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Visit to Rwanda

Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter*

Summary

The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter, conducted an official visit to Rwanda from 19 to 30 May 2025 to assess progress and challenges in poverty reduction and social rights. The report acknowledges Rwanda's significant achievements in reducing monetary and multidimensional poverty, with national poverty rates falling from 39.8% in 2017 to 27.4% in 2024, and extreme poverty halving to 5.4%. Disparities persist, however: rural poverty remains nearly double urban levels, and inequality is pronounced, with the richest 1% earning 20% of national income. Structural vulnerabilities, including high public debt, reliance on external financing and uneven benefits from economic growth, threaten inclusive development. Rwanda's growth model – focused on services and high-end investments – has not sufficiently translated into broad-based job creation or poverty reduction, particularly for rural populations.

The Rapporteur calls for prioritizing social investment and rights-based policies to ensure equitable progress. Key recommendations include increasing budgets for health, education and social protection, addressing high dropout and repetition rates in schools and improving early childhood development to combat stunting. The report urges reforms to guarantee decent work, including establishing a statutory minimum wage and accelerating the formalization of employment. It highlights the need to strengthen social protection schemes, expand nutrition support and ensure inclusive housing policies. Special attention is given to women, historically marginalized Batwa communities and refugees – categories that face systemic barriers to rights and opportunities. Finally, the report stresses that meaningful participation and accountability are essential for sustainable development, warning against self-censorship and urging the Government to foster genuine dialogue to enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of policies.

* The summary of the report is being circulated in all official languages. The report itself, which is annexed to the summary, is being circulated in the language of submission only.

Annex

Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter, on his visit to Rwanda

I. Introduction

1. The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter, conducted an official visit to Rwanda from 19 to 30 May 2025. He extends his sincere gratitude to the Government of Rwanda for its cooperation before and during the visit.

2. Throughout the mission, the Special Rapporteur met with the Prime Minister; the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation; the Minister of Justice; the Minister of Health; the Minister of Finance and Economic Planning; the Minister of Local Government and the Local Administrative Entities Development Agency; the Minister of Public Service and Labour; the Minister of Education; the Minister of Agriculture and Animal Resources; the Minister in charge of Emergency Management; the Minister of Environment; members of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, including the Speaker of Parliament; the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; and the Chief Ombudsperson.

3. He also held meetings at the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion; the Rwanda Revenue Authority; the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda; the Rwanda Development Board; the Rwanda Social Security Board; the National Bank of Rwanda; the Rwanda Governance Board; the Rwanda Cooperative Agency; the Gender Monitoring Office; the National Child Development Agency; the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board; the Rwanda Biomedical Centre; the Rwanda Housing Authority; the Water and Sanitation Corporation; the Rwanda Energy Group; the Rwanda Transport Development Agency; the National Land Authority; and the Rwanda Environment Management Authority.

4. The Special Rapporteur also met with representatives of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank and the African Development Bank; as well as with the National Human Rights Commission and representatives of trade unions, employer organizations, civil society organizations, activists, academia and the Rwanda Inter-Religious Council.

5. During his visit, the Special Rapporteur travelled to the Southern and Western Provinces and the city of Kigali. In addition to meeting with the Governors of the Southern and Western Provinces, he engaged with community members, cooperative members, farmers and historically marginalized groups.

6. The Special Rapporteur is grateful for the support provided by the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the United Nations country team in Rwanda. He expressed gratitude to all who shared their experiences.

II. State of poverty and inequality

A. Monetary poverty

7. Rwanda's progress in the fight against poverty is impressive. The seventh Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (EICV7), conducted by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, uses two monetary poverty lines, both based on a cost-of-basic-needs approach.[1] The national monetary poverty line for 2024 was set at 560,127 Rwanda francs per adult equivalent per year (January 2024 prices), covering essential nutritional needs and basic non-food expenses such as housing, fuel and clothing. Using this benchmark, 27.4% of

[1] National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, *EICV7 Report: Poverty Profile Thematic Report 2023/24* (Kigali, 2025).

the population – approximately 3.6 million people – lived below the poverty line in 2024, down from 39.8% estimated for 2017 through imputation modelling. Thus, around 1.5 million Rwandans have been lifted out of poverty over this seven-year period. The extreme poverty line, set at 356,432 Rwanda francs per adult equivalent per year, corresponds to the cost of obtaining 2,400 kilocalories per day. In 2024, 5.4% of the population – roughly 700,000 people – lived in extreme poverty, down from 11.3% in 2017.

8. Although monetary poverty declined in both rural and urban settings, important spatial inequalities remain: 31.6% of the rural population lives below the national poverty line, nearly twice the rate found in urban areas (16.7%). Similarly, extreme poverty in rural zones is estimated at 6.4%, more than double the 3.1% figure in urban areas. Overall, more than 4 in 5 poor Rwandans live in rural areas.[2] Poverty is highest in the Western and Southern Provinces, where 37.4% and 34.7% of the population live in poverty, and 9% and 7.4% in extreme poverty, respectively. In contrast, Kigali records the lowest poverty incidence at 9.1% (1.1% in extreme poverty).

9. Moreover, while the Government has placed considerable emphasis on job creation as a means to reduce poverty, work does not always pay: 1 in 4 workers (25.3%) live in poverty.[3] In-work poverty is most pronounced in low-skilled occupations such as elementary jobs and subsistence farming and most concentrated in agriculture: 31.4% of agricultural workers live in poverty, compared to 23.7% in industry and just 12.1% in services.

B. Multidimensional poverty

10. According to the 2023 multidimensional poverty index published by the United Nations Development Programme and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 48.8% of Rwandans are multidimensionally poor and 22.7% vulnerable to multidimensional poverty, showing important improvements compared to 2015 (57.5% and 49.0%, respectively) and 2010 (66.8% and 50.6%, respectively).[4] Key deprivations include a lack of access to clean cooking fuel (48.7%), adequate housing (44.4%), electricity (36.5%) and assets (36.9%). Educational indicators also contribute very significantly to poverty, with 28.9% of the population deprived in years of schooling and 8% in school attendance. Nutrition remains a major problem, with 23% of the population considered undernourished.

11. According to EICV7, monetary poverty affects men and women at comparable rates. Multidimensional child poverty is higher in female-headed households, however, compared to male-headed ones, a gap that is strongly associated with lower levels of education among mothers and household heads.[5]

C. Inequality

12. According to the World Inequality Database, the richest 1% of Rwandans earn 20% of national income, nearly twice the share held by the bottom 50%.[6] In terms of wealth, the top 1% control 30.3% of net personal assets, while the bottom half holds just 3.3%. While the national Gini coefficient reflects a moderate level of inequality (0.37), inequalities are far more pronounced in urban (0.44) than in rural (0.26) areas.[7] In other terms, while poverty is spread equally in rural areas, wealth is spread unequally in cities.

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[2] National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, Fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census 2022: Thematic Report on Population Projections, July 2023.

[3] National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, *EICV7 Report: Poverty Profile Thematic Report 2023/24*.

[4] United Nations Development Programme and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2024: Poverty amid Conflict* (New York and Oxford, 2024), p. 29.

[5] National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Economic Policy Research Institute, *Multidimensional Child Poverty in Rwanda: A Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA)* (2018).

[6] See https://wid.world/country/rwanda.

[7] National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, *EICV7 Report: Poverty Profile Thematic Report 2023/24*.

13. The Gini coefficient represents an apparent improvement from earlier estimates (around 0.47), which had placed Rwanda among the most unequal low-income countries, depending on the data set used.[8] Methodological changes and data limitations make it difficult, however, to reliably assess inequality trends over time. The National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda could deepen its analysis of wealth inequality – including disparities in land ownership, financial assets and immovable property – in addition to income inequality, and future reporting on inequality could complement the Gini coefficient with additional indicators that are more sensitive to the two extreme ends of the distribution ladder. In particular, the Palma ratio, which compares the share of the richest 10% to that of the poorest 40%, can usefully inform policies aimed at greater equity.

D. Measurement of poverty

14. The measurement and reporting of poverty data in Rwanda have been controversial in the past.[9] The credibility of poverty statistics depends on the transparent and consistent application of sound methodologies, including the choice of inflation indices and the treatment of spatial price variations. Prices for basic goods and services vary significantly across rural and urban areas and between provinces, affecting poverty estimates. While the current methodology applies spatial price deflators to household consumption to account for geographic variation in prices, the national poverty line remains uniform across the country. The Government should consider introducing regionally differentiated poverty lines – or an equivalent spatial adjustment to the poverty threshold itself – to better reflect local cost-of-living differences. Doing so would enhance the accuracy of poverty estimates and support adequate policy responses.

15. Poverty reduction is central to Rwanda's national development strategy. It is therefore vital that poverty data remain open to scrutiny, rigorously produced and accessible to civil society, academia and development partners. Maintaining the integrity of official statistics will reinforce public trust and contribute to more effective, evidence-based policymaking.

III. Pro-poor macroeconomic choices

A. Investing in people

16. Rwanda has recorded strong economic growth, averaging 7.5% over the past decade and exceeding 8% annually between 2021 and 2024, well above the sub-Saharan Africa average of 4.1% during the same period.[10] This growth has been largely driven by substantial public investment, particularly in the services sector, with a strategic focus on information and communications technology (ICT), trade and the development of high-end tourism through the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions industry.[11] Significant investment has also been directed towards the industrial sector (construction and manufacturing activities) and critical infrastructure, including roads, energy, water, sanitation and transport, notably the national airline. These priorities, laid out in the first national strategy for transformation[12] and further refined in the second national strategy for

[8] World Bank, "Rwanda poverty and equity brief", April 2023.

[9] Maurice Okito, "Rwanda poverty debate: summarising the debate and estimating consistent historical trends", *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 46, No. 162 (2019).

[10] National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, *GDP National Accounts*, available at www.statistics.gov.rw/statistical-publications/subject/gdp-calendar-year-publications (accessed on 28 May 2025); and International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook Database, available at www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2025/april (accessed on 28 May 2025).

[11] World Bank and Republic of Rwanda, *Rwanda Country Economic Memorandum 2024: Pathways to Sustainable and Inclusive Growth* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2024), pp. 1–3.

[12] Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, *Seven Year Programme 2017–2024: NST1* (n.d.).

transformation,[13] reflect the Government's ambition to rapidly transition to a service-, manufacturing- and export-led economy with the goal of achieving upper-middle-income country status by 2035.[14] In the agricultural sector, this vision is supported by ongoing efforts to move away from subsistence farming towards a more commercial and capital-intensive model aimed at boosting productivity and enhancing export potential. Over the years, the Government has also put effort into fostering a business-friendly environment to stimulate private-sector-led growth, gained a reputation for low corruption and was consistently among Africa's top performers in the World Bank's ease-of-doing-business rankings.[15]

17. This growth strategy has mainly benefited a narrow formal sector elite, however, and the link between economic expansion and poverty reduction has weakened over time. Educated urban populations have gained, while those with lower levels of education or living in rural and remote areas feel they have been left behind.[16] Although individuals with upper secondary or university education make up only about 15% of the employed workforce, they account for one third to over half of jobs in the industry and services sectors. Around 70% of employment in high value-added service subsectors, such as information and communications, goes to university graduates, despite this group comprising just 7% of all employed workers.[17] As acknowledged by the Government of Rwanda itself in a report prepared with the World Bank, the viability of a services sector-driven growth model in Rwanda remains inconclusive: the available evidence suggests that it is not delivering on its promises for economic transformation, in particular in terms of long-term job creation.[18] Rwanda's strategy to become a regional hub through high-profile investments like the Kigali Convention Centre may boost short-term growth and visibility, but it benefits mostly a wealthier and foreign clientele. Redirecting resources towards agriculture would more effectively reduce poverty and improve rural livelihoods, shifting from trickle-down to inclusive, bottom-up development.

B. Ringfencing social investment

18. Given the necessity of reallocating scarce public resources to initiatives that directly benefit the broader population, particularly in rural areas, it becomes essential for Rwanda to prioritize social investments in the face of pressing macroeconomic constraints.

19. By 1 January 2025, public debt had reached 78.7% of gross domestic product (GDP). The joint World Bank-IMF debt sustainability analysis classifies the debt situation as "moderate", though vulnerabilities remain significant.[19] To avoid being moved to the "high-risk" category of borrowers, the Government has committed to reducing the public deficit from the level of 6.9% of GDP at the end of 2024 to 3.3% in the next two years under the current IMF programme.[20] It is entering, in other terms, "shock therapy". Medium-term sustainability concerns are exacerbated by uncertainties around concessional financing availability, domestic resource mobilization challenges and ongoing exchange rate pressures.

20. This arrives, moreover, at the worst possible time. Support from external donors has become less predictable and the Government will be reducing expenditure for development projects mainly funded by countries that have halted official development assistance to Rwanda, in reaction to the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in addition to the global retreat of the United States Agency for International Development.

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13 Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, *Five Years Government Programme 2024–2029. NST2* (n.d.).

14 Republic of Rwanda, "Vision 2050", December 2020, p. 13.

15 World Bank, *Doing Business 2020: Comparing Business Regulation in 190 Economies – Economy Profile of Rwanda* (Washington, D.C., 2020).

16 World Bank and Republic of Rwanda, *Rwanda Country Economic Memorandum 2024*, pp. 3–6, 124 and 125.

17 Ibid., p. 125.

18 Ibid., p. 119.

19 World Bank, *Rwanda – Joint World Bank-IMF Debt Sustainability Analysis (English)* (Washington, D.C., 2025).

20 IMF, *Fourth Review*, IMF Country Report No. 23/342 (Washington, D.C., 2024).

21. The Government must prioritize investing in people and safeguarding economic and social rights by mobilizing domestic resources[21] and curbing lost revenues (e.g. from offshore wealth and corporations' profit shifting),[22] while ringfencing the budgets of social investment. Sustained investment in health, education, social protection and workers' rights is essential for Rwanda to harness its demographic dividend over the next decade.

22. The most recent trends are concerning in this regard. The health budget declined as a share of the national budget from 10% in 2020/21 to around 7% in 2024/25.[23] Social protection has seen a 22% reduction in its 2024/25 budget allocation,[24] although coverage is still patchy, and the 2025/26 budget anticipates a further decrease of 30% in nominal terms.[25] While budget allocations for water and sanitation have increased in recent years, they remain inadequate: the current allocation of 8,036 Rwanda francs per person would need to more than double to enable Rwanda to meet its Sustainable Development Goal targets linked to clean water and sanitation.[26] Moreover, the funding of policies in areas such as healthcare and social protection depend largely on donors' support: a sustainable financing strategy for funding these sectors is urgently needed.

IV. Social rights as a compass

23. Rwanda's weak human capital – ranked 160th out of 174 countries in the Human Capital Index – reflects poor learning outcomes and high child stunting, limiting long-term development potential. Investing in health, education and nutrition is essential to translate economic progress into meaningful poverty and inequality reduction, guided by human rights principles.

A. Education

24. With 58% of the population under 24, Rwanda must ensure universal access to quality education to prepare for a knowledge-based economy as envisioned in "Vision 2050". Some progress has been achieved on this front: adult literacy rose from 73% in 2017 to 76% in 2024, the gender gap has narrowed, and the share of the population without any formal education dropped significantly, from 16% in 2022 to 10% in 2024.[27] Despite these gains, challenges remain, with 62.9% having only attended primary school, 23.9% reaching secondary school and 4.3% accessing tertiary education.[28] Equally troubling is that Rwanda has one of the lowest levels of education attainment in the region:[29] the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization speaks of a "learning crisis".[30] The World Bank's Human Capital Index shows that students in Rwanda score 358 on a harmonized test score scale, where 625 represents advanced attainment and 300 represents minimum

[21] See the recommendations in IMF, *Fourth Review*, p. 11.

[22] European Union Tax Observatory and Skatteforsk – Centre for Tax Research. *Atlas of Offshore World: Country Profile – Rwanda* (Paris and Oslo, 2023).

[23] UNICEF Rwanda. *Budget Brief on Child-Focused Sectors: 2024–2025 – Investing in Social Sectors for Human Development in Rwanda* (Kigali, 2024).

[24] Ibid.

[25] Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, *Explanatory Note to Budget Framework Paper for 2024–2025* (Kigali, 2024); Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, *Budget Framework Paper 2025/2026–2027/2028* (Kigali 2025).

[26] UNICEF Rwanda, *Budget Brief on Child-Focused Sectors: 2024–2025 – Investing in Social Sectors for Human Development in Rwanda* (Kigali, 2024).

[27] National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, *EICV7 Report: Education Thematic Report 2023/24* (Kigali, 2025).

[28] Ibid.

[29] Republic of Rwanda and World Bank, *Pathways to Sustainable and Inclusive Growth in Rwanda* (2024).

[30] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "Rwanda: education country brief", January 2024.

attainment.[31] Expected years of school are 6.9 (ranking Rwanda 167th out of 175 countries in the Index), and learning-adjusted years of schooling (combining quantity and quality) are just 3.9 (ranking Rwanda 169th).[32] Children attend 6.9 years of school on average, but learn only 3.9 years of content. Of the total population aged 15 years and above, 24.2% are illiterate (26.4% of women compared to 21.6% of males; and 28.9% in rural areas compared to 13.1% in urban areas).[33]

25. Three challenges persist. Dropout rates remain high despite some reduction achieved through the universalization of school-feeding since 2021: net enrolment rates are 94.3% in primary school, but just 39% in pre-primary and 26.4% in secondary education.[34] While primary and secondary schooling are free in principle, parents face "hidden costs", such as examination fees, school meal contributions and "voluntary" parent-teacher association dues.[35] Teenage pregnancy among girls and discrimination towards "historically marginalized people" are other factors explaining high dropout rates.[36]

26. Repetition rates are high, absorbing one quarter of the total education budget: among the children who attended primary school during the 2022/23 academic year, 21% repeated the same grade in the 2023/24 academic year, and the repetition rate was 10.7% in lower secondary schools and 4.3% in upper secondary schools.[37] Completion rates remain low (42%, 25% and 14% according to EICV7 for primary, lower and upper secondary education, respectively),[38] a situation that has in fact worsened in secondary education compared to 2017 (the completion rates were 45.1%, 19.5% and 16.6% in the fifth Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey).[39] High repetition rates are linked to poor school readiness, stunting, undernutrition and language barriers following the shift to English instruction, for which many teachers were unprepared.

27. The poor quality of education is a third source of concern. Classrooms are often extremely crowded, with an average of 59 pupils per class in 2022 (a reduction from 71 in 2020).[40] Some 64% of primary schools also operate on a double-shift system, with learners spending just 22 hours per week with teachers out of the recommended 42 hours.[41] ICT investments, including the "one laptop per child" programme, are not a substitute for investing more to improve the teacher-pupil ratio. This makes the commitment of "Vision 2050" that "all classes will reach middle-income standards for pupil-classroom and pupil-teacher ratios by 2035"[42] even more relevant.

28. Children from low-income households and in rural areas are disadvantaged in the education system. Since only 17.3% of children from the lowest quintile have access to preschool services (compared to 41.3% of children from the highest quintile), they come to

[31] World Bank, Human Capital Index, available at https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/search/dataset/0038030/Human-Capital-Index (accessed on 10 February 2025).

[32] Ibid.

[33] National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, *EICV7 Report: Education Thematic Report 2023/24*.

[34] Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Education, *2022/23 Education Statistical Yearbook* (2024).

[35] A. Shepherd, A. Simons and K. Bird, *Rebooting Rwanda's Poverty Reduction after a Slowdown* (Chronic Poverty Advisory Network and UK Aid, 2020), p. 26; Timothy Williams, "Implementing fee-free education in Rwanda", in *Politics and Knowledge Shaping Education Reform*, Colleen McLaughlin and Alan Ruby, eds. (Cambridge University Press, 2025).

[36] Joint submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, "Great Lakes Initiative for Human Rights and Development (GLIHD) and Community of Potters of Rwanda (COPORWA)", available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2761&Lang=en (accessed on 4 March 2025).

[37] National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, *EICV7 Report: Education Thematic Report 2023/24*, pp. 14 and 15.

[38] Ibid.

[39] National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, *5th Population and Housing Census: Educational Characteristics of the Population* (2022).

[40] UNICEF Rwanda, "Education in Rwanda: a situation analysis", January 2024.

[41] Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Education, *Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2024–2029* (n.d.).

[42] Republic of Rwanda, "Vision 2050".

school less well prepared.[43] Moreover, children from low-income backgrounds cannot afford private schools, which provide the best education: 99.0% of children in the lowest quintile attend public or government-subsidized schools, whereas 34.4% of children in the highest quintile are in private schools, a gap that largely corresponds to a rural-urban divide (only 3.3% of children in rural areas attend private schools, while this is the case for 23.4% of children in cities).[44] There is a significant disparity in school attendance between children without disabilities (93% in primary and 33.9% in secondary schools) and those with disabilities (62% in primary and 13.7% in secondary schools), underscoring the urgent need for more inclusive education.

29. Reducing hidden education costs and improving the quality of education and labour market relevance are essential to close gaps, as poor households face high financial and opportunity costs when keeping children in school.[45]

B. Healthcare

30. Rwanda's health indicators reflect both impressive progress and persistent challenges. Life expectancy increased from 51.2 years in 2002 to 69.6 years in 2022.[46] The country has achieved high coverage in essential services, with 94% of births attended by skilled health personnel and immunization rates exceeding 95%. The prevalence of wasting among children under 5 has dropped dramatically (by 87% since 2000), now standing at just 1.1%. Maternal and under-5 mortality rates are still high, however, and child stunting continues to affect 1 in 3 children under 5, with 9% severely stunted.[47]

31. Since 2006, the community-based health insurance system (*mutuelles de santé*), has been fully implemented. Having health insurance is mandatory under Law No. 3/2015 of 2 March 2015, and therefore coverage is extensive: more than 11 million individuals are covered, representing 87.9% of the population. Although coverage depends on payment of a premium, the minimum fee is relatively modest (3,000 Rwanda francs), and the vast majority of households that cannot afford to pay (representing approximately 800,000 people) are supported by a government subsidy.[48]

32. The country operates a decentralized healthcare public service system starting with 58,000 community health workers working at the village level, and comprising 1,286 health posts (offering basic medical services in villages, largely staffed by community health workers or nurses), 518 health centres (providing more comprehensive primary healthcare services than a health post, at the district level), 34 district hospitals (secondary healthcare) and 13 national referral or specialized hospitals (tertiary healthcare).[49] While this coverage has reduced the travel time needed to obtain healthcare, the number of skilled health workers remains low: there are 1.2 skilled health workers (physician, nurse of midwife) per 1,000 people, a quarter of the World Health Organization-recommended minimum health workforce density to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (4.45 per 1,000).[50] Increasing healthcare funding will be difficult as nearly half the budget relies on external loans or grants, and its share of the national budget has fallen to 6.6%, far below the 15% target set by the Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases.[51]

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43 UNICEF Rwanda, "Education in Rwanda".
44 National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, *EICV7 Report: Education Thematic Report 2023/24*, table 2.5.
45 Shepherd, Simons, and Bird, *Rebooting Rwanda's Poverty Reduction*, p. 40.
46 United Nations Rwanda. *Common Country Analysis* (Kigali, 2024).
47 UNICEF, "Health, nutrition and early childhood development in Rwanda: a situation analysis", January 2024.
48 Data provided by the Ministry of Health.
49 Ibid.
50 Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Health, *Health Sector Strategic Plan V: July 2024–June 2029* (n.d.).
51 UNICEF Rwanda, "Rwanda budget briefs 2024–25", January 2023.

C. Food

33. Four in five (83%) Rwandan households are food-secure, a slight improvement since 2021.[52] Food insecurity still affects 17% of households, however, with 1% facing severe food insecurity.[53] It is most pronounced in the Western Province (particularly Rubavu and Nyamasheke districts) and the Southern Province (notably Nyamagabe district), where the rates are 23% and 16%, respectively.[54]

34. While fewer people are starving, dietary diversity and the adequacy of diets remain problematic. In 2024, 75.7% of Rwandans could not afford a healthy diet, a figure higher than the averages in Eastern Africa (73.7%), sub-Saharan Africa (72.2%), Africa overall (64.8%) and low-income countries (71.5%).[55] Undernourishment affects 31% of the population (approximately 4.3 million people).[56]

35. Food insecurity is most severe among rural, land-poor households,[57] especially those headed by women or individuals with limited education or work opportunities, reflecting gender and economic disparities in access to secure livelihoods. Approximately 27% of households in the country are female-headed and are more likely to be food-insecure.[58] While women are extensively involved in agricultural production and labour, men are more frequently employed in higher-paying occupations such as skilled labour, salaried work or owning small businesses.

36. Dietary diversity among women improved between 2021 and 2024: the proportion consuming a diversified diet rose from 32% to 41%. Nevertheless, access to nutrient-rich foods such as eggs, meat and vitamin A-rich vegetables remains limited.[59] There were also modest improvements in infant and young child feeding practices in Rwanda: the proportion of infants aged 6–23 months meeting the minimum dietary diversity rose from 33% to 45%, minimum meal frequency increased from 34% to 40%, and the share meeting the minimum acceptable diet improved from 16% to 23%.

37. Despite this progress, overall levels remain low – only 22% of children receive a diet that meets the minimum acceptable standards, with just 34% achieving adequate dietary diversity and 46% receiving meals at the recommended frequency.[60] Nutritional deficits are particularly alarming during early childhood, a critical window for physical and cognitive development.[61] In 2024, 30% of children were stunted, 2.1% wasted and 8% underweight. Stunting rates are significantly higher in the Western and Northern Provinces (37% and 34%, respectively) compared to the national average.[62]

38. Stunting is driven by maternal malnutrition and low birth weight, while mothers' education and access to health services strongly reduce risks by improving feeding practices and childcare.[63]

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52 National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2024 CFSVA Rwanda, available at http://www.statistics.gov.rw/sites/default/files/documents/2025-07/Rwanda%20CFSVA%202024.pdf.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and others. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024: Financing to End Hunger, Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in All Its Forms* (Rome, FAO, 2024).
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.; World Food Programme (WFP). *Rwanda Annual Country Report 2024: Country Strategic Plan 2019–2024* (Kigali, 2025).
58 National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2024 CFSVA Rwanda.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 UNICEF, *Nourishing a New Generation in Rwanda* (New York, 2019).
62 National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2024 CFSVA Rwanda.
63 Lauriane Nyiraneza and others, "Risk factors associated with childhood stunting in Rwanda: a secondary analysis of the 2014 Nutrition, Markets and Gender (NMG) Survey", *Journal of Management and Strategy*, vol. 10, No. 2 (2019).

39. The "One egg per child, every day" campaign,[64] as well as the Kwihaza project – a four-year initiative (2023–2026) to develop aquaculture, horticulture and fisheries value chains[65] – are promising, as they seek to combine improved income opportunities in rural areas with better nutrition. The "1,000 days in the land of 1,000 hills" initiative integrates media outreach, community health worker engagement and evidence-based behaviour change strategies to promote improved nutrition and hygiene practices, with the overarching objective of reducing childhood malnutrition and preventable diseases.[66]

40. Food insecurity remains highest in rural areas. While agriculture employs 61.6% of the workforce,[67] a sector that accounts for 27% of GDP,[68] the vast majority of food producers are small-scale farmers depending on subsistence agriculture; most of them (77%) are women.[69] Persistent structural challenges – such as soil degradation, post-harvest losses, demographic pressure, limited arable land and poor market connectivity –undermine food security. Low consumption of animal proteins and iron-rich foods, coupled with poor dietary diversity, drives widespread malnutrition. In the Karongi district, the Special Rapporteur heard how irregular rainfall, droughts, floods, pests, crop diseases and competition for scarce land further exacerbate these vulnerabilities.

41. Rwanda's dependence on small-scale rain-fed agriculture heightens vulnerability, even among households above the poverty line, due to constant exposure to economic shocks, food price volatility and climate-related risks such as floods, droughts, landslides, soil erosion and deforestation. These factors make a sustained escape from poverty particularly challenging for rural communities reliant on subsistence farming.[70]

42. Despite notable progress in agricultural productivity and environmental sustainability, agriculture faces persistent systemic challenges. Inadequate post-harvest storage infrastructure heightens seasonal food insecurity, forcing reliance on markets during periods of high prices and limiting access to nutritious diets. Weak market linkages, insufficient infrastructure and emerging climate-related threats further compound these issues. Addressing them requires increased investment in agricultural value chains and stronger private sector engagement to ensure stable food supply and affordability during lean seasons.[71] Government efforts to promote monocropping, particularly maize, aim to advance commercial agriculture but risk increasing farmers' production costs, creating dependency on external inputs and degrading soil health once subsidies are withdrawn. Conversely, mixed cropping, agroforestry and the use of leguminous plants offer more sustainable alternatives by reducing erosion, improving soil fertility and enhancing water retention.

D. Water, sanitation and hygiene

43. Progress in ensuring access to water, sanitation and hygiene services has been significant. Access to improved drinking water sources increased from 87% in 2016/17 to 90% in 2023/24, and the proportion of the population with access to improved sanitation facilities rose from 86% to 94% during the same period.[72] By 2024, 94% of Rwandan households had access to improved sanitation, representing an increase from 86% in 2021.[73]

44. Access to improved, non-shared toilet facilities has risen only marginally – from 66% to 72% – with urban households consistently better served than rural ones.[74] The implementation of the new national water and sanitation policy faces significant challenges,

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[64] UNICEF, "UNICEF and NCDA roll out campaign to combat malnutrition in children", 16 December 2022.
[65] See www.minagri.gov.rw/updates/news-details/minagri-launches-kwihaza-project.
[66] UNICEF, "A child's first 1,000 days in Rwanda", 1 December 2017.
[67] EICV7.
[68] WFP, "Draft Rwanda country strategic plan (2025–2029)", December 2024.
[69] Ibid.
[70] World Bank, "Climate risk country profile: Rwanda", 2021.
[71] Ibid.
[72] National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, *EICV7 Report: Poverty Profile Thematic Report 2023/24*.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

notably the shortage of trained professionals for the design, maintenance and management of water and sanitation systems, particularly wastewater and faecal sludge, which critically undermines service delivery.

45. Budgetary allocations, while increasing, remain insufficient to meet the country's ambitions. In the 2024/25 fiscal year, the Government spent 8,036 Rwanda francs per person on water, sanitation and hygiene – less than half of the estimated 19,378 Rwanda francs per person required to meet Sustainable Development Goal targets.[75] While the drinking water access programme absorbs 72% of the national water, sanitation and hygiene budget, investment in district-level infrastructure continues to decline, disproportionately affecting rural populations.[76] This is particularly concerning given that 82.11% of Rwandans live in rural areas,[77] where access to both water and sanitation remains significantly lower.

46. Spatial disparities are not limited to the urban-rural divide. Approximately 86.9% of the population in grouped settlements (*imidugudu*) had better access to improved drinking water compared to 80.9% of those in scattered rural settlements, and access to improved sanitation facilities was higher in planned settlements (87.4%) than in isolated rural housing (74.7%); in urban areas, the contrast between planned (97.7%) and unplanned settlements (94%) was also notable.[78]

47. These gaps place a disproportionate burden and danger on girls and women, who often spend hours collecting water, hindering their access to education and economic participation. Proximity to safe water sources remains an issue. Only 25% of Rwandans access improved drinking water within 200 m of their homes, while 42% access it within 500 m and only 16% access water within 200 m, compared to 60% in urban areas.[79]

E. Housing

48. Rwanda seeks to address the growing need for adequate housing through large-scale urban and rural development programmes. In Kigali – where the population grew from 18% of the national total in 2017 to 28% in 2024, with projections reaching 35% by 2025 – the Government has introduced several initiatives to improve living conditions in informal settlements. These include the relocation of residents to newly constructed vertical apartment complexes, such as those in Mpazi.[80]

49. In rural areas, the Government is pursuing an integrated development programme and the creation of "rurban" settlements, which combine planned housing infrastructure with opportunities for economic participation.[81] Villagers who relinquished land for commercial agricultural ventures became shareholders in the resulting enterprises by which they are employed. Furthermore, the Government has introduced 73 "rurban" nodes across 307 km^2, each planned to accommodate around 24,500 people, and reports suggest that the proportion of planned rural settlements has increased from 61.7% to 67.9%.[82] The expansion of feeder roads has also facilitated improved access to markets and services.[83]

[75] See http://unicef.org/rwanda/media/6446/file/UNICEF_Rwanda_Budget_Briefs_2024_2025_WASH.pdf.pdf.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Trading Economics, Rwanda - Rural Population, available at https://tradingeconomics.com/rwanda/rural-population-percent-of-total-population-wb-data.html.
[78] Gratien Twagirayezu and others, "The current state and future prospects of water and sanitation services in East Africa: the case of Rwanda", *Polish Journal of Environmental Studies*, vol. 32, No. 1 (2023).
[79] Ibid.
[80] See www.kigalicity.gov.rw/news-detail/press-release-ground-breaking-for-mpazi-informal-settlement-upgrading-works.
[81] See https://climatechange.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/GCF_Readiness_Project_NLUDMP_Dissenimation_Technical_Report.pdf.
[82] Ibid.
[83] See www.minagri.gov.rw/updates/news-details/rural-feeder-roads-development-opens-rwanda-countryside-to-agriculture-development.

50. Blind spots remain. In response to increasing climate-related disasters, the Government has undertaken relocations from high-risk areas, such as valleys and hillsides, often citing flood or landslide risks. While necessary from a public safety perspective, these relocations have frequently lacked transparency, participation and basic procedural safeguards. The Special Rapporteur received reports from affected communities, indicating that they were given only minutes to a few hours to vacate their homes before demolition, with no prior consultation, compensation or alternative accommodation. Many were forced to sleep outdoors in adverse weather conditions. Although the climate-related measures were not explicitly targeted at the Batwa, this community was disproportionately impacted due to its heightened vulnerability and historical marginalization.

51. Additional concerns include the lack of meaningful consultation with affected communities, the absence of legal recourse for those evicted and the risk that land development prioritizes commercial or aesthetic interests over the rights of the poor. In some cases, the repurposing of land in high-risk areas for plantation use raises questions about equitable access and long-term sustainability.

52. Nonetheless, the Special Rapporteur acknowledges the Government's stated commitment to sustainable urbanization and climate resilience. The integration of housing initiatives with broader social and economic goals, including shareholder models and rent support, offers promising avenues for rights-based development. Ensuring that all housing policies are implemented with full respect for human rights principles, including participation, non-discrimination and accountability, will be essential to avoid exacerbating poverty and exclusion. Greater attention to the needs of historically marginalized peoples, women-headed households and persons with disabilities will further strengthen the inclusivity and effectiveness of Rwanda's housing programmes.

F. Social protection

53. Social protection is delivered through the Vision Umurenge Programme (VUP), initially launched in 2008 and implemented through the Local Administrative Entities Development Agency under overall supervision of the Ministry of Local Government. The current components, benefiting in total 500,000 households or 1.7 million people (13% of the population), include a public works component, with 85,000 persons covered under the classic public works programme and 72,000 covered under the expanded public works programme in 2024, figures that are lower than in previous years but remain significant;[84] a cash transfer component (direct support); a home-based early childhood development component (enabling low-income households with care work responsibilities to be paid while learning and caring for children with the support of early childhood development centres); a nutrition-sensitive direct support component; a skills development component (training); and a productive assets transfer component (including the Girinka programme ("one cow per poor household")). The Special Rapporteur discussed these programmes in depth, with both the beneficiaries and the implementing authorities, in the Southern and Western Provinces in particular.

1. Coverage and targeting

54. Overall, 35% of those in the poorest quintile and about 14% of those in the second quintile live in a household that receives at least one VUP transfer. Coverage remains weak, however: VUP benefits only 27% of households considered extremely poor and 23% of households considered poor.[85] Adequate targeting is therefore especially crucial. Until 2024, targeting was achieved by classifying households in five categories, from the wealthiest (A) to the most destitute (E). This *Ubudehe* classification system was considered stigmatizing, however, and did not sufficiently encourage targeted households to graduate out of poverty. It was also considered to be prone to abuse, as households sought to be classified within the lowest category to benefit from interventions. The dynamic social registry (*Imibereho*) is now being rolled out to address these insufficiencies and, in fact, to "activate" beneficiaries,

[84] Figures provided by the Ministry of Public Service and Labour.
[85] World Bank and Republic of Rwanda, *Rwanda Country Economic Memorandum 2024*, p. 119.

rather than to encourage long-term dependency: it is therefore aligned with the 2022 national strategy for sustainable graduation. The *Imibereho* social registry also facilitates permanent updating through integration with other databases, for instance the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics system, where the composition of the household changes.

55. Under the new social registry, the identification of households in need of support is based on a mapping of households' needs, through the questionnaires parasocial workers fill in during their households' visits, using a proxy means testing approach; the listing of households at the village level through the village chief (*mudugudu*); and the validation of the list at community meetings (*inteko z'abaturage*, at the village level).[86] Households that feel that they should have been included can appeal against the decision not to include them in certain interventions, first at the level of the cell, then at the district level: this is an administrative remedy against exclusion.

56. Based on the extensive interviews he conducted, the Special Rapporteur found that the targeting was essentially sound. There are three concerns, however. First, some individuals mentioned that parasocial workers and/or village chiefs could receive small bribes (*ikisiriko*) to facilitate inclusion on the list of beneficiaries (the figure of 5,000 Rwanda francs was mentioned). Second, since inclusion for a form of support is validated at community meetings, individuals who feel that they have been excluded may fear for their status within the community if they challenge the assessment that has been made about their situation.

57. Third, a major gap concerns households that are considered outsiders to the community, particularly the semi-nomadic Batwa. The underinclusion of the Batwa is not remedied in community meetings, since they usually do not take part and are, in any case, pariahs to the community. Moreover, there appears to be no outreach strategy informing the Batwa about their rights and providing support to ensure they claim them.

58. These concerns call for adopting a rights-based approach to the social support policies provided under VUP, in line with the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202). More clearly defining the beneficiaries, providing information in language and in a format that people can understand, and ensuring access to remedies in conditions that encourage people to use such remedies, could reduce the risks both of underinclusion and corruption. For coverage to increase, however, sustainable financing options will have to be found. While funding increased slightly from 1.36% to 1.61% of GDP between 2016/17 and 2020/21, the share of expenditure funded by external sources nearly doubled during this period, from 17.4% to 30.5%.[87] Moreover, the budgetary allocation for social protection has been falling in nominal terms in recent years.

2. Public works

59. The potential of the public works component of VUP could be maximized further, beyond the minimal income support it provides (between 1,500 and 3,000 Rwanda francs is paid per day). By 2024, while a total of 864,365 individuals were benefiting from the public works programme, 191,504 individuals (more than one fifth of the total) were supported through the home-based component of the expanded public works programme.[88] The deployment of the home-based component of the expanded public works programme could relieve caregivers, mostly women, improving their access to work. Public works programmes can also accelerate the acquisition of skills, particularly when combined with a training component, and can serve as a tool to combat gender stereotypes, by ensuring that women perform work traditionally done by men (as in infrastructure building) and, conversely, by tasking men to do work traditionally performed by women (as in care work). Public works can also serve to meet community needs, especially where the works to be performed are determined at community meetings.

[86] Detailed guidance is provided in the *Standard Operating Procedures* (published by the Ministry of Local Development dated March 2025).

[87] World Bank and Republic of Rwanda, *Rwanda Country Economic Memorandum 2024*, p. 119.

[88] Figures provided by the Ministry of Local Government.

3. Direct support

60. By 2024, 104,506 people were receiving direct support through the *ingoboka* cash transfer system, granted to those who are unable to work.[89] The amount is set at 7,500 Rwanda francs per month (8,500 Rwanda francs for older persons, above the age of 65). This is inadequate and does not allow the beneficiary to survive without relying on solidarity networks. In order to allow beneficiaries to be protected from extreme destitution, the *ingoboka* should be raised to at least 46,600 Rwanda francs per month, corresponding approximately to the national poverty line and to the wage paid under the public works programme. Moreover, the amount should be set considering the additional costs incurred by persons with disabilities.[90]

4. Nutrition support

61. Nutrition-sensitive direct support is a form of income support (7,500 Rwanda francs per month) for pregnant and lactating women to encourage the uptake of essential health and nutrition services for the 1,000 days between conception and the second birthday of the child. This component of VUP cannot be underestimated. As of 2023/24, the last period for which data were available at the time of the visit, 142,115 women were benefiting from the programme across 20 districts. This, in addition to the home-based early childhood development component of VUP, should be further expanded in the future, as stunting rates remain high in the country, affecting 49% of children from low-income households.

62. Reducing stunting requires a comprehensive policy approach, including child allowances and parental education on adequate nutrition. However, the most urgent improvement concerns early childhood development centres. According to the Auditor General's 2024 report, 92.2% of visited centres failed to provide holistic services for children under 6, 73% lacked sufficient caregivers and 27% did not adequately feed children.[91]

5. Old age pension

63. In addition to the VUP set of protections, the *Ejo Heza* long-term savings scheme was set up by Law No. 29/2017 of 29 June 2017 as a scheme that all residents in Rwanda can join on a voluntary basis. The scheme can also be joined by informal workers with irregular earnings (since the amount and frequency of contributions can vary across time). The Government provides a fiscal incentive to join the scheme, by matching the voluntary contributions of households identified as poor. Although the scheme had enrolled 3.6 million participants by 2025[92] – a remarkable achievement – approximately 80% of informal workers remain without coverage, underscoring the challenges low-wage earners face in saving for social protection.

64. While the progress achieved in realizing the right to social security is commendable, significant gaps remain. Both the coverage and the adequacy of social protection should be improved to comply with article 9 of theInternational Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and to meet the standards set in the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), which is still awaiting ratification by Rwanda. The most significant gaps concern the complete absence of unemployment benefits (although 13.9% of workers are unemployed),[93] as well as of family benefits (child allowances) and maternity benefits; and the low coverage and inadequate amount of the minimum income scheme. Persons with disabilities who are unable to work may access direct support under VUP; however, this assistance remains minimal. While these groups are not entirely left without aid, the support provided is fragmented and insufficient. In this context, the reduction in budgetary allocations for social protection is particularly concerning, as this is an area in which Rwanda cannot afford to economize.

89 Figures provided by the Ministry of Public Service and Labour.
90 E/C.12/RWA/CO/5, para. 36.
91 Republic of Rwanda, Office of the Auditor General of State Finances, *Annual Audit Report for the Year Ended 30 June 2023* (2024), p. 58.
92 Figure provided by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning.
93 See https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/?ref_area=RWA.

V. Employment

65. The Government has placed a strong emphasis on job creation, and the recent changes to the social protection system are guided by the hope of reducing dependency and pressuring beneficiaries into employment and thus graduating out of poverty. Yet much remains to be done to ensure the conditions of decent work in Rwanda. Three priorities emerge.

66. While the Labour Code (Law No. 66/2018 of 30 August 2018) provides for the establishment of a minimum wage, this provision remains unimplemented: as a result, the statutory minimum wage has not been updated since 1973. The Special Rapporteur welcomes the efforts of the Government to cooperate with social partners to establish a minimum wage applicable across all sectors, corresponding at least to the living wage and regularly indexed to the cost of living, in order to ensure all workers and their families an adequate standard of living.[94]

67. A second priority is to accelerate the transition from informal to formal work. Some 82.2% of employment is informal.[95] Consistent with the ILO Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), and the general comment of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights dedicated to just and favourable conditions of work,[96] Rwanda should pursue a two-track approach towards formalization. First, in addition to ensuring that informal workers' working conditions are protected, the social security provisions covering workers who are registered should be progressively extended to informal workers.[97] Second, specific incentives should be put in place to encourage formalization. The Special Rapporteur welcomes the fact that businesses that register are granted tax exemptions for two years, and that article 122 of the Labour Law and articles 90 and 101 of the Public Procurement Law (No. 031/2022) ensure contractors' responsibility for wage payments, including for subcontracted workers, thereby supporting labour formalization.

68. A third priority concerns the ending of child labour. Rwanda has adopted successive strategies for the elimination of child labour since 2014. The Labour Code prohibits the employment of children under the age of 16 and regulates work conditions for those between 16 and 18. This is complemented by ministerial order 02/MIFOTRA/23 of 1 August 2023. The generalization of the school-feeding programme, which is a powerful tool to reduce school dropout, can also help. Much more could be done, however. The Law determining Organization of Education (No. 10/2021) could make education compulsory until the minimum age for admission to employment or work (16 years), consistent with article 2 (3) of the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), which Rwanda has ratified. Any "light work" authorized for children between 13 and 15 years of age should not prejudice school attendance, which is incompatible with article 39 of ministerial order 02/MIFOTRA/23, which allows children aged 13 to 15 years to work up to six hours per day. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations have also deplored the limited enforcement of the existing provisions concerning the commercial sexual exploitation of children and the rehabilitation and social reintegration of children who are victims of trafficking, despite Rwanda being a party to the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1989 (No. 182).[98]

69. None of these improvements will be effective, however, unless two conditions are fulfilled: a strengthening of the enforcement of labour regulations and of social dialogue. Progress could be made on both points.

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[94] Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comments No. 23 (2016), para. 18; E/C.12/RWA/CO/5 (2025), para. 31; A/78/175, paras. 34–48.

[95] See https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/?ref_area=RWA.

[96] Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comments No. 23, para. 47 (d).

[97] International Labour Organization (ILO), Recommendation (No. 204), para. 18.

[98] CEDAW/C/RWA/CO/10, para. 27; ILO, *Application of International Labour Standards 2025 - Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations* (2025), pp. 564–565. These concerns were also expressed in A/HRC/47/14, para. 135.47.

70. While acknowledging the fact that each labour inspector conducts an average of 264 inspections annually, a very high figure, the ability for labour inspectors to perform their duties is constrained by the relatively limited number of inspectors. Rwanda has 33 labour inspectors for a total number of 4.3 million workers, whereas on average, in sub-Saharan Africa, there are 2.35 labour inspectors per 100,000 workers:[99] in order to reach this average, the number of labour inspectors would need to be tripled. According to article 12 (1) (a) of the ILO Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), which Rwanda has ratified, labour inspectors should also be allowed to enter enterprises at any time, whenever there is a need, without this power being limited to working hours: section 6 (2) (1) of ministerial order 001/19.20 of 17 March 2020 relating to labour inspection should be amended in this regard, since its current formulation provides that labour inspectors can enter an enterprise during working hours.[100] Finally, it should also be made clear in legislation that labour inspectors should be tasked to monitor not only enterprises in the formal sector, but also enterprises in the informal sector. Indeed, in order to accelerate formalization, a specific body of labour inspectors, tasked exclusively with monitoring the informal sector, could be recommended.

71. Unions too could be allowed more space to operate freely and to strengthen the bargaining position of workers. According to the latest statistics available (from 2019), only 5.9% of workers were unionized, and only 5.7% were covered by collective bargaining agreements.[101] This should be related to the concerns expressed by the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations about the protection of union rights under the ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87), and the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), the most significant concern being that the Labour Code (Law No. 66/2018 of 30 August 2018) does not explicitly prohibit anti-union discrimination and interference by private employers. While the Government refers to article 284 of the Penal Code (Law No. 68/2018 of 30 August 2018) as prohibiting anti-union discrimination, this only applies to public servants and refers only to “individual freedom”, without providing specific protection against interference with the exercise of union rights.

VI. Marginalized populations

A. Women

72. As noted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,[102] women face greater vulnerability driven by entrenched patriarchal norms and persistent gender-based power imbalances both within households and in the wider community. This restricts women’s access to opportunities and participation, despite gender mainstreaming in public work programmes (see para. 59) and the targeting of women-headed households in social protection schemes.

73. Gender-based violence remains widespread. Among women aged 15–49, 37% have experienced physical violence at some point since the age of 15 and 23% have experienced sexual violence.[103] The links between poverty and gender-based violence are bidirectional. Poverty increases the risk of gender-based violence: 44.6% of women in the lowest wealth quintile reported having experienced physical violence since the age of 15 compared to 29.6% in the highest wealth quintile.[104] Conversely, intra-household conflict is a major source of impoverishment: poor women report that men routinely fail to pool earnings or divert their

[99] Lucas Ronconi, “Enforcement and the effective regulation of labour”, IDB Working Paper Series No. IDB-WP-622 (2015), p. 6.
[100] ILO, *Application of International Labour Standards 2025*, pp. 846–847.
[101] See https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/?ref_area=RWA.
[102] See CEDAW/C/RWA/CO/10.
[103] National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, Ministry of Health and ICF, *Rwanda Demographic Survey 2019–20* (2021), pp. 287 and 288.
[104] Ibid., table 16.1.1.

income to pay for their own consumption (alcohol, prostitutes, a second wife) rather than contributing to necessary household consumption and investment costs.[105]

B. The Batwa

74. During his visit, the Special Rapporteur met with members of the Batwa community, Community members reported enduring inadequate housing, food insecurity and limited access to essential services. Education remains out of reach for many Batwa children due to the inability to pay school-related fees, contributing to a cycle of intergenerational poverty. Livelihood opportunities are scarce. Pottery, once a vital craft, has declined due to restricted access to clay and reduced market demand. Agricultural or public works are irregular and poorly remunerated.

75. The Batwa are officially classified under the "historically marginalized peoples" category, a broad and undefined category[106] encompassing groups perceived as historically excluded, including women, persons with disabilities, Muslims and the Batwa. This terminology reflects Rwanda's efforts to promote national unity and social cohesion in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, notably through the adoption of Law No. 47/2001 on the Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Discrimination and Sectarianism, commonly referred to as the "Divisionism Law", which prohibits the use of ethnic classifications in public discourse.[107]

76. While the intention of promoting national unity is commendable, the current approach has had adverse consequences for the Batwa, effectively denying their recognition as a distinct Indigenous and minority group. Without legal status or land rights, the Batwa remain highly marginalized.[108] They have been systematically displaced from their ancestral lands due to deforestation, violent conflict and conservation initiatives. Communities were expelled from areas now designated as national parks, including Volcanoes, Gishwati and Nyungwe, without consultation, free, prior and informed consent or adequate compensation.[109] Most were resettled into mainstream society at the lowest socioeconomic level, with minimal support to rebuild their lives.

77. Echoing other United Nations human rights mechanisms' concerns,[110] the Special Rapporteur deplores the continued marginalization of the Batwa. Their status as an Indigenous group is neither acknowledged nor protected under national law, hindering their ability to seek redress for structural discrimination.

C. Refugees

78. Rwanda has demonstrated commendable progress in adopting a rights-based approach to refugee protection. As of 2025, it hosted approximately 135,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan and Burundi.[111] Around 90% reside in five designated camps (Kiziba, Nyabiheke, Kigeme, Mugombwa and Mahama), while individuals evacuated from Libya are supported through the Emergency Transit Mechanism in Gashora.[112] The Government's legal framework, anchored in Law No. 042/2024 Governing Refugees, upholds key rights under the

[105] Shepherd, Simons, and Bird, *Rebooting Rwanda's Poverty Reduction*, p. 26.
[106] Article 80 (2) of the Constitution of Rwanda of 2003, as revised in 2015.
[107] Law No. 47/2001 of 2001 on Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Discrimination and Sectarianism.
[108] Minority Rights Group, African Initiative for Mankind Progress Organization and Women's Organization for Promoting Unity, *Submission to the Human Rights Committee: Review of Rwanda – List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LOIPR),* 144th session of the Human Rights Council, 23 June–25 July 2025.
[109] International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, "The Indigenous World 2020: Rwanda", 11 May 2020.
[110] E/C.12/RWA/CO/5, paras. 22 and 23; CERD/C/RWA/CO/18-20; CRC/C/RWA/CO/5-6.
[111] See https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/operations/Rwanda.
[112] Ibid.

1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, including access to education, healthcare, civil registration, documentation and freedom of movement.[113] Refugees were set to be included in the national health insurance scheme (*mutuelles de santé*) by 2025.[114]

79. Refugees, particularly those in camps, nevertheless continue to face serious structural and practical barriers to realizing their rights. While the law affirms the right to work, most refugees have limited access to formal employment and rely on precarious informal jobs or humanitarian assistance. In urban areas, the absence of housing or financial support further entrenches poverty among refugee households.[115] Land scarcity severely restricts opportunities for self-reliance through agriculture or resettlement outside camps. Discrimination and limited professional networks often hinder access to decent work, especially for those with higher qualifications.

80. The Special Rapporteur welcomes Rwanda's inclusive refugee policy and the steps taken to align domestic legislation with international standards. However, he urges the Government to expand livelihood opportunities, extend social protection schemes and remove practical barriers that impede refugees' full participation in society – particularly for urban refugees, who remain underserved.

VII. Participation and accountability

81. Oversight mechanisms exist to ensure that public authorities are held accountable. The Special Rapporteur met with the National Ombudsman's Office, which performs an important role in tackling maladministration and corruption. The Office of the Auditor General submits reports on schedule, which are reviewed by the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament and the National Public Prosecution Authority within six months.[116] Their findings are presented in televised plenary sessions, and statistics on economic crimes, including the names of offenders, are publicly disclosed, contributing to a culture of transparency and deterrence.

82. Various tools are also in place to encourage community participation and improve accountability. At the national level, the National Dialogue Council (*Umushyikirano*) is held annually under the chairship of the President. Citizens raise questions and concerns, either in person or online, which are addressed publicly by government officials.[117] At the district level, local councils (*Inama Njyanama*) composed of elected representatives serve as an indirect channel for citizen engagement in decision-making. Joint Action Development Forums also operate at the district level. They are multi-stakeholder platforms established to facilitate participatory planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation of district-level projects.[118] Finally, citizens' assemblies (*inteko z'abaturage*) function every Tuesday as regular community meetings where village (cell) leaders engage with community members.[119]

83. These tools are relatively effective in ensuring that local authorities are held accountable for the delivery of services, especially combined with the *Imihigo* system of performance contracts, under which ministers, district mayors, governors and ambassadors sign annual contracts with the President, committing to specific development goals, and which are publicly disclosed.[120] Digital governance tools, notably the *Irembo* platform, have

[113] Law No. 042/2024 of 19/04/2024 on Governing Refugees and Applicants for Refugee Status in Rwanda.

[114] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Rwanda multi-year strategy 2023–2025", November 2025.

[115] Refugees International, "Turning policy into reality: refugees' access to work in Rwanda", September 2023.

[116] Claudia Baez Camargo and Tharcisse Gatwa, "Informal governance and corruption: transcending the principal agent and collective action paradigms – Rwanda country report", Basel Institute on Governance, July 2018, p. 33.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Rwanda Governance Board, *Good Governance and Decentralisation in Rwanda*, Rwanda Governance Review, Vol. VI, Special Issue, June 2018.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Camargo and Gatwa, "Informal governance and corruption".

also enhanced transparency and reduced bureaucratic discretion in service delivery; the platform provides citizens with standardized information on service procedures and timelines.[121]

84. Such tools depend on the participation of the population being meaningful. The Special Rapporteur received, however, troubling testimonies from community members who expressed fear of voicing dissent or criticizing government policies. Several interlocutors reported that challenging official decisions could lead to reprisals, including being labelled as criminals. As a result, participation is often superficial, with individuals attending consultations but engaging in self-censorship and refraining from expressing genuine concerns: while criticism of public service delivery is welcome, questioning the Government's policies is discouraged. Fears of being accused of "instigating divisions" or "causing civil unrest", as referenced in article 164 of Rwanda's Criminal Code, undermine meaningful engagement and risk producing ineffective and wasteful policies.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

85. **The Special Rapporteur commends the progress achieved so far in reducing poverty in the country. He identifies the following key recommendations.**

86. **In order to build human capital and ensure that general progress is more fairly distributed, maintaining and even increasing social investment, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the public budget, is essential.**

87. **Investing in education is vital. Improvements should be made to the training of teachers and to pupil-teacher ratios. To reduce dropout rates, in addition to continuing the school-feeding programme, low-income households should be supported to meet the hidden costs in access to education. Education should be made compulsory until 16 years of age, the minimum age at which children can work. This will also help to reduce child labour.**

88. **To reduce the urban-rural poverty gap, more support should go to small-scale farmers, by supporting agroecological and climate-resilient mixed cropping schemes and by supporting farmers' cooperatives and connections to markets.**

89. **The Vision Umurenge Programme is a lifeline for 500,000 households, but it will only be effective in protecting from extreme destitution if the levels of direct support, both for those unable to work and for mothers receiving nutrition-sensitive direct support, are increased. The services provided by early childhood development centres should be strengthened and their funding secured. This is the only way the high levels of stunting can be lowered.**

90. **To ensure that work pays, a statutory minimum wage should be established, corresponding at least to a living wage. The formalization of work should be further encouraged, by combining protection of the rights of informal workers (discouraging their exploitation) and positive incentives for employers who declare their workers or businesses that seek registration.**

91. **Women in poverty are more at risk of violence, and intra-household violence and inequities deprive women of economic opportunities. Combating gender-based power imbalances and patriarchal norms is an essential tool in the fight against poverty.**

92. **The Batwa are the most marginalized group in the country. Consistent with the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, they should be protected from forcible removal from their lands or territories, and no relocation should take place without free, prior and informed consent and just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return.**

[121] Ibid., p. 33.

93. **While various participatory mechanisms exist, allowing for accountability of officials and preventing the risks of corruption, dissent should be encouraged, not discouraged. This will ensure that the commendable development efforts of the Government are based on genuine feedback, strengthening both legitimacy and effectiveness.**