2³⁹⁰.

14.2.2 The characteristics of victims of trafficking (VoT) in Rwanda were identified in a 2019 report by Never Again Rwanda and have been summarised by CPIT in the table below. The report analysed records from DGIE, the High Court for International Crimes (HCCIC) and the National Public Prosecuting Authority (NPPA) from 2016-2018 to produce a socio-demographic profile of VoTs³⁹¹.

³⁷⁹ RNP, '[RNP conducts workshop for media practitioners, youth volunteers ...](#)', 28 September 2021

³⁸⁰ GoR, '[Official Gazette number 39 of 24/09/2018, Law number 51/2018 of ...](#)', 24 September 2018

³⁸¹ Xe.com, '[10,000,000 RWF to GBP – Convert Rwanda Francs to British...](#)', 9 November 2023

³⁸² Xe.com, '[15,000,000 RWF to GBP – Convert Rwandan Francs to British ...](#)', 9 November 2023

³⁸³ Xe.com, '[20,000,000 RWF to GBP – Convert Rwandan Francs to British ...](#)', 9 November 2023

³⁸⁴ Xe.com, '[25,000,000 RWF to GBP – Convert Rwandan Francs to British ...](#)', 9 November 2023

³⁸⁵ Xe.com, '[5,000,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British ...](#)', 9 November 2023

³⁸⁶ Xe.com, '[10,000,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British ...](#)', 9 November 2023

³⁸⁷ USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)' (Prosecution), 15 June 2023

³⁸⁸ Walk Free, '[Global Slavery Index: Rwanda](#)' (Prevalence and number), 19 June 2023

³⁸⁹ Walk Free, '[Global Slavery Index: Rwanda](#)' (Prevalence and number), 19 June 2023

³⁹⁰ Walk Free, '[Global Slavery Index: Prevalence and Number \(Africa\)](#)', 19 June 2023

³⁹¹ Never Again Rwanda, '[Understanding Human Trafficking...](#)' (pages 46 to 47), August 2019

	Proportion of all identified VOTs (based on data from 2017 and 2018, population size = 515)	Proportion of VoTs where the trafficker was prosecuted (based on data from 2016 to 2018, population size = 85)
Nationality	Burundi (63%), DRC (15%), Rwanda (14%), Other (9%)	Rwanda (60%), Burundi (40%)
Gender	Female (78%), Male (22%)	Female (95%), Male (5%)
Relationship status	-	Single (89%), Married (7%)
Age	-	Under 18 (18%), 18 to 30 (69%), 31 and above (13%)

14.2.3 The USSD's 2023 TiP report considered Rwanda's 'trafficking profile': 'Traffickers target vulnerable populations such as youth experiencing homelessness, orphaned children, children with disabilities, young women and girls, unemployed adults, and internally displaced persons. International organizations reported traffickers entice young girls into domestic servitude and in some cases force them into sex trafficking.'³⁹²

[Back to Contents](#)

14.3 Refugee victims of trafficking

14.3.1 UKHO officials asked UNHCR about trafficking in refugee camps during a meeting on 21 March 2022:

'The issue that UNHCR felt they were struggling with was regarding girls. Most of them were promised employment in cities and towns. So mostly come as house maids or work in restaurant or bars, and therefore the risk is more trafficking/exploitation within Rwanda rather than cross border or internationally. Some girls don't tell [UNHCR] or even [their] parents that they are leaving the camp. But once abuse happens, they come to [UNHCR]. [UNHCR] [b]elieve the risk [of trafficking] is less for urban refugees; they generally have better opportunities, in terms of mobility, socially, financially.'³⁹³

14.3.2 During a meeting with the HO on 23 March 2022, Alight was asked whether the vulnerability to trafficking of young women and girls in refugee camps also existed among urban refugees. They replied that they hadn't received any feedback from community activists that the trafficking of urban refugees was a problem. However, they highlighted incidents of female camp-based refugees relocating to urban areas: 'When refugees move to urban areas, this increases their vulnerabilities...[which] may result... [in] negative coping mechanisms including transactional sex.'³⁹⁴

³⁹² USSD, '2023 Trafficking in Persons Report' (Trafficking Profile), 15 June 2023

³⁹³ Annex 2, 'A1. Meeting with UNHCR', 21 March 2022

³⁹⁴ Annex 3, 'A8. Meeting with Alight', 23 March 2022

14.3.3 The USSD's 2023 TiP report noted:

'Refugees fleeing conflict and political violence in Burundi and the DRC remain highly vulnerable to trafficking in Rwanda due to difficulties finding employment, and some are exploited by traffickers in other countries after transiting Rwanda. Observers reported that refugee children, particularly girls, orphans, and young people were at greater risk of trafficking. Researchers have reported some parents in refugee camps receive money in exchange for their children's work in domestic service or in the commercial sex industry.'³⁹⁵

See also [Recruitment of children into conflicts](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

14.4 Protection and support

14.4.1 In an October 2021 response to the UN, the Government of Rwanda described its framework for tackling human trafficking: 'In addition to a strong legal framework, a specific Directorate in charge of human trafficking was established within the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB). This Directorate is in charge of prevention, detection and investigation of human trafficking cases that are domestic and cross border.'³⁹⁶

14.4.2 The USSD's 2023 TiP report placed Rwanda in [Tier 2](#):

'The Government of Rwanda does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period [when it was also ranked in Tier 2]... These efforts included identifying more trafficking victims, repatriating trafficking victims from overseas, and convicting more traffickers... However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government continued to lack specialized SOPs [standard operating procedures] to adequately screen for trafficking among vulnerable populations and did not refer any victims to services. The government provided support to and coordinated with the March 23 Movement (M23) armed group, which forcibly recruited and used children.'³⁹⁷

14.4.3 The USSD's 2023 TiP report also stated: 'The government conducted awareness-raising campaigns and continued to use media and radio programs to increase community awareness of trafficking, particularly among youth, vulnerable communities, and in border areas. The Ministry of Justice reported conducting awareness raising campaigns in 111 schools and RIB conducted awareness activities using mobile stations and Isange One Stop Center vans.'³⁹⁸

14.4.4 The USSD's 2023 TiP report added: 'NGOs offered general assistance and support in refugee camps, but a lack of capacity and resources inhibited the

³⁹⁵ USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)' (Trafficking Profile), 15 June 2023

³⁹⁶ GoR, UN CEDAW, '[Tenth periodic report submitted by Rwanda ...](#)' (para 107), 4 October 2021

³⁹⁷ USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)' (Tier 2) 15 June 2023

³⁹⁸ USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)' (Prevention), 15 June 2023

implementation of effective procedures, screening, and assistance to trafficking victims in refugee camps.’³⁹⁹

14.4.5 The USSD’s 2021, 2022 and 2023 TiP reports provided the following data on investigations, prosecutions and convictions (table by CPIT):

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Trafficking investigations	63	86	35	142	74
Trafficking victims identified	n/a	96	131	110	263
Defendants prosecuted	n/a	9	2	12	9
Defendants convicted	n/a	2	2	0	6

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14.4.6 The USSD’s 2022 TiP report explained: ‘Prolonged pandemic-related lockdowns, limited staffing capacity, and other workplace disruptions in 2021 impeded the government’s progress on implementing policies and efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes.’⁴⁰³

14.4.7 The USSD’s 2023 TiP noted: ‘The government trained 66 judges on combating human trafficking and money laundering, and trained investigators on combating human trafficking and migrant smuggling.’⁴⁰⁴

14.4.8 The USSD 2023 TiP commented:

‘...[D]ue to inconsistent use of identification procedures, authorities may have arrested or detained some unidentified trafficking victims, especially among underserved communities such as individuals in commercial sex, adults and children experiencing homelessness, and children in forced begging. The government continued operating transit centres that advocacy groups and NGOs reported detained vulnerable persons and potential trafficking victims – including individuals in commercial sex, adults and children experiencing homelessness, members of the LGBTQI+ community, foreign nationals, and children in street vending and forced begging – and did not adequately screen for trafficking indicators among them.’⁴⁰⁵

14.4.9 The UK’s International Ambassador for Human Rights provided a statement on 8 July 2021 during the UN Universal Periodic Review Adoption for Rwanda which stated: ‘We welcome that Rwanda accepted recommendations from other countries on combatting human trafficking, but we were disappointed that Rwanda did not support the UK recommendation to screen, identify and provide support to trafficking victims, including those held in Government transit centres.’⁴⁰⁶

See also [Transit and rehabilitation centres](#) and [Arrest, prosecution, and](#)

³⁹⁹ USSD, [‘2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda’](#) (Protection), 15 June 2023

⁴⁰⁰ USSD, [‘2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda’](#), 1 July 2021

⁴⁰¹ USSD, [‘2022 Trafficking in Persons Report’](#) (page 468), July 2022

⁴⁰² USSD, [‘2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda’](#), June 2023

⁴⁰³ USSD, [‘2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda’](#) (page 469) 15 June 2023

⁴⁰⁴ USSD, [‘2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda’](#) (Prosecution) 15 June 2023

⁴⁰⁵ USSD, [‘2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda’](#) (Protection), July 2022

⁴⁰⁶ FCDO, [‘UN Human Rights Council: Universal Periodic Review Adoption – Rwanda’](#), 8 July 2021

15. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) persons

15.1 Demography

- 15.1.1 Rwanda Today, a Rwandan English newspaper, reported that My Right Alliance, an organisation that works with LGBTI people, stated there were ‘12,000 LGBT community members in Kigali’ as of December 2020. However, no explanation is provided how this figure was obtained⁴⁰⁷.
- 15.1.2 As with past censuses, the most recent national census in 2022 did not include questions about sexual and gender minorities and therefore provide information on proportion of the population who identify as LGBTI^{408 409}.
- 15.1.3 There is no further information in the sources consulted on the proportion or size of the LGBTI population (see [Bibliography](#)).

[Back to Contents](#)

15.2 Legal context

- 15.2.1 The Conversation, an independent source of news analysis and informed comment written by academic experts⁴¹⁰, noted in regard to Rwanda and the LGBTI community, that:

‘Rwanda is one of the few African countries that has assented to international conventions and continental frameworks that protect the human rights of all citizens, including the UN Declaration on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and the UN Report on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity LGBT Populations. The country is also a signatory to the 2011 United Nations statement condemning violence against LGBT people and has joined nine other African countries to support LGBT rights.

‘Within Rwanda, however, domestic policy on LGBT rights is a grey area. Article 26 on marriage recognises marriage between biological male and female. This law amplifies ambiguity on Rwanda’s stance on the legality of LGBT people, resulting in a fragile social environment.’⁴¹¹

- 15.2.2 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted: ‘No laws criminalize sexual orientation, consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, or so-called cross-dressing.’⁴¹² The US Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), ‘a public-private partnership between the US Department of State’s Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) and security professionals from U.S. organizations operating abroad’, however, observed in February 2022 ‘Same-sex sexual activity is legal but not widely discussed.’⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁷ Rwanda Today, ‘[Pandemic hits Rwanda’s sexual minorities harder](#)’, 16 December 2020

⁴⁰⁸ DW, ‘[Rwanda’s census: LGBTQ+ people just want to be counted](#)’, 22 August 2022

⁴⁰⁹ Washington Blade, ‘[Rwanda criticized over exclusion of LGBTQ, intersex...](#)’, 29 August 2022

⁴¹⁰ The Conversation, ‘[Who we are](#)’, no date

⁴¹¹ The Conversation, ‘[Rwanda: LGBT rights are protected on paper, but...](#)’, 16 May 2022

⁴¹² USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

⁴¹³ OSAC, ‘[Rwanda country security report](#)’ (Safety Concerns for LGBTI+ Travelers), 9 February 2022

- 15.2.3 HRW's report covering the events of 2022 noted: 'Rwanda is one of a few countries in East Africa that does not criminalize consensual same-sex relations, and the government's policies are generally seen as progressive.'⁴¹⁴
- 15.2.4 In May 2022 the Health Development Initiative (HDI), a Kigali-based NGO focusing on healthcare, and the Kenya-based African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) commented: 'The Rwandan law does not criminalize LGBT people, however, their rights are open to interpretation based on the moral inclinations of members of the public and those in positions of power. This compromises their full access to rights, including health and other fundamental needs.'⁴¹⁵
- 15.2.5 According to the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), in 2009 a draft amendment to the Penal Code was submitted to the Rwandan Parliament. Draft Article 217 read: 'Any person who practices, encourages or sensitises people of the same sex, to sexual relation or any sexual practice, shall be liable for a term of imprisonment ranging from five to ten years and fine ranging from 200,000 to one million Rwanda francs [£132⁴¹⁶ to £663⁴¹⁷].'⁴¹⁸ The Belgian government's COI unit (Cedoca) reported in October 2019 that Article 217 was removed from the draft Penal Code at the end of 2009. The removal followed objections to the Article made by various groups including civil society organisations, international organisations and senior officials in the Rwandan Ministry of Health⁴¹⁹. In the sources consulted, CPIT found no information to indicate that the Rwandan government has since reconsidered proceeding with Article 217 or other similar legislation (see [Bibliography](#)).
- 15.2.6 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted: 'The law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons in housing, employment, nationality laws, or access to government services such as health care.'⁴²⁰
- 15.2.7 Whilst LGBTI persons are not specifically named among the groups identified as being protected under the law, the [Constitution of Rwanda](#) includes anti-discrimination provisions protecting all citizens of Rwanda, including Articles 11 and 16:
- **'Article 11** – All Rwandans are born and remain free and equal in rights and duties. Discrimination of whatever kind based on, inter alia, ethnic origin, tribe, clan, colour, sex, region, social origin, religion or faith, opinion, economic status, culture, language, social status, physical or mental disability or any other form of discrimination is prohibited and punishable by law...
 - **'Article 16** – All human beings are equal before the law. They shall

⁴¹⁴ HRW, '[World Report 2023: Rwanda – events of 2022](#)', 13 January 2023

⁴¹⁵ HDI/APHRC, '[Examination of LGBT people's lived experiences...](#)' (page 6), May 2022

⁴¹⁶ Xe.com, '[200,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British Pounds](#)', 9 November 2023

⁴¹⁷ Xe.com, '[1,000,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British ...](#)', 9 November 2023

⁴¹⁸ FIDH, "'[Anti-homosexuality](#)' draft amendments endanger the defence...", 16 December 2009

⁴¹⁹ Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)', 30 October 2019

⁴²⁰ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

enjoy, without any discrimination, equal protection of the law.⁴²¹

- 15.2.8 A June 2020 report by 12 NGOs representing the rights of female sex workers and LGBTI persons in Rwanda, submitted as part of the UN's Universal Periodic Review of Rwanda, raised concerns about the 'Lack of legal recognition for Transgender and Intersex persons.'⁴²² In September 2023, Deutsche Welle (DW) noted that Rwandan law only recognises the sex of a person as being male or female, so activists were calling for a change in legislation to allow for trans and intersex persons to change their legal gender⁴²³.
- 15.2.9 In December 2020, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) noted Rwanda had not adopted specific legal protections for LGBTI persons in relation to hate crimes or incitement to cause hatred, and that conversion therapies were not prohibited. ILGA also noted an absence of legal recognition for same-sex marriage or civil unions⁴²⁴.
- 15.2.10 During a meeting with the UKHO on 22 March 2022, a representative from NCHR commented: 'The law is not against [LGBTI persons]... it doesn't talk about them. Not yet something which is a significant issue in society.'⁴²⁵
- 15.2.11 In a meeting with the UKHO on 21 March 2022, LAF commented: '[I] think that LGBT people can act freely and form associations. This was not the case 5 or 6 years ago (seeing progress). Being LGBT is not criminalised by the law.'⁴²⁶
- 15.2.12 In a meeting on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBTI community in Rwanda remarked that the 'Gov[ernmen]t should be more proactive [and] comprehensive in terms of human rights/anti-discrimination laws to protect LGBT as a vulnerable community' noting also that '[the LGBTI community] currently have Article 16 [of the [Constitution of Rwanda](#)], which is broader'⁴²⁷.

[Back to Contents](#)

15.3 State attitudes

- 15.3.1 Rwanda signed joint UN declarations relating to LGBTI rights in 2011, 2015 and 2017. The declarations called for an end to violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and condemned capital punishment for consensual same-sex relationships⁴²⁸.
- 15.3.2 In a September 2019 email response documented in the Cedoca COI focus, the Executive Director of the HDI described the position of Rwandan political leaders as 'progressive but sometimes ambiguous.'⁴²⁹

⁴²¹ GoR, '[Constitution](#)' (Articles 11 and 16), 24 December 2015

⁴²² LGBTI/sex worker coalition, [JS5 - Joint Submission 5](#) (page 4), June 2020

⁴²³ DW, '[Rwanda: Activists want trans and intersex legal rights](#)', 15 September 2023

⁴²⁴ ILGA, '[State-sponsored homophobia...](#)' (page 326), December 2020

⁴²⁵ Annex 3, '[A7. Meeting with NCHR](#)', 22 March 2022

⁴²⁶ Annex 3, '[A6. Meeting with LAF](#)', 21 March 2022

⁴²⁷ Annex 3, '[A9. Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community](#)', 5 April 2022

⁴²⁸ Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (pages 7 to 8), 30 October 2019

⁴²⁹ Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (page 27), 30 October 2019

- 15.3.3 Cedoca quoted an extract from an interview President Kagame gave to French-language magazine Jeune Afrique in March 2019, where the President said:
- ‘In Rwanda, homosexuality is not a crime, and members of the gay community are not arrested, molested or insulted. So it's not a problem, neither for me nor for Rwandans. On the other hand, wanting to legislate on this subject at all costs is the best way to create a problem in a society that has had its standards, values and codes for centuries. Homosexuals exist, we know they exist. Their freedom should not interfere with that of others, and vice versa. Let's keep it at that...’⁴³⁰
- 15.3.4 The Cedoca COI focus 2019 documented a shift in the reporting of LGBTI stories by the pro-government New Times newspaper: ‘Articles published before 2009 consider homosexuality as an unnatural vice against African values and give voice mainly to people who are hostile to LGBT. On the other hand, the articles published subsequently (with a few exceptions) reflect a diversity of points of view, with several authors showing themselves to be quite tolerant towards LGBT people and openly pleading their cause.’⁴³¹
- 15.3.5 In an article dated 23 September 2019, Reuters reported that following a well-known Rwandan gospel singer coming out as gay the minister for foreign affairs, posted on Twitter that the government would ensure the singer’s] rights were protected, noting “All Rwandans are born and remain equal in rights and freedoms”.⁴³²
- 15.3.6 A July 2020 article by DW reported ‘Rwandan President Paul Kagame has, in the past, avoided questions about homophobia, claiming that the country was dealing with more important issues and that all Rwandans were equal before the constitution, despite the ambiguous laws.’⁴³³
- 15.3.7 In November 2020, Vice News interviewed Sulemani Muhirwa, a Programme Officer for HDI, and reported: “From 2018 I can testify to some valuable changes in terms of behaviors and perceptions,” Muhirwa said. He cites a more tolerant media landscape, successful sensitization campaigns, and the gradual expansion of stigma-free healthcare as part of that shift. But there is still work to be done for full recognition of rights for transgender people, he acknowledged.’⁴³⁴
- 15.3.8 The 2022 USSD report noted: ‘[LGBTQI+] organizations reported barriers to open participation in the political process in that candidates and government officials were unwilling to engage openly on LGBTQI+ concerns.’⁴³⁵
- 15.3.9 LAF, in a meeting with the UKHO on 21 March 2022 considered that ‘LGBT+ is not officially recognised...The Government has kept a neutral position.’⁴³⁶

⁴³⁰ Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 28), 30 October 2019

⁴³¹ Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 15), 30 October 2019

⁴³² Reuters, ‘[INTERVIEW - Rwandan gospel singer shrugs off backlash to ...](#)’, 23 September 2019

⁴³³ DW, ‘[Rwandan church embraces LGBT+ community](#)’, 21 July 2020

⁴³⁴ Vice News, ‘[Rwanda’s Transgender Community Face Violent ...](#)’, 20 November 2020

⁴³⁵ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 3), 20 March 2023

⁴³⁶ Annex 3, ‘[A6. Meeting with LAF](#)’, 21 March 2022

15.3.10 In a meeting with the UKHO on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBTI community described the government as exhibiting a ‘strategic silence’ on LGBTI issues⁴³⁷. The same group noted that they were ‘Starting on strategies to engage [with the] Gov[ernmen]t but starting from [a] minimal position.’⁴³⁸

15.3.11 In May 2022, HDI and the APHRC published a study covering the experiences of LGBT persons, plus attitudes towards LGBT persons. The participants in the study were adults (18 and over), who lived in Kigali and the southern provinces of Rwanda. The study included a ‘lived experience’ survey of LGBT persons and a ‘general perception’ survey of members of the public. Other components of the study included focus groups with LGBT participants, and interviews with stakeholders including ‘police officers, small business owners, teachers, healthcare providers, religious leaders, cultural leaders and influencers, and civil servants.’⁴³⁹

15.3.12 The HDI/APHRC study participants were made up of:

- 499 LGBT persons responded to the ‘lived experiences’ survey (including 71 persons who identified as transgender)
- 1,254 members of the public responded to the ‘public perceptions’ survey
- 6 focus group discussions (59 LGBT participants)
- 6 in-depth interviews with LGBT persons
- 16 stakeholder interviews⁴⁴⁰

15.3.13 The HDI/APHRC survey asked 1,254 members of the public whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘Lawmakers in Rwanda have a negative attitude towards LGBT people’. The results showed 20% strongly agreed or agreed, 45% were neutral, and 34% strongly disagreed or disagreed⁴⁴¹.

15.3.14 In a May 2023 podcast transcribed by CPIT by the Executive Director of HDI, Dr Aflodis Kagaba, commented that the HDI/APHRC study received approval by the Rwanda National Ethics Committee (affiliated with the Rwandan Ministry of Health⁴⁴²). Dr Kagaba noted a shift in position ‘...we’re happy that the National Ethics Committee was able to approve this kind of study because previous challenges we have had is you come up with this study and they’re like “you can’t do this kind of study” but they approved it...’⁴⁴³

15.3.15 In April 2023, the Washington Blade, a LGBTQ newspaper in the United States, reported the GoR Ministry of Health and Rwanda Biomedical Center, alongside NGO Plan International Rwanda, had launched the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Toolkit titled ‘Amahitamo Yanjye’ (‘My

⁴³⁷ Annex 3, [‘A9. Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community’](#), 5 April 2022

⁴³⁸ Annex 3, [‘A9. Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community’](#), 5 April 2022

⁴³⁹ HDI/APHRC, [‘Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...’](#) (pages 3 and 8), May 2022

⁴⁴⁰ HDI/APHRC, [‘Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...’](#) (pages 9, 13, 14, 28), May 2022

⁴⁴¹ HDI/APHRC, [‘Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...’](#) (page 32), May 2022

⁴⁴² RNEC, [‘About the committee’](#), no date

⁴⁴³ Kagaba, A, The Long Form with Sanny Ntayombya, [‘Podcast episode...’](#), 1 May 2023

Choice'), which included content on sexual orientation. However, the government's involvement in the toolkit 'sparked criticism from the public'. This prompted a GoR spokesperson to state that the book belonged to Plan International Rwanda and 'den[y]... any state institution having "validated, endorsed or adopted [the publication]"'.⁴⁴⁴

[Back to Contents](#)

15.4 Policies and strategies

- 15.4.1 The NCHR's Strategic Plan, covering 2022 to 2027, contained no reference to LGBTI persons⁴⁴⁵.
- 15.4.2 The 2020 JS5 Joint Submission to the UN Human Rights Council was concerned by the 'omission of Transgender, Lesbians and Intersex persons in various policies and strategies... [which] tend to adhere to the binary vision of gender as Men and Woman.'⁴⁴⁶
- 15.4.3 In an interview with the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) on 27 July 2021, the Executive Director of Hope and Care Organisation (HAC), a Kigali-based community organisation working with LGBTI persons and sex workers, stated that the government had not put any policies in place to support the LGBTI community in Rwanda because the government did not acknowledge the population's existence⁴⁴⁷.

[Back to Contents](#)

15.5 Arrest, prosecution, and detention of LGBTI persons

- 15.5.1 The Cedoca COI focus 2019 quoted the Executive Director of the HDI: '... we have noticed that some officers of the police and judiciary do not have sufficient knowledge of [the] LGBT [community] from a human rights perspective. They consider people belonging to LGBT community as deviant in regard to the Rwanda culture. There are still instances of illegal arrests especially when found in bars or streets and later released after a few days of detention and later realising that there is no case to be prosecuted.'⁴⁴⁸
- 15.5.2 The same source also stated HDI had: '... recorded some cases of arrests and detentions of LGBT in [Gikondo] detention centre "presumably to transform them from the[ir] immoral behaviour"'. The source did not provide the number of arrests and detentions, nor the period during which the incidents took place⁴⁴⁹.
- 15.5.3 The Programme Coordinator of a Rwandan human rights organisation told Cedoca: 'We have previously had members of the [LGBTI] community illegally detained because of their [sexual] orientation but this has gradually improved in the recent past.'⁴⁵⁰
- 15.5.4 The Cedoca report also noted: 'In the consulted sources, Cedoca found no

⁴⁴⁴ Washington Blade, '[Rwanda recognizes LGBTQ relationships in new...](#)', 11 April 2023

⁴⁴⁵ NCHR, '[Strategic plan 2022 to 2027](#)', October 2018

⁴⁴⁶ LGBTI/sex worker coalition, '[JS5 - Joint Submission 5](#)' (page 4), June 2020

⁴⁴⁷ IRB, '[Rwanda: Situation of persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender ...](#)', 23 August 2021

⁴⁴⁸ Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (page 9), 30 October 2019

⁴⁴⁹ Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (page 11), 30 October 2019

⁴⁵⁰ Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (page 12), 30 October 2019

information on legal actions against homosexuals or LGBT [the Cedoca desk research covered the period from 2014 to 22 October 2019].⁴⁵¹

- 15.5.5 In November 2020, Vice News reported: ‘Although transgender people in Rwanda cannot be charged with a crime based on their sexuality or gender identity, they are frequently abused by law enforcement and detained for indeterminate amounts of time at facilities [transit centres] that lack transparency.’⁴⁵²
- 15.5.6 Vice News interviewed 3 transwomen who had been held at Gikondo Transit Centre in 2018 or 2019. One of the women, Bella, told Vice that she had been falsely accused of being homeless and selling drugs. Bella described how she had been held in Gikondo for 6 weeks where she was humiliated, beaten, and raped by other detainees⁴⁵³.
- 15.5.7 The NCHR annual report 2020-2021 reported that out of the 5,589 people in transit centres, 116 people were detained for reasons of ‘deviant behaviour’. The report did not specify if any of the people detained under the ‘deviant behaviour’ category were LGBTI⁴⁵⁴. The list of reasons given for detention in transit centres in the 2021-2022 NCHR report did not include a ‘deviant behaviour’ category⁴⁵⁵.
- 15.5.8 In correspondence with the IRB, dated 23 August 2021, the Executive Director of Human Rights First Association Rwanda (HRFR) stated ‘transgender people are illegally arrested [and] beaten by the police at detention facilities.’ The source provided no further details, including numbers or frequency of incidents⁴⁵⁶.
- 15.5.9 HRW reported in September 2021:
- ‘Rwandan authorities rounded up and arbitrarily detained over a dozen gay and transgender people, sex workers, street children, and others [the breakdown of detainees by profile is not provided by HRW] in the months before a planned June 2021 high-profile international conference...
- ‘They were held in a transit center in Gikondo neighborhood of the capital Kigali, unofficially called “Kwa Kabuga,” known for its harsh and inhuman conditions...’⁴⁵⁷
- 15.5.10 As research for the article, HRW conducted telephone interviews between April and June 2021 with 17 former detainees from Gikondo, 9 of whom identified as transgender or gay. While HRW did not specify how many of the 9 interviewees were transgender, the majority of references in the article appear to relate to transwomen. The 9 people interviewed ‘were detained at Gikondo between December 2020 and April 2021.’⁴⁵⁸
- 15.5.11 HRW noted: ‘People interviewed who identified as gay or transgender said

⁴⁵¹ Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 8), 30 October 2019

⁴⁵² Vice News, ‘[Rwanda’s Transgender Community Face Violent...](#)’, 20 November 2020

⁴⁵³ Vice News, ‘[Rwanda’s Transgender Community Face Violent...](#)’, 20 November 2020

⁴⁵⁴ NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report July 2020 – June 2021](#)’ (page 100), September 2021

⁴⁵⁵ NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2021 – June 2022](#)’ (page 79), September 2022

⁴⁵⁶ IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Situation of persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender ...](#)’, 23 August 2021

⁴⁵⁷ HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting](#)’, 27 September 2021

⁴⁵⁸ HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting](#)’, 27 September 2021

that security officials accused them of “not representing Rwandan values.” They said that other detainees beat them because of their clothes and identity. Three other detainees, who were held in the “delinquents” room at Gikondo, confirmed that fellow detainees and guards more frequently and violently beat people they knew were gay or transgender than others.⁴⁵⁹

15.5.12 HRW also reported, in relation to the 9 interviewees: ‘Several said the police or local security officers detained them after members of the public reported seeing them with their partners and other lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, or wearing women’s clothing if they were perceived not to be female.’⁴⁶⁰

15.5.13 HRW referred to the same information when it published ‘UK’s Rights Assessment of Rwanda Not Based on Facts’ in May 2022. The report stated, ‘Human Rights Watch has documented how LGBTI people have been detained, beaten, insulted and harassed for their sexual identity.’⁴⁶¹

15.5.14 In a meeting with the UKHO on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBTI community explained: ‘[A] LGBT person who gets arrested, is at risk... of abuse/mistreatment (torture, beatings) – heard testimonies – LGBT+ people imprisoned... beaten by guards, paraded around prisons.’⁴⁶² They explained that it was ‘Not the case individuals would be arrested due to sexuality, just that they would be at risk once [their] sexuality [was] discovered in prison.’⁴⁶³

15.5.15 The May 2022 HDI/APHRC survey asked 1,254 members of the public whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, ‘People have been arrested for being LGBT’. The results showed 15% strongly agreed or agreed, 64% were neutral, and 21% strongly disagreed or disagreed⁴⁶⁴.

See also the section on Transit Centres [Number and characteristics of detainees](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

15.6 Societal attitudes

15.6.1 A December 2018 report by research company Laterite, based upon interviews with 52 stakeholders (including the Government of Rwanda, local authorities, international donor organisations and NGOs), commented: ‘[Stakeholders] explained that non-heterosexual orientations or behavior are believed not [to] be part of African culture and are not accepted by the prevailing Christian beliefs... Stigma is especially severe for women and men who are transgender.’⁴⁶⁵

15.6.2 The Cedoca COI focus 2019 quoted the Executive Director of My Right Alliance: ‘Stigma, discrimination and harassment exist in general society on high scale level because of the culture and religion which are very intolerant

⁴⁵⁹ HRW, [‘Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting’](#), 27 September 2021

⁴⁶⁰ HRW, [‘Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting’](#), 27 September 2021

⁴⁶¹ HRW, [‘UK’s Rights Assessment of Rwanda Not Based on Facts’](#), 12 May 2022

⁴⁶² Annex 3, [‘A9. Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community’](#), 5 April 2022

⁴⁶³ Annex 3, [‘A9. Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community’](#), 5 April 2022

⁴⁶⁴ HDI/APHRC, [‘Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...’](#) (page 32), May 2022

⁴⁶⁵ Laterite, [‘Gender and social inclusion assessment’](#) (page 23), 11 December 2018

towards homosexuality.⁴⁶⁶

- 15.6.3 Cedoca also quoted an August 2019 email exchange with the Programme Coordinator of a Rwandan human rights and LGBT organisation. The coordinator said the Church ‘remains the biggest opposition towards the sexual minority family. Many have very tough and condescending words.’⁴⁶⁷
- 15.6.4 While acknowledging that ‘society still holds on to conservative attitudes towards homosexuality’, DW noted in a July 2020 article that ‘... the LGBT+ community in Rwanda is gradually gaining acceptance and respect within a largely conservative society.’⁴⁶⁸
- 15.6.5 ILGA noted in August 2020: ‘...homosexuality is considered a taboo topic, and there is no significant public discussion of this issue in any region of the country.’⁴⁶⁹
- 15.6.6 In a November 2020 article, Vice News quoted the Executive Director of Hope and Care Organisation (HOC), a Rwandan LGBT-support group: ‘Homosexuality is not criminalized in Rwanda, but many LGBTI people keep their sexuality and gender identity secret in an attempt to avoid rejection, discrimination and abuse... This has led many more to choose to silence when faced with injustice.’⁴⁷⁰
- 15.6.7 In June 2021, Reuters reported: ‘LGBT+ rights groups in the largely conservative Christian nation [Rwanda] say homophobic attitudes are widespread.’⁴⁷¹
- 15.6.8 Advanced Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (ALIGN), a digital research platform focusing on gender justice and equality⁴⁷² published a study in August 2021. The research documented the views of 20 civil society organisations (CSOs) and 160 individuals from LGBTQI communities in Kigali on the treatment of LGBTQI people⁴⁷³:
- ‘... the study probed respondents about the types of gender norms and stereotypes that commonly emerge about people from this community, with the vast majority (89%) reporting that LGBTQI people are characterised as an immoral group. In addition, 80% said that being a member of the LGBTQI community was associated with being against the will of God, 51% said that LGBTQI people are considered to be social outcasts, and 41% stated that identifying as LGBTQI is characterised as a medical disorder.’⁴⁷⁴
- 15.6.9 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted: ‘LGBTQI+ groups conducted public activities in Kigali during the year, including Pride festivities and a fashion show, indicating increasing tolerance and acceptance of LGBTQI+’

⁴⁶⁶ Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 13), 30 October 2019

⁴⁶⁷ Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 29), 30 October 2019

⁴⁶⁸ DW, ‘[Rwandan church embraces LGBT+ community](#)’, 21 July 2020

⁴⁶⁹ ILGA, ‘[LGBTI Organisations In Rwanda Unite Under Coalition.](#)’, 10 August 2020

⁴⁷⁰ Vice News, ‘[Rwanda’s Transgender Community Face Violent Detentions ...](#)’, 20 November 2020

⁴⁷¹ Reuters, ‘[Brave and hopeful’ LGBT+ Rwandans prepare for their first Pride](#)’, 29 June 2021

⁴⁷² ALIGN, ‘[About ALIGN](#)’, no date

⁴⁷³ ALIGN, ‘[Gender-based violence against LGBTQI people in civil society ...](#)’, August 2021

⁴⁷⁴ ALIGN, ‘[Gender-based violence against LGBTQI people in civil ...](#)’ (page 12), August 2021

persons in some parts of the country's society.'⁴⁷⁵

15.6.10 The May 2022 HDI/APHRC survey asked 1,254 members of the public whether they agreed or disagreed with certain statements about LGBT persons. CPIT has summarised the results in the table below:

Statement	Agree or Strongly agree %	Neutral %	Disagree or Strongly disagree %
LGBT people's sexual acts or gender expressions are against what God intended	74	12	14
I believe that LGBT people should be treated like any other person under the law	53	12	35
LGBT people are unnatural	49	16	35
I support LGBT rights	32	16	51

476

15.6.11 During a meeting with NCHR on 22 March 2022, a UKHO official asked whether a gay couple could live openly, to which one of the NCHR representatives commented: 'In our society, there is privacy – [you] will not find man and wife being openly affectionate. So those who are gay, you don't see them in the street. So gay people can live in [the] same house but society won't know whether they are gay or not.' Another NCHR representative explained that no one cares about another person's private life but whereas a female couple who lived together would be described as 'gay' outside of Rwanda, they are described as 'friends' within Rwanda.⁴⁷⁷

15.6.12 In a meeting with the HO on 21 March 2022, LAF noted: 'The acceptance of the LGBTQ community is something the country has to understand - it's not something to be enforced. It is being discussed. Over 99% of people are religious, but there are statements in support of emerging LGBTQ groups. Rwanda is very lenient, it is more liberal than other neighbouring countries re: LGBT+.'⁴⁷⁸

[Back to Contents](#)

15.7 Societal treatment

15.7.1 According to organisations which represent LGBTI persons – consulted for Laterite's 2018 report – while violence against LGBTI persons still takes place, it has 'decreased significantly' since 2009⁴⁷⁹ (the year the draft Article 217 amendment to the Penal Code was withdrawn) (see [Legal rights](#)). Laterite provided no further detail regarding how the participating

⁴⁷⁵ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

⁴⁷⁶ HDI/APHRC, '[Examination of LGBT people's lived experiences...](#)' (page 34), May 2022

⁴⁷⁷ Annex 3, '[A7. Meeting with NCHR](#)', 22 March 2022

⁴⁷⁸ Annex 3, '[A6. Meeting with LAF](#)', 21 March 2022

⁴⁷⁹ Laterite, '[Gender and social inclusion assessment](#)' (page 27), 11 December 2018

organisations quantified violence levels.

- 15.7.2 The Cedoca COI focus 2019 quoted the Executive Director of HDI: 'We have registered cases where parents have refused to pay school fees, healthcare insurance or providing food to their children because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.'⁴⁸⁰
- 15.7.3 Cedoca also asked about meeting places for LGBTI persons, and the HDI Director responded: '... so far we have three hotels that are friendly with LGBT gatherings. There are also a number of small bars and night clubs that are friendly to the LGBTI community. Examples are Kigali View Hotel, Hart Land Hotel, Papyrus, People club.'⁴⁸¹
- 15.7.4 Additional 'safe' places in Kigali were identified by the Executive Director of My Right Alliance: '...the Bauhaus Bar, the Sun City Hotel and the Inema Art Centre.'⁴⁸²
- 15.7.5 In November 2020, Amahoro Human Respect (AHR), a youth-led Kigali-based NGO, published a study involving 493 LGBT participants, which looked at the impact of COVID-19 on the Rwandan LGBT community. The majority of respondents were gay or bisexual (total of 90%), with 6% transgender and 4% lesbian. The study used a combination of questionnaires, interviews and focus groups to report on experiences of 'homophobia'⁴⁸³. The study did not provide a breakdown of the acts or behaviours which are covered by the definition of 'homophobia' so the severity and scope of the respondents' experiences is not known.
- 15.7.6 The study found:
- 11.2% 'never' experienced homophobia
 - 19.3% 'sometimes' experienced homophobia
 - 36.5% 'most of the time' experienced homophobia
 - 31.6% 'always' experienced homophobia⁴⁸⁴
- 15.7.7 AHR's focus groups: '...revealed that most people [who] experienced homophobic acts are transgender women because of their gender expression.'⁴⁸⁵
- 15.7.8 The AHR study also collected data on the places where the respondents experienced 'homophobia':
- Law enforcement services settings: 4.3%
 - Work environment: 5.7%
 - Health facilities: 5.9%
 - Civil society organisations: 6.3%

⁴⁸⁰ Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (page 16), 30 October 2019

⁴⁸¹ Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (page 21), 30 October 2019

⁴⁸² Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (page 22), 30 October 2019

⁴⁸³ AHR, '[Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on Rwandan LGBT...](#)' (page 16), Nov 2020

⁴⁸⁴ AHR, '[Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on Rwandan LGBT...](#)' (page 16), Nov 2020

⁴⁸⁵ AHR, '[Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on Rwandan LGBT...](#)' (page 19), Nov 2020

- Markets: 6.5%
- Churches or mosques: 7.1%
- Family: 18.6%
- Bars, hotels and night clubs: 21.0%
- Community: 24.7%⁴⁸⁶

15.7.9 The AHR report did not specify the phrasing of the question relating to 'place' of 'homophobia'. However, the figures provided by AHR add up to 100%, suggesting respondents were asked to select a single or main 'place' category. In this case, the statistics may not reflect the experiences of respondents who have faced homophobia in more than one setting.

15.7.10 The East Africa Trans Health & Advocacy Network (EATHAN) conducted a study in 2020 across 5 African countries, including Rwanda, where 24 intersex, trans and gender non-conforming (ITGNC) persons based in Kigali were interviewed⁴⁸⁷. The majority of respondents (54%) identified as transwomen, 38% as transmen, one person as intersex and one person as gender non-conforming⁴⁸⁸. The report noted: 'Trans people still face harassment and discrimination' and 'stigma, discrimination and harassment of ITGNC persons remains rampant'. The source did not provide further details of the frequency or nature of the discrimination and harassment encountered, nor whether this was state or societal treatment⁴⁸⁹.

15.7.11 A December 2020 article by Rwanda Today noted the establishment of an LGBT-friendly church in Kigali, the 'Church of God Rwanda'. The article reported: 'Besides giving... [LGBT persons] a safe space to worship, the church also offers counselling services to LGBT members who are battling depression and drug abuse.'⁴⁹⁰

15.7.12 Freedom House's 2022 World Report, reporting on 2021 events, noted: 'LGBT+ activists organized Rwanda's first pride celebrations in June.'⁴⁹¹ In a meeting with HO on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBTI community confirmed that a Pride march took place in 2021, explaining they had to do it 'differently to initial plans' but describing it as 'successful'⁴⁹². According to Outright International, Rwanda was one of 105 countries which held public Pride events in 2022⁴⁹³. No further information on pride events taking place in Rwanda in 2022 or 2023 could be found in the sources consulted by CPIT (see [Bibliography](#)).

15.7.13 During a meeting between the UKHO and UNHCR on 21 March 2022, a representative commented: 'UNHCR has not heard of any violence against the LGBTI community. Rwanda is mostly tolerant – have had some LGBT+ [from Uganda] and [UNHCR] provide counselling, financial assistance. Most

⁴⁸⁶ AHR, '[Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on Rwandan LGBT...](#)' (page 19), Nov 2020

⁴⁸⁷ EATHAN, '[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)', (Methodology) 2020

⁴⁸⁸ EATHAN, '[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)', (page 20) 2020

⁴⁸⁹ EATHAN, '[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)', (p 41 and 45) 2020

⁴⁹⁰ Rwanda Today, '[Pandemic hits Rwanda's sexual minorities harder](#)', 16 December 2020

⁴⁹¹ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2022 – Rwanda](#)' (E1), 28 February 2022

⁴⁹² Annex 3, '[A9. Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community](#)', 5 April 2022

⁴⁹³ Outright International, '[We Remain Resilient: Pride Around the...](#)' (page 54), June 2023

of the time they [LGBTI persons] stay in urban areas. There is a network [of LGBTI persons]... There was a recent TV debate addressing issue of social stigma.⁴⁹⁴

15.7.14 At the same meeting, a UNHCR representative explained: ‘Local leaders [are responsible] for facilitating access to services. If the local leader is very conservative [then for an] LGBT person, it would not go well.’⁴⁹⁵

15.7.15 The HDI/APHRC survey, published in May 2022, asked 499 LGBT persons about sources of discrimination. The results showed 85% of respondents reported discrimination from individuals in the community, 24% reported discrimination from NGOs and private organisations, and 19% reported discrimination from public institutions⁴⁹⁶.

15.7.16 The same survey found: ‘Among those who disclosed their [sexual orientation and gender identity]... 15% experienced rejection from their families and 11% from social acquaintances.’⁴⁹⁷

15.7.17 The HDI/APHRC collected information on self-reported discriminatory and violent actions committed by a sample of 1,254 members of the public against LGBTI persons within the previous year. HDI/APHRC categorised the actions into 5 types. CPIT has summarized the information in the table below:

Self-reported action	Actions by members of the public in past year	
	Number	%
Used a derogatory name to refer to someone who is LGBT	257	20
Teased someone who dressed and acted like someone of the opposite sex	229	18
Avoided someone because they are LGBT	216	17
Refused to hire or work with someone because they are LGBT	54	4
Beat/physically injured someone because they are LGBT	37	3

498

15.7.18 A June 2021 article by Reuters noted: ‘LGBT+ Rwandans say they are often... ostracised by family and friends if they come out, with violent threats forcing some to flee the country.’⁴⁹⁹

15.7.19 The HDI/APHRC survey, published in May 2022, based upon the responses

⁴⁹⁴ Annex 2, [‘A1. Meeting with UNHCR’](#), 21 March 2022

⁴⁹⁵ Annex 2, [‘A1. Meeting with UNHCR’](#), 21 March 2022

⁴⁹⁶ HDI/APHRC, [‘Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...’](#) (page 18), May 2022

⁴⁹⁷ HDI/APHRC, [‘Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...’](#) (page 21), May 2022

⁴⁹⁸ HDI/APHRC, [‘Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...’](#) (page 37), May 2022

⁴⁹⁹ Reuters, [‘Brave and hopeful’ LGBT+ Rwandans prepare for their first Pride](#), 29 June 2021

of 499 LGBT persons, found that while 43% agreed that they were '[m]ostly free to express [their] gender identify and/or sexual orientation', 68% 'reported feeling mistreated and discriminated against whenever they expressed their sexual orientation'⁵⁰⁰.

- 15.7.20 UK Government travel advice for British nationals visiting Rwanda stated: 'Homosexuality is not illegal in Rwanda but remains frowned on by many. LGBT individuals can experience discrimination and abuse, including from local authorities.'⁵⁰¹

[Back to Contents](#)

15.8 Treatment of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees

- 15.8.1 A 2017 article on US news site Mashable quoted Louis Busingye, a Programme Coordinator with Human Rights First Rwanda Association, who said: 'There are those [LGBTI persons] who are persecuted [in other countries] and who have sought refuge in Rwanda.'⁵⁰²
- 15.8.2 In a June 2020 Refugee Policy Summary, published in March 2022, the UNHCR commented that while, in general, there was not discrimination against refugees: '... discrimination might occur in some situations, for instance in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, this is true for both refugees and members of the host community.'⁵⁰³
- 15.8.3 During a meeting with UKHO on 23 March 2022, Alight was asked whether the organisation provided SGBV services to asylum seekers or refugees who are members of the LGBTI community. Alight explained:
- 'There is a culture of silence – we may come across those cases it's not ease [sic] to know. Our policy and obligations are very clear, no discrimination against that group but extra measures taken to respect their status and ensure our project design aligns with the needs to this group.
- 'Not aware of much LGBT profile in RWA. If made aware of LGBT asylum seekers / refugees (both urban and camp based) Alight will adapt, redesign and provide services accordingly.'⁵⁰⁴

[Back to Contents](#)

15.9 State protection

- 15.9.1 The Cedoca COI focus 2019 quoted the Executive Director of HDI (Dr Kagaba):
- "In principle, an LGBT [person] as all citizens have the right to seek a protection from the police – but in practice, it is difficult for the community to trust the policeman (individual) knowing that they might have their own attitudes.'" The source then provided an example of a case where an LGBT couple approached the police and sought and received advice, and the

⁵⁰⁰ HDI/APHRC, '[Examination of LGBT people's lived experiences...](#)' (page 19), May 2022

⁵⁰¹ UKG, '[Foreign travel advice: ...](#)' (Local laws and customs), updated 22 June 2023

⁵⁰² Mashable, '[Tomorrow, they'll accept us: Rwandans fight...](#)', 18 November 2017

⁵⁰³ UNHCR, '[Refugee policy review framework country summary as at 30 ...](#)' (page 4), 10 March 2022

⁵⁰⁴ Annex 3, '[A8. Meeting with Alight](#)', 23 March 2022

source added: ‘...nwe have also noted that not all policemen have necessarily a negative attitude on LGBT issues.’⁵⁰⁵

- 15.9.2 In May 2023, Dr Kagaba participated in a podcast and was asked ‘in cases of abuse and discrimination what has the law enforcement or the court system done to protect those in the [LGBT] community and have you seen some action? Have police arrested people? Have people gone to court?... Are we seeing a lot of prosecutions based off of discrimination or is it something that you don’t see enough of?’ Dr Kagaba replied, ‘We have followed up a number of cases, a few of them they have gone to court and they have been judged fairly.’ Dr Kagaba also mentioned that some judges made comments during the process which made LGBT persons feel uncomfortable, and this indicated a need for further training of members of the judiciary⁵⁰⁶.
- 15.9.3 The podcast host also asked whether law enforcement – in relation to LGBT issues – had improved or worsened during Dr Kagaba’s years working in the field. Dr Kagaba responded that he was ‘quite pleased with the progress’ and mentioned how training had resulted in some police officers becoming LGBT advocates and lawyers were more willing to take on LGBT cases⁵⁰⁷.
- 15.9.4 An anonymous employee of an international organisation told Cedoca in 2019 that LGBT persons could seek protection but added: ‘... the reactions of law enforcement officers may vary, so an LGBT individual may be denied protection. This [is] due to individual beliefs or traditions and not [to] an institutional policy.’⁵⁰⁸
- 15.9.5 Cedoca also reported: ‘According to [email correspondence with] Jean-Claude Uwihoreye, Executive Director of My Right Alliance, LGBT people cannot seek protection from the courts or the police. Lawyers refuse to take LGBT cases and LGBT court cases are dismissed.’⁵⁰⁹
- 15.9.6 A June 2020 report by 12 NGOs, submitted as part of the UN’s Universal Periodic Review of Rwanda, raised concerns about: ‘Inadequate enforcement of the law criminalizing hate speech, which targets female sex workers and LGBTI persons.’⁵¹⁰
- 15.9.7 In November 2020, Vice News reported:
- ‘In July, the Great Lakes Initiative for Human Development [GLIHD] secured a 24 hour toll-free number for wrongfully arrested LGBTQ Rwandans. The hotline was funded by UNAIDS in partnership with the Rwanda Biomedical Center. “We put in place two lawyers to always intervene whenever there is an arrest,” Mulisa [Executive Director of GLIHD] said. “If we can provide such a service, when some people are falsely accused and falsely arrested, [we] can stop this.”...
- ‘Since July, five transgender people have used the hotline following their

⁵⁰⁵ Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 11), 30 October 2019

⁵⁰⁶ Kagaba, A, The Long Form with Sanny Ntayombya, ‘[Podcast episode...](#)’, 1 May 2023

⁵⁰⁷ Kagaba, A, The Long Form with Sanny Ntayombya, ‘[Podcast episode...](#)’, 1 May 2023

⁵⁰⁸ Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 12), 30 October 2019

⁵⁰⁹ Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 8), 30 October 2019

⁵¹⁰ LGBTI/sex worker coalition, [JS5 - Joint Submission 5](#) (page 4), June 2020

arrest by police. All were released.’⁵¹¹

- 15.9.8 Based upon correspondence dated 5 August 2021, the IRB reported: ‘The Executive Director of HRFR [Human Rights First Association Rwanda] stated that it is hard for LGBTI people to receive assistance from law enforcement due to discrimination and that in some instances, LGBTI individuals have been denied assistance... The same source stated that the judiciary is independent and operates without discrimination.’⁵¹²
- 15.9.9 LAF told the UKHO in a meeting on 21 March 2022 that on the issue of whether LGBTI persons can seek protection from the police: ‘LGBT people can and do complain to the police about their treatment and the police do deal with those cases.’⁵¹³
- 15.9.10 In a meeting with the UKHO on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBTI community explained that the ‘police as an institution [are] ok, it’s individuals which are [the] problem – difficult to say how widespread (no data) but think not common, just case by case’ and that ‘[i]f you report mistreatment of police, [there are] no repercussions’⁵¹⁴.
- 15.9.11 Of the 499 LGBT persons who responded to the HDI/APHRC survey, published in May 2022: ‘One in three respondents stated that they knew about government programs and campaigns against discrimination based on SOGI and other minority groups.’⁵¹⁵
- 15.9.12 Dr Hazel Cameron provided oral evidence on the MEDP to the UK Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights on 8 June 2022. She noted: ‘... there is no non-discriminatory legislation towards LGBT persons. However, Rwanda’s National Commission for Human Rights - the NCHR - is engaged in the protection and monitoring of human rights in Rwanda. It encourages people to make complaints about human rights violations and it conducts investigations into those complaints.’⁵¹⁶
- For more information on NCHR’s complaints process see [Human rights oversight bodies](#)
- 15.9.13 In relation to redress for discrimination a LGBTI person might face, Dr Cameron noted: ‘There are pathways. If you were being discriminated against by an individual, a neighbour, or you sought employment and were discriminated against, you could seek redress - in certain circumstances, depending on the type of discrimination. If it involved a civilian, you could report that matter to the police force and it would be investigated by the Rwanda Investigation Bureau.’⁵¹⁷
- 15.9.14 The NCHR’s annual report - which contains details of monitoring activities undertaken by the Commission - covering the period July 2021 to June

⁵¹¹ Vice News, ‘[Rwanda’s Transgender Community Face Violent Detentions ...](#)’, 20 November 2020

⁵¹² IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Situation of persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender ...](#)’, 23 August 2021

⁵¹³ Annex 3, ‘[A9. Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community](#)’, 5 April 2022

⁵¹⁴ Annex 3, ‘[A9. Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community](#)’, 5 April 2022

⁵¹⁵ HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (page 26), May 2022

⁵¹⁶ Joint Committee on Human Rights, ‘[Oral evidence: The UK-Rwanda Migration ...](#)’, 8 June 2022

⁵¹⁷ Joint Committee on Human Rights, ‘[Oral evidence: The UK-Rwanda Migration ...](#)’, 8 June 2022

2022, contained no reference to LGBTI persons⁵¹⁸.

[Back to Contents](#)

15.10 Healthcare

- 15.10.1 In a meeting with the UKHO on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBTI community considered that the ‘LGBT community fears to go to hospitals, doctors can have traditional attitudes’ and that mental health problems are “widespread”. However, they also cited one example where ‘one individual had mental health problems, when finally went to doctor, doctor said they wished she’d come to be helped sooner.’⁵¹⁹
- 15.10.2 Twenty-three percent of the 499 LGBT respondents to the May 2022 HDI/APHRC survey reported experiencing discrimination in accessing healthcare⁵²⁰.
- 15.10.3 In a May 2023 podcast, which discussed the HDI/APHRC report’s findings, the guest, Dr Aflodis Kagaba of the HDI, gave the example of LGBT persons feeling unwelcome in health facilities and being made to feel uncomfortable by health workers. The podcast host asked: ‘Are they [LGBT persons] being denied service or are they being made to feel discriminated against?’. Dr Kagaba replied, ‘They are not being denied service but again discrimination actually ends up making someone not go [to the health centre].’⁵²¹
- 15.10.4 The podcast host mentioned that health facilities were run by different types of providers – including religious organisations, NGOs and the state – and asked whether treatment of LGBT persons varied as a result. Dr Kagaba replied, ‘There are issues everywhere but not at the same level.’ Dr Kagaba discussed differing attitudes between organisations, with some religious health providers being more progressive than others, he also mentioned differing attitudes at an individual level. He commented that an ‘enabling environment’ existed and progress was being made towards the provision of ‘stigma-free services’ across health facilities, and that LGBT persons could be signposted towards stigma-free health providers⁵²².
- 15.10.5 A coalition of community-based and civil society organisations working on the rights of women involved in sex work and LGBT+ persons in Rwanda, which submitted a shadow report to the fifth periodic report of Rwanda on the UN CESCR, dated January 2023, noted that ‘The National Strategic Plan on HIV and AIDS 2018-2024, suggests to reduce sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) and HIV related stigma and discrimination, but fails to suggest numeric targets to be achieved. The Coalition is concerned with the omission of LGBT+ persons in the National Strategic Plan on HIV and AIDS.’⁵²³
- 15.10.6 The same source noted that the Fourth Health Sector Strategic Plan 2018-2024 ‘... does not make any specific mention of LGBT+ persons or their

⁵¹⁸ NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)’, September 2022

⁵¹⁹ Annex 3, ‘[A9. Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community](#)’, 5 April 2022

⁵²⁰ HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (page 16), May 2022

⁵²¹ Kagaba, A, The Long Form with Sanny Ntayombya, ‘[Podcast episode...](#)’, 1 May 2023

⁵²² Kagaba, A, The Long Form with Sanny Ntayombya, ‘[Podcast episode...](#)’, 1 May 2023

⁵²³ OHCHR, ‘[Shadow Report to the Fifth Periodic Report of Rwanda \[CESCR\]](#)’ (page 6), January 2023

health needs.’⁵²⁴

15.10.7 The Coalition shadow report also expressed concern at the practice of conversion therapy, stating that the subject was raised during focus group discussions with LGBTI community members who explained that it: ‘... often takes the form of coerced prayers, coerced counselling, corporal punishment for children and young adolescents aiming to change their sexual orientation. The testimony is also supported by research findings which revealed that some healthcare professionals perceived same sex conduct as a disease and focused on “treating” the patient’s sexual orientation, instead of the patients’ health conditions.’⁵²⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

15.11 Employment and education

15.11.1 The EATHAN 2020 study found that, out of the 24 ITGNC Rwandan respondents surveyed, 37.5% earned their income from sex work, 20.7% were self-employed, 33.3% were employed and 8.3% had no income⁵²⁶. The report did not provide a breakdown of employment status in relation to sexual orientation or gender identity, however the majority of respondents (54%) identified as transwomen⁵²⁷.

15.11.2 A December 2020 article by Rwanda Today noted that:

‘Sexual minorities, including sexual workers and members of the LGBT community, faced the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic in Rwanda as most of them lost their jobs, [were] jailed, cases of discriminations and attacks also intensified in the larger community.

‘Up to 60 per cent of the 12,000 members of the LGBT community in Kigali lost their jobs, according to My Right Alliance, an organisation that works with LGBT members.

‘Many of the members of LGBT community worked in bars, hotels, restaurants and salons and they were the first to be laid off, and were not restored. It becomes easier for them to be targeted since majority live openly as members of the LGBT, which has made them susceptible to silent discrimination.’⁵²⁸

15.11.3 The ALIGN 2021 study into the workplace experiences of LGBTI employees of CSOs in Kigali noted that: ‘While some have reported that finding employment is an uphill task, others state that if they do find employment they have to keep their sexual orientation and gender identity a secret to avoid stigmatising and discriminatory acts, including getting laid off. Others have reported that they have lost their jobs soon after the information related to their gender or sexuality was discovered.’⁵²⁹

15.11.4 The ALIGN study asked 160 LGBT respondents, ‘Have you ever

⁵²⁴ OHCHR, ‘[Shadow Report to the Fifth Periodic Report of Rwanda \[CESCR\]](#)’ (page 7), January 2023

⁵²⁵ OHCHR, ‘[Shadow Report to the Fifth Periodic Report of Rwanda \[CESCR\]](#)’ (page 8), January 2023

⁵²⁶ EATHAN, ‘[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)’, (page 24) 2020

⁵²⁷ EATHAN, ‘[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)’, (page 20) 2020

⁵²⁸ Rwanda Today, ‘[Pandemic hits Rwanda’s sexual minorities harder](#)’, 16 December 2020

⁵²⁹ ALIGN, ‘[Gender-based violence against LGBTQI people in civil...](#)’, (page 5), August 2021

experienced any type of GBV at your work place?', 74% replied 'Yes'. Of these respondents when asked, 'What types of GBV have you experienced while within a civil society workplace?' they reported:

- 'Psychological or emotional violence' (85%)
- 'Sexual harassment' (35%)
- 'Physical violence' (0.5%)
- 'Other forms of discrimination' (71%)⁵³⁰

15.11.5 In a meeting with the UKHO on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBTI community considered that 'COVID [was] being used by employers as pretext to fire people they know are LGBT – can't fire someone purely because they're LGBT (could be reported to Gov[ernmen]t) but [employers] try to find other excuses.'⁵³¹

15.11.6 Of the 499 LGBT persons who responded to the HDI/APHRC survey, published in May 2022, 64% were unemployed, 19% were in formal employment and 11% were self-employed. The report's methodology did not specify when the survey data was collected and so it is unclear to what extent the unemployment level was impacted by COVID-19⁵³².

15.11.7 Twenty per cent of respondents of the HDI/APHRC survey reported experiencing discrimination in employment. Focus group discussions, for example, raised the issue of missing out on promotion⁵³³.

15.11.8 The HDI/APHRC survey also found that 96% of LGBT respondents had attended school and 55% had received vocational training as their highest level of education. 23% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination in education, and some LGBT persons who took part in the study's focus groups mentioned hiding their sexual orientation and gender identity from their educational institution to avoid stigma⁵³⁴.

15.11.9 In its shadow report to the UNCESCR, the Coalition expressed concern at the '... weak enforcement of anti-discrimination measures at the workplace. It was revealed during a focus group discussion that LGBT+ persons face stigma and discrimination at workplaces.'⁵³⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

15.12 Housing

15.12.1 The Cedoca COI focus 2019 quoted the Executive Director of the HDI: '[W]e have registered cases of landlords who have expelled LGBT members from their paid houses after getting to know about their homosexuality status.'⁵³⁶

15.12.2 In a meeting between UKHO and UNHCR on 21 March 2022, a representative commented: 'LGBT+ [people] have some difficulties

⁵³⁰ ALIGN, '[Gender-based violence against LGBTQI people in civil ...](#)', (page 10), August 2021

⁵³¹ Annex 3, '[A9. Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community](#)', 5 April 2022

⁵³² HDI/APHRC, '[Examination of LGBT people's lived experiences...](#)' (pages 13 and 24), May 2022

⁵³³ HDI/APHRC, '[Examination of LGBT people's lived experiences...](#)' (pages 16 and 17), May 2022

⁵³⁴ HDI/APHRC, '[Examination of LGBT people's lived experiences...](#)' (pages 13 and 20), May 2022

⁵³⁵ OHCHR, '[Shadow Report to the Fifth Periodic Report of Rwanda \[CESCR\]](#)' (page 8), January 2023

⁵³⁶ Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (page 16), 30 October 2019

accessing employment and renting accommodation in urban areas – cases of being denied accommodation.⁵³⁷

- 15.12.3 Of the 499 LGBT persons who responded to the HDI/APHRC survey, published in May 2022, 31% reported experiencing discrimination in housing. Participants in focus groups reported landlords refusing to let houses or instances of being evicted due to their sexual orientation⁵³⁸.
- 15.12.4 The coalition of community-based and civil society organisations working on the rights of women involved in sex work and LGBT+ persons in Rwanda, which submitted a shadow report to the fifth periodic report of Rwanda on the UN CESCR, dated January 2023, noted that ‘The Coalition received information from the members of the LGBT+ community who reported that they are often evicted from their rental houses by landlords because of their perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity expression.’⁵³⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

15.13 Civil society support

- 15.13.1 ILGA noted that LGBTI organisations often feared having their applications for legal registration rejected so chose to ‘... identify as human rights organisations that serve the LGBTI community, instead of principally LGBTI organizations.’⁵⁴⁰
- 15.13.2 A December 2020 article by Rwanda Today, English language newspaper, noted that, in terms of LGBTI NGO registration: ‘[NGOs] say institutional discrimination against LGBT members still exist, for instance up to now they can’t register organisations even when the law allows them to. “The moment [Rwanda Governance Board] RGB gets to know that its [sic] an LGBT organisation, they toss you up and down until they deny you registration” said Uwihoreye, whose organisation is also still an association because of this.’⁵⁴¹
- 15.13.3 The USSD 2022 report noted: ‘Although LGBTQI+ persons could meet and held various events throughout the year, difficulty registering their own civil society organizations was a barrier to doing more activities.’⁵⁴²
- 15.13.4 In a September 2023 report, Outright International listed Rwanda as a country where LGBTI civil society organisations exist, but ‘Registration As Openly LGBTIQ Is Prohibited or Generally Impossible.’⁵⁴³
- 15.13.5 In a meeting with the UKHO on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBTI community stated that ‘No NGO [had] registered outright as LGBT-focused, though there is awareness of some organisations’ work in this space.’⁵⁴⁴
- 15.13.6 In a meeting between the UKHO and LAF on 21 March 2022, a LAF

⁵³⁷ Annex 2, [‘A1. Meeting with UNHCR’](#), 21 March 2022

⁵³⁸ HDI/APHRC, [‘Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...’](#) (pages 16 and 17), May 2022

⁵³⁹ OHCHR, [‘Shadow Report to the Fifth Periodic Report of Rwanda...’](#) (page 11), January 2023

⁵⁴⁰ ILGA, [‘State-sponsored homophobia: global legislation overview ...’](#) (page 172), December 2020

⁵⁴¹ Rwanda Today, [‘Pandemic hits Rwanda’s sexual minorities harder’](#), 16 December 2020

⁵⁴² USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

⁵⁴³ Outright International, [‘The Global State of LGBTIQ Organizing’](#) (pages 21, 75), September 2023

⁵⁴⁴ Annex 3, [‘A9. Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community’](#), 5 April 2022

representative commented on the general circumstances of LGBTI persons in Rwanda: ‘LAF have provided advice to LGBT individuals but because they need assistance, not because they are LGBT. LAF know that they have been aggrieved because of their sexuality. LAF assists because a person’s rights have not been respected – for whatever reason. There are a lot of NGOs that assist LGBTQ people.’⁵⁴⁵

15.13.7 Of the 499 LGBT persons who responded to the HDI/APHRC survey, published in May 2022: ‘Over half... mentioned knowing non-governmental organizations that support LGBT rights.’⁵⁴⁶

15.13.8 Dr Hazel Cameron’s evidence to the UK Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights on 8 June 2022 noted:

‘... The Government of Rwanda have a relatively progressive position on LGBT-related issues, but that is hindered when efforts by actors who are working to advance LGBT rights have to be shaped by quite an intense social stigma at grass-roots level, which comes down to a lack of understanding. There is a need for much greater awareness training in the country and for the country to take into consideration the non-discrimination legislation. That does need to be reviewed.’⁵⁴⁷

15.13.9 The FH report 2023 noted in regard to political influence: ‘Societal discrimination, as well as the regime’s general repression of dissent, prevents LGBT+ Rwandans from freely pursuing their communities’ political interests.’⁵⁴⁸

See also [Non-governmental organisations](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

15.14 Organisations supporting LGBTI persons

15.14.1 A December 2018 report by Laterite provided a list of organisations in Kigali which support LGBTI persons. The list below has been drawn from the Laterite report, with links to active websites of the organisations:

- [Never Again Rwanda](#)
‘[A]ims to empower Rwandans, and especially youth, with opportunities to become active citizens through peacebuilding and development.’
- [Horizon Community Association](#) (HOCA)
‘[T]he first organization representing LGBTI in Rwanda, mainly working with MSM [men who have sex with men].’
- [Health Development Initiative](#) (HDI)
‘[S]trives to improve both the quality and accessibility of healthcare for all Rwandans through advocacy, education and training. HDI has extended experience working with the LGBTI community.’

⁵⁴⁵ Annex 3, ‘[A6. Meeting with LAF](#)’, 21 March 2022

⁵⁴⁶ HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (page 26), May 2022

⁵⁴⁷ Joint Committee on Human Rights, ‘[Oral evidence: The UK-Rwanda Migration ...](#)’, 8 June 2022

⁵⁴⁸ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)’ (B4), March 2023

- [My Right Alliance](#)
'My Rights Alliance promotes the rights of LGBTI, working on advocacy and access to justice and health.'
- [Safe Friendly Society](#)
'[P]romotes the rights of MSM; they work on advocacy and access to justice, training of healthcare providers, and research and documentation.'
- [Rights for All](#) (RIFA)
'[A] non-profit organization representing lesbians and bisexual women, transmen and LBT who are sex workers, in order to improve their health and rights and protection.'
- [Rwanda Rainbow Rights](#)
'[W]orks on capacity building of MSM to provide them with economic skills and on HIV-prevention of MSM and sex workers.'
- [Building Hope for Future](#)
'[A]n organization that works with transwomen and transwomen who are sex workers, in order to make sure that all transwomen have access to schooling and health, and that they can live in a society without fear of being judged.'⁵⁴⁹

15.14.2 Other LGBTI rights organisations (not exhaustive) include:

- [AMAHORO Human Respect](#)
- [Human Rights First Rwanda Association](#)
- [Hope and Care Rwanda](#)
- [Other Sheep Rwanda](#)

15.14.3 A coalition of community-based and civil society organisations working on the rights of women involved in sex work and LGBT+ persons in Rwanda, which submitted a shadow report to the fifth periodic report of Rwanda on the UN CESCR, dated January 2023, noted that the following organisations made up the coalition:

- Health Development Initiative (HDI)
- Rwanda NGO Forum on HIV /AIDS and Health Promotion (RNGOF on HIV /AIDS & HP)
- Association de Soutien aux PVVIH+ (ANSP+)
- Centre for Rule of Law Rwanda (CERULAR)
- Amahoro Human Respect Organisation (AHR)
- My Rights Association (MRA)
- Safe Friendly Society (SFS)

⁵⁴⁹ Laterite, '[Gender and social inclusion assessment](#)' (pages 52 and 53), 11 December 2018

- Horizon Community Association (HOCA)
- Building hope for Future (BHF)
- Bright Future Organization (BFO)
- Hope and Care (HAC)
- Joint Action for Bright Future (JABFA)
- Pride Ark Organization (PAO)
- Health and Rights Initiative (HRI)
- Abahujumugambi of Nyarugenge
- One for All Organization
- Indatwa of Huye and Ruhango
- Abishyize Hamwe of Gasabo
- Igitego of Muhanga⁵⁵⁰

15.14.4 In June 2023, German Government's International Development Agency (GIZ – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) indicated that it was aware of around 40 Rwandan civil society organisations and stakeholders that represented the LGBTQI+ community⁵⁵¹.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

16. Religious groups

16.1 Legal rights

16.1.1 Article 37 of the Constitution states: 'Freedom of thought, conscience, religion, worship and public manifestation thereof is guaranteed by the State in accordance with the law.'⁵⁵²

16.1.2 The 2022 USSD Religious Freedom report noted: 'Under the law determining the organization and functioning of FBOs [Faith-based organisation], which include religious groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) associated with religious groups, any organization, umbrella organization, or ministry that intends to begin operations must obtain legal status from the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB).' ⁵⁵³

16.1.3 The USSD also noted: 'The law states FBOs may give their opinions on social or faith-related matters but may not engage in political activities to gain political power, organize debates to support political organizations or political candidates, or use any other means to support candidates for public office.'⁵⁵⁴ The same source also observed that in 2022 there were reports that the government pressured religious leaders to refrain from speaking out

⁵⁵⁰ OHCHR, '[Shadow Report to the Fifth Periodic Report of Rwanda \[CESCR\]](#)' (page 2), January 2023

⁵⁵¹ GIZ, '[Equality, not exclusion](#)', 16 June 2023

⁵⁵² GoR, '[Constitution](#)' (Article 37), 24 December 2015

⁵⁵³ USSD, '[2022 report on international religious freedom: Rwanda](#)', (section 2), 15 May 2023

⁵⁵⁴ USSD, '[2022 report on international religious freedom: Rwanda](#)', (section 2), 15 May 2023

including Biryogo mosque, Masjid Madina and Markaz^{559 560 561}.

- [Al-Masidjid Q'Ubah Africa Muslims Agency Butare-Rwanda](#) is in Huye district and the Islamic Cultural Centre is in Kigali⁵⁶²

16.2.3 The Rwanda Muslim Community (RMC) has a [website](#) (in Kinyarwanda) and a '[X](#)' (formerly [Twitter](#)) account (in Kinyarwanda and English).

16.2.4 In a January 2020 travel article on Kigali, the BBC described the Kigali area of Nyamirambo as a '... bustling, largely Muslim neighbourhood known for its pan-African restaurants, bars, cafes and couture shops.'⁵⁶³

16.2.5 When asked about access to places of worship, the NCHR representative explained: '[There are] Catholic churches, mosques, temple.... If there is that group, there is worship. Kigali City masterplan has standards for all buildings – if places of worship fulfil standards, no problem. Rwanda has an institution (Rwanda Governance Board) for religion, if want to create church then apply to this board.'⁵⁶⁴

16.2.6 The 2022 USSD Religious Freedom report noted:

'During the year the government continued to enforce requirements, imposed since 2018 related to basic infrastructure, health, safety, and noise pollution standards for houses of worship. During the initial enforcement of these requirements in 2018, the government closed almost 9,000 places of worship, and more than 6,000 remained closed. Some groups that closed because they could not meet the infrastructure requirements consolidated to become larger and better resourced organizations that were better able to meet the standards. For example, some smaller Protestant churches with one or two pastors that had been closed previously merged to form larger churches with six to eight pastors, with congregations three to four times their original size. Some pastors lamented it was more difficult to maintain community cohesiveness with such expanded membership. The government did not publish statistics on the total number of places of worship.'⁵⁶⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

16.3 Treatment

16.3.1 For information on demography, see [Demography and language](#) above.

16.3.2 The 2022 USSD Religious Freedom report noted:

'Jehovah's Witnesses said they did not encounter significant problems obtaining government employment owing to their religious beliefs, particularly those related to swearing oaths, and said the government generally provided reasonable accommodations to individuals holding these beliefs. They continued, however, to state that certain government-funded religious schools sought to force Jehovah's Witnesses' families to participate in religious

⁵⁵⁹ Rwanda Muslim Community, @islamrwanda, '[The leadership of #RMC...](#)' 13 August 2020

⁵⁶⁰ BBC, '[Rwanda bans Kigali mosques from using loudspeakers](#)', 15 March 2018

⁵⁶¹ KT Press, '[Nyarugenge Bans Speakers On Mosques](#)', 14 March 2018

⁵⁶² Islamic Cultural Center Kigali, '[@CenterKigali](#)', 1 March 2021

⁵⁶³ BBC, '[The most inviting city in Africa?](#)', 6 January 2020

⁵⁶⁴ Annex 3, '[A7. Meeting with NCHR](#)', 22 March 2022

⁵⁶⁵ USSD, '[2022 report on international religious freedom: Rwanda](#)' (Government practices),

ceremonies contrary to their beliefs and laws guaranteeing freedom of worship. This in some cases resulted in conflict and the expulsion or voluntary departure of students from the schools. Jehovah's Witnesses reported this caused an undue financial burden on their communities, as 25 students had to enroll as boarders in more distant schools or pay higher tuition fees, and 16 students remained out of school.⁵⁶⁶

- 16.3.3 The US OSAC reported in February 2022: 'Religious and ethnic violence are not significant issues in Rwanda.'⁵⁶⁷
- 16.3.4 In a meeting on 22 March 2022, a UKHO official asked the NCHR about the treatment of minority religious groups and the NCHR representative commented: 'Freedom to worship as they believe, no discrimination. Majority of Rwandans are Christians, also have Muslims, all other religions (Bahae temple, even including animists). Nobody is excluded, no one is denied their worship.'⁵⁶⁸
- 16.3.5 The FH report 2023 noted: 'Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed, but the government has taken steps to assert greater control over religious institutions. A 2018 law requires religious organizations to obtain legal status from the RGB, to which they must submit extensive documentation. Thousands of places of worship, including churches and mosques, have been closed for allegedly violating health, safety, or noise regulations.'⁵⁶⁹
- 16.3.6 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) – an independent US government body (separate from the USSD) – published its annual report on religious freedom violations in April 2023, covering events of 2022. The USCIRF report contained a single mention of Rwanda, in relation to an attack on a church in Kishishe (DRC) by the armed group M23 in December 2022⁵⁷⁰.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

17. Persons with disabilities

17.1 Legal and policy framework

- 17.1.1 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted: 'The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities, and the government generally enforced these provisions.'⁵⁷¹
- 17.1.2 The duty of care of the state to persons with disabilities, and the prohibition of discrimination, are set out in
- the Constitution (Articles 10, 16 and 51)⁵⁷²
 - Law No. 01/2007 (relating to the protection of persons with disabilities)

⁵⁶⁶ USSD, '[2021 report on international religious freedom: Rwanda](#)' (Section II), 2 June 2022

⁵⁶⁷ OSAC, '[Rwanda country security report](#)', 9 February 2022

⁵⁶⁸ Annex 3, '[A7. Meeting with NCHR](#)', 22 March 2022

⁵⁶⁹ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)' (D2), March 2023

⁵⁷⁰ USCIRF, '[2023 Annual Report](#)' (page 74), April 2023

⁵⁷¹ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

⁵⁷² GoR, '[Constitution](#)', 24 December 2015

in general)⁵⁷³ and

- Law No. 71/2018 (protection of the rights of the child with specific protection for children with disabilities)⁵⁷⁴

17.1.3 The National Council of Persons with Disabilities was created via the Constitution in 2003 and oversees issues affecting persons with disabilities and assists with the implementation of policies which benefit such persons⁵⁷⁵.

17.1.4 In May 2021 the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) published a national policy and 4-year strategic plan for persons with disabilities which: ‘... intends to promote the full inclusion and participation of PwDs [persons with disabilities] in all sectors of Rwandan society. The policy sets out priorities for addressing issues of disability, and promotes an inclusive, barrier-free, and rights-based society.’⁵⁷⁶

17.1.5 The MINALOC report noted: ‘Although these policies and laws are important, there remains a gap between legal policy frameworks and the actual experiences of PwDs in Rwanda.’⁵⁷⁷

[Back to Contents](#)

17.2 Treatment and access to services and assistance

17.2.1 In a meeting between the UKHO and NCHR on 22 March 2022, NCHR commented: ‘[The] [g]eneral treatment [of people with disabilities is] good, no discrimination, still some issues but there is political will (shown in laws, establishment of institutions like NCHR & National Council for Peoples with Disability) to ensure issues are revealed and addressed.’⁵⁷⁸

17.2.2 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted: ‘Some citizens viewed disability as a curse or punishment that could result in social exclusion and sometimes abandoned or hid children with disabilities from the community.’⁵⁷⁹

17.2.3 In March 2022, the NCHR monitored 26 institutions that care for persons with disabilities. The NCHR found that persons with disabilities received their basic needs (food, sanitation, accommodation) and ‘... medical care through the community health insurance scheme of their families, or health insurance paid by Districts or partners, Military Medical Insurance (MMI) or that of Rwanda Social Security Board (RSSB)... centers still face the issue related to special medical treatment needed by persons with disabilities but not paid for by the mutual health insurance scheme “MUSA”.’⁵⁸⁰

17.2.4 The 2022 Population and Housing Census recorded that 96.8% of persons with a disability had medical insurance, slightly lower than the 97.4% of

⁵⁷³ GoR, ‘[Law No 01/2007 relating to protection of disabled persons in general](#)’, 21 May 2007

⁵⁷⁴ GoR, ‘[Law No.71/2018 of 31/08/2018 relating to the protection of the child](#)’, 10 September 2018

⁵⁷⁵ NCPD, ‘[Mission of NCPD](#)’, no date

⁵⁷⁶ MINALOC, ‘[National policy of persons with disabilities and four year ...](#)’ (page xiv), May 2021

⁵⁷⁷ MINALOC, ‘[National policy of persons with disabilities and four year ...](#)’ (page 2), May 2021

⁵⁷⁸ Annex 3, ‘[A7. Meeting with NCHR](#)’, 22 March 2022

⁵⁷⁹ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

⁵⁸⁰ NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)’ (page 38), September 2022

persons without a disability⁵⁸¹.

17.2.5 The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) 2022 annual report, published on 29 June 2023, noted: 'Thousands of people with disabilities obtained treatment and assistive devices at ICRC-supported centres in Rwanda. Physical rehabilitation providers developed their capacities with training and other support from the ICRC.'⁵⁸²

17.2.6 Children with special educational needs or disabilities can attend either special schools or mainstream schools. The number of persons with disabilities with access to education increased from 25,561 in 2015 to 104,596 in 2019, although levels of enrolment of children with disabilities was lower than enrolment of children without disabilities^{583 584 585}.

The 2022 Population and Housing Census indicated that 65% of children (age 6 to 17) with a disability were attending school, compared to 82% of children without a disability⁵⁸⁶.

17.2.7 The NCHR 2021 annual report found: '...special needs education schools and inclusive education schools are faced with challenges in their effort to help children with disabilities; they don't have enough teaching and special materials to help children with disabilities with special assistance for their learning activities.'⁵⁸⁷ There was no reference to special needs education schools in the 2022 NCHR annual report.

17.2.8 There are 2 specialised centres - Rilima and Home de la Vierge des Pauvres (HVP) Gatagara – which offer healthcare services and devices for children with disabilities. Kigali University Teaching Hospital (CHUK) and Butare University Teaching Hospital (CHUB) also provide orthotics and prostheses to persons with disabilities. Services in all 4 centres are covered by community-based health insurance⁵⁸⁸.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

18. Migrants

18.1.1 The 2022 Population and Housing Census recorded 366,794 foreign-born people residing in Rwanda, with 109,596 living in the City of Kigali⁵⁸⁹. Foreign-born residents therefore made up approximately 2.8% of the total population of 13.2 million (see [Demography and language](#)).

18.1.2 The IOM's 2021 Migration Profile for Rwanda stated:

'Rwanda aims to promote the ethical recruitment of migrant workers through the National Labour Mobility Policy. The policy outlines comprehensive

⁵⁸¹ MFEP and NISR, '[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)' (Table 56), Feb 2023

⁵⁸² ICRC, '[Annual Report 2022](#)' (page 125), 29 June 2023

⁵⁸³ UNHRC, '[National report submitted in accordance with paragraph ...](#)' (page 14), 9 November 2020

⁵⁸⁴ GoR, '[Tenth Periodic Report of the Republic of Rwanda on the ...](#)' (page 27), May 2021

⁵⁸⁵ MINALOC, '[National policy of persons with disabilities and four year ...](#)' (page 5), May 2021

⁵⁸⁶ MFEP and NISR, '[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)' (Table 57), Feb 2023

⁵⁸⁷ NCHR, '[Annual activity report, July 2020 to June 2021](#)' (page 138), September 2021

⁵⁸⁸ UNHRC, '[National report submitted in accordance with paragraph ...](#)' (page 14), 9 November 2020

⁵⁸⁹ MFEP and NISR, '[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)' (Table 30), Feb 2023

measures for the ethical recruitment and treatment of migrants, including ensuring non-discrimination and equality of treatment for all workers, conducting inspections to ensure that the employment of migrants is subject to labour standards and ensuring protection for migrants during the recruitment process by monitoring recruitment activities.⁵⁹⁰

18.1.3 The IOM also noted that migrant workers have the same access to social protection as nationals (social protection includes pensions, disability and survivor benefits, maternity leave and severance pay)⁵⁹¹.

18.1.4 A September 2021 press release by UN OHCHR described the presentation of the second periodic report on Rwanda to members of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families:

‘Regarding access to justice for migrant workers and members of their families, including those in irregular situations, Ms. Rwakazina [Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the UN] informed the Committee that they had access to administrative and judicial avenues, including the right to lodge complaints for violations of their rights under the Convention, and to access effective remedies. If not satisfied, they could appeal to the Ministry of Public Service and Labor.’⁵⁹²

18.1.5 A NCHR representative at meeting with the UKHO on 22 March 2022 and commented: ‘If there is [an] area NCHR has not received complaints, it is this one [treatment of non-Rwandans] – no one has complained about treatment because they look different. Rwandan society receives everyone, Chinese people work smoothly with Rwandans in construction, people from the West, Europe, America, we cross each other in the workplace, everywhere, do sport/socialise every day.’⁵⁹³

18.1.6 The NCHR was also asked about discrimination against non-Rwandans in employment. A representative explained:

‘In practice, not much experience of discrimination in the workplace: there can be a difference in treatment but labour law provides for certain requirements (e.g. certain posts need to be Rwandan) but where a post is open to all, there is no discrimination.

‘Majority of private employers use foreign staff... depends on specificity of skills (for example, majority of chefs in hotels are from Kenya due to the fact that Kenya has an advanced experience in [the] tourism sector). In some schools which follow [an] English programme, [the] majority of teachers are [from] Kenya/Uganda, their teachers are more fluent in English than Rwandans.

‘In public service, most jobs [are] reserved for Rwandans; some jobs, specific tasks can hire expatriates.’⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹⁰ IOM, ‘[Republic of Rwanda profile 2021: Migration governance indicators](#)’ (page 17), 1 June 2021

⁵⁹¹ IOM, ‘[Republic of Rwanda profile 2021: Migration governance indicators](#)’ (page 12), 1 June 2021

⁵⁹² OHCHR, ‘[In Dialogue with Rwanda. Committee on the Rights of Migrant ...](#)’, 28 September 2021

⁵⁹³ Annex 3, ‘[A7. Meeting with NCHR](#)’, 22 March 2022

⁵⁹⁴ Annex 3, ‘[A7. Meeting with NCHR](#)’, 22 March 2022

19. Ethnic groups

- 19.1.1 Protection from discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, ancestry, clan, race or region is set out in Article 16 of the Constitution⁵⁹⁵.
- 19.1.2 Following the 1994 genocide the government removed all references to ethnicity in official papers and documentation. This included a ban on ID cards identifying a person as Hutu, Tutsi or Twa, and also a ban on organisations based on ethnic affiliation. As a consequence, the government no longer recognises organisations focused on advocating for the estimated 34,000 Twa persons⁵⁹⁶.
- 19.1.3 The UN compilation report submitted as part of the UPR noted: 'In 2018, four Special Rapporteurs expressed concern about what appeared to be a recurring pattern of attacks against Batwa by non-Batwa.'⁵⁹⁷ See also [Demography and language](#)
- 19.1.4 The 2022 Population and Housing Census contained no questions on ethnic group⁵⁹⁸.

20. Healthcare

20.1 Community Based Health Insurance scheme (CBHI)

- 20.1.1 The Rwandan Social Security Board (RSSB) stated in an undated entry on its website that the community-based health insurance scheme (CBHI) is 'a solidarity health insurance system in which persons (families) come together and pay contributions for the purpose of protection and receipt of medical care. It was established in order to help people with low-income access medical care at affordable cost'.⁵⁹⁹
- 20.1.2 During a UKHO visit on 20 January 2022 to Kinigi Health Centre, the Mayor of Musanze explained contributions to the CBHI:

'All civil servants contribute 0.3% of [their] salary to the scheme. For community [non civil servants the] cost is 3000 RWF [£1.91]⁶⁰⁰ per head of family per year. Civil service contribution is added to community contribution to assist cost of payment. Contribution of 3000 RWF is managed by the Rwanda Social Security Board, the community pay through mobile money payment on phone, enter ID and make payment. Civil servants contribute to a different scheme.'⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁵ GoR, '[Constitution](#)', 24 December 2015

⁵⁹⁶ USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

⁵⁹⁷ UNHRC, '[Working group on the UPR 37th session, compilation ...](#)' (para 95), 13 November 2020

⁵⁹⁸ MFEP and NISR, '[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)' (Annex 3), Feb 2023

⁵⁹⁹ RSSB, '[CBHI Scheme](#)', no date

⁶⁰⁰ Xe.com, '[3,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British Pounds](#)', 27 November 2023

⁶⁰¹ Annex 3, '[A2. Visit to Kinigi Integrated Development Program \(IDP\) Model...](#)', 20 January 2022

20.1.3 Statistics from the 2022 Population and Housing Census indicated that 97% of the population of Rwanda had medical insurance⁶⁰².

20.1.4 In 2022 the World Health Organisation (WHO) analysed the progress of African nations towards achieving the goal of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) defined as, 'All people have access to the health care they need, when and where they need it, without facing financial hardships.'⁶⁰³

20.1.5 WHO measured UHC through 2 indicators:

- service coverage index – the availability and quality of essential health services⁶⁰⁴
- financial risk protection – level of out-of-pocket healthcare costs⁶⁰⁵

20.1.6 The WHO report compared 44 African countries and found that Rwanda had '... relatively high service coverage index and good financial risk protection as compared to... [its] peers, and so... [is] doing well vis-à-vis UHC.'⁶⁰⁶

For information on healthcare specific to asylum seekers and refugees, see the section on Health in [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Asylum system](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

20.2 Health facilities

20.2.1 Health care provisions in Rwanda are delivered through community health workers (CHWs), health posts, health centres, district hospitals and tertiary (national) hospitals⁶⁰⁷.

20.2.2 The national referral and teaching hospitals are the highest level of care provided within Rwanda, providing more advanced specialised care and conducting research. Four out of the 5 tertiary hospitals are in Kigali: University Teaching Hospital of Kigali (CHUK), King Faisal Hospital, Rwanda Military Hospital and Ndera Neuropsychiatric Hospital⁶⁰⁸.

20.2.3 An undated page on the Rwanda Development Board website stated:

'The country currently operates a well-functioning, decentralized healthcare public service system comprising 1700 health posts, 500 health centers, 42 district hospitals, and five national referral hospitals. Rwanda also has a vibrant private health services sector, which comprises of 2 general hospitals, two eye hospitals, 50 clinics and polyclinics, eight dental clinics, four eye clinics, and 134 dispensaries. There is 1 Joint Commission International-certified hospital and one public medical college producing 100 general practitioners per year'.⁶⁰⁹

20.2.4 The Rwanda Health Sector Performance report published by the Rwandan Ministry of Health (MoH), covering the period July 2020 to June 2021, stated:

⁶⁰² MFEP and NISR, '[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)' (Table 28), Feb 2023

⁶⁰³ WHO, '[Tracking universal health coverage in the WHO African region](#)' (page x), 2022

⁶⁰⁴ WHO, '[Tracking universal health coverage in the WHO African region](#)' (page 8), 2022

⁶⁰⁵ WHO, '[Tracking universal health coverage in the WHO African region](#)' (page 17), 2022

⁶⁰⁶ WHO, '[Tracking universal health coverage in the WHO African region](#)' (page 21), 2022

⁶⁰⁷ WHO, '[Primary Health Care Systems, Comprehensive case study...](#)' (page 12), June 2018

⁶⁰⁸ WHO, '[Primary Health Care Systems, Comprehensive case study...](#)' (page 12), June 2018

⁶⁰⁹ RDB, '[Health Services \(Overview\)](#)', no date

'CHUK is the main referral public hospital in the country. It has a mission of providing quality referral and specialised health care and medical education, conduct research in health issues, providing support to Provincial and District hospitals in terms of health care services and capacity building.'⁶¹⁰

[Back to Contents](#)

20.3 Treatment of mental health

20.3.1 On 8 June 2022, Dr Hazel Cameron provided oral evidence on the MEDP and Human Rights to the UK Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights: 'The [Rwandan] Government accept that there is a need for additional psychiatrists throughout the country, but this need has been addressed through impressive initiatives that are being led by the mental health division manager at the Rwanda Biomedical Centre.'⁶¹¹

20.3.2 An October 2022 study published in BMC Public Health investigating mental health disorders and services in Rwanda noted that:

'The government of Rwanda has decentralized and integrated mental health services from national referral hospitals down to health centres, where trained health professionals (including psychiatrists, mental health nurses, clinical psychologists, and general nurses and GPs) conduct assessment of, and provide care and treatment for, a wide range of mental health needs...however the scale of need for mental health support far outstrips current capacity'.⁶¹²

20.3.3 In May 2023, The New Times, a Rwandan English language online news site, provided additional information on mental health care in Rwanda: 'According to the RBC [Rwanda Biomedical Centre], Rwanda currently has 2,000 psychologists working across various sectors, with 600 serving in the healthcare sector. The country also has 500 psychiatric nurses...' The article highlighted a shortage of psychiatrists (currently 15) and referenced the goal of providing one psychiatrist for every district hospital by 2030⁶¹³.

[Back to Contents](#)

20.4 Availability and affordability of medication

20.4.1 The Rwandan Ministry of Health published a 'National Pharmaceutical Products Pricing and Containment Policy' in October 2020. The goal of this policy is to 'increase control over the pharmaceutical costs in the private and public sectors as well as to improve monitoring of the supply chain related costs in order to ensure quality, affordable and efficacious medicines and medical products for all Rwandans'.⁶¹⁴

20.4.2 An August 2020 study investigating the availability and affordability of medicines in Rwanda found that: 'Availability of medicines fell short of the of [sic] 80% target set by WHO, but was better than reported from many other developing countries. Availability of medicines was highest in the private

⁶¹⁰ MoH, '[Rwanda Health Sector Performance Report 2020 - 2021](#)' (page 84), 6 June 2023

⁶¹¹ Joint Committee on Human Rights, '[Oral evidence: The UK-Rwanda Migration ...](#)', 8 June 2022

⁶¹² Kayitashonga, Y, and others, '[Prevalence of mental disorders, associated...?](#)', 5 October 2022

⁶¹³ The New Times, '[Shortage of mental health professionals persists, warns RBC](#)', 17 May 2023

⁶¹⁴ MoH, '[National Pharmaceutical Products Pricing and Containment Policy](#)', (page 9) October 2020

sector (71.3%) and slightly lower in the faith-based (62.8%) and public (59.6%) sectors.⁶¹⁵

- 20.4.3 The same study noted: ‘Prices for generic medicines in public and faith-based health facilities were remarkably low... the government procurement agency was found to work efficiently, achieving prices 30% below the international procurement price given in the International Medical Product Price Guide’.⁶¹⁶

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

21. Non-governmental organisations

21.1 Legal rights and registration

- 21.1.1 The Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) is mandated to register and monitor the functioning of both national and international NGOs⁶¹⁷.
- 21.1.2 The registration requirements and law governing NGOs varies depending on whether an organisation is national or international. Full details of the respective registration requirements and laws are available on the [RGB website](#)⁶¹⁸.
- 21.1.3 [Law No.04/2012 of 17/02/2012](#) governs the organisation and functioning of national NGOs, relevant Articles are summarised in the table⁶¹⁹:

Article 10: Autonomy of national NGOs	Without prejudice to provisions of other laws, national non-governmental organisations shall enjoy financial, moral and administrative autonomy.
Article 13: Restrictions in the functioning of a national NGO	A national NGO shall not be allowed to engage in fundraising or organise public rallies with an intention to support any political organisation or any independent candidate campaigning for a political office, registration or any other way to support candidates for public office.
Article 20 and 24: Reasons for refusal to issue a certificate of registration or grant legal personality to a national NGO	Reasons include: convincing evidence that the organisation intends to jeopardize security, public order, health, morals or human rights.
Article 28: Rights of a national NGO	Rights include: 1. to put forward views in designing national policies and legislation in relation with the

⁶¹⁵ Bizimana, T, and others, PloS One, '[Prices, availability and affordability...](#)', 3 Aug 2020

⁶¹⁶ Bizimana, T, and others, PloS One, '[Prices, availability and affordability...](#)', 3 Aug 2020

⁶¹⁷ RGB, '[Non-governmental organisations](#)', no date

⁶¹⁸ RGB, '[Non-governmental organisations](#)', no date

⁶¹⁹ GoR, '[Official Gazette No.15 of 09/04/2012 ...](#)', 17 February 2012

	<p>functioning of national NGOs</p> <p>2. to advocate, protect and promote human rights and other national values</p> <p>3. to express opinions and views on national policies and legislation</p>
Article 35: Judicial dissolution of a national NGO	A competent court in Rwanda, after considering the case... shall dissolve the national NGO if it is ruled out that such an organisation is convicted of breach of laws, jeopardises security, public order, health, morals or human rights.

[Back to Contents](#)

21.2 Operation and restrictions

21.2.1 The BTI 2022 report (covering the period 1 February 2019 to 31 January 2021) noted:

‘Over the past years, government intimidation, harassment, obstruction and threats have significantly emasculated independent organizations. NGOs and Community Service Organizations (CSOs) are politically and socially sidelined by the government and allowed by the government primarily as a necessary concession to its international reputation and as sources of additional funds. All non-governmental (NGOs) and human rights organizations must become members of the National Civil Society Platform.’⁶²⁰

21.2.2 The same BTI report noted

‘The government restricts and harasses local and international NGOs, as well as foreign-funded media and human rights programs that have reported on the regime’s repression or policy failings. Programs run by Transparency International, Lawyers without Borders and the Rwandan League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights were shut down or became powerless under government pressure.’ The BTI report provided no further detail regarding the circumstances of the shutdowns or restrictions⁶²¹.

21.2.3 The Rwandan Government’s submission to CEDAW in 2021 stated:

‘The GoR does not interfere in any way with internal functioning of NGOs... The laws are in place to regulate the functioning of NGOs.

‘The increase in the number of NNGOs [National NGOs] from 454 in 2012 to 1881 in 2020... and INGOs [International NGOs] from 180 in 2017 to 197 in 2020, also, in 2020 several International Non-Government Organisations relocated their international or regional headquarters to Rwanda. Such developments affirm that the legal and operating environment of CSOs [Civil Society Organisations] is significantly conducive.’⁶²²

21.2.4 USAID’s [Civil Society Organisation \(CSO\) Sustainability Index](#), covering the

⁶²⁰ BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Political participation), 23 February 2022

⁶²¹ BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Rule of law), 23 February 2022

⁶²² GoR, [UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#) (paragraphs 44 and 45), 4 October 2021

events of 2021, reported: ‘Other than the sentencing of media activists, no specific state harassment of civil society groups is known to have occurred in 2021.’⁶²³

- 21.2.5 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted: ‘Civil society organizations collaborating with the government’s political and development plans were able to act relatively freely while those that did not faced difficulties... [the government] delayed or denied registration to local and international NGOs seeking to work on human rights, media freedom, or political advocacy.’⁶²⁴
- 21.2.6 In a meeting between the UKHO and LAF on 21 March 2022, a LAF representative commented:
- ‘The Registration process is easy and generally okay for NGOs. You need to lodge an application with the Rwandan government and meet certain requirements. The registration process is no more than 30 or 60 days. The registration process does take longer than setting up a business but this is because the government need to do their due diligence, for example, who is funding the NGO. Although it can be bureaucratic - 5 years to set up has been known. But the Government is not so interested in non-profit making organisations.
- ‘If [registration is] refused, you are given reasons why and you can appeal and apply again. There is a Government proposal to introduce a power to remove directors of NGOs, which LAF is opposing.’⁶²⁵
- 21.2.7 At the same meeting, LAF indicated that some NGOs could be refused, depending on the topic or topics it was seeking to represent (eg LGBT)⁶²⁶.
- 21.2.8 In a meeting with the UKHO on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBTI community also pointed to the registration process for civil society groups being very long, with ‘lots of administrative challenges... NGOs need to say their purpose is something else (broader human rights [rather than LGBTI-specific rights]) to register. There have been issues with local administrations and/or excessive bureaucracy and organisations have experienced hurdles/delays – one case took 3 years to fully/permanently register.’ The representatives also explained that ‘the government as an institution [is] not an issue but individuals in Gov[ernment]t can be obstructive.’⁶²⁷
- 21.2.9 Representatives of the LGBTI community also commented at the same meeting with the UKHO: ‘[if a group is] running [an] event, [they] need to inform Local Authorities, observe protocols etc – if not, risk of losing status.’ The representatives gave one example of ‘issues arising from [an] event related to IDAHOBIT [International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia and Transphobia] which caused problems for organisation but is now resolved.’⁶²⁸

See also [Organisations supporting LGBTI persons](#)

⁶²³ USAID, ‘[2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: Rwanda](#)’ (page 2), November 2022

⁶²⁴ USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 2B), 20 March 2023

⁶²⁵ Annex 3, ‘[A6. Meeting with LAF](#)’, 21 March 2022

⁶²⁶ Annex 3, ‘[A6. Meeting with LAF](#)’, 21 March 2022

⁶²⁷ Annex 3, ‘[A9. Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community](#)’, 5 April 2022

⁶²⁸ Annex 3, ‘[A9. Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community](#)’, 5 April 2022

21.2.10 The FH report 2023 noted: ‘Registration and reporting requirements for both domestic and foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are onerous, and activities that the government defines as divisive are prohibited. NGOs that focus on governance and human rights issues face particular scrutiny, with the risk of closure encouraging self-censorship.’⁶²⁹

21.2.11 The World Association of Nongovernmental Organizations has a list of [NGO’s in Rwanda](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

21.3 NGOs involved with refugees and asylum seekers

21.3.1 During a meeting between UKHO and UNHCR on 21 March 2022, a representative explained:

‘There are plenty of NGOs that support refugees ([UNHCR] have around 12 partner organisations, international/national, with different expertise/purposes). List of partner organisations - Save the Children, Humanity & Inclusion, ADRA [Adventist Development and Relief Agency], AHA [Africa Humanitarian Action], GIZ [German Government’s International Development Agency], World Vision, Plan [International], Prison Fellowship Rwanda, Legal Aid Foundation, ALIGHT, Rwandan Red Cross, Caritas.

‘For all partners to work in [a] refugee camp, [they] have to sign tripartite partner agreement (UNHCR, MINEMA, NGO).

‘Most [support is] focused on camps but some specific NGOs provide support for urban refugees (Save the Children; there is a community centre in Gikondo in Kigali).

‘There is a camp manager in MINEMA for each camp (clear refugee program management policy), field officer from UNHCR, representatives from all organisations.’⁶³⁰

21.3.2 In a meeting between the UKHO and LAF on 21 March 2022, LAF commented that they have ‘... a very good relationship with [the] Rwandan government. There is a tripartite agreement between LAF, UNHCR and the Rwandan government.’⁶³¹

21.3.3 LAF also explained that: ‘[i]n the past, NGOs were crippled by intrusion by the Rwandan government but things keep improving. International and national NGOs who support asylum seekers/ refugees generally operate freely.’⁶³²

21.3.4 The following list provides examples of international and national NGOs working in Rwanda to assist refugees and asylum seekers. The list is intended to provide an indication of the range of services and service providers and is not exhaustive:

- [Adventist Development and Relief Agency Rwanda \(ADRA\)](#):

⁶²⁹ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)’ (E2), March 2023

⁶³⁰ Annex 2, ‘[A1. Meeting with UNHCR](#)’, 21 March 2022

⁶³¹ Annex 3, ‘[A6. Meeting with LAF](#)’, 21 March 2022

⁶³² Annex 3, ‘[A6. Meeting with LAF](#)’, 21 March 2022

- international organisation affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church
- partner with local communities, organisations and governments to deliver relief and development assistance
- education, infrastructure and food provision in refugee camps⁶³³
634
- [Alight Rwanda](#):
 - Alight (formerly, American Refugee Committee) is a global family of organisations providing support to displaced people
 - partners with Government of Rwanda (GoR), UN and US agencies and the private sector
 - works with refugees in camps, urban areas, reception and transit centres
 - health care, nutrition, housing, infrastructure, sustainable livelihoods, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) services, water and sanitation⁶³⁵ ⁶³⁶
- [Center for Rule of Law Rwanda](#) (CERULAR)
 - provider of legal aid services.
 - monitoring of the rule of law and human rights⁶³⁷
 - partners with GoR⁶³⁸
- [Global Humanitarian and Development Foundation](#) (GHDF):
 - a Rwandan NGO providing humanitarian services, youth programs, economic development and HIV/GBV prevention
 - partners with UNHCR and local community-based groups
 - responsible for WASH in several refugee camps⁶³⁹
- [Kepler](#):
 - partners with UNHCR, GoR and employers
 - provides access to higher education to youths from marginalized and refugee communities. Operates in Rwanda, DRC, Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda⁶⁴⁰
- [Legal Aid Forum](#) (LAF):
 - collection of national organisations which provide legal services to

⁶³³ ADRA, '[ADRA Rwanda supports increase of digital learning, ...](#)', 27 January 2022

⁶³⁴ ADRA, '[Completed projects](#)', no date

⁶³⁵ Alight Rwanda, '[The post 2020-21](#)', no date

⁶³⁶ Alight Rwanda, '[Embracing new possibilities](#)', no date

⁶³⁷ CERULAR, '[Our Partners](#)', 2 November 2023

⁶³⁸ CERULAR, '[Program overview](#)', 2 November 2023.

⁶³⁹ GHDF, '[Home](#)', no date

⁶⁴⁰ Kepler, '[Refugee education](#)', no date

vulnerable groups

- works with GoR and UNHCR⁶⁴¹ to provide legal services to refugees and asylum seekers including civil registration, detention visits, mediation, victim representation, advocacy⁶⁴²
- [Prison Fellowship Rwanda](#) (PFR):
 - national NGO set up in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide and was involved in organising the Gacaca courts which dealt with low-level genocide offenders
 - partners with the GoR and local and international organisations (including UNHCR) to ensure access to justice by providing legal assistance and access to civil registration and documentation to refugees living in both camps and urban areas^{643 644}
- [Sustainable Development & Humanitarian Action](#) (SDHA):
 - a Rwandan NGO founded by volunteers providing support and humanitarian relief in disasters and for refugees and the vulnerable⁶⁴⁵.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section updated: 7 December 2023

22. Umuganda (community work)

22.1 Background

22.1.1 In a January 2020 travel article on Kigali the BBC reported: ‘Umuganda, a Kinyarwanda word that can be roughly translated as “community service”, is part of Rwanda’s heritage; it became an officially encouraged practice as early as 1998 and a law 10 years ago.’⁶⁴⁶

22.1.2 Undated teaching materials produced by the Rwandan Education Board noted:

‘The work done is organised by community members and is done voluntarily and without pay. The projects completed through Umuganda include, the construction of schools, feeder roads, road repair, terracing, reforestation, home construction for vulnerable people, erosion control, and water canals...

‘Planning for Umuganda is done in council meetings at the cell level. It is the responsibility of local leaders as well as national leaders to mobilise the population to participate in Umuganda. Community members meet and agree on the date (usually a weekend) and the activity. Participation in Umuganda is compulsory for all able-bodied citizens.’⁶⁴⁷

22.1.3 A February 2022 research paper published by the European University

⁶⁴¹ LAF, [Our Partners](#), no date

⁶⁴² LAF, [About us](#), no date

⁶⁴³ Umurimo, [Gikondo community center manager](#), 22 December 2019

⁶⁴⁴ Borgen Project, [Restorative justice and the Rwandan genocide](#), 11 March 2021

⁶⁴⁵ SDHA, [About us](#), no date

⁶⁴⁶ BBC, [The most inviting city in Africa?](#), 6 January 2020

⁶⁴⁷ Rwanda Basic Education Board, [Unit 7: national duties and obligations](#), no date

Institute (EUI), noted the use of community-based programmes as a post-genocide tool to promote national unity and reconciliation:

‘The Government tapped into traditional forms of collaboration such as Umuganda, a tradition of voluntary work to achieve a range of societal objectives collectively. The aim was to instil in Rwandans a spirit of self-reliance with dignity. The principle at the core of this community work was that Rwanda’s problems are solved by Rwandans themselves through joint efforts... It involves collective action at community level to achieve a range of societal objectives including the rehabilitation of bridges and water channels, the construction of houses for the poor, schools and health centres and the protection of the environment. Umuganda bonds families and is a mechanism that solidifies social cohesion. Through Umuganda, people learned to smile again: friends and foes share a joke, exchange ideas and eventually transform conflicts constructively.’⁶⁴⁸

- 22.1.4 On 8 April 2022, Rwanda Today, a Rwandan-based online news site, noted that: ‘The monthly community work Umuganda has returned after significant decline in Covid-19 infections. About 1,500 people gathered at Bumbogo in Kigali to clear bushes, drainage channels and to sweep the streets during community work... Vanessa Umutoni, another Bumbogo resident, said Umuganda is a a [sic] good initiative for Rwandan community because it contributes to improving and protecting the environment.’⁶⁴⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

22.2 Law

- 22.2.1 In November 2020 the UNDP noted: ‘Umuganda is regulated by Law No. 53/2007, the Prime Minister’s Order No. 58/03 and recently the Revised Umuganda Policy and Strategy 2017–2022.’⁶⁵⁰
- 22.2.2 [Prime Minister’s Order \(PMO\) No. 58/03](#) sets out the structure and function of the committees responsible for overseeing Umuganda, including compliance with, and enforcement of the law⁶⁵¹.

[Back to Contents](#)

22.3 Requirement to participate

- 22.3.1 The Rwandan Education Board noted: ‘Rwandans between 18 and 65 years of age are obliged to participate in Umuganda. Expatriates living in Rwanda are encouraged to take part.’⁶⁵²
- 22.3.2 The January 2020 BBC article noted: ‘On the last Saturday of every month, between 08:00 and 11:00, at least one person between the ages of 18 and 65 in every Rwandan household must get outside and clean, fix or do maintenance work... And though you can now be fined for repeatedly skipping your umuganda duties without a reason, everyone I [the journalist]

⁶⁴⁸ EUI, [‘National reconciliation in Rwanda: experiences and lessons ...’](#) (page 14), 28 February 2022

⁶⁴⁹ Rwanda Today, [‘Umuganda back after 2-year break as Covid cases drop’](#), 8 April 2022

⁶⁵⁰ UNDP, [‘Rwanda National Human Development Report 2018, Policy ...’](#) (page 53), November 2020

⁶⁵¹ GoR, [‘Prime Minister’s Order N°58/03 of 24/08/2009...’](#), 16 November 2009

⁶⁵² Rwanda Basic Education Board, [‘Unit 7: national duties and obligations’](#), no date

spoke to about it is in favour of the nation-wide ritual of pitching in.⁶⁵³

- 22.3.3 The February 2022 EUI research paper also noted: 'Umuganda is institutionalised and compulsory for all Rwandans including the President of the Republic and other political leaders, as well as the security forces.'⁶⁵⁴

[Back to Contents](#)

22.4 Non-participation

- 22.4.1 MINALOC statistics for the period July 2015 to June 2016, reported by the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), showed an average nationwide participation in Umuganda of 91% (of eligible people aged 18 to 65). The rate of participation was lowest in Kigali city (82%)⁶⁵⁵. CPIT was not able to identify more recent statistics in the sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)).
- 22.4.2 The RGB report noted: 'The law establishing community works specifies that all capable people from 18-65 years old must participate in Umuganda activities, but... this is not respected.' To support this statement the RGB provided the results of a 2016 survey which asked citizens' opinions about the level of attendance at Umuganda. A nationwide average of 69% were not satisfied with attendance levels, the figure for Kigali city was 76%⁶⁵⁶.
- 22.4.3 In July 2018 NPR, a US-based media organisation, reported:
- 'Police monitor the streets and can stop Rwandans who aren't participating and make them clean up on the spot. Rwandans who don't participate in the cleanup can be fined 5,000 francs [£3.32⁶⁵⁷]... not a small sum when average income is about [US]\$150 [£122.01⁶⁵⁸] a month...
- 'Not everyone participates, especially in cities where it's harder to keep track of the citizenry. Some are excused because they're caring for their children or are ill. Others simply stay at home until 11 a.m.'⁶⁵⁹
- 22.4.4 [Article 28 of PMO 58/03](#) states: 'Anyone given a penalty for not participating in community works has the right to appeal to the next General Meeting to be given an opportunity of being heard.'⁶⁶⁰
- 22.4.5 NPR added:
- 'Not everyone is a supporter of Umuganda. On a mundane level, shopkeepers in Kigali grumble about lost business during Umuganda, and people who must travel are inconvenienced by the ban on driving. The concerns go far deeper than that. An oft-debated question is what is gained or lost by the country's steely governance. Some people, especially outsiders, say Umuganda is forced labor imposed by a harsh regime that represses any dissent - part of a veneer of order and modernity that masks authoritarianism. But in a country with no compulsory military service is

⁶⁵³ BBC, '[The most inviting city in Africa?](#)', 6 January 2020

⁶⁵⁴ EUI, '[National reconciliation in Rwanda: experiences and lessons ...](#)' (page 14), 28 February 2022

⁶⁵⁵ RGB, '[Impact assessment of umuganda 2007 to 2016](#)' (page 6), October 2017

⁶⁵⁶ RGB, '[Impact assessment of umuganda 2007 to 2016](#)' (page 30), October 2017

⁶⁵⁷ Xe.com, '[5,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British Pounds](#)', 9 November 2023

⁶⁵⁸ Xe.com, '[150 USD to GBP - Convert US Dollars to British Pounds](#)', 9 November 2023

⁶⁵⁹ NPR, '[How Rwanda tidied up its streets \(and the rest of the country, too\)](#)', 18 July 2018

⁶⁶⁰ GoR, '[Prime Minister's Order N°58/03 of 24/08/2009...](#)' (Article 28), 16 November 2009

mandatory cleanup OK?...

'Whatever the answers, cleanliness seems to have seeped into the country's consciousness. Many Rwandans simply see Umuganda as community service, albeit mandatory. "Now it has become like a lifestyle. People are used to it," a Rwandan man tells me matter-of-factly.'⁶⁶¹

- 22.4.6 The BBC reported on 14 April 2022: 'One Rwandan, who asked not to be named, explains there is no law that forces people to attend the Umuganda - but there is a fear you will gain a reputation, that someone will report you, that your name will be logged as a troublemaker.'⁶⁶²

[Back to Contents](#)

22.5 Refugees and asylum seekers

- 22.5.1 In a June 2020 Refugee Policy Summary, published in March 2022, the UNHCR considered the issue of 'social cohesion' between refugees and host communities in Rwanda and commented: 'Members of the host community often attend celebrations in the refugee camps, while refugees and citizens alike take part in compulsory community work called Umuganda...'⁶⁶³

- 22.5.2 UNHCR's Refugee Response Plan for 2021 stated: 'UNHCR and partners have prioritized the promotion of peaceful coexistence of the local community and the refugee community through various projects and events, including... joint Umuganda.'⁶⁶⁴

- 22.5.3 During a HO visit to Gashora Transit Centre on 18 January 2022, the Manager of Gashora explained the asylum seekers resident in Gashora '...can help the local community to aid cultural integration and encourage interaction. For example, they work with the local community to clean streets alongside Rwandans (practise commonly known as Umuganda).' ⁶⁶⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

⁶⁶¹ NPR, '[How Rwanda tidied up its streets \(and the rest of the country, too\)](#)', 18 July 2018

⁶⁶² BBC, '[UK asylum deal: Is Rwanda a land of safety or fear?](#)', 14 April 2022

⁶⁶³ UNHCR, '[Refugee policy review framework country summary as at 30 ...](#)' (page 3), 10 March 2022

⁶⁶⁴ UNHCR, '[Rwanda country refugee response plan Jan to Dec 2021](#)' (page 13), 19 April 2021

⁶⁶⁵ Annex 3, '[A1. Meeting at Gashora Transit Centre](#)', 18 January 2022

Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

All the COI included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s). Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared and contrasted to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

This note is intended to be comprehensive but not exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned this does not mean that the event did or did not take place or that the person or organisation does or does not exist.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

Version control and feedback

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **2.0**
- valid from **10 January 2024**

[Back to Contents](#)

Feedback to the Home Office

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

[Back to Contents](#)