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## USDOS – US Department of State

### 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Rwanda

#### Rwanda (Tier 2)

The Government of Rwanda does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Rwanda remained on Tier 2. These efforts included victim identification and referral to care, in partnership with an international organization; finalizing the updated national action plan (NAP); and implementing two ministerial orders establishing interagency responsibilities for responding to trafficking crimes against Rwandans overseas and providing them with protection services. The government also increased trafficking investigations and prosecutions. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government did not convict any traffickers during the reporting period. The government lacked a proactive standardized mechanism to adequately screen for potential trafficking victims among vulnerable populations and refer them to protective services.

#### PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Systematically and proactively screen and identify trafficking victims, especially among vulnerable populations, including among gender-based violence (GBV) victims, persons in commercial sex, those from the LGBTQI+ community, children experiencing homelessness, and those at government transit centers.
- Increase effective trafficking investigations and prosecutions and adequately sentence convicted traffickers.
- Institutionalize the training of front-line officials on the new standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the identification and referral of victims to appropriate services.
- Strengthen coordination of government agencies contributing to Rwanda’s counter trafficking efforts.
- Expand victim witness support programs and training for law enforcement and legal professionals working with victim-witnesses.
- Expand victim and shelter services, including for male victims.
- Expand trafficking identification and protection measures for Rwanda’s refugee population.
- Conduct additional training and capacity building to law enforcement agencies on recognizing and combating internal forms of trafficking.
- Ensure underserved communities are provided with adequate victim identification and protection measures.
- Develop and implement a centralized data system of trafficking crimes, with data disaggregated by type of trafficking, and train law enforcement and immigration officials in relevant ministries on its use.

#### PROSECUTION

The government maintained anti-trafficking law enforcement effort. The 2018 anti-trafficking law criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking. The law prescribed penalties of 10 to 15 years’ imprisonment and a fine of 10 million to 15 million Rwandan francs (\$10,000 to \$15,000), which increased to 20 to 25 years’ imprisonment and a fine of 20 million to 25 million Rwandan francs (\$20,000 to \$25,000) if the crime was transnational in nature. The law prescribed penalties of five to 10 years’ imprisonment and a fine of 5 million to 10 million Rwandan francs (\$5,000 to \$15,000) for forced labor trafficking crimes. These penalties were sufficiently stringent, and with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. However, the law defined trafficking broadly to include illegal adoption without the purpose of exploitation, sexual intercourse for the purpose of exploitation, as well as the sale of organs and other body parts.

The government initiated 142 trafficking case investigations (15 sex trafficking cases, 125 labor trafficking cases, two unspecified exploitation cases), compared with 35 case investigations in the previous reporting period. The government prosecuted 12 defendants—one suspect in one sex trafficking case and 11 suspects for unspecified exploitation in eight cases—compared with prosecution of two defendants in two labor trafficking and one sex trafficking case in 2020. The government did not report convicting any traffickers, compared with conviction of two traffickers in the previous reporting period. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or

convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes. Prolonged pandemic-related lockdowns, limited staffing capacity, and other workplace disruptions in 2021 impeded the government’s progress on implementing policies and efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes. Pandemic-related challenges significantly affected the government’s anti-trafficking efforts, with government offices operating at reduced staffing capacity.

Scarce resources, lack of training, and limited capacity inhibited law enforcement efforts to investigate trafficking cases, prosecute suspected perpetrators, and convict traffickers. Observers reported continued challenges in officials’ ability to distinguish trafficking from other crimes and reported a need for Rwanda’s law enforcement agencies to conduct additional training and capacity building on recognizing and combating internal forms of trafficking. The government focused on transnational trafficking cases which were more easily identified at border crossings while it faced challenges investigating internal trafficking crimes. Although the government reported sharing information with other governments, international cooperation to combat trafficking remained limited particularly in jurisdictions where Rwanda lacked a diplomatic presence or law enforcement mutual assistance agreements.

In partnership with an international organization, authorities provided anti-trafficking training to district government officials in Huye, Rubavu, and Rusizi districts, regions at high risk of trafficking because of cross-border movement to and from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Rwanda Development Board (RDB) in collaboration with an international organization hosted a workshop on human trafficking issues for government officials. The government trained 18 investigators on victim assistance and referral procedures. The government did not report making any changes to its routine trainings and professional development for police, investigators, prosecutors, or social workers assigned to counter GBV, which incorporated components on anti-trafficking laws and procedures.

## PROTECTION

The government made mixed protection efforts. The government identified and referred fewer potential trafficking victims to care, and it did not effectively screen or assist victims among underserved communities. The government identified 110 trafficking victims (39 for sex trafficking, 67 for labor trafficking, and four for unspecified exploitation) during the reporting period, compared with 131 victims identified in the previous reporting period. Officials referred one sex trafficking victim to government and NGO shelters for assistance, compared with 48 victims referred in the previous reporting period. The government was beginning to implement procedures from the new National Action Plan (NAP) related to victim identification and referral at the end of the reporting period. NGOs raised concerns that there was a need for gender-specific identification protocols and guidance on how to collect evidence for use in prosecuting cases. Additionally, NGOs reported a lack of proactive screening measures for identifying and referring potential trafficking victims from underserved communities to protected services. Observers also reported fluctuating staffing throughout the pandemic made it more difficult to coordinate among agencies to identify and refer potential trafficking victims to care, which reduced capacity to track those who received services. Additionally, the government in collaboration with an international organization trained protection actors and counselors at government-run Isange One Stop Centers on the identification of trafficking victims and how to refer them for services.

The government decreased funding for victim care due to pandemic-related budget constraints; it dedicated 181.3 million Rwandan francs (\$181,300) compared with 206 million Rwandan francs (\$206,000) for victim care in 2020 and 233 million Rwandan francs (\$233,000) in 2019. The government continued to operate its network of 44 one-stop centers to assist GBV and trafficking victims. Observers reported four shelters affiliated with NGOs and 17 government-affiliated safe houses also offered services. The government opened its first child-friendly space in coordination with an international organization in September 2021, which offered services for juvenile suspects, victims, and witnesses, including victims and witnesses of trafficking crimes. Observers reported the government planned to establish several more of these spaces, funding permitting. The government’s one-stop centers—located in hospitals and district capitals—provided short-term shelter and psycho-social, medical, and legal services to victims. The government did not report how many trafficking victims it assisted at the one-stop centers during the reporting period. NGOs reported the one-stop centers primarily focused on the needs of female victims, while assistance for male victims remained insufficient. The government reported victims generally stayed at Isange One-Stop Centers for three days, after which victims could choose between longer-term shelter or independent living options, depending on their situations. The long-term government shelters provided up to six months of shelter services for human trafficking and GBV victims. The extent and quality of services varied between locations, particularly regarding the provision of adequate psycho-social counseling, and social workers did not always screen and identify trafficking victims as distinct from GBV victims. The government and NGOs reported adult victims residing at shelters had freedom of movement and could participate in support programs on their own accord. The government reported having available temporary shelter services if victims were unwilling to return to their places of origin. NGOs reported foreign victims had the same access to services as Rwandan victims. The government reported providing and funding counseling services, medical care, literacy and numeracy education, and vocational training for the reintegration of identified former child soldiers—both boys and girls. NGO service providers offered general assistance and support in refugee camps, but a lack of capacity and resources inhibited the implementation of effective procedures, screening, and assistance to trafficking victims in refugee camps.

The 2018 anti-trafficking law stated that trafficking victims should not be detained, charged, or prosecuted for their involvement in any unlawful activity that was a direct consequence of being exploited. However, due to a lack of formal identification procedures through most of the reporting period, authorities sometimes penalized victims for

forced begging and other unlawful acts their traffickers compelled them to commit. The government continued operating transit centers that advocacy groups and NGOs reported detained vulnerable persons and potential trafficking victims—including those in commercial sex, adults and children experiencing homelessness, members of the LGBTQI+ community, foreign nationals, and children in street vending and forced begging—and did not adequately screen for trafficking indicators among them. The government held many potential victims of trafficking in these centers, which functioned as de facto detention facilities, for up to six months. Observers further noted that authorities often released detainees back on the streets abruptly and without notice, thereby exposing them to possible revictimization. While some centers provided detainees and identified victims with psychological counseling, education, vocational training, and reintegration services, not all transit centers offered the same services. NGOs reported officials did not effectively use identification and screening mechanisms to screen for trafficking indicators among underserved communities such as those engaged in commercial sex, adults and children experiencing homelessness, and children in street vending and forced begging who were also denied access to protection measures. Observers reported officials did not follow victim referral procedures with respect to the LGBTQI+ community and individuals in commercial sex due to widespread cultural prejudice. Officials were less likely to refer members of the LGBTQI+ community for services, if at all.

The government supported the repatriation of one Rwandan victim from Oman. The government identified two trafficking victims in Uganda. The anti-trafficking law also required the government to provide support to identified trafficking victims abroad by covering the cost of transportation and repatriation to Rwanda. In July 2021, the government approved two ministerial orders to clarify responsibilities for interagency coordination to support the repatriation of victims and coordination of efforts to identify and assist internal victims. NGOs applauded this action, which explained clear policies and provided a budget to support their anti-trafficking efforts. The government reported having a dedicated budget to repatriate Rwandan nationals from trafficking situations overseas, and diplomats and immigration officials worked to facilitate repatriations, especially from Gulf states. However, observers noted Rwanda’s relatively limited diplomatic footprint often made it difficult for Rwandan officials abroad to provide first-hand assistance to trafficking victims overseas. Media and NGOs reported victims continued to receive support packages of 250,000 Rwandan francs (\$250) upon reintegration into their home communities. The 2018 anti-trafficking law called for the government to provide legal assistance and information to victims in a language they understood; however, the government did not report the number of potential victims to whom it provided such assistance. The anti-trafficking law also protected the identity of victims by allowing court proceedings to be conducted by camera and permitting the use of a video link, but the government did not report providing any victims with these protections during the reporting period. The anti-trafficking law permitted trafficking victims to obtain employment and remain in Rwanda (or leave Rwanda) pending trial proceedings. The government did not report whether it granted this immigration relief to any victims during the reporting period. The anti-trafficking law continued to allow victims to file civil suits against traffickers for restitution and civil damages and stated that victims were exempt from paying any associated filing fees, but the government did not report any suits filed or courts ordering restitution for trafficking victims during the reporting period.

## PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent trafficking. The government finalized an updated NAP in July 2021 after consulting with survivors and including their input when developing it. The interagency anti-trafficking technical committee continued to lead coordinated national anti-trafficking efforts despite insufficient funding and pandemic-related closures. The government adjusted anti-trafficking interagency coordination and in-person engagements to accommodate pandemic restrictions. The government reported holding two major meetings on trafficking issues during the reporting period and conducting regular informal coordination beyond those meetings. Observers noted the anti-trafficking committee held fewer activities during the reporting period. Observers noted the government continued to display political will to combat trafficking, but they assessed the technical committee was not an effective coordinating body. The government did not have a central repository of trafficking data from all law enforcement agencies, which hindered coordination on trafficking issues.

The government conducted national and local awareness-raising campaigns during the reporting period. The government conducted targeted awareness raising campaigns in November and December 2021. The government conducted, in collaboration with an international organization, awareness raising activities at all of Rwanda’s refugee camps to reduce the risk of trafficking. In partnership with an international organization, the government also conducted awareness raising activities in Rubavu, Rusizi, and Huye districts. Adapting to the challenges of the pandemic, the government used media and radio programs to increase community awareness of trafficking risks. The Rwanda Directorate General for Immigration and Emigration (DGIE), Ministry of Justice (MINIJUST), Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB), Rwanda National Police (RNP), and other government agencies, in coordination with an international organization, continued to work together to target leaders in higher-risk communities. The RIB, RNP, and other government agencies continued to operate national hotlines for reporting crimes; they reported receiving 15 calls related to trafficking. These hotlines accommodated speakers in English, French, Kinyarwanda, and Kiswahili, advertised in public awareness campaigns on TV, radio, and social media, and were available 24 hours a day. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

The government had policies to regulate labor recruitment companies. These policies required their registration with the Rwanda Development Board, licensing from the Ministry of Labor, submission of monthly reports to the government, writing labor contracts in one of the official languages and in a language that both the employee and employer understand, and including salary, date of payment, and dispute settlement procedures in employment contracts. The government did not permit international labor brokers to operate in Rwanda. The government reported

labor inspectors and local authorities were trained to identify forced labor; however, NGOs reported the limited number of inspectors and insufficient funds hindered the government’s labor inspections. Despite limited labor inspectors and funds, the government prevented 115 cases of forced labor in which individuals were planning to travel to the Middle East to perform domestic work. The government did not disclose how it regulated, oversaw, and screened for trafficking indicators in the labor recruitment process during the reporting period. The government sought coordination with other governments on transnational labor issues.

## TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Rwanda, and traffickers exploit victims from Rwanda abroad. Traffickers subject Rwandan men, women, and children to sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic work, and in the agricultural, mining, industrial, and service sectors in Rwanda. Traffickers exploit Rwandan women and girls in forced labor, specifically in domestic service, bars, and restaurants, and exploit men and boys in forced labor in mines and plantations. Traffickers sometimes exploit Rwandan children and young adults, including secondary school students between the ages of 13 and 18, in commercial sex in hotels, at times with the cooperation of hotel owners. Traffickers subject Rwandan adults and children to sex trafficking and forced labor in domestic work, agricultural, industrial, and service sectors abroad, including in East Africa, Southern Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. NGOs reported cultural norms minimized laborers’ rights and consequently made identifying forced labor difficult. The free movement of citizens of the East African Community made it easier for traffickers to move victims across borders within the region. Traffickers transited victims through Uganda and Tanzania before reaching final destinations that included African, East Asian, and Middle Eastern countries.

International organizations reported increased vulnerability to trafficking among Rwandans due to the pandemic’s impact on the economy. Migrant workers in search of job opportunities became vulnerable to traffickers. Observers reported pandemic-related border closures reduced the number of victims transiting out of the country. Traffickers target vulnerable populations such as youth experiencing homelessness, orphaned children, children with disabilities, young women and girls, unemployed adults, and internally displaced persons. The vast majority of female victims have been single women younger than 30 years old. International organizations reported traffickers entice young girls into domestic servitude and in some cases force them into sex trafficking. In October 2020, an NGO reported forced street begging as a new form of trafficking exacerbated by the pandemic. Observers report parents receive compensation for allowing traffickers to exploit their children in forced begging during the day. An international organization reported that 43 percent of children with disabilities did not attend school, increasing their vulnerability to being targeted by traffickers. In previous years, international organizations reported concerns that children in refugee camps were vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups operating in the DRC and noted Rwandan children were among those demobilized from armed groups in the DRC. Traffickers in neighboring countries continue to pose as labor recruitment agents to recruit and transport small numbers of victims through the country. A study found that most victims were Rwandan or Burundian in origin. Victims tend to know their traffickers and recruiters; researchers report parents of victims occasionally were complicit in trafficking. Traffickers tend to be male, but females increasingly make up a substantial percentage of traffickers. Sometimes parents send their children to live with relatives to improve their economic situation, but the children become victims of domestic servitude or child sex trafficking. Traffickers deceive guardians and victims with false promises of better opportunities for employment in neighboring countries. Greater access to the internet and social media platforms continues to create new and easier opportunities for traffickers to access and recruit victims. Observers report traffickers employ coercive means to control and keep their victims in their exploitive positions; coercive tactics include isolating and restricting victims’ movements, depriving them of money, restricting their ability to communicate, threat and use of violence, drugs, debt bondage for children of victims, and retaining identity or travel documents.

Sources report traffickers move victims more easily across borders due to a trilateral agreement among the governments of Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda that allows foreign nationals to use national identification in lieu of a passport. In 2019, sources reported a new migration pattern developed by traffickers transiting victims through each of these countries on their way to Ethiopia and Kenya before they embark on their journey to the Middle East. In 2022, Rwanda hosted 127,000 refugees and asylum seekers from the DRC and Burundi. Refugees fleeing conflict and political violence in Burundi and the DRC remain highly vulnerable to trafficking in Rwanda due to an inability to secure legitimate employment, and some are exploited by traffickers in other countries after transiting Rwanda. Sources reported that refugee children, particularly girls, orphans, and young people were at greater risk of exploitation. Researchers have reported some parents in refugee camps receive money in exchange for their daughters’ work in domestic service or in the commercial sex industry. Researchers reported Burundians and Congolese were at risk for trafficking. There were no reports of forcible or coerced recruitment out of the Mahama refugee camp by Rwandan government officials since 2015.

### ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on trafficking in persons (covering April 2021 to March 2022)

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