



Home Office

# Country Information Note

## Rwanda: Human rights

Version 3.0

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# Country information on human rights in Rwanda

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## 1. Glossary

Common abbreviations used in this CIN are set out below.

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| ACLED    | Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project                       |
| AI       | Amnesty International  |
| BTI      | Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index                          |
| 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                                      |
| OHCHR    | United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights      |
| 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  |
| SORA  | Safety of Rwanda Act 2024  |
| 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   |

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## 2. About this note

- 2.1.1 This Country Information Note (CIN) contains publicly available country information about human rights issues in Rwanda which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the [Error! Reference source not found.](#)
- 2.1.2 The CIN forms part of the evidence base to assist caseworkers when making decisions about whether it is safe to relocate an individual from the UK to the Republic of Rwanda (Rwanda) under the terms of the [Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda \(MEDP\)](#).
- 2.1.3 The [Safety of Rwanda Act 2024 \(SORA 2024\)](#) provides that: 'Every decision-maker must conclusively treat the Republic of Rwanda as a safe country' (section 2(1)).
- 2.1.4 However, SORA 2024 does not prevent decision makers from considering whether Rwanda: '... is a safe country for the person in question, based on compelling evidence relating specifically to the person's particular individual circumstances (rather than on the grounds that the Republic of Rwanda is not a safe country in general)' (section 4(1)(a)).
- 2.1.5 When considering whether a person's particular individual circumstances meet the requirements of section 4(1)(a) see the guidance [Safety of Rwanda](#).
- 2.1.6 This CIN must be read together with other Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT) products:
- [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Asylum system](#)

- [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Medical and healthcare](#)
- [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](#)

2.1.7 This CIN must be read together with other Home Office guidance:

- Safety of Rwanda
- [Inadmissibility: safe third country cases](#)
- [Considering Human Rights Claims](#)
- [Medical claims under Articles 3 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#)

2.1.8 This CIN must be read together with other related information:

- [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 \(Asylum and Immigration\) Act 2024](#)

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### 3. Geographical context

#### 3.1 Map of Rwanda



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#### 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 2022<sup>2</sup>.
- 3.2.2 Kinyarwanda, French, English and Swahili/Kiswahili are official languages<sup>3</sup>.
- 3.2.3 The 2022 Population and Housing Census indicated that a large minority of Rwandan residents were 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 language<sup>4</sup>.
- 3.2.4 The 2022 Population and Housing Census provided the breakdown of religious affiliation in Rwanda:
  - Catholic 40%
  - Pentecostal 21%

<sup>1</sup> UN Geospatial, '[Rwanda](#)', 1 September 2018

<sup>2</sup> MFEP and NISR, '[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)' (Table 1), Feb 2023

<sup>3</sup> CIA, '[World factbook: Rwanda](#)' (People and Society – Languages), 14 November 2023

<sup>4</sup> 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%<sup>5</sup>

3.2.5 The US State Department's 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.'<sup>6</sup> See [Religious groups](#)

3.2.6 The majority of the population of Rwanda are either ethnic Hutu (85%) or ethnic Tutsi (14%), with a much smaller third ethnic group, the Batwa (1%), although these estimates are from 1994<sup>7</sup>. 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 population<sup>8</sup>. See [Persons with disabilities](#)

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## 4. Human rights framework

### 4.1 Human rights instruments

4.1.1 There are 9 international human rights instruments, of which Rwanda is a state party to 8<sup>9</sup> 10.

| International human rights instrument  | Ratification/ 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                    |

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

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

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

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

<sup>9</sup> OHCHR, '[The Core International Human Rights Instruments and their monitoring bodies](#)', no date

<sup>10</sup> OHCHR, '[Status of ratification interactive dashboard](#)' (Rwanda), no date

|   |      |
|---|------|
| 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 |

- 4.1.2 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' Rights<sup>11 12</sup>.
- 4.1.3 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 report<sup>13</sup>.

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## 4.2 Human rights oversight bodies

- 4.2.1 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.'<sup>14</sup>
- 4.2.2 The US State Department's 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda (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 of Justice and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, although these courts lacked mechanisms to enforce their judgments in Rwanda.'<sup>15</sup>
- 4.2.3 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

<sup>11</sup> AU, '[Member states](#)', no date

<sup>12</sup> AU, '[African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights](#)', no date

<sup>13</sup> NCHR, '[Status of Submission...to International and Regional Treaty Monitoring Bodies](#)', May 2023

<sup>14</sup> Claiming Human Rights, '[Claiming Human Rights - in Rwanda](#)', undated

<sup>15</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1E), 20 March 2023

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.'<sup>16</sup>

- 4.2.4 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<sup>17 18</sup>. GANHRI is a worldwide network which represents over 110 national human rights institutions<sup>19</sup>.
- 4.2.5 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.'<sup>20</sup>
- 4.2.6 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 refugees<sup>21</sup>. CPIT has compiled data from NCHR's annual reports<sup>22 23 24</sup>, showing the number and outcome of complaints, into the table below. The NCHR data did not provide a breakdown of complainants by profile:

|                                    | <b>July 2019 to June 2020</b> | <b>July 2020 to June 2021</b> | <b>July 2021 to June 2022</b> |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 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                           |

<sup>16</sup> NCHR, '[About](#)' (Overview), no date

<sup>17</sup> GANHRI, '[Accreditation](#)', no date

<sup>18</sup> GANHRI, '[Status accreditation chart as of 26.04.2023](#)', 26 April 2023

<sup>19</sup> GANHRI, '[Home page](#)', no date

<sup>20</sup> NCHR, '[About](#)' (Powers of NCHR)', no date

<sup>21</sup> NCHR, '[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)' (pages 5 to 6), September 2022

<sup>22</sup> NCHR, '[Annual activity report, July 2019 to June 2020](#)' (page 9), no date

<sup>23</sup> NCHR, '[Annual activity report, July 2020 to June 2021](#)' (page 14), September 2021

<sup>24</sup> NCHR, '[Annual activity report July 2021 to June 2022](#)', (page 14), September 2022

- 4.2.7 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 complaint<sup>25</sup>.
- 4.2.8 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 independent<sup>26</sup>. 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 Rwanda<sup>27</sup>.
- 4.2.9 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.’<sup>28</sup>

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## 5. Political context

### 5.1 The 1994 genocide

- 5.1.1 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<sup>29 30</sup>.

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### 5.2 Post-genocide governance and development

- 5.2.1 Chapter 3, Article 10 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.’<sup>31</sup>
- 5.2.2 The World Bank’s Country Partnership Framework for the period 2021 to

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<sup>25</sup> NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2020 to June 2021](#)’ (pages 14 and 15), September 2021

<sup>26</sup> UNHRC, ‘[Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of ...](#)’ (paras 9 to 10), 2 May 2016

<sup>27</sup> UNHRC, ‘[Working group on the UPR 37<sup>th</sup> session, compilation ...](#)’ (para 15), 13 November 2020

<sup>28</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 5), 20 March 2023

<sup>29</sup> BBC, ‘[Rwanda: How the genocide happened](#)’, 17 May 2011

<sup>30</sup> Al Jazeera, ‘[Kagame’s Rwanda is still Africa’s most inspiring success story](#)’, 21 October 2019

<sup>31</sup> GoR, ‘[Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda revised in 2015](#)’ 24 Dec 2015

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.'<sup>32</sup>

- 5.2.3 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.'<sup>33</sup>
- 5.2.4 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.'<sup>34</sup>
- 5.2.5 UNHCR's April 2023 'Annual Results Report' for Rwanda, 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.'<sup>35</sup>
- 5.2.6 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 tourism<sup>36</sup>.
- 5.2.7 The 2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) assessed 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-categories<sup>37</sup>. 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 countries<sup>38</sup>.
- 5.2.8 Rwanda's performance in the various subcategories was:
- Foundations for Economic Opportunity, score 63.4, ranked 9<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> World Bank, '[Country partnership framework... Rwanda FY21 to FY26](#)' (page 6), 22 October 2020

<sup>33</sup> MRGI, '[Rwanda](#)' (Current issues), October 2020

<sup>34</sup> USAID, '[Democracy, human rights and governance](#)', no date

<sup>35</sup> UNHCR, '[Annual results report 2022 Rwanda](#)' (page 4), 28 April 2023

<sup>36</sup> RDB, '[Annual report 2022](#)' (page 3), 3 May 2023

<sup>37</sup> IIAG, '[Rwanda: 2012-2021 Governance Results, 2022](#)' (page 3), January 2023

<sup>38</sup> IIAG, '[Rwanda: 2012-2021 Governance Results, 2022](#)' (page 7), January 2023

- Security and rule of law: score 66.2, ranked 9<sup>th</sup>
- Participation rights and inclusion: score 44.0, ranked 30<sup>th</sup>
- Human development: score 62.2, ranked 10<sup>th</sup><sup>39</sup>

5.2.9 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 100<sup>40</sup>.

5.2.10 In February 2024, the World Bank Rwanda Economic Update stated that Rwanda's GDP is 'expected to regain momentum, with projections of 7.2% growth in 2024-26' which is 'driven by a recovery in global tourism, new construction projects, and manufacturing activities.'<sup>41</sup>

5.2.11 On 12 March 2024, the New Times reported, according to the National Institute of Statistics, Rwanda's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 8.2% in 2023, boosted 'largely by the services sector' which grew by 11% and accounted for 44% of the total GDP.<sup>42</sup>

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### 5.3 Political system

5.3.1 The 2022 USSD human rights report described Rwanda's political structure: '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.'<sup>43</sup>

5.3.2 The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI), covering the period 1 February 2021 to January 2023, which assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries, noted in its executive summary for Rwanda that:

'Rwanda has maintained political stability and relatively low levels of corruption over the past two years. This is directly attributable to the regime's strong authoritarian grip over the country. Security and control of the territory have remained largely secure. The ruling party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), continues to exert significant influence over the country and effectively controls public space and civil society. Loyalty and discipline are expected across institutions and in various aspects of the public sphere. Detractors, particularly those within circles of power, are not tolerated, and many have either been targeted and forced into exile or assassinated. Repression has also been aimed at other forms of opposition, specifically non-RPF political adversaries, journalists and civil society activists. There is minimal space for power-sharing, genuine political diversity, an independent and thriving civil society, or freedom of expression.'<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> IIAG, '[Rwanda: 2012-2021 Governance Results, 2022](#)' (page 16), January 2023

<sup>40</sup> IIAG, '[Rwanda: 2012-2021 Governance Results, 2022](#)' (page 9), January 2023

<sup>41</sup> World Bank, '[Rwanda Economic Update: Mobilizing Domestic Savings...](#)' (page iv), February 2024

<sup>42</sup> The New Times, '[Rwanda's economy grew 8.2% in 2023](#)', 12 March 2024

<sup>43</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (Exec Summary), 20 March 2023

<sup>44</sup> BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2024](#)' (Executive summary), 19 March 2024

## 5.4 Operation of political parties

- 5.4.1 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.’<sup>45</sup> See [Non-governmental organisations](#)
- 5.4.2 Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2023 report, covering the events of 2022 stated: ‘Opposition parties face administrative obstacles to registration and political pressure to toe the government line’.<sup>46</sup> HRW’s 2024 report, covering the events of 2023, stated: ‘As Rwanda approaches its 2024 general elections, space for political opposition remains closed, both inside and outside the ruling party.’<sup>47</sup>
- 5.4.3 Freedom House (FH) in its February 2024 report – Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda, covering the events of 2023, (FH report 2024) noted that ‘The RPF has ruled Rwanda without interruption since 1994, banning and repressing any opposition group that could mount a serious challenge to it. All registered parties currently belong to the RPF-dominated NCFPO [National Consultative Forum for Political Organizations].’<sup>48</sup>
- 5.4.4 In February 2024 FH published its global freedom status, which 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)<sup>49</sup>. 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 status<sup>50</sup>. The FH report 2024 noted, ‘While the right to join and operate a political party is constitutionally enshrined, the government-controlled Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), responsible for registering political parties, can deny registration at its discretion and without proper justification.’<sup>51</sup>
- 5.4.5 The BTI 2024 report commented: ‘At the national level, all registered parties are required to participate in the consultations of the NFPO [or NCFPO]. The forum serves as a control mechanism, preventing direct clashes among parties and in parliament.’<sup>52</sup>
- 5.4.6 The 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

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<sup>45</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 2B), 20 March 2023

<sup>46</sup> HRW, ‘[World Report 2023: Rwanda – events of 2022](#)’, 13 January 2023

<sup>47</sup> HRW, ‘[World Report 2024 – Rwanda - events of 2023](#)’, 11 January 2024

<sup>48</sup> FH ‘[Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda](#)’ (B2) February 2024

<sup>49</sup> FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2024 - Rwanda](#)’, February 2024

<sup>50</sup> FH, ‘[Freedom in the World Research Methodology](#)’ (Keys to scores and status), no date

<sup>51</sup> FH ‘[Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda](#)’ (B1) February 2024

<sup>52</sup> BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2024](#)’ (Political and social integration), 19 March 2024

least five (5) people having their domicile in each district.<sup>53</sup>

See [Treatment of political opponents and activists](#)

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## 5.5 Elections

5.5.1 The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC)'s Stakeholders' Submissions report, published in November 2020, with contributions from various NGOs<sup>54</sup> 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.'<sup>55</sup>

5.5.2 The 2022 USSD human rights report summarised Rwanda's most recent election results:

'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 winning two seats each. In both the 2017 and 2018 elections, international monitors reported numerous flaws, including irregularities in the vote tabulation process.'<sup>56</sup>

5.5.3 The BTI 2024 report scored Rwanda 2 out of 10 under the criteria 'free and fair elections.'<sup>57</sup> According to BTI, a score of less than 6 means that 'Free elections are not held or are marked by serious irregularities and restrictions.'<sup>58</sup>

5.5.4 The BTI 2024 report commented:

'Elections are part of the authoritarian setup of Rwanda's government politics, functioning more openly on the local level than on the national level. However, even at the local level, local authorities maintain a tight grip on the population in the villages. The inclusion of two new parties in the last parliamentary elections occurred without posing any threat to the power of the system. However, it is noteworthy that the Democratic Green Party – a

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<sup>53</sup> RGB, '[Political organisations](#)', no date

<sup>54</sup> UNHRC, '[Summary of Stakeholders' submissions](#)' (page 10 to 12), 16 November 2020

<sup>55</sup> UNHRC, '[Summary of Stakeholders' submissions](#)' (page 6), 16 November 2020

<sup>56</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (Exec Summary), 20 March 2023

<sup>57</sup> BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2024](#)', (Political and social integration), 19 March 2024

<sup>58</sup> BTI, '[Methodology](#)' (Democracies and autocracies), no date



party the government had previously attempted to hinder – obtained its inaugural parliamentary seats in the 2017 elections.’<sup>59</sup>

- 5.5.5 On 22 February 2024, the New Times website reported that Rwanda’s National Electoral Commission had released the calendar for the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections. The campaign period will begin on June 22 and close on July 13 before voting gets underway from July 14 and 16<sup>60</sup>.

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Section updated: 16 April 2024

## 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 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...’<sup>61</sup>

- 6.1.2 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.’<sup>62</sup>

- 6.1.3 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.’<sup>63</sup>

- 6.1.4 The BTI 2024 report, covering the period 1 February 2021 to January 2023,

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<sup>59</sup> BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2024](#)’ (Stability of institutions), 19 March 2024

<sup>60</sup> The New Times, ‘[Electoral commission releases elections calendar](#)’, 22 Feb 2024

<sup>61</sup> MoJ, ‘[Introduction to the third Universal Periodic...](#)’ (page 7), 25 January 2021

<sup>62</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 2A), 20 March 2023

<sup>63</sup> HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Wave of free speech prosecutions](#)’, 16 March 2022

noted ‘Critics and opponents considered dangerous by the regime are prosecuted on fabricated charges of genocide revisionism, corruption, terrorism and immoral behavior. The judiciary serves as the means through which the government perpetuates authoritarian rule by prosecuting opponents and critics of the state.’<sup>64</sup>

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## 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, HRW’s statement that ‘Opposition candidates had reported harassment, threats, and intimidation. Government authorities had arrested, forcibly disappeared, or threatened political opponents.’<sup>65</sup> HRW’s submission to the UPR provided the examples of the arrest of Diana Rwigara – a ‘would-be independent candidate’ – (and 2 family members) in September 2017, and cases of arrest, conviction and ill-treatment of members of the unregistered opposition party FDU-Inkingi, including 4 cases of ‘missing’ members (from 2018 and 2019) and 2 cases from 2019 of deaths ‘in mysterious circumstances’<sup>66</sup>.
- 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 what it claimed were 104 cases of illegal detentions over the 7-year period between 2010 and 2017<sup>67</sup>.
- 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 2014<sup>68</sup> 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.’<sup>69</sup>
- 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 their family members, who had been targeted by the authorities, including Paul Rusesabagina and his daughter<sup>70</sup>. Rusesabagina was arrested in August 2020 for alleged ties to an opposition organisation and was released in March 2023 after his sentence was commuted<sup>71</sup>.
- 6.2.5 The IRB cited one source who indicated ‘... known critics of the RPF, these

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<sup>64</sup> BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2024](#)’, (independent judiciary), 19 March 2024

<sup>65</sup> UNHRC, ‘[Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions](#)’ (page 6), 16 November 2020

<sup>66</sup> HRW, ‘[Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Rwanda](#)’ (paras 8 to 10), July 2020

<sup>67</sup> HRW, ‘[We will force you to confess: torture and unlawful...](#)’ (page 1 and 2), 10 October 2017

<sup>68</sup> HRW, ‘[We will force you to confess: torture and unlawful...](#)’ (page 2), 10 October 2017

<sup>69</sup> HRW, ‘[We will force you to confess: torture and unlawful...](#)’ (summary), 10 October 2017

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

<sup>71</sup> The Guardian, ‘[Hotel Rwanda’s Paul Rusesabagina released from prison](#)’, 25 March 2023

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 surveillance<sup>72</sup>.

6.2.6 In correspondence with the IRB, a professor of African History and Political Studies 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.’<sup>73</sup>

6.2.7 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.’<sup>74</sup>

6.2.8 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.’<sup>75</sup>

6.2.9 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.’<sup>76</sup>

6.2.10 The FH report 2023 noted: ‘The government has a long history of repressing

<sup>72</sup> IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...](#)’, 26 August 2021

<sup>73</sup> IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...](#)’, 26 August 2021

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

<sup>75</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1E), 20 March 2023

<sup>76</sup> FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2022](#)’ (B1), 28 February 2022

its political opponents, and members of opposition parties face the threat of disappearance, arbitrary arrest and detention, and assassination.<sup>77</sup> The report did not quantify 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.’<sup>78</sup> The FH report 2024 noted that ‘In December 2022, Théophile Ntirutwa, another [Dalfa-Umurinzi] party member, was convicted of disseminating false information to create “a hostile international opinion” against the government and received a seven-year prison sentence.’<sup>79</sup>

- 6.2.11 HRW also mentioned ill-treatment of Victoire Ingabire and members of the Dalfa-Umurinzi party in articles dated September 2019<sup>80</sup> and March 2022<sup>81</sup>. In a January 2023 update, HRW reported the ongoing trial of 9 Dalfa-Umurinzi party members and one 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.’<sup>82</sup> HRW’s 2024 annual report, published in January 2024, updated that 8 party members and one journalist remained in prison<sup>83</sup>.
- 6.2.12 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.’<sup>84</sup> (FDU-Inkingi was also led by Victoire Ingabire before it was replaced by Dalfa-Umurinzi<sup>85</sup>.)
- 6.2.13 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 compiled<sup>86</sup>.
- 6.2.14 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

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

<sup>78</sup> FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)’ (B1), March 2023

<sup>79</sup> FH ‘[Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda](#)’ (B1) February 2024

<sup>80</sup> HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Killing Is Latest Attack on Opponents](#)’, 24 September 2019

<sup>81</sup> HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Wave of Free Speech Prosecutions](#)’, 16 March 2022

<sup>82</sup> HRW, ‘[Politician Convicted for Harming Rwanda’s Image](#)’, 18 January 2023

<sup>83</sup> HRW, ‘[World Report 2024 – Rwanda - events of 2023](#)’, 11 January 2024

<sup>84</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1A), 20 March 2023

<sup>85</sup> Al Jazeera, ‘[My story: Being an opposition figure in Rwanda](#)’, 20 April 2022

<sup>86</sup> DW, ‘[Rwanda: The mysterious deaths of political opponents](#)’, 15 September 2021

documented over 30 cases of opposition members, journalists, critics, and activists who have died, disappeared, or ended up in jail.<sup>87</sup>

- 6.2.15 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.’<sup>88</sup>
- 6.2.16 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 from 28 July 1994. As of 20 March 2024, the most recent case cited was 6 February 2023<sup>89</sup>. 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 provide more detail on the number and type of recorded incidents<sup>90</sup>.

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

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### 6.3 Treatment of journalists and social media commentators

- 6.3.1 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) produces an annual World Press Freedom Index: ‘...to compare the level of freedom enjoyed by journalists and media in 180 countries and 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)<sup>91</sup>. In the 2023 index, Rwanda scored 46.58 – categorised by RSF as ‘difficult’ – ranking it 131<sup>st</sup> out of 180 countries<sup>92</sup>.
- 6.3.2 BTI’s 2024 report scored Rwanda 3 out of 10 under the criteria ‘Freedom of expression.’<sup>93</sup> (0 meaning freedom of expression or media freedom does not exist, or severe restrictions are in place and 10 meaning there are no restrictions)<sup>94</sup>.
- 6.3.3 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

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<sup>87</sup> HRW, [‘The cost of speaking up in Rwanda’](#), 7 July 2022

<sup>88</sup> HRW, [‘Rwanda: Jailed Critic Denounces Torture in Prison’](#), 13 June 2022

<sup>89</sup> Rwandan Lives Matter, [‘All forgotten victims’](#), no date

<sup>90</sup> Rwandan Lives Matter, [‘About this initiative’](#), no date

<sup>91</sup> RSF, [‘Methodology used for compiling the World Press Freedom Index 2023’](#), no date

<sup>92</sup> RSF, [‘Index 2023’](#), no date

<sup>93</sup> BTI, [‘Rwanda Country Report 2024’](#), (Freedom of expression), 19 March 2024

<sup>94</sup> BTI, [‘Methodology’](#) no date

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.<sup>95</sup> DW provided no detail on the numbers or circumstances of YouTubers who have been 'arrested, silenced and jailed'.

6.3.4 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.'<sup>96</sup>

6.3.5 The FH report 2024 commented: 'Rwandan journalists and outlets self-censor. Under the 2018 penal code revisions, cartoons and writings that "humiliate" Rwandan leaders were criminalized, though defamation was decriminalized... journalists face restrictions on online expression.'<sup>97</sup>

6.3.6 In March 2024, The Conversation, an independent source of news analysis and informed comment written by academic experts<sup>98</sup>, published an article which discussed the findings of research published in August 2023. It stated:

'...we found that many Rwandan journalists believe that they have a great deal of freedom and that outsiders don't consider the country's history when evaluating the media. Outsiders, for example, hear that Rwandan journalists cannot criticise the president or high-ranking government officials and immediately think there is no press freedom. But local journalists say they don't feel oppressed. They feel relatively free to choose their story topics. They don't want to publish critical stories because they want to foster peace.'<sup>99</sup>

6.3.7 The table below, compiled by CPIT, is based on the RSF 'Barometer'<sup>100</sup>. RSF's methodology<sup>101</sup> 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    |

<sup>95</sup> DW, '[Where is Africa's media freedom under threat?](#)', 3 May 2022

<sup>96</sup> FH, '[Freedom on the Net 2023 – Rwanda](#)' (Overview), 4 October 2023

<sup>97</sup> FH '[Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda](#)' (D1) February 2024

<sup>98</sup> The Conversation, '[Who we are](#)', no date

<sup>99</sup> The Conversation, '[Press freedom in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda...](#)' 18 March 2024

<sup>100</sup> RSF, '[Barometer](#)', no date

<sup>101</sup> RSF, '[Methodology used for compiling the World Press Freedom Index 2023](#)', no date

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 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 |

6.3.8 The table below, compiled by CPIT, shows comparable data from the Committee to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) database<sup>102</sup>, 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)             | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    |
| Journalists detained (incidents during the year) | 4    | 0    | 1    | 3    | 0    | 0    |

6.3.9 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<sup>103</sup>. Idamange received a 15-year sentence<sup>104</sup> which was extended by 2 years in March 2023<sup>105</sup>. Karasira was imprisoned in May 2021 and his trial was ongoing as of January 2024<sup>106 107</sup>.

6.3.10 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 rights<sup>108</sup>).<sup>109</sup>

6.3.11 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.'<sup>110</sup> Bahati's situation remained unknown as of February 2024<sup>111</sup>.

6.3.12 The FH report 2023 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

<sup>102</sup> CPJ, '[Explore CPJ's database of attacks on the press: journalists attacked in Rwanda](#)', no date

<sup>103</sup> HRW, '[World Report 2022 – Rwanda - events of 2021](#)', 24 February 2022

<sup>104</sup> HRW, '[World Report 2022 – Rwanda - events of 2021](#)', 24 February 2022

<sup>105</sup> HRW, '[World Report 2024 – Rwanda - events of 2023](#)', 11 January 2024

<sup>106</sup> HRW, '[World Report 2024 – Rwanda - events of 2023](#)', 11 January 2024

<sup>107</sup> Afro America Network, '[Rwanda... Aimable Karasira in a high security detention](#)', 10 August 2021

<sup>108</sup> CPJ, '[Dieudonné Niyonsenga](#)', no date

<sup>109</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1C), 20 March 2023

<sup>110</sup> FH, '[Freedom in the World 2022](#)' (D4), 28 February 2022

<sup>111</sup> FH '[Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda](#)' (D4) February 2024

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<sup>112</sup>. The FH report 2024 covered the same information plus one additional event, the death of John Ntwali (see below)<sup>113</sup>.

6.3.13 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.’<sup>114</sup> The New Times, a pro-government online news site, reported Ntwali’s death as the result of a motorcycle accident<sup>115</sup>. 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’<sup>116</sup>. In January 2024, HRW updated that ‘One year after Ntwali’s suspicious death, there has been no credible accounting of the alleged road accident that caused his death.’<sup>117</sup>

6.3.14 In January 2024, HRW reported:

‘During [Dieudonné] Niyonsenga’s detention, Human Rights Watch has received multiple reports from people who saw wounds on his face and body, and said he spoke of frequent beatings. Though Niyonsenga and others have raised this treatment in court, to the best of Human Rights Watch’s knowledge, judicial authorities have not acted to investigate or end the abuse...Niyonsenga and his lawyers also told the court that prison authorities confiscated documents relating to his trial. It is not the first time that Niyonsenga and other prisoners have raised such interference, which violates detainees’ fair trial rights.’<sup>118</sup>

6.3.15 In April 2024, BBC Monitoring reported that Rwandan journalist Jean-Paul Nkundineza, who worked with Igihe and other online local TV stations, had been handed a three-year prison sentence and fined for “public insult and abuse of a whistleblower” after being arrested in October 2023 by the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) on criminal charges for public defamation, abuse of a whistleblower and intimidation<sup>119</sup>.

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## 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

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<sup>112</sup> FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)’ (D1), March 2023

<sup>113</sup> FH ‘[Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda](#)’ (D1) February 2024

<sup>114</sup> HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Suspicious death of investigative journalist](#)’, 20 January 2023

<sup>115</sup> The New Times, ‘[Local journalist dies in car accident](#)’, 19 January 2023

<sup>116</sup> HRW, ‘[Questions Remain Over Rwandan Journalist’s Suspicious Death](#)’, 18 July 2023

<sup>117</sup> HRW, ‘[Rwanda: End Abuses Against Journalists](#)’, 18 January 2024

<sup>118</sup> HRW, ‘[Rwanda: End Abuses Against Journalists](#)’, 18 January 2024

<sup>119</sup> BBC Monitoring, ‘Rwandan journalist sentenced to three years in prison’, 18 April 2024



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 law and the Interpol Red Notice System,” the FBI concluded.’<sup>120</sup> (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.’<sup>121</sup>

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.’<sup>122</sup>

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 Rwanda<sup>123</sup>. Sources also indicated that family members of political opponents abroad faced harassment and intimidation<sup>124</sup>.

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 Mozambique<sup>125</sup>. The 2022 USSD report referenced the same 3 incidents from 2021<sup>126</sup>.

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<sup>120</sup> OCCRP, ‘[Rwanda fed false intelligence to US and Interpol...](#)’, 4 November 2022

<sup>121</sup> BBC, ‘[The loyalty oath keeping Rwandans abroad in check](#)’, 18 November 2020

<sup>122</sup> KT Press, ‘[Rwanda Welcomes S. Africa Law...](#)’, 6 January 2020

<sup>123</sup> IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...](#)’, 26 August 2021

<sup>124</sup> IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...](#)’, 26 August 2021

<sup>125</sup> USSD, ‘[2021 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1E), 12 April 2022

<sup>126</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1E), 20 March 2023

- 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.’<sup>127</sup> However, 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 Australia.
- 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 officials<sup>128</sup>.
- 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.’<sup>129</sup>
- 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 Uganda<sup>130</sup>.
- 6.4.10 HRW noted:
- ‘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.’<sup>131</sup> The HRW 2024 report provided no additional information<sup>132</sup>.

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## 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

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<sup>127</sup> HRW, ‘[World Report 2023: Rwanda – events of 2022](#)’, 13 January 2023

<sup>128</sup> HRW, ‘[“Join us or die” Rwanda’s extraterritorial repression](#)’, (page 1 & 11) 10 October 2023

<sup>129</sup> HRW, ‘[“Join us or die” Rwanda’s extraterritorial repression](#)’, (page 7) 10 October 2023

<sup>130</sup> HRW, ‘[“Join us or die” Rwanda’s extraterritorial repression](#)’, (page 7& 61), 10 October 2023

<sup>131</sup> HRW, ‘[“Join us or die” Rwanda’s extraterritorial repression](#)’, (page 7), 10 October 2023

<sup>132</sup> HRW, ‘[World Report 2024 – Rwanda - events of 2023](#)’, 11 January 2024

fame.’<sup>133</sup>

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.’<sup>134</sup>

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 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.’<sup>135</sup>

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.’<sup>136</sup>

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Section updated: 16 April 2024

## 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

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<sup>133</sup> AI, ‘[Pegasus Project: Rwandan authorities chose thousands...](#)’, 19 July 2021

<sup>134</sup> FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)’ (D4), March 2023

<sup>135</sup> FH, ‘[Freedom on the Net 2023 – Rwanda](#)’ (C5), 4 October 2023

<sup>136</sup> FH, ‘[Freedom on the Net 2023 – Rwanda](#)’ (C6), 4 October 2023

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.'<sup>137</sup>

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... [£1,992<sup>138</sup>] and 5,000,000 Rwandan francs... [£3,319<sup>139</sup>].'<sup>140</sup>

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 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.'<sup>141</sup>

7.1.5 The BTI 2024 report noted 'The constitution guarantees the freedoms of assembly and association; however, assemblies require police permits and are subject to government restrictions. Opposition groups or people suspected of not supporting the government are rarely accorded the right to exercise the freedom of assembly.'<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Laws on The Right of Peaceful Assembly, 'Rwanda', July 2022

<sup>138</sup> Xe.com, '[3,000,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British Pounds](#)', 2 November 2023

<sup>139</sup> Xe.com, '[5,000,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British Pounds](#)', 2 November 2023

<sup>140</sup> CIVICUS and other, '[Submission to the UN UPR, 37th Session...Rwanda](#)' (page 10), 9 July 2020

<sup>141</sup> FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)' (E1), March 2023

<sup>142</sup> BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2024](#)' (Effective power to govern), 19 March 2024

## 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.’<sup>143</sup> ACLED researchers ‘collect and review the latest reports from selected local, national and international sources, including media, vetted social media accounts, government and 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.’<sup>144</sup>
- 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 developments<sup>145</sup>.
- 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.’<sup>146</sup>
- 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.’<sup>147</sup>
  - 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.’<sup>148</sup>
  - 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.’<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> ACLED, [‘Quick guide to ACLED data’](#) (page 3), June 2022

<sup>144</sup> ACLED, [‘Quick Guide to ACLED Data’](#), June 2022

<sup>145</sup> ACLED, [‘Quick guide to ACLED data’](#) (page 6), June 2022

<sup>146</sup> ACLED, [‘Codebook’](#) (page 13), no date

<sup>147</sup> ACLED, [‘Codebook’](#) (page 14), no date

<sup>148</sup> ACLED, [‘Codebook’](#) (page 14), no date

<sup>149</sup> ACLED, [‘Codebook’](#) (page 14), no date

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.’<sup>150</sup>

7.2.6 The table below, compiled by CPIT, provides a summary of documented incidents of protests and riots in Rwanda between 1 January 2018 and 21 March 2024, using data downloaded from the ACLED website.

| Event type | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 (part) | Total |
|------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------|-------|
| Protest    | 3    | 2    | 1    | 1    | 3    | 1    | 2           | 13    |
| Riot       | 2    | 0    | 1    | 2    | 2    | 2    | 0           | 10    |

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7.2.7 ACLED’s dataset provides 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<sup>152</sup>.

| 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                      | ‘... refugees that had recently been transferred from Libya [sic] refugee camps demonstrated against living conditions due to coronavirus restrictions at the  |

<sup>150</sup> ACLED, ‘[Codebook](#)’ (page 14), no date

<sup>151</sup> ACLED, ‘[Data export tool](#)’, data downloaded 21 March 2024

<sup>152</sup> ACLED, ‘[Data export tool](#)’, data downloaded 21 March 2024

|  |   |
|--|---|
| intervention)  | Gashora refugee camp outside Kigali.... Police intervened to stop the demonstration.’   |
| 8 October 2021<br>(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 (peaceful protest)                  | ‘... Congolese refugees protested against killings of 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.’ |
| 4 March 2024 (peaceful protest)                      | ‘On 4 March 2024, Congolese refugees (Banyamulenge) protested against the killing of the Tutsi ethnic group in DRC, inside the Kiziba/Karongi Refugee Camp (Karongi, West).’  |
| 4 March 2024 (peaceful protest)                      | ‘On 4 March 2024, Congolese refugees (Banyamulenge) protested against the killing of the Tutsi ethnic group in DRC, inside the Nkamira Refugee Camp (Rubavu, West).’  |

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

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### 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’<sup>153</sup>.

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...’<sup>154</sup>

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.’<sup>155</sup>

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 roles<sup>156</sup>.

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## 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 2018<sup>157</sup>.

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.’<sup>158</sup>

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 11<sup>159</sup>.

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<sup>153</sup> MINEMA, ‘[Ministerial instructions determining the management of...](#)’ (Article 2), June 2016

<sup>154</sup> MINEMA, ‘[Ministerial instructions determining the management of...](#)’ (Article 12e), June 2016

<sup>155</sup> UNHCR, ‘[Protection](#)’, no date

<sup>156</sup> UNHCR, ‘[Operational update: Rwanda September 2022](#)’, 17 October 2022

<sup>157</sup> UNHCR, ‘[Clashes in Rwanda camp lead to tragic refugee death](#)’, 4 May 2018

<sup>158</sup> UNHCR, ‘[UNHCR shocked over reports of refugee deaths in Rwanda](#)’, 23 February 2018

<sup>159</sup> UNHCR, ‘[UNHCR shocked over refugee deaths in Rwanda](#)’, 26 February 2018



- 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 system<sup>160</sup>.
- 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 restore law and order in the camp and its surroundings."<sup>161</sup>
- 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.'<sup>162</sup>
- 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.'<sup>163</sup>
- 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

<sup>160</sup> The New Humanitarian, '[Please Tell Us Where We Belong...](#)', 4 April 2018

<sup>161</sup> KT Press, '[Kiziba camp leaders behind violent unrest – gov't](#)', 30 April 2018

<sup>162</sup> The New Times, '[Congolese refugees arrested for attacking police officers](#)', 2 May 2018

<sup>163</sup> Reuters, '[Rwanda police arrest 23 Congolese refugees after violence in camp](#)', 2 May 2018

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.’<sup>164</sup>

- 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.”’<sup>165</sup>
- 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.’<sup>166</sup>
- 7.4.11 In response to the incident at Kiziba refugee camp, the National Commission 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.’<sup>167</sup> For more information on the function and independence of the NCHR see [Human rights oversight bodies](#).
- 7.4.12 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.’<sup>168</sup>
- 7.4.13 In a June 2022 statement following the announcement of the MEDP, the 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.’<sup>169</sup>
- 7.4.14 ACLED documented 3 events related to the Kiziba protests. Their categories and notes on each event have been reproduced in the table below<sup>170</sup>.

| Date of event and category | ACLED notes on event                                 |
|----------------------------|--|
| 21 February                | ‘Congolese refugees in the Karongi Refugee Camp held |

<sup>164</sup> UNHCR, ‘[Clashes in Rwanda camp lead to tragic refugee death](#)’, 4 May 2018

<sup>165</sup> HRW, ‘[Rwanda: A Year On, No Justice for Refugee Killings](#)’, 23 February 2019

<sup>166</sup> HRW, ‘[Rwanda: A Year On, No Justice for Refugee Killings](#)’, 23 February 2019

<sup>167</sup> NCHR, ‘[Summary of the NCHR Report on Kiziba Refugee Camp Incident](#)’, no date

<sup>168</sup> HRW, ‘[UK’s Rights Assessment of Rwanda Not Based on Facts](#)’, 12 May 2022

<sup>169</sup> UNHCR, ‘[UNHCR analysis of the legality and appropriateness...](#)’ (paragraph 20), 8 June 2022

<sup>170</sup> ACLED, ‘[Data export tool](#)’, data downloaded 17 August 2022

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 2018 (peaceful protest) | 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.'   |

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Section updated: 16 April 2024

## 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'.<sup>171</sup>

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)<sup>172</sup>

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;

'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;

<sup>171</sup> GoR, '[Constitution](#)' (Article 29), 24 December 2015

<sup>172</sup> GoR, '[Law relating to the criminal procedure Number 027/2019 of 19/09/2019](#)', 8 November 2019

'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.'<sup>173</sup>

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## 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.'<sup>174</sup>

### 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...'<sup>175</sup>

### 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.'<sup>176</sup>

### 8.2.4 The functioning of the courts is regulated by several laws:

- Law no 012/2018 of 4 April 2018 determines the organisation and functioning of the judiciary<sup>177</sup>
- Law No 09/2004 of 29 April 2004 which provides a Code of Ethics for judges<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> GoR, '[Constitution](#)' (Article 151), 24 December 2015

<sup>174</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices...](#)' (Executive summary), 20 March 2023

<sup>175</sup> RNP, '[About us](#)' (History), no date

<sup>176</sup> GoR, '[Constitution](#)' (Article 152), 24 December 2015

<sup>177</sup> GoR, '[Law no 012/2018](#)', 4 April 2018

<sup>178</sup> GoR, '[Law No 09/2004](#)', 29 April 2004

- Law No 22/2018 of 29 April 2018 provides for appeal / review of court decisions / judgments<sup>179</sup>

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'<sup>180</sup>

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.'<sup>181</sup>

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### 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?<sup>182</sup>

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

'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

<sup>179</sup> GoR, Ministry of Justice, '[Official Gazette](#)' (Law No 22/2018), 29 April 2018

<sup>180</sup> US CIA, '[World Factbook](#)' (Rwanda), updated 6 December 2023

<sup>181</sup> GoR, '[The Judiciary](#)' (High Council of the Judiciary), no date

<sup>182</sup> Gallup, '[2020 Global Law and Order Report](#)' (pages 7 and 16), 2020

forms of misconduct are available online on the website of the Ministry of Justice.’<sup>183</sup>

8.3.3 The FH report covering events in 2023, 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 maximum<sup>184</sup>.

8.3.4 Rwanda’s scores on FH’s Rule of Law indicator are summarised in the table below<sup>185</sup>.

| 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.’<sup>186</sup> The household survey in Rwanda was conducted in 2018 and had a sample size of 316<sup>187</sup>.

8.3.6 Rwanda’s global rank in the 2023 index was 41<sup>st</sup> out of 142 countries and 1<sup>st</sup> in the region<sup>188</sup>.

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)<sup>189</sup>

8.3.8 Rwanda’s score on each of the 8 elements, plus the country’s global and regional rank (within sub-Saharan Africa), is summarised in the table below<sup>190</sup>.

| Factor                           | Score<br>(Scale 0 to 1*) | Regional rank<br>(out of 34) | Global rank<br>(out of 142) |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Constraints on government powers | 0.60                     | 5                            | 45                          |
| Absence of corruption            | 0.68                     | 1                            | 32                          |
| Open government                  | 0.57                     | 3                            | 51                          |

<sup>183</sup> Joint Committee on Human Rights, ‘[Oral evidence: The UK-Rwanda Migration ...](#)’, 8 June 2022

<sup>184</sup> FH, ‘[Freedom in the World Research Methodology](#)’, 2024

<sup>185</sup> FH ‘[Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda](#)’ (Section F) February 2024

<sup>186</sup> WJP, ‘[Methodology Snapshot](#)’, (page 2), 25 October 2023

<sup>187</sup> WJP, ‘[Methodology Snapshot](#)’, (page 5) 25 October 2023

<sup>188</sup> WJP, ‘[Rwanda](#)’, 25 October 2023

<sup>189</sup> WJP, ‘[Rwanda](#)’, 25 October 2023

<sup>190</sup> WJP, ‘[Rule of Law Index 2023](#)’ (page 148), 25 October 2023

|                        |      |   |    |
|------------------------|------|---|----|
| 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 |
| <b>Overall</b>         | 0.63 | 1 | 41 |

\* 1 indicates the strongest adherence to the rule of law

8.3.9 Transparency International Rwanda (TI-RW) publishes the Rwanda Bribery Index (RBI) annually with the aim of analysing the experience and perception of Rwandans with regards the incidence of bribery in the country<sup>191</sup>. The survey was conducted in all 4 provinces of Rwanda, with 2,475 respondents<sup>192</sup>. TI-RW reported that ‘the majority of Rwandans (70.2%) commend the effectiveness of the government’s efforts in the fight against corruption.’<sup>193</sup> It also reported that ‘Over the last 12 months of 2022, 29.10% of Rwandans directly or indirectly demanded or offered a bribe in an interaction with an institution.’<sup>194</sup>

8.3.10 Transparency International’s 2023 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 49th (out of 180 countries) ahead of a number of EU nations, giving it a score of 53 out of 100. This is a slight increase since 2022<sup>195</sup>.

8.3.11 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

<sup>191</sup> TI-RW, [‘Rwanda Bribery Index 2022’](#), 2022

<sup>192</sup> TI-RW, [‘Rwanda Bribery Index 2022’](#), 2022

<sup>193</sup> TI-RW, [‘Rwanda Bribery Index 2022’](#), 2022

<sup>194</sup> TI-RW, [‘Rwanda Bribery Index 2022’](#), 2022

<sup>195</sup> Transparency International, [‘Corruption Perceptions Index 2023’](#), January 2023

investigate or report on corruption issues due to the risk of government reprisals.<sup>196</sup>

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## 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.’<sup>197</sup>
- 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.’<sup>198</sup>
- 8.4.3 A spokesperson for the courts, cited in The New Times 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.’<sup>199</sup>
- 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.’<sup>200</sup>
- 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

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<sup>196</sup> FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023 - Rwanda](#)’ (C2), March 2023

<sup>197</sup> GoR, ‘[Legal aid services](#)’, no date

<sup>198</sup> CERULAR, ‘[Access to Justice](#)’, no date

<sup>199</sup> The New Times, ‘[How judiciary is tackling case backlog, maintaining quality...](#)’, 5 September 2023

<sup>200</sup> CERULAR, ‘[Provision of a legal aid service](#)’, no date



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 counsel to all in need.<sup>201</sup>

- 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 public<sup>202</sup>. No further details were provided about the nature of the complaints.

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## 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.’<sup>203</sup>
- 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’<sup>204</sup> 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 surveys<sup>205</sup>.
- 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<sup>206</sup>:

| Category                                     | Score  |
|--|--------|
| Trust in the judiciary                       | 90.7%  |
| Percentage of backlog cases in the judiciary | 22.54% |
| Independence of courts                       | 95.50% |
| Percentage of cases filed online in courts   | 100%   |
| Clearance rate                               | 89%    |

- 8.5.4 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.’<sup>207</sup>
- 8.5.5 The same USSD report added: ‘Domestic and international observers noted

<sup>201</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 1E), 20 March 2023

<sup>202</sup> NPPA, [‘NPPA quarterly progress report, July 2021 to March 2022’](#) (page 30), June 2022

<sup>203</sup> GoR, [‘Constitution’](#) (Article 150), 24 December 2015

<sup>204</sup> RGB, [‘About RGB’](#), no date

<sup>205</sup> RGB, [‘Rwanda Governance Scorecard 10<sup>th</sup> Edition’](#) (page 3), 31 October 2023

<sup>206</sup> RGB, [‘Rwanda Governance Scorecard 10<sup>th</sup> Edition’](#) (page 20), 31 October 2023

<sup>207</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 1E), 20 March 2023

outcomes in high-profile genocide, security, and politically sensitive cases appeared predetermined.<sup>208</sup> The report mentioned Paul Rusesabagina's court case as one where 'many observers concluded his fair trial guarantees had not been respected.'<sup>209</sup>

- 8.5.6 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.'<sup>210</sup>
- 8.5.7 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 crimes<sup>211</sup>.
- 8.5.8 HRW's World Report 2023, 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 year<sup>212</sup>.
- 8.5.9 HRW's World Report 2024, covering events in 2023 cited Paul Rusesabagina's commutation, but provided no additional examples<sup>213</sup>.
- 8.5.10 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 genocide<sup>214</sup>.
- 8.5.11 The Government of Netherlands (GoN) 2023 country of origin information report on Rwanda provided information obtained from a confidential source, noting: '...political pressure could also be exerted through the public prosecutor and the clerk of court. For example, critics of the authorities who 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.'<sup>215</sup>
- 8.5.12 On the independence of the judiciary, the FH report 2024 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.'<sup>216</sup>
- 8.5.13 The BTI 2024 report scored Rwanda 3 out of 10 under the criteria 'Independent judiciary'<sup>217</sup>. Scores under 4 indicate 'Constitutional oversight

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<sup>208</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1E), 20 March 2023

<sup>209</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1E), 20 March 2023

<sup>210</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1E), 20 March 2023

<sup>211</sup> HRW, '[World report 2022: Rwanda](#)', 13 January 2022

<sup>212</sup> HRW, '[World report 2023: Rwanda](#)', 12 January 2023

<sup>213</sup> HRW, '[World Report 2024 – Rwanda - events of 2023](#)', 11 January 2024

<sup>214</sup> The Guardian, '[Rwanda president suggests UK extradite genocide suspects...](#)', 16 May 2022

<sup>215</sup> GoN, '[Country of origin information report on human rights...](#)' (page 44), 30 June 2023

<sup>216</sup> FH, '[Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda](#)' (F1) February 2024

<sup>217</sup> BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2024](#)', (Independent judiciary), 19 March 2024

and checks and balances of the executive, legislature or judiciary do not exist, or exist only on paper.’<sup>218</sup>

8.5.14 The BTI 2024 report stated:

‘The Rwandan judiciary serves an important political function. It is generally perceived as independent and fair and is seen as supportive of the less privileged and promoting inclusivity. The judiciary has the authority to interpret laws and review legislation and policies. However, in reality, the judiciary lacks true independence and is frequently influenced by the executive branch. Individuals critical of the regime frequently encounter unfounded accusations, while judges tend to align with the government’s position.’<sup>219</sup>

8.5.15 For information on the appeal rights of asylum seekers see the [Country Information Note Rwanda: Asylum system](#)

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## 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.’<sup>220</sup> For more information of the Gashora-based Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) see section on the ETM in the [Country Information Note 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’’.<sup>221</sup> 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.’<sup>222</sup>

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

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<sup>218</sup> BTI, [‘Methodology’](#), (Democracies and autocracies), no date

<sup>219</sup> BTI, [‘Rwanda Country Report 2024’](#), (Separation of powers), 19 March 2024

<sup>220</sup> The Guardian, [‘Rwandan police chief accused of sexual assault of child refugee...’](#), 27 April 2020

<sup>221</sup> The New Times, [‘RIB dismisses abuse allegations at Gashora Transit Centre’](#), 29 April 2020

<sup>222</sup> APA News, [‘Rwandan Police officer arrested over killing resident...’](#), 1 September 2020

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.'<sup>223</sup>

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.'<sup>224</sup>

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."<sup>225</sup>

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 proceedings<sup>226</sup>. 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.'<sup>227</sup>

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.

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<sup>223</sup> APA News, '[Rwanda's police condemned over use of excessive force...](#)', 6 September 2020

<sup>224</sup> KT Press '["We Will Rein It In" – President Kagame Weighs In On Police...](#)', 7 September 2020

<sup>225</sup> KT Press '["We Will Rein It In" – President Kagame Weighs In On Police...](#)', 7 September 2020

<sup>226</sup> NCHR, '[Assessment of the impact of anti Covid-19 pandemic ...](#)' (Section 3.1), December 2020

<sup>227</sup> NCHR, '[Assessment of the impact of anti Covid-19 pandemic ...](#)' (Section 3.2), December 2020

'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.'<sup>228</sup>

8.6.10 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.'<sup>229</sup>

8.6.11 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.'<sup>230</sup>

8.6.12 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.'<sup>231</sup>

8.6.13 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<sup>232</sup>.

8.6.14 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].'<sup>233</sup>

8.6.15 In November 2023, the New Times reported on comments made by the RNP spokesperson, Commissioner of Police (ACP) Boniface Rutikanga in regards to bribery who said 'Fighting corruption and related vices is given due attention... it's a zero-tolerance policy. This goes both ways, to the person offering a bribe and a Police officer receiving it.... Fighting corruption and poor service delivery is an individual and collective responsibility. Call 997 (toll-free) or any known Police communication channels, to report a Police

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<sup>228</sup> The East African, '[Rwanda kicks out 386 officers from police force](#)', 25 February 2021

<sup>229</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1A), 20 March 2023

<sup>230</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1C), 20 March 2023

<sup>231</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1D), 20 March 2023

<sup>232</sup> The New Times, '[Over 80 RIB investigators sacked over corruption](#)', 7 February 2023

<sup>233</sup> CGTN Africa, '[200 Rwandan police officers fired after they were...](#)', 15 June 2023

officer, who solicits a bribe and the person offering it.’<sup>234</sup>

- 8.6.16 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 includes a helpline number for following up on complaints<sup>235</sup>.

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## 8.7 Death penalty

- 8.7.1 Rwanda abolished the death penalty for all crimes in 2007<sup>236</sup>.

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Section updated: 16 April 2024

## 9. Police custody, prison and unofficial detention centres

### 9.1 Treatment

- 9.1.1 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.’<sup>237</sup>
- 9.1.2 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<sup>238 239</sup>.
- 9.1.3 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.’<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> The New Times, ‘[Police: Fighting corruption a collective responsibility](#)’, 10 November 2023

<sup>235</sup> RNP, ‘[Citizen Complaint](#)’, undated

<sup>236</sup> AI, ‘[Rwanda: Abolition of the death penalty](#)’, 27 July 2007

<sup>237</sup> HRW, ‘[We will force you to confess: torture and unlawful...](#)’ (page 4), 10 October 2017

<sup>238</sup> UNHRC, ‘[Compilation on Rwanda A/HRC/WG.6/37/RWA/2](#)’ (paras 23 and 25), 13 November 2020

<sup>239</sup> UNCAT, ‘[Concluding observations on the second ...](#)’ (paras 16 and 40), 21 December 2017

<sup>240</sup> FCDO, ‘[UN Human Rights Council: Universal Periodic Review Adoption – Rwanda](#)’, 8 July 2021

- 9.1.4 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.’<sup>241</sup>
- 9.1.5 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.’<sup>242</sup>
- 9.1.6 The FH 2024 report noted: ‘Both ordinary criminal suspects and political detainees are routinely subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in custody.’<sup>243</sup>
- 9.1.7 The BTI 2024 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.’<sup>244</sup>

See [Government critics and opponents](#)

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## 9.2 Conditions

- 9.2.1 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.’<sup>245</sup>

- 9.2.2 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.’<sup>246</sup>

See [Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.](#)

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## 10. Transit and rehabilitation centres

### 10.1 Structure and function

- 10.1.1 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.’<sup>247</sup> NRS

<sup>241</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 1A), 20 March 2023

<sup>242</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 1C), 20 March 2023

<sup>243</sup> FH [‘Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda’](#) (F3) February 2024

<sup>244</sup> BTI, [‘Rwanda Country Report 2024’](#) (Prosecution of office abuse), 2024

<sup>245</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 1C), 20 March 2023

<sup>246</sup> FCDO, [‘Guidance: Rwanda prisoner pack’](#) (3.3), 9 May 2022

<sup>247</sup> GoR, [‘Law N°17/2017 of 28/04/2017...’](#) (Article 7), 15 May 2017

responsibilities include overseeing the operation of rehabilitation and transit centres<sup>248</sup>.

- 10.1.2 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.’<sup>249</sup>
- 10.1.3 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
  - Gitagata (Bugesera District, Eastern Province), admits adult females plus male and female children ages 10 to 17.
  - Nyamagabe (Nyamagabe District, Southern Province), admits adult males<sup>250</sup>.
- 10.1.4 NCHR’s 2022 annual report, published in March 2023, identified 8 Rehabilitation Centres<sup>251</sup>.
- 10.1.5 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.’<sup>252</sup>
- 10.1.6 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.’<sup>253</sup>
- 10.1.7 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.’<sup>254</sup>

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

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## 10.2 Law

- 10.2.1 The law on the mission, organisation and functioning of transit centres is set

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<sup>248</sup> GoR, ‘[Law N°17/2017 of 28/04/2017...](#)’ (Article 7), 15 May 2017

<sup>249</sup> GoR NRS, ‘[District transit centers](#)’, no date

<sup>250</sup> GoR, ‘[Official Gazette n° Special of 07/06/2018](#)’, 7 June 2018

<sup>251</sup> NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)’ (page 84), September 2022

<sup>252</sup> GoR NRS, ‘[A 5- Year Strategic Plan 2022-2027](#)’ (page 3), 22 April 2022

<sup>253</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1D), 20 March 2023

<sup>254</sup> HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting](#)’, 27 September 2021



out in Ministerial Order Number 001/07.01<sup>255</sup>.

10.2.2 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.’<sup>256</sup>

10.2.3 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.’<sup>257</sup>

10.2.4 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.’<sup>258</sup> 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.’<sup>259</sup> 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.’<sup>260</sup>

10.2.5 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.’<sup>261</sup>

<sup>255</sup> GoR, ‘[Ministerial Order... No.001/07.01 of 19/04/2018](#)’, 26 April 2018

<sup>256</sup> GoR, ‘[Ministerial Order... No.001/07.01 of 19/04/2018](#)’ (Article 2 - pages 18-19), 26 April 2018

<sup>257</sup> NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)’ (page 80), September 2022

<sup>258</sup> GoR, ‘[Official Gazette n° Special of 07/06/2018](#)’ (Article 12), 7 June 2018

<sup>259</sup> GoR, ‘[Official Gazette n° Special of 07/06/2018](#)’ (Article 17 – page 36), 7 June 2018

<sup>260</sup> NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)’ (page 85), September 2022

<sup>261</sup> HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting](#)’, 27 September 2021

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

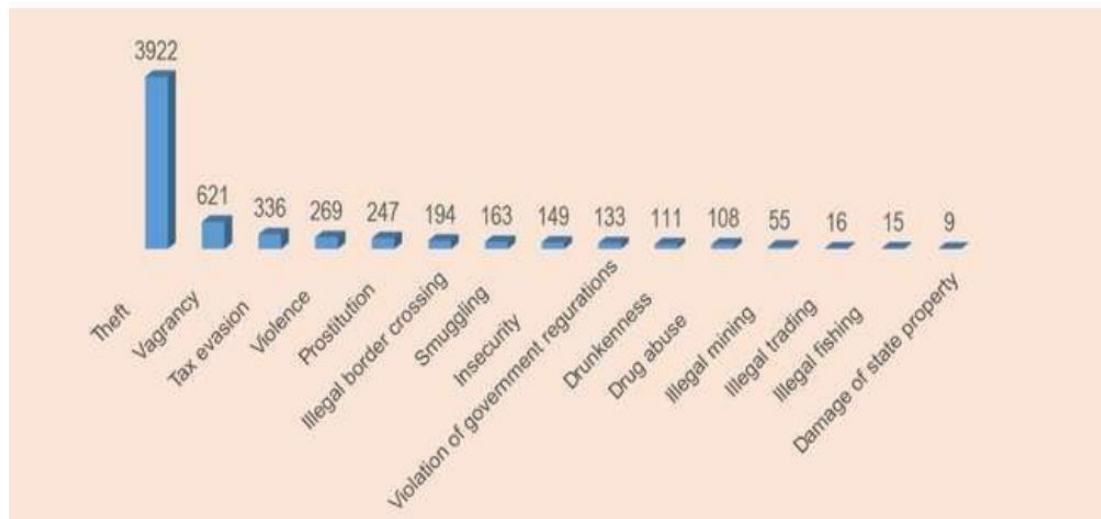
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### 10.3 Number and characteristics of detainees

#### 10.3.1 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 processing into vocational and educational programs.’<sup>262</sup>

#### 10.3.2 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). The NCHR provided a breakdown of the reasons people had been brought to the transit centres. A total of 6,348 reasons were recorded, the predominant reason for transfer to a transit centre was suspected theft (61.7% of cases)<sup>263</sup>.



#### 10.3.3 NCHR monitored 2 of the 3 rehabilitation centres holding 1,653 persons (1,072 men, 284 boys, 94 women and 23 girls)<sup>264</sup>.

#### 10.3.4 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.](#)

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### 10.4 Treatment and conditions

#### 10.4.1 The 2021-2022 NCHR’s review of 28 transit centres and 2 rehabilitation

<sup>262</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 1D), 20 March 2023

<sup>263</sup> NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)’ (page 79), September 2022

<sup>264</sup> NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)’ (page 78 and 84), September 2022

centres looked at living conditions, including food, healthcare and accommodation. The NCHR found that ‘...the rights of rehabilitated persons [in rehabilitation centres] were respected’<sup>265</sup>. 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 issue<sup>266</sup>.

10.4.2 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.’<sup>267</sup>

10.4.3 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.’<sup>268</sup>

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

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## 11. Women’s rights and status

### 11.1 Legal rights

11.1.1 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 sex<sup>269</sup>.

11.1.2 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<sup>270 271</sup>.

11.1.3 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

<sup>265</sup> NCHR, [‘Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022’](#) (page 86-88), September 2022

<sup>266</sup> NCHR, [‘Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022’](#) (page 82), September 2022

<sup>267</sup> HRW, [‘Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting’](#), 27 September 2021

<sup>268</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 1C), 20 March 2023

<sup>269</sup> GoR, [‘Constitution’](#) (Articles 10 and 16), 24 December 2015

<sup>270</sup> GoR, [‘Official Gazette 37’](#) (Articles 206, 209 and 218), 12 September 2016

<sup>271</sup> MIGEPROF, [‘Tenth Periodic Report of the Republic of Rwanda on the ...’](#) (page 7), May 2021

equal work and prohibits discrimination in hiring decisions.’<sup>272</sup>

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## 11.2 Gender equality: policy and practice

11.2.1 The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) website outlined the policies in place to ensure gender equality<sup>273</sup>:

- [‘Revised National Gender Policy’](#) (2021) under revision<sup>274</sup>
- [‘National Policy against Gender Based Violence’](#) (2011)<sup>275</sup>
- [‘National Policy for Family Promotion’](#) (2005)... developed to ensure that the principle of gender equality is mainstreamed across sectors<sup>276</sup>
- [‘National Strategy for Transformation \(NST1\)’](#) sets to strengthen and promote gender equality and ensure equal opportunities for all Rwandans...<sup>277</sup>

11.2.2 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.’<sup>278</sup>

11.2.3 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 Councils<sup>279</sup>.

11.2.4 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 rights<sup>280</sup>:

- [Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion \(MIGEPROF\)](#): coordinates policy implementation for women’s and children’s issues<sup>281</sup>
- [Gender Monitoring Office](#): monitors progress towards the goal of gender

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<sup>272</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

<sup>273</sup> MIGEPROF, [‘Directorate General of Gender ...’](#) (Enabling legal framework), no date

<sup>274</sup> MIGEPROF, [‘Revised National Gender Policy’](#), February 2021

<sup>275</sup> MIGEPROF, [‘National Policy against Gender Based Violence’](#), July 2011

<sup>276</sup> MIGEPROF, [‘National Policy for Family Promotion’](#), December 2005

<sup>277</sup> GoR,, [‘National Strategy for Transformation \(NST1\)’](#) 1 January 2017

<sup>278</sup> World Bank, [‘Country partnership framework... Rwanda FY21 to FY26’](#) (page 7), 22 October 2020

<sup>279</sup> UNHRC, [‘National report submitted in accordance with paragraph ...’](#) (page 9), 9 November 2020

<sup>280</sup> MIGEPROF, [‘Tenth Periodic Report of the Republic of Rwanda on the ...’](#), May 2021

<sup>281</sup> MIGEPROF, [‘About’](#), undated

equality and the fight against gender-based violence<sup>282</sup>

- [National Women's Council](#): advocacy to increase women's participation in society<sup>283</sup>

- 11.2.5 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.'<sup>284</sup>
- 11.2.6 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 12<sup>th</sup> most gender-equal country in the world (out of 146) and 2<sup>nd</sup> in Africa (the UK was 15<sup>th</sup> in the world)<sup>285 286</sup>.
- 11.2.7 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 2020<sup>287</sup>.
- 11.2.8 The 2022 Population and Housing Census indicated that among the female population (age 12 and above), 20% were head of household<sup>288</sup>.
- 11.2.9 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.'<sup>289</sup>
- 11.2.10 The FH report 2024 stated that 'Women enjoy broad legal equality with men, with a significant presence in the economy as workers and business owners, but gender-based discrimination persists, especially in rural areas, and gender-equality measures have again largely favored English-speaking elites in urban areas.'<sup>290</sup>

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### 11.3 Freedom of movement

- 11.3.1 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.'<sup>291</sup>
- 11.3.2 An April 2023 BBC Travel article examined safe destinations for sole female

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<sup>282</sup> GMO, '[Key responsibilities](#)' undated

<sup>283</sup> NWC, '[About us](#)', undated

<sup>284</sup> UNDP, '[Gender Equality Strategy: UNDP Rwanda \(2019-2022\)](#)' (pages 5-6), 19 January 2022

<sup>285</sup> WEF, '[Global Gender Gap report 2023](#)' (page 62), 20 June 2023

<sup>286</sup> WEF, '[Global Gender Gap report 2023](#)' (page 26), 20 June 2023

<sup>287</sup> UNHRC, '[National report submitted in accordance with paragraph ...](#)' (page 11), 9 November 2020

<sup>288</sup> MFEP and NISR, '[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)' (Table 48), Feb 2023

<sup>289</sup> RDB, '[Annual report 2022](#)' (pages 30 and 31), 3 May 2023

<sup>290</sup> FH '[Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda](#)' (F4) February 2024

<sup>291</sup> 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 world<sup>292</sup>.

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## 12. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

### 12.1 Legal context

12.1.1 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 marriage<sup>293</sup>
- [Law N° 66/2018 of 30/08/2018](#) protects workers against SGBV and harassment in the workplace<sup>294</sup>
- [Law N° 59/2008 of 10/09/2008](#) contains provisions for the prevention and punishment of gender-based violence<sup>295</sup>

12.1.2 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 imprisonment<sup>296</sup>.

12.1.3 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.'<sup>297</sup>

12.1.4 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.'<sup>298</sup>

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### 12.2 Domestic abuse, and physical and sexual violence

12.2.1 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.'<sup>299</sup>

12.2.2 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

<sup>292</sup> BBC Travel, '[Five countries that are safer for women](#)', 3 April 2023

<sup>293</sup> MIGEPROF, '[Directorate General of Gender ...](#)' (Enabling legal framework), no date

<sup>294</sup> MIGEPROF, '[Directorate General of Gender ...](#)' (Enabling legal framework), no date

<sup>295</sup> Land Portal Foundation, '[Law N° 59/2008 of 10/09/2008 on Prevention and ...](#)', no date

<sup>296</sup> GoR, '[UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#)' (para 98), 4 October 2021

<sup>297</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

<sup>298</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

<sup>299</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

physical violence in the 12 months preceding the survey.<sup>300</sup>

- ‘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.’<sup>301</sup>

12.2.3 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.’<sup>302</sup>
- ‘... divorced, separated, or widowed women... are more likely (42%...) to have experienced sexual violence than currently married women... (22%...) and never-married women... (19%...)’<sup>303</sup>

12.2.4 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 from the groups listed 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           |

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<sup>300</sup> NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 287), September 2021

<sup>301</sup> NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 287), September 2021

<sup>302</sup> NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 288), September 2021

<sup>303</sup> NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 288), September 2021

<sup>304</sup> NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 298), September 2021

<sup>305</sup> NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 301), September 2021

## 12.3 SGBV against asylum seekers and refugees

12.3.1 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 underreporting<sup>306</sup>.

12.3.2 The government's submission to the CEDAW 10<sup>th</sup> 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.'<sup>307</sup>

12.3.3 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](#)). 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 and funding.'<sup>308</sup>

12.3.4 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.

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<sup>306</sup> UNHCR, '[Rwanda country refugee response plan Jan to Dec 2021](#)' (page 11), 19 April 2021

<sup>307</sup> GoR, '[UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#)' (paragraphs 271 to 275), 4 October 2021

<sup>308</sup> Annex 3, '[Meeting with Alight](#)', 23 March 2022



'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.'<sup>309</sup>

For more information on Alight see [Annex 3, Meeting with Alight, 23 March 2022](#)

See also [Protection and support](#), the section on Safeguarding in the [Country Information Note - Rwanda: Asylum system](#) and the sections Health and wellbeing of Relocated Individuals, Victims of trauma, torture, SGBV and trafficking, and NGOs providing health services in the [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Medical and healthcare](#)

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## 12.4 Policies and programmes

- 12.4.1 Rwanda's submission to the CEDAW in 2021 stated: 'In 2018–2019, mass community awareness was conducted in more than 1,291 secondary schools and 38 High Learning Institutions in Rwanda...'<sup>310</sup>
- 12.4.2 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.'<sup>311</sup>
- 12.4.3 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.'<sup>312</sup>
- 12.4.4 And: '[A] Regional Centre of Excellence on Gender Based Violence and Child abuse... [provides] high quality research and statistics related to

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<sup>309</sup> Annex 3, '[Meeting with Alight](#)', 23 March 2022

<sup>310</sup> GoR, [UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#) (paragraph 73), 4 October 2021

<sup>311</sup> GoR, [UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#) (paragraph 31), 4 October 2021

<sup>312</sup> GoR, [UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#) (paragraph 67), 4 October 2021

SGBV, child abuse and other forms of violence to the public, policy makers, law enforcement personnel and other SGBV practitioners in the region.’<sup>313</sup>

- 12.4.5 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 SGBV<sup>314</sup>.
- 12.4.6 MIGEPROF, in a December 2021 update on its website taking stock of what the country had achieved in countering gender-based violence, commented: ‘... 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’abatwariye, 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.’<sup>315</sup>
- 12.4.7 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...’<sup>316</sup>

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## 12.5 Protection and support

- 12.5.1 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<sup>317 318</sup>.
- 12.5.2 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 GBV<sup>319</sup>.
- 12.5.1 The [National Public Prosecution Authority](#) (NPPA) is responsible for the

<sup>313</sup> GoR, [UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#) (paragraph 90), 4 October 2021

<sup>314</sup> RNP, [‘RNP conducts workshop for media practitioners, youth volunteers ...’](#), 28 September 2021

<sup>315</sup> MIGEPROF, [‘The fight against GBV concerns every Rwandan’](#), 10 December 2021

<sup>316</sup> USSD, [‘2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 6), 20 March 2023

<sup>317</sup> RNP, [website](#), no date

<sup>318</sup> RNP, [‘Rwandan Isange One Stop model to tackle gender based violence ...’](#), 5 November 2015

<sup>319</sup> RIB, [‘What we investigate’](#), no date

investigation and prosecution of crimes<sup>320</sup>.

- 12.5.2 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.’<sup>321</sup> 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%        |

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- 12.5.3 The 2022 USSD human rights report stated ‘... the government handled rape cases as a judicial priority.’<sup>323</sup>

- 12.5.4 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 violence.’<sup>324</sup>

- 12.5.5 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.’<sup>325</sup>

- 12.5.6 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:

<sup>320</sup> NPPA, ‘[About us – background](#)’, no date

<sup>321</sup> NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 294), September 2021

<sup>322</sup> NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 294), September 2021

<sup>323</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

<sup>324</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

<sup>325</sup> MIGEPROF, ‘[The fight against GBV concerns every Rwandan](#)’, 10 December 2021

'[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[ab]lished 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[ernmen]t 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: 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.'<sup>326</sup>

- 12.5.7 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

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<sup>326</sup> Annex 3, '[Isange One Stop Centre, meeting at the hospital](#)', 19 January 2022

home visits and follow-up phone calls to monitor progress of cases.<sup>327</sup>

12.5.8 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.'<sup>328</sup>

See also the section [SGBV against asylum seekers and refugees](#), the section on Safeguarding in the [Country Information Note - Rwanda: Asylum system](#) and the sections Health and wellbeing of Relocated Individuals, NGOs providing health services, and Victims of trauma, torture, SGBV and trafficking in the [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Medical and healthcare](#)

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

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## 12.6 Arrest, prosecution and conviction

12.6.1 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<sup>329</sup>. The NPPA report did not specify the gender of the victim but did provide the gender of the suspect. In cases of both rape and harassment of spouse, the accused were predominantly male (94.7%).

|                     | <b>Rape</b> | <b>Harassment of spouse</b> |
|---------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| 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                          |

<sup>327</sup> Annex 3, '[Isange One Stop Centre, meeting at the hospital](#)', 19 January 2022

<sup>328</sup> Annex 3, '[Isange One Stop Centre, meeting at the hospital](#)', 19 January 2022

<sup>329</sup> NPPA, '[NPPA quarterly progress report, July 2022 to September 2022](#)' (page 24), December 2022

|                 |     |     |
|-----------------|-----|-----|
| Conviction rate | 67% | 97% |
|-----------------|-----|-----|

- 12.6.2 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.'<sup>330</sup>
- 12.6.3 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.'<sup>331</sup>
- 12.6.4 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 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.'<sup>332</sup>

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Section updated: 16 April 2024

## 13. Modern slavery/trafficking

### 13.1 Legal context

- 13.1.1 [Law \(No 51/2018\)](#) is designed to prevent and punish human trafficking and exploitation<sup>333</sup>.
- 13.1.2 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... [£6,642<sup>334</sup> to £9,964<sup>335</sup>], which increased to 20 to 25 years' imprisonment and a fine of 20 million to 25 million Rwandan francs... [£13,282<sup>336</sup> to £16,603<sup>337</sup>] 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... [£3,320<sup>338</sup> to £ 6,641<sup>339</sup>] for labor trafficking crimes.'<sup>340</sup>

See also [Protection and support](#)

<sup>330</sup> MIGEPROF, '[The fight against GBV concerns every Rwandan](#)', 10 December 2021

<sup>331</sup> MIGEPROF, '[The fight against GBV concerns every Rwandan](#)', 10 December 2021

<sup>332</sup> RNP, '[RNP conducts workshop for media practitioners, youth volunteers ...](#)', 28 September 2021

<sup>333</sup> GoR, '[Official Gazette number 39 of 24/09/2018, Law number 51/2018 of ...](#)', 24 September 2018

<sup>334</sup> Xe.com, '[10,000,000 RWF to GBP – Convert Rwanda Francs to British ...](#)', 9 November 2023

<sup>335</sup> Xe.com, '[15,000,000 RWF to GBP – Convert Rwandan Francs to British ...](#)', 9 November 2023

<sup>336</sup> Xe.com, '[20,000,000 RWF to GBP – Convert Rwandan Francs to British ...](#)', 9 November 2023

<sup>337</sup> Xe.com, '[25,000,000 RWF to GBP – Convert Rwandan Francs to British ...](#)', 9 November 2023

<sup>338</sup> Xe.com, '[5,000,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British ...](#)', 9 November 2023

<sup>339</sup> Xe.com, '[10,000,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British ...](#)', 9 November 2023

<sup>340</sup> USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)' (Prosecution), 15 June 2023

## 13.2 Prevalence and profile

13.2.1 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 people<sup>341</sup>. The 2023 index estimated the prevalence of modern slavery in Rwanda at 4.3 victims per 1,000 population.<sup>342</sup> for comparison, the prevalence in Africa was 5.2<sup>343</sup>.

13.2.2 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 VoTs<sup>344</sup>.

|                     | <b>Proportion of all identified VOTs (based on data from 2017 and 2018, population size = 515)</b> | <b>Proportion of VoTs where the trafficker was prosecuted (based on data from 2016 to 2018, population size = 85)</b> |
|---------------------|--|---|
| 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%)  |

13.2.3 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.'<sup>345</sup>

## 13.3 Refugee victims of trafficking

13.3.1 During a meeting with the HO on 23 March 2022, Alight was asked about the vulnerability to trafficking of refugee women and girls in camps and urban

<sup>341</sup> Walk Free, '[Global Slavery Index: Rwanda](#)' (Prevalence and number), 19 June 2023

<sup>342</sup> Walk Free, '[Global Slavery Index: Rwanda](#)' (Prevalence and number), 19 June 2023

<sup>343</sup> Walk Free, '[Global Slavery Index: Prevalence and Number \(Africa\)](#)', 19 June 2023

<sup>344</sup> Never Again Rwanda, '[Understanding Human Trafficking...](#)' (pages 46 to 47), August 2019

<sup>345</sup> USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)' (Trafficking Profile), 15 June 2023

areas. Alight 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 [from camps] to urban areas, this increases their vulnerabilities...[which] may result... [in] negative coping mechanisms including transactional sex.'<sup>346</sup>

#### 13.3.2 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.'<sup>347</sup>

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

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### 13.4 Protection and support

#### 13.4.1 Ministerial Order No. 013/MOJ/AG/21 sets out the support available for victims of trafficking. Article 3 states that:

'A victim of the crime of trafficking in persons in Rwanda or a victim of that crime repatriated from abroad who is unable or does not want to immediately return to his or her origin, who is unable to support himself or herself or who has no place of residence in Rwanda is received and temporarily sheltered at a place designated by the organ in charge of Isange One Stop Center [IOSC] service.

'The victim is sheltered for a period not exceeding six (6) months in consideration of his or her age, sex or the category of trafficking undergone. The victim sheltered is provided with basic needs, including food, drinks, clothes and hygiene items.'<sup>348</sup>

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

See also the section on Safeguarding in the [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Asylum system](#). For information on healthcare services available to VoT see [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Medical and healthcare](#)

#### 13.4.2 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

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<sup>346</sup> Annex 3, '[Meeting with Alight](#)', 23 March 2022

<sup>347</sup> USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)' (Trafficking Profile), 15 June 2023

<sup>348</sup> GoR, '[Ministerial Order No. 013/MOJ/AG/21 of 29/08/2021...](#)', 30 August 2021



cases that are domestic and cross border.<sup>349</sup>

#### 13.4.3 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.'<sup>350</sup>

For more information on the identification of, and support for, VoT see the section on Safeguarding in the [Country Information Note - Rwanda: Asylum system](#) and the sections Health and wellbeing of Relocated Individuals, and Victims of trauma, torture, SGBV and trafficking in the [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Medical and healthcare](#)

See also [Activities of M23](#) and [Recruitment of children and refugees into regional conflicts](#)

13.4.4 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.'<sup>351</sup>

13.4.5 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 implementation of effective procedures, screening, and assistance to trafficking victims in refugee camps.'<sup>352</sup>

13.4.6 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    |

<sup>349</sup> GoR, UN CEDAW, '[Tenth periodic report submitted by Rwanda ...](#)' (para 107), 4 October 2021

<sup>350</sup> USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)' (Tier 2) 15 June 2023

<sup>351</sup> USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)' (Prevention), 15 June 2023

<sup>352</sup> USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)' (Protection), 15 June 2023

- 13.4.7 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.'<sup>356</sup>
- 13.4.8 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.'<sup>357</sup>
- 13.4.9 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..<sup>358</sup>
- 13.4.10 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.'<sup>359</sup>

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

## 13.5 Treatment

- 13.5.1 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.'
- 13.5.2 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

<sup>353</sup> USSD, '[2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)', 1 July 2021

<sup>354</sup> USSD, '[2022 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)' (page 468), July 2022

<sup>355</sup> USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)', June 2023

<sup>356</sup> USSD, '[2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)' (page 469) 15 June 2023

<sup>357</sup> USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)' (Prosecution) 15 June 2023

<sup>358</sup> USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)' (Protection), July 2022

<sup>359</sup> FCDO, '[UN Human Rights Council: Universal Periodic Review Adoption – Rwanda](#)', 8 July 2021

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 .

- 13.5.3 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.'
- 13.5.4 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.'
- 13.5.5 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.'
- 13.5.6 The FH 2024 report noted: 'Both ordinary criminal suspects and political detainees are routinely subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in custody.'
- 13.5.7 The BTI 2024 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.'

See [Government critics and opponents](#)

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## 13.6 Conditions

- 13.6.1 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.'
- 13.6.2 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.'

See [Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.](#)

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Section updated: 16 April 2024

Transit and rehabilitation centres and [Arrest, prosecution, and detention of](#)

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

### 14.1 Demography

- 14.1.1 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. No explanation was provided of how this figure was obtained<sup>360</sup>.
- 14.1.2 As with past censuses, the most recent national census in 2022 did not include questions about sexual and gender minorities<sup>361 362</sup>.
- 14.1.3 There was no further information in the sources consulted on the size of the LGBTI population (see [Bibliography](#)).

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### 14.2 Legal context

#### 14.2.1 In May 2022, The Conversation noted:

'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.'<sup>363</sup>

- 14.2.2 The 2022 USSD human rights report noted: 'No laws criminalize sexual orientation, consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, or so-called cross-dressing.'<sup>364</sup> 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.'<sup>365</sup>
- 14.2.3 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

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<sup>360</sup> Rwanda Today, '[Pandemic hits Rwanda's sexual minorities harder](#)', 16 December 2020

<sup>361</sup> DW, '[Rwanda's census: LGBTQ+ people just want to be counted](#)', 22 August 2022

<sup>362</sup> Washington Blade, '[Rwanda criticized over exclusion of LGBTQ, intersex...](#)', 29 August 2022

<sup>363</sup> The Conversation, '[Rwanda: LGBT rights are protected on paper, but...](#)', 16 May 2022

<sup>364</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

<sup>365</sup> OSAC, '[Rwanda country security report](#)' (Safety Concerns for LGBTI+ Travelers), 9 February 2022

progressive.<sup>366</sup>

14.2.4 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.’<sup>367</sup>

14.2.5 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 [£132<sup>368</sup> to £663<sup>369</sup>].’<sup>370</sup> 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 Health<sup>371</sup>. 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](#)).

14.2.6 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.’<sup>372</sup>

14.2.7 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 enjoy, without any discrimination, equal protection of the law.<sup>373</sup>

14.2.8 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

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<sup>366</sup> HRW, ‘[World Report 2023: Rwanda – events of 2022](#)’, 13 January 2023

<sup>367</sup> HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (page 6), May 2022

<sup>368</sup> Xe.com, ‘[200,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British Pounds](#)’, 9 November 2023

<sup>369</sup> Xe.com, ‘[1,000,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British ...](#)’, 9 November 2023

<sup>370</sup> FIDH, ‘[“Anti-homosexuality” draft amendments endanger the defence...](#)’, 16 December 2009

<sup>371</sup> Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’, 30 October 2019

<sup>372</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

<sup>373</sup> GoR, ‘[Constitution](#)’ (Articles 11 and 16), 24 December 2015

Universal Periodic Review of Rwanda, raised concerns about the 'Lack of legal recognition for Transgender and Intersex persons.'<sup>374</sup> 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 gender<sup>375</sup>.

- 14.2.9 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 unions<sup>376</sup>.

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### 14.3 State attitudes

- 14.3.1 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 relationships<sup>377</sup>.
- 14.3.2 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.'<sup>378</sup>
- 14.3.3 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...'<sup>379</sup>
- 14.3.4 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.'<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> LGBTI/sex worker coalition, [JS5 - Joint Submission 5](#) (page 4), June 2020

<sup>375</sup> DW, '[Rwanda: Activists want trans and intersex legal rights](#)', 15 September 2023

<sup>376</sup> ILGA, '[State-sponsored homophobia...](#)' (page 326), December 2020

<sup>377</sup> Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (pages 7 to 8), 30 October 2019

<sup>378</sup> Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (page 27), 30 October 2019

<sup>379</sup> Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (page 28), 30 October 2019

<sup>380</sup> Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (page 15), 30 October 2019

- 14.3.5 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".<sup>381</sup>
- 14.3.6 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.'<sup>382</sup>
- 14.3.7 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.<sup>383</sup>
- 14.3.8 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.'<sup>384</sup>
- 14.3.9 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.'<sup>385</sup>
- 14.3.10 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 interviews<sup>386</sup>
- 14.3.11 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

<sup>381</sup> Reuters, '[INTERVIEW - Rwandan gospel singer shrugs off backlash to ...](#)', 23 September 2019

<sup>382</sup> DW, '[Rwandan church embraces LGBT+ community](#)', 21 July 2020

<sup>383</sup> Vice News, '[Rwanda's Transgender Community Face Violent ...](#)', 20 November 2020

<sup>384</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 3), 20 March 2023

<sup>385</sup> HDI/APHRC, '[Examination of LGBT people's lived experiences...](#)' (pages 3 and 8), May 2022

<sup>386</sup> HDI/APHRC, '[Examination of LGBT people's lived experiences...](#)' (pages 9, 13, 14, 28), May 2022

agreed or agreed, 45% were neutral, and 34% strongly disagreed or disagreed<sup>387</sup>.

- 14.3.12 In a May 2023 podcast transcribed by CPIT, 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 Health<sup>388</sup>]. 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...’<sup>389</sup>
- 14.3.13 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 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]”’.<sup>390</sup>

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#### 14.4 Policies and strategies

- 14.4.1 The NCHR’s Strategic Plan, covering 2022 to 2027, contained no reference to LGBTI persons<sup>391</sup>.
- 14.4.2 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.’<sup>392</sup>
- 14.4.3 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 existence<sup>393</sup>.

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#### 14.5 Arrest, prosecution, and detention of LGBTI persons

- 14.5.1 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

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<sup>387</sup> HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (page 32), May 2022

<sup>388</sup> RNEC, ‘[About the committee](#)’, no date

<sup>389</sup> Kagaba, A, The Long Form with Sanny Ntayombya, ‘[Podcast episode...](#)’, 1 May 2023

<sup>390</sup> Washington Blade, ‘[Rwanda recognizes LGBTQ relationships in new...](#)’, 11 April 2023

<sup>391</sup> NCHR, ‘[Strategic plan 2022 to 2027](#)’, October 2018

<sup>392</sup> LGBTI/sex worker coalition, ‘[JS5 - Joint Submission 5](#)’ (page 4), June 2020

<sup>393</sup> IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Situation of persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender ...](#)’, 23 August 2021



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.<sup>394</sup>

- 14.5.2 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 place<sup>395</sup>.
- 14.5.3 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.’<sup>396</sup>
- 14.5.4 The Cedoca report also noted: ‘In the consulted sources, Cedoca found no information on legal actions against homosexuals or LGBT [the Cedoca desk research covered the period from 2014 to 22 October 2019].’<sup>397</sup>
- 14.5.5 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.’<sup>398</sup>
- 14.5.6 Vice News interviewed 3 transwomen who had been held at Gikondo Transit Centre in 2018 or 2019. One of the women told Vice that she had been falsely accused of being homeless and selling drugs. She described how she had been held in Gikondo for 6 weeks where she was humiliated, beaten, and raped by other detainees<sup>399</sup>.
- 14.5.7 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 LGBTI<sup>400</sup>. The list of reasons given for detention in transit centres in the 2021-2022 NCHR report did not include a ‘deviant behaviour’ category<sup>401</sup>.
- 14.5.8 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 incidents<sup>402</sup>.

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<sup>394</sup> Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 9), 30 October 2019

<sup>395</sup> Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 11), 30 October 2019

<sup>396</sup> Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 12), 30 October 2019

<sup>397</sup> Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 8), 30 October 2019

<sup>398</sup> Vice News, ‘[Rwanda’s Transgender Community Face Violent...](#)’, 20 November 2020

<sup>399</sup> Vice News, ‘[Rwanda’s Transgender Community Face Violent...](#)’, 20 November 2020

<sup>400</sup> NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report July 2020 – June 2021](#)’ (page 100), September 2021

<sup>401</sup> NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2021 – June 2022](#)’ (page 79), September 2022

<sup>402</sup> IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Situation of persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender ...](#)’, 23 August 2021

#### 14.5.9 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...’<sup>403</sup>

14.5.10 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.’<sup>404</sup>

14.5.11 HRW noted: ‘People interviewed who identified as gay or transgender said 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.’<sup>405</sup>

14.5.12 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.’<sup>406</sup>

14.5.13 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.’<sup>407</sup>

14.5.14 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 disagreed<sup>408</sup>.

See also the section on Transit Centres [Number and characteristics of detainees](#)

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## 14.6 Societal attitudes

14.6.1 A December 2018 report by research company Laterite, based upon interviews with 52 stakeholders (including the Government of Rwanda, local

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<sup>403</sup> HRW, [‘Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting’](#), 27 September 2021

<sup>404</sup> HRW, [‘Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting’](#), 27 September 2021

<sup>405</sup> HRW, [‘Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting’](#), 27 September 2021

<sup>406</sup> HRW, [‘Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting’](#), 27 September 2021

<sup>407</sup> HRW, [‘UK’s Rights Assessment of Rwanda Not Based on Facts’](#), 12 May 2022

<sup>408</sup> HDI/APHRC, [‘Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...’](#) (page 32), May 2022

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.'<sup>409</sup>

- 14.6.2 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 towards homosexuality.'<sup>410</sup>
- 14.6.3 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.'<sup>411</sup>
- 14.6.4 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.'<sup>412</sup>
- 14.6.5 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.'<sup>413</sup>
- 14.6.6 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.'<sup>414</sup>
- 14.6.7 In June 2021, Reuters reported: 'LGBT+ rights groups in the largely conservative Christian nation [Rwanda] say homophobic attitudes are widespread.'<sup>415</sup>
- 14.6.8 Advanced Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (ALIGN), a digital research platform focusing on gender justice and equality<sup>416</sup> 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 people<sup>417</sup>:

'... 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

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<sup>409</sup> Laterite, '[Gender and social inclusion assessment](#)' (page 23), 11 December 2018

<sup>410</sup> Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (page 13), 30 October 2019

<sup>411</sup> Cedoca, '[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' (page 29), 30 October 2019

<sup>412</sup> DW, '[Rwandan church embraces LGBT+ community](#)', 21 July 2020

<sup>413</sup> ILGA, '[LGBTI Organisations In Rwanda Unite Under Coalition.](#)', 10 August 2020

<sup>414</sup> Vice News, '[Rwanda's Transgender Community Face Violent Detentions ...](#)', 20 November 2020

<sup>415</sup> Reuters, '[Brave and hopeful' LGBT+ Rwandans prepare for their first Pride](#)', 29 June 2021

<sup>416</sup> ALIGN, '[About ALIGN](#)', no date

<sup>417</sup> ALIGN, '[Gender-based violence against LGBTQI people in civil society ...](#)', August 2021

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.<sup>418</sup>

14.6.9 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+ persons in some parts of the country’s society.’<sup>419</sup>

14.6.10 The May 2022 HDI/APHRC survey asked 1,254 members of the public whether they agreed or disagreed with certain statements about LGBT persons<sup>420</sup>. 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                              |

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## 14.7 Societal treatment

14.7.1 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 2009<sup>421</sup> (the year the draft Article 217 amendment to the Penal Code was withdrawn) (see [Demography](#)

[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. No explanation was provided of how this figure was obtained.

14.7.2 As with past censuses, the most recent national census in 2022 did not include questions about sexual and gender minorities .

14.7.3 There was no further information in the sources consulted on the size of the LGBTI population (see Bibliography).

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14.7.4 Legal ). Laterite provided no further detail regarding how the participating organisations quantified violence levels.

14.7.5 The Cedoca COI focus 2019 quoted the Executive Director of HDI: ‘We have

<sup>418</sup> ALIGN, ‘[Gender-based violence against LGBTQI people in civil...](#)’ (page 12), August 2021

<sup>419</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

<sup>420</sup> HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (page 34), May 2022

<sup>421</sup> Laterite, ‘[Gender and social inclusion assessment](#)’ (page 27), 11 December 2018

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.<sup>422</sup>

- 14.7.6 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.’<sup>423</sup>
- 14.7.7 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.’<sup>424</sup>
- 14.7.8 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’<sup>425</sup>. 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.
- 14.7.9 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 homophobia<sup>426</sup>
- 14.7.10 AHR’s focus groups: ‘...revealed that most people [who] experienced homophobic acts are transgender women because of their gender expression.’<sup>427</sup>
- 14.7.11 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%
  - Markets: 6.5%

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<sup>422</sup> Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 16), 30 October 2019

<sup>423</sup> Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 21), 30 October 2019

<sup>424</sup> Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 22), 30 October 2019

<sup>425</sup> AHR, ‘[Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on Rwandan LGBT...](#)’ (page 16), Nov 2020

<sup>426</sup> AHR, ‘[Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on Rwandan LGBT...](#)’ (page 16), Nov 2020

<sup>427</sup> AHR, ‘[Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on Rwandan LGBT...](#)’ (page 19), Nov 2020

- Churches or mosques: 7.1%
- Family: 18.6%
- Bars, hotels and night clubs: 21.0%
- Community: 24.7%<sup>428</sup>

14.7.12 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.

14.7.13 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 interviewed<sup>429</sup>. The majority of respondents (54%) identified as transwomen, 38% as transmen, one person as intersex and one person as gender non-conforming<sup>430</sup>. 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 treatment<sup>431</sup>.

14.7.14 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.'<sup>432</sup>

14.7.15 Freedom House's 2022 World Report, reporting on 2021 events, noted: 'LGBT+ activists organized Rwanda's first pride celebrations in June.'<sup>433</sup> According to Outright International, Rwanda was one of 105 countries which held public Pride events in 2022<sup>434</sup>. 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](#)).

14.7.16 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 institutions<sup>435</sup>.

14.7.17 The same survey found: 'Among those who disclosed their [sexual orientation and gender identity]... 15% experienced rejection from their

<sup>428</sup> AHR, '[Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on Rwandan LGBT...](#)' (page 19), Nov 2020

<sup>429</sup> EATHAN, '[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)', (Methodology) 2020

<sup>430</sup> EATHAN, '[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)', (page 20) 2020

<sup>431</sup> EATHAN, '[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)', (p 41 and 45) 2020

<sup>432</sup> Rwanda Today, '[Pandemic hits Rwanda's sexual minorities harder](#)', 16 December 2020

<sup>433</sup> FH, '[Freedom in the World 2022 – Rwanda](#)' (E1), 28 February 2022

<sup>434</sup> Outright International, '[We Remain Resilient: Pride Around the...](#)' (page 54), June 2023

<sup>435</sup> HDI/APHRC, '[Examination of LGBT people's lived experiences...](#)' (page 18), May 2022

families and 11% from social acquaintances.<sup>436</sup>

14.7.18 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  |

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14.7.19 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.’<sup>438</sup>

14.7.20 The HDI/APHRC survey, published in May 2022, based upon the responses 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’<sup>439</sup>.

14.7.21 UK Government travel advice for British nationals visiting Rwanda stated: ‘Same-sex sexual activity is not illegal in Rwanda, but is frowned on by locals. LGBT+ travellers can experience discrimination and abuse, including from local authorities.’<sup>440</sup>

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## 14.8 State protection

14.8.1 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

<sup>436</sup> HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (page 21), May 2022

<sup>437</sup> HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (page 37), May 2022

<sup>438</sup> Reuters, ‘[Brave and hopeful’ LGBT+ Rwandans prepare for their first Pride](#)’, 29 June 2021

<sup>439</sup> HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (page 19), May 2022

<sup>440</sup> UKG, ‘[Foreign travel advice: ...](#)’ (Laws and cultural differences), updated 2 February 2024

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 source added: ‘...we have also noted that not all policemen have necessarily a negative attitude on LGBT issues.’<sup>441</sup>

- 14.8.2 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 judiciary<sup>442</sup>. (Podcast transcribed by CPIT)
- 14.8.3 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 cases<sup>443</sup>.
- 14.8.4 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.’<sup>444</sup>
- 14.8.5 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.’<sup>445</sup>
- 14.8.6 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.’<sup>446</sup>
- 14.8.7 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

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<sup>441</sup> Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 11), 30 October 2019

<sup>442</sup> Kagaba, A, The Long Form with Sanny Ntayombya, ‘[Podcast episode...](#)’, 1 May 2023

<sup>443</sup> Kagaba, A, The Long Form with Sanny Ntayombya, ‘[Podcast episode...](#)’, 1 May 2023

<sup>444</sup> Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 12), 30 October 2019

<sup>445</sup> Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 8), 30 October 2019

<sup>446</sup> LGBTI/sex worker coalition, [JS5 - Joint Submission 5](#) (page 4), June 2020



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 arrest by police. All were released.’<sup>447</sup>

14.8.8 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.’<sup>448</sup>

14.8.9 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 [sexual orientation and gender identity] and other minority groups.’<sup>449</sup>

14.8.10 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.’<sup>450</sup>

For more information on NCHR’s complaints process see [Human rights oversight bodies](#)

14.8.11 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.’<sup>451</sup>

14.8.12 The NCHR’s annual report – which contains details of monitoring activities undertaken by the Commission – covering the period July 2021 to June 2022, contained no reference to LGBTI persons<sup>452</sup>.

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## 14.9 Healthcare

14.9.1 A study in the peer-reviewed journal *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, explored the trauma, mental health and healthcare experiences of lesbian and bisexual women in Rwanda. The study was published in 2023 but was based upon interviews which were conducted in July and August 2017<sup>453</sup>. The study sample included 20 lesbian and bisexual

<sup>447</sup> Vice News, ‘[Rwanda’s Transgender Community Face Violent Detentions ...](#)’, 20 November 2020

<sup>448</sup> IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Situation of persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender ...](#)’, 23 August 2021

<sup>449</sup> HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (page 26), May 2022

<sup>450</sup> Joint Committee on Human Rights, ‘[Oral evidence: The UK-Rwanda Migration ...](#)’, 8 June 2022

<sup>451</sup> Joint Committee on Human Rights, ‘[Oral evidence: The UK-Rwanda Migration ...](#)’, 8 June 2022

<sup>452</sup> NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)’, September 2022

<sup>453</sup> Hughes and others, ‘[Trauma, mental health and health care experiences...](#)’ (Method) 2023

women from four provinces (Eastern, Southern, Western and Kigali); 13 participants lived in urban areas and 7 lived in rural areas<sup>454</sup>; 17 participants identified as lesbian and 3 as bisexual<sup>455</sup>. The study concluded that 'Although health care was reported to be generally available, these women felt the need to conceal their sexual identity to avoid discrimination in health care settings, which limits opportunities to receive needed care.'<sup>456</sup>

- 14.9.2 Twenty-three percent of the 499 LGBT respondents to the May 2022 HDI/APHRC survey reported experiencing discrimination in accessing healthcare<sup>457</sup>.
- 14.9.3 A coalition of civil society organisations working on the rights of women involved in sex work and LGBT+ persons in Rwanda submitted a shadow report dated January 2023 to the fifth periodic review of Rwanda by the UN CESCR. The report noted that the Fourth Health Sector Strategic Plan 2018-2024 '... does not make any specific mention of LGBT+ persons or their health needs.'<sup>458</sup>
- 14.9.4 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.'<sup>459</sup> The research findings mentioned by the Coalition are not specified or referenced in the report.
- 14.9.5 The same source noted that 'Interviews with key informants and focus group discussions revealed that transgender persons faced the shortage of specialized hormonal treatment including medication as such medication is not available in pharmacies and those with financial means had to buy hormonal medication from abroad.'<sup>460</sup> The Coalition report did not specify the date of the interviews or focus groups, nor who or how many people participated.
- 14.9.6 A March 2023 study, published in the peer-reviewed journal BMC Public Health, explored the healthcare-seeking experiences of men who have sex with men (MSM) and transwomen in Rwanda<sup>461</sup>. The study involved 16 MSM and 12 transwomen from 5 districts in Rwanda, using semi-structured in-depth interviews<sup>462</sup>. The study did not specify when the data was collected but stated that participants were recruited between September and October

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<sup>454</sup> Hughes and others, ['Trauma, mental health and health care experiences...'](#) (Method) 2023

<sup>455</sup> Hughes and others, ['Trauma, mental health and health care experiences...'](#) (Method) 2023

<sup>456</sup> Hughes and others, ['Trauma, mental health and health care experiences...'](#) (Intro) 2023

<sup>457</sup> HDI/APHRC, ['Examination of LGBT people's lived experiences...'](#) (page 16), May 2022

<sup>458</sup> OHCHR, ['Shadow Report to the Fifth Periodic Report of Rwanda \[CESCR\]'](#) (page 7), January 2023

<sup>459</sup> OHCHR, ['Shadow Report to the Fifth Periodic Report of Rwanda \[CESCR\]'](#) (page 8), January 2023

<sup>460</sup> OHCHR, ['Shadow Report to the Fifth Periodic Report of Rwanda \[CESCR\]'](#) (page 7), January 2023

<sup>461</sup> Isano and others, ['A qualitative study to explore the healthcare-seeking...'](#) March 2023

<sup>462</sup> Isano and others, ['A qualitative study to explore the healthcare-seeking...'](#), (Methods), March 2023

2021<sup>463</sup>. The study did not provide a breakdown of the responses by MSM or transwomen participants. It also did not provide separate analysis of experiences comparing districts or comparing rural and urban areas. It concluded that ‘MSM and TGW [transwomen] in Rwanda continue to face negative experiences within the healthcare delivery settings. These experiences include mistreatment, refusal of care, stigma, and discrimination.’<sup>464</sup>

#### 14.9.7 The study noted that:

‘All respondents reported some negative experiences when seeking care at health facilities and generally were dissatisfied with the care they received.’<sup>465</sup> It identified 4 sub-themes regarding this dissatisfaction: ‘(1) Required services were not available in the health facilities, (2) Healthcare providers refused to offer treatment to MSM and TGW, (3) Healthcare providers could not separate sexuality and gender identity from health conditions, and (4) Healthcare providers violated provider-patient privacy and openly mocked MSM and TGW patients.’<sup>466</sup>

#### 14.9.8 The study also noted:

‘Limited availability of LGBTI + friendly facilities, particularly in rural areas, creates challenges for MSM and TGW in accessing health services. Many participants reported having to travel long distances to seek care from trusted providers, which increased the financial burden...health services dedicated to MSM and TGW persons are limited and are only being offered by a few community organizations and civil society organizations working on the health, rights, and advocacy of LGBTI + persons. Nearly all these organizations are based in Kigali.’<sup>467</sup>

14.9.9 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].’<sup>468</sup> (Podcast transcribed by CPIT)

14.9.10 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

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<sup>463</sup> Isano and others, [‘A qualitative study to explore the healthcare-seeking...’](#), (Methods), March 2023

<sup>464</sup> Isano and others, [‘A qualitative study to explore the healthcare...’](#), (Conclusion), March 2023

<sup>465</sup> Isano and others, [‘A qualitative study to explore the healthcare-seeking...’](#), (Results), March 2023

<sup>466</sup> Isano and others, [‘A qualitative study to explore the healthcare-seeking...’](#), (Results), March 2023

<sup>467</sup> Isano and others, [‘A qualitative study to explore the healthcare-seeking...’](#), (Results), March 2023

<sup>468</sup> Kagaba, A, The Long Form with Sanny Ntayomba, [‘Podcast episode...’](#), 1 May 2023

‘stigma-free services’ across health facilities, and that LGBT persons could be signposted towards stigma-free health providers<sup>469</sup>.

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## 14.10 Employment and education

14.10.1 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 income<sup>470</sup>. 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 transwomen<sup>471</sup>.

14.10.2 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.’<sup>472</sup>

14.10.3 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.’<sup>473</sup>

14.10.4 The ALIGN study asked 160 LGBT respondents, ‘Have you ever 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%)

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<sup>469</sup> Kagaba, A, The Long Form with Sanny Ntayomba, [‘Podcast episode...’](#), 1 May 2023

<sup>470</sup> EATHAN, [‘Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...’](#), (page 24) 2020

<sup>471</sup> EATHAN, [‘Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...’](#), (page 20) 2020

<sup>472</sup> Rwanda Today, [‘Pandemic hits Rwanda’s sexual minorities harder’](#), 16 December 2020

<sup>473</sup> ALIGN, [‘Gender-based violence against LGBTQI people in civil...’](#), (page 5), August 2021

- ‘Other forms of discrimination’ (71%)<sup>474</sup>

- 14.10.5 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-19<sup>475</sup>.
- 14.10.6 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 promotion<sup>476</sup>.
- 14.10.7 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 stigma<sup>477</sup>.
- 14.10.8 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.’<sup>478</sup>

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## 14.11 Housing

- 14.11.1 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.’<sup>479</sup> The source provided no further information on the numbers or dates of incidents.
- 14.11.2 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 orientation<sup>480</sup>.
- 14.11.3 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.’<sup>481</sup> The

<sup>474</sup> ALIGN, ‘[Gender-based violence against LGBTQI people in civil ...](#)’, (page 10), August 2021

<sup>475</sup> HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (pages 13 and 24), May 2022

<sup>476</sup> HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (pages 16 and 17), May 2022

<sup>477</sup> HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (pages 13 and 20), May 2022

<sup>478</sup> OHCHR, ‘[Shadow Report to the Fifth Periodic Report of Rwanda \[CESCR\]](#)’ (page 8), January 2023

<sup>479</sup> Cedoca, ‘[Sexual orientation and gender identity](#)’ (page 16), 30 October 2019

<sup>480</sup> HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (pages 16 and 17), May 2022

<sup>481</sup> OHCHR, ‘[Shadow Report to the Fifth Periodic Report of Rwanda...](#)’ (page 11), January 2023

source provided no further information on the numbers or dates of incidents.

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## 14.12 Civil society support

14.12.1 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.’<sup>482</sup>

14.12.2 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.’<sup>483</sup>

14.12.3 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.’<sup>484</sup>

14.12.4 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.’<sup>485</sup>

14.12.5 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.’<sup>486</sup>

14.12.6 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.’<sup>487</sup>

14.12.7 The FH report 2024 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.’<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> ILGA, ‘[State-sponsored homophobia: global legislation overview ...](#)’ (page 172), December 2020

<sup>483</sup> Rwanda Today, ‘[Pandemic hits Rwanda’s sexual minorities harder](#)’, 16 December 2020

<sup>484</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

<sup>485</sup> Outright International, ‘[The Global State of LGBTIQ Organizing](#)’ (pages 21, 75), September 2023

<sup>486</sup> HDI/APHRC, ‘[Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences...](#)’ (page 26), May 2022

<sup>487</sup> Joint Committee on Human Rights, ‘[Oral evidence: The UK-Rwanda Migration ...](#)’, 8 June 2022

<sup>488</sup> FH ‘[Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda](#)’ (B4) February 2024

See also [Non-governmental organisations](#)

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### 14.13 Organisations supporting LGBTI persons

14.13.1 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.'
- [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.'<sup>489</sup>

14.13.2 Other LGBTI rights organisations (not exhaustive) include:

- [AMAHORO Human Respect](#)

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<sup>489</sup> Laterite, '[Gender and social inclusion assessment](#)' (pages 52 and 53), 11 December 2018

- [Human Rights First Rwanda Association](#)
- [Hope and Care Rwanda](#)
- [Other Sheep Rwanda](#)

14.13.3 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)
- 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 Muhanga<sup>490</sup>

14.13.4 In June 2023, the 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+ community<sup>491</sup>.

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Section updated: 16 April 2024

<sup>490</sup> OHCHR, ‘[Shadow Report to the Fifth Periodic Report of Rwanda \[CESCR\]](#)’ (page 2), January 2023

<sup>491</sup> GIZ, ‘[Equality, not exclusion](#)’, 16 June 2023



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

### 15.1 Maps

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



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15.1.2 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 Kigali<sup>493</sup>.



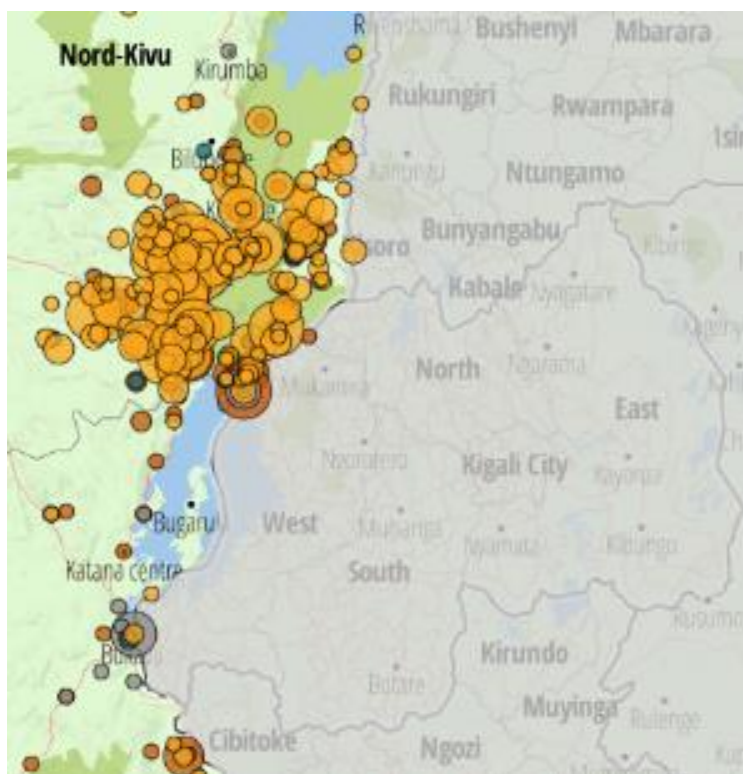
494

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

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

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

- 15.1.3 On 17 January 2024 ACLED provided an interactive dashboard illustrating political violence events in 2023 in DRC. An extract from the map is provided below, showing the location and incidence of events along the border between eastern DRC (green) and Rwanda and Uganda (grey). Orange circles represent battles, red circles represent violence against civilians<sup>495</sup>.



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## 15.2 Conflict in eastern DRC

- 15.2.1 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<sup>496 497</sup>.
- 15.2.2 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 genocide<sup>498</sup>.
- 15.2.3 On 22 February 2024, DW, an online German newspaper, interviewed Kristof Titeca, a conflict researcher at the University of Antwerp, who noted that Rwanda supported M23 for several reasons: to protect its interests in eastern DRC, notably trade of Congolese gold (which is Rwanda's largest

<sup>495</sup> ACLED, '[Conflict Watchlist 2024: Democratic Republic of Congo: Re-elected...](#)', 17 Jan 2024

<sup>496</sup> The New Humanitarian, '[Revived M23 rebellion worsens DR Congo's security ...](#)', 7 July 2022

<sup>497</sup> BBC, '[DR Congo protests: Anti-UN anger rages amid war crime warning](#)', 28 July 2022

<sup>498</sup> ACSS, '[Rwanda and the DRC at Risk of War as New M23 Rebellion Emerges...](#)', 29 June 2022

export) and the threat of FDLR to Rwandan security<sup>499</sup>.

15.2.4 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...

'... 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.'<sup>500</sup>

15.2.5 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)<sup>501</sup>.

15.2.6 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.'<sup>502</sup>

15.2.7 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 border<sup>503</sup>.

15.2.8 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

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<sup>499</sup> DW, '[Why Rwanda supports M23 rebels in DR Congo's conflict](#)', 22 February 2024

<sup>500</sup> ICG, '[East Africa's DR Congo Force: The Case for Caution](#)', 25 August 2022

<sup>501</sup> UN Security Council, '[Letter dated 16 December 2022... S/2022/967](#)' (Annex 53&54), 16 Dec 2022

<sup>502</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 1), 20 March 2023

<sup>503</sup> The New Times, '[Rwanda spokesperson explains Rubavu border incident](#)', 24 October 2023

[eastern DRC] and its surroundings along the Rwandan border mounted the pressure on Goma.<sup>504</sup>

- 15.2.9 DRC was named on the ACLED '[Conflict Watchlist 2024](#)' which noted RDF involvement with the M23 'diminished from February 2023 but surged again in the last quarter of 2023 as fighting resumed...the rising direct confrontations between the FARDC and RDF in late 2023 continue to pose risks for escalation between the two countries.'<sup>505</sup>
- 15.2.10 On 17 February 2024, the US Department of State issued a press release which condemned Rwanda's support for M23 and called on the DRC to cease cooperation with the FDLR<sup>506</sup>.
- 15.2.11 At a UN Security Council meeting on the 20 February 2024, the US representative called on Rwanda to withdraw its forces and missile systems from eastern DRC. The Rwandan speaker refuted this stating that the DRC's support for the FDLR presented a serious threat to Rwanda's security and territorial boundaries<sup>507</sup>.
- 15.2.12 On 2 March 2024 the New Times reported thousands of Congolese refugees in Kiziba camp protested against the killings of Tutsi, Banyamulenge and Hemi communities in eastern DRC. The refugees accused the Congolese government and armed groups like FDLR, Mai Mai, Nyatura and CODECO of committing genocide<sup>508</sup>.
- 15.2.13 On 15 March 2024, a BBC Monitoring article reported that in mid-December South Africa, Tanzania and Malawi sent the first contingent of SAMIDRC, the South African Development Community (SADC) force, which will replace the East African Community Force (EACRF). SAMIDRC will be stationed in and around Goma in a 12-month renewable mandate <sup>509</sup>.

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### 15.3 History and origins of the March 23 Movement (M23)

- 15.3.1 DW, 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...'<sup>510</sup>
- 15.3.2 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

<sup>504</sup> UN Security Council, '[Letter dated 15 December 2023... S/2023/990](#)' (Para 26), 30 Dec 2023

<sup>505</sup> ACLED, '[DRC: Rising Tensions with Rwanda Amid Escalating Violence...](#)', 8 February 2023

<sup>506</sup> USSD, '[Escalation of Hostilities in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo](#)', 17 February 2024

<sup>507</sup> UN Security Council, '[Escalating Violence in Democratic Republic of Congo...](#)', 20 February 2024

<sup>508</sup> The New Times, '[Video: Congolese refugees protest killings of Tutsi...](#)', 4 March 2024

<sup>509</sup> BBC Monitoring, Regional force in 'slow start' in eastern DR Congo – report, 14 March 2024

<sup>510</sup> DW, '[DR Congo: Vague prospects for peace](#)', 15 December 2022

mobilising power draws on the discrimination North Kivu's Tutsis [Banyamulenge] have faced due to their Rwandan roots.'<sup>511</sup>

- 15.3.3 On 31 May 2022, Afro Impact, a Benin-based media site, reported that M23 is '...mainly made up of Congolese Tutsis.'<sup>512</sup>
- 15.3.4 VoA reported that M23 '...claims to fight against persecution of Congolese of Tutsi origin.'<sup>513</sup>
- 15.3.5 The New Humanitarian also reported that: 'UN experts say [M23] has several hundred fighters.'<sup>514</sup>.

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## 15.4 Activities of M23

- 15.4.1 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<sup>515 516</sup>. M23 have been sanctioned by the UN since 2012 and have been accused of abuses against civilians, including abduction, rape and summary executions<sup>517 518 519 520 521</sup>.
- 15.4.2 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.'<sup>522</sup>
- 15.4.3 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.'<sup>523</sup>
- 15.4.4 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]

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<sup>511</sup> The New Humanitarian, '[Revived M23 rebellion worsens DR Congo's security ...](#)', 7 July 2022

<sup>512</sup> Afro Impact, '[DRC-Rwanda conflicts...](#)', 31 May 2022

<sup>513</sup> VoA, '[Rwandan President Threatens to Evict Congolese Refugees](#)', 9 January 2023

<sup>514</sup> The New Humanitarian, '[Revived M23 rebellion worsens DR Congo's security ...](#)', 7 July 2022

<sup>515</sup> The New Humanitarian, '[Revived M23 rebellion worsens DR Congo's security ...](#)', 7 July 2022

<sup>516</sup> Reuters, '[Congo accuses Rwanda of sending disguised troops across border](#)', 9 June 2022

<sup>517</sup> United Nations Security Council, '[M23](#)', no date

<sup>518</sup> HRW, '[DR Congo: Resurgent M23 Rebels Target Civilians](#)', 25 July 2022

<sup>519</sup> UN Security Council, '[Letter dated 16 December 2022... S/2022/967](#)' (Annex 36), 16 Dec 2022

<sup>520</sup> HRW, '[DR Congo: Atrocities by Rwanda-backed M23 rebels](#)', 6 February 2023

<sup>521</sup> HRW, '[DR Congo: Killings, Rapes by Rwanda-Backed M23 Rebels](#)', 13 June 2023

<sup>522</sup> Reuters, '[Congo accuses Rwanda of sending disguised troops across border](#)', 9 June 2022

<sup>523</sup> Reuters, '[Congo says Rwandan forces supported latest rebel attacks...](#)', 13 June 2022

crossed the border in the zones occupied by the enemy.<sup>524</sup>

- 15.4.5 The DRC has accused Rwanda of backing M23, which the Rwandan government denied<sup>525</sup>. 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 findings<sup>526</sup>. 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.'<sup>527</sup>
- 15.4.6 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 2023<sup>528</sup>.
- 15.4.7 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 Masisi<sup>529</sup>.
- 15.4.8 The same report 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.'<sup>530</sup>
- 15.4.9 ACLED's 2024 conflict watchlist profile noted that by the end of 2023 M23 had become the most active non-state armed group in DRC and gained more control of territory than previous years, with M23 violence escalating in the last quarter of 2023<sup>531</sup>.

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## 15.5 Recruitment of children and refugees into regional conflicts

- 15.5.1 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 enlist<sup>532</sup>.
- 15.5.2 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

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<sup>524</sup> Virunga Business Radio, '[DR Congo rebels 'receive Rwanda army reinforcements'](#)', 6 July 2022

<sup>525</sup> The New Humanitarian, '[Revived M23 rebellion worsens DR Congo's security ...](#)', 7 July 2022

<sup>526</sup> UN Security Council, '[Letter dated 16 December 2022... S/2022/967](#)' (Paras 47-51), 16 Dec 2022

<sup>527</sup> UN Security Council, '[Final report... S/2023/431](#)' (page 2), 13 June 2023

<sup>528</sup> UN Security Council, '[Letter dated 15 December 2023... S/2023/990](#)' (Para 28), 30 Dec 2023

<sup>529</sup> UN Security Council, '[Letter dated 15 December 2023... S/2023/990](#)' (Para 30), 30 Dec 2023

<sup>530</sup> UN Security Council, '[Letter dated 15 December 2023... S/2023/990](#)' (Para 27), 30 Dec 2023

<sup>531</sup> ACLED, '[Conflict Watchlist 2024: Democratic Republic of Congo: Re-elected...](#)' 17 Jan 2024

<sup>532</sup> CIA, '[World Factbook: Rwanda](#)' (Military and Security), 8 November 2022

provided by the UN and relates to the armed conflict in the DRC<sup>533</sup>.

|  | <b>Total</b> |
|--|--------------|
| Children recruited during the reporting period | 392          |
| Children abducted during the reporting period  | 730          |

15.5.3 The June 2023 UN report did not specify the home location of the children recruited/abducted. However, the UN's June 2022 report, covering the period January to December 2021, provided information on the location from which children were recruited/abducted. The table below has been compiled by CPIT using data provided by the UN<sup>534</sup>.

|  | <b>Total</b> | <b>Identified cases from outside DRC</b>        |
|--|--------------|---|
| Children recruited during reporting period | 565          | 2 (trafficked into DRC from Burundi and Uganda) |
| Children abducted during reporting period  | 684          | 6 (neighbouring countries – not specified)      |

15.5.4 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.'<sup>535</sup>

15.5.5 The most recent mention of children living in Rwanda 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.'<sup>536</sup>

<sup>533</sup> UN Security Council, '[Children and armed conflict... A/77/895](#)' (pages 9-10), 5 June 2023

<sup>534</sup> UN Security Council, '[Children and armed conflict... A/76/871](#)' (pages 9-11), 23 June 2022

<sup>535</sup> USSD, '[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)' (Trafficking Profile), 15 June 2023

<sup>536</sup> USSD, '[2016 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)' (page 318), June 2016

- 15.5.6 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.’<sup>537</sup> The 2023 USSD TiP report made no reference to the Mahama refugee camp<sup>538</sup>.
- 15.5.7 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<sup>539</sup> <sup>540</sup> <sup>541</sup> <sup>542</sup>.
- 15.5.8 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 mainly Congolese refugees <sup>543</sup> ) by, and on behalf of, M23 <sup>544</sup>                                   |
| 2014       | Reported cases from 2013 of children recruited by, and on behalf of, M23 <sup>545</sup>   |
| 2016       | Reported cases from 2015 of Burundian refugee children recruited from Mahama refugee camp (which houses mainly Burundian refugees) <sup>546</sup> <sup>547</sup> into Burundian armed groups <sup>548</sup> |
| 2023       | The Rwandan government provided material support to, and coordinated with, M23 a non-state armed group that forcibly recruited and used children <sup>549</sup>   |

- 15.5.9 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,

<sup>537</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)’ (Trafficking Profile), 19 July 2022

<sup>538</sup> USSD, ‘[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)’, 15 June 2023

<sup>539</sup> CRS, ‘[Child Soldiers Prevention Act: security assistance restrictions](#)’, 31 October 2022

<sup>540</sup> Stimson, ‘[Tracking CSPA Implementation](#)’, 19 November 2021

<sup>541</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’ (page 51), July 2022

<sup>542</sup> USSD, ‘[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’ (Child Soldiers Prevention Act List), 15 June 2023

<sup>543</sup> UNHCR, ‘[Rwanda: where we work](#)’, 31 August 2022

<sup>544</sup> USSD, ‘[2013 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’, (page 312) June 2013

<sup>545</sup> USSD, ‘[2014 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’, June 2014

<sup>546</sup> UNHCR, ‘[Rwanda: where we work](#)’, 31 August 2022

<sup>547</sup> UNHCR, ‘[Rwanda: Mahama Refugee Camp Profile \(as of 09 April 2021\)](#)’, 5 May 2021

<sup>548</sup> USSD, ‘[2016 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’ (page 318), June 2016

<sup>549</sup> USSD, ‘[2023 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)’, (Prosecution), 15 June 2023



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.<sup>550</sup>

15.5.10 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.’<sup>551</sup>

15.5.11 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’<sup>552</sup> (The split of civilians and RDF soldiers among the 30 recruits was not provided).

15.5.12 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 training<sup>553</sup>.

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## 16. Non-governmental organisations

### 16.1 Legal rights and registration

16.1.1 The Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) is mandated to register and monitor the functioning of both national and international NGOs<sup>554</sup>.

16.1.2 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](#)<sup>555</sup>.

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<sup>550</sup> UN Security Council, ‘[Letter dated 10 June 2022... S/2022/479](#)’ (para 66), 14 June 2022

<sup>551</sup> UN Security Council, ‘[Letter dated 10 June 2022... S/2022/479](#)’ (para 67), 14 June 2022

<sup>552</sup> UN Security Council, ‘[Letter dated 16 December 2022... S/2022/967](#)’ (Annex 28), 16 Dec 2022

<sup>553</sup> UN Security Council, ‘[Letter dated 16 December 2022... S/2022/967](#)’ (Annex 24), 16 Dec 2022

<sup>554</sup> RGB, ‘[Non-governmental organisations](#)’, no date

<sup>555</sup> RGB, ‘[Non-governmental organisations](#)’, no date

16.1.3 [Law No.04/2012 of 17/02/2012](#) governs the organisation and functioning of national NGOs, relevant Articles are summarised in the table<sup>556</sup>.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 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: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. to put forward views in designing national policies and legislation in relation with the functioning of national NGOs</li> <li>2. to advocate, protect and promote human rights and other national values</li> <li>3. to express opinions and views on national policies and legislation</li> </ol> |
| 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.   |

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## 16.2 Operation and restrictions

16.2.1 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

<sup>556</sup> GoR, '[Official Gazette No.15 of 09/04/2012 ...](#)', 17 February 2012

Society Organisations] is significantly conducive.<sup>557</sup>

- 16.2.2 USAID's [Civil Society Organisation \(CSO\) Sustainability Index](#), covering the 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.'<sup>558</sup> As of 5 April 2024, this report – published in November 2022 – remained the most recent report available.
- 16.2.3 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.'<sup>559</sup>
- 16.2.4 The FH report 2024 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.'<sup>560</sup>
- 16.2.5 The BTI 2024 report noted:  
'Over the past years, government intimidation, harassment, obstruction and threats have significantly undermined independent organizations. NGOs and community service organizations (CSOs) are politically and socially marginalized by the government and allowed primarily as a necessary concession to its international reputation and as sources of additional funds. All non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights organizations must become members of the National Civil Society Platform.'<sup>561</sup>
- 16.2.6 The BTI 2024 report also noted:  
'The government restricts and harasses some 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. Transparency International, Lawyers without Borders, and the Rwandan League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights have had their programs shut down or rendered powerless under government pressure.'<sup>562</sup> The 3 organisations mentioned by BTI are the same 3 organisations mentioned in BTI's previous report (published in February 2022)<sup>563</sup>. The BTI report provided no further detail about the date or circumstances of the shutdowns or restrictions.<sup>564</sup>
- 16.2.7 The World Association of Nongovernmental Organizations has a list of [NGO's in Rwanda](#).

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<sup>557</sup> GoR, [UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#) (paragraphs 44 and 45), 4 October 2021

<sup>558</sup> USAID, '[2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: Rwanda](#)' (page 2), November 2022

<sup>559</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 2B), 20 March 2023

<sup>560</sup> FH '[Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda](#)' (D2) February 2024

<sup>561</sup> BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2024](#)', (Effective power to govern), 19 March 2024

<sup>562</sup> BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2024](#)', (Prosecution of office abuse), 19 March 2024

<sup>563</sup> BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)' (Rule of law), 23 February 2022

<sup>564</sup> BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2024](#)', (Prosecution of office abuse), 19 March 2024

## 16.3 NGOs involved with refugees and asylum seekers

16.3.1 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 \(ADRA\)](#):
  - international organisation affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church
  - partners with local communities, organisations and governments to deliver relief and development assistance
  - education and infrastructure and food provision in refugee camps<sup>565 566</sup>
- [Africa Humanitarian Action \(AHA\)](#):
  - international NGO that provides humanitarian relief, recovery and advocacy services
  - currently has three programmes in Rwanda which cover the areas of Kigeme, Kiziba, Mugombwa, Gashora, Kijote, Nyanza, Nyarushishi, Huye and Kigali
  - nutrition – education and counselling services to refugees, programmes for pregnant and lactating women
  - healthcare- provides motherhood services including antenatal care, delivery and postnatal care for refugees residing in Gashora ETM centre
  - livelihood- training for young mothers in refugee camps in hairdressing, tailoring and sewing<sup>567</sup>
- [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
  - healthcare, nutrition, housing, infrastructure, sustainable livelihoods, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) services, water and sanitation<sup>568 569</sup>

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<sup>565</sup> ADRA, '[ADRA Rwanda supports increase of digital learning, ...](#)', 27 January 2022

<sup>566</sup> ADRA, '[Completed projects](#)', no date

<sup>567</sup> AHA, '[Rwanda](#)', no date

<sup>568</sup> Alight Rwanda, '[The post 2020-21](#)', no date

<sup>569</sup> Alight Rwanda, '[Embracing new possibilities](#)', no date

- [Caritas Rwanda](#):
  - an NGO affiliated with the Catholic church which has partnered with GoR as well as international organisations such as USAID and the EU
  - works with refugees in camps providing training for livelihoods, financial support for small businesses, and counselling<sup>570</sup>
- [Center for Rule of Law Rwanda](#) (CERULAR)
  - provider of legal aid services.
  - monitoring of the rule of law and human rights<sup>571</sup>
  - partners with GoR<sup>572</sup>
- [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 camps<sup>573</sup>
- [Humanity and Inclusion](#) (HI):
  - international charity that works with disabled and vulnerable people to help meet their basic needs, improve living conditions and promote respect for their dignity and fundamental rights<sup>574</sup>
  - facilitates access to care and protection for vulnerable people, including people with mental health problems and physical and functional rehabilitation needs for people living in refugee camps
  - provides technical aids such as wheelchairs or canes, as well as psychosocial support.
- [International Committee of the Red Cross](#) (ICRC):
  - helps people affected by conflict, armed violence and promotes the laws that protects victims of war.
  - ICRC works with Rwandan Red Cross to reunite families<sup>575</sup>
- [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 Uganda<sup>576</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> Caritas, '[Rwanda](#)', no date

<sup>571</sup> CERULAR, '[Our Partners](#)', 2 November 2023

<sup>572</sup> CERULAR, '[Program overview](#)', 2 November 2023.

<sup>573</sup> GHDF, '[Home](#)', no date

<sup>574</sup> HI, '[About us](#)' no date

<sup>575</sup> ICRC, '[Rwanda](#)', no date

<sup>576</sup> Kepler, '[Refugee education](#)', no date

- [Legal Aid Forum](#) (LAF):
  - collection of national organisations which provide legal services to vulnerable groups
  - works with GoR and UNHCR<sup>577</sup> to provide legal services to refugees and asylum seekers including civil registration, detention visits, mediation, victim representation, advocacy<sup>578</sup>
- [Prison Fellowship Rwanda](#) (PFR):
  - national NGO set up in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide
  - 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<sup>579 580</sup>
- [Save the Children Rwanda](#):
  - international organisation that has worked in Rwanda since 1994 in partnership with GoR and local stakeholders. Focuses on education, child protection, child rights governance and health and nutrition in humanitarian and development contexts<sup>581</sup>
- [World Vision](#):
  - global Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation which provides support for children, families and communities affected by poverty and injustice, irrespective of religion, race, ethnicity or gender
  - World Vision Rwanda partnered with other organisations to provide aid in the form of water and hygiene resources for over 20,000 asylum seekers<sup>582</sup>
- [Sustainable Development & Humanitarian Action](#) (SDHA):
  - a Rwandan NGO founded by volunteers providing support and humanitarian relief in disasters and for refugees and the vulnerable<sup>583</sup>.

See also the section NGOs providing health services in the [Country Information Note Rwanda: Medical and healthcare](#)

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## 17. Religious groups

### 17.1 Legal rights

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<sup>577</sup> LAF, [Our Partners](#), no date

<sup>578</sup> LAF, [‘About us’](#), no date

<sup>579</sup> Umurimo, [‘Gikondo community center manager’](#), 22 December 2019

<sup>580</sup> Borgen Project, [‘Restorative justice and the Rwandan genocide’](#), 11 March 2021

<sup>581</sup> Save the Children, [‘About us’](#), no date

<sup>582</sup> World Vision, [‘Rwanda’](#), no date

<sup>583</sup> SDHA, [‘About us’](#), no date

- 17.1.1 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.’<sup>584</sup>
- 17.1.2 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).’<sup>585</sup>
- 17.1.3 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.’<sup>586</sup> The same source also observed that there were reports that the government pressured religious leaders to refrain from speaking out against government policies<sup>587</sup>.
- 17.1.4 In 2020, the government amended the law to allow Jehovah’s Witnesses to take up employment as civil servants and teachers without the need to swear an oath of allegiance to the country (a requirement which conflicted with their beliefs)<sup>588</sup>.

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## 17.2 Places of worship

- 17.2.1 A search using Google Maps on 27 November 2023 showed the location of mosques, most of which are centred around Kigali. Google Maps uses a variety of data and is updated regularly from sources including satellite imagery, information from Google Maps users and local business owners<sup>589</sup>. Therefore, the currency and accuracy of the information may vary, but CPIT has sought to verify the information through other sources where possible (see below).

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<sup>584</sup> GoR, ‘[Constitution](#)’ (Article 37), 24 December 2015

<sup>585</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 report on international religious freedom: Rwanda](#)’, (section 2), 15 May 2023

<sup>586</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 report on international religious freedom: Rwanda](#)’, (section 2), 15 May 2023

<sup>587</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 report on international religious freedom: Rwanda](#)’, (section 2), 15 May 2023

<sup>588</sup> USSD, ‘[2020 report on international religious freedom: Rwanda](#)’ (Section 2), 12 May 2021

<sup>589</sup> Google Maps, ‘[9 things to know about Google's maps data: Beyond the Map](#)’, 1 October 2019





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.’<sup>596</sup>

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### 17.3 Treatment

17.3.1 For information on demography, see [Demography and language](#)

17.3.2 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 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.’<sup>597</sup>

17.3.3 The US OSAC reported in February 2022: ‘Religious and ethnic violence are not significant issues in Rwanda.’<sup>598</sup>

17.3.4 The FH report 2024 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.’<sup>599</sup>

17.3.5 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 2022<sup>600</sup>.

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## 18. Persons with disabilities

### 18.1 Legal and policy framework

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<sup>596</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 report on international religious freedom: Rwanda](#)’ (Govt practices), 15 May 2023

<sup>597</sup> USSD, ‘[2021 report on international religious freedom: Rwanda](#)’ (Section II), 2 June 2022

<sup>598</sup> OSAC, ‘[Rwanda country security report](#)’, 9 February 2022

<sup>599</sup> FH ‘[Freedom in the World 2024 – Rwanda](#)’ (D2) February 2024

<sup>600</sup> USCIRF, ‘[2023 Annual Report](#)’ (page 74), April 2023

- 18.1.1 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.’<sup>601</sup>
- 18.1.2 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)<sup>602</sup>
  - Law No. 01/2007 (relating to the protection of persons with disabilities in general)<sup>603</sup>
  - Law No. 71/2018 (protection of the rights of the child with specific protection for children with disabilities)<sup>604</sup>
- 18.1.3 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 persons<sup>605</sup>.
- 18.1.4 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.’<sup>606</sup>
- 18.1.5 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.’<sup>607</sup>

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## 18.2 Treatment and access to services and assistance

- 18.2.1 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.’<sup>608</sup>
- 18.2.2 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”.’<sup>609</sup>

<sup>601</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

<sup>602</sup> GoR, ‘[Constitution](#)’, 24 December 2015

<sup>603</sup> GoR, ‘[Law No 01/2007 relating to protection of disabled persons in general](#)’, 21 May 2007

<sup>604</sup> GoR, ‘[Law No.71/2018 of 31/08/2018 relating to the protection of the child](#)’, 10 September 2018

<sup>605</sup> NCPD, ‘[Mission of NCPD](#)’, no date

<sup>606</sup> MINALOC, ‘[National policy of persons with disabilities and four year ...](#)’ (page xiv), May 2021

<sup>607</sup> MINALOC, ‘[National policy of persons with disabilities and four year ...](#)’ (page 2), May 2021

<sup>608</sup> USSD, ‘[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 6), 20 March 2023

<sup>609</sup> NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2021 to June 2022](#)’ (page 38), September 2022

- 18.2.3 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 persons without a disability<sup>610</sup>.
- 18.2.4 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.’<sup>611</sup>
- 18.2.5 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 the enrolment of children with disabilities was lower than the enrolment of children without disabilities<sup>612 613 614</sup>.
- 18.2.6 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 disability<sup>615</sup>.
- 18.2.7 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.’<sup>616</sup> There was no reference to special needs education schools in the 2022 NCHR annual report.
- 18.2.8 The GoR’s national report, submitted in November 2020 as part of the UPR noted that 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 insurance<sup>617</sup>.

See also the section on Safeguarding in the [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Asylum system](#). For information on healthcare services see [Country Information Note – Rwanda: Medical and healthcare](#)

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## 19. Migrants

- 19.1.1 The 2022 Population and Housing Census recorded 366,794 foreign-born people residing in Rwanda, with 109,596 living in the City of Kigali<sup>618</sup>.

<sup>610</sup> MFEP and NISR, ‘[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)’ (Table 56), Feb 2023

<sup>611</sup> ICRC, ‘[Annual Report 2022](#)’ (page 125), 29 June 2023

<sup>612</sup> UNHRC, ‘[National report submitted in accordance with paragraph ...](#)’ (page 14), 9 November 2020

<sup>613</sup> GoR, ‘[Tenth Periodic Report of the Republic of Rwanda on the ...](#)’ (page 27), May 2021

<sup>614</sup> MINALOC, ‘[National policy of persons with disabilities and four year ...](#)’ (page 5), May 2021

<sup>615</sup> MFEP and NISR, ‘[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)’ (Table 57), Feb 2023

<sup>616</sup> NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2020 to June 2021](#)’ (page 138), September 2021

<sup>617</sup> UNHRC, ‘[National report submitted in accordance with paragraph ...](#)’ (page 14), 9 November 2020

<sup>618</sup> MFEP and NISR, ‘[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)’ (Table 30), Feb 2023

Foreign-born residents therefore made up approximately 2.8% of the total population of 13.2 million (see [Demography and language](#)).

19.1.2 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 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.'<sup>619</sup>

19.1.3 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)<sup>620</sup>.

19.1.4 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.'<sup>621</sup>

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## 20. Ethnic groups

20.1.1 Protection from discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, ancestry, clan, race or region is set out in Article 16 of the Constitution<sup>622</sup>.

20.1.2 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 persons<sup>623</sup>.

20.1.3 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.'<sup>624</sup> See also

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<sup>619</sup> IOM, '[Republic of Rwanda profile 2021: Migration governance indicators](#)' (page 17), 1 June 2021

<sup>620</sup> IOM, '[Republic of Rwanda profile 2021: Migration governance indicators](#)' (page 12), 1 June 2021

<sup>621</sup> OHCHR, '[In Dialogue with Rwanda, Committee on the Rights of Migrant ...](#)', 28 September 2021

<sup>622</sup> GoR, '[Constitution](#)', 24 December 2015

<sup>623</sup> USSD, '[2022 Country reports on human rights practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

<sup>624</sup> UNHRC, '[Working group on the UPR 37<sup>th</sup> session, compilation ...](#)' (para 95), 13 November 2020

## [Demography and language](#)

- 20.1.4 The 2022 Population and Housing Census contained no questions on ethnic group<sup>625</sup>.

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## 21. Umuganda (community work)

### 21.1 Background

- 21.1.1 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.’<sup>626</sup>

- 21.1.2 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.’<sup>627</sup>

- 21.1.3 A February 2022 research paper published by the European University 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.’<sup>628</sup>

- 21.1.4 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

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<sup>625</sup> MFEP and NISR, ‘[Fifth Rwanda population and housing census 2022...](#)’ (Annex 3), Feb 2023

<sup>626</sup> BBC, ‘[The most inviting city in Africa?](#)’, 6 January 2020

<sup>627</sup> Rwanda Basic Education Board, ‘[Unit 7: national duties and obligations](#)’, no date

<sup>628</sup> EUI, ‘[National reconciliation in Rwanda: experiences and lessons ...](#)’ (page 14), 28 February 2022

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.<sup>629</sup>

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## 21.2 Law

21.2.1 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.'<sup>630</sup>

21.2.2 [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 law<sup>631</sup>.

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## 21.3 Requirement to participate

21.3.1 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.'<sup>632</sup>

21.3.2 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] spoke to about it is in favour of the nation-wide ritual of pitching in.'<sup>633</sup>

21.3.3 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.'<sup>634</sup>

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## 21.4 Non-participation

21.4.1 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%)<sup>635</sup>. CPIT was not able to identify more recent statistics in the sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)).

21.4.2 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

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<sup>629</sup> Rwanda Today, '[Umuganda back after 2-year break as Covid cases drop](#)', 8 April 2022

<sup>630</sup> UNDP, '[Rwanda National Human Development Report 2018, Policy ...](#)' (page 53), November 2020

<sup>631</sup> GoR, '[Prime Minister's Order N°58/03 of 24/08/2009...](#)', 16 November 2009

<sup>632</sup> Rwanda Basic Education Board, '[Unit 7: national duties and obligations](#)', no date

<sup>633</sup> BBC, '[The most inviting city in Africa?](#)', 6 January 2020

<sup>634</sup> EUI, '[National reconciliation in Rwanda: experiences and lessons ...](#)' (page 14), 28 February 2022

<sup>635</sup> RGB, '[Impact assessment of umuganda 2007 to 2016](#)' (page 6), October 2017

the level of attendance at Umuganda. A nationwide average of 69% were not satisfied with attendance levels, the figure for Kigali city was 76%<sup>636</sup>.

21.4.3 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 [£3.32<sup>637</sup>]... not a small sum when average income is about [US]\$150 [£122.01<sup>638</sup>] 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.’<sup>639</sup>

21.4.4 [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.’<sup>640</sup>

21.4.5 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 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.’<sup>641</sup>

21.4.6 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.’<sup>642</sup>

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## 21.5 Refugees and asylum seekers

21.5.1 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

<sup>636</sup> RGB, [‘Impact assessment of umuganda 2007 to 2016’](#) (page 30), October 2017

<sup>637</sup> Xe.com, [‘5,000 RWF to GBP - Convert Rwandan Francs to British Pounds’](#), 9 November 2023

<sup>638</sup> Xe.com, [‘150 USD to GBP - Convert US Dollars to British Pounds’](#), 9 November 2023

<sup>639</sup> NPR, [‘How Rwanda tidied up its streets \(and the rest of the country, too\)’](#), 18 July 2018

<sup>640</sup> GoR, [‘Prime Minister's Order N°58/03 of 24/08/2009...’](#) (Article 28), 16 November 2009

<sup>641</sup> NPR, [‘How Rwanda tidied up its streets \(and the rest of the country, too\)’](#), 18 July 2018

<sup>642</sup> BBC, [‘UK asylum deal: Is Rwanda a land of safety or fear?’](#), 14 April 2022

Umuganda...<sup>643</sup>

21.5.2 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.'<sup>644</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> UNHCR, '[Refugee policy review framework country summary as at 30 ...](#)' (page 3), 10 March 2022

<sup>644</sup> UNHCR, '[Rwanda country refugee response plan Jan to Dec 2021](#)' (page 13), 19 April 2021



# 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](#).

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# Version control and feedback

## Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **3.0**
- valid from **24 April 2024**

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## 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](#).

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## 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](#).

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