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Home Office

Review of asylum processing

Rwanda: country information on the asylum system

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Preface

Purpose

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

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

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

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

This note provides objective country information about Rwanda's asylum system, support provisions and integration opportunities.

It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

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

- Review of asylum processing Rwanda: assessment
- Review of asylum processing Rwanda: country information on general human rights in Rwanda and;
- Review of asylum processing Rwanda: notes of interviews

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

Review

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

Gathering and presentation of country information

The country information has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account its relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency,

transparency, and traceability.

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

All the open-source country information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge, and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the country information is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate and balanced. It is compared and contrasted where appropriate so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture is provided of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Feedback

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable, and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures, or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

Contents

Preface	2
Contents.....	4
Country information on Rwanda's asylum system	6
1. Refugee overview and demographics.....	6
1.1 Persons seeking refuge in Rwanda.....	6
1.2 Rwandan nationals returning to Rwanda.....	8
2. Asylum/refugee law	8
3. Agencies responsible for refugees and asylum seekers.....	9
3.1 Government agencies	9
3.2 Partnerships	10
4. Asylum process	11
4.1 General commentary	11
4.2 Key stages of the process	11
4.3 Timelines.....	12
4.4 Initial contact	13
4.5 Information provided to asylum seekers.....	13
4.6 Post initial contact	14
4.7 Refugee Status Determination Committee	15
4.8 Legal representation.....	18
4.9 Use of interpreters/translators	20
4.10 Notification of decisions.....	21
4.11 Ability to challenge a negative decision	22
4.12 Persons ineligible for refugee status	24
4.13 Revocation of refugee status.....	24
4.14 Decision outcomes and recognition rates.....	25
5. Failed asylum seekers	27
5.1 Alternative routes to remain in Rwanda.....	27
6. Immigration detention and returns	28
6.1 Refoulement	28
6.2 Immigration detention, deportation, and voluntary returns	28
7. Documentation for asylum seekers and refugees.....	30
8. Accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees	32
8.1 Asylum seekers	32
8.2 Camp based refugees	32
8.3 Urban refugees.....	34

8.4	Emergency Transit Mechanism (Gashora)	35
9.	Proposed alternative accommodation for relocated persons	36
9.1	Context.....	36
9.2	Kinigi Integrated Development Program Model Village	36
9.3	Karama model village	36
10.	Refugee rights and access to services	38
10.1	Education	38
10.2	Health	38
10.3	Right to work	39
10.4	Freedom of movement within the country.....	43
10.5	Freedom to travel out of, and return to, the country	44
10.6	Citizenship.....	45
11.	Rwandan asylum seekers in the UK and other countries	45
11.1	Rwandan asylum seekers and refugees worldwide.....	45
11.2	Rwandan asylum seekers in the UK.....	45
	Bibliography	46
	Sources cited	46
	Sources consulted but not cited.....	55

Country information on Rwanda's asylum system

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

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

Section 1 updated: 24 March 2022

1. Refugee overview and demographics

1.1 Persons seeking refuge in Rwanda

- 1.1.1 According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Rwanda is committed to respecting its international obligations and '...has adhered to all major international conventions and human rights instruments.'¹ and: 'Since the 1990s, Rwanda has maintained an open door policy towards refugee influxes from the neighbouring countries.'²
- 1.1.2 At a meeting with Home Office (HO) officials on 21 March 2022, a representative of UNHCR commented: 'UNHCR is here to support the asylum process in order to fulfil international obligations. The Government appreciates what [it] means to be a refugee.'³
- 1.1.3 As of August 2021, the total population of refugees and asylum seekers in Rwanda was 127,382, consisting of 61.0% from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 38.6% from Burundi, 0.2% from Eritrea and 0.2% Other. Children (from birth to age 17) made up 49% of the refugee/asylum seeker population⁴.
- 1.1.4 Many of the DRC refugees arrived in Rwanda over 20 years ago, while a more recent influx occurred between 2012 and 2014. The Burundian refugees began arriving in 2015, when the country's political situation deteriorated, but some are now being voluntarily repatriated. There are 6 refugee camps, 5 of which house predominantly DRC refugees and one which accommodates predominantly Burundian refugees⁵.
- 1.1.5 Approximately 90% of refugees live in camps, with the remainder settled in urban areas, mainly Kigali and Huye (12,881 as of 31 August 2021). While a

¹ UNHCR, '[Rwanda country refugee response plan Jan to Dec 2021](#)' (page 10), 19 April 2021

² UNHCR, '[Submission to OCHCR](#)' (page 2), July 2020

³ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

⁴ UNHCR, '[Operational Data Portal: Rwanda](#)', 31 August 2021

⁵ UNHCR, '[Submission to OCHCR](#)' (page 1), July 2020

majority of the refugees in the camps are reliant upon humanitarian support, refugees in the urban areas live largely independently^{6,7}.

- 1.1.6 During a meeting between the HO and the Rwandan Government on 18 January 2022, senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MINAFFET) and the Ministry in charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA) explained that most of the urban refugees live in Kigali city [9,841] with a good number of them living in Huye [842] and Nyamata [2,299] and very few in other cities (Muhanga, Rubavu, Musanze and Rusizi)⁸
- 1.1.7 In 2016, the Rwandan government made 4 commitments with regards refugees:
- To facilitate camp-based refugees to move from assistance programmes and in to work.
 - To issue valid refugee ID cards to all eligible persons.
 - To integrate refugee students into the national education system.
 - To provide urban refugees access to the national health insurance system⁹.
- 1.1.8 In collaboration with UN Agencies, Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector, the government is on track to fulfil the last 3 commitments (on documentation, education, and health) and continues to work towards the first commitment of making refugees self-reliant¹⁰.
- 1.1.9 At the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December 2019, Rwanda made an additional 9 pledges to improve the situation of refugees, which builds upon the pledges made in 2016¹¹.
- 1.1.10 In January 2021, the UN's Rwanda team provided an update on the country's progress towards meeting its pledges. The UN described progress on the 2016 commitments as 'impressive' and commented:
- 'Despite the challenges of COVID-19 – an unprecedented pandemic, all nine [additional] pledges have on-going activities. Donors such as the World Bank, IKEA Foundation, the EU, and the Danish Government are supporting UNHCR, the Government of Rwanda and its partners on initiatives such as classroom construction, linked to the pledge on education; agricultural projects linked to the livelihoods pledge, and on a feasibility study on ravine rehabilitation in the camps for environment preservation. In addition, broad support for the GRF pledges is ongoing with the World Bank as part of its funding to the country.
- 'Rwanda is determined to fulfil its pledges, assisted by UNHCR, donors, and other stakeholders. One of the key objectives of the GRF was to expand

⁶ UNHCR, '[Submission to OCHCR](#)' page 1), July 2020

⁷ UNHCR, '[Rwanda country refugee response plan Jan to Dec 2021](#)' (page 10), 19 April 2021

⁸ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁹ UNHCR, '[An overview ... on Refugees](#)', 15 March 2021

¹⁰ UNHCR, '[An overview ... on Refugees](#)', 15 March 2021

¹¹ UN Rwanda, '[Rwanda: 1000 hills and a big heart](#)', 15 January 2021

funding sources, to support countries like Rwanda who are making an inclusive and laudable effort to help refugees access national services.¹²

- 1.1.11 In December 2021, UNHCR's Kigali-based representative said: 'Rwanda has done an excellent job integrating refugees in the national education system, including urban refugees in the national community-based health insurance plan, providing them with national ID cards and offering them livelihoods opportunities.'¹³
- 1.1.12 The UNHCR High Commissioner visited Rwanda in April 2021 and praised the Rwandan Government for its response to refugees and asylum-seekers. In May 2021, following the eruption of Mount Nyiragongo volcano in the DRC, the Rwandan government provided support to 8,000 Congolese who crossed the border¹⁴.

[Back to Contents](#)

1.2 Rwandan nationals returning to Rwanda

- 1.2.1 In 2015, the UNHCR recommended the invocation of the "ceased circumstances" clause for Rwandans who had fled the country between 1959 and 1998. As per the 1951 Refugee Convention, the cessation clause is applied when there have been durable changes in a refugee's country of origin, with the result that they no longer have a well-founded fear of persecution. As of September 2020, approximately 3.5 million exiled Rwandans had returned. The Rwandan government worked with UNHCR and other organisations to assist the returnees, most of whom resettled in their districts of origin¹⁵.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 2 updated: 24 March 2022

2. Asylum/refugee law

- 2.1.1 Refugee-related conventions signed by Rwanda¹⁶ are:

International refugee law	Ratification/ Accession
1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (and its 1967 Protocol)	1980
The Organisation of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects to the Problems of the Refugees in Africa	1979
African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the "Kampala Convention")	2012
1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness	2006

¹² UN Rwanda, '[Rwanda: 1000 hills and a big heart](#)', 15 January 2021

¹³ UNHCR, '[A new approach to refugee integration bears fruit in Rwanda](#)', 14 December 2021

¹⁴ UNHCR, '[...Operational Update: April - June 2021](#)', 28 July 2021

¹⁵ USSD, '[USSD report 2020](#)' (section 2), 30 March 2021

¹⁶ UNHCR, '[Submission to OCHCR](#)' (page 1), July 2020

2.1.2 National asylum/refugee law^{17 18 19 20 21}:

Law	Key points
Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda (2003, amended 2015), Article 28	Recognises the right of refugees to seek asylum
Law No. 13 ter/2014 of 21/05/2014 relating to refugees	Sets out: Refugee status determination (RSD) procedures and timelines Refugees' rights and obligations
No. 112/03 of 19/06/2015 Prime Minister's Order determining the organisation and functioning of the National Refugee Status Determination Committee (NRSDC) and benefits granted to its members	Sets out: Composition and duties of the NRSDC
Ministerial Instructions No. 02/2016 Determining the Management of Refugees and Refugee Camps	Sets out: Rules for living in camps Responsibilities of government and stakeholders
No. 30/2018 of 02/06/2018 Law determining the jurisdiction of courts	Sets out: Right of Appeal to High Court

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 3 updated: 24 March 2022

3. Agencies responsible for refugees and asylum seekers

3.1 Government agencies

- 3.1.1 The Ministry in Charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA) leads on refugees and asylum seekers and has declared the Rwandan government's commitment to receiving and protecting refugees^{22,23}
- 3.1.2 Other government departments involved in the refugee/asylum seeker response are: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MINAFFET), Directorate of Immigration/Emigration (DGIE), the National Identification Agency (NIDA), and the National Refugee Committee²⁴
- 3.1.3 While MINEMA leads the refugee response, UNHCR and other partners provide operational support, funding and advice²⁵.

See also [Refugee Status Determination Committee](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

¹⁷ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette number 26 of 30/06/2014](#)' (pages 71 to 93), 30 June 2014

¹⁸ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette number 26 of 29/06/2015](#)' (pages 3 to 12), 19 June 2015

¹⁹ Government of Rwanda, '[Ministerial Instructions No. 02/2016](#)', 1 June 2016

²⁰ Government of Rwanda, '[Constitution](#)', 24 Dec 2015

²¹ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette No. Special of 02/06/2018](#)' (Article 47), 2 June 2018

²² MINEMA, '[Refugee management](#)', no date

²³ MINEMA, '[Statement by the Minister in charge of emergency management ...](#)', 20 June 2020

²⁴ UNHCR, '[UNHCR Rwanda fact sheet March 2021](#)' (page 2), 26 March 2021

²⁵ UNHCR, '[UNHCR Rwanda fact sheet March 2021](#)' (page 2), 26 March 2021

3.2 Partnerships

- 3.2.1 In May 2019, Rwanda received US\$60 million funding from the World Bank Group to improve access to services and economic opportunities for refugees and host communities in the six districts that host refugee camps. The Socio-Economic Inclusion of Refugees and Host Communities Project (also called the Jya Mbere Project) will run from August 2019 to October 2024 and is intended to upgrade schools, health facilities, roads and water/sanitation systems in districts which host refugee camps. The project will also fund access to finance to promote entrepreneurship and employment skills training for refugees and host communities and strengthen social relations between refugees and host communities. In December 2020, construction work began on 40 new classrooms in Gisagara District, with an additional 210 classrooms to be built in Gicumbi, Gatsibo, Kirehe and Nyamagabe Districts. In June 2021, the World Bank approved an additional US\$20 million dollars of funding. The World Bank estimated that since the project's inception in 2019, Jya Mbere has provided improved access to services such as health, education and clean water to over 450,000 Rwandans and refugees^{26 27 28}.
- 3.2.2 In September 2019, Rwanda signed an MoU with the UNHCR and the African Union to receive refugees and asylum seekers evacuated from Libya. Under the so-called Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM), the UNHCR conducts refugee status determination processes and issues documentation which enables refugees and asylum seekers to access services while they wait for an outcome. Possible outcomes include: resettlement in a third country, return to country of origin, return to a country where asylum had been granted or local integration in Rwanda, subject to agreement with the authorities^{29 30 31}.
- 3.2.3 As part of the ETM agreement, the UNHCR has upgraded the Gashora Transit Centre, including the health facilities, sanitation and accommodation units. All persons transiting through the ETM are offered counselling or referral to mental health services and legal assistance. The Centre also provides refugees with employment training and opportunities³².
- 3.2.4 Operation of the ETM has been hindered by COVID-19 restrictions on travel and between September 2019 and December 2020, 515 people were relocated from Libya to Rwanda. Of these, 327 have undergone refugee status determination and 203 refugees have departed for resettlement, of whom a minimum of 121 were resettled in Sweden and Canada. The

²⁶ World Bank, '[World Bank supports improved basic services...](#)', 23 June 2021

²⁷ MINEMA, '[Jya Mbere project... Oct to Dec 2020](#)' (page 6 to 7), March 2021

²⁸ MINEMA, '[Jya Mbere project launches construction of classrooms](#)', no date

²⁹ MINEMA, '[...refugees and asylum seekers from Libya safely arrived in Rwanda](#)', no date

³⁰ Altai Consulting, '[EUTF ...2020 yearly report](#)' (page 42), June 2021

³¹ UN Human Rights Council, '[Summary of Stakeholders' submissions](#)' (page 10), 16 Nov 2020

³² Altai Consulting, '[EUTF... 2020 yearly report](#)' (page 42), June 2021

UNHCR estimates that 1,500 evacuees from Libya will be relocated to Rwanda in 2021^{33 34 35}.

See also [Emergency Transit Mechanism \(Gashora\)](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 4 updated: 24 March 2022

4. Asylum process

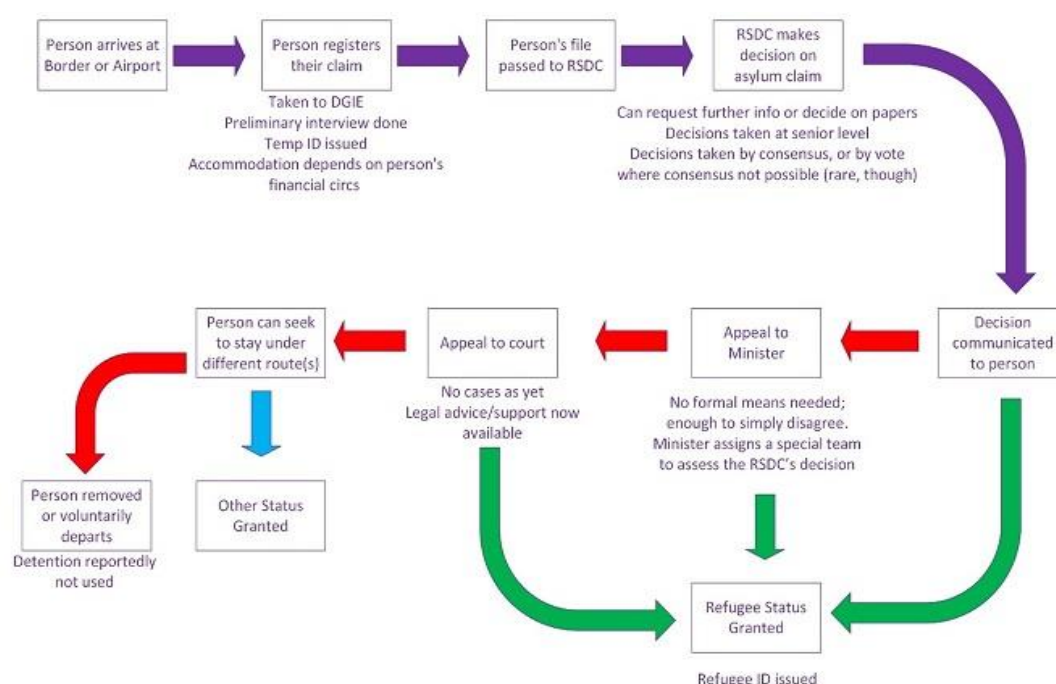
4.1 General commentary

- 4.1.1 In its review of access to the asylum system, UNHCR stated: ‘The 2014 Law relating to Refugees, is fully compliant with international standards and sufficiently details the [Refugee Status Determination] RSD procedures. The PM Order frames not only the composition of the [National Refugee Status Determination Committee] NRSDC, but also contains provisions outlining access to the asylum procedure. While the legal framework is progressive, its implementation appears challenging in practice.’³⁶

[Back to Contents](#)

4.2 Key stages of the process

- 4.2.1 Based primarily upon information gathered during meetings with Rwandan Government officials on 18 January 2022 and 22 March 2022³⁷, alongside other sources consulted in this document, CPIT has summarised the key stages of the RSD process in the diagram below:



³³ MINEMA, ‘[...refugees and asylum seekers from Libya safely arrived in Rwanda](#)’, no date

³⁴ Altai Consulting, ‘[EUTF... 2020 yearly report](#)’ (page 10), June 2021

³⁵ UNHCR, ‘[Rwanda country refugee response plan Jan to Dec 2021](#)’ (page 9), 19 April 2021

³⁶ UNHCR, ‘[Submission to OCHCR](#)’ (page 4), July 2020

³⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

4.3 Timelines

4.3.1 Senior Rwandan Government officials from MINAFFET and MINEMA provided the following information on 18 January 2022: and 22 March 2022, Rwandan government officials provided the timeline for key stages in the process:

- ‘Submission of application files by DGIE: within 15 days
- Decision by RSDC: within 45 calendar days (can be made sooner, sometimes 5 or 10 days)
- Notification of the decision: Within 10 days the committee to communicate to the applicant. Provided by a letter in one of the 3 official languages of Rwanda – English, French or Kinyarwanda
- Appeal: within 30 days
- Appeal decision: within 30 days³⁸

4.3.2 HO officials asked whether there is any monitoring of the targets or the RSD process and the Director of Response and Recovery Unit at MINEMA explained:

‘The timelines are the limit. When they receive the application from DGIE it takes between 2-3 weeks to organise the meeting and make a decision. If the applicant wants to appeal, they usually do it immediately rather than at the 30 days.

‘We don’t have someone responsible for monitoring those targets, but there is someone who sets meetings, chases missing information to keep on track. If we are not able to complete on target that forms a strong basis for appeal to the 2nd level. For example, if it took 6 months that is a strong reason for the court to revoke the decision of RSDC.’³⁹

4.3.3 The US State Department 2020 Human Rights Practices Report (USSD report 2020), covering events in 2020 noted delays in the process for making individual refugee status determinations and that the committee with responsibility for making decisions on individual cases met infrequently⁴⁰.

4.3.4 At a meeting with HO officials on 21 March 2022, UNHCR explained:

‘There are two weeks (15 days) for the DGIE to pass the application to NRSDC. They [the NRSDC] should ideally issue the result within 2 weeks, although that often doesn’t happen – it’s a slow process, it can take a while to receive results. The process should take 45 days from application to initial decision but sometimes people wait one to two years.

‘As mentioned, due to the shifting of the policy from Prima Facie to individual recognition, there are some bottle neck[s] at DGIE and NRSDC to comply with the timeframe.’⁴¹

³⁸ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

³⁹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁴⁰ USSD, ‘[USSD report 2020](#)’ (section 2), 30 March 2021

⁴¹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

4.4 Initial contact

- 4.4.1 Asylum seekers must report to a local authority and are then taken to an immigration and emigration office where they are registered. The DGIE reviews the case and grants a temporary residence permit (valid for 3 months). The DGIE then submits the applicant's file to the Refugee Status Determination Committee (RSDC) within 15 days⁴².
- 4.4.2 In its submission to the UPR, UNHCR raised concerns that some asylum seekers, particularly lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex [LGBTI] persons, faced challenges when attempting to submit asylum claims, with requests being verbally rejected⁴³.
- 4.4.3 During the meeting between HO officials and the Rwandan Government on 18 January 2022, the Colonel and Special Advisor on Migration explained: 'Once an asylum seeker is in the country the local authorities on the ground take them to immigration. They [the local authorities] don't process them. There are immigration offices at all borders and throughout Rwanda. So that is when the formal process starts.'⁴⁴
- 4.4.4 And: 'When received by the local authority (LA) they are taken to immigration which starts the process. This is usually straightaway but if they arrive at night for example, they will be accommodated by the LA.'⁴⁵ And: 'They are received by the LA (they are responsible for catering for vulnerable people). They may stay over-night for example. They have offices where they can sustain them there or they can stay with family, or open a shelter.'⁴⁶

See also the section Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and questioning (LGBTIQ+) persons in the [note on human rights](#)

4.5 Information provided to asylum seekers

- 4.5.1 During the meeting with the Rwandan Government on 18 January 2022, HO officials asked what information an asylum seeker receives during the registration of his/her claim about how the asylum system works. The Director of Response and Recovery Unit MINEMA explained:
- 'A person receives information at the first application point during first reception with DGIE. The officer who receives the person will provide the initial information.
 - 'For the first level claim: they are provided information on their right to/how to claim. This can take place during the interview with RSDC or during the handover of the notification. For example: information about further level of appeal, support from NGOs/UNHCR frameworks and where they can get legal assistance etc.

⁴² Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette number 26 of 30/06/2014](#)' (page 82), 30 June 2014

⁴³ UNHCR, '[Submission to OCHCR](#)' (page 5), July 2020

⁴⁴ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁴⁵ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁴⁶ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

- ‘For the second level of claim – rights and responsibilities of submitting an appeal to the High Court and gaining assistance, this information would be provided when the first decision notification was handed over.’⁴⁷

4.5.2 During a meeting with the Legal Aid Forum (LAF) on 21 March 2022, the LAF representative said that he: ‘did not know if there are leaflets available at the border to explain the asylum process, but Immigration staff at the borders are told what to say. The law says that they have to explain. There is information on the Rwandan government’s website.’⁴⁸

4.5.3 In a meeting between HO and the Government of Rwanda on 22 March 2022, a DGIE official explained that the steps in the asylum process are outlined to applicants verbally and that: ‘There are no documents provided to outline the process.’⁴⁹

4.5.4 In a meeting between HO and the Government of Rwanda on 22 March 2022, a MINEMA official showed the HO team examples of documents taken from case files and stated they were:

- a written application for asylum;
- a DGIE summary of a case;
- a decision outcome: Dated 8th June 2020;
- a written appeal to the Minister of Immigration: Dated 1st July 2020;
- a ministerial appeal outcome: Dated 3rd August 2020;
- a temporary residence permit; and
- a refugee identity card.

Due to privacy concerns, timing, language barriers and the scope of experience of the MINEMA official, the HO team were unable to obtain further detail from the source on the substance of the documents⁵⁰.

[Back to Contents](#)

4.6 Post initial contact

4.6.1 During the meeting with the Rwandan Government on 18 January 2022, the Director of Response and Recovery Unit MINEMA explained: ‘If someone enters the border and claims asylum, the LA [Local Authority] reports the person to the nearest immigration centre. Temporary resident permit is issued. The LA reports immediately to the reception centre, transit centre or camp. In that period the process continues as per the RSD.’⁵¹

4.6.2 HO officials asked whether asylum applicants have a choice to go to a transit centre, reception centre, urban area or camp, and the Director of Response

⁴⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁴⁸ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A7, Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

⁴⁹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 22 March 2022

⁵⁰ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 22 March 2022

⁵¹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

and Recovery Unit of MINEMA explained: 'Yes, within the structures or outside of the refugee camp if the person can sustain themselves.'⁵²

- 4.6.3 HO officials asked about interviews of asylum seekers and the Colonel and Special Advisor on Migration explained: 'There are two points of contact. Preliminary interview is just registering basic information and issuing the temporary residence permit so the applicant can stay legally. That is then passed on to DGIE and they can do a subsequent interview. However, if they have enough information from immigration, then the RSDC can use that. The RSDC can also ask for more information from the person, within the 3 months.'⁵³

[Back to Contents](#)

4.7 Refugee Status Determination Committee

- 4.7.1 Based upon information gathered during a meeting with Rwandan Government officials on 18 January 2022, the Refugee Status Determination Committee (RSDC) is made up of senior government officials representing eleven member institutions⁵⁴

- 4.7.2 At the same meeting, an official from MINAFFET and the Director of Response and Recovery Unit at MINEMA reported:
- 'The eligibility and protection office in MINEMA does day-to-day management. Scope of the Refugee Status Determination Committee (RSDC) is to take decisions on applications for refugee status and decisions on revocation of the RSD according to international laws.

'For example, where an applicant faced terrorist charges, the committee could take the decision to revoke.'⁵⁵

- 4.7.3 Rwandan Government officials from MINAFFET and MINEMA explained how the RSDC functions:
- 'The process begins at the airport/border (first dealing with immigration) which is entry clearance and preliminary processing.
 - 'DGIE receives file and provides a preliminary analysis of the application. DGIE submits the application to RSDC.
 - 'Once files are received, the MINEMA Eligibility and Protection Office ensures all information is received. If something missing, further information can be requested to be submitted by the applicant. The RSDC can request to meet the applicant to verify information (in a 20-40 min interview).
 - 'A meeting with RSDC is organised within 2-3 weeks of receipt of the application to decide the claim.'⁵⁶

⁵² [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁵³ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁵⁴ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁵⁵ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁵⁶ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

- 4.7.4 During the meeting, Rwandan Government officials discussed the RSDC's capacity:
- 'MINEMA ensures continuous capacity for effective RSD process – refresher training is provided every year for RSDC members and officers from MINEMA and DGIE.
- 'Two officers in the Eligibility and Protection office have also benefited from professional training on eligibility in a specialised centre (Italy) during the last 4 years.
- 'The RSDC has decided cases from a variety of nationalities in the last 3 years (DRC, Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Cameroon, Chad, Syria, Lebanon).
- 'The readiness of RSDC to handle a potential increased number of applications would be achieved through increasing the number of RSDC sittings and to group similar cases together.'⁵⁷
- 4.7.5 When asked by HO officials whether all claimants are interviewed or if some claims are decided on paper, a senior Rwandan Government official clarified: 'Depending on the case, a claimant may be called for additional interview. A decision can also be taken basing on the available information.'⁵⁸
- 4.7.6 HO officials asked about the regularity of RSDC meetings and whether claims are considered individually or as a group and the Director of Response and Recovery Unit at MINEMA explained: 'The law dictates that the RSDC must meet twice a quarter but there is provision to meet on a weekly basis if we have many cases. If cases are similar, we can group them together. For example, applicants from the same country or similar claim type. This makes it easier to make decisions.'⁵⁹
- 4.7.7 The Director added:
- 'Decisions are taken by consensus. If necessary, we can move to vote but this is in only a few cases, the majority [of the time] we are able to form a consensus. An additional meeting can be added if we need to further discuss to reach a consensus.
- 'If necessary additional institutions can be invited to the RSDC meeting to advise/provide info i.e. UNHCR. They are unable to vote/make a decision but can attend an advisory capacity. For example, on a country where there is not much information or the decision is more difficult, they can link us with officers in that country to obtain information to assist the decision-making process.
- 'We try to avoid pending cases – this only occurs where we lack information and need more time.'⁶⁰

⁵⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁵⁸ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁵⁹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁶⁰ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

- 4.7.8 HO officials asked whether everyone on the Committee had to attend to make the decision or is there was a minimum amount and a senior official from MINEMA explained: 'There is a core number provided by law. For example, if there are 11 people on the committee at least 7 should attend. We can always call a second meeting.'⁶¹
- 4.7.9 In a later meeting between HO and the Government of Rwanda on 22 March 2022, a DGIE official was asked how many cases were considered in a typical RSDC meeting but the official was unable to provide the information at the time of asking.⁶²
- 4.7.10 The DGIE official was also asked what information the Committee receives to help them to make their decision and he explained:
- 'The Committee receive the initial written application from the claimant. The claimant then attends a meeting with DGIE during which the basis of claim is obtained from the claimant. The DGIE then pulls together a summary of the case, which is passed to the Eligibility Officer (EO). The EO may speak to the claimant again to obtain more information, if there are gaps in the information provided by DGIE. All the information is placed in a file and passed to the RSD committee to consider.'⁶³
- 4.7.11 In a meeting with the Government of Rwanda on 22 March 2022, a HO official asked whether the RSD Committee looks at Country of Origin information (COI) and a DGIE official replied 'The Committee is not obligated to decide the case at the first sitting. They might need further information from other sources – or from the applicant and they can invite any other person to give extra information... For example, the Minister of Foreign Affairs (MINAFFET) use information from his own Ministry/foreign offices to verify the information the applicant has given. But the Committee doesn't always rely on independent information.'⁶⁴
- 4.7.12 In its July 2020 submission to the UPR, the UNHCR commented: 'The NRSDC's capacity needs to be built, with currently only one eligibility officer assessing all of the cases. UNHCR, despite its observatory role, is often not invited to attend the RSD- reviewing panel discussions.'⁶⁵
- 4.7.13 At a meeting with HO officials on 21 March 2022, UNHCR commented: '[UNHCR] not allowed to be in the room when they have the interview and when they give their decision. [UNHCR] have tried several times to be observers.'⁶⁶
- 4.7.14 At the same meeting, the UNHCR representative said that while there were many positive aspects of protection in Rwanda, there were some ways in which RSD processing could be done better:
- '[UNHCR] try to provide more support to authorities – there are gaps to implementation of RSDC (mainly lack of capacity, turnover of RSDC

⁶¹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁶² [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 22 March 2022

⁶³ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 22 March 2022

⁶⁴ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 22 March 2022

⁶⁵ UNHCR, '[Submission to OCHCR](#)' (page 4), July 2020

⁶⁶ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

members extremely high, some may not have right background/training) but the Rwandan government don't always agree with the support offered, for instance more Eligibility Officers to expedite the process and avoid backlog, or more consistent training for the panel members, or to assume our observatory role in the process.'

- 'The high turnover rate of appointed members in the RSD Committee further hinders the capacity of the refugee status determination's committee because inexperienced persons or with limited knowledge on international protection are onboarded in the committee. UNHCR cannot provide the support it thinks is needed. UNHCR has the expertise, the resource, the mandate, and the willingness to support the NRSDC anyway we can. The offers have been made frequently, and so far we only received invitation to conduct joint training for 3 days end of last year.'
- 'The structure [of appeals] could be better. The appeal is addressed to Minema, which is part of the NRSDC panel, so there is a question about independence.'
- 'UNHCR has offered training opportunities including on international refugee law (from San Remo institute) to government lawyers and are always turned down. But in December 2021, its offer was accepted to have joint training for NRSDC.'⁶⁷

[Back to Contents](#)

4.8 Legal representation

4.8.1 According to Article 12 of the Ministerial Instructions determining the management of refugees and refugee camps, all refugees shall enjoy the rights provided by the 1951 Convention and other international instruments ratified by the Rwandan Government, including access to justice and legal representation. (To note, the terminology used throughout the document is 'refugee', asylum seekers are not specifically mentioned)⁶⁸.

4.8.2 During the meeting with the Rwandan Government on 18 January 2022, HO officials asked about the availability of legal advice and support for asylum seekers during the RSD process. The Director of Response and Recovery Unit at MINEMA explained:

'Legal assistance is provided for the 2nd level claim [referral to minister for review]. Up to now there have been no cases of an asylum seeker having a lawyer before the RSDC decision because the initial decisions are based on analysis of facts and explanations provided by the asylum seeker. For cases submitted to the High Court [appeal] we have an implementing partner (NGO) so if there is a need to provide legal assistance, that NGO would be able to provide help. The information on legal assistance is provided during the handing over of the notification of the first level decision [by the RSDC].'⁶⁹

⁶⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

⁶⁸ Government of Rwanda, '[Ministerial Instructions No. 02/2016](#)' (Article 12), 1 June 2016

⁶⁹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

- 4.8.3 HO officials asked whether claimants were allowed to have a legal adviser for the first level claim if they wanted one and the Director explained: 'No, only at the level where a case goes before the court. There is no legal assistance for appeal [review] to the minister.'⁷⁰
- 4.8.4 Rwandan Government officials reported that legal assistance is paid for by the NGO⁷¹.
- 4.8.5 Free legal aid services are provided to refugees and asylum seekers by UNHCR partner organisations such as the Legal Aid Forum (LAF). LAF describes itself as: 'A non-governmental organisation bringing together 36 national and international organizations that provide or support legal aid services to [Rwanda's] poor and vulnerable population.' Services provided include legal advice and support on access to asylum and the refugee status determination process. Between 2015 and 2020, 77 asylum seekers received free legal aid^{72,73,74}.
- 4.8.6 At a meeting with HO officials on 21 March 2022, UNHCR explained:
- 'UNHCR partners with 2 [other] organisations that help with legal assistance. UNHCR will provide advice/support as early as the person approaches [them] or a partner. UNHCR will refer asylum seekers who approached the office requesting assistance to the partners.
- 'The right of legal representation is not recognised during the RSD procedure but lawyers and legal aid organizations may prepare the application on behalf of the asylum-seekers. Lawyers give legal counselling on the process i.e. explain what is to be expected in the process, documents, and which elements they need to highlight in their claim.
- 'Usually a lawyer will accompany the person to file the application to DGIE – then that's it. During the deliberation of the panel [NRSDC], they can't bring a lawyer. Asylum seekers are interviewed by the panel... One asylum seeker vs a panel of 10. Sometimes less than 1 hour deliberation...
- 'If the claim is rejected, they (the lawyer) starts helping again – this time with appeal. Usually the person gives the same (maybe a bit more) detail as the initial application. This is because they don't know why the application was rejected.'⁷⁵
- 4.8.7 Based upon information gathered during a meeting between the HO and LAF on 21 March 2022:
- 'LAF are involved when a person submits an in-country claim for asylum, when their asylum claim is already under consideration, before they begin the process, or at the Appeal stage.

⁷⁰ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁷¹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁷² UNHCR, '[Help: Rwanda legal assistance](#)', no date

⁷³ LAF, '[Lawyers make case for GBV victims, refugees](#)', 30 Nov 2020

⁷⁴ Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, '[Report on CEDAW](#)' (page 45 to 46), May 2021

⁷⁵ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

‘Some [asylum seekers] are referred to LAF via UNHCR and others self refer. Not all asylum seekers are referred to LAF, but those with ‘issues’ with their asylum claims do.

‘Asylum seekers contact LAF through a LAF hotline, through other people or through the LAF website. There is information about LAF on its website or people hear about the organisation through word of mouth. Asylum seekers can walk into LAF. [LAF] try to help everyone, if they can.

‘LAF advises asylum seekers how to apply for asylum and helps with the asylum process, such as detailing how long each stage should take, asylum seekers’ rights, introduction to immigration, lodge written application. It also works with the camps. It is the only organisation that provides legal aid to asylum seekers...

‘LAF provide assistance from the very beginning of the asylum process through to the Appeal stage. [For example, LAF assisted 5 Congolese ladies whose asylum claim had been rejected. The ladies had not received a decision on their case in writing, but did so, following an explanation from LAF on the Law and the process which states they were entitled to a written decision.]

‘There are help desks in many places (for example in Universities). If asylum seekers come to our offices, LAF will inform them [of their rights]. Not clear if the Board tell them their rights. The [Rwandan] government don’t inform their own citizens of their rights if they are arrested.

‘LAF also provide criminal and civil legal support to refugees.’

And: ‘LAF lawyers are Immigration lawyers who have trained extensively (with the assistance of UNHCR). LAF have 15 Immigration lawyers. There may be others and the Immigration Department has its own Immigration lawyers.’⁷⁶

- 4.8.8 The LAF representative was unable to provide details of how many asylum seekers LAF had assisted with their claims⁷⁷.

[Back to Contents](#)

4.9 Use of interpreters/translators

- 4.9.1 Based upon information gathered during a meeting with Rwandan Government officials on 18 January 2022, claimants have access to interpreters. The Director of Response and Recovery Unit at MINEMA explained: ‘Most of the time we collaborate with UNHCR. If someone on the committee doesn’t speak Arabic etc then we will get an interpreter but most of our asylum seekers are from countries surrounding ours, so we usually speak one of the languages.’⁷⁸

⁷⁶ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A7, Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

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

⁷⁸ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

- 4.9.2 During the same meeting, HO officials asked whether applicants have the right to correct what has been recorded by the government during interviews, in other words, to correct any translation errors. A senior government official explained: 'Most of the cases are from surrounding countries so we share languages and there is no language barrier. Arabic/Amharic/Tigrinya we have high quality interpreters (collaborating with UNHCR). No cases where we have had that, but we would be able to give the applicant a second chance to verify what had been said if necessary.'⁷⁹
- 4.9.3 Another senior official added: 'The person interviewing the asylum seeker takes notes, the script is not necessarily given to them but you make notes and may clarify facts. The applicant approves what you have captured. At a later stage you can speak to them again on the phone or write for subsequent interview to clarify points.'⁸⁰
- 4.9.4 Conversely, in a later meeting between HO and the Government of Rwanda on 22 March 2022, a DGIE official was asked about access to interpreters and explained 'Claimants are able to arrange their own interpreters to attend the meetings with DGIE, the EO [Eligibility Officer], and the RSDC if required. Interpreters are not provided. However, most claimants speak either English, Kinyarwanda or Swahili or French, therefore there is no need for them to arrange an interpreter. If the claimant speaks another language (Arabic given as an example) they are free to arrange their own interpreters.'⁸¹
- 4.9.5 In a meeting between HO and the Government of Rwanda on 22 March 2022, an official from DGIE explained: 'DGIE don't need a lot of interpreters, so they are normally provided by UNHCR... If a relative can interpret for the person they are invited to come to the Committee, for example Swahili interpreters. It's more difficult for example if Arabic is needed.'⁸²
- 4.9.6 At a meeting with HO officials on 21 March 2022, a representative of UNHCR explained: 'Asylum seekers are interviewed by the [NRSDC] panel. Only interpreter assistance is allowed for asylum seekers who do not speak English, Kinyarwanda or French.'⁸³

[Back to Contents](#)

4.10 Notification of decisions

- 4.10.1 Applications for asylum are considered by the RSDC, which is required by law to make a decision within 45 days of receiving the applicant's file from DGIE. The RSDC is required to set out its reasons for granting or refusing refugee status in a written notice of its decision, given to the applicant within 10 days from the date the decision was made⁸⁴.
- 4.10.2 During the meeting with the Rwandan Government on 18 January 2022, HO officials asked to what extent the RSDC provides reasons for its decisions

⁷⁹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁸⁰ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁸¹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 22 March 2022

⁸² [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 22 March 2022

⁸³ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

⁸⁴ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette number 26 of 30/06/2014](#)' (page 82), 30 June 2014

and a Senior Official from MINAFFET explained: 'We may explain the decision. The applicant will then be able to expand on anything they didn't mention for the appeal. We always communicate the decision to the applicant.'⁸⁵

- 4.10.3 In a meeting between HO and the Rwandan Government on 22 March 2022, a DGIE official explained: 'Once the decision is made, the EO [Eligibility Officer] notifies the applicant in writing/by phone/in person and of timescales to appeal. If the applicant is not satisfied with the decision, they can appeal.'⁸⁶
- 4.10.4 On refused cases, the official added: 'No details relating to each and every piece of information given by the applicant are given [in the reasons for refusal]. No, it's not a very detailed explanation.'⁸⁷
- 4.10.5 According to the UNHCR: '[the] Basis of the RSD decisions, particularly rejection, are not known or properly explained including to the asylum seekers.'⁸⁸
- 4.10.6 At a meeting with HO officials on 21 March 2022, UNHCR explained: 'The decision is usually in a written letter. There are two templates: "your claim has been accepted and granted" OR "we regret to inform you that the refugee status requested was not granted because the reasons provided during the interview were not pertinent". No further reasons for the decision are provided, which renders the right to appeal against a negative decision difficult or impossible to exercise in practice.'⁸⁹
- 4.10.7 In a meeting between the HO and LAF on 21 March 2022, a LAF representative explained that, by law, the RSD Committee must notify every applicant of the outcome of his/her asylum claim in writing, but the representative was unsure whether all claimants are provided with reasons for the decision⁹⁰.

[Back to Contents](#)

4.11 Ability to challenge a negative decision

- 4.11.1 The applicant has a right to appeal within 30 days from notification of the decision. Appeal cases (first review) are decided by the Minister of MINEMA within one month, during which time the applicant has the right to remain in Rwanda⁹¹.
- 4.11.2 In December 2017, the UN Committee Against Torture (UNCAT) noted that it regretted '... the State party's failure to provide information on the time frames observed in the adjudication of asylum claims and on the use of judicial remedies to challenge deportations.'⁹²

⁸⁵ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁸⁶ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 22 March 2022

⁸⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 22 March 2022

⁸⁸ UNHCR, '[Submission to OCHCR](#)' (page 4), July 2020

⁸⁹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

⁹⁰ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A7, Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

⁹¹ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette number 26 of 30/06/2014](#)' (page 83), 30 June 2014

⁹² UNCAT, '[Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Rwanda...](#)', 21 December 2017

- 4.11.3 During the meeting between the Rwandan Government and HO officials on 18 January 2022, a senior Rwandan Government official explained the appeals process:
- ‘When rejected, the applicant asylum seeker can make an appeal [request a review] to the Minister in charge of Emergency Management. She/he submits a letter appealing the RSDC decision. In this case the Minister assigns a special team to assess the decision taken by RSDC for confirmation or revocation. From the departments of Ministry of Foreign affairs or the PM’s ministry legal dept, not those part of the RSDC. The team is not fixed it depends on the case. The minister gathers a team with the capacity and experience to consider and analyse the case.
- ‘The asylum seeker has a second level appeal option [the first court appeal after ministerial review] provided by the law to submit the case to the High Court.’⁹³
- 4.11.4 The law that allows High Court adjudication for cases relating to applications for asylum is contained in the [Official Gazette n° Special of 02/06/2018, Article 47](#) (page 49-50).
- 4.11.5 HO officials asked about the composition of the team which is given the role of assessing the RSDC’s decision, and the Director of Response and Recovery Unit MINEMA explained: ‘[The number of people in the appeal team] depends how many appeals there are and what needs to be re-assessed. May be 9 different government ministries to assess. People are chosen who have the knowledge/ability and can consider/challenge the decision of the RSDC. The minister may appoint one of the RSDC members to provide information on the basis of the decision. That team makes the decision (recommendation) and then that decision goes to the minister to finally decide.’⁹⁴
- 4.11.6 HO officials asked whether the judicial consideration/decision at appeal is independent from the RSDC and a senior Rwandan Government official explained: ‘There is no connection between the RSD proceedings and the high court proceedings. One of the government officials from the MoJ presents to the court. The same would apply to asylum seekers.’⁹⁵
- 4.11.7 HO officials asked whether claimants need to give reasons why they are appealing a negative decision and the Colonel and Special Advisor on Immigration explained: ‘There is a legal right to appeal, and to be not happy with the decision is enough.’⁹⁶
- 4.11.8 In a meeting between the HO and LAF on 21 March 2022, a LAF representative explained:
- ‘If an asylum seeker’s claim is rejected, the main [appeal] option is the courts. They can go to the Courts - by themselves, or with the assistance of

⁹³ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁹⁴ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁹⁵ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

⁹⁶ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

LAF. The RSDC doesn't tell them about it so [asylum seekers] might not know.

'The appeals process is open to every claim. Even the committee has levels of appeals. Process is: immigration, Minister, then courts – but need to check. Don't think it is the case any more so might just be the committee and the courts. The court option is always there. Think can appeal to a higher court. Don't know [numbers of appeals]. You need to ask for stats from Rwandan government.

'Asylum seekers can apply to a higher Court, that cannot be denied.'

'The applicant provides the same information for an appeal. Don't think they are required to provide any additional information.

'There is no funding from Government for [representation].'⁹⁷

4.11.9 In a meeting with the Government of Rwanda on 22 March 2022, a HO official asked what information needs to be provided for an appeal and a DGIE official responded: 'The appellant has to come up with more credible evidence in order to substantiate their claim, they will have been told that what you gave the Committee wasn't clear. They may even have an idea where the gaps [in evidence] were.'⁹⁸

4.11.10 UNHCR commented on the appeals (ministerial review) process in 2020: '... the practice of appeal decisions being taken by the Minister of MINEMA poses questions as to the independency of the appeal process and could further result in bottlenecks once a larger number of applications needs to be processed.'⁹⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

4.12 Persons ineligible for refugee status

4.12.1 Rwanda makes no distinction between minor and major criminal activities when considering eligibility for refugee status. Grounds for ineligibility include prosecution: 'for any felony other than a political crime before [the applicant] takes refuge in Rwanda.'¹⁰⁰

[Back to Contents](#)

4.13 Revocation of refugee status

4.13.1 A person granted refugee status on a prima facie basis may have his/her status revoked by the RSDC for reasons of territorial integrity and national security¹⁰¹.

4.13.2 During the meeting with the Rwandan Government on 18 January 2022, a HO official asked whether the RSDC had ever had to revoke status and a senior official from MINEMA advised: 'In terms of revocation possibly 1 case

⁹⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A7, Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

⁹⁸ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 22 March 2022

⁹⁹ UNHCR, '[Submission to OCHCR](#)' (page 4), July 2020

¹⁰⁰ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette number 26 of 30/06/2014](#)' (page 85), 30 June 2014

¹⁰¹ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette 26 of 30/06/2014](#)' (Article 16, page 86), 30 June 2014

back in 2017' The Colonel and Special Adviser on Immigration added: 'Refugees are subject to the laws of Rwanda for crimes committed here.'¹⁰²

[Back to Contents](#)

4.14 Decision outcomes and recognition rates

4.14.1 Refugees and asylum-seekers in Rwanda, UNHCR statistics for 2016 to 2020¹⁰³:

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total refugees under UNHCR's mandate (population at year end)	156,065	170,991	145,359	145,054	139,501
Total asylum seekers (population at year end)	456	438	423	613	465
Total 'others of concern'* (population at year end)	1,444	1,844	3,734	5,323	13,640
Total decisions taken on asylum claims during the year	n/a	32	234	307	228
Of which:					
Recognized		10	35	188	70
Rejected		0	0	0	0
Closed		22	199	119	158

*Others of concern refers to individuals who do not fall into any of the other groups (e.g. refugees or asylum seekers) but to whom UNHCR has extended its protection and/or assistance, based on humanitarian or other special grounds.

4.14.2 The vast majority of refugees in Rwanda have been recognized prima facie; in other words, refugee status has been awarded on the basis of objective circumstances in the country of origin which apply to a group as a whole. This approach is favoured over individual status determination in situations where the assessment of individual claims is impractical or unnecessary, either due to the volume of people seeking refuge or where the similar situation of members of a group is apparent^{104 105}.

4.14.3 Prima facie refugee status is granted in accordance with Article 13 of the 2014 law Relating to Refugees in Rwanda and the 1951 Refugee Convention, where a population fleeing in mass influx are unconditionally granted refugee status^{106 107 108}.

4.14.4 While Burundian and DRC refugees have largely been granted on a prima facie basis, other nationalities have been assessed individually. According to

¹⁰² [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹⁰³ UNHCR, '[Refugee data finder](#)', data downloaded 23 Aug 2021

¹⁰⁴ UNHCR, '[Guidelines on International Protection ...](#)', 24 June 2015

¹⁰⁵ UNHCR, '[Submission to OCHCR](#)' (page 4), July 2020

¹⁰⁶ Government of Rwanda, '[Government grants prima facie..](#)' 24 April 2015

¹⁰⁷ Government of Rwanda, '[Constitution](#)', 24 Dec 2015

¹⁰⁸ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette 26 of 30/06/2014](#)' (Article 13), 30 June 2014

UNHCR, which met with the HO on 21 March 2022, DRC and Burundian refugees are no longer granted on a prima facie basis:

‘Since August 2021, the Rwandan government shifted its policy for Burundian refugees to be considered on an individual basis (instead of prima facie), DRC refugees have been going through individual basis recognition for a little longer. No prima facie recognition anymore.’

And: ‘[Previously] everyone was dealt with as prima facie: only non-Burundian and non-DRC would go through the [RSDC] panel. The number is small – 0.3% other nationalities. There is a tendency to grant asylum to those from neighbouring countries; rejection rates are higher for people from Middle Eastern and other countries. There is a view they should go to neighbouring safe countries – they don’t see there is a protection need. Sometimes they also don’t see some refugees can be sur place refugees.’¹⁰⁹

4.14.5 During the meeting between the Rwandan Government and HO officials on 18 January 2022, Rwandan Government officials provided the following breakdown of individual asylum cases considered (figures from 2019):

- ‘Refugee status granted: 44 cases comprised of 62 individuals
- ‘Refugee status rejected – 64 cases comprised of 124 individuals
- ‘Pending: 2 cases comprised of 3 individuals
- ‘Missing: 2
- ‘Number of appeals: 24
- ‘Number of appeals change of decisions: 2
- ‘Number to High court: 0

A senior government official explained: ‘[the] Law [for appeal to the High Court] was promulgated only last year by [official gazette](#). This will increase the rights of applicants.’¹¹⁰

4.14.6 During the same meeting, HO officials asked if the Rwandan Government could clarify the meaning of the UNHCR category of ‘closed cases’ (see table 7.14.1) and a senior Rwandan official explained ‘When someone applies for asylum we communicate that to UNHCR. We have a shared system. Once the decision is taken that is communicated to DGIE, UNHCR and the national documentation agency. UNHCR either close the case or confirm status and issue the refugee documents. If refused and the person chooses not to appeal, then it is closed. It means the process of taking the decision is finished and [the] applicant is satisfied of the process outcome.’¹¹¹

4.14.7 At a meeting with HO officials on 21 March 2022, UNHCR explained that closed cases included: ‘departure and deregistration (for example, receive Rwandan citizenship and therefore no longer require refugee status).’¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

¹¹⁰ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹¹¹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹¹² [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

- 4.14.8 **Note:** It is unclear how the Rwandan Government statistics on asylum claims reconcile with UNHCR's data (table 4.14.1).

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 5 updated: 24 March 2022

5. Failed asylum seekers

5.1 Alternative routes to remain in Rwanda

- 5.1.1 During the meeting with the Rwandan Government on 18 January 2022, HO officials asked what happens to those whose asylum decision is refused at appeal, and a senior government official explained: 'Some failed asylum seekers choose to remain in Rwanda and obtain different types of residence permits that suits their purpose of stay. Others return home voluntarily or move to third country. During the initial interview with DGIE, another option on remaining may be provided. So, if their reason for coming isn't for protection they can be given a work permit for example.'¹¹³
- 5.1.2 In a meeting between the HO and LAF on 21 March 2022, a LAF representative explained: 'If an asylum seeker's claim is rejected, they can apply to stay in the country by transferring their status. If they have employment, they can apply for a work permit, but these opportunities are limited. There is an assumption that an asylum seeker will be destitute, it is deemed strange that a person would then apply to change their status to set up a business, for example. It would be better for that person not to have attempted to gain entry into the country via the asylum route.'
- 5.1.3 They added 'Some people enter the country via the tourist or student or businessperson visa routes and then claim asylum.' but they 'Have not encountered a situation where a person has been refused and not got a visa – but the same committee determine asylum applications and determine work permit visas.'¹¹⁴
- 5.1.4 At a meeting with HO officials on 21 March 2022, UNHCR commented: 'Rejected asylum seekers might, in rare cases, be able to get a residence permit and stay in Rwanda if they have another route (investment, employment, marriage). However, this will not be possible in most cases because usually the person sought asylum as a last resort, for example, cases with no valid passport due to persecution, they cannot apply for another avenue due to lack of formal documentation...

'Some asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers need a passport to apply for other [immigration] status but this is not always possible; [UNHCR] had not seen many examples of GoR giving waiver for those who don't have valid passports. There were a few cases though.'¹¹⁵
- 5.1.5 During the meeting with the Rwandan Government on 18 January 2022, HO officials asked whether applying for an alternative status required the person

¹¹³ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹¹⁴ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A7, Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

¹¹⁵ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

to withdraw his/her application for refugee status, and a Senior Official from DGIE explained: 'The first step is to register as an asylum seeker. In the event that is withdrawn by the applicant, he will have to submit a new application for a different status of choice. You cannot have 2 status applications running at once.'¹¹⁶

- 5.1.6 The Colonel and Special Advisor on Immigration added: 'Being refused asylum does not exclude you from another type of status. A person may be an economic migrant. If you are a failed asylum seeker you can choose to go home or reside at one of the camps.'¹¹⁷ HO officials asked whether a failed asylum seeker has less rights, and the Colonel and Special Advisor on Immigration explained: 'The right to work is provided by the law for asylum seekers or refugees. You don't have any disadvantage you can work as a migrant, failed asylum seeker or refugee the rights are all the same.'¹¹⁸

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 6 updated: 24 March 2022

6. Immigration detention and returns

6.1 Refoulement

- 6.1.1 The definition of, and protection against refoulement, as set out in 'Law N° 13ter/2014 of 21/05/2014 Relating to Refugees' is identical to the provisions of the 1951 Convention^{119,120}.
- 6.1.2 According to a July 2020 UNHCR submission: 'There is a general respect for the principle of non-refoulement and no cases were known to be deported in the past few years.'¹²¹
- 6.1.3 At a meeting with HO officials on 21 March 2022, UNHCR gave an example of two Libyans who tried to claim asylum on arrival and were not let into the country. According to the representative: 'UNHCR escalated whilst the two Libyans remained at the airport. They were ultimately sent back despite UNHCR's efforts – they said they were here for investment (a common route to come to Rwanda) – just kept in airport lobby for 2 days until next flight out (not detained) but very well treated. They faced challenges in all transit countries until they reached the country of departure.'¹²²

[Back to Contents](#)

6.2 Immigration detention, deportation, and voluntary returns

- 6.2.1 During the meeting with the Rwandan Government on 18 January 2022, HO officials asked whether asylum seekers are detained or deported, and the Director of Response and Recovery Unit at MINEMA explained: 'There is no

¹¹⁶ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹¹⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹¹⁸ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹¹⁹ UNHCR, '[Submission to OCHCR](#)' (page 1), July 2020

¹²⁰ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette 26 of 30/06/2014](#)' (Article 21, page 88), 30 June 2014

¹²¹ UNHCR, '[Submission to OCHCR](#)' (page 2), July 2020

¹²² [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

detention of someone who is a failed asylum seeker and no detention to return. Some failed asylum seekers have been assisted to return home.¹²³

- 6.2.2 HO officials asked whether failed asylum seekers are forcibly removed and a senior Rwandan Government official replied: 'Not really. Most are from neighbouring countries so they can return or apply to stay in Rwanda. But for example, if they can't get a job they may wish to go back home.'¹²⁴
- 6.2.3 Migrant detention is used as a last resort. The law places emphasis on deporting migrants who violate immigration law, rather than placing them in detention. The 2019 Ministerial Order relating to immigration and emigration states that: 'A foreigner subject to deportation may be hosted in a specified premisses [sic] before his or her deportation from Rwanda', although the Order does not specifically refer to the detention and deportation of failed asylum seekers^{125 126}.
- 6.2.4 At a meeting with HO officials on 21 March 2022, UNHCR commented: 'If you do not have a visa, the person has 15 days to present themselves to 'Immigration'. This is in the Immigration Law. UNHCR was aware of one person [asylum seeker] detained in the last year. We are aware (from partner's report) the charge was for immigration related issue, but we are not sure if there are any other charges included. Under Immigration law, persons without a lawful basis for stay can be detained.'¹²⁷
- 6.2.5 At the same meeting, UNHCR commented on the removal of failed asylum seekers:
- 'UNHCR believed there was some risk of a person being detained or deported at point of rejection. Few people appeal after rejection. [If someone is refused and they can't get a visa] then there is a risk of being detained or deported. If no valid passport, some are deported.
- 'Most people given 48 hours to leave country but occasional cases where someone 'seized' straight after notification and taken to border by land. UNHCR was aware of at least 2 cases where unsuccessful asylum seekers had been taken directly to the border.'¹²⁸
- 6.2.6 UNHCR also talked about refoulement, but referenced three Syrian cases where the persons had been rejected in the first instance and on appeal. [UNHCR] felt the Rwandan Government didn't wish to deport them.'¹²⁹
- 6.2.7 A LAF representative who met with the HO on 21 March 2022 explained that 'A person cannot be deported while waiting for an Appeal outcome.'¹³⁰
- 6.2.8 The same (LAF) source expanded:

¹²³ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹²⁴ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹²⁵ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette ...](#)' (Article 52), 30 May 2019

¹²⁶ IOM, '[Republic of Rwanda profile 2021: Migration governance indicators](#)' (page 21), 2021

¹²⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

¹²⁸ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

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

¹³⁰ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A7, Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

‘The possibility for detention is always there (but not for those from East Africa), if the person is considered an illegal immigrant. It is hard to enter Rwanda illegally [because visas are granted at the border.] But a person who remains in the country once their visa has expired is considered an illegal immigrant. That person may be detained and deported if they have not made a claim for asylum, or if they have not submitted an Appeal immediately following a negative asylum decision. Not sure if anyone has been detained.’

‘Can’t say how they will be deported. It is obvious that they would be detained pending removal. Can’t speak from experience. I guess detention would be at police stations. Can’t be taken to prison unless the court decides that you can be imprisoned. This is the position in Rwandan law.’¹³¹

- 6.2.9 In April 2020 the Global Detention Project published its Rwanda Immigration Detention Data Profile, the most up to date profile at the time of writing. There are no available statistics regarding the number of immigration detainees in Rwanda¹³². [Rwanda Immigration Detention Data Profile \(2020\) - Global Detention Project | Mapping immigration detention around the world](#)
- 6.2.10 In sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)), no information could be found to indicate that specific detention facilities exist for illegal migrants or failed asylum-seekers.
- 6.2.11 Since January 2021, 19,726 Burundian refugees have been voluntarily repatriated, in collaboration with the UNHCR (this figure rose to 27,621 since August 2019)¹³³. Voluntary returnees hand back their refugee status documents at the Rwandan border^{134,135}.

See also [Asylum process](#), [Failed asylum seekers](#) and [Treatment and conditions in detention](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 7 updated: 24 March 2022

7. Documentation for asylum seekers and refugees

- 7.1.1 During the meeting between the Rwandan Government and HO officials on 18 January 2022, Rwandan Government officials provided the following information on the 3 types of documents issued to asylum seekers and refugees and the associated rights:
- ‘Temporary residents permit - rights: allows them to stay in the country legally and obtain assistance from UNHCR.
 - ‘Refugee ID [name, DOB, photo, expiry, place] looks like a national ID card and provides these rights: apply for job, register for health insurance, telephone card, bank, marriage, insurance, college, business, driving permit

¹³¹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A7, Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

¹³² Global Detention Project, ‘[Rwanda Immigration Detention Data Profile \(2020\)](#)’, 20 April 2020

¹³³ UNHCR, ‘[Operational update: Rwanda May 2021](#)’, 26 June 2021

¹³⁴ UNHCR, ‘[...Operational Update: April - June 2021](#)’, 28 July 2021

¹³⁵ MINEMA, ‘[First group of 493 Burundian refugees voluntarily repatriated](#)’, no date

- ‘Refugee travel doc [looks like a passport] allows travel abroad.’¹³⁶
- 7.1.2 At the same meeting, a senior official from DGIE explained that there is no charge for the refugee ID, but there is a charge for the travel document.¹³⁷
- 7.1.3 HO officials asked about the validity of the temporary resident permit and the Director of Response and Recovery Unit at MINEMA explained: ‘It is valid for 3 months, the same period as the timeframe for deciding the case. If the decision is delayed, it can be renewed for another 3 months.’¹³⁸
- 7.1.4 When HO officials asked about the process for extending temporary resident permits a second senior Rwandan official explained: ‘When the applicant has a pending appeal it is a given right that he can stay in country until the case is decided. That is provided in law, even beyond the initial 3 months where necessary. The law [regarding extension of the permit] is applied automatically.’¹³⁹
- 7.1.5 HO officials asked if there were circumstances in which a residence permit would be denied, for example, due to criminality, and a senior government official explained: ‘There is a very short interview with immigration just to register in the asylum system and enable access to assistance. When the DGIE deems it necessary, they schedule another interview. However, whatever the findings, they cannot revoke the temporary residence permit.’¹⁴⁰
- 7.1.6 Refugees aged 16 and above are issued with refugee identity cards. The Rwandan government made a commitment in 2016 to ensure that 100% of refugees would be issued with a refugee identity card by the end of 2017. As of 31 December 2020, 77% of refugees were in possession of refugee IDs, with the government anticipating that it would meet its target by the end of 2021¹⁴¹.
- 7.1.7 An application form for a refugee ID is submitted to MINEMA, supported by a proof of registration document. Applicants are then notified by the National Identification Agency (NIDA) to arrange for biometrics to be taken¹⁴².
- 7.1.8 Refugee ID cards allow access to bank accounts, mobile SIM cards and business registration¹⁴³.
- 7.1.9 Civil registration, for example, birth registration, is accessible to refugees living in both camps and urban areas¹⁴⁴.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 8 updated: 24 March 2022

¹³⁶ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 Jan 2022

¹³⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 Jan 2022

¹³⁸ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 Jan 2022

¹³⁹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 Jan 2022

¹⁴⁰ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 Jan 2022

¹⁴¹ Republic of Rwanda, ‘[Jya Mbere project... Oct to Dec 2020](#)’ (page 11, table 1), March 2021

¹⁴² UNHCR, ‘[Help: Rwanda documentation](#)’, no date

¹⁴³ UNHCR, ‘[Submission to OCHCR](#)’ (page 6), July 2020

¹⁴⁴ UNHCR, ‘[Submission to OCHCR](#)’ (page 6), July 2020

8. Accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees

8.1 Asylum seekers

- 8.1.1 During the meeting with the Rwandan government on 18 January 2022, HO officials asked where asylum seekers live during the 3-month period when they have a temporary residence permit and the Director of Response and Recovery Unit at MINEMA explained: 'The asylum seeker has choice between living in transit/reception centre/refugee camp or urban area.' The government further explained that a person is unable to choose his/her camp: 'It depends on their arrival and availability. They don't have a choice, they go where settlement is available.'¹⁴⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

8.2 Camp based refugees

- 8.2.1 Article 23 of the Law relating to refugees states that asylum seekers and refugees shall be entitled to settle in a refugee camp¹⁴⁶.
- 8.2.2 There are 3 reception centres (Gatore and Nyanza) and 3 transit centres (Nyarushishi in Rusizi District, Kijote in Nyabihu District and Gashora in Bugesera District)¹⁴⁷.
- 8.2.3 The 6 refugee camps are:
- Nyabiheke (Gatsibo District)
 - Gihembe (Gicumbi District)
 - Mugombwa (Gisagara District)
 - Kiziba (Karongi District)
 - Kigeme (Nyamagabe District)
 - Mahama (Kirehe District)¹⁴⁸
- 8.2.4 UNHCR data (updated 31 August 2021) provides the following breakdown of refugee numbers¹⁴⁹:

	Population
Refugee camp	
• Mahama	45,938
• Kiziba	16,864
• Kigeme	15,802
• Nyabiheke	14,550
• Mugombwa	11,058
• Gihembe	9,922
Urban area	

¹⁴⁵ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹⁴⁶ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette 26 of 30/06/2014](#)' (Article 23, page 89), 30 June 2014

¹⁴⁷ MINEMA, '[The single project implementation unit](#)', no date

¹⁴⁸ MINEMA, '[The single project implementation unit](#)', no date

¹⁴⁹ UNHCR, '[Operational data portal: Rwanda](#)', updated 31 August 2021

• Kigali	12,030
• Huye	851
Other	365
Total	127,380

- 8.2.5 During the meeting with the Rwandan government on 18 January 2022, HO officials were told ‘UNHCR provide in-camp support. The Government of Rwanda and other partners are trying to provide support. Starting from 2018 the Government of Rwanda have a development plan with UNHCR to support both urban and camp refugees.’¹⁵⁰
- 8.2.6 The USSD report 2020 noted that in general, the authorities provided adequate security within refugee camps. The Rwanda National Police (RNP) maintains a police presence in refugee camps. There were no major security incidents at any of the refugee camps during 2020¹⁵¹.
- 8.2.7 The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) found that the rights of camp-based refugees were respected in terms of access to shelter, food, water, medical care, education and security¹⁵².
- 8.2.8 UNHCR stated that camp-based refugees live in UNHCR-provided semi-permanent houses. UNHCR also provides infrastructure such as water and drainage systems, access roads and communal spaces such as markets. Housing standards and camp infrastructure vary by camp, with the UNHCR undertaking an operation to relocate residents in situations where shelters are considered unsafe, for example, due to environmental degradation of the land. The UNHCR estimated that at the end of 2020, 80% of refugees had adequate shelters^{153,154}.
- 8.2.9 In June 2021, the World Food Programme (WFP) announced that COVID-related funding shortfalls had necessitated a cut in refugee rations of 8% in Rwanda¹⁵⁵.
- 8.2.10 WFP also announced a shift to a ‘targeted’ approach to food assistance whereby rations are allocated according to vulnerability. Highly vulnerable refugees would continue to receive full food assistance rations, moderately vulnerable refugees would receive 50 percent rations and refugees classified as not vulnerable would no longer receive general food assistance from the WFP. The new targeted approach, combined with the overall cut in food rations means that in June 2021, refugees classified as highly vulnerable received 92 percent of a full ration whereas the moderately vulnerable received 46 percent of a full ration¹⁵⁶.
- 8.2.11 During the meeting with the Rwandan government on 18 January 2022, a senior official from MINEMA explained: ‘UNHCR provide support in camps.

¹⁵⁰ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹⁵¹ USSD, ‘[USSD report 2020](#)’ (section 2), 30 March 2021

¹⁵² NCHR, ‘[Annual activity report, July 2019 to June 2020](#)’ (page 9), no date

¹⁵³ UNHCR, ‘[UNHCR Rwanda fact sheet March 2021](#)’ (page 4), 26 March 2021

¹⁵⁴ UNHCR, ‘[Rwanda country refugee response plan Jan to Dec 2021](#)’ (page 7), 19 April 2021

¹⁵⁵ WFP, ‘[Refugees worldwide face rising hunger due to funding gaps amidst Covid-19](#)’, 18 June 2021

¹⁵⁶ WFP, ‘[WFP Eastern Africa: regional refugee update June 2021](#)’, 15 July 2021

There are also refugees in camps who have jobs and support themselves. Assistance [from UNHCR] is provided on level of income (means tested). So refugees who have business but live in the refugee camp won't have the same level of assistance as those who don't.¹⁵⁷

See also the [note on human rights](#), sections Complaint mechanisms available to asylum seekers and/or refugees, SGBV against asylum seekers and refugees and Modern slavery/trafficking.

[Back to Contents](#)

8.3 Urban refugees

8.3.1 During the meeting on 18 January 2022, senior Rwandan government officials from MINAFFET and MINEMA reported: 'Urban refugees considered as self-reliant make up 10% [of the total refugee population]. Living in camp/urban relies on choice/ability for refugee to sustain themselves.'¹⁵⁸

8.3.2 During the same meeting, HO officials asked if there are instances where urban refugees move to camps. A senior government official explained: 'If they cannot sustain themselves, they can move to a camp. It also works the other way, they can move out of the camp too.'¹⁵⁹

8.3.3 Another senior Rwandan government official added: 'Last year there were 39 people who went from urban area to camp. In Kigali this year there were 9841 refugees residing and sustaining themselves. Some have a job in the city. If they lose their job and cannot sustain themselves, then they can leave the city and go to the camp for assistance.'¹⁶⁰

8.3.4 A HO official asked whether the government would provide assistance to an asylum seeker if they wanted to remain in the city and a senior government official explained: 'The options are camps, transit centres or reception centres. When in the camp, the person is not restricted to remain there, they can look for other accommodation options. They can request to move to urban areas if they can support themselves, but this does not happen in many cases.'¹⁶¹

8.3.5 At a meeting with HO officials on 21 March 2022, UNHCR commented: 'Usually [urban refugees] are educated people/ some with small businesses/ people who can afford to rent accommodation (in the more affordable areas) tend to live in urban areas and send their children to public schools.

'The concentration/spread of urban refugees [is] not dictated by Government; there is general freedom on where they live.

'There was lots of relocation from urban to camps in COVID-times (because of the impact on the economy). People lost jobs, restaurants and bars were closed, the typical employment. With assistance of [UNHCR], Government helped to relocate people to camps. There are free medical and education

¹⁵⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹⁵⁸ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹⁵⁹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹⁶⁰ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹⁶¹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

systems in the camps. It sometimes happens unrelated to COVID. The camp acts as a safety net.’¹⁶²

- 8.3.6 At the same meeting, UNHCR explained: ‘For camp refugees who wish to stay in urban area, they could just request a permission to MINEMA and Camp Manager to leave the camp and [provide a] reason.’¹⁶³
- 8.3.7 During a meeting with HO on 23 March 2022, Alight was asked whether they were aware of urban refugees or asylum seekers relocating to the refugee camps and the circumstances why this might happen. Alight replied that, in their experience, the problem is movement in the other direction: ‘i.e., refugees moving from camps to urban areas. When refugees move to urban areas, this increases their vulnerabilities to an extent women and girls may result into negative coping mechanisms including transactional sex.’¹⁶⁴

[Back to Contents](#)

8.4 Emergency Transit Mechanism (Gashora)

- 8.4.1 During a HO visit to Gashora Transit Centre on 18 January 2022, the Manager of Gashora provided an overview of the Centre’s operations:

‘Since 2019 the centre has hosted people from Libya under the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM). 824 people have been received into the system and 462 have been resettled overseas.

‘Apart from the legal/processing side we:

- ‘Handle trauma issues with partner organisations
- ‘Provide mental health and psychosocial support
- ‘Medical, for example, vaccinations, prescriptions
- ‘Accommodation (small houses)
- ‘Food (3 meals a day)

‘We consider different aspects such as gender, nationality, age, and specific needs for example disability, when considering accommodation and how we house people together. Because it is a transit centre, and they are passing through, we go through their cases individually to see how they can best be supported for the future.

‘In terms of resettlement, most movement is from here to European countries or Canada. UNHCR process the cases and decide on the asylum case and eligibility for resettlement.

‘Most of the asylum seekers here are young people, average age 23 years, so it is important to start training to provide for long term solutions/their futures. This helps them to have purpose and gain skills. We have a driving

¹⁶² [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

¹⁶³ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

¹⁶⁴ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A10, Meeting between HO and Alight, 23 March 2022

school for example. We have language classes in Kinyarwanda, English and French, also training in domestic electricals.

‘We also see how they can help the local community to aid cultural integration and encourage interaction. For example, they work with the local community to clean streets alongside Rwandans (practise commonly known as Umuganda).

‘After they have been here for a while, we see they start recovering from the trauma they have encountered, and the programmes we provide help them with this and in gaining skills. They might be able to start their own business for example.’¹⁶⁵

8.4.2 The Camp Manager explained that the existing capacity of Gashora is 380 but the plan is to increase capacity to 700.¹⁶⁶

8.4.3 For further information on Gashora ETM, including the day-to-day running and photographs of the facilities on site, see [notes of interviews](#) Annex A2. Meeting at Gashora Transit Centre, 18 January 2022.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 9 updated: 24 March 2022

9. Proposed alternative accommodation for relocated persons

9.1 Context

9.1.1 This section provides an overview of two accommodation projects (Kinigi and Karama Model Villages). These villages do not represent the actual accommodation which would be used to house any UK-relocated asylum seekers. Instead, the two projects have been highlighted by the Rwandan government in order to illustrate the type of accommodation which would be available for UK-relocated asylum seekers.

[Back to Contents](#)

9.2 Kinigi Integrated Development Program Model Village

For notes on and photographs of the visit to Kinigi Integrated Development Program (IDP) Model Village (MV) (Musanze) on 20 January 2022, including photographs of the health centre on site, and nearby school see [notes of interviews](#) Annex A6. Visit to Kinigi Integrated Development Program (IDP) Model Village (Musanze) 20 January 2022.

[Back to Contents](#)

9.3 Karama model village

9.3.1 The Karama model village, in the Nyarugenge district of Kigali was opened in July 2019. 240 households were relocated from high-risk zones around Kigali. The complex comprises of apartment blocks, an Early Childhood Development Centre (ECD) for 180 pupils and a secondary school for 1104

¹⁶⁵ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A2, HO visit to Gashora Transit Centre, 18 January 2022

¹⁶⁶ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A2, HO visit to Gashora Transit Centre, 18 January 2022

students comprising of 24 classrooms, 3 laboratories and a library¹⁶⁷. The village has a poultry farm, health centre, sports facilities, market and is connected to road networks and water, waste and electricity systems¹⁶⁸.

- 9.3.2 The Government of Rwanda provided the HO with information and photographs of the development of the model village of Karama. This photograph shows housing before development¹⁶⁹:



- 9.3.3 Housing in the model village after development¹⁷⁰:



- 9.3.4 Photograph of the school¹⁷¹:

¹⁶⁷ Ministry of Defence, '[President Kagame Inaugurates Karama Model Village ...](#)', 3 July 2019

¹⁶⁸ Government of Rwanda, 'Kigali informal settlement upgrading projects', 13 January 2022

¹⁶⁹ Government of Rwanda, 'Kigali informal settlement upgrading projects', 13 January 2022

¹⁷⁰ Government of Rwanda, 'Kigali informal settlement upgrading projects', 13 January 2022

¹⁷¹ Government of Rwanda, 'Kigali informal settlement upgrading projects', 13 January 2022



Section 10 updated: 24 March 2022

10. Refugee rights and access to services

See also [Accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees](#)

10.1 Education

10.1.1 UNHCR noted the Rwandan government has committed to integrate refugee children into the national education system. Refugee children study alongside children from the host community in schools close to the refugee camps. Refugee children study the same curriculum as the host population and graduate with the same qualifications, however, most schools are lacking in resources^{172 173}.

10.1.2 As of 31 December 2020, 29,140 refugee students were enrolled in primary schools, 15,121 were enrolled in secondary schools and 100% of refugee pupils had been integrated into the national education system¹⁷⁴.

[Back to Contents](#)

10.2 Health

10.2.1 UNHCR noted in June 2020 the Rwandan government had committed to include urban refugees (and urban refugee students) in the national Community Based Health Insurance scheme (CBHI). The CBHI is normally open to nationals who pay means-linked premiums but – in collaboration with UNHCR – is also available to refugees. The CBHI provides access to primary health services on par with Rwandan nationals¹⁷⁵.

10.2.2 According to MINEMA, as of 31 December 2020, 8,014 urban refugees and refugee students had enrolled into CBHI (100% of refugees who met the requirements)¹⁷⁶.

¹⁷² UNHCR, '[Inclusion of refugees into the Rwandese national education system](#)', 18 March 2020

¹⁷³ UNHCR, '[Rwanda country refugee response plan Jan to Dec 2021](#)' (page 7), 19 April 2021

¹⁷⁴ Republic of Rwanda, '[Jya Mbere project... Oct to Dec 2020](#)' (page 11, table 1), March 2021

¹⁷⁵ UNHCR, '[Community-based health insurance for urban refugees ...](#)', 24 June 2020

¹⁷⁶ Republic of Rwanda, '[Jya Mbere project... Oct to Dec 2020](#)' (page 11, table 1), March 2021

- 10.2.3 During the meeting between the Rwandan government and HO officials on 18 January 2022, senior government officials reported: ‘Currently, 9863 urban refugees and refugee students are enrolled to community health insurance and can benefit from health services through the health scheme. UNHCR pay for urban refugee health insurance.’¹⁷⁷
- 10.2.4 Refugees housed in the 6 camps receive free primary health care provided through 7 camp-based clinics run by UNHCR. Refugees with more serious health issues are referred to district hospitals or other facilities^{178 179}.
- 10.2.5 UNHCR noted in their operational update in June 2021 that the health services available in the camps include: assistance for victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), disability support (including physical and occupational therapy), treatment for HIV/AIDS, palliative care and mental health care (including drug rehabilitation)¹⁸⁰.
- 10.2.6 Refugees and asylum seekers can access COVID-19 services at no cost¹⁸¹.

[Back to Contents](#)

10.3 Right to work

- 10.3.1 MINEMA and UNHCR’s joint strategy, published in May 2021 aims to reduce dependency on humanitarian aid and provide refugees with access to socio-economic opportunities; a government and UNHCR priority. Refugees are permitted to work and in 2016 the government launched a livelihoods strategy with UNHCR (for the period 2016 to 2020) designed to increase refugee employment. This strategy has since been updated for the period 2021 to 2024, with the aim to ensure that all refugees are self-reliant by 2030¹⁸².
- 10.3.2 The most recent UNHCR data, relating to August 2021, provided a snapshot of Mahama camp in which 11,812 refugees were engaged in income-generating activities (out of a camp population of 45,938, of which 49% were below 18)¹⁸³.
- 10.3.3 In 2019 (pre-COVID) the UNHCR conducted a review of the effectiveness of the 2016 to 2020 strategy and collected data on the sources of income for both refugees (split by camp-based refugees and urban refugees) and the host community. A review of the table below¹⁸⁴ indicates 2 key points:
- 1) There is a much higher degree of self-reliance among urban refugees than camp refugees (measured by the proportion of income which is derived from employment or self-employment).
 - 2) Using the host community as a baseline, there is a much closer match between the proportion of total income with urban refugees than camp

¹⁷⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 18 Jan 2022

¹⁷⁸ Republic of Rwanda, ‘[Jya Mbere project... Oct to Dec 2020](#)’ (page 21), March 2021

¹⁷⁹ UNHCR, ‘[Rwanda country refugee response plan Jan to Dec 2021](#)’ (page 6), 19 April 2021

¹⁸⁰ UNHCR, ‘[Operational update: Rwanda May 2021](#)’, 26 June 2021

¹⁸¹ UNHCR, ‘[Health insurance in Rwanda](#)’, 24 June 2020

¹⁸² MINEMA and UNHCR, ‘[Joint strategy ... 2021 to 2024](#)’ (page viii and xi), May 2021

¹⁸³ UNHCR, ‘[Operational update: Rwanda August 2021](#)’ (page 3), 29 Sept 2021

¹⁸⁴ MINEMA and UNHCR, ‘[Joint strategy ... 2021 to 2024](#)’ (table 1, page 8), May 2021

refugees. The proportion of total income which is derived from income-generating activities (employment, self-employment and agriculture) is 18.6% (camp refugees), 75.0% (urban refugees) and 94.6% (host community).

Income source	As a percentage of total income		
	Camp	Urban	Host
Cash-based interventions (CBI) [monthly humanitarian assistance received from WFP and UNHCR]	73.7	0	0
Business	8.2	51.2	12.5
Wage employment	4.1	23.8	17.3
Agriculture	6.3	0	64.8
Remittances	0.7	11.3	0
Other	7.0	13.7	5.4
Total	100	100	100

- 10.3.4 To note, in relation to the data in the table, it does not explain the absolute level of household income of the 3 groups. It also does not account for any impact COVID-19 has had on both the absolute level of household income, and the relative importance of the different income streams, nor whether these measures have since returned to pre-COVID levels.
- 10.3.5 Since the date of the 2019 review, MINEMA and UNHCR noted COVID-19 restrictions have had a negative impact on both the livelihood opportunities and poverty levels of both urban and camp-based refugees¹⁸⁵.
- 10.3.6 The UNHCR review found that 13% of camp-based refugees and 6.3% of urban refugees are 'extremely vulnerable', have no capacity to engage in income-generating activities and, are entirely dependent on external assistance, including humanitarian assistance. The majority of people in this group are elderly or chronically ill or physically challenged and have no active earning member in their household¹⁸⁶.
- 10.3.7 The UNHCR identified a trend in 2019 of vulnerable urban refugees increasingly requesting to return to a camp because they were struggling to meet their needs in an urban setting, although UNHCR suggests that the roll out of health insurance to urban refugees may help to reverse this trend¹⁸⁷.
- 10.3.8 During the meeting with the Rwandan Government on 18 January 2022, a HO official mentioned that if a refugee is unable to sustain themselves, they go to camp. The HO official asked what happens if a Rwandan citizen is unable to support themselves. The Colonel and Special Adviser on Immigration explained: 'It is the responsibility of the local authority to care for the most vulnerable. The government has housing projects, offer jobs. Various systems to provide for those who cannot support themselves.'¹⁸⁸
- 10.3.9 Sources noted non-legal barriers exist which hinder refugee access to employment and self-employment. Many employers, for example, are

¹⁸⁵ MINEMA and UNHCR, '[Joint strategy ... 2021 to 2024](#)' (page 10 to 11), May 2021

¹⁸⁶ MINEMA and UNHCR, '[Joint strategy ... 2021 to 2024](#)' (page 10), May 2021

¹⁸⁷ MINEMA and UNHCR, '[Joint strategy ... 2021 to 2024](#)' (page 10), May 2021

¹⁸⁸ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

unaware of the legality of employing refugees and are unfamiliar with the refugee ID card, which results in many refugees turning to informal employment. Other barriers included: limited access to financial services, lack of skill development and delays to obtaining long-term permission to leave camps to seek work. Part of the 2020 to 2024 strategy involves reducing the non-legal barriers to refugee employment and self-employment^{189,190,191,192,193,194}.

10.3.10 During the meeting between the Rwandan government and HO officials on 18 January 2022, HO officials asked how easy it is for an urban refugee to find a job, and a senior official from MINEMA replied: 'The job market is open for competition and a refugee has the right to work.'¹⁹⁵

10.3.11 Senior officials also reported: 'MINEMA Is implementing a World Bank funded project aiming at improving access to basic services and economic opportunities for refugees and host communities. The Matching Grant is provided to refugees and it serves as an incentive, and aims to improve access to finance and reduce collateral needs on the case of Refugees. Granted to urban and camp-based refugees.'¹⁹⁶

10.3.12 A HO official asked who is eligible for the scheme and a senior official from MINEMA explained:

'Everyone in the urban areas is eligible to this support. The advisors (NGOs) are approaching the communities. We have a 'right to work campaign' by MINEMA and refugees in urban areas have the conditions of the programme explained. Conditions to enter the scheme are:

- 'Either the refugee can apply for financial support for their own business or a business in the host communities must employ refugees to be eligible.
- 'They have to work with the financial institutions'¹⁹⁷

10.3.13 UNHCR noted various organisations operated within Rwandan refugee camps and ran projects designed to promote job opportunities for refugees, including the provision of training in business development and financial management and the offer of low-cost loans to assist refugees to set up businesses. For example, AEC pledged to support 35,000 entrepreneurs in Rwanda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Lebanon and Jordan by 2024^{198 199}.

10.3.14 During a meeting with HO on 23 March 2022, Alight was asked whether camp-based and urban refugees were able to find work. They replied: 'Government of Rwanda pledged to support refugees and host communities

¹⁸⁹ MINEMA and UNHCR, '[Joint strategy ... 2021 to 2024](#)' (pages viii, xi, 4, 11 and 12,), May 2021

¹⁹⁰ UNHCR, '[... Livelihoods Strategic Directions 2021 to 2025](#)' (page 3), 1 July 2021

¹⁹¹ UNHCR, '[Submission to OCHCR](#)' (page 6), July 2020

¹⁹² USSD, '[2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Rwanda](#)' (section 2), 30 March 2021

¹⁹³ UNHCR, '[Rwanda country refugee response plan Jan to Dec 2021](#)' (page 8), 19 April 2021

¹⁹⁴ Bilgili and Loschmann for FMR, '[Refugees and host communities ... labour market](#)', June 2018

¹⁹⁵ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹⁹⁶ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹⁹⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

¹⁹⁸ UNHCR, '[Women refugee entrepreneurs are pushing for self-reliance in Rwanda](#)', 8 March 2021

¹⁹⁹ UNHCR, '[Operational update: Rwanda May 2021](#)', 26 June 2021

under the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants known as the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), and the subsequent Strategic Plan for Refugee Inclusion (2019–2024) has accelerated efforts to increase socioeconomic inclusion for refugee populations and host communities. In line with this commitment, the Government of Rwanda have accorded refugees the right to work, and refugees are steadily being integrated into the country's health and education systems.^{'200}

- 10.3.15 At a meeting with HO officials on 21 March 2022, UNHCR commented: 'When it comes to the general public, unemployment is still high in Rwanda. There is competition between the local people and refugees, with a tendency to recruit local people. But in terms of the Law, there is free access to work and to purchase properties, land and to start businesses, but the limits in term of opportunity are still present. Some refugees say pay (for refugees) is not equal to that of nationals with the same job.'²⁰¹
- 10.3.16 A meeting was held between HO officials and [Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator](#) at Harambee's premises in Kigali on 19 January 2022. Although the organisation does not provide any specific training for asylum seekers or refugees, representatives explained 'There are other organisations that specifically provide those services. But anyone can ask for our support [and] services.'²⁰²
- 10.3.17 The organisation provided information relating to their work with young people in Rwanda in general. For more information on this, see [Annex A5](#).
- 10.3.18 HO officials asked whether employers draw a distinction between refugees and asylum seekers and Rwandan citizens in the job market, and the Regional Manager explained: 'It depends on the job, not having the Kinyarwanda language may prevent someone from getting a job, but likely only very local jobs. The govt encourages opportunities for refugees. Goes back to us advocating for young people.'²⁰³
- 10.3.19 The Accounts Manager added: 'I think this distinction might be seen in micro enterprises. For example, selling small goods, or work in people's homes. If they don't speak Kinyarwanda but speak English, other, different opportunities are opened. We don't keep statistics on numbers of students who are asylum seekers or refugees.'²⁰⁴
- 10.3.20 The Regional Manager commented: 'There are other languages that are useful business languages such as Swahili and French. Refugees are very resourceful and will learn languages if they need to.'²⁰⁵
- 10.3.21 HO officials asked how easy it is to set up a business and the Regional Manager explained: 'Very easy. It can take less than 24 hrs to get a permit. We also provide information on the steps to take to register the business and

²⁰⁰ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A10, Meeting between HO and Alight, 23 March 2022

²⁰¹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

²⁰² [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A5, Meeting between HO and Harambee, 19 January 2022

²⁰³ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A5, Meeting between HO and Harambee, 19 January 2022

²⁰⁴ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A5, Meeting between HO and Harambee, 19 January 2022

²⁰⁵ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A5, Meeting between HO and Harambee, 19 January 2022

the tax to be paid etc. Sometimes the youth we work with just need the information.’²⁰⁶

10.3.22 A senior official from MINAFFET added: ‘There is no restriction [on refugees], they have to follow the same regulations as RWA citizens. There is no discrimination based on nationality, status etc. For refugees there may be support for business (as do RWA citizens). Inkomoko are supporting small businesses and refugee businesses. They work with the host community and employ refugees etc.’²⁰⁷

10.3.23 In a meeting between the HO and LAF on 21 March 2022, a LAF representative explained:

‘By Law, asylum seekers cannot work whilst waiting for their initial decision or an appeal outcome. It is not possible to work without ID, nor open a Bank account, but some people might work in the informal sector. But most asylum seekers have ‘connections’ and are supported by relatives or friends.

‘Asylum seekers are not treated fairly when working in the informal sector.

‘Refugees are allowed to work but are exploited and not paid the same and find it very hard to find employment. They are often denied Contracts.’²⁰⁸

10.3.24 In a meeting between HO and the Government of Rwanda on 22 March 2022, a government official explained how an asylum seeker obtains the right to work: ‘An asylum seeker can apply for jobseeker visa if they have a passport and they have a job offer. Asylum seeker cannot apply for a visa unless they have police clearance [from country of origin]. Once granted refugee status, they can work. Otherwise asylum seeker cannot work.’²⁰⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

10.4 Freedom of movement within the country

10.4.1 UNHCR and the Government of Rwanda stated camp-based refugees need to apply for permission to leave the camp. The permissions are valid for a maximum of three months. Refugees who leave the camp without a valid permission are at risk of arrest. Any refugee who is absent for 3 months without authorisation is inactivated in the refugee database^{210 211 212}.

10.4.2 During a meeting between HO and UNHCR on 21 March 2022, the representative explained: ‘...camp-based refugees have to obtain travel authorisation to leave a camp, and they normally need to return within 3 months. However, they can re-apply as many times as they like. Some people leave on a daily basis to work with permission.’²¹³

²⁰⁶ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A5, Meeting between HO and Harambee, 19 January 2022

²⁰⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A5, Meeting between HO and Harambee, 19 January 2022

²⁰⁸ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A7, Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

²⁰⁹ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Government of Rwanda, 22 March 2022

²¹⁰ UNHCR, ‘[Submission to OCHCR](#)’ (page 6), July 2020

²¹¹ Government of Rwanda, ‘[Official Gazette 26 of 30/06/2014](#)’ (Article 25, page 90), 30 June 2014

²¹² Government of Rwanda, ‘[Ministerial Instructions No. 02/2016](#)’ (Article 17, page 16), 1 June 2016

²¹³ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A8, Meeting between HO and UNHCR, 21 March 2022

- 10.4.3 UNHCR considered that urban refugees enjoyed more freedom of movement than camp-based refugees²¹⁴.
- 10.4.4 UNHCR reported in May 2021: 'In practice, refugees in Rwanda can pursue self-employment activities similarly to nationals. Many refugees, in urban and camps, were able to establish their own businesses, employ other refugees or Rwandans, pay taxes, and travel in the region for business purposes.'²¹⁵
- 10.4.5 During the meeting with the Rwandan Government on 18 January 2022, a senior official from MINEMA explained: 'Refugees and asylum seekers have freedom of movement, there are no restrictions. If in a camp, management at the camp should be informed that you will be out of the camp but there is no restriction.'²¹⁶
- 10.4.6 Based upon information gathered during a meeting between the HO and LAF on 21 March 2022:
- 'There are no restrictions on movement in urban areas.
- 'There are 6 Refugee camps and people are allowed to move about, but this may not be straightforward. Permission to leave on a daily basis (for example to work), must be obtained from the Camp Manager.
- 'Urban refugees need a document. They are entitled to IDs from 2 years ago. The same ID allows them to work and move freely.'²¹⁷
- See also the [note on human rights](#), section on Freedom of movement for women.

[Back to Contents](#)

10.5 Freedom to travel out of, and return to, the country

- 10.5.1 A refugee who returns to their country of origin loses his/her refugee status and will be required to submit a new asylum claim to the authorities if he/she returns to Rwanda²¹⁸.
- 10.5.2 Refugees can apply for a refugee travel document which entitles the holder to travel in all countries except for his/her country of nationality. The travel document is valid for 5 years²¹⁹.
- 10.5.3 In order to obtain a refugee travel document, refugees are required to submit an application form and letter, a recommendation from the camp manager, proof of refugee registration and refugee ID card, photograph and payment of RWF 20,000 [GBP £14]²²⁰.
- 10.5.4 In 2018, the Rwandan Government launched Machine Readable Refugee Travel Documents (MRTDs) with the aim of helping refugees, 'to carry on productive activities across the borders such as business, study, medical treatment or family reunification'. About 3,277 MRTDs had been issued as of

²¹⁴ UNHCR, '[Rwanda country refugee response plan Jan to Dec 2021](#)' (page 10), 19 April 2021

²¹⁵ MINEMA and UNHCR, '[joint strategy ...2021 to 2024](#)' (page 4), May 2021

²¹⁶ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

²¹⁷ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A7, Meeting between HO and LAF, 21 March 2022

²¹⁸ Government of Rwanda, '[Ministerial Instructions No. 02/2016](#)' (Article 4, page 6), 1 June 2016

²¹⁹ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette no.Special of 30/05/2019](#)' (Article 34), 30 May 2019

²²⁰ DGIE, '[Requirements for refugee travel document application](#)', no date

November 2019. The MRTD is intended to increase refugees' mobility and self-reliance^{221 222}.

[Back to Contents](#)

10.6 Citizenship

- 10.6.1 Refugees are able to naturalize, in accordance with Rwandan law²²³.
- 10.6.2 During the meeting between the Rwandan Government and HO officials on 18 January 2022 the Colonel and Special Advisor on immigration explained: 'Refugees after a certain time they can apply for naturalisation.'²²⁴
- 10.6.3 A second senior government official explained: 'There are a set of pathways and options, for example, time spent in country or through marriage.'²²⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 11 updated: 24 March 2022

11. Rwandan asylum seekers in the UK and other countries

11.1 Rwandan asylum seekers and refugees worldwide

- 11.1.1 Rwandan citizens who were refugees or asylum seekers in other countries for the period 2016 to 2020 is available via UNHCR's [Refugee data finder](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

11.2 Rwandan asylum seekers in the UK

- 11.2.1 Statistics on Rwandan nationals who had made asylum claims in the UK is available at [Outcome analysis of asylum applications](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

²²¹ UNHCR, '[Submission to OCHCR](#)' (page 6), July 2020

²²² UNHCR, '[GoR and UNHCR launch ...](#)', 10 Oct 2018

²²³ Government of Rwanda, '[Official Gazette 26 of 30/06/2014](#)' (Article 19, page 88), 30 June 2014

²²⁴ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

²²⁵ [Notes of interviews](#), Annex A1, Meeting between HO and Govt of Rwanda, 18 January 2022

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[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)