



Home Office

Review of asylum processing

Rwanda: country information on general human rights

Version 1.0

May 2022

Preface

Purpose

Country policy and information notes (CPINs) provide country of origin information (COI) on the most common and/or more complex issues arising in protection claims in the UK. We currently have around 150 published on the [Gov.Uk](https://www.gov.uk) website covering around 40 countries.

CPINs include information from a wide range of sources including media outlets; local, national and international organisations; and the Foreign, and Commonwealth and Development Office.

Where possible, we conduct primary research in countries of origin to fill information gaps we have identified through data analysis which cannot be addressed through desk-based research.

In addition to background information obtained from a range of sources, they also include relevant caselaw and the Country policy and information team's (CPIT) general assessment of the key aspects of the refugee status determination process (that is risk, availability of protection, possibility of internal relocation, and whether the claim is likely to be certified as 'clearly unfounded').

This note provides objective country information about general human rights issues considered relevant to the topic. However, it is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It must be read in conjunction with the assessment and separate country information reports:

- Review of asylum processing Rwanda: assessment
- Review of asylum processing Rwanda: country information on the asylum system; and
- Review of asylum processing Rwanda: notes of interviews

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Review

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable, and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We are therefore committed to reviewing the assessment, and the underlying evidence on which it is based, during 2022.

Gathering and presentation of country information

The country information 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 its relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency, and traceability.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All the open-source country information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available. 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 country information is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate and balanced. It is compared and contrasted where appropriate so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture is provided 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.

Feedback

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](#).

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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Country information on general human rights in Rwanda

Note: This note does not contain the Home Office's assessment of the human rights situation in Rwanda, neither is it intended to be an exhaustive survey of this particular subject or theme. It contains quotes from material written by a range of sources. The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

It is part of the objective evidence base for the Home Office's assessment of whether Rwanda is a 'safe third country' (in line with paragraph 345B of the immigration rules), which is set out in the [Review of asylum processing - Rwanda – Assessment](#).

Section 1 updated: 24 March 2022

1. Human rights overview

1.1 Human rights indicators

1.1.1 The following tables provide two key human rights indicators^{1 2}

Indicator	Regional average (sub-saharan Africa)	Rwanda value	Rwanda regional ranking (out of 49)
Women political empowerment index (Measures the extent to which women are politically empowered) (Scored 0-1, higher values indicate greater female empowerment)	0.69	0.79	15th
Women civil liberties index (Measures women's ability to make meaningful decisions in key areas of their lives, including freedom of domestic movement, right to private property, freedom from forced labor, and access to justice) (Scored 0-1, higher values indicate greater civil liberties for women)	0.59	0.66	23rd
Freedom of association index (Measures the extent to which parties, including opposition parties, are allowed to form and to participate in elections, and the extent to which CSOs are able to form and operate freely) (Scored 0-1, higher values indicate greater freedom of association)	0.61	0.25	45th

¹ USAID, '[Country dashboard Rwanda](#)', no date

² Institute for Economics and Peace, '[Global Peace Index 2021](#)' (page 20), June 2021

Indicator	Regional average (sub-saharan Africa)	Rwanda value	Rwanda regional ranking (out of 49)
Political liberties index (Measures the extent to which political liberties - freedom of association and freedom of expression - are respected) (Scored 0-1, higher values indicate greater respect for political liberties)	0.63	0.28	44th
Physical violence index (Measures the extent to which physical integrity - freedom from political killings and torture by the government - is respected) (Scored 0-1, higher values indicate greater respect for physical integrity)	0.58	0.12	47th
Violence against civilians (total number of fatalities in 2020) (Civilian fatalities resulting from events where an organised armed group inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants)	272	12	23 rd (out of 37)
Freedom of religion (Measures the extent to which individuals have the right to choose a religion, change religion, and practice their religion without being subject to restrictions) (Zero is average, higher is better)	0.97	0.41	40th
World Press Freedom Index (Measures the overall press freedom environment in a country, taking into account: pluralism, media independence, environment and self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency, infrastructure, and abuses) (Scored 0-100, lower scores indicate greater press freedom)	37.22	50.66	23rd
Rule of Law Index (Measures the extent to which 4 universal principles are upheld: (1) Government and individuals are accountable under the law. (2) Laws are just, applied evenly and protect fundamental rights. (3) The processes by which the laws are enacted, administered, and enforced are accessible, fair, and efficient. (4) Delivery of justice is timely and by competent, ethical, and independent representatives) (Scored 0-1, higher values indicate stronger rule of law)	0.46	0.62	1st (out of 33)
Global Peace Index (A compilation of 23 indicators which measure the state of peace across three domains: (1) Societal safety and security. (2) Ongoing domestic and international conflict. (3) Degree of Militarisation) (Scored 1-5, lower scores indicate greater level of peace)	2.263	2.028	16 th (out of 44)

- 1.1.2 The World Justice Project's "Rule of Law Index" 2021 performance report³ ranked Rwanda as 1st out of 33 regionally and 42nd of 139 globally on the rule of law³. The Rwanda page of the report is replicated in the two graphics below.

Rwanda

Region: Sub-Saharan Africa

Income Group: Low

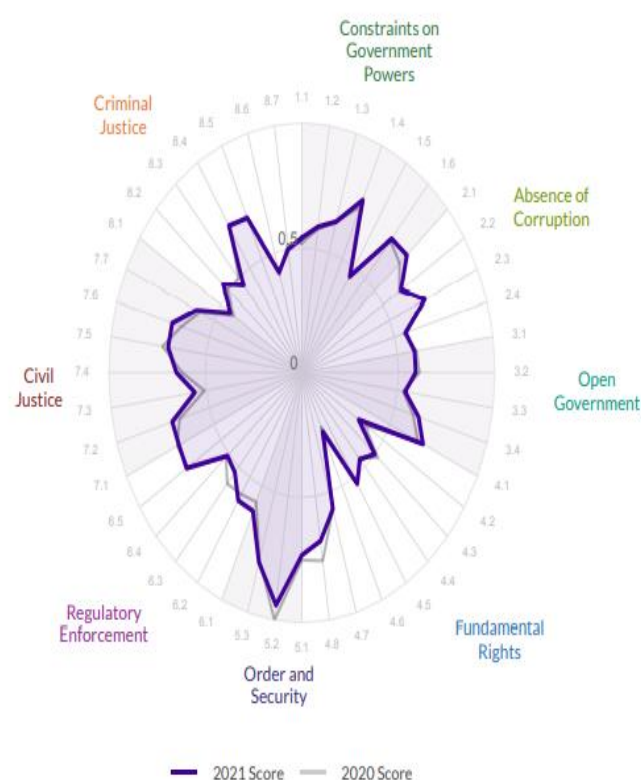
The scores range from 0 to 1, where 1 signifies the highest possible score and 0 signifies the lowest possible score.

Overall Score	Regional Rank	Income Rank	Global Rank
0.62	1/33	1/18	42/139
Score Change	Rank Change		
0.00	2▲		

	Factor Score	Score Change	Regional Rank	Income Rank	Global Rank
 Constraints on Government Powers	0.62	0.01	4/33	1/18	42/139
 Absence of Corruption	0.65	0.02	1/33	1/18	40/139
 Open Government	0.59	0.00	2/33	1/18	46/139
 Fundamental Rights	0.50	-0.01	14/33	7/18	90/139
 Order and Security	0.82	-0.02	1/33	1/18	33/139
 Regulatory Enforcement	0.59	0.00	3/33	1/18	41/139
 Civil Justice	0.66	0.02	1/33	1/18	31/139
 Criminal Justice	0.53	0.00	4/33	1/18	48/139

* Indicates statistically significant change at the 10 percent level

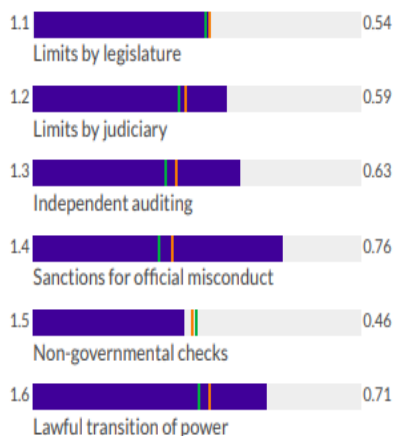
Low Medium High



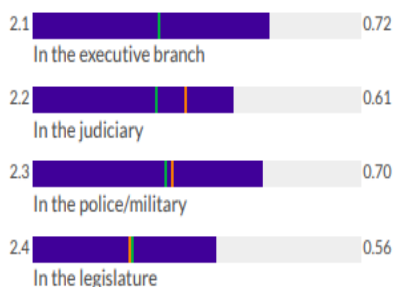
³ WJP, 'Rule of Law Index' 2021 performance report', 2021

■ Rwanda ■ Sub-Saharan Africa ■ Low

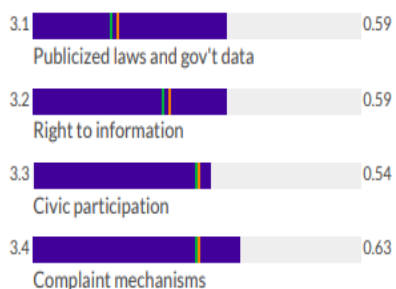
Constraints on Government Powers



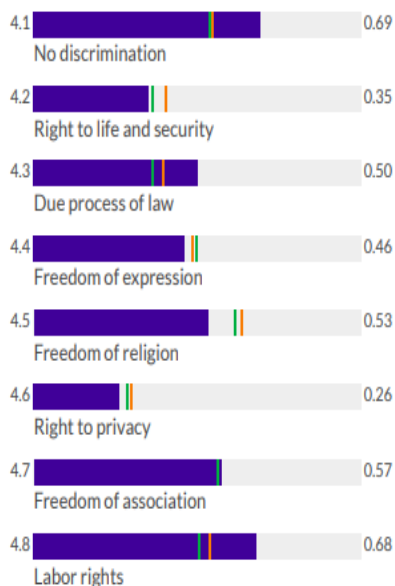
Absence of Corruption



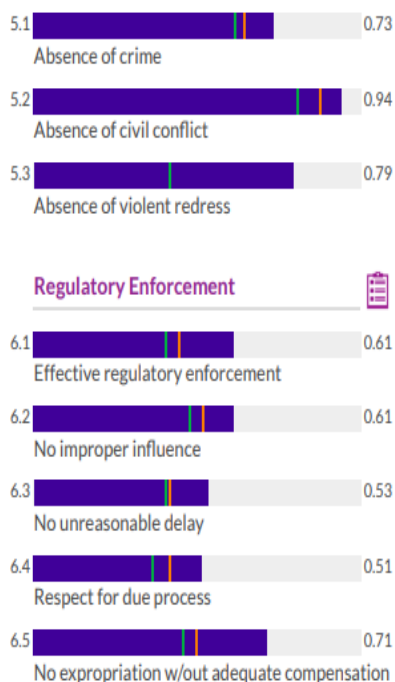
Open Government



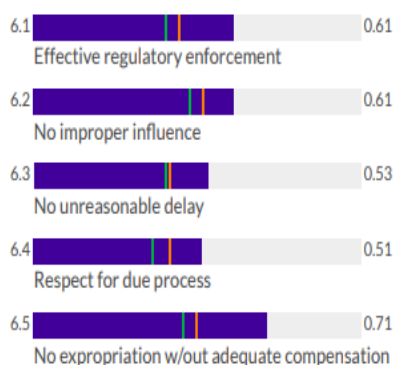
Fundamental Rights



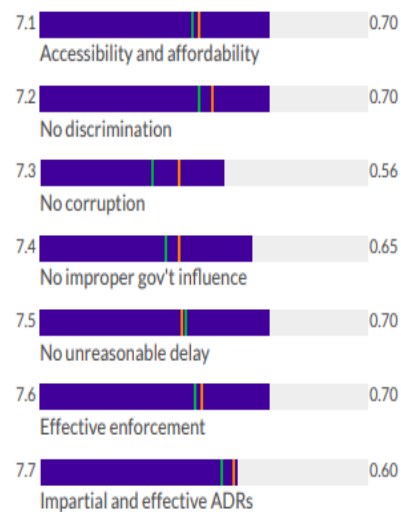
Order and Security



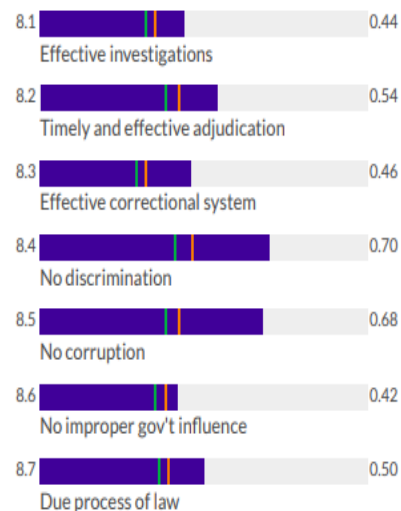
Regulatory Enforcement



Civil Justice



Criminal Justice



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1.2 Human rights instruments

- 1.2.1 There are 9 core international human rights instruments, of which Rwanda is a state party to 8^{4,5}.

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
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

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Section 2 updated: 24 March 2022

2. Political context

- 2.1.1 Freedom House noted in its Freedom in the World Report 2022, reporting on 2021 events, that, 'The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), led by President Paul Kagame, has ruled the country since 1994, when it ousted forces responsible for that year's genocide and ended a civil war.'. It also noted that the regime has maintained stability and economic growth' ⁶.
- 2.1.2 The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2022 on Rwanda, covering the period 1 February 2019 to 31 January 2021, noted in its Executive summary 'Rwanda continued to enjoy political stability and general security, low levels of corruption with liberal legal frameworks in place. The ruling Rwanda Patriotic Front Party continued to dominate the country with robust authority and tight control over civil society. These factors along with Rwanda's weak opposition indicate that significant political and social unrest remains unlikely in the foreseeable future. [...].'⁷
- 2.1.3 USAid, on its website describing its activities in the country and the general context in which it operates, noted 'Rwanda has made remarkable progress in developing its governance structures, maintaining security, promoting reconciliation and strengthening the justice system.' However, the same

⁴ OHCHR, '[The Core International Human Rights Instruments and their monitoring bodies](#)', no date

⁵ OHCHR, '[Status of ratification interactive dashboard](#)', no date

⁶ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2022](#)' (Overview), 28 February 2022

⁷ BTI, '[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)' (Executive summary), 23 February 2022

report noted that ‘Despite this progress, significant challenges in democracy, human rights and governance remain.’⁸

2.1.4 The 2020 Global Law and Order report (produced by the polling company Gallup) scored Rwanda at 80 out of 100, higher than the regional average (67). It presented the results from their latest measurements of people’s answers to 4 questions, based on interviews with nearly 175,000 adults in 144 countries and areas in 2019. The 4 questions were:

- 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?⁹

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Section 3 updated: 24 March 2022

3. Political opposition

3.1 Political opposition: general context

3.1.1 The USSD 2020 report noted ‘Significant human rights issues included... political prisoners or detainees ... and restrictions on political participation.’¹⁰

3.1.2 Freedom House noted in its Freedom in the World Report 2022, reporting on 2021 events, that ‘The government has a long history of repressing its political opponents, and members of opposition parties face the threat of disappearance, arbitrary arrest and detention, and assassination.’¹¹ However, the report does not appear to provide a sense of the scale and/or extent of each of these measures.

3.1.3 The Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI) 2022 on Rwanda, covering the period 1 February 2019 to 31 January 2021, noted in its Executive summary ‘There is generally very little room for power-sharing, an independent and vital civil society and freedom of expression.’¹²

3.1.4 Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported, in its World Report 2022 covering 2021 events, that ‘The ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) continued to stifle dissenting and critical voices and to target those perceived as a threat to the government and their family members. The space for political opposition, civil society, and media remained closed.’¹³ In an update in March 2022, HRW’s assessment of the space for opposition appeared to soften from ‘closed’ to ‘weak’: HRW stated: ‘Rwanda has very few opposition

⁸ USAid, ‘[Democracy, Human Rights and Governance](#)’, April 2022

⁹ Gallup, ‘[2020 Global Law and Order Report](#)’ (pages 7 and 16), 2020

¹⁰ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’, (page 2), 30 March 2021

¹¹ Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2022](#)’ (B1), 28 February 2022

¹² BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Executive summary), 23 February 2022

¹³ HRW, ‘[World Report 2022 – Rwanda](#)’, 13 January 2022

parties, and human rights organizations and independent media remain weak.’¹⁴

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3.2 Freedom of assembly and association

3.2.1 A website on laws on the right to peaceful assembly, managed by the Centre for Human Rights of the University of Pretoria, referred to the laws (international, regional and domestic) that Rwanda was party to:

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

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

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

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

‘The 1991 Law on Public Demonstrations and Public Gatherings is the primary legislation governing assembly. Article 5 of the Law requires notification to the authorities of an assembly 30 days in advance. The authorities must respond at least six days before the assembly. There is no exception made for spontaneous demonstrations, and there is no specific provision to address counter-demonstrations.’¹⁵

3.2.2 The BTI 2022 report noted ‘Civil rights are codified by law, but not respected and protected. There are tight restrictions on freedom of speech, press, assembly and association.... ‘Programs run by Transparency International, Lawyers without Borders and the Rwandan League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights were shut down or became powerless under government pressure.’¹⁶. The BTI 2022 report added ‘The constitution guarantees freedom 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 rarely are accorded the rights to exercise freedom of assembly.’¹⁷

3.2.3 The USSD human rights report for 2020 noted that the government limited freedom of association, adding, ‘Although the government generally granted licenses to private organizations, it impeded the formation of political parties, restricted political party activities...’¹⁸. It also pointed to ‘... overly restrictive nongovernmental organization laws...’¹⁹

¹⁴ HRW, [‘Rwanda: Wave of Free Speech Prosecutions’](#), 16 March 2022

¹⁵ Laws on The Right of Peaceful Assembly, [‘Rwanda’](#), no date

¹⁶ BTI, [‘Rwanda Country Report 2022’](#) (Rule of law), 23 February 2022

¹⁷ BTI, [‘Rwanda Country Report 2022’](#) (Political participation), 23 February 2022

¹⁸ USSD, [‘2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda’](#) (section 2b), 30 March 2021

¹⁹ USSD, [‘2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda’](#), (page 2), 30 March 2021

See also [Operation of non-governmental organisations.](#)

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3.3 Freedom of speech

3.3.1 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: 'The UK is pleased that Rwanda fully supports our recommendation to protect and enable journalists to work freely, without fear of retribution, and ensure that State authorities comply with the access to information law. This is an important step to promote freedom of speech, including allowing space for critical voices.'²⁰

3.3.2 The USSD human rights report for 2020 stated that:

'There were no official restrictions on individuals' right to criticize the government publicly or privately on policy implementation and other issues, 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 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.'²¹

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3.4 Political opposition: registration and operation of political parties

3.4.1 Freedom House noted:

'The RPF has ruled Rwanda without interruption since 1994, banning and repressing any opposition group that could mount a serious challenge to its leadership. All registered parties currently belong to the NCFPO [National Consultative Forum for Political Organizations (NCFPO), a public body meant to promote political consensus]. While the DGPR [Democratic Green Party of Rwanda] won two parliamentary seats in 2018, current conditions generally prevent it from gaining further positions of authority or increasing its support to the point where it can viably compete with the RPF.'²²

3.4.2 Freedom House noted, 'The government-controlled Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) is responsible for registering political parties.'²³ 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 least five (5) people having their domicile in each district.'²⁴

²⁰ FCDO, '[UN Human Rights Council: Universal Periodic Review Adoption – Rwanda](#)', 8 July 2021

²¹ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 2a), 30 March 2021

²² Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2022](#)' (B2), 28 February 2022

²³ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2022](#)' (B1), 28 February 2022

²⁴ RGB, '[Political organisations](#)', no date

- 3.4.3 Freedom House argued that ‘In practice it can deny registration at its discretion without proper justification.’²⁵ HRW gave an illustrative example of this in respect of the 2017 presidential elections, ‘... independent candidates, Diana Rwigara and Gilbert Mwenedata, said that they had fulfilled eligibility requirements of 600 signatures supporting their candidacy, including 12 from each of the 30 districts. But the National Electoral Commission rejected their efforts to register, claiming that many of the signatures were invalid.’²⁶
- 3.4.4 The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC)’s Stakeholders’ Submissions report, published November 2020, in contributions from various NGOs²⁷ 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. JS7 stated that the 2017 election had taken place in a context of closed political space.’²⁸
- 3.4.5 The BTI 2022 report provided detail about the electoral system²⁹ and explained that:
- ‘There are no more relevant actors to contest the current authoritarian rule. The president is formally and de facto the most powerful actor. Possible opponents of the power base are co-opted or coerced into the system so that they have no actual influence on decision-making. If they become too outspoken or are simply no longer useful to the system, they are removed. ... The inclusion of two new parties in the last parliamentary elections took place because it did not pose any threat to the power of the system, although it is significant that the Democratic Green Party – which the government had previously tried to thwart – secured its first ever parliamentary seats in the 2017 elections.’³⁰

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3.5 Political opposition: reported treatment of opponents

- 3.5.1 In the context of the 2017 election, the Summary of Stakeholders’ submission to UNHRC noted ‘Opposition candidates had reported harassment, threats, and intimidation. Government authorities had arrested, forcibly disappeared, or threatened political opponents.’³¹
- 3.5.2 Freedom House reported that ‘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.’³²

²⁵ Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2022](#)’ (B1), 28 February 2022

²⁶ HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Politically Closed Elections](#)’, 18 August 2017

²⁷ UN Human Rights Council, ‘[Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions](#)’ (page 10 to 12), 16 Nov 2020

²⁸ UN Human Rights Council, ‘[Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions](#)’ (page 6), 16 Nov 2020

²⁹ BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Political participation), 23 February 2022

³⁰ BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Stability of institutions), 23 February 2022

³¹ UN Human Rights Council, ‘[Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions](#)’ (page 6), 16 Nov 2020

³² Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2022](#)’ (B1), 28 February 2022

- 3.5.3 The IRB also provided examples of past critics of the government, as well as family members of opponents, who had been targeted by the authorities³³, including Paul Rusesabagina, brought to recognition in the film *Hotel Rwanda*, which portrayed his life-saving actions during the Rwandan genocide^{34 35}.
- 3.5.4 Freedom House also cited the case of ‘Innocent Bahati, a poet known for reciting his social commentary on YouTube, went missing in February 2021; his location and condition remained unknown at year’s end.’³⁶
- 3.5.5 HRW’s World Report 2022, covering 2021 events, added ‘Arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and torture in official and unofficial detention facilities was commonplace, and fair trial standards were routinely flouted in cases deemed sensitive.’³⁷
- 3.5.6 The BTI 2022 report argued that ‘The regime has sufficient legal and forceful means to silence any open critics.’³⁸ and noted, ‘Critics and opponents considered dangerous by the regime are prosecuted on fabricated charges of genocide revisionism, corruption, terrorism and immoral behavior. The judiciary is the tool by which the government perpetuates authoritarian rule by prosecuting opponents and critics of the state.’³⁹
- 3.5.7 In March 2022, HRW published an update on the ‘politically motivated prosecutions’ of opposition members, journalists, and social media commentators and stated: ‘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.’⁴⁰
- 3.5.8 In contrast to sources reporting on the repression of political opponents, a submission by the Rwandan Government’s Ministry of Justice to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group on 25 January 2021 defended its position and 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. That said Government is always open to frankly engage even on perceptions so that whatever lies at the base of a perception is addressed as appropriate.’⁴¹

³³ IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...](#)’, 26 August 2021

³⁴ BBC News, ‘[Paul Rusesabagina: From Hotel Rwanda hero to convicted...](#)’, 20 September 2021

³⁵ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’, (page 8-9), 30 March 2021

³⁶ Freedom House, ‘[Freedom in the World 2022](#)’ (D4), 28 February 2022

³⁷ HRW, ‘[World Report 2022 – Rwanda](#)’, 13 January 2022

³⁸ BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Political participation), 23 February 2022

³⁹ BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Rule of law), 23 February 2022

⁴⁰ HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Wave of free speech prosecutions](#)’, 16 March 2022

⁴¹ Ministry of Justice, ‘[Introduction to the third Universal Periodic...](#)’ (page 7), 25 January 2021

- 3.5.9 The BTI 2022 report noted ‘Political opponents are often targeted and those who engage in targeting are never prosecuted. Nor are the cases investigated. There have been accusations of the police torturing people in so-called safe houses across Kigali. Despite the outcry over their existence, the government has never admitted they exist or addressed the violations committed in them.’⁴²
- 3.5.10 The USSD report noted: ‘There were also reports the government failed to follow through on its obligation to conduct full, timely, and transparent investigations of killings of political opponents’, and cited the example of the March 2019 killing of Anselme Mutuyimana, a member of the unregistered United Democratic Forces-Inkingi (FDU-Inkingi) opposition party⁴³.
- 3.5.11 HRW’s World Report 2022, covering 2021 events, added ‘Several high-profile critics, including opposition members and commentators using social media or YouTube to express themselves, went missing, were arrested or threatened.’⁴⁴ The same report highlighted the case of Victoire Ingabire and set out she ‘was the president of the unregistered opposition party FDU-Inkingi before founding Dalfa-Umurinzi in November 2019, was released from prison in 2018. Members of her party have repeatedly been harassed, threatened, and arrested, or have died or disappeared in suspicious circumstances. Since October 2021, at least eight members of her party have been arrested and charged with offenses, including spreading rumors and forming a criminal association, in relation to a book they acquired and an online training session they attended to learn strategies for peaceful dissent.’⁴⁵
- 3.5.12 The IRB noted in August 2021 that:
- ‘Sources stated that both Hutu and Tutsi critics of the government have been targeted (Associate Teaching Professor 28 July 2021; Associate Professor 26 July 2021; Professor of political science 4 Aug. 2021). In an interview with the Research Directorate, a professor of political science and international relations at Boston University whose research focuses on state-society relations in Africa reported that although both Hutu and Tutsi have been targeted, Hutu typically face “greater scrutiny” (Professor of political science 4 Aug. 2021).’⁴⁶
- 3.5.13 In a May 2019 response, the IRB cited sources who said:
- ‘... those openly critical of the government or opposing the government and who hold [translation] “locally important” positions (for example, a local prominent citizen or teacher) are especially at risk of being targeted by these forms of surveillance and control and of being threatened, arrested or physically injured...’, and ‘... “even low members [of opposition parties] who try to run, for instance, in local elections,” as well as supporters of those opposition parties, risk being harassed by law enforcement, or arrested, and face risks of “disappearance, even murders”, [but] the consequences can

⁴² BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Rule of law), 23 February 2022

⁴³ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’, (page 2-3), 30 March 2021

⁴⁴ HRW, ‘[World Report 2022 – Rwanda](#)’, 13 January 2022

⁴⁵ HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Wave of Free Speech Prosecutions](#)’, 16 March 2022

⁴⁶ IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...](#)’, 26 August 2021

also be material, such as confiscation of property by the government or expropriation...⁴⁷

3.5.14 In correspondence with the IRB in August 2021, a professor of African history and political studies stated that

‘... 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. (Professor of African history 6 Aug. 2021).’⁴⁸

3.5.15 In regard to treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan government in the past, the Canadian IRB noted, ‘... the Rwandan government maintains an interest in the activities of any vocal critic of the RPF and Kagame, past or present, or anyone working in the field of human rights...’ and that ‘... the passage of time does not diminish the risk faced by political opponents of the government...’⁴⁹

3.5.16 In September 2021, Deutsche Welle (DW), a German news and current affairs media outlet, compiled a list of ‘mysterious deaths and disappearances’ of people critical of Rwanda’s government. The list, dating back from 1996 up to September 2021, included opposition politicians and activists, journalists, and businessmen⁵⁰.

3.5.17 The Canadian IRB also cited one who source indicated, ‘... known critics of the RPF, these individuals faced difficulties accessing employment, education and health care resources, and were “constantly harassed” by authorities...’, although 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...’, although they may still be kept under surveillance⁵¹.

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3.6 Political opposition: reported targeting of diaspora outside Rwanda

3.6.1 The USSD 2020 report noted ‘Significant human rights issues included... politically motivated reprisal against individuals located outside the country.’⁵²

3.6.2 HRW also reported on alleged treatment and targeting of the Rwandan diaspora critical of the government⁵³. The IRB also noted that political

⁴⁷ IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Treatment by authorities of President Kagame’s opponents...](#)’, 10 May 2019

⁴⁸ IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...](#)’, 26 August 2021

⁴⁹ IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...](#)’, 26 August 2021

⁵⁰ DW, ‘[Rwanda: The mysterious deaths of political opponents](#)’, 15 September 2021

⁵¹ IRB, ‘[Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...](#)’, 26 August 2021

⁵² USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’, (page 2), 30 March 2021

⁵³ HRW, ‘[World Report 2022 – Rwanda](#)’, 13 January 2022

opponents abroad had been targeted and that it was possible they could be targeted or viewed with suspicion on return to Rwanda, though that might depend on their profile or the issue which they were challenging⁵⁴. Sources also indicated that family members of political opponents abroad faced harassment and intimidation⁵⁵. Freedom House also noted, 'Rwandans living outside the country have been threatened, attacked, forcibly disappeared, or killed, apparently in retaliation for their public or suspected opposition to the regime.'⁵⁶

- 3.6.3 In 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 report 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.'⁵⁷

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3.7 Political opposition: reported use of surveillance and electronic surveillance

- 3.7.1 The USSD report 2020 noted '... arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious restrictions on free expression, press, and the internet, including threats of violence against journalists, censorship, and website blocking...' ⁵⁸
- 3.7.2 Freedom House noted in its Freedom in the World Report 2022, reporting on 2021 events, that the RPF had '... suppressed political dissent through pervasive surveillance.'⁵⁹
- 3.7.3 Freedom House claimed that:
- 'The 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. In 2019, WhatsApp disclosed that its messaging service had been exploited to target Rwandan dissidents with Pegasus, a suite of surveillance software. Rwandan authorities have also used mobile data and geolocation tools as part of their response to COVID-19.
- 'In addition to electronic surveillance, the authorities reportedly use informants to infiltrate civil society, further discouraging citizens from voicing dissent. Individuals have been forcibly disappeared, arrested, detained, and assassinated for expressing their views.'⁶⁰
- 3.7.4 In regard to surveillance, Amnesty International (AI) reported in July 2021 that 'New evidence uncovered by Amnesty International and Forbidden

⁵⁴ IRB, '[Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...](#)', 26 August 2021

⁵⁵ IRB, '[Rwanda: Treatment of people who have opposed the Rwandan...](#)', 26 August 2021

⁵⁶ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2022](#)' (B3), 28 February 2022

⁵⁷ KT News, '[Rwanda Welcomes S. Africa Law...](#)' 6 January 2020

⁵⁸ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)', (page 2), 30 March 2021

⁵⁹ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2022](#)' (Overview), 28 February 2022

⁶⁰ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2022](#)' (D4), 28 February 2022

Stories has revealed that Rwandan authorities used NSO Group's spyware to potentially target more than 3,500 activists, journalists and politicians. It was also used to infect the phone of Carine Kanimba, Paul Rusesabagina's daughter, of Hotel Rwanda fame.⁶¹

3.7.5 The Freedom House Freedom on the Net 2021 report also cited the NSO Group spyware, known as Pegasus⁶².

3.7.6 In a response dated May 2019, the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada's Research Directorate cited a source who said, '... generally, opponents or critics of President Kagamé avoid expressing their views in public, even in a casual setting like a café or bar, for fear of being overheard by intelligence services or government informants.' Another source indicated similar and said that '... the Rwandan government's control apparatus is very developed, encompassing local forms of surveillance as well as informants in local governance structures.'⁶³

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3.8 Political participation of marginalised communities

3.8.1 Freedom House noted, in regard to the political rights of certain segments of the population, that:

'The constitution calls on the president to ensure "representation of historically marginalized communities" in the Senate through his appointees. However, asserting one's ethnic identity in politics is banned, meaning the level of representation is unclear. The prohibition on discussion of ethnicity makes it nearly impossible for disadvantaged groups – including the Twa, an Indigenous group – to organize independently and advocate for their interests.

'The constitution requires women to occupy at least 30 percent of the seats in each chamber of Parliament. While women currently hold more than 38 percent of Senate seats and about 61 percent of the lower house seats, they have little practical ability to engage in politics outside the RPF structure. The promotion of gender equity disproportionately privileges English-speaking Tutsis over French-speaking Hutus and rural Tutsis. Societal discrimination, as well as the regime's general repression of dissent, prevents LGBT+ Rwandans from freely pursuing their communities' political interests.'⁶⁴

3.8.2 The United States Department of State (USSD) noted in its 2020 human rights report that, 'No laws limit participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. The constitution calls for women to occupy at least 30 percent of positions in decision-making organs, including the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The government consistently implemented this requirement.'⁶⁵

⁶¹ AI, '[Pegasus Project: Rwandan authorities chose thousands...](#)', 19 July 2021

⁶² Freedom House, '[Freedom on the Net 2021](#)' (C5), 21 September 2021

⁶³ IRB, '[Rwanda: Treatment by authorities of President Kagamé's opponents...](#)', 10 May 2019

⁶⁴ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2022](#)' (B4), 28 February 2022

⁶⁵ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 3), 30 March 2021

- 3.8.3 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' and states that 'Political activities' and 'Gatherings based on ethnicity, nationality, or any other sectarian ground' and participating in, or inciting others into unlawful riots are prohibited⁶⁶.
- 3.8.4 Article 12 refers to refugees' rights and freedoms and states that they have the right to 'Membership to association of forums with non-political orientation...'⁶⁷

See section on Refugee rights and access to services in the [note on the asylum system](#) and also [Equality and women's rights](#).

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Section 4 updated: 24 March 2022

4. Law and order

4.1 Overview

- 4.1.1 The USSD noted in its 2020 report 'Significant human rights issues included: unlawful or arbitrary killings by the government; forced disappearance by the government; torture by the government; harsh and life-threatening conditions in some detention facilities; arbitrary detention...'⁶⁸
- 4.1.2 However, the same USSD report also explained 'The Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) is responsible for conducting investigations into such killings. Under the Ministry of Justice, the National Public Prosecution Authority (NPPA) is responsible for prosecuting abuse cases involving police, while the Rwanda National Police (RNP) Inspectorate of Services investigates cases of police misconduct....'⁶⁹
- 4.1.3 The Rwandan National Police has a section called the 'Directorate of Inspectorate of Services'. Its website has [a detailed page](#) on how to make a complaint about a police officer, what a person can complain about, suggested detail to include, the procedure after making a complaint and possible outcomes⁷⁰.
- 4.1.4 The USSD report added that 'The government took some steps to prosecute or punish officials who committed abuses, including within the security services, but impunity involving civilian officials and some members of the state security forces was a problem.'⁷¹
- 4.1.5 On 13 January 2022, HRW published its annual world report, covering events in 2021, which claimed that 'Arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and torture in official and unofficial detention facilities was commonplace [...]. There were credible reports of arbitrary detention and mistreatment of

⁶⁶ MINEMA, '[Ministerial instructions determining the management of...](#)' (Article 2), June 2016

⁶⁷ MINEMA, '[Ministerial instructions determining the management of...](#)' (Article 12e), June 2016

⁶⁸ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)', (page 2), 30 March 2021

⁶⁹ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)', (page 2-3), 30 March 2021

⁷⁰ RNP, '[Directorate of Inspectorate of Services](#)', undated

⁷¹ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)', (page 2), 30 March 2021

people accused of “deviant behaviors,” including street children, sex workers and petty vendors.’⁷²

- 4.1.6 On 25 March 2022, the UNHRC published the report and recommendations of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review in Rwanda which stated that ‘Arbitrary arrest and detention, suspicious death in detention and the excessive use of force were not part of government policy and were recognized as crimes. Whenever they happened, thorough investigations were undertaken. Improvements would continue to be made and there would be continued engagement with partners to address those issues.’⁷³

See also [Political opposition](#)

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4.2 Excessive use of force and extrajudicial killings

- 4.2.1 On 1 September 2020, African Press Agency News (APA) published an article entitled ‘Rwandan Police officer arrested over killing resident for COVID-19 curfew violation’ which stated:

‘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.

‘The statement issued by the Police said that “Police has [sic] arrested the officer involved in the shooting of Evariste Nsengiyumva, a resident of Zaza sector, Ngoma district.”

‘According to the police statement, the shooting took place on Sunday evening at 8:30PM, as police and local security organs enforced the nationwide 7 pm (5.00 pm GMT) curfew.

‘Investigations to establish circumstances of the shooting are underway, said the police.’⁷⁴

- 4.2.2 The USSD report provided some examples of excessive force allegedly being used by the police⁷⁵.
- 4.2.3 A website called [Rwandan Lives Matter](#), which describes itself as an initiative set up by Rwandan human rights campaigners, documents a number of incidents where individuals have allegedly been killed or disappeared at the hands of the Rwandan authorities as well as where the authorities had launched an investigation⁷⁶.
- 4.2.4 In a meeting on 21 March 2022, between the Home Office (HO) and the Legal Aid Forum (LAF), a network of non-governmental organisations (NGO) which advocates for access to legal services, HO officials asked about reports of excessive force being used by the police generally, not solely in respect of asylum seekers or refugees. The LAF representative commented

⁷² HRW, ‘[World Report 2022: Rwanda](#)’, 13 January 2022

⁷³ UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Working Group...Rwanda](#)’, (page 9), 25 March 2021

⁷⁴ APA News, ‘[Rwandan Police officer arrested over killing resident...](#)’, 1 September 2020

⁷⁵ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’, (page 2-3), 30 March 2021

⁷⁶ Rwandan Lives Matter, ‘[Anonymous Men](#)’, 28 April 2021

that although the President has declared it should not occur, it is reported. LAF had no cases at present and had not been approached for representation, possibly because there was a degree of acceptance that it could occur⁷⁷.

- 4.2.5 During a meeting on 22 March 2022, a HO official asked whether the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) had any concerns about the police using excessive force and the representative commented:

‘Sometimes NCHR hear about it in news and conducts an investigation and comes up with recommendations for relevant institutions. It is not something that occurs frequently, for example, at the beginning of movement restrictions/curfew in 2020 during COVID (for example if not home in time) police may have used excessive force. A policeman has been charged due to that (see NCHR’s report) However this was at the beginning (of Covid restrictions) and NCHR and other institutions intervened and this has been decreasing.’⁷⁸

See also [Political opposition](#)

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4.3 Torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment

- 4.3.1 The USSD report stated:

‘The constitution and law prohibit such practices, but there were numerous reports of abuse of detainees by police, military, and National Intelligence and Security Services officials.

‘In 2018 the government enacted a law that prescribes 20 to 25 years’ imprisonment for any person convicted of torture. The law mandates that when torture is committed by a public official in the course of his or her duties, the penalty for conviction is life imprisonment.’⁷⁹

- 4.3.2 The USSD report stated ‘Prisoners were sometimes subjected to torture.’ [...] and that

‘Human rights advocates continued to report instances of illegally detained individuals tortured in unofficial detention centers. Advocates including HRW claimed that military, police, and intelligence personnel employed torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment to obtain information and forced confessions, which in some cases resulted in criminal convictions. Some defendants in addition alleged in court they had been tortured while in detention to confess to crimes they did not commit, but there were no reports of any judges ordering an investigation into such allegations or dismissing evidence obtained under torture, and there were no reported prosecutions of state security forces personnel for torture.’⁸⁰

- 4.3.3 The UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights provided a statement on 8 July 2021 during the UN Universal Periodic Review Adoption for

⁷⁷ [Annex A7](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

⁷⁸ [Annex A9](#), Meeting between HO and NCHR, 22 March 2022

⁷⁹ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’, (page 4-5), 30 March 2021

⁸⁰ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’, (page 4-5), 30 March 2021

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.’⁸¹

See also [Deaths in detention](#)

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4.4 Other misconduct by authorities

- 4.4.1 On 27 April 2020, the Guardian published an article entitled ‘Rwandan police chief accused of sexual assault of child refugee at UN centre [Gashora ETM]. However, CPIT could find no other examples of this happening in the sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)). The Guardian article also noted ‘... The Rwandan government did not respond to requests for comment, but confirmed an investigation is underway.’⁸²
- 4.4.2 In April 2020, the New Times reported on how 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’.⁸³
- 4.4.3 UNHCR’s submission to the UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) noted excessive force had been used by security services to crack down on protests by refugees. In February 2018, 12 Congolese refugees from Kiziba camp were killed when police opened fire on protesters demonstrating against a cut in food rations. The incident resulted in the arrest and prosecution of a number of refugees and the organisers of the protest were charged with offences including ‘inciting insurrection’ and ‘spreading false information with intent to create a hostile international opinion against the Rwandan state’⁸⁴.
- 4.4.4 In response to the incident at Kiziba refugee camp, the National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR) investigated. The subsequent summary report explained their methodology and key conclusions, which included ‘live ammunition was used as the last resort after violent and organized attack was launched by a group of demonstrators against Police.’⁸⁵
- 4.4.5 At a meeting with HO officials on 21 March 2022, UNHCR commented:
‘Impact [of the events at Kiziba is] still being felt at camp – people were very upset at the length of sentences.

⁸¹ FCDO, ‘[UN Human Rights Council: Universal Periodic Review Adoption – Rwanda](#)’, 8 July 2021

⁸² The Guardian, ‘[Rwandan police chief accused of sexual assault of child refugee...](#)’, 27 April 2020

⁸³ The New Times, ‘[RIB dismisses abuse allegations at Gashora Transit Centre](#)’, 29 April 2020

⁸⁴ UNHCR, ‘[Submission to OHCHR](#)’ (page 3), July 2020

⁸⁵ NCHR, ‘[Summary of the NCHR Report on Kiziba Refugee Camp Incident](#)’, undated

‘However, [UNHCR] are not aware of any other similar incidents. Occasionally people (1 or 2) sit in front of [UNHCR’s] offices, but security remove peacefully. Students demonstrate in secondary school, smashing windows. Now lots of care about how these are handled, refugees also more careful since.’

UNHCR also added that arrest and detention for unauthorized demonstrations is in the law in Rwanda and would apply equally to nationals.⁸⁶

- 4.4.6 In a meeting between the HO and LAF on 21 March 2022, a LAF representative commented on the events at Kiziba:

‘There was an incident in 2018 in the Kiziba camp in the west. There was refugee rioting and the police used force. The case is pending before the Court. LAF handled the case first and were involved (representing the refugees). They left the case to a partner in 2020. Police alleged that they were attacked by rioting refugees. Some refugees have been charged with incitement to commit a crime. Not heard of any other incidents since.’

‘The LAF representative was not aware of any asylum seekers or refugees being stopped by the police in the street.’⁸⁷

See section Camp based refugees in the [note on the asylum system](#)

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4.5 Arbitrary arrest and detention

- 4.5.1 The USSD report stated:

‘The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, but state security forces regularly arrested and detained persons arbitrarily and without due process. The law provides for the right of persons to challenge in court the lawfulness of their arrest or detention; however, few tried, and there were no reports of any detainees succeeding in obtaining prompt release or compensation for unlawful detention. Observers credited the RNP with generally strong discipline and effectiveness. The RNP institutionalized community relations training that included appropriate use of force and respect for human rights, although arbitrary arrests and beatings remained problems.

‘Human rights NGOs previously reported that individuals suspected of having ties to the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, the Rwanda National Congress, or other insurgent groups were detained unlawfully and held incommunicado for long periods in harsh and inhuman conditions.

See also [Political opposition](#)

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⁸⁶ [Annex A8](#), Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

⁸⁷ [Annex A7](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

4.6 Treatment and conditions in detention

4.6.1 On 27 September 2021 HRW published an article entitled 'Rwanda: Round Ups Linked to Commonwealth Meeting' which stated:

'Following reports on abuses at the Gikondo transit center in 2015, 2016, and 2020, this practice was condemned during Rwanda's review by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, a Geneva-based treaty body, in February 2020. Between April and June 2021, Human Rights Watch interviewed via telephone 17 former detainees from Gikondo. Interviews with nine people who identified as transgender or homosexual, three women who were detained with their babies, four men who worked as street vendors at local markets, and a 13-year-old boy living on the streets in Kigali, confirmed that patterns of abuse that Human Rights Watch documented previously are ongoing. Due to fear of reprisals against interviewees, Human Rights Watch has withheld all identifying information.

'At Gikondo, detainees are held in overcrowded rooms in conditions well below standards required by Rwandan and international law. The former detainees said they have inadequate food, water, and health care; suffer frequent beatings; and are rarely allowed to leave filthy, overcrowded rooms. People were detained there without basic due process standards. None of the former detainees interviewed were formally charged with any criminal offense and none saw a prosecutor, judge, or lawyer before or during their detention. There were no measures to protect people from Covid-19, and former detainees said they did not have access to testing, soap, masks, or basic hygiene and sanitation amenities.'⁸⁸

4.6.2 The same source further stated:

'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. The authorities acknowledge that there are 28 "transit centers" in Rwanda, including "Kwa Kabuga," the unofficial name of Kigali's transit center situated in the Gikondo residential suburb of Kigali.

'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 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. The arbitrary nature of the detention is reflected in the complete absence of due process once people are taken to Gikondo. In most cases, detainees are held in various police stations or sector (local government) offices across Kigali before being transferred to

⁸⁸ HRW, ['Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting'](#), 27 September 2021

Gikondo. None of the interviewees were taken before a judge or given access to a lawyer before being transferred to Gikondo.’⁸⁹

4.6.3 The USSD report stated:

‘Conditions at prisons and unofficial detention centers ranged from harsh and life threatening to approaching international standards. The government took steps to make improvements in some prisons, but conditions varied widely among facilities.

‘Physical conditions in prisons operated by the Rwanda Correctional Service (RCS) approached international standards in some respects, although reports of overcrowding and food shortages were common. According to the RCS, the prison population rose from fewer than 52,000 inmates in 2015 to approximately 66,000 during the year, which greatly exacerbated overcrowding. Convicted persons and individuals in pretrial detention in RCS prisons were fed once per day, and family members were allowed to deposit funds so that convicts and detainees could purchase additional food at prison canteens, but human rights advocates reported that lack of food continued to be a problem. Domestic media reported food insecurity among the prison population worsened due to COVID-19 restrictions, which prohibited family members from purchasing and delivering food rations. The government did not keep statistics on deaths in custody beyond deaths of prisoners due to illness (who received medical treatment in custody). Authorities held men and women separately in similar conditions, and authorities generally separated pretrial detainees from convicted prisoners, although there were numerous exceptions due to the large number of detainees awaiting trial.

‘... Conditions were generally harsh and life threatening in unofficial detention centers. Reports from previous years indicated individuals detained at such centers suffered from limited access to food, water, and health care. Conditions were often harsh and life threatening at district transit centers holding street children, street vendors, suspected drug abusers, persons engaged in prostitution, homeless persons, and suspected petty criminals. Overcrowding was common in police stations and district transit centers.

‘Human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported authorities at district transit centers frequently failed to adhere to the requirements of a 2018 ministerial order determining the “mission, organization, and functioning” of transit centers.’⁹⁰

4.6.4 The USSD report also referred to allegations made by HRW, and added that ‘Transit centers often lacked separate facilities for children. Medical treatment was reportedly irregular, and many detainees suffered ailments such as malaria, rashes, or diarrhea. The government discouraged further detentions in these transit centers due to the difficulties of preventing the spread of COVID-19 under such conditions. In a press interview, the minister

⁸⁹ HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting](#)’, 27 September 2021

⁹⁰ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’, (page 5-6), 30 March 2021

of justice and the prosecutor general stated authorities could continue to pursue cases while defendants were on bail.⁹¹

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

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4.7 Deaths in detention

4.7.1 Non-targeted deaths and abuses have also been reported in detention centres and at the hands of police officers, for example, deaths of suspects in police custody, or abuses occurring as a means to obtain false confessions^{92,93}.

4.7.2 The USSD report 2020 and a 20 February 2020 HRW article entitled 'Rwanda: Ensure Justice Over Kizito Mihigo Death' provided extensive detail of one particular incident ([involving Kizito Mihigo, a popular gospel singer and a genocide survivor, was found dead in police custody on February 17 [2020].).^{94,95}

4.7.3 HRW added:

'Mihigo was among the 2,000 prisoners released in September 2018 after a presidential pardon, which also included high-profile political opposition figure Victoire Ingabire. Since then, at least four opposition members and one journalist have either [died or disappeared in mysterious circumstances in Rwanda](#). Although the investigation bureau said they opened investigations into these cases, Human Rights Watch has not been able to determine that any of the findings were made public or if anyone was prosecuted.

'Mihigo is not the first detainee to die in police custody in Rwanda. In April 2018, 10 days after he was arrested, police said [Donat Mutunzi, a lawyer, hanged himself in his cell](#) at Ndera police station. According to reports, the [autopsy revealed "severe wounds" on his face](#) and temples. In February 2015, Emmanuel Gasakure, a cardiologist and former doctor to President Paul Kagame, was reportedly [shot dead by police while in custody](#) at Remera Police Station. A [police spokesperson alleged](#) in a statement to the media that Gasakure was attempting to disarm a guard when he was shot.

'Human Rights Watch has documented numerous cases of arbitrary arrests, detentions, prosecutions, killings, torture, enforced disappearances, threats, harassment, and intimidation against government opponents and critics in Rwanda.'⁹⁶

See also [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#) and [Treatment and conditions in detention and Political opposition](#)

⁹¹ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)', (page 5-6), 30 March 2021

⁹² USSD, '[USSD report 2020](#)' (section 1), 30 March 2021

⁹³ UN Human Rights Council, '[Compilation on Rwanda](#)' (pages 3 to 4), 13 November 2020

⁹⁴ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)', (page 2-3), 30 March 2021

⁹⁵ HRW, '[Rwanda: Ensure Justice Over Kizito Mihigo Death](#)', 20 February 2020

⁹⁶ HRW, '[Rwanda: Ensure Justice Over Kizito Mihigo Death](#)', 20 February 2020

4.8 State response(s) regarding excessive use of force

- 4.8.1 On 6 September 2020 APA News published an article entitled 'Rwanda's police condemned over use of excessive force amid COVID-19' which stated:

'Rwandan Minister of Justice Johnston Busingye on Saturday condemned the use of excessive and at times deadly force by some police personnel while on duty during COVID-19 lockdown, saying this is not part of the operational guidelines of Rwanda National Police.

'This reaction by Rwandan senior official comes after isolated incidents wherein enforcing the law, some officers use as has been witnessed in the recent past.

'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.'⁹⁷

- 4.8.2 On 7 September 2020 KT Press published an article "We Will Rein It In" – President Kagame Weighs In On Police Brutality Debate' which stated '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 fatalities -something he attributed to individuals.' It cited Mr Kagame as having said that

'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 it on the entire police force to create an impression that it is the most brutal police force ...

'...the manner in which it is discussed, it seems to suggest that the issue has gone out of hand or that the officers are encouraged to use excessive force on unarmed civilians.

"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.

"However, I have also learned that indeed they have been individual excesses," he said, adding that he can't attribute that to lack of sufficient training.

⁹⁷ APA News, ['Rwanda's police condemned over use of excessive force...'](#), 6 September 2020

“They have sufficient training. They have not only the ability but also the commitment to do what they are doing. The individual excesses depend on individuals really,”

[...]

“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 very good force otherwise.”⁹⁸

- 4.8.3 The Rwandan National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) produced a report entitled ‘Assessment of the impact of anti Covid-19 pandemic measures on human rights in Rwanda: from March 2020 to October 2020’. The Commission noted that the overall objective of the adoption of these measures was to protect the lives of the people living in Rwanda. However, the NCHR observed allegations of involvement of some police officers in incidents leading to the death of citizens while enforcing anti -COVID-19 measures. The Commission noted on-going criminal proceedings (at the time of publication) for those who were involved in acts which amounted to the violation of the right to life in the Districts of Rwamagana, Ngoma and Nyanza⁹⁹.
- 4.8.4 The Rwandan NCHR’s report also noted ‘that some of the local leaders and night patrol agents commonly known in Kinyarwanda as “Abanyerondo” abused power during the enforcement of COVID-19 pandemic preventive measures. Positively, the Commission noted the prosecution of those who were involved.’¹⁰⁰
- 4.8.5 The UNHCR noted that Rwanda has not implemented recommendations made by the UN Committee against Torture. In 2017, a 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 also because of concerns that detainees could face reprisals for participating in interviews¹⁰¹.
- 4.8.6 The USSD reported that ‘In 2018, the government introduced a law prohibiting torture, with a sentence of 20 to 25 years’ imprisonment but there have been no reported prosecutions of state security personnel. The law also allows judges to detain or fine state security personnel and government officials who unlawfully detained others but there have been no reports of judges exercising this authority¹⁰².
- 4.8.7 In a meeting between HO and NCHR on 22 March 2022, a NCHR representative commented: ‘People can complain to NCHR if they feel they’ve been mistreated [by the police], there is a toll-free line and electronic complaint management system through which people can send their complaints; NCHR then investigates (not every complaint may be true),

⁹⁸ KT Press [“We Will Rein It In” – President Kagame Weighs In On Police...](#), 7 September 2020

⁹⁹ NCHR, [‘Assessment of the impact of anti Covid-19 pandemic measures ...’](#) (§3.1), December 2020

¹⁰⁰ NCHR, [‘Assessment of the impact of anti Covid-19 pandemic measures ...’](#) (§3.2), December 2020

¹⁰¹ UN Human Rights Council, [‘Compilation on Rwanda’](#) (page 2), 13 November 2020

¹⁰² USSD, [‘USSD report 2020’](#) (section 1), 30 March 2021

advise [the] concerned party; if NCHR finds a human rights violation, ask institution to address issue.’¹⁰³

See also [Complaint mechanisms](#).

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4.9 Police reform

4.9.1 On 25 February 2021 The East African published an article entitled ‘Rwanda kicks out 386 officers from police force’ which stated:

‘Rwanda National Police (RNP) has dismissed about 386 police officers over gross misconduct in its latest bid to clean up law enforcement, The EastAfrican has learnt.

‘The officers, including 18 senior sergeants, 104 sergeants, corporals, and constables were sacked through a ministerial order published on February 16.

‘The number is more than six times the total number of police officers the force dismissed between January and October last year, signaling the ongoing quiet cleaning-up of the force.

‘While details of the dismissal are yet to be made public, the ministerial order refers to Articles 69 and 70 of the specific statute for police officers pertaining to dismissal without notice and definitive dismissal from the service, respectively.

‘The EastAfrican contacted RNP for comment but by press time no response had been availed.

‘As per the clauses, 146 officers under the definitive dismissal are likely to have been sacked over serious disciplinary faults, while more than 240 who were discharged without notice could have abandoned duty, made false declarations during recruitment, restricted by the penal laws to resume service or had not been promoted for two consecutive times.

‘RNP has had a “zero tolerance to corruption” stance over the years in attempts to tackle graft.

‘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.’¹⁰⁴

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

¹⁰³ [Annex A9](#), Meeting between HO and NCHR, 22 March 2022

¹⁰⁴ The East African, [‘Rwanda kicks out 386 officers from police force’](#), 25 February 2021

on these charges. Big numbers of police officers have been sent away from the police.’¹⁰⁵

See also [Complaint mechanisms](#) and [State response\(s\) regarding excessive use of force](#)

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Section 5 updated: 24 March 2022

5. Complaint mechanisms

5.1 Human rights oversight bodies

- 5.1.1 The website ‘Claiming Human Rights: Guide to International Procedures Available in Cases of Human Rights Violations in Africa’, which is a joint project of the National Commissions for UNESCO of France and Germany (but not UNESCO itself) noted that ‘Since Rwanda is an 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 EU guidelines (on Human Rights Defenders, Death Penalty and Torture) to Embassies of EU Member States and the Delegations of the European Commission.’¹⁰⁶
- 5.1.2 Rwanda’s national human rights institution, the National Commission for Human Rights (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^{107 108}
- 5.1.3 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. Between July 2019 and June 2020, the Commission processed 763 complaints about human rights violations.¹⁰⁹
- 5.1.4 In a meeting with HO on 22 March 2022, representatives from NCHR set out the Commission’s mandates and described its structure (see [Annex A9. Meeting with NCHR](#)).
- 5.1.5 The UN Human Rights Committee has expressed concern that the members of the NCHR were selected by a committee appointed by the President and has called on the Rwandan government to ensure that the selection of NCHR members is transparent and independent¹¹⁰.

See also [Complaint mechanisms](#)

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¹⁰⁵ [Annex AZ](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

¹⁰⁶ Claiming Human Rights, ‘[Claiming Human Rights - in Rwanda](#)’, undated

¹⁰⁷ GANHRI, ‘[Chart of the status of national institutions](#)’, 20 January 2021

¹⁰⁸ GANHRI, ‘[Accreditation](#)’, no date

¹⁰⁹ NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2019 to June 2020](#)’ (page 9), no date

¹¹⁰ UN Human Rights Council, ‘[Compilation on Rwanda](#)’ (page 2), 13 November 2020

5.2 Complaints about public services

- 5.2.1 In a meeting between the HO and LAF on 21 March 2022, a LAF representative commented: 'Rwanda has a lot of complaints mechanisms. There are many structures: the Courts (including appeals), the Ombudsman, Committees, NGOs, Family Council. The country is very rich in terms of help. The Government has put many things in place for handling complaints.'¹¹¹
- 5.2.2 The Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA), which regulates public utilities including 'telecommunications network and/or Telecommunications services, electricity, water, removal of waste products from residential or business premises, extraction and distribution of gas and transport of goods and persons'¹¹², set out its complaints procedure, which stated, 'Any person who has an issue against a public utility in terms of service provision may complain to RURA for redress. Notwithstanding this, consumers are encouraged to complain directly to the Utility in the first instance. However, where a complaint made directly to a utility is in the opinion of the person complaining not satisfactorily dealt with, such may be redirected to RURA.'¹¹³
- 5.2.3 The Center for Rule of Law Rwanda (CERULAR), a national non-governmental organisation, noted 'Access to justice challenges in Rwanda include but 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.'¹¹⁴
- 5.2.4 In regard to its provision of legal aid services, CERULAR noted: '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.'¹¹⁵
- 5.2.5 The Rwandan NCHR noted: 'The Commission shall have powers to file legal proceedings in civil, commercial, labour and administrative matters for violation of human rights provided by the Constitution, international treaties ratified by Rwanda and other laws. In that regard, the Commission may be represented in courts by

¹¹¹ [Annex AZ](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

¹¹² RURA, '[Background](#)', no date

¹¹³ RURA, '[Complaints handling procedures](#)', no date

¹¹⁴ CERULAR, '[Access to Justice](#)', no date

¹¹⁵ CERULAR, '[Access to Justice](#)', no date

its employees authorized by relevant authority on the request of the Chairperson of the Commission. The Commission may also be represented by a council of its choice.’¹¹⁶

- 5.2.6 In a meeting with NCHR on 22 March 2022, a HO official asked whether complaint mechanisms were available for people dissatisfied with public services and the NCHR representative commented:

‘Yes – Rwanda Governance Board. In each institution there is a way to report for a bad service you have received. If the staff didn’t do [service] or did it wrongly, you can complain to him or her then action can be taken. Refugees can report issues too.

‘NCHR doesn’t replace other institutions such as the courts, so such issues are reported to court normally. There are institutions available for investigation. Institutions will follow up on complaints and take suspect to court. NCHR [is] there if an institution doesn’t do what it’s supposed to do. Person can come to NCHR and NCHR will take the issue on his/her behalf.’¹¹⁷

- 5.2.7 However, the USSD noted in its 2020 human rights report that, ‘According to many observers, the NCHR did not have adequate resources to investigate all reported abuses and remained biased in favor of the government. Some victims of human rights abuses did not report them to the NCHR because they perceived it as biased and feared retribution by state security forces.’¹¹⁸

- 5.2.8 On 28 September 2021, the UN OHCHR reported that, ‘The Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families [CMW] today concluded its consideration of the second periodic report of Rwanda¹¹⁹ on its implementation of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families...’¹²⁰

- 5.2.9 Presenting the report, Marie Chantal Rwakazina, Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations Office at Geneva, said ‘Regarding access to justice for migrant workers and members of their families, including those in irregular situations, Ms. Rwakazina 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.’¹²¹

- 5.2.10 When asked by a member of the Committee ‘Which mechanisms or measures existed at the regional level protecting migrant workers’ human rights and allowing them to defend their rights, if they did not have access to individual complaints before the African Court of Human Rights?’, the Rwandan state delegation responded, ‘... migrant workers who were victims

¹¹⁶ NCHR, ‘[Power to file legal actions](#)’, no date

¹¹⁷ [Annex A9](#), Meeting between HO and NCHR, 22 March 2022

¹¹⁸ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 5), 30 March 2021

¹¹⁹ CMW, ‘[Second periodic report submitted by Rwanda under article 73...](#)’, 30 January 2020

¹²⁰ OHCHR, ‘[In Dialogue with Rwanda, Committee on the Rights of Migrant...](#)’, 28 September 2021

¹²¹ OHCHR, ‘[In Dialogue with Rwanda, Committee on the Rights of Migrant...](#)’, 28 September 2021

of human rights violations could still file complaints. The Charter of the Court said that individuals needed to exhaust local remedies before filing an international complaint.¹²²

See also [Migrants/foreigners](#).

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5.3 Complaint mechanisms available to asylum seekers and/or refugees

- 5.3.1 Though not referring specifically to asylum seekers, MINEMA's 2016 ministerial instructions determining the management of refugees and refugee camps states at Article 4 that, 'A refugee who faces security concern or any other threat can report it to [...] any other government security organ. Refugees at all times can request the assistance of UNHCR and its legal partners.'¹²³
- 5.3.2 Article 12 of the same ministerial instructions states that refugees have the right to 'Access to justice and legal representation...' and 'To be protected and assisted by the government.'¹²⁴
- 5.3.3 The USSD noted in its 2020 human rights report in regard to security issues at refugee camps that, 'Refugees were free to file complaints at both camp and area police stations.'¹²⁵
- 5.3.4 The Socio-Economic Inclusion of Refugees and Host Communities in Rwanda Project (Jya Mbere Project), coordinated by MINEMA, aims to 'improve access to basic services and economic opportunities for refugees and host communities, and support environmental management, in the target areas in Rwanda.'¹²⁶ In its annual progress report, covering 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, MINEMA cited its grievance redress mechanism relating to the project and noted it had established 6 Grievance Redress Committees (GRCs) during the reporting period. The report stated 'During this reporting period, grievances were reported in person, letters and received via telephone messages (WhatsApp group for monitoring classrooms constructions in Gisagara). 14 out of 19 reported complaints related to ongoing construction activities in Gisagara were addressed... Addressed complaints were confirmed in monitoring visit held on June 14 and 15, 2021. Pending complaints will be addressed under operation and maintenance period by the District.'¹²⁷
- 5.3.5 In a meeting between the HO and LAF on 21 March 2022, a LAF representative explained: 'If an asylum seeker wishes to complain about the length of time waiting for a decision or an ID card, they can complain to the Minister by letter but [the question is] whether they know about their rights.'¹²⁸

¹²² OHCHR, '[In Dialogue with Rwanda, Committee on the Rights of Migrant...](#)', 28 September 2021

¹²³ MINEMA, '[Ministerial instructions determining the management of...](#)' (Article 4), June 2016

¹²⁴ MINEMA, '[Ministerial instructions determining the ...](#)' (Articles 12f and 12h), June 2016

¹²⁵ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 2f), 30 March 2021

¹²⁶ MINEMA, '[Jya Mbere Project/Socio-Economic Inclusion of...](#)' (page 6), 30 September 2021

¹²⁷ MINEMA, '[Jya Mbere Project/Socio-Economic Inclusion of...](#)' (page 42), 30 September 2021

¹²⁸ [Annex A7](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

5.3.6 A representative of UNHCR told the HO on 21 March 2022 that: ‘...[T]here is no way for a refugee to complain about [the RSD] process.’¹²⁹

5.3.7 In a meeting between HO and NCHR on 22 March 2022, a NCHR representative commented: ‘[NCHR perform] monitoring in camps, we ask refugees about issues they might be facing. If issue relating to denial of work, they can speak to NCHR and institutions about that.’¹³⁰

See also the sections on Documentation for asylum seekers and refugees and Camp based refugees in the [note on the asylum system](#).

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Section 6 updated: 24 March 2022

6. Operation of non-governmental organisations

6.1 Registration process

6.1.1 The Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) is mandated to register and monitor the functioning of both national and international NGOs¹³¹.

6.1.2 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 website¹³²

6.1.3 In a meeting between the HO and LAF on 21 March 2022, a LAF representative commented:

‘The Registration process is easy and generally okay for NGOs. You need to lodge an application with the Rwandan government and meet certain requirements. The registration process is no more than 30 or 60 days. The registration process does take longer than setting up a business but this is because the government need to do their due diligence, for example, who is funding the NGO. Although it can be bureaucratic - 5 years to set up has been known. But the Government is not so interested in non-profit making organisations.

‘If [registration is] refused, you are given reasons why and you can appeal and apply again. There is a Government proposal to introduce a power to remove directors of NGOs, which LAF is opposing.’¹³³

6.1.4 In a meeting on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBT+ community also pointed to the registration process being very long, with ‘lots of administrative challenges’ and that ‘NGOs need to say their purpose is something else (broader human rights) to register. There have been issues with local administrations and/or excessive bureaucracy and organisations have experienced hurdles/delays – one case took 3 years to fully/permanently register.’ Representatives also explained that it was ‘Possible to get registration documents but it’s difficult – easier to do so

¹²⁹ [Annex A8](#), Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

¹³⁰ [Annex A9](#), Meeting between HO and NCHR, 22 March 2022

¹³¹ RGB ‘[Non-governmental organisations](#)’, no date

¹³² RGB ‘[Non-governmental organisations](#)’, no date

¹³³ [Annex A7](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

when interacting face to face with someone'. They also explained that 'the government as an institution [is] not an issue but individuals in Govt can be obstructive.'¹³⁴

See also [Freedom of assembly and association](#)

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6.2 National NGO operation and restrictions

6.2.1 Law No.04/2012 of 17/02/2012 governs the organisation and functioning of national NGOs. Relevant points are summarised in the table¹³⁵:

Article 10: Autonomy of national NGOs	Without prejudice to provisions of other Laws, national non-governmental organisations shall enjoy financial, moral and administrative autonomy.
Article 13: Restrictions in the functioning of a national NGO	A national NGO shall not be allowed to engage in fundraising or organise public rallies with an intention to support any political organisation or any independent candidate campaigning for a political office, registration or any other way to support candidates for public office.
Article 20 and 24: Reasons for refusal to issue a certificate of registration or grant legal personality to a national NGO	Reasons include: convincing evidence that the organisation intends to jeopardize security, public order, health, morals or human rights.
Article 28: Rights of a national NGO	Rights include: 1. to put forward views in designing national policies and legislation in relation with the functioning of national NGOs 2. to advocate, protect and promote human rights and other national values 3. to express opinions and views on national policies and legislation
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.

6.2.2 The BTI 2022 report noted:

¹³⁴ [Annex A11](#), Meeting with representatives of the LGBT+ community, 5 April 2022

¹³⁵ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette No.15 of 09/04/2012](#)', 17 February 2012

‘Over the past years, government intimidation, harassment, obstruction and threats have significantly emasculated independent organizations. NGOs and Community Service Organizations (CSOs) are politically and socially sidelined by the government and allowed by the government primarily as a necessary concession to its international reputation and as sources of additional funds. All non-governmental (NGOs) and human rights organizations must become members of the National Civil Society Platform.’¹³⁶

- 6.2.3 The same BTI report noted ‘The government restricts and harasses local and international NGOs, as well as foreign-funded media and human rights programs that have reported on the regime’s repression or policy failings.’¹³⁷
- 6.2.4 The USSD report 2020 noted the government ‘...delayed or denied registration to local and international NGOs seeking to work on human rights, media freedom, or political advocacy.’¹³⁸
- 6.2.5 In a meeting between the HO and LAF on 21 March 2022, LAF indicated to the HO that some NGOs could be refused, depending on the topic or topics it was seeking to represent (e.g. LGBT)¹³⁹. In a meeting on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBT+ community stated that ‘No NGO [had] registered outright as LGBT-focused, though there is awareness of some organisations’ work in this space’¹⁴⁰
- 6.2.6 In a meeting on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBT+ community also stated that ‘[if a group is] running [an] event, [they] need to inform Local Authorities, observe protocols etc – if not, risk of losing status.’ The representatives gave one example of ‘issues arising from event related to IDAHOBIT [International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia and Transphobia] which caused problems for organisation but is now resolved’¹⁴¹
- 6.2.7 The World Association of Nongovernmental Organizations has a directory of [NGO's in Rwanda](#).

See also [Freedom of assembly and association](#)

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6.3 NGOs involved with refugees and asylum seekers in Rwanda

- 6.3.1 During a meeting between HO and UNHCR on 21 March 2022, a representative explained:

‘There are plenty of NGOs that support refugees ([UNHCR] have around 12 partner organisations, international/national, with different expertise/purposes). List of partner organisations - Save the Children, Humanity & Inclusion, ADRA, AHA, GIZ, World Vision, PLAN, Prison

¹³⁶ BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Political participation), 23 February 2022

¹³⁷ BTI, ‘[Rwanda Country Report 2022](#)’ (Rule of law), 23 February 2022

¹³⁸ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 2b), 30 March 2021

¹³⁹ [Annex A7](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

¹⁴⁰ [Annex A11](#), Meeting with representatives of the LGBT+ community, 5 April 2022

¹⁴¹ [Annex A11](#), Meeting with representatives of the LGBT+ community, 5 April 2022

Fellowship Rwanda, Legal Aid Foundation, ALIGHT, Rwandan Red Cross, Caritas.

‘For all partners to work in refugee camp, have to sign tripartite partner agreement (UNHCR, MINEMA, NGO).

‘Most [support] focused on camps but some specific NGOs provide support for urban refugees (Save the Children; there is a community centre in Gikondo in Kigali).

‘There is a camp manager in MINEMA for each camp (clear refugee program management policy), field officer from UNHCR, representatives from all organisations.’¹⁴²

6.3.2 In a meeting between the HO and LAF on 21 March 2022, LAF commented that they have ‘... a very good relationship with Rwandan government. There is a tripartite agreement between LAF, UNHCR and the Rwandan government.’¹⁴³

6.3.3 They also explained that ‘In the past, NGOs were crippled by intrusion by the Rwandan government but things keep improving. International and national NGOs who support asylum seekers/ refugees generally operate freely’¹⁴⁴

6.3.4 The following list provides examples of international and national NGOs working in Rwanda to assist refugees and asylum seekers. The list is intended to provide an indication of the range of services and service providers and is not exhaustive.

6.3.5 [Adventist Development and Relief Agency Rwanda \(ADRA\):](#)

- international organisation affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church
- partner with local communities, organisations and governments to deliver relief and development assistance
- education, infrastructure and food provision in refugee camps^{145 146}

6.3.6 [Alight Rwanda:](#)

- Alight (formerly, American Refugee Committee) is a global family of organisations providing support to displaced people
- partners with GoR, UN and US agencies and the private sector
- works with refugees in camps, urban areas, reception and transit centres
- health care, nutrition, housing, infrastructure, sustainable livelihoods, SGBV services, WASH^{147 148}

6.3.7 [Global Humanitarian and Development Foundation](#) (GHDF):

¹⁴² [Annex A8](#), Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

¹⁴³ [Annex A7](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

¹⁴⁴ [Annex A7](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

¹⁴⁵ Adventist Review, ‘[ADRA Rwanda supports increase of digital learning, nutrition...](#)’, 27 Jan 2022

¹⁴⁶ ADRA, ‘[Completed projects](#)’, no date

¹⁴⁷ Alight Rwanda, ‘[The post 2020-21](#)’, no date

¹⁴⁸ Alight Rwanda, ‘[Embracing new possibilities](#)’, no date

- 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 camps¹⁴⁹

6.3.8 [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 Uganda¹⁵⁰

6.3.9 [Legal Aid Forum](#) (LAF):

- Collection of national organisations which provide legal services to vulnerable groups
- Works with GoR and UNHCR to provide legal services to refugees and asylum seekers including civil registration, detention visits, mediation, victim representation, advocacy¹⁵¹

6.3.10 [Plan International:](#)

- International development and humanitarian organisation
- operate in Rwandan refugee camps, focusing on supporting children (childhood development, child protection, teen pregnancy, SGBV)¹⁵²

6.3.11 Prison Fellowship Rwanda PFR:

- National NGO set up in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide and was involved in organising the Gacaca courts which dealt with low-level genocide offenders
- partners with the GoR and local and international organisations (including UNHCR) to ensure access to justice by providing legal assistance and access to civil registration and documentation to refugees living in the camps and urban areas^{153 154}

6.3.12 [Sustainable Development & Humanitarian Action](#) (SDHA):

- a Rwandan NGO founded by volunteers providing support and humanitarian relief in disasters and for refugees and the vulnerable.

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Section 7 updated: 24 March 2022

7. Women

7.1 Constitution

¹⁴⁹ GHDF, '[Home](#)', no date

¹⁵⁰ Kepler, '[Refugee education](#)', no date

¹⁵¹ LAF, '[Annual report 2020](#)', no date

¹⁵² Plan International, '[Rwanda home](#)', no date

¹⁵³ Umurimo, '[Gikondo community center manager](#)', 22 December 2019

¹⁵⁴ Borgen Project, '[Restorative justice and the Rwandan genocide](#)', 11 March 2021

- 7.1.1 The [Constitution](#) of the Republic of Rwanda (2003, revised in 2015) prohibits discrimination based on sex and states the principle of equality between men and women¹⁵⁵.
- 7.1.2 The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF), website breaks the constitution down into relevant laws:
- ‘The [Law N° 27/2016 of 08/07/2016 governing matrimonial regimes, donations and successions](#): This law provides for equal inheritance rights between boys and girls as well as equal property management among married couples.
 - ‘The [Law No 43/2013 of 16/06/2013 governing Land in Rwanda](#): guarantees equal rights on land access, ownership and utilization to both men and women.
 - ‘The [Law N° 66/2018 of 30/08/2018 regulating labor in Rwanda](#) providing protection of workers against gender based violence and any kind of harassment at the work place.
 - ‘The [Organic Law No. 12/2013/OL of 12/09/2013 on State Finances and Property](#): This law has supported to institutionalize financing for gender equality across Government expenditures (Gender Budget Statement – GBS).
 - ‘The [Law N° 003/2016 of 30/03/2016 establishing and governing maternity leave benefits scheme](#): This law guarantees security of women employment and protection of a child.
 - ‘The [Law N° 68/2018 of 30/08/2018](#) determining offences and penalties in general criminalizes GBV offenses, child defilement, human trafficking, marital rape and forced marriage.
 - ‘The [Law N° 71/2018 of 31/08/2018 relating to the protection of the child](#): This guarantees the protection of all children against all kind of abuse.
 - ‘The [Law N° 32/2016 of 28/08/2016 governing persons and family](#): This law promotes the principles of gender equality through governing persons and family as well as relation between persons.’¹⁵⁶

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7.2 Equality and women’s rights

- 7.2.1 The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda (2003, revised in 2015) prohibits discrimination based on sex and states the principle of equality between men and women. The Constitution sets a minimum quota of 30% for women’s representation in decision-making positions and this quota has been exceeded. Women hold 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 Councils¹⁵⁷,

¹⁵⁵ Government of Rwanda, ‘[Constitution](#)’ (Articles 10 and 16), 24 Dec 2015

¹⁵⁶ Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, ‘[Gender promotion](#)’, no date

¹⁵⁷ UN Human Rights Council, ‘[National report](#)’ (page 9), 9 Nov 2020

- 7.2.2 Policies to ensure that the principle of gender equality is mainstreamed across sectors include:
- [‘Revised National Gender Policy’](#) (2021) under revision,
 - [‘National Policy against Gender Based Violence’](#) (2011),
 - ‘National Policy for Family Promotion (2005) ... developed to ensure that the principle of gender equality is mainstreamed across sectors.
 - ‘National Strategy for Transformation (NST1) sets to strengthen and promote gender equality and ensure equal opportunities for all Rwandans whilst fostering the culture of solidarity with vulnerable groups.’¹⁵⁸
- 7.2.3 There are 3 main bodies involved in promoting and upholding women’s rights:
- Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion: coordinates policy implementation in the area of women and children’s issues.
 - Gender Monitoring Office: monitors progress towards the goal of gender equality and the fight against GBV.
 - National Women’s Council: advocacy and mobilisation to increase women’s participation in society¹⁵⁹.
- 7.2.4 A 2016 law gave spouses equal rights and obligations and made husband and wife joint heads of the household. Either spouse can apply for a divorce. Women also have equal rights to inheritance of land and property^{160,161}.
- 7.2.5 The Global Gender Gap Index 2021 which 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, ranks Rwanda the 7th (out of 156) most gender-equal country in the world (the United Kingdom is 23rd), and 2nd in Africa. Rwanda also ranks 6th in political empowerment stating that: ‘In Rwanda, gender parity has been fully achieved in the share of ministerial positions and parliamentary positions held by women.’¹⁶²
- 7.2.6 There is gender parity in education, with girls accounting for 49.7% and 53.2% of enrolments in primary and secondary education, respectively¹⁶³.
- 7.2.7 With regard access to health, MIGEPROF noted that: ‘Rwanda is the first low-income country to provide free universal access for the HPV vaccine for adolescent girls...’¹⁶⁴
- 7.2.8 Advancements for women in the media include:
- ‘An Association of Rwandan Female journalists (ARFEM) was created to raise awareness on gender equality issues in the media.

¹⁵⁸ Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, [‘Gender promotion’](#), no date

¹⁵⁹ Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, [‘Report on CEDAW’](#) (page 10), May 2021

¹⁶⁰ Government of Rwanda, [‘Official Gazette 37’](#) (Articles 206, 209 and 218), 12 Sept 2016

¹⁶¹ Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, [‘Report on CEDAW’](#) (page 7), May 2021

¹⁶² World Economic Forum, [‘Global Gender Gap report 2021’](#) (pages 10, 19 and 29), 30 March 2021

¹⁶³ UN Human Rights Council, [‘National report’](#) (page 11), 9 Nov 2020

¹⁶⁴ Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, [‘Gender promotion’](#), no date

- ‘Gender mainstreaming strategy in Media sector which is under review has been developed to ensure a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.’¹⁶⁵

7.2.9 The USSD Human Rights report 2020 stated:

‘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 allows women to inherit property from their fathers and husbands, and couples may make their own legal property arrangements. Women experienced some difficulties pursuing property claims due to lack of knowledge, procedural bias against women in inheritance matters, multiple spousal claims due to polygyny, and the threat of gender-based violence. The law requires equal pay for equal work and prohibits discrimination in hiring decisions. There are no known legal restrictions on women’s working hours or employment in the same occupations, tasks, and industries as men. Studies in previous years indicated few persons reported gender-based discrimination in workplaces, and most people were either unaware of it or unwilling to discuss it. Experts concluded gender-based discrimination remained underreported, in part because victims of discrimination feared losing their employment.’¹⁶⁶

7.2.10 Freedom House, Freedom in the World report 2022 stated: ‘While women enjoy broad legal equality and have a significant presence in the economy as workers and business owners, gender-based discrimination persists, and gender-equality efforts have largely favored English-speaking Tutsis.’¹⁶⁷

7.2.11 Amnesty International in a report on the human rights situation covering 2020 for Rwanda stated: ‘In May, the President pardoned 36 women convicted for abortion. All except eight of them were arrested and convicted after 2018 Penal Code revisions. While abortion remained illegal in most circumstances, the 2018 Penal Code introduced legal exceptions in cases of rape, incest or forced marriage.’¹⁶⁸

7.2.12 The Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Rwanda noted the Government of Rwanda’s response that ‘Strong legal, policy and institutional frameworks had been put in place to continue to protect the rights of children and ensure that perpetrators of sexual violence, trafficking in children and unlawful child labour were brought to justice’¹⁶⁹.

7.2.13 The Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Rwanda noted that ‘In 2018, the law on human trafficking (Law No. 51/2018 of 13/08/2018) was adopted. Capacity-building sessions for law enforcement officers had been held, which had resulted in an increase in the rate of convictions for trafficking in persons.’¹⁷⁰.

¹⁶⁵ Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, ‘[Gender promotion](#)’, no date

¹⁶⁶ USSD, [2020 Human Rights report](#) (section 6), March 2021

¹⁶⁷ Freedom House: ‘[Freedom in the World 2022 – Rwanda](#)’, 28 February 2022

¹⁶⁸ AI, ‘[The State of the World’s Human Rights: Rwanda 2020](#)’, 7 April 2021

¹⁶⁹ UN HRC, ‘[Report of the Working Group on the UPR](#)’ (para 16), 25 March 2021

¹⁷⁰ UN HRC, ‘[Report of the Working Group on the UPR](#)’ (para 17), 25 March 2021

- 7.2.14 In response to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Rwanda, Canada, Italy and Sweden were among several states to commend Rwanda on steps on gender equality¹⁷¹.
- 7.2.15 In their 2019-2022 Gender Equality Strategy, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
- ‘Since the devastating 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda has emerged as an impressive story of transformation in Africa. Guided by successive national medium-term plans and comprehensive policy reforms over the last two decades, the country has achieved remarkable socioeconomic progress.
- ‘Among many other areas, this has been demonstrated by a more than three-fold increase in per capita gross domestic product (from \$206 in 2002 to \$729 in 2016) and major advances in health, education, social protection, unity and reconciliation.
- ‘Rwanda has, equally, 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.’¹⁷²
- 7.2.16 The same report highlighted an earlier (2017) World Economic Forum (WEF) report which ranked Rwanda as the fourth best country in closing gender gaps¹⁷³.

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7.3 Freedom of movement for women

- 7.3.1 The OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index, citing various sources, stated: ‘Under the Identity Card Law (2008b, Art. 11) and Ministerial Order 3/1: Regulations and Procedures for Implementing Nationality Law (2011, Art. 17), men and women and have the same rights to apply for identity cards and passports, regardless of marital status. The law provides women with the same rights as men to acquire passports for their minor children (Rwanda, 2011, Art. 17). As per Article 23 of the Constitution, every Rwandan has the right to leave and to return to the country, and there are no gender-biased restrictions on freedom of movement enshrined in the law.’¹⁷⁴
- 7.3.2 The USSD Human Rights report 2020 stated: ‘The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.’¹⁷⁵

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Section 8 updated: 24 March 2022

8. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

8.1 Domestic abuse, sexual assault and rape

¹⁷¹ UN HRC, ‘[Report of the Working Group on the UPR](#)’ (paras 32, 64 and 106), 25 March 2021

¹⁷² UNDP, ‘[Gender Equality Strategy: UNDP Rwanda \(2019-2022\)](#)’, December 2018

¹⁷³ UNDP, ‘[Gender Equality Strategy: UNDP Rwanda \(2019-2022\)](#)’, December 2018

¹⁷⁴ OECD ‘[Social Institutions and Gender Index](#)’, 2019

¹⁷⁵ USSD, ‘[2020 Human Rights report](#)’ (section 6), March 2021

- 8.1.1 The OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), citing various sources, stated: ‘... GBV remains pervasive, as it is widely accepted by the society as a result of entrenched traditional patriarchal norms ... Although reporting rates for GBV cases have increased as a result of the government’s prevention and protection efforts, it remains under-reported due to victims’ fear of stigma, retaliation, and women’s economic dependence on the perpetrator ...’¹⁷⁶
- 8.1.2 USSD report 2020 stated: ‘Domestic violence against women and children remained common. CSOs and NGOs reported this trend appeared to increase during COVID-19, although precise data was unavailable. Authorities encouraged reporting of domestic violence cases, although most incidents remained within the extended family and were not reported or prosecuted.’¹⁷⁷
- 8.1.3 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) made several key findings:
- **‘Spousal violence:** 46% of ever-married women and 18% of ever-married men have experienced spousal physical, sexual, or emotional violence.
 - **‘Trends in spousal violence:** The prevalence of any spousal violence among ever-married women increased from 40% in 2014-15 to 46% in 2019-20 but declined slightly from 20% to 18% among men over the same period.
 - **‘Injuries due to spousal violence:** 41% of ever-married women and 39% of ever-married men who have experienced spousal physical or sexual violence have sustained injuries.
 - **‘Help seeking:** 40% of women and 38% of men who have experienced physical or sexual violence have never sought help to stop the violence or told someone about it; only 43% of women and 40% of men have sought help. The most common sources of help are neighbors and family members.’¹⁷⁸
- 8.1.4 The table below compiled using data from the 2 most recent RDH surveys shows the percentage of women age 15-49 who have experienced physical violence since age 15^{179,180}:

	Ever experienced physical violence		Ever experienced sexual violence	
	2014/15	2019/2020	2015/15	2019/2020
Female	34.5%	37%	22.4%	22.5%

¹⁷⁶ OECD ‘[Social Institutions and Gender Index](#)’, 2019

¹⁷⁷ USSD, [2020 Human Rights report](#) (section 6), March 2021

¹⁷⁸ NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 285), September 2021

¹⁷⁹ NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)’ (page 285), September 2021

¹⁸⁰ NISR, ‘[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2014/2015](#)’ (page 270), March 2016

- 8.1.5 The table below, compiled using data from the 2 most recent RDH surveys, shows the percentage of women age 15-49 who have experienced physical violence since age 15, according to background characteristics: age, residence, province and marital status.

Background characteristic	2014/15	2019/20
Age		
15-19	24.4	21.8
20-24	28.1	33.2
25-29	35.4	38.7
30-39	39.6	43.2
40-49	43.4	45.1
Residence		
Urban	35.0	32.9
Rural	34.4	37.6
Province		
City of Kigali	35.8	34.8
South	32.2	38.2
West	33.6	39.0
North	37.3	37.7
East	35.2	34.2
Marital status		
Never married	22.4	23.4
Married or living together	39.2	41.6
Divorced/separated/widowed	54.2	64.4
Total	34.5	36.7
Total number of women	2679	2788

- 8.1.6 The table below, compiled using data from the 2 most recent Rwandan Demographic and Health Surveys, shows the percentage of women age 15-49 who have reported experiencing physical violence since age 15 who report specific persons who committed the violence by marital status of respondent^{181 182}:

Person	Ever married 2014/15	Never married 2014/15	Ever married 2019/20	Never married 2019/20
Current husband/partner	57.5	-	59.9	-
Former husband/partner	27.4	-	26.9	-
Current boyfriend	0.0	0.8	0.4	1.8
Former boyfriend	1.2	4.0	1.0	3.5
Father/stepfather	6.3	17.4	1.2	1.8

¹⁸¹ NISR, '[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)' (page 296), September 2021

¹⁸² NISR, '[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2014/2015](#)' (page 270), March 2016

Mother/stepmother	3.3	20.3	9.5	41.5
Brother/sister	4.3	18.7	5.8	16.8
Other relative	5.8	8.2	2.9	7.0
Teacher	2.8	21.2	2.6	23.4
Police/soldiers	1.1	0.8	0.1	0.6
Other	6.6	21.4	7.0	12.9

8.1.7 The above data shows that ever married women report their current husband or partner and former husband or partner as the most common perpetrator of violence, 59.9% and 26.9 % respectively for 2019/20 survey and 57.5% and 27.4% from the 2014/15 survey. With never married women most often reporting their mother/stepmother (42%) and teacher (23%) as perpetrators of the violence^{183 184}.

8.1.8 Among women and men who have reported experiencing physical or sexual violence and sought help, the most common sources for help were:

Help from	Women 2015/15	Men 2015/15	Women 2019-20	Men 2019-20
Neighbours	60%	44%	40%	32%
Own family	27%	28%	33%	24%
Friend	5%	18%	7%	15%
Husband/wife/partners family	16%	2%	18%	7%
Local authorities	-	-	18%	17%
Police	10%	12%	11%	17%

8.1.9 In a meeting with the HO on 22 March 2022, a representative of NCHR explained: 'There is a tradition of a weekly meeting about gender at village level, we call it "parents evening" to share and address issues. We have a traditional court (Abunzi mediators) at local village level, for example, if there is a quarrel between husband and wife, their mandate is to address the issues to see if they can mediate before going to Court. If they fail then it can be escalated [to court]'.¹⁸⁵

8.1.10 In a meeting with the HO on 22 March 2022, a representative of NCHR commented that they were: 'Currently seeing situation of teenage pregnancies due to GBV – men with money can incite girls from poor families, buy things for her (watch, mobile phone), girl can be violated. Institutions are in place if those situations arise to punish people responsible. Age of consent is 18'.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ NISR, '[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2019/2020](#)' (page 296), September 2021

¹⁸⁴ NISR, '[Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey of 2014/2015](#)' (page 270), March 2016

¹⁸⁵ [Annex A9](#), Meeting between HO and NCHR, 22 March 2022

¹⁸⁶ [Annex A9](#), Meeting between HO and NCHR, 22 March 2022

8.2 Penalties for rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment

8.2.1 The OECD SIGI, citing various sources, stated:

‘Rape is a criminal offense under the Law on Prevention and Punishment of Gender- Based Violence and subject to a penalty ranging between 10 and 20 years of imprisonment, with increased penalties if the crime results in bodily harm or mental illness... Rape is legally defined as “causing another person to engage in a non-consensual sexual intercourse by using force, threat or trickery” ... “Sexual intercourse” is not defined in the law, so it is unclear if rape requires proof of penetration. Marital rape is criminalized, however it is considered a separate act from non-marital rape and subject to lower penalties: imprisonment of up to six months, and a fine of RWF 100 000 [£74¹⁸⁷] to 300 000 [£222¹⁸⁸]...’¹⁸⁹

8.2.2 The USSD report 2020 stated: ‘... The law criminalizes rape of men and women and spousal rape, and the government handled rape cases as a judicial priority. Penalties for conviction of rape range from 10 years’ to life imprisonment with substantial monetary fines. Penalties for conviction of committing physical and sexual violence against one’s spouse range from three to five years’ imprisonment.’¹⁹⁰

8.2.3 Freedom House, Freedom in the World report 2022 stated: ‘The penalties for spousal rape are much lighter than for other forms of rape.’¹⁹¹

8.2.4 On domestic violence, OECD stated:

‘Domestic violence is a criminal offense under the Law on Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence and subject to a penalty of six to two years imprisonment.... The Law covers physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence from spouses, but does not explicitly cover abuse from former partners...The Law does not forbid mediation or conciliation in cases of domestic violence... The enforcement and promotion of domestic violence legislation falls under the purview of the broader accompanying National Policy against Gender-Based Violence... While the definition of GBV cited in the policy covers domestic violence (stating, “this violence may be exercised within or outside households”), and domestic violence victims have access to GBV health services, hotline and emergency shelters, the Policy does not include provisions specific to the prevention of domestic violence...’¹⁹²

8.2.5 The USSD report 2020 stated ‘The law prohibits sexual harassment and provides for penalties for conviction of six months’ to one year’s imprisonment and monetary fines. The penalties are increased when the offender is an employer or other person of authority and the victim is a

¹⁸⁷ [Xe Currency Converter](#), 21 March 2022

¹⁸⁸ [Xe Currency Converter](#), 21 March 2022

¹⁸⁹ OECD ‘[Social Institutions and Gender Index](#)’, 2019

¹⁹⁰ USSD, [2020 Human Rights report](#) (section 6), March 2021

¹⁹¹ Freedom House: ‘[Freedom in the World 2022 – Rwanda](#)’, 28 February 2022

¹⁹² OECD ‘[Social Institutions and Gender Index](#)’, 2019

subordinate. Nevertheless, advocacy organizations reported sexual harassment remained common.’¹⁹³

- 8.2.6 USSD Human Rights report 2020 stated: ‘In March and April [2020], several RDF [Rwanda Defence Force] soldiers allegedly committed rape while enforcing COVID-19 lockdown measures, media reported. The RDF issued a press release on April 4 stating it had arrested five suspects and was investigating the cases.’¹⁹⁴ CPIT could not find information in the sources consulted to suggest this was part of a wider or more systemic pattern (see [Bibliography](#)).

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8.3 Government policies and programmes

- 8.3.1 In a 2015 paper examining ‘Women's experiences of gender equality laws in rural Rwanda: the case of Kamonyi District’, published in the Journal of Eastern African Studies, author Mediatrice Kagaba noted ‘A Gender-Based Violence Law (2009) and related policy (2011) give a woman the right to report gender abuses whether these occur in the household or outside the home. The same instruments defined gender-based violence and introduced penalties for this’¹⁹⁵
- 8.3.2 A State report, submitted by Rwanda, on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Government of Rwanda, CEDAW 10th periodic report) stated: ‘In 2018–2019, mass community awareness was conducted in more than 1,291 secondary schools and 38 High Learning Institutions in Rwanda and the dialogues held on gender equality and Gender Based Violence prevention.’¹⁹⁶
- 8.3.3 The USSD report 2020 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 and was included for all troops and police preparing for deployment to peacekeeping missions abroad...
‘The government provides sexual and reproductive health services for victims of sexual or gender-based violence via the country’s network of Isange One Stop Centers.’¹⁹⁷
- 8.3.4 The Government of Rwanda, CEDAW 10th periodic report stated:
‘The Government of Rwanda also secured 14.95 Million USD from the World Bank through the Great Lakes Emergency Sexual and Gender Based Violence and Women Health Project, to establish a robust GBV Management Information System. The system is hosted by the Regional Centre of Excellence of GBV and child abuse under the coordination of the

¹⁹³ USSD, [2020 Human Rights report](#) (section 6), March 2021

¹⁹⁴ USSD, [2020 Human Rights report](#) (section 6), March 2021

¹⁹⁵ Mediatrice Kagaba, ‘[Women's experiences of gender equality laws ...](#)’, 7 December 2015

¹⁹⁶ Government of Rwanda, [UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#) (paragraph 73), 4 October 2021

¹⁹⁷ USSD, [2020 Human Rights report](#) (section 6), March 2021

Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF). It is meant to enhance data management especially those collected one stop centres. This will address the challenge of lack of harmonized reporting mechanisms in all IOSCs where for example GBV officers report to the Ministry of Health (MINISANTE) and former Judicial Police Officers reported to Rwanda National Police, the situation which affected quick information sharing and timely interventions'¹⁹⁸

- 8.3.5 The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion website in an update from December 2021 stated with regard government initiatives:

'Since their inception in 2009, there are now [44 Isange One Stop Centres](#) (IOSC) around the country – one in each district hospital. Isange One Stop Centres 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 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.'¹⁹⁹

- 8.3.6 In addition to the Isange One Stop Centres, and following a UN global campaign against GBV, MIGEPROF reported on the country's achievements, while acknowledging the continued widespread problem of GBV in Rwanda, stating:

'The most crucial step is preventing violence and 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.

'These 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...

'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...

¹⁹⁸ Government of Rwanda, [UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#) (paragraph 97), 4 October 2021

¹⁹⁹ MIGEPROF, [The fight against GBV concerns every Rwandan](#), 10 December 2021

'The government recognises that a multi-sectorial approach is necessary to end gender-based violence in our society. The government of Rwanda have taken decisive actions on this front and will continue to do so in the future to ensure that all residents are safe, can speak out freely against perpetrators and get justice on time. We will not stop until these goals have been met.'²⁰⁰

- 8.3.7 Freedom House stated 'Domestic violence remains widespread and seldom reported despite government programs to combat it.'²⁰¹

See also [Annex A4, meeting with Isange One Stop Centre, 19 January 2022](#)

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8.4 Arrests, prosecutions and convictions

- 8.4.1 The tables below were compiled using data from two National Public Prosecution Authority (NPPA) reports. The first report covers July - December 2017 and the second July – September 2020. Table 1 shows GBV cases prosecuted and table 2 shows conviction rates^{202 203}.

Crime	Year	Received cases*	Filed with court	Closed cases	Total cases handled	Pending cases	% of cases handled*
Child defilement	2017	1463	820	429	1249	214	85.37
	2020	1064	437	308	745	319	70.0
Rape	2017	228	87	112	199	29	87.28
	2018	192	60	77	137	55	71.4
Harassment of Spouse	2017	541	358	143	501	40	92.61
	2020	606	380	95	475	131	78.4
Total	2017	2232	1265	684	1949	283	87.32
	2020	1862	877	480	1357	505	72.9

'The number of case files that Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) transmitted to NPPA for analysis and the percentage of cases handled'²⁰⁴

Crime	Year	Pronounced cases	Cases won	Cases lost	Conviction rate %
Child defilement	2017	673	538	135	79.9
	2020	305	208	97	68.2
Rape	2017	66	38	28	57.6
	2020	256	239	17	93.4
	2017	275	267	8	97.1

²⁰⁰ MIGEPROF, '[The fight against GBV concerns every Rwandan](#)', 10 December 2021

²⁰¹ Freedom House: '[Freedom in the World 2022 – Rwanda](#)', 28 February 2022

²⁰² NPPA, '[NPPA Quarterly progressive report July – December 2017](#)', March 2018

²⁰³ NPPA, '[NPPA Quarterly progressive report July – September 2020](#)', no date

²⁰⁴ NPPA, '[NPPA Quarterly progressive report July – September 2020](#)', no date

Harassment of Spouse	2020	34	27	7	79.4
Total	2017	1014	843	171	83.1
	2020	595	474	121	79.7

- 8.4.2 The OECD SIGI, citing various sources, stated: ‘Domestic violence is prevalent and culturally condoned, as spousal rape, physical abuse, denial of property rights, verbal abuse and psychological harassment are often perceived as a normal part of family life... Most instances of domestic violence remain within the extended family and are not reported or prosecuted...’²⁰⁵
- 8.4.3 The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion website in an update from December 2021 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.’²⁰⁶
- 8.4.4 The RNP stated in a news report on their website: ‘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.’²⁰⁷
- 8.4.5 CPIT was not able to find further statistical information on arrests, prosecutions and convictions in the sources consulted see [Bibliography](#))

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8.5 SGBV against asylum seekers and refugees

- 8.5.1 The majority of information focused on the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in camps. In sources consulted (see [bibliography](#)) CPIT was not able to find any further information on SGBV relating to urban asylum seekers or refugees.
- 8.5.2 The OECD SIGI, citing various sources, stated: ‘Refugee women and girls, particularly those in refugee camps, are at a disproportionate risk of GBV, including “survival sex” in exchange for food or water, and human trafficking ... The GBV services the government has provided, such as the Isange One Stop Centres, are typically remote from refugee camps and refugee women and girls lack confidential complaint mechanisms and access to justice...’²⁰⁸
- 8.5.3 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. Incidents are thought to have increased during

²⁰⁵ OECD ‘[Social Institutions and Gender Index](#)’, 2019

²⁰⁶ MIGEPROF, ‘[The fight against GBV concerns every Rwandan](#)’, 10 December 2021

²⁰⁷ Rwanda National Police, ‘[RNP conducts workshop ... on GBV prevention](#)’, 28 September 2021

²⁰⁸ OECD ‘[Social Institutions and Gender Index](#)’, 2019

COVID-19 due to reduced access to UNHCR and partner staff and because of an increase in partner violence during lockdown²⁰⁹.

8.5.4 The Government of Rwanda, CEDAW 10th periodic report stated with regard refugee women and girls:

‘The state ensures the security of citizens and their properties wherever they are within its territory. Police officers of both genders are deployed in sufficient numbers at each refugee camp. Should there be a need to reinforce security in terms of increasing the number of police officers, the police station at Sector level, which is close to the refugee camps, would be ready to intervene. With regard to lighting, the GoR [Government of Rwanda] is pleased to report that all refugee camps are connected to electricity and have sufficient lighting.

‘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.

‘Legal Aid Forum (LAF), one of the NGOs offering legal aid services in refugee camps has also empowered 121,974 people on how to manage GBV cases and conducted awareness campaigns within the camp on human trafficking.

‘The Government of Rwanda in collaboration with Partners provides women, girls and children shelter and food. The Government in collaboration with partners train refugees on SGBV and they are taught on early reporting and evidence for legal purposes against SGBV.

‘All refugee camps have access to Isange One Stop Centres available in the District hosting. Each camp has a health facility.’²¹⁰

8.5.5 A UNHCR operational update from November-December 2021 on refugees and asylum seekers included the following information with regard gender-based violence (GBV):

‘UNHCR, partners, and refugees launched the annual 16 Days of Activism against GBV in the Mahama camp [Mahama (Kirehe District)²¹¹] and urban settings on 25 November. The theme for 2021 was “Orange the World: End Gender-Based Violence Now”. The period was marked with different awareness-raising and advocacy sessions with the community and other

²⁰⁹ UNHCR, ‘[Rwanda country refugee response plan Jan to Dec 2021](#)’ (page 11), 19 April 2021

²¹⁰ Government of Rwanda, [UN CEDAW: Tenth periodic report...](#) (para 271-275), 4 October 2021

²¹¹ MINEMA, ‘[The single project implementation unit](#)’, no date

shareholders, incl. public authorities, judges, prosecutors, Rwanda Bureau of Investigation (GBV), and Police...

- '73 new GBV cases were identified, 69 in the camp [Mahama] and four in Huye urban [setting], including child defilement, physical assault, denial of resources, and emotional abuse cases. The survivors were assisted accordingly.
- '306 GBV and Child Protection (CP) Community-based group members in the camp were trained on the existing CP and GBV prevention and response interventions...
- '59 new cases of GBV, including rape, child defilement, sexual assault, psychological/emotional abuse, denial of resources, and physical assault, were reported in [the refugee camps²¹²] Kigeme (31), Mugombwa (6), Kiziba (6), and Nyabiheke (16) camps. The survivors were assisted accordingly.'²¹³

8.5.6 A HO team visited the Isange One Stop Centre (IOSC) branch in Kigali on 19 January 2022. The Centre's Manager and Co-ordinator explained 'We work with UNHCR on training awareness campaigns and psycho-social services.'²¹⁴

8.5.7 HO officials asked about victims who cannot speak Kinyarwanda, French or English, and the Manager explained: 'We can struggle with unofficial languages or sign languages.'²¹⁵

8.5.8 HO officials met with representatives of Alight on 23 March 2022. Alight is an NGO which provides a range of services to both camp-based and urban refugees, see ([NGOs involved with refugees and asylum seekers in Rwanda](#)). Alight described the support available to urban refugees and asylum seekers who experience SGBV:

'Alight support to POCs in Rwanda with provision of services under Health, Nutrition, SGBV prevention and case management, community empowerment and Child Protection in ETM Gashora. For SGBV case management, our referral pathways include safe spaces (both under Alight and also government administered). Alight also tries to run awareness campaigns to advise 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 support urban based asylum seekers. Alight is specifically assigned to provide protection services - other organisations provide support in other areas (medical, food, shelter etc). Asked to ensure protection matters.

²¹² MINEMA, '[The single project implementation unit](#)', no date

²¹³ UNHCR, '[Operational update – Rwanda Nov-Dec 2021](#)', November – December 2021

²¹⁴ [Annex A4](#), HO visit to IOSC Kigali, 19 January 2022

²¹⁵ [Annex A4](#), HO visit to IOSC Kigali, 19 January 2022

‘Alight SGBV programming is composed of 2 components – awareness (create awareness of rights at household level and different kinds of gender-based violence e.g., sexual, psychosocial, physical, child neglect etc). Alight has a hotline, if you call, someone will revert back to caller immediate and the person will receive services within 24 hours.

‘Asylum seekers newly arrived into the country are aware of ALIGHT protection services as they pass through transit camps that are inside country borders. Alight usually receives referrals from different stakeholders including those from UNHCR and IOM, who have mandated Alight to oversee issues for target POCs.

‘Alight uses such occasions as commemoration of international days such International Women’s day, day of the child, to convey messages of SGBV prevention.

‘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.

‘Alight uses existing referral path ways facilitate affected POCs to access to justice, healthcare, housing by refereeing them to appropriate service provider– such services also includes ‘safe spaces’ for people who prefer not to go home based on 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.’²¹⁶

8.5.9 On the extent of the SGBV problem, Alight commented:

‘SGBV [is] a particular problem for refugees given their vulnerability. There is a Culture of silence in this country which Alight is trying to address through SASA community mobilisation approach²¹⁷ – SGBV happening daily at household level but extent to which this is reported is low. Alight adopting integrated approach that is anchored on community-based structure and SASA (Community Activists – live and work in community, responsible for awareness, identifying cases, helping to guide where to seek support they require). GBV is remains problem in RWA – here need extra resources like advocacy and funding.’²¹⁸

8.5.10 Alight was unable to provide information on whether the risk of SGBV differed between camp-based refugees and urban refugees. Alight's statistics related to camp-based cases, which they estimate at 400 to 500 cases a year.’²¹⁹

²¹⁶ [Annex A10](#), HO meeting with Alight, 23 March 2022

²¹⁷ <https://raisingvoices.org/women/the-sasa-approach/>

²¹⁸ [Annex A10](#), HO meeting with Alight, 23 March 2022

²¹⁹ [Annex A10](#), HO meeting with Alight, 23 March 2022

- 8.5.11 During a meeting on 21 March 2022, HO officials asked the UNHCR about the relative risk of SGBV for camp and urban refugees and a representative replied that the SGBV risk was the same. The representative added: ‘Urban refugees can report to the office and community centre via walk-in or using the helpline. But if they don’t make effort to reach to make complaint, [UNHCR] don’t have information about them.’²²⁰
- 8.5.12 The representative also said: ‘...[T]here is always a gap between what the refugees want, what they need and what [the organisation] can provide, but particularly a gap in legal assistance – not enough lawyers, in some locations, only one lawyer deals for all cases in one location including for SGBV.’²²¹

See also the section on Camp based refugees in the [note on the asylum system](#) and [SGBV: Protection and support](#).

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8.6 Modern slavery/trafficking

- 8.6.1 A 2018 law is designed to prevent human trafficking and exploitation. The law provides for the protection of victims, sets out the assistance provided to victims and also gives details of prison sentences and fines for perpetrators. The law prohibits the commercial sexual exploitation of children and this crime is punishable by life imprisonment^{222 223}.
- 8.6.2 In its May 2021 response to the UN on its obligations and progress on Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Government of Rwanda explained that ...
- ‘The Law No 51/2018 of 13/08/2018 relating to the prevention, suppression and punishment of trafficking in persons and exploitation of others was enacted and is in line with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. Article 12 of the above stated law, specifically provides special assistance to the child victim.
- ‘In addition to a strong legal framework, a specific Directorate in charge of human trafficking was established within the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB). This Directorate is in charge of prevention, detection and investigation of human trafficking cases that are domestic and cross border.’²²⁴
- 8.6.3 Figures from 2018 estimated the prevalence of modern slavery in Rwanda at 11.56 victims per 1,000 population. For comparison, the regional average (sub-saharan Africa) was 10.25 and the world average was 6.01²²⁵.
- 8.6.4 The USSD’s 2021 Trafficking in Persons 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

²²⁰ [Annex A8](#), HO meeting with UNHCR, 21 March 2022

²²¹ [Annex A8](#), HO meeting with UNHCR, 21 March 2022

²²² USSD, ‘[USSD report 2020](#)’ (section 6), 30 March 2021

²²³ Government of Rwanda, ‘[Official Gazette 39](#)’, 24 Sept 2018

²²⁴ CEDAW, ‘[10th periodic report submitted by Rwanda ...](#)’ (paras 106-107), October 2021

²²⁵ USAID, ‘[Country dashboard Rwanda](#)’, no date

government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity...

'These efforts included identifying more victims and referring them to care; increasing national awareness and prevention campaigns; and organizing government and NGO long-term care shelters into a government-managed network. The government also increased sex trafficking investigations and prosecutions and convicted a sex trafficker for the first time. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government investigated fewer trafficking cases and prosecuted and convicted fewer traffickers compared to the previous year. The government lacked a victim-witness support program and did not maintain shelters for male victims. The government detained thousands of potential victims in district transit centers without conducting adequate screening or referring identified victims to proper care and assistance.'²²⁶

8.6.5 The same USSD report noted:

'Observers reported an increase in domestic trafficking, possibly due to the impact of the pandemic. International organizations reported increased vulnerability to trafficking among Rwandans due to the pandemic and a dwindling economy. Migrant workers migrated from rural areas to urban areas, specifically Kigali, in search of job opportunities and, consequently, became vulnerable to traffickers. Observers reported pandemic-related border closures reduced the number of victims transiting out of the country...

'There were no reports of forcible or coerced recruitment out of the Mahama refugee camp by Rwandan government officials since 2015.'²²⁷

8.6.6 Reports indicated that traffickers target vulnerable populations such as homeless youths, orphans, children with disabilities, young women and girls, unemployed adults and internally displaced persons. Burundian and DRC refugees are also vulnerable to trafficking due to their lack of access to employment. There are reports that some parents in refugee camps receive money for their daughters' work in domestic service, tea plantations or in the sex industry. There are also reports of the sexual exploitation of adolescent girls who are lured from refugee camps with the promise of paid work. While the most common types of trafficking are labour trafficking and sex trafficking, there are reported cases of youths being lured to countries such as Malawi and Mozambique where they are forced to join armed groups²²⁸
²²⁹.

8.6.7 When asked about trafficking in camps by HO officials during a meeting on 21 March 2022, UNHCR responded:

'The issue that UNHCR felt they were struggling with was regarding girls. Most of them were promised employment in cities and towns. So mostly come as house maids or work in restaurant or bars, and therefore the risk is

²²⁶ USSD, '[2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)', 1 July 2021

²²⁷ USSD, '[TiP Report 2021 – Rwanda](#)', (section Protection), 1 July 2021

²²⁸ USSD, '[2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda](#)', 1 July 2021

²²⁹ Never Again Rwanda, '[Understanding Human Trafficking in Rwanda](#)' (page 32), August 2019

more trafficking/exploitation within Rwanda rather than cross border or internationally. Some girls don't tell [UNHCR] or even parents that they are leaving the camp. But once abuse happens, they come to [UNHCR]. Believe the risk [of trafficking] is less for urban refugees; they generally have better opportunities, in terms of mobility, socially, financially.²³⁰

- 8.6.8 During a meeting with HO on 23 March 2022, Alight was asked whether the vulnerability to trafficking of young women and girls in refugee camps also existed among urban refugees. They replied that they hadn't received any feedback from community activists that the trafficking of urban refugees was a problem. However, they highlighted incidents of female camp-based refugees relocating to urban areas – When refugees move to urban areas, this increases their vulnerabilities to an extent women and girls may result into negative coping mechanisms including transactional sex.²³¹
- 8.6.9 The most recent detailed research on trafficking in Rwanda was published in August 2019 through a collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The characteristics of Rwandan victims of trafficking (VOT), identified by the IOM report²³², are summarised in the table. The report looked at 2 different data sources and this variation has been reflected in the range of percentages provided.

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

Note on data: the population size of 515 represents all VOT identified, whereas the population of 85 is the breakdown of cases which have reached prosecution level. The data indicates that a far higher proportion of Rwandan VOT cases reach prosecution level than the other 2 main nationalities of victims. It is possible that there are barriers to the prosecution of cases relating to Burundian and Congolese victims (these nationalities make up the majority of refugees), although it is not possible to confirm with the data provided.

- 8.6.10 A specific directorate has been established within the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB), with responsibility for investigating and preventing human trafficking. Government data indicates that there has been an increase in conviction rates for trafficking offences over the 3-year period from 2016 to

²³⁰ [Annex A8](#), HO meeting with UNHCR, 21 March 2022

²³¹ [Annex A10](#), HO meeting with Alight, 23 March 2022

²³² Never Again Rwanda, '[Understanding Human Trafficking in Rwanda](#)' (page 46 to 47), August 2019

2018²³³, although the number of prosecuted cases for each year is not provided.

Year	2016	2017	2018
Conviction rate for trafficking cases	12.5%	41.7%	53.3%

- 8.6.11 The USSD's 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report²³⁴ provided the following data on investigations and prosecutions and attributed the drop in investigations in 2020 to the COVID-19 lockdowns and the related diversion of resources required to enforce COVID restrictions:

Year	2018	2019	2020
Trafficking investigations	63	86	35
Trafficking victims identified	n/a	96	131
Trafficking victims referred for assistance	n/a	30	37
Defendants prosecuted	n/a	9	2
Defendants convicted	n/a	2	2

- 8.6.12 The same USSD 2021 report noted the government organised presentations in refugee camps to educate refugees and asylum-seekers on the identification of victims and reporting of trafficking cases. NGOs offered support to victims of trafficking in refugee camps but a lack of resources inhibited the provision of effective procedures and assistance²³⁵.
- 8.6.13 Trafficking victims who are not identified as such, are at risk of being detained. NGOs reported the detention of vulnerable persons and potential trafficking victims including homeless adults, street children and members of the LGBTQI+ community²³⁶.
- 8.6.14 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. In recognising the progress made by Rwanda, the UK encourages Rwanda to submit an optional mid-term report to provide an update on implementation of recommendations, between reviews.'²³⁷

See also the section on Camp based refugees in the [note on the asylum system](#) and [Operation of non-governmental organisations](#)

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8.7 Other forms of SGBV

- 8.7.1 The OECD SIGI, citing various sources, stated: 'Female genital mutilation (FGM) is not traditionally practiced in Rwanda. The Government has ratified

²³³ Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, '[Report on CEDAW](#)' (page 21 to 22), May 2021

²³⁴ USSD, '[2021 trafficking in persons report: Rwanda](#)', 1 July 2021

²³⁵ USSD, '[2021 trafficking in persons report: Rwanda](#)', 1 July 2021

²³⁶ USSD, '[2021 trafficking in persons report: Rwanda](#)', 1 July 2021

²³⁷ FCDO, '[UN Human Rights Council: Universal Periodic Review Adoption – Rwanda](#)', 8 July 2021

the Maputo Protocol, which prohibits “all forms of female genital mutilation, scarification, medicalisation and para-medicalisation of female genital mutilation and all other practices in order to eradicate them” ...²³⁸

8.7.2 The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in an October 2021 report on ending child marriage stated: ‘Rwanda [is] ... coming close to the elimination of child marriage. ...levels have continued to decline, with the practice becoming rare.’²³⁹

8.7.3 Over the period 2015 to 2020, the Rwandan government reported an increase in prosecution of cases of SGBV against children²⁴⁰, although the conviction rate was not provided.

Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
SGBV court cases	840	830	2,293	2,537	3,009

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8.8 Protection and support

8.8.1 USSD Human Rights report 2020 stated:

‘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 throughout the country, providing free medical, psychological, legal, and police assistance to victims of domestic violence.’²⁴¹

8.8.2 The [Rwandan National Police](#) (RNP) enforce criminal laws related to gender-based violence. Established in 2009 by the RNP the ‘Isange one stop centre’ model has been recognised at the INTERPOL General Assembly as an example of best practice for preventing and responding to gender-based violence and child domestic abuse^{242,243}.

8.8.3 The [Rwanda Investigation Bureau](#) (RIB) is mandated to prevent, suppress and investigate Gender Based Violence. They have an emergency toll free number to report domestic and/or gender based violence²⁴⁴.

8.8.4 The [National Public Prosecution Authority](#) (NPPA) is responsible for the investigation and prosecution of crimes²⁴⁵

8.8.5 Efforts to raise awareness in GBV response and prevention the RNP in collaboration with the Rwanda Media Commission (RMC), held a one-day workshop for media practitioners and youth volunteers in community policing. The Inspector General of police appealed to attendees and the

²³⁸ OECD ‘[Social Institutions and Gender Index](#)’, 2019

²³⁹ UNICEF, ‘[Towards Ending Child Marriage: Global trends and profiles of progress](#)’, October 2021

²⁴⁰ UN Human Rights Council, ‘[National report submitted by GoR](#)’ (page 13), 9 Nov 2020

²⁴¹ USSD, [2020 Human Rights report](#) (section 6), March 2021

²⁴² Rwanda National Police, [website](#), no date

²⁴³ Rwanda National Police, ‘[Rwandan Isange One Stop model ...](#)’ 5 November 2015

²⁴⁴ Rwanda Investigation Bureau, ‘[What we investigate](#)’, no date

²⁴⁵ National Public Prosecution Authority, ‘[About us – background](#)’, no date

public to report all sexual and gender-based violence²⁴⁶.

- 8.8.6 The Health Development Initiative (HDI) report Situation of Female Sex Workers (FSW) and LGBTI Persons in Rwanda, based on 'data collected from studies, national reports, national documents' and also focus group discussions with female sex workers reported:

'Females Sex Workers ... reported during the focus group discussion that the main reason they do not file complaints to the police in case of gender-based violence is due to the perception by the police that they are deviant and therefore such complaints are unlikely to be reported. In 2019, under the project "Empower, Include, Respect: Making human rights work for LGBTI and Sex Worker communities in Rwanda", HDI recorded 93 cases of allegation human rights violations committed against FSW ... The project recorded allegations of physical abuse amounting to ... 52 % against FSWs of the reported cases.'²⁴⁷

- 8.8.7 A HO team visited the Isange One Stop Centre (IOSC) branch in Kigali on 19 January 2022. The Centre's Manager and Co-ordinator provided an overview of the IOSC's function and purpose:

'Centre manages victims of Gender-based violence (GBV) and child abuse (CA) in general, not specifically asylum seekers or refugees. One stop centre model with a holistic approach.

'Est 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 MoJ under one roof – 24/7 and is free (to the victim, as is paid by the govt and partners).

'Keeping services together in one place:

- 'Address the multiple needs of victims (risk of pregnancy/STD resulting from sexual violence, health, social needs)
- 'Provide comprehensive services
- 'Reduces risk of losing evidence – if the victim has to move around hospital to police etc
- '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 CA.

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

²⁴⁶ Rwanda National Police, '[RNP conducts workshop...](#)', 28 September 2021

²⁴⁷ HDI, '[Situation of Female Sex Workers and LGBTI Persons in Rwanda](#)', 3 July 2020

'Operational framework exists to move a victim through the process: reception (referral) – investigation (judicial support) – medical (examination/treatment) – psychosocial support – safe room (temp shelter) - counsellors.

'44 IOSC in all 30 districts, all district hospitals, referral and specialised hospitals. Mobile van (1) with a 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.

'Victims of GBV and CA can be men/women, boys/girls.

'Impact of single location – timely comprehensive support, reduction in re-victimisation, prevention of infection/unwanted pregnancies.

'IOSC is for anyone who has experienced GBV and child abuse (male and female). Service covers both RWA nationals and non-nationals.'²⁴⁸

8.8.8 HO officials asked what type of documentation is needed to access IOSC's services and whether a lack of ID prevents access, and the Centre Manager explained: 'In general we ask for ID and where the person is from, relationship and this is all done at the reception.'²⁴⁹

8.8.9 And: 'If they don't have ID, usually someone knows them. Treatment is first and verification of ID later. The one service that might be an issue is the termination of pregnancy, especially if a minor. But it is rare that no one has ID or we are not able to identify.'²⁵⁰

8.8.10 HO officials asked about the referral process, and the Manager explained about referrals into the Centre and also what happens when a person leaves the Centre:

'We get referrals from friends, community, schools, employers (anyone can refer). The entry point is free.

'At exit the referral onward will depend on where they are based and the circumstances of their case. We use existing community structures to provide services (ie counselling).

'We carry out home visits and follow-up phone calls to monitor progress of cases.'²⁵¹

8.8.11 HO officials asked about the Doctor to patient ratio at IOSC, and the Manager explained: 'The MoH [Ministry of Health] doctor/patient ratio doesn't apply to Isange. We receive 10 to 12 victims per day. There is one permanent full time Dr and cover when they are not present. There is a Dr available 24/7.'²⁵²

8.8.12 HO officials asked about the availability of psychosocial support, and the Manager explained: 'Every person should receive psycho-social support but sometimes, for example, if one victim's session takes 2 to 3 hours, then we

²⁴⁸ [Annex A4](#), HO visit to IOSC Kigali, 19 January 2022

²⁴⁹ [Annex A4](#), HO visit to IOSC Kigali, 19 January 2022

²⁵⁰ [Annex A4](#), HO visit to IOSC Kigali, 19 January 2022

²⁵¹ [Annex A4](#), HO visit to IOSC Kigali, 19 January 2022

²⁵² [Annex A4](#), HO visit to IOSC Kigali, 19 January 2022

may not have enough counsellors. Some sessions can be hours long. The concept is to provide for every person that comes to the centre, but we are also able to do referrals to counsellors in the community.’²⁵³

- 8.8.13 HO officials asked about SGBV-awareness programmes and the Manager explained: ‘Awareness campaigns are run in the community and we are working with different partners about how to access services and the services victims can get. We have phone lines. We are working with different partners to achieve this. Different awareness programs are run by different ministries.’²⁵⁴

- 8.8.14 HO officials asked what happens if a woman doesn’t want to return home after visiting the Centre, and 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.’²⁵⁵

- 8.8.15 The Centre Manager gave the HO team a tour of the facility and explained: ‘We have a children’s counselling room, medical-legal examination room, children’s interview room, adult counselling room. Samples are taken on site.’²⁵⁶

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

See also [Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and questioning \(LGBTIQ+\) persons](#) and [SGBV against asylum seekers and refugees](#).

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Section 9 updated: 24 March 2022

9. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and questioning (LGBTIQ+) persons

9.1 Legal rights

- 9.1.1 No laws criminalise sexual orientation or consensual same-sex acts between adults. Attempts to criminalise consensual same-sex acts through revision of

²⁵³ [Annex A4](#), HO visit to IOSC Kigali, 19 January 2022

²⁵⁴ [Annex A4](#), HO visit to IOSC Kigali, 19 January 2022

²⁵⁵ [Annex A4](#), HO visit to IOSC Kigali, 19 January 2022

²⁵⁶ [Annex A4](#), HO visit to IOSC Kigali, 19 January 2022

the Penal Code Act were withdrawn in 2009/2010^{257,258,259}. In the sources consulted there is no information indicating that the Rwandan government has since reconsidered proceeding with any such legislation (see [Bibliography](#)).

- 9.1.2 The USSD report 2020 outlined ‘The law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons in housing, employment, nationality laws, or access to government services such as health care.’²⁶⁰
- 9.1.3 Whilst LGBTIQ+ persons are not specifically named among the groups identified as being protected under the law, the [Constitution of Rwanda](#) lays out the following anti-discrimination and protective provisions protecting all citizens of Rwanda:
- **‘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 15** – Every person has the right to physical and mental integrity. No person shall be subjected to torture, physical abuse or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.
 - **‘Article 16** – All human beings are equal before the law. They shall enjoy, without any discrimination, equal protection of the law...
 - **‘Article 18** – The person’s liberty is guaranteed by the State. No one shall be subjected to prosecution, arrest, detention or punishment on account of any act or omission that did not constitute a crime under the law in force at the time it was committed. The right to be informed of the nature and cause of charges and the right to defence are absolute at all levels and degrees of proceedings before administrative, judicial and all other decision-making organs...
 - **‘Article 22 (1)** – The private life, family, home or correspondence of a person shall not be subjected to arbitrary interference; his or her honour and good reputation shall be respected...
 - **‘Article 41** – All citizens have the right and duties relating to health. The State has the duty of mobilising the population for activities aimed at promoting good health and to assist in the implementation of these activities...
 - **‘Article 46** – Every citizen has the duty to relate to other persons without discrimination and to maintain relations conducive to safeguarding, promoting and reinforcing mutual respect, solidarity and tolerance.’²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 6), 30 March 2021

²⁵⁸ ILGA, ‘[State-sponsored homophobia...](#)’ (page 93), Dec 2020

²⁵⁹ Sida, ‘[The Rights of LGBTI People in Rwanda](#)’, page 2, December 2014

²⁶⁰ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’ (page 37), 30 March 2021

²⁶¹ Government of Rwanda, ‘[Constitution](#)’ (Article 1), 24 Dec 2015

- 9.1.4 Gender identity/expression is not listed as a prohibited ground in laws criminalising discrimination²⁶².
- 9.1.5 In 2012, Rwanda was one of the 57 signatory states of the UN Declaration on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, and one of the six African countries to sign the UN Report on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity²⁶³.
- 9.1.6 UHAI – EASHRI, an organisation of philanthropic activists²⁶⁴, published a report analysing the human rights of sex workers and LGBTI+ communities in Rwanda (UHAI – EASHRI report 2016), based on literature reviews, web-based documents, face-to-face and web-based interviews, email exchanges and focus groups, to ascertain the lived experiences of LGBTI+ persons in Rwanda. The report noted that whilst ‘homosexuality’ is not criminalised, sex work and sex workers are criminalised²⁶⁵.
- 9.1.7 A summary report on the situation of female sex workers and LGBTI persons in Rwanda by 12 NGOs dated June 2020 (JG5 – Joint Submission 5) submitted as part of the UN’s Universal Periodic Review of Rwanda observed:
- ‘Rwanda has made progress in terms of protection and promotion of the rights of Female Sex Workers, LGBTI and Gender non-conforming persons from both the legal and policy framework. The Coalition welcomes the decriminalization of sex work in 2018...The Coalition also positively notes the broad prohibition of discrimination in the Constitution of 2003, as revised in 2015 under its article 16. The Coalition also notes the criminalization of discrimination under article 163 of the Law N°68/2018 of 30/08/2018 determining offenses and penalties in general.’²⁶⁶
- 9.1.8 However, the JG5 – Joint Submission also raised a number concerns including ‘Lack of legal recognition for Transgender and Intersex persons... [i]nadequate legal protection against gender based violence;.. Inadequate enforcement of the law criminalizing hate speech, which targets female sex workers and LGBTI persons’²⁶⁷.
- 9.1.9 The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) noted Rwanda has not adopted specific legal protections for LGBTI persons in employment, in relation to hate crimes or incitement to cause hatred and that conversion therapies are not prohibited.²⁶⁸
- 9.1.10 An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) COI query response dated 29 September 2021, based on a range of sources, stated: ‘According to an article by the German international broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW), people of diverse [sexual orientation and gender identity / expression] SOGIE are "in a state of limbo" due to the vagueness of the laws and the

²⁶² UN OHCHR, ‘[Summary of stakeholders’ submissions](#)’ (paragraph 16), 16 November 2020

²⁶³ UHAI-EASHRI, ‘[...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda](#)’, (page 6), 2016

²⁶⁴ UHAI-EASHRI, ‘[Our Issues](#)’, nd

²⁶⁵ UHAI-EASHRI, ‘[...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda](#)’, (page 6), 2016

²⁶⁶ LGBTI/sex worker coalition, [JG5 - Joint Submission 5](#) (pages 3 to 4), June 2020

²⁶⁷ LGBTI/sex worker coalition, [JG5 - Joint Submission 5](#) (page 4), June 2020

²⁶⁸ ILGA, ‘[State-sponsored homophobia...](#)’ (page 326), Dec 2020

ways they are applied to the community’.²⁶⁹

- 9.1.11 In a meeting on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBT+ community in Rwanda remarked that the ‘Govt should be more proactive & comprehensive in terms of human rights/anti-discrimination laws to protect LGBT as a vulnerable community’ noting also that ‘they currently have Article 16 [of the Constitution], which is broader’.²⁷⁰
- 9.1.12 During a meeting with the HO on 22 March 2022, a representative from NCHR commented: ‘The law is not against [LGBTIQ+ people]... , it doesn’t talk about them. Not yet something which is a significant issue in society.’²⁷¹

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9.2 Government attitudes, policies and strategies

- 9.2.1 Senior government officials have expressed support for the human rights of all persons regardless of sexual orientation. In 2016, OutRight (a New York based LGBTIQ+ advocacy group) commented: ‘Rwanda President Paul Kagame doesn’t want to have the same trouble as his neighbors Burundi, Tanzania, and Uganda when it comes to the LGBT community.’ The comment was made following an event in San Francisco, attended by Kagame, where he was asked about LGBTIQ+ persons living in Rwanda and replied: ‘It hasn’t been our problem. And we don’t intend to make it our problem.’ In 2018, Kagame met Ellen DeGeneres and her wife Portia de Rossi in Kigali and Kagame tweeted the meeting and posted the video on his YouTube channel^{272 273 274}.
- 9.2.2 The USSD report 2020 noted ‘Cabinet-level government officials expressed support for the human rights of all persons regardless of sexual orientation...’²⁷⁵
- 9.2.3 The JG5 – Joint Submission 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.’²⁷⁶
- 9.2.4 In an article of 23 September 2019, Reuters noted that, following a well-known Rwandan gospel singer coming out as gay, ‘Olivier Nduhungirehe, Rwanda’s state minister for foreign affairs, tweeted that the government would ensure Nabonido’s rights were protected. “All Rwandans are born and remain equal in rights and freedoms,” he wrote.’²⁷⁷
- 9.2.5 A 2019 report by CEDOCA, the research unit of the Belgian Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS), in an unofficial translation, highlighted that ‘The Ministry of Justice, specifically the

²⁶⁹ IRB, ‘[Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...](#)’, 29 September 2021

²⁷⁰ [Annex A11](#), Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community, 5 April 2022

²⁷¹ [Annex A9](#), Meeting between HO and NCHR, 22 March 2022

²⁷² USSD, ‘[2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’ (section 6) 12 Apr 2022

²⁷³ KT Press, ‘[Homosexuality isn’t our problem says President Kagame](#)’, 25 Sept 2016

²⁷⁴ OutRight Action International, ‘[Kagame: Rwanda has no problems with gays](#)’, 24 Sept 2016

²⁷⁵ USSD, ‘[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)’, (page 37) 30 March 2021

²⁷⁶ LGBTI/sex worker coalition, [JG5 - Joint Submission 5](#) (page 4), June 2020

²⁷⁷ Reuters, ‘[...singer shrugs off backlash to coming out hoping to help others](#)’ 23 September 2019

Access to Justice coordination unit as well as the National Human Rights Commission have also embraced the notion of equality in the justice sector and we work quite closely with them should instance of injustice arise. Coincidentally yesterday we had a meeting with the National Human Rights Commission discussing how to include LGBTI/Q in the National Human Rights Action Plan'²⁷⁸.

- 9.2.6 In reference to plans for protections being put in place for LGBTI Rwandans, the CEDOCA report 2019, reflected President Kagame's attitudes to LGBTI Rwandans as well as his thoughts on protective provisions:

'Asked in March 2019 about the need for legislation protecting the rights of homosexuals during an interview with the magazine Jeune Afrique, President Kagame explains: "In Rwanda, homosexuality is not a crime, and members of the gay community are neither arrested, molested or insulted. It is therefore 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 norms, values and codes for centuries. Homosexuals exist, we know they exist. Their freedom must not interfere with that of others, and reciprocally. Let's stay there.'"'²⁷⁹

- 9.2.7 A July 2020 article by Deutsche Welle 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.'²⁸⁰

- 9.2.8 An IRB information response dated 29 September 2021, based on a range of sources noted that: 'The HAC Executive Director stated that the government has not put any policies in place to support the LGBTI community because when the government is asked about the LGBTI population in Rwanda, the government does not acknowledge this population's existence.'²⁸¹

- 9.2.9 In a meeting on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBT+ community described the government's as having a "strategic silence" on issues faced by LGBT community'²⁸². The same group did also note that they were 'Starting on strategies to engage Govt but starting from minimal position.'²⁸³

- 9.2.10 The CEDOCA report 2019 in an unofficial translation noted 'Several sources note that the majority of Rwandan political leaders refrain from speaking out publicly on homosexuality and LGBT, these debates being a "private matter" which is not "in the interest of the development of the country"'²⁸⁴

- 9.2.11 The Cedocca report 2019 also noted:

'Aflodis Kagaba, executive director of HDI, describes the position of

²⁷⁸ Cedoca, '[COI Focus Rwanda, L'homosexualité](#)', page 29, 30 October 2019

²⁷⁹ Cedoca, '[COI Focus Rwanda, L'homosexualité](#)', 30 October 2019

²⁸⁰ DW, '[Rwandan church embraces LGBT+ community](#)', 21 July 2020

²⁸¹ IRB, '[Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...](#)', 23 August 2021

²⁸² [Annex A11](#), Meeting with representatives of the LGBT+ community, 5 April 2022

²⁸³ [Annex A11](#), Meeting with representatives of the LGBT+ community, 5 April 2022

²⁸⁴ Cedoca, '[COI Focus Rwanda, L'homosexualité](#)', page 27, 30 October 2019

Rwandan political leaders as “progressive but sometimes ambiguous”. The study by IDS and the Center for Human Rights published in 2015 speaks of a “strategic” silence, pragmatic by the Rwandan authorities around the question LGBT rights. This study suggests that the lack of debate around identity issues of LGBT and other socially and economically marginalized groups is a reflection of the silence around ethnic identity. Moreover, given, on the one hand, the influence of religious communities, but on the other hand, the importance of foreign governmental and non-governmental partners, the Rwandan government has an interest in avoiding a controversial debate which could arouse strong debates at national, regional and international levels.’²⁸⁵

- 9.2.12 LAF, in the meeting with the HO on 21 March 2022 considered that ‘LGBT+ is not officially recognised...The Government has kept a neutral position.’²⁸⁶
- 9.2.13 The Health Development Initiative (HDI) in Rwanda conducted a mixed-method study of the lived experiences of LGBTI+ people and public perceptions in Rwanda (HDI LGBTI+ summary fact sheet). Their methodology was detailed in a summary factsheet: ‘The study used a concurrent, equal status, mixed-methods approach consisting of a quantitative survey of 499 and 1,243 respondents for the lived experiences and public perceptions surveys respectively. The study team also conducted six focus group discussions (FGDs) with a total of 59 participants as well as 16 key informant interviews.’²⁸⁷
- 9.2.14 The HDI LGBTI+ summary factsheet noted that the ‘Majority of respondents thought that the LGBT community should not be accepted in either the community (62%) or the country (56%). About half of them (48%) stated that LGBT individuals are feared in the community.’²⁸⁸

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9.3 Arrest, prosecution, and detention of LGBTIQ+ persons

- 9.3.1 The UHAI-EASHRI report 2016 noted that due to ‘religions and rigid conceptualisation of culture’²⁸⁹ there has been a perpetuation of human rights abuses against LGBT and sex worker Rwandans, including arbitrary arrest and detention, and a denial of access to justice²⁹⁰. The same report also focused on the treatment of LGBTI+ persons by the ‘Inkeragutabara’; the reserve force of the Rwanda Defence Forces which work with the police patrolling streets and keeping peace and public order; who have been largely recorded to have been involved in cases of ‘physical violence, extortion and cruel and degrading treatment against LGBT people’²⁹¹, including the apprehension of a transgender woman (between 2015-2016) due to her identity and gender expression, who was forced to parade like a

²⁸⁵ Cedoca, ‘[COI Focus Rwanda, L’homosexualité](#)’, page 27, 30 October 2019

²⁸⁶ [Annex A7](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

²⁸⁷ HDI, ‘[Fact sheet, Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences... in Rwanda](#)’, nd

²⁸⁸ HDI, ‘[Fact sheet, Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences... in Rwanda](#)’, nd

²⁸⁹ UHAI-EASHRI, ‘[...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda](#)’, (page 7), 2016

²⁹⁰ UHAI-EASHRI, ‘[...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda](#)’, (page 7), 2016

²⁹¹ UHAI-EASHRI, ‘[...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda](#)’, (page 11), 2016

model in a busy bus station for nearly two hours before being released²⁹².

9.3.2 The same report noted: 'Reported cases of arbitrary arrests of LGBT people by the police are done on the basis of other reasons such as disturbing public order, theft, possession of illegal substances (drugs), and idleness in the streets ("kuba inzererezi"). Most respondents interviewed said that these arrests are carried out without even checking people's identification cards. In most cases individuals are forced to pay instant bribes to avoid being taken to police stations.'²⁹³

9.3.3 The UHAI-EASHRI report 2016 also highlighted the Gikondo Transit Centre, also known as "Kwa Kabuga" which was opened in 2005 'in order to reduce the number of people wandering in the streets of Kigali by involving them in a socio-professional training program before reintegrating them back into society'²⁹⁴. In relation to the experiences of LGBTI persons detained at the Gikondo centre, the report noted:

'The Gikondo Transit Centre is not recognised by law per se, and as such, processes utilised within the transit center appear to exist in abstract without proper regulation and close monitoring of how this centre and others like it are run. The lack of any form of documented legal detention procedures and conditions makes Kwa Kabuga an arbitrary detention centre. Detention conditions for vulnerable groups such as LGBT people living with HIV/AIDS do not allow access to diets that complement the use of ARVs. Transgender people can be detained in an environment that is incompatible with their gender identity and expression.'²⁹⁵

9.3.4 The CEDOCA report 2019 noted in an unofficial translation that, 'In the sources consulted, Cedoca found no information on legal actions in against homosexuals or LGBT.'²⁹⁶

9.3.5 In November 2020, Vice News reported on a transgender woman who was arrested after being accused of being homeless and for selling drugs. The individual, Bella, claimed that she held in a 'tiny' room in Gikondo transit center for 6 weeks during which time she was subject to abuse and assaults, and raped by fellow detainees.'²⁹⁷

9.3.6 The IRB information response dated 23 August 2021, based on a range of sources, stated:

'According to sources, while individuals cannot be charged for any crimes based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, other charges can be used to detain people of diverse SOGIE... Sources report arrests of LGBTI individuals using public morality laws... According to correspondence that Belgium's Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons received in September 2019 from the HDI Executive Director, "some" police officers perceive LGBT individuals "as deviant" and while

²⁹² UHAI-EASHRI, '[...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda](#)', (page 12), 2016

²⁹³ UHAI-EASHRI, '[...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda](#)', (page 12), 2016

²⁹⁴ UHAI-EASHRI, '[...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda](#)', (page 12), 2016

²⁹⁵ UHAI-EASHRI, '[...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda](#)', (page 13), 2016

²⁹⁶ Cedoca, '[COI Focus Rwanda, L'homosexualité](#)', 30 October 2019

²⁹⁷ Vice, '[...Transgender Community Face Violent Detentions For Being Trans](#)', 20 November 2020

homosexuality is not criminalized, HDI has registered cases of "illegal arrests and detentions" of LGBT individuals by police and the District Administration Security Support Organ (DASSO). According to ILGA World, transgender and gender diverse people report being harassed by police and "some" transgender individuals also report being "arbitrarily searched, arrested and detained without being given any reason". The Vice article notes that while transgender individuals cannot be charged based on their sexuality or gender identity, "they are frequently abused by law enforcement and detained for indeterminate amounts of time at facilities that lack transparency" and where they face transphobic abuse; a transgender woman interviewed by Vice stated that she was held for six months and beaten every day. In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Executive Director of Human Rights First Association Rwanda (HRFR), a human rights organization providing legal assistance in Rwanda (HRFR n.d.), similarly stated that "transgender people are illegally arrested [and] beaten by the police at detention facilities". ILGA World reports that according to Rwanda Gender Pride, "a human rights organisation in Rwanda working on the rights of transgender and gender non-conforming persons," one of the centres in Kigali where transgender people are "arbitrarily detained" does not have "any form of documented legal detention procedures" and is "not recognised by law per se"²⁹⁸

9.3.7 However, LAF, in the meeting with the HO on 21 March 2022 considered that '... people who are LGBT+ are not harassed or mistreated.'²⁹⁹

9.3.8 In a meeting on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBT+ community explained 'LGBT person who gets arrested, is at risk – if police find out, at risk of abuse/mistreatment (torture, beatings) – heard testimonies – LGBT+ people imprisoned in prison within prisons, beaten by guards, paraded around prisons'³⁰⁰ They explained that it was 'Not the case individuals would be arrested due to sexuality, just that they would be at risk once sexuality discovered in prison'³⁰¹

See also [LGBTIQ+ persons: Protection](#)

9.3.9 In September 2021, HRW reported:

'Rwandan authorities rounded up and arbitrarily detained over a dozen gay and transgender people, sex workers, street children, and others in the months before a planned June 2021 high-profile international conference, Human Rights Watch said.

'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, which appear to have deteriorated further due to the increase in the number of detainees held there and the pandemic.'³⁰²

9.3.10 Between April and June 2021, HRW conducted telephone interviews with 17

²⁹⁸ IRB, '[Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...](#)', 29 September 2021

²⁹⁹ [Annex A7](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

³⁰⁰ [Annex A11](#), Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community, 5 April 2022

³⁰¹ [Annex A11](#), Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community, 5 April 2022

³⁰² HRW, '[Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting](#)', 27 September 2021

former detainees from Gikondo, 9 of which were with people who identified as transgender or homosexual. They found that, ‘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.’³⁰³

- 9.3.11 The same report also noted ‘Rwanda is one of a few countries in East Africa that does not criminalize consensual same-sex relations. Vagrancy, begging, and sex work are not criminalized either. Yet the authorities continue to use Gikondo Transit Center to imprison people accused of “deviant behavior that is harmful to the public,” including street vending and homelessness.’³⁰⁴
- 9.3.12 HRW also noted, in relation to the 9 LGBTI persons interviewed, that they were detained at Gikondo Transit Center between December 2020 and April 2021, after being targeted due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The report detailed the experience of one 27-year-old transgender person³⁰⁵
- 9.3.13 In relation to treatment of LGBTI+ persons in a law enforcement setting, an IRB COI query response dated 29 September 2021, based on a range of sources, highlighted a 2020 study on the impact of COVID-19 on LGBT individuals in Rwanda conducted by Amahoro Human Respect (AHR), a youth-led Kigali-based NGO. The study detailed that, of 438 respondents interviewed, 4.3% had experienced homophobia in a law enforcement setting³⁰⁶.
- 9.3.14 In relation to reportage of human rights abuses by the state against LGBTI+ persons, the UHAI-EASHRI report 2016 noted ‘Another challenge is posed by the fact that several violations against LGBT persons in Rwanda remain undocumented. The majority of LGBT do not report cases of human rights violations for fear of further persecution and stigmatisation and because of a general ignorance about the breadth of their rights as citizens of Rwanda.’³⁰⁷
- 9.3.15 An IRB COI query response dated 29 September 2021, based on a range of sources noted that: ‘The Vice article states that the government's "lack of explicit legal protections for LGBTQ Rwandans enables the arbitrary detention of transgender people ... in the Gikondo Transit Center".’³⁰⁸

See also [Treatment and conditions in detention](#)

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9.4 Protection

- 9.4.1 An IRB COI query response dated 29 September 2021, based on a range of sources noted that:

³⁰³ HRW, [‘Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting’](#), 27 September 2021

³⁰⁴ HRW, [‘Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting’](#), 27 September 2021

³⁰⁵ HRW, [‘Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting’](#), 27 September 2021

³⁰⁶ IRB, [‘Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...’](#), 29 September 2021

³⁰⁷ UHAI-EASHRI, [‘...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda’](#), (page 13), 2016

³⁰⁸ IRB, [‘Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...’](#), 29 September 2021

'In a study conducted by the Coalition members of the LGBTI community stated that they do not file complaints of GBV with the police because the police have a perception that they are "deviant"; this results in complaints of GBV against the LGBTI population going unreported. The CGRA report indicates that according to correspondence CGRA received in August 2019 from the Executive Director of My Right[s] Alliance, LGBT individuals are not able to seek protection from courts or the police. The Executive Director of HRFR 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.'³⁰⁹

- 9.4.2 In relation to LGBTI+ persons experiences in the legal system, the same source noted: 'According to the Coalition, although religious leaders have used hate speech against LGBTI people in public, none have ever been prosecuted. A report by the CGRA states that according to the Executive Director of My Right[s] Alliance, an LGBTI rights organization based in Kigali, lawyers are "'homophobic'," and "'many"' refuse to take LGBT cases.'³¹⁰

- 9.4.3 The CEDOCA report 2019 noted in an unofficial translation that, in relation to LGBTI+ persons access to legal aid:

'In 2016, UHAI conducted a survey on the rights of LGBT and sex workers in Rwanda. The analysis is mainly based on data collected in the capital Kigali and described above all the situation in urban areas. The regional organization notes the difficult access of LGBT people to justice in cases of violations of their rights. It attributes this to a lack of accessible and adequate legal assistance. Yet the vulnerable socio-economic situation of LGBT people often requires a legal assistance...'³¹¹

- 9.4.4 The same report highlighted a quote from Selon Jean-Claude Uwihoreye, of LGBTI NGO 'My Right Alliance'³¹² '[...] even if the lawyers are aware that LGBTI community is not criminalized they are homophobic because of their societal origin influence and many of them ignore to treat and defend LGBTI cases in courts. Judicial authorities actions against LGBTI are not frequent but cases of rejecting their cases occur. LGBTI can't at all request protection from the police or from the courts.'³¹³

- 9.4.5 In November 2020, American-based media outlet Vice News reported that:

'In July, the Great Lakes Initiative for Human Development 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 said. "If we can provide such a service, when some people are falsely accused and falsely arrested, [we] can stop this..."

'...Since July, five transgender people have used the hotline following their

³⁰⁹ IRB, '[Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...](#)', 29 September 2021

³¹⁰ IRB, '[Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...](#)', 29 September 2021

³¹¹ Cedoca, '[COI Focus Rwanda, L'homosexualité](#)', 30 October 2019

³¹² Cedoca, '[COI Focus Rwanda, L'homosexualité](#)', 30 October 2019

³¹³ Cedoca, '[COI Focus Rwanda, L'homosexualité](#)', 30 October 2019

arrest by police. All were released.’³¹⁴

9.4.6 LAF told the HO in the meeting on 21 March 2022 that on the issue of whether LGBTIQ+ persons can seek protection from the police: ‘LGBT people can and do complain to the police about their treatment and the police do deal with those cases.’³¹⁵

9.4.7 In a meeting on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBT+ community explained that the ‘police as an institution [are] ok, it’s individuals which are problem – difficult to say how widespread (no data) but think not common, just case by case’ and that ‘If you report mistreatment of police, [there are] no repercussions’³¹⁶

9.4.8 In the sources consulted, CPIT could not find any further LGBTI+ specific mechanisms of complaint or avenues of redress (see [Bibliography](#)).

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9.5 LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees

9.5.1 In a meeting between HO and UNHCR on 21 March 2022, a representative commented:

‘UNHCR has noticed that LGBT asylum seekers have not been able to register their claims. They have to report to the local authorities and are told by the most junior immigration staff that Rwanda is not the place for them, or Rwanda does not deal with such issues. They are given immediate verbal rejection...

‘[UNHCR are] currently supporting 3 individual cases by LGBT+ asylum seekers. They had been pending for 2 to 5 months. [Caveated that UNHCR does not see all cases]. UNHCR is not always informed by DGIE if there is any asylum seeker approaching DGIE for asylum, we can only track asylum seekers who approach our office or legal aid partners.’³¹⁷

9.5.2 During a meeting with HO on 23 March 2022, Alight was asked whether the organisation provides SGBV services to asylum seekers or refugees who are members of the LGBTI community, to which they explained:

‘There is a culture of silence – we may come across those cases it’s not ease to know. Our policy and obligations are very clear, no discrimination against that group but extra measures taken to respect their status and ensure our project design aligns with the needs to this group.

‘Not aware of much LGBT profile in RWA. If made aware of LGBT asylum seekers / refugees (both urban and camp based) Alight will adapt, redesign and provide services accordingly.’³¹⁸

9.5.3 In a meeting on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBT+ community when asked about the treatment of LGBTI asylum seekers, provided some examples, but no one was able to provide much information on LGBT

³¹⁴ Vice, ‘[...Transgender Community Face Violent Detentions For Being Trans](#)’, 20 November 2020

³¹⁵ [Annex A7](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

³¹⁶ [Annex A11](#), Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community, 5 April 2022

³¹⁷ [Annex A8](#), Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

³¹⁸ [Annex A10](#), Meeting between HO and Alight, 23 March 2022

asylum seekers having issues with the asylum process (see [Annex A11, Meeting with representatives of the LGBT+ community](#)).

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9.6 Presence and integration of foreign-born persons

- 9.6.1 According to a 2018 report by the OECD, when looking at foreign-born individuals and their social integration into Rwanda, “Representing about 3.6% of the resident population (NISR, 2012a), international immigrants (foreign-born individuals) to Rwanda seem to have considerably increased since the 1990s. However, too little is known about the way in which these groups have settled and currently live in the country, due to the absence of studies on their geographical distribution, integration or economic activities.’³¹⁹
- 9.6.2 The same report also noted that research into foreign-born nationals, including vulnerable groups and refugees, is lacking. It explained:
- ‘Regarding the social integration of foreign and foreign-born individuals, Rwanda is seen as an exemplary country in the region. This is likely owing to its political history and experience in reconciling post-conflict communities. Nonetheless, further research and policies are needed to improve the living and working conditions of certain vulnerable categories of foreign and foreign born workers. Policies could, for instance, help integrate refugee communities currently residing in the country, given the importance of refugee spending for developing the local economy.’³²⁰
- 9.6.3 The CEDOCA report 2019 highlighted one instance of LGBT persons seeking refuge in Rwanda and noted, in an unofficial translation that, ‘In addition, a Rwandan LGBT activist claims in 2017 that Ugandan LGBT people persecuted in their country of origin have taken refuge in Rwanda. Cedoca has not found any other source that identifies LGBT people who sought refuge in Rwanda.’³²¹

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9.7 Societal norms and treatment

- 9.7.1 A 2019 report by CEDOCA noted in an unofficial translation that ‘Aflodis Kagaba, Executive Director of HDI [Health Development Initiative] describes the situation in Rwandan society as: “The Rwandan society is normally conservative with a high adhesion to religious and cultural values. Many Rwandan[s] do not tolerate homosexuality on the basis that it is immoral or a foreign sickness imported into the country”’³²²
- 9.7.2 ILGA noted in 2020 ‘...homosexuality is considered a taboo topic, and there is no significant public discussion of this issue in any region of the country’³²³ and the US Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) noted ‘Same-sex

³¹⁹ OECD, ‘[How Immigrants Contribute to Rwanda’s Economy](#)’, page 27, 28 March 2018

³²⁰ OECD, ‘[How Immigrants Contribute to Rwanda’s Economy](#)’, page 37, 28 March 2018

³²¹ Cedoca, ‘[COI Focus Rwanda, L’homosexualité](#)’, page 17, 30 October 2019

³²² Cedoca, ‘[COI Focus Rwanda, L’homosexualité](#)’, 30 October 2019

³²³ ILGA, ‘[LGBTI Organisations In Rwanda Unite Under Coalition](#)’, 10 August 2020

sexual activity is legal but not widely discussed.³²⁴ Freedom House noted 'LGBT+ people face strong social stigma.'³²⁵

- 9.7.3 An article by Reuters, published 29 June 2021, noted that 'LGBT+ rights groups in the largely conservative Christian nation say homophobic attitudes are widespread.'³²⁶ However, DW noted in a July 2020 article that '...the LGBT+ community in Rwanda is gradually gaining acceptance and respect within a largely conservative society.'³²⁷
- 9.7.4 In a meeting between HO and UNHCR on 21 March 2022, a representative referred to a report launched on 18 March 2022: 'NGOs working on [the report] found that 80% of Rwandan nationals think being gay is unnatural.'³²⁸
- 9.7.5 During a meeting with NCHR on 22 March 2022, a HO official asked whether a gay couple could live openly and a NCHR representative commented: 'In our society, there is privacy – [you] will not find man and wife being openly affectionate. So those who are gay, you don't see them in the street. So gay people can live in same house but society won't know whether they are gay or not.' Another NCHR representative explained that no one cares about another person's private life but whereas a female couple who lived together would be described as 'gay' outside of Rwanda, they are described as 'friends' within Rwanda.³²⁹
- 9.7.6 The UHAI – EASHRI report 2016 noted that 'Religions and rigid conceptualisation of culture influences public opinion and has consequently led to the perpetuation of human rights abuses against LGBT and sex worker Rwandans. The ultimate consequence is the increased and unaddressed vulnerability of LGBT and sex workers to various human rights violations, including verbal, physical and sexual abuse...'³³⁰
- 9.7.7 The USSD report 2020 noted 'LGBTI persons reported societal discrimination and abuse...'³³¹
- 9.7.8 On 23 September 2019, Reuters reported that since a famous Rwandan gospel singer, Albert Nabonibo, came out as gay on a Christian YouTube channel, he has received insults from fans, has been shunned by friends and asked to leave his job³³². The article noted:
- '... LGBT+ rights groups in the largely conservative Christian nation say homophobic attitudes are widespread.
- 'Sexual minorities face stigma and discrimination, from being ostracised by their families or abused by neighbours to being denied a job or housing.

- 9.7.9 The same article noted that, whilst he has received backlash, he has also

³²⁴ OSAC, '[Rwanda 2022 Crime & Safety Report](#)' 9 February 2022.

³²⁵ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2022 Rwanda](#)', (section S4), 28 February 2022

³²⁶ Reuters, '[Brave and hopeful' LGBT+ Rwandans prepare for their first Pride](#)', 29 June 2021

³²⁷ DW, '[Rwandan church embraces LGBT+ community](#)', 21 July 2020

³²⁸ [Annex A8](#), Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

³²⁹ [Annex A9](#), Meeting between HO and NCHR, 22 March 2022

³³⁰ UHAI-EASHRI, '[...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda](#)', (page 7), 2016

³³¹ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)', (page 37) 30 March 2021

³³² Reuters, '[...singer shrugs off backlash to coming out hoping to help others](#)'. 23 September 2019

received 'encouraging messages' from the LGBT+ community³³³.

- 9.7.10 In 2020 an LGBT-friendly church opened in Kigali and in June 2021, Reuters reported on plans to hold Rwanda's first Pride event in the city^{334 335}. In a meeting on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBT+ community confirmed that a Pride march took place in 2021, explaining they had to do it 'differently to initial plans' but describing it as 'successful'³³⁶
- 9.7.11 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 interviewed³³⁷. The majority of respondents (54%) identified as transwomen, 38% as transmen, 4% as intersex and 4% as gender non-conforming³³⁸. In its key observations the report noted 'Trans people still face harassment and discrimination' and in its conclusion 'The conflation and lack of distinction between sexual orientation and gender identity has also mean that even in countries like Rwanda where there is no criminalization of adult same sex sexual activity and relations, stigma, discrimination and harassment of ITGNC persons remains rampant'.³³⁹ The source did not provide further detail on the nature of the discrimination and harassment encountered, or whether this was state or societal treatment.
- 9.7.12 In relation to familial and community treatment of LGBTI+ persons, a 2020 study on the impact of COVID-19 on LGBT individuals in Rwanda conducted by AHR detailed that, of 438 respondents interviewed, 18.6% had experienced homophobia from family members and 24.7% had experienced homophobia from the community³⁴⁰. An IRB COI query response dated 29 September 2021 also referenced the 2020 AHR study.³⁴¹
- 9.7.13 The same IRB response noted: 'According to a community centre coordinator for HDI interviewed by Vice, since 2018 there has been a shift "in terms of behaviours and perceptions" and toward a more tolerant media landscape, while he also indicated that "there is still work to be done for [the] full recognition of rights for transgender people"'³⁴²
- 9.7.14 The AHR study 2020 found that, in relation to familial and community treatment of LGBTI+ persons, of 438 respondents interviewed, 18.6% had experienced homophobia from family members, 24.7% had experienced homophobia from the community and 21% had experienced homophobia when accessing bars, hotels and nightclubs³⁴³.
- 9.7.15 A December 2020 article by Rwanda Today, a Rwandan-based news

³³³ Reuters, '[...singer shrugs off backlash to coming out hoping to help others](#)', 23 September 2019

³³⁴ Reuters, '[Brave and hopeful LGBT+ Rwandans prepare for their first Pride](#)', 29 June 2021

³³⁵ DW, '[Rwandan church embraces LGBT+ community](#)', 21 July 2020

³³⁶ [Annex A11](#), Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community, 5 April 2022

³³⁷ EATHAN, '[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)', (Methodology) 2020

³³⁸ EATHAN, '[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)', (page 20) 2020

³³⁹ EATHAN, '[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)', (p 41 and 45) 2020

³⁴⁰ IRB, '[Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...](#)', 29 September 2021

³⁴¹ IRB, '[Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...](#)', 29 September 2021

³⁴² IRB, '[Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...](#)', 29 September 2021

³⁴³ IRB, '[Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...](#)', 29 September 2021

source, 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, 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.’³⁴⁴

9.7.16 The EATHAN 2020 study found that 37.5% of ITGNC Rwandans surveyed had experienced violence by an intimate partner recently [timescale not defined] and 54.2% did not feel safe where they lived³⁴⁵.

9.7.17 The OLOS MRA report included LGBTI respondents’ experiences of being ‘thrown out’ of their homes by family³⁴⁶, being offered ‘mental treatment to cure’ their sexuality³⁴⁷ and threats of violence³⁴⁸.

9.7.18 The HDI LGBTI+ summary factsheet noted, when researching respondents’ views of and actions towards LGBTI+ people, that:

‘More than half of the study participants reported holding a negative attitude towards LGBT individuals. While one in four participants reported not having attempted to take any action against LGBT individuals, the same participants stated that they would do anything to harm an LGBT person. Conversely, close to half (47%) of the respondents reported that they had not and would not avoid someone because they are LGBT. Only 17% affirmed that they had avoided someone in the 12 months preceding the survey because of that person being LGBT while 21% of the respondents stated that they had used derogatory names to refer to someone because that person was LGBT. Three percent of the respondents reported that they had physically harmed an LGBT individual in the 12 months preceding the survey.’³⁴⁹

9.7.19 The same report noted that, in terms of abuse in domestic settings, ‘Close to two in every three respondents had experienced psychological abuse, while one in every ten respondents had experienced physical abuse. Common forms of psychological abuse included being called negative names, being taunted and subjected to isolation as well as being associated with the devil.’³⁵⁰

9.7.20 Advanced Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (ALIGN), a digital

³⁴⁴ Rwanda Today, ‘[Pandemic hits Rwanda’s sexual minorities harder](#)’, 16 December 2020

³⁴⁵ EATHAN, ‘[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)’, (page 38) 2020

³⁴⁶ MRA, ‘[Our Lives Our Struggle](#)’, no date

³⁴⁷ MRA, ‘[Our Lives Our Struggle](#)’, no date

³⁴⁸ MRA, ‘[Our Lives Our Struggle](#)’, no date

³⁴⁹ HDI, ‘[Fact sheet, Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences... in Rwanda](#)’, no date

³⁵⁰ HDI, ‘[Fact sheet, Examination of LGBT people’s lived experiences... in Rwanda](#)’, no date

research platform focusing on gender justice and equality³⁵¹ published a report on gender-based violence against LGBTQI people in workplaces in Kigali city in August 2021 (ALIGN workplace study 2021). The study was conducted using exploratory and mixed methods to identify gender norms affecting LGBTQI community members among workplaces in Kigali. The study focused on 20 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and 160 individuals from LGBTQI communities in Kigali to provide their views on treatment of LGBTQI people³⁵². Whilst the study focused mainly on LGBTQI people in the workplace, it was also noted that:

‘First, the study probed respondents about the types of gender norms and stereotypes that commonly emerge about people from this community, with the vast majority (89%) reporting that LGBTQI people are characterised as an immoral group. In addition, 80% said that being a member of the LGBTQI community was associated with being against the will of God, 51% said that LGBTQI people are considered to be social outcasts, and 41% stated that identifying as LGBTQI is characterised as a medical disorder.

‘The responses of key informants were largely in line with these stereotypes. Some key informants added stereotypes that discredit the mental capacity of members of the LGBTQI community. One commented: “We consider them as those that lack intellect and morals”. - Key informant from Nyarugenge district.’³⁵³

- 9.7.21 HRW noted, in relation to 9 LGBTI persons interviewed, who were detained at Gikondo Transit Center between December 2020 and April 2021: ‘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.’³⁵⁴

- 9.7.22 LAF in their meeting with the HO on 21 March 2022 noted:

‘[I] think that LGBT people can act freely and form associations. This was not the case 5 or 6 years ago (seeing progress). Being LGBT is not criminalised by the law. There is stigma in society, but this is now being talked about or discussed.

‘The acceptance of the LGBTQ community is something the country has to understand - it’s not something to be enforced. It is being discussed. Over 99% of people are religious, but there are statements in support of emerging LGBTQ groups. Rwanda is very lenient, it is more liberal than other neighbouring countries re: LGBT+.’³⁵⁵

- 9.7.23 In a meeting between HO and UNHCR on 21 March 2022, a representative commented: ‘UNHCR has not heard of any violence against the LGBTI community. Rwanda is mostly tolerant – have had some LGBT+ [from Uganda] and [UNHCR] provide counselling, financial assistance. Most of the

³⁵¹ ALIGN, ‘[About ALIGN](#)’, no date

³⁵² ALIGN, ‘[...LGBTQI people in civil society workplaces in Kigali city](#)’, August 2021

³⁵³ ALIGN, ‘[...LGBTQI people in civil society workplaces in Kigali city](#)’, page 12, August 2021

³⁵⁴ HRW, ‘[Rwanda: Round Ups-Linked to Commonwealth Meeting](#)’, 27 September 2021

³⁵⁵ [Annex A7](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

time they [LGBT+] stay in urban areas. There is a network [of LGBT+]. LGBT+ have some difficulties accessing employment and renting accommodation in urban areas – cases of being denied accommodation. There was a recent TV debate addressing issue of social stigma.³⁵⁶

See also [Access to services - overview](#) and [Civil society organisations' ability to provide support](#).

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9.8 Access to services - overview

- 9.8.1 Fair Planet, a non-profit organisation focused on human rights worldwide³⁵⁷ reported in 2021 that 'The growing attacks on the queer community in Rwanda has seen its members become among the most economically marginalised, vulnerable and poorest in the country, as they struggle to access employment opportunities and health services.'³⁵⁸
- 9.8.2 An article by Reuters published 29 June 2021 noted that 'LGBT+ Rwandans say they are often fired, evicted, labelled as satanic, or ostracised by family and friends if they come out, with violent threats forcing some to flee the country.'³⁵⁹
- 9.8.3 The UHAI – EASHRI report 2016 noted that public opinion of LGBTI+ persons (including sex workers) has resulted in the denial of access to justice, family expulsion, denial of housing rights, denial of employment rights and discrimination³⁶⁰.
- 9.8.4 The AHR study 2020 found that, of 438 respondents interviewed, 6.5% had experienced homophobia at markets, 7.1% had experienced the same at Churches or Mosques³⁶¹. It was also found that '...focus group participants, particularly transgender women, reported that "homophobia was still rampant in institutions," including in religious, civil society, media and business organizations. The same source further states that "transgender women sex workers who meet their clients in public places, such as bars/high clubs and hotels reported that other customers often mocked, harassed or beat them"'³⁶²
- 9.8.5 A December 2020 article by Rwanda Today noted some improvements in access to services in recent years:
- 'The LGBT community in Rwanda had made some gains over the last few years, especially since government removed the provision that criminalised homosexuality in 2010.
- 'The decriminalization of homosexuality granted several rights to the community, for instance freedom of association and worship, which they previously forewent.

³⁵⁶ [Annex A8](#), Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

³⁵⁷ Fair Planet, '[About Fair Planet](#)', no date

³⁵⁸ Fair Planet, '[Rwanda set for a historic first pride event](#)', 25 June 2021

³⁵⁹ Reuters, '[Brave and hopeful LGBT+ Rwandans prepare for their first Pride](#)', 29 June 2021

³⁶⁰ UHAI-EASHRI, '[...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda](#)', (page 7), 2016

³⁶¹ IRB, '[Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...](#)', 29 September 2021

³⁶² IRB, '[Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...](#)', 29 September 2021

'Many for instance could not go to worship in any religious denomination, but this has since changed especially for Christian members of the LGBTI community, after an inclusive church called Church of God Rwanda, was established in Nyamirambo, a Kigali suburb.

'Besides giving them a safe space to worship, the church also offers counselling services to LGBT members who are battling depression and drug abuse.'³⁶³

- 9.8.6 In a meeting between HO and UNHCR on 21 March 2022, a representative explained: 'Local leaders [are responsible] for facilitating access to services. If the local leader is very conservative [then for an] LGBT person, it would not go well... LGBT+ have some difficulties accessing employment and renting accommodation in urban areas – cases of being denied accommodation.'³⁶⁴

- 9.8.7 In a meeting on 5 April 2022, one of the representatives of the LGBT+ community considered that 'there was a big gap in the treatment of LGBT+ community in every field – e.g. health, justice'³⁶⁵

See also [LGBTIQ+ persons: legal rights](#), [Healthcare](#) and [Employment](#).

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9.9 Healthcare

- 9.9.1 The USSD report 2020 noted that 'While there is no policy restricting reproductive health service access for LGBTI persons, there are no protections either, and LGBTI persons and organizations reported societal discrimination as a barrier when seeking services.'³⁶⁶
- 9.9.2 The AHR study 2020 found that, that of 438 respondents interviewed, 5.9% had experienced homophobia when accessing healthcare facilities³⁶⁷.
- 9.9.3 An IRB COI query response dated 29 September 2021, based on a range of sources, noted:
- 'Sources indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on minority groups, including people of diverse SOGIE. Sources report that people blame COVID-19 on the LGBTI community and that LGBTI people are discriminated against in accessing emergency support. AHR reports that following the first lockdown in March 2020, they "received a large number of reports from Rwandan LGBT individuals about starvation, homelessness, unemployment, poor access to healthcare and lack of appropriate personal protection equipment (PPE), such as face masks."³⁶⁸
- 9.9.4 The HDI LGBTI+ summary factsheet noted that, of the participating respondents, 47.3% had experienced challenges in accessing healthcare³⁶⁹.

³⁶³ Rwanda Today, "[Pandemic hits Rwanda's sexual minorities harder](#)", 16 December 2020

³⁶⁴ [Annex A8](#), Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

³⁶⁵ [Annex A11](#), Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community, 5 April 2022

³⁶⁶ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)', (page 32) 30 March 2021

³⁶⁷ IRB, '[Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...](#)', 29 September 2021

³⁶⁸ IRB, '[Responses to Information Requests, Rwanda...](#)', 29 September 2021

³⁶⁹ HDI, '[Fact sheet, Examination of LGBT people's lived experiences... in Rwanda](#)', no date

- 9.9.5 In a meeting on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBT+ community considered that the 'LGBT community fears to go to hospitals, doctors can have traditional attitudes' and that mental health problems are 'widespread'. However, they also cited one example where 'one individual had mental health problems, when finally went to doctor, doctor said they wished she'd come to be helped sooner'³⁷⁰

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9.10 Employment

- 9.10.1 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 income³⁷¹. The report did not provide a breakdown in relation to sexual orientation or gender identity and employment, however the majority of respondents (54%) identified as transwomen³⁷².

- 9.10.2 A 2019 report by CEDOCA, in an unofficial translation noted:

'Several sources also indicate that most LGBT people experience discrimination and stigma in the job market or workplace because of their sexual orientation or their perceived gender identity. A study published by IDS and the Center for Human Rights in 2015 clarifies that the most vulnerable group is transgender people, whose "non-conforming" gender identity is more visible. Having no access to other jobs, they are often forced to leave...'³⁷³

- 9.10.3 The same report noted that:

'In Working places is hard to come out homosexual, those who are already in the places (positions) they are they stay quite [quiet] although suspicions in co-workers raises as days go by. Chance to get job when you are already identified yourself as homosexual is totally less, but there are some positions in different places that they target some our community members to attract various clients, here I mean like some business receptions room services and many others'³⁷⁴

- 9.10.4 On the issue of access to employment or self-employment for LGBTQ asylum seekers or refugees, LAF commented: 'UNHCR has been trying to assist, but without Refugee status people can't work. Some are supported by friends. LAF is limited to legal issues (so do not have a lot of information) but aware of one man who declared his LGBTQ status while working for a Church and was dismissed from his duties.'³⁷⁵

- 9.10.5 The CEDOCA report 2019 also noted, in an unofficial translation:

'In a 2015 HDI report, an activist testifies that he lost his job because of his engagement in the LGBT community.'

³⁷⁰ [Annex A11](#), Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community, 5 April 2022

³⁷¹ EATHAN, '[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)', (page 24) 2020

³⁷² EATHAN, '[Legal gender recognition access to trans affirming healthcare...](#)', (page 20) 2020

³⁷³ Cedoca, '[COI Focus Rwanda, L'homosexualité](#)', (page 17), 30 October 2019

³⁷⁴ Cedoca, '[COI Focus Rwanda, L'homosexualité](#)', (page 17), 30 October 2019

³⁷⁵ [Annex A7](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

'In March 2017, Grace Nyinawumuntu lost her job coaching AS Kigali football team. Media reported accusations of homosexuality and "promoting lesbianism" as well as sexual harassment of female soccer players. The team invoked against Grace Nyinawumuntu her lack of discipline and the introduction of "divisionism⁹⁸" among the players. In April 2018, a court ordered the club to pay compensation for wrongful dismissal.'³⁷⁶

- 9.10.6 The OLOS MRA report highlighted some experiences of employment for LGBTI persons in Rwanda:

"When we first met, he seemed cool – he even hired me to work for him when I requested a job.

'Yet over time he began to suspect that I was a homosexual. When he confronted me, I told him that I was. He began to harass me and turn other staff members against me. He reached out to my friends and family to try to convince them to hate me. "I was obliged to leave my job, and I continue to be discriminated against everywhere..."³⁷⁷

- 9.10.7 The same report highlighted: "For a while I worked as a waiter in a hotel. The manager there used to harass me often due to my gender and sexual orientation. Once, I dropped a fork after clearing a customer's table. The manager told me to stop immediately and used that incident as evidence that I performed badly at work. In addition, the manager told me that customers don't like me being in the hotel due to my appearance."³⁷⁸

- 9.10.8 The ALIGN workplace study 2021 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.'³⁷⁹

- 9.10.9 The same study continued:

'The majority (74%) of respondents reported having experienced GBV at their workplace. The most prevalent type of GBV experienced was emotional violence (85%); and sexual violence (35%), with physical violence being the form of GBV they had been least likely to encounter. Respondents had also experienced discrimination in terms of being excluded from organisational decision-making meetings and consultations (71%)...

'The study also explored trends in GBV against different groups within the LGBTQI community to identify those at greatest risk. Those who identified as transgender were said to encounter more than one third of the total incidence of GBV (37.5%) making them the group most likely to experience such violence.'³⁸⁰

- 9.10.10 Researchers also asked respondents 'specifically how easy it is for them to

³⁷⁶ Cedoca, '[COI Focus Rwanda, L'homosexualité](#)', page 17, 30 October 2019

³⁷⁷ MRA, '[Our Lives Our Struggle](#)', no date

³⁷⁸ MRA, '[Our Lives Our Struggle](#)', no date

³⁷⁹ ALIGN, '[...LGBTQI people in civil society workplaces in Kigali city](#)', page 5, August 2021

³⁸⁰ ALIGN, '[...LGBTQI people in civil society workplaces in Kigali city](#)', page 10, August 2021

secure and hold a job within CSOs organizations. Almost half of all respondents (46%) reported that this is very hard, and well over one third (40%) said that it is hard.³⁸¹ Another aspect the study sought to examine was organisational policies and mechanisms to address GBV issues among CSOs and it was found that:

‘Respondents were asked whether they felt comfortable where they work(ed). The majority (40%) responded neutrally, while a little less than a third (29%) reported feeling comfortable and slightly more than a third (31%) reported feeling uncomfortable. The study also asked whether the respondents felt protected at their work place, to which the most (66%) reported that they did not feel protected. In addition, the majority of respondents (66%) stated that they had never signed any organisational policy document pertaining to the protection of vulnerable groups at their place of work, including members of the LGBTQI community. When key informants were asked whether the CSOs they represented had policies to regulate LGBTQI issues, they universally confirmed the presence of such policies. Deeper inquiry, however, revealed that these are generic safeguarding or GBV policies, and that addresses gender issues for vulnerable groups such as the LGBTQI people in particular...’³⁸²

9.10.11 The same report found:

‘All key informants were consistent in stating that the major gaps associated with discrimination, exclusion and GBV against LGBTQI employees at CSOs are also found at national regulatory and policy level. While some respondents stated that there are no specific laws and policies in place concerning LGBTQI people, other respondents were explicit in arguing that this perception translates into the lack of organisational policies for the protection of LGBTQI employees.

9.10.12 In considering the level of sensitivity within the organisations to diverse gender identities, the report found, ‘It found that the vast majority of organizations (79%) lacked hygienic and sanitation infrastructures (such as toilets for transgender people) and that more than half of CSOs (54%) lacked communication policies and tools that use gender-sensitive pronouns. It revealed that the majority (68%) of the organisations that had such communication policies and tools do not implement them.’³⁸³

9.10.13 In a meeting on 5 April 2022, representatives of the LGBT+ community considered that ‘COVID [was] being used by employers as pretext to fire people they know are LGBT – can’t fire someone purely because they’re LGBT (could be reported to Govt) but try to find other excuses.’³⁸⁴

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9.11 Housing

9.11.1 In the HDI LGTBI+ summary factsheet, it was noted that, of the respondents

³⁸¹ ALIGN, ‘...LGBTQI people in civil society workplaces in Kigali city’, page 11, August 2021

³⁸² ALIGN, ‘...LGBTQI people in civil society workplaces in Kigali city’, page 13, August 2021

³⁸³ ALIGN, ‘...LGBTQI people in civil society workplaces in Kigali city’, page 15, August 2021

³⁸⁴ [Annex A11](#), Meeting w/ representatives of the LGBT+ community, 5 April 2022

surveyed, 30% had faced discrimination when looking for, or in, housing³⁸⁵.

9.11.2 The OLOS MRA report detailed one single LGBTI persons' experience of discrimination in housing³⁸⁶.

9.11.3 According to the PAI report 2021, LGBTI+ Rwandans have been evicted from rented homes due to their sexual orientation³⁸⁷.

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9.12 Civil society organisations' ability to provide support

9.12.1 The USSD report 2020 noted discrimination including challenges to officially registering LGBTI non-governmental organisations (NGOs)³⁸⁸.

9.12.2 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.'³⁸⁹

9.12.3 The UHAI-EASHRI report 2016, noted that, in relation to the legal processes involved with LGBTI organisations. 'There are no legal provisions restricting LGBT organisations from getting legal recognition as non-governmental organisations in Rwanda. However there appears to be a general fear that pursuing registration would result in a denial of legal recognition on the grounds such as 'gross indecency', 'promotion of homosexuality' or that the existence of said organisations are 'contrary to the Rwandan culture and values.'³⁹⁰

9.12.4 The UHAI-EASHRI report detailed that:

'The majority of LGBT organisations are based and operate in Kigali city, the capital of Rwanda. Hope and Care19 has been in operation since 2012 as a partner to an international organisation "ASOLATE" in the Eastern Province, Burasirazuba, and carries out activities around youth empowerment. Other Sheep Rwanda is an organisation that operates in Gisenyi, Rubavu. Pride Ark, Amahoro Human Respect, My Rights Association and Other Sheep Rwanda are the only LGBT organisations recognised as community-based organisations in their respective districts.'³⁹¹

(see [Hope and Care Rwanda](#), [Amahoro Human Respect](#), [My Rights Association](#) and [Other Sheep Rwanda](#) for further information on the support each organisation offers).

9.12.5 A 2019 report by CEDOCA, in an unofficial translation also highlighted a number of LGBTI organisations in operation in Rwanda³⁹², including [Rainbow Rights Rwanda](#), [Safe Friendly Society](#), [Rights For All Rwanda](#).

³⁸⁵ HDI, '[Fact sheet, Examination of LGBT people's lived experiences... in Rwanda](#)', no date

³⁸⁶ MRA, '[Our Lives Our Struggle](#)', no date

³⁸⁷ PAI, '[Voices of Resilience in Uncertainty](#)', June 2021

³⁸⁸ USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)', (page 37) 30 March 2021

³⁸⁹ ILGA, '[State-sponsored homophobia: global legislation overview update...](#)' (page 172), Dec 2020

³⁹⁰ UHAI-EASHRI, '[...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda](#)', (page 20), 2016

³⁹¹ UHAI-EASHRI, '[...Human Rights Of Sex Workers And LGBT... In Rwanda](#)', (page 7), 2016

³⁹² Cedoca, '[COI Focus Rwanda, L'homosexualité](#)', 30 October 2019

9.12.6 The Kuchu Times, an African-based LGBTI news website³⁹³ reported on 10 August 2020 that:

‘The LGBTI community in Rwanda has taken a massive step towards solidifying the movement with the formation of a coalition that unites all Rwandan LGBTI organisations. The coalition named Rwanda Diversity and Equality Network (RDEN) was unveiled through social media on July 20th.

‘While it remains unknown how many organisations have come together to form this coalition or if it is a membership union, social media reports indicate it will be the new cornerstone for the movement.

“As part of joining our efforts for a more effective advocacy, this is a massive step forward which gives hope for the future of the LGBTI movement in Rwanda. We have the conviction that together we can achieve a lot more,” activist Astherie Iribagiza shared on her Twitter account.³⁹⁴

9.12.7 A December 2020 article by Rwanda Today noted that, in terms of LGBTI NGO registration: ‘They 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 RGB gets to know that its 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.³⁹⁵

9.12.8 In November 2020, Vice News reported that:

‘In July, the Great Lakes Initiative for Human Development 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 said. “If we can provide such a service, when some people are falsely accused and falsely arrested, [we] can stop this...

‘...Since July, five transgender people have used the hotline following their arrest by police. All were released.’³⁹⁶

9.12.9 In a meeting between the HO and LAF on 21 March 2022, a LAF representative commented on the general circumstances of LGBTIQ+ persons in Rwanda:

‘LAF doesn’t know about the difference in treatment of different LGBT+ groups - this is something new, the nuances are yet to be recognised...

‘LAF have provided advice to LGBT individuals but because they need assistance, not because they are LGBT. LAF know that they have been aggrieved because of their sexuality. LAF assists because a person’s rights have not been respected – for whatever reason.

‘There are a lot of NGOs that assist LGBTQ people.’³⁹⁷

³⁹³ Kuchu Times, ‘[About](#)’, no date

³⁹⁴ Kuchu Times, ‘[LGBTI Organisations in Rwanda Unite Under Coalition](#)’, 10 August 2020

³⁹⁵ Rwanda Today, ‘[Pandemic hits Rwanda’s sexual minorities harder](#)’, 16 December 2020

³⁹⁶ Vice, ‘[...Transgender Community Face Violent Detentions For Being Trans](#)’, 20 November 2020

³⁹⁷ [Annex A7](#), Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

See also [Operation of non-governmental organisations](#)

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Section 10 updated: 24 March 2022

10. Religious denominations and ability to practise faith

- 10.1.1 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.'³⁹⁸
- 10.1.2 The law requires religious organisations to obtain legal status from the government and preachers to hold academic degrees³⁹⁹.
- 10.1.3 Rwanda's religious demographic (according to 2019-2020 estimates) is: 57.7% Protestant (includes Adventist 12.6%), 38.2% Roman Catholic, 2.1% Muslim, 1% Other (includes Jehovah's Witness), 1.1% None⁴⁰⁰.
- 10.1.4 The law states religious organisations may express an opinion on social or faith-related issues but may not engage in political activities. There were reports that the government pressured prominent religious leaders to refrain from speaking out against government policies⁴⁰¹.
- 10.1.5 During 2020, many places of worship remained closed because their premises failed to meet government-mandated health and safety and noise pollution standards. Religious leaders reported that the required infrastructure improvements were prohibitively expensive⁴⁰².
- 10.1.6 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). Similarly, the government allowed modified wedding ceremonies for Jehovah's Witnesses, removing the requirement to take a pledge on the national flag⁴⁰³.
- 10.1.7 A search using Google Maps on 1 March 2022 showed the location of mosques, mostly 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 owners⁴⁰⁴. Therefore, the currency and accuracy of the information may vary, but CPIT has sought to verify the information through other sources where possible (see the paragraphs below). CPIT was not able to find websites for the majority of Rwandan mosques listed on Google Maps⁴⁰⁵.

³⁹⁸ Government of Rwanda, '[Constitution](#)' (Article 37), 24 Dec 2015

³⁹⁹ USSD, '[USSD report 2020](#)' (section 2), 30 March 2021

⁴⁰⁰ CIA, '[The world factbook Rwanda](#)' (People and Society), updated 17 January 2022

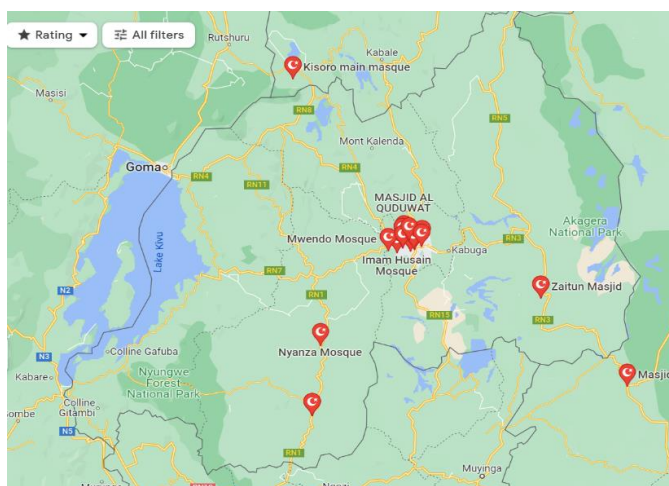
⁴⁰¹ USSD, '[USSD report 2020](#)' 12 May 2021

⁴⁰² USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Rwanda](#)', 12 May 2021

⁴⁰³ USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Rwanda](#)', 12 May 2021

⁴⁰⁴ Google Maps, '[9 things to know about Google's maps data: Beyond the Map](#)', 30 September 2019

⁴⁰⁵ Google Maps, '[Map of Rwanda +mosque](#)', 1 March 2022



- 10.1.8 The Nyarugenge district of Kigali has the capital's largest mosques including Biryogo mosque, Masjid Madina and Markaz^{406 407 408} with a significant number of Muslims living in this area⁴⁰⁹. [Al-Masidjid Q'Ubah Africa Muslims Agency Butare-Rwanda](#) is in Huye district and the Islamic Cultural Centre is in Kigali⁴¹⁰
- 10.1.9 The New Times reported the reopening of 6 mosques in Rwanda on 23 July 2020, after closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic. These were 3 mosques in Kigali (Nyamirambo (Onatracom), Kacyiru and one in the city centre) and 3 in Nyanza, Kirehe and Musanze districts⁴¹¹.
- 10.1.10 The Rwanda Muslim Community (RMC) has a [website](#) (in Kinyarwanda) and an active [Twitter](#) account (in Kinyarwanda and English).
- 10.1.11 In a meeting on 22 March 2022, a HO official asked the NCHR about the treatment of minority religious groups and the NCHR representative commented: 'Freedom to worship as they believe, no discrimination. Majority of Rwandans are Christians, also have Muslims, all other religions (Bahae temple, even including animists). Nobody is excluded, no one is denied their worship.'⁴¹²
- 10.1.12 When asked about access to places of worship, the NCHR representative explained: '[There are] Catholic churches, mosques, temple. Bahae temple, you can find some Indians who worship statues as Gods – freedom of worship. If there is that group, there is worship. Kigali City masterplan has standards for all buildings – if places of worship fulfil standards, no problem. Rwanda has an institution (Rwanda Governance Board) for religion, if want to create church then apply to this board.'⁴¹³
- 10.1.13 The USSD report on Religious Freedom covering events in 2020 noted:
- 'The constitution and other laws prohibit religious discrimination and provide

⁴⁰⁶ Rwanda Muslim Community, @islamrwanda, '[The leadership of #RMC...](#)' 13 August 2020.

⁴⁰⁷ BBC, '[Rwanda bans Kigali mosques from using loudspeakers](#)', 15 March 2018

⁴⁰⁸ KT Press, '[Nyarugenge Bans Speakers On Mosques](#)', 14 March 2018

⁴⁰⁹ USSD, '[2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Rwanda](#)', 12 May 2021

⁴¹⁰ Islamic Cultural Center Kigali, '[@CenterKigali](#)', 1 March 2021

⁴¹¹ The New Times, '[Covid-19: Only few mosques reopened for public prayers](#)', 23 July 2020

⁴¹² [Annex A9](#), Meeting between HO and NCHR, 22 March 2022

⁴¹³ [Annex A9](#), Meeting between HO and NCHR, 22 March 2022

for freedom of religion and worship. The law requires religious groups and faith-based organizations (FBOs) to obtain legal status before beginning operations...during the year, the government allowed a small number of the more than 6,000 churches, mosques, and other places of worship that had remained closed since 2018 for violating health and safety standards or noise pollution ordinances to reopen after they made required infrastructure improvements.... Religious leaders stated numerous faith-based groups and associations contributed to greater understanding and tolerance by participating in interfaith meetings, organizing activities under the auspices of an interfaith religious leaders' forum, and collaborating on community development projects.⁴¹⁴

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Section 11 updated: 24 March 2022

11. Persons with disabilities

- 11.1.1 The law prohibits discrimination against any person with a physical, sensory, intellectual or mental disability and the government generally enforced these provisions. The duty of care of the state to persons with disabilities and the prohibition of discrimination are set out in the Constitution in Articles 10, 16 and 51^{415 416}.
- 11.1.2 The National Council of Persons with Disabilities was created via the Constitution in 2003 and oversees issues affecting disabled persons and assists with the implementation of policies which benefit disabled persons⁴¹⁷.
- 11.1.3 There are 2 specialised centres - Rilima and HVP Gatagara – which offer healthcare services and devices for disabled children. Kigali University Teaching Hospital (CHUK) and Butare University Teaching Hospital (CHUB) also provide orthotics and prosthesis to persons with disabilities. Services in all 4 centres are covered by community-based health insurance⁴¹⁸.
- 11.1.4 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 has increased from 25,561 in 2015 to 104,596 in 2019^{419 420}.
- 11.1.5 In a meeting between HO and NCHR on 22 March 2022, NCHR commented: 'General treatment [of people with disabilities is] good, no discrimination, still some issues but there is political will (shown in laws, establishment of institutions like NCHR & National Council for Peoples with Disability) to ensure issues are revealed and addressed.'⁴²¹
- 11.1.6 In a review of centres for persons with disabilities, the NCHR found that social rights (food, treatment, living conditions) and the right to an education

⁴¹⁴ USSD, '[2020 report on Report on International Religious Freedom: Rwanda](#)', 12 May 2021

⁴¹⁵ USSD, '[USSD report 2020](#)' (section 6), 30 March 2021

⁴¹⁶ Government of Rwanda, '[Constitution](#)', 24 Dec 2015

⁴¹⁷ The National Council of Persons with Disabilities, '[Mission of NCPD](#)', no date

⁴¹⁸ UN Human Rights Council, '[National report submitted by GoR](#)' page 14), 9 Nov 2020

⁴¹⁹ UN Human Rights Council, '[National report submitted by GoR](#)' (page 14), 9 Nov 2020

⁴²⁰ Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, '[Report on CEDAW](#)' (page 27), May 2021

⁴²¹ [Annex A9](#), Meeting between HO and NCHR, 22 March 2022

were respected. Special-needs education equipment and teachers were available in the centres, although children with disabilities who attended regular schools faced the challenge of insufficiently trained teachers and inadequate teaching materials⁴²².

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Section 12 updated: 24 March 2022

12. Age (young and old)

- 12.1.1 Article 51 of the Constitution sets out the duty of the state for the welfare of the elderly⁴²³. In a review of care centres for the elderly, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) found the right to social welfare, medical care, freedom of information and freedom of religion were respected⁴²⁴.
- 12.1.2 Article 19 of the Constitution sets out the state's duty to protect children. The National Commission for Children (part of the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion) is responsible for children's rights and protection^{425 426}. Street children who come to the attention of the authorities are transferred to rehabilitation centres. There are reports of children being abused and held in harsh conditions⁴²⁷.
- 12.1.3 The law prohibits child labour and the minimum age for full-time employment is 16. The government has introduced initiatives to reduce child labour, however, the NCHR reported that some children are subjected to the practice as a result of various factors, including domestic violence and poverty^{428,429}.

See also [Other forms of SGBV](#).

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Section 13 updated: 24 March 2022

13. Ethnic and national groups

- 13.1.1 Protection from discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, ancestry, clan, race or region is set out in Article 16 of the Constitution⁴³⁰.
- 13.1.2 Rwanda has 3 ethnic groups: Hutu, Tutsi and Twa (Batwa). Following the 1994 genocide where Hutus were directed to kill Tutsis, 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 ethnicity and also a ban on organisations based on ethnic affiliation. As a result, the Twa lost their official designation as an ethnic group and the government no longer recognises groups advocating for Twa issues. This

⁴²² NCHR, '[Annual activity report, July 2019 to June 2020](#)' (page 9), no date

⁴²³ Government of Rwanda, '[Constitution](#)' (Article 51), 24 Dec 2015

⁴²⁴ NCHR, '[Annual activity report, July 2019 to June 2020](#)' (page 9), no date

⁴²⁵ Government of Rwanda, '[Constitution](#)' (Article 19), 24 Dec 2015

⁴²⁶ National Commission for Children, '[Home](#)', no date

⁴²⁷ USSD, '[USSD report 2020](#)' (section 6), 30 March 2021

⁴²⁸ NCHR, '[Annual activity report, July 2019 to June 2020](#)' (page 82), no date

⁴²⁹ USSD, '[USSD report 2020](#)' (section 7), 30 March 2021

⁴³⁰ Government of Rwanda, '[Constitution](#)', 24 Dec 2015

has had the effect of undermining efforts to address inequalities such as higher levels of poverty and lower levels of education among the Batwa. The Batwa have an estimated population size of 33,000 and are dispersed throughout the country. The Batwa community has been subjected to discrimination and attacks by non-Batwa persons^{431 432 433}.

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Section 14 updated: 24 March 2022

14. Migrants/foreigners

14.1.1 The 2019 National Labour Mobility Policy prohibits migrant exploitation and outlines measures to protect migrants and ensure all workers are treated equally⁴³⁴. Migrant workers have equal access to social protection as nationals (social protection includes pensions, disability and survivor benefits, maternity leave and severance pay)⁴³⁵

14.1.2 The NCHR was asked about the treatment of non-Rwandans during a meeting with HO on 22 March 2022 and a NCHR representative commented: 'If there is [an] area NCHR has not received complaints, it is this one – no one has complained about treatment because they look different. Rwandan society receives everyone, Chinese people work smoothly with Rwandans in construction, people from the West, Europe, America, we cross each other in the workplace, everywhere, do sport/socialise every day.'⁴³⁶

14.1.3 The NCHR were also asked about discrimination against non-Rwandans in employment and a representative explained:

'In practice, not much experience of discrimination in the workplace: there can be a difference in treatment but labour law provides for certain requirements (e.g. certain posts need to be Rwandan) but where a post is open to all, there is no discrimination.

'Majority of private employers use foreign staff but don't exclude Rwandans, depends on specificity of skills (for example, majority of chefs in hotels are from Kenya due to the fact that Kenya has an advanced experience in tourism sector). In some schools which follow English programme, majority of teachers are Kenya/Uganda, their teachers are more fluent in English than Rwandans.

'In public service, most jobs reserved for Rwandans; some jobs, specific tasks can hire expatriates.'⁴³⁷

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⁴³¹ Minority Rights Group International, '[Rwanda Twa](#)', October 2020

⁴³² USSD, '[USSD report 2020](#)' (section 6), 30 March 2021

⁴³³ UN Human Rights Council, '[Compilation on Rwanda](#)' (page 11), 13 November 2020

⁴³⁴ Ministry of Public Service and Labor, '[National labour mobility policy](#)', 2019

⁴³⁵ IOM, '[Republic of Rwanda profile 2021: Migration governance indicators](#)' (page 12), 2021

⁴³⁶ [Annex A9](#), Meeting between HO and NCHR, 22 March 2022

⁴³⁷ [Annex A9](#), Meeting between HO and NCHR, 22 March 2022

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