

# RWANDA 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rwanda is a constitutional republic dominated by a strong presidency. The ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front party leads a governing coalition that includes four smaller parties. In 2017 voters elected President Paul Kagame to a third seven-year term with a reported 99 percent of the vote. One independent candidate and one candidate from an opposition political party participated in the presidential election, but authorities disqualified three other candidates. In the 2018 elections for parliament's lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, candidates from the Rwandan Patriotic Front coalition and two other parties supporting Rwandan Patriotic Front policies won all but four of the open seats. For the first time, independent parties won seats in the chamber, with the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda and the Social Party Imberakuri winning two seats each. In both the 2017 and 2018 elections, international monitors reported numerous flaws, including irregularities in the vote tabulation process. In 2019, 12 new senators were elected to the 26-member Senate via indirect elections. Faculty at public and private universities elected two other senators. President Kagame appointed another four senators, and the National Consultative Forum for Political Organizations designated two, in accordance with the constitution. In September 2020 the National Consultative Forum for Political Organizations designated two new senators, including a member of the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda.

The Rwanda National Police, under the Ministry of Justice, is responsible for internal security. The Rwanda Defense Force, under the Ministry of Defense, also works on internal security and intelligence matters alongside the Rwanda National Police. The Rwanda Investigation Bureau is responsible for many of the investigative functions formerly performed by the Rwanda National Police, including counterterrorism investigations, investigation of economic and financial crimes, and judicial police functions. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over state security forces. There were credible reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary

killings by the government; forced disappearance by the government; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary detention; political prisoners or detainees; politically motivated reprisals against individuals located outside the country, including killings, kidnappings, and violence; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; and serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations.

The government took some steps to prosecute or punish officials who committed abuses and acts of corruption, including within the security services, but impunity involving civilian officials and some members of the state security forces was a problem.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person**

### **a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings**

There were reports the government committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. The Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) is responsible for conducting investigations into such killings. Under the Ministry of Justice, the National Public Prosecution Authority (NPPA) is responsible for prosecuting abuse cases involving police, while the Rwanda National Police (RNP) Inspectorate of Services investigates cases of police misconduct.

There were reports police killed several persons attempting to resist arrest or escape police custody. In April press reported officers killed five individuals in Kirehe District attempting to escape custody. Press also reported police killed a young man in Rwamagana District in August who reportedly resisted arrest when apprehended for not complying with COVID-19 curfews. There were no public

reports of investigations into these killings.

The government did not make public the details of its autopsy and investigation into the death of Kizito Mihigo, a popular gospel singer and genocide survivor. Mihigo was found dead in police custody in February 2020 while imprisoned on charges of illegally attempting to cross the border, attempting to join terrorist groups, and corruption. Mihigo was well known for authoring a song about the suffering of both Tutsis and Hutus during the genocide, which some officials believed violated genocide denial and divisionism statutes. Many human rights defenders called on the government to conduct an independent investigation, which had not taken place as of November.

The government did not follow through on conducting full, timely, and transparent investigations of killings of political opponents from previous years, such as the 2019 killing of Anselme Mutuyimana, a member of the unregistered United Democratic Forces-Inkingi (FDU-Inkingi) opposition party.

## **b. Disappearance**

There were several reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities. Rwandan poet Innocent Bahati disappeared on February 7, with no reports of his welfare or whereabouts as of December. Bahati was known for providing incisive social commentary through his poetry, including on topics considered sensitive. Independent groups called on the government to investigate his disappearance, but as of November the government had not disclosed any information regarding the case.

The government failed to complete investigations or take measures to ensure accountability for disappearances of political opponents that occurred in previous years, such as those of Venant Abayisenga, Eugene Ndereyimana, and Boniface Twagirimana (see also section 1.e., Politically Motivated Reprisal against Individuals Located Outside the Country, Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, and Coercion, case of Noel Zihabamwe).

There were reports Rwanda Defense Force (RDF) military intelligence personnel were responsible for disappearances, illegal detention, and torture. Observers reported RDF intelligence personnel took suspected political opponents to

unofficial detention centers where they were subject to beatings and other cruel and degrading treatment with the purpose of extracting intelligence information.

Domestic organizations cited a lack of independence and capacity for government officials to investigate security sector abuses effectively, including reported enforced disappearances.

### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

The constitution and law prohibit such practices, but there were reports of abuse of detainees by police, military, and National Intelligence and Security Services officials. The law prescribes 20 to 25 years' imprisonment for any person convicted of torture and lifetime imprisonment for public officials that commit torture in the course of their official duties. There were no known cases where authorities applied this statute throughout the year.

Authorities reportedly sometimes subjected prisoners to torture. Paul Rusesabagina, a prominent political opposition figure best known for serving as the inspiration for the film *Hotel Rwanda*, claimed authorities bound, blindfolded, and beat him during the first four days of his detention after his arrival in the country in August 2020. The High Court Chamber for International Crimes did not disclose any investigation into these claims when it convicted Rusesabagina of eight counts of terrorism-related crimes on September 20 and sentenced him to 25 years in prison. Aimable Karasira, a citizen journalist who was on trial for genocide denial and minimization and illicit enrichment, stated in August guards beat him in prison while he was awaiting trial. The court rejected Karasira's claims, arguing Karasira did not provide credible evidence, although it did not describe any steps it took to investigate the charges.

Human rights advocates continued to report instances of illegally detained individuals tortured in unofficial detention centers (see also section 1.b.). Advocates including Human Rights Watch (HRW) claimed military, police, and intelligence personnel employed torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment to obtain information and forced confessions, which in some cases resulted in criminal convictions. There were no reports of any judges

ordering an investigation into such allegations or dismissing evidence obtained under torture, and there were no reported prosecutions of state security forces personnel for torture.

There were many reports of District Administration Security Support Organ (DASSO) personnel, which report to the Ministry of Local Government, beating citizens while enforcing the law and local administrative orders, particularly government COVID-19 prevention measures (for example, curfews and requirements to wear a face covering in public). In September the minister of local government announced all DASSO personnel should receive human rights training to address these concerns, but as of November there were no reports authorities had conducted such training.

The government took some steps to prosecute or punish security services who committed abuses, but impunity was a problem, particularly in cases where government opponents were the apparent victims of abuses.

### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

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

**Physical Conditions:** Physical conditions in some prisons operated by the Rwanda Correctional Service (RCS) approached international standards in some respects, but there were also reports of overcrowding and food shortages in some facilities. Citing 2020 data, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) World Prison Brief reported the country held 76,099 detainees in facilities with a capacity of 61,320 persons.

Authorities held men and women separately in similar conditions, and authorities generally separated pretrial detainees from convicted prisoners, although there were numerous exceptions due to the large number of detainees awaiting trial. The law does not allow children older than age three to remain with their incarcerated mothers (see also section 6, Persons with Disabilities).

Convicted persons and individuals in pretrial detention in RCS prisons were fed once per day, and family members were allowed to deposit funds for convicts and detainees to purchase additional food at prison canteens, but human rights advocates reported lack of food continued to be a problem. Food insecurity among the prison population worsened due to COVID-19 restrictions, which prohibited family members from purchasing and delivering food rations. The government did not keep statistics on deaths in custody beyond deaths of prisoners due to illness (who received medical treatment in custody); the government vaccinated vulnerable prisoners against COVID-19.

Conditions were generally harsh and life threatening in unofficial or intelligence service-related detention centers. Reports from previous years indicated individuals detained at such centers suffered from limited access to food, water, and health care.

Conditions were often harsh and life threatening at National Rehabilitation Service-operated district transit centers holding street children, street vendors, suspected drug abusers, persons engaged in commercial sex, homeless persons, and suspected petty criminals. Overcrowding was common in police stations and district transit centers, and human rights advocates reported in previous years children were at times subject to physical abuse and beatings in transit centers. Advocates reported local law enforcement officials regularly cleared the streets of homeless and other needy individuals and subjected them to abusive treatment and conditions in transit centers. These actions in some cases coincided with major international events or conferences taking place in the country. Observers raised concerns regarding poor hygiene and sanitation in transit centers, particularly in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Administration:** The RCS investigated reported abuses by corrections officers, and the same hierarchical structure existed in police and security forces for investigating abuses; there was no independent institution charged with investigating abuses or punishing perpetrators. Authorities generally allowed family members prompt access to detained relatives, unless the individuals were held on state security charges, or in unofficial or intelligence service-related detention facilities. During some periods of the COVID-19 pandemic, prison officials restricted visitor access. Some prisoners in politically sensitive cases also

reported the government did not allow them to have confidential consultations with their lawyers.

**Independent Monitoring:** The government restricted most monitoring of prison conditions by independent nongovernmental observers. The government no longer permitted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to monitor prison conditions according to the ICRC's standards. This caused the ICRC to discontinue its prison-monitoring activities in the country. In some cases, the government restricted access to specific prisoners and delayed consular notification of the arrest of some foreign nationals. The government permitted monitoring of prison conditions and trials of individuals whom the UN International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) had transferred to the country's jurisdiction for trials related to the 1994 genocide, per agreement with the IRMCT. Journalists could access prisons with a valid press card but required permission from the RCS commissioner to take photographs or interview prisoners or guards.

#### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, but state security forces arrested and detained persons arbitrarily and without due process. The law provides for the right of persons to challenge in court the lawfulness of their arrest or detention; however, few tried, and there were no reports of any detainees succeeding in obtaining prompt release or compensation for unlawful detention.

#### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

The law requires authorities to investigate and obtain a warrant before arresting a suspect. Arrest warrants must be served during daylight hours (between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.), but there were reports of police conducting searches and arrests outside of these hours. The RNP institutionalized community relations training that included appropriate use of force and respect for human rights, although arbitrary arrests and beatings remained problems. Police may detain suspects for up to 72 hours without an arrest warrant. Prosecutors must submit formal charges within five days of arrest. Police may detain minors a maximum of 15 days in pretrial detention but only for crimes that carry a penalty for conviction of five years' or more imprisonment. Police and prosecutors have previously disregarded these

provisions and held individuals, sometimes for months and often without charge, particularly in security-related cases. State security forces held some suspects incommunicado or under house arrest.

The law permits investigative detention if authorities believe public safety is threatened or the accused might flee, and judges interpreted these provisions broadly. A judge must review such a detention every 30 days. By law it may not extend beyond one year; however, the RCS sometimes held suspects at the behest of state prosecutors indefinitely after the first authorization of investigative detention and did not always seek reauthorization every 30 days.

After prosecutors formally file a charge, detention may be indefinite unless bail is granted. Bail exists only for crimes for which the maximum sentence if convicted is five years' imprisonment or less, but authorities may release a suspect pending trial if satisfied the person would not flee or become a threat to public safety and order. Detainees were generally allowed access to attorneys of their choice, provided that the attorneys were registered with the Rwanda Bar Association (RBA), were members of another international bar association that had a reciprocal agreement with the RBA, or were from a foreign jurisdiction included in a regional integration agreement to which the country was a party. The government at times violated the right to habeas corpus.

The law allows judges to impose detention of equivalent duration and fines on state security forces and other government officials who unlawfully detained individuals, but there were no reports judges exercised this authority.

**Arbitrary Arrest:** The government continued to use arbitrary arrests (or the threat of arbitrary arrest) as a tool to discourage government critics, independent voices, and political opposition members. In March independent journalist Dieudonne Niyonsenga (also known as Hassan Cyuma) was acquitted of breaking a COVID-19 curfew and other charges. The court found prosecutors produced no credible evidence substantiating the charges. Prosecutors immediately announced their intent to appeal, and in November the court found him guilty of four charges, sentencing him to seven years in prison. Several days later, prosecutors once again appealed the court's judgment after determining one of the four charges they had brought against Niyonsenga was based on a law that had been repealed in 2019;



the court had failed to note this irregularity when it convicted Niyonsenga of all four charges. As of November, Niyonsenga remained in detention awaiting the court's action. Prior to his arrest in April 2020, Niyonsenga reported allegations that RDF soldiers had committed rapes during COVID-19 lockdown enforcement operations and other topics considered sensitive in the country.

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

Unregistered opposition political parties reported authorities detained their officials and supporters, including for lengthy periods. Christopher Kayumba, the leader of the Rwandese Platform for Democracy (RPD), was arrested on September 9 on charges of assault and rape, which he denied. The RPD released a letter Kayumba wrote from prison in which he indicated government officials previously warned him to cease his political activities or be “destroyed” criminally.

Although there is no requirement for individuals to carry an identification document (ID), police and the DASSO regularly detained street children, vendors, suspected petty criminals, and beggars without IDs and sometimes charged them with illegal street vending or vagrancy. Authorities released adults who could produce an ID and transported street children to their home districts, to shelters, or for processing into vocational and educational programs. As in previous years, authorities held detainees without charge at district transit centers for weeks or months at a time before either transferring them to a National Rehabilitation Service (NRS) rehabilitation center without judicial review or forcibly returning them to their home areas. Detainees held at district transit centers or NRS rehabilitation centers could contest their detentions before the centers' authorities but did not have the right to appear before a judge. Advocates raised concerns that detainees at transit centers were not adequately screened for human trafficking indicators.

**Pretrial Detention:** Lengthy pretrial detention was a serious problem, and authorities often detained prisoners for months without arraignment, in large part due to administrative delays caused by case backlogs. The NGO World Prison

Brief reported 2020 data indicating 9.7 percent of prisoners were pretrial detainees. The law permits detention of genocide and terrorism suspects until trial. The law provides pretrial detention, illegal detention, and administrative sanctions be fully deducted from sentences imposed. There were few reports of individuals being subjected to pretrial detention for periods exceeding the maximum sentence for the alleged offense. The law does not provide for compensation to persons who are acquitted.

### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence. Authorities generally respected court orders. Domestic and international observers noted outcomes in high-profile genocide, security, and politically sensitive cases appeared predetermined.

#### **Trial Procedures**

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. The law provides for a presumption of innocence and requires defendants be informed promptly and in detail of the charges in a language they comprehend. In the case of Paul Rusesabagina, an American Bar Association Center for Human Rights report in June alleged that public comments by President Kagame characterizing Rusesabagina as guilty were “a severe violation of the presumption of innocence.”

Defendants have the right to a trial without undue delay. Human rights advocates and government officials noted shortages of judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys as well as resource limitations within the criminal justice system resulted in delays for many defendants, particularly those awaiting pro bono government-provided legal aid.

By law detainees are allowed access to lawyers, but the expense and scarcity of lawyers limited access to legal representation. Some lawyers were reluctant to work on politically sensitive cases, fearing harassment and threats by government officials, including monitoring of their communications.

Defendants have the right to communicate with an attorney of their choice,

provided the attorney is registered with the RBA. Many defendants could not afford private counsel. The law provides for legal representation of minors. The RBA and 36 other member organizations of the Legal Aid Forum provided legal assistance to some indigent defendants but lacked the resources to provide defense counsel to all in need.

The law requires that defendants have adequate time and facilities to prepare their defense, and judges routinely granted requests to extend preparation time. In the case of Paul Rusesabagina, the court denied a request to grant several additional months for the defense to prepare, arguing adequate time had already been provided. Independent observers contended the volume of case material and Rusesabagina's initial lack of access to attorneys of his choosing negatively impacted his ability to defend himself at trial. He also reportedly lacked access to privileged and confidential documents, hampering his ability to prepare a defense with his lawyers. In February the minister of justice admitted to media that prison officials intercepted and read documents from Rusesabagina's lawyers before giving them to Rusesabagina. Citing these and other flaws, the American Bar Association concluded in June that Rusesabagina's fair trial guarantees were compromised such as to call into question any verdict convicting him.

The law provides for a right to free interpretation, although interpreters were more difficult to access in rural areas. Defendants have the right to be present at trial, confront witnesses against them, and present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. By law defendants may not be compelled to testify or confess guilt. Judges generally respected these rights during trial. The law provides for the right to appeal, and authorities respected this provision, although lack of access to computers necessary to file such appeals impeded some defendants' ability to exercise that right.

State security forces continued to coerce suspects into confessing guilt in security-related cases. Judges tended to accept confessions allegedly obtained through torture and failed to order investigations when defendants alleged torture during their trial.

The judiciary sometimes held security-related, terrorism, and high-profile political trials in closed chambers. Some defense attorneys in these cases reported

irregularities and complained judges tended to disregard the rights of the accused when hearings were not held in public. In contrast, hearings in the high-profile trial of Rusesabagina and his 20 codefendants were held in public and streamed online.

The RDF routinely tried military offenders, as well as civilians who previously served in the RDF, before military tribunals that handed down penalties of fines, imprisonment, or both for those convicted. Military courts provided defendants with similar rights as civilian courts, including the right of appeal. Defendants often appeared before military tribunals without legal counsel due to the cost of hiring private attorneys and the unwillingness of most attorneys to defend individuals accused of crimes against state security. The law stipulates military courts may try civilian accomplices of soldiers accused of crimes.

In 2012 the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda transferred its remaining genocide cases to the IRMCT. The IRMCT continued to pursue the six remaining genocide fugitives subject to tribunal indictments. Of these cases, five were expected to be transferred to the country's jurisdiction and observed by the IRMCT if apprehended; the remaining case would be tried by the IRMCT.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were reports local officials and state security forces detained and imprisoned some individuals who disagreed publicly with government decisions or policies. Some opposition leaders and government critics faced indictment under broadly applied charges of genocide incitement, genocide denial, inciting insurrection or rebellion, or attempting to overthrow the government. Others faced apparently unrelated criminal charges. Political prisoners were generally afforded the same protections, including visitation rights, access to lawyers and doctors, and access to family members, as other detainees. The government did not generally give human rights or humanitarian organizations access to specific political prisoners; however, authorities provided access for consular officials to see Paul Rusesabagina.

Occasionally authorities held politically sensitive detainees in individual cells. International and domestic human rights groups reported the government held a

small number of political prisoners in custody, including Christopher Kayumba (see section 3, Political Parties and Political Participation), Deo Mushayidi, Theoneste Niyitegeka, and nine individuals affiliated with unregistered political opposition party DALFA-Umurinzi who were arrested in October and were on trial during the year. Six FDU-Inkingi party leaders also remained in prison after being arrested in 2017 and convicted in 2020 on various charges that they alleged were a result of their political activities.

### **Politically Motivated Reprisal against Individuals Located Outside the Country**

There were numerous reports the government attempted to pursue political opponents abroad.

**Extraterritorial Killing, Kidnapping, Forced Returns, or Other Violence or Threats of Violence:** In February RNC official Seif Bamporiki was killed in Cape Town, South Africa. The RNC is an opposition group reported to have carried out armed attacks against Rwanda, and there were reports of Rwandan involvement in the killings of other RNC officials in South Africa. RNC officials stated the circumstances of Bamporiki's death were unusual and suggested the Rwandan government was behind his killing. South African authorities initially suggested the case was a possible murder-robbery but had not publicized a final finding as of November.

In May Rwandan journalist, opposition figure, and asylum seeker Cassien Ntamuhanga went missing in Mozambique. In 2015 Ntamuhanga was arrested in Rwanda for conspiring against the government, conspiring against the president, and conspiracy to commit murder. He escaped from prison in 2017 and fled to Mozambique. Authorities there denied knowledge of his detention, but advocates reported Ntamuhanga was taken into custody by persons dressed as Mozambican police with the assistance of an individual who appeared to be speaking with Ntamuhanga in Kinyarwanda. Advocates expressed concern Ntamuhanga was the victim of a politically motivated enforced disappearance. The governments of Rwanda and Mozambique both denied any knowledge of Ntamuhanga's welfare and whereabouts.

In September attackers killed Rwandan diaspora leader and refugee Revocat Karemangingo in Mozambique. The attackers reportedly used two vehicles to crash into the front and back of Karemangingo's car and then shot him at least six times. Mozambican authorities were investigating the case as of November. Some members of the diaspora accused the Rwandan government of being involved in the killing of Karemangingo, who reportedly survived an attempt on his life in 2016 and previously served in the Rwandan Armed Forces, which presided over Rwanda's 1994 genocide.

The government did not cooperate with the government of South Africa to act on warrants for the arrest of two Rwandans accused of murdering Rwandan opposition figure and dissident Patrick Karegeya at a hotel in Johannesburg in 2014. South African officials stated the killing was "directly linked to the involvement of the Rwandan government."

**Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, and Coercion:** Advocates reported that Rwandans living overseas experienced digital threats, spyware attacks, family intimidation and harassment, physical intimidation, and assault. Advocates stated the government applied these measures as needed to put pressure on individuals who threatened government interests.

In June Noel Zihabamwe, an Australian citizen who first arrived on a humanitarian visa in 2006 from Rwanda, filed a complaint with the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances concerning the disappearance of his two brothers in Rwanda in 2019. He alleged a Rwandan official approached him in 2016 and requested he inform on the activities of the Rwandan diaspora in Australia. Zihabamwe said he refused to do so and later spoke to the press in 2019 concerning the experience. One month later, his two brothers disappeared, Zihabamwe said. The government denied knowledge of their whereabouts.

In July Amnesty International and Forbidden Stories reported Rwandan authorities used spyware produced by the NSO Group to target activists, journalists, and politicians. The groups reported more than 3,500 telephone numbers that were potential targets of the software linked to Rwanda appeared on the leaked Pegasus list. In a statement to the *Washington Post*, the government denied that it used Pegasus software and said it did not possess such a "technical capability in any

form.” Amnesty alleged that the targets of Rwandan surveillance included critics of the country living abroad. In September Belgian media reported that a Belgian journalist and his wife, a Rwandan refugee, were targeted by spyware. The report cited an assessment by Belgian authorities that the surveillance was carried out by the Rwandan government.

**Efforts to Control Mobility:** The government reportedly engaged in efforts to restrict the movement of citizens abroad for politically motivated purposes. In 2019 an Australian citizen of Rwandan descent had his Australian passport confiscated by authorities during travels to the country to visit his dying mother, according to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. As of October 2020, the individual reportedly remained under monitoring and unable to leave the country. In 2012 the government invalidated the passports of seven Rwandan exiles and opposition members living in South Africa without officially notifying them or giving them an opportunity to appeal the decision. The individuals successfully sued the government before the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and the court ordered the restoration of their passports in 2019.

### **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

Mechanisms exist for citizens to file lawsuits in civil matters, including for abuses of human rights. The judiciary was generally independent and impartial in civil matters, with some exceptions involving state interests. The Office of the Ombudsman processed claims of judicial wrongdoing on an administrative basis. Individuals may submit cases to the East African Court of Justice and the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights, although these courts lacked mechanisms to enforce their judgments in Rwanda.

### **Property Seizure and Restitution**

Reports of expropriation of land for the construction of roads, government buildings, and other infrastructure projects were common, and complainants frequently cited government failure to provide adequate and timely compensation. The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) investigated some of these cases and advocated on citizens’ behalf with relevant local and national authorities but was unable to effect restitution in most of the cases.

The government forcibly evicted individuals from dwellings across the country (primarily in Kigali) deemed to be in swamp land or other zones at high risk of flooding or landslides. Some of those who were evicted said the government refused to offer them compensation on the basis dwellings should never have been constructed in those locations. Citizens who joined litigation against the government (for example, persons who were evicted from the Kangondo II neighborhood of Nyarutarama in Kigali in 2018) in some cases reported threats and harassment to persuade them to drop their cases. Some of these cases remained pending as of November.

#### **f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

Although the constitution and law prohibit such actions, the government continued to monitor homes, movements, telephone calls, email, and personal and institutional communications. Government informants continued to work within internet and telephone companies, international and local NGOs, religious organizations, media, and other social institutions. In July Amnesty International and Forbidden Stories reported the government contracted with the NSO Group to use sophisticated telephone hacking tools to monitor individuals of interest within the country and abroad.

The law requires police to obtain authorization from a state prosecutor prior to entering and searching citizens' homes. According to human rights organizations, state security forces at times entered homes without obtaining the required authorization or did so outside the legal hours for conducting searches and arrests.

The government blocked some websites, including media outlets, that included content considered contrary to government positions.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media**

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for members of the



press and other media “in conditions prescribed by the law,” but the government severely restricted this right. Journalists reported government officials questioned, threatened, and at times arrested journalists who expressed views deemed critical of the government on sensitive topics. Government failure to investigate or prosecute attacks on human rights defenders and journalists led to de facto restrictions on freedom of expression.

The Rwanda Media Commission (RMC), a self-regulatory body, sometimes intervened on journalists’ behalf but was generally viewed as biased towards the government. Journalists reported most positions on the RMC board were filled in close consultation with the government and called into question the board’s independence. Journalists engaged in self-censorship to avoid potential problems or retaliatory responses from the government.

**Freedom of Expression:** There were no official restrictions on individuals’ right to criticize the government publicly or privately on policy implementation and other topics, but broad interpretation of provisions in the law had a chilling effect on such criticism. The government generally did not tolerate criticism of the presidency and government policy on security, human rights, and other matters deemed sensitive.

Laws prohibiting divisionism, genocide ideology, and genocide denial were broadly applied and discouraged citizens, residents, and visitors to the country from expressing viewpoints that could be construed as promoting societal divisions.

In September the government convicted Yvonne Idamange of six counts, including inciting an insurrection, denigrating genocide commemorations, and publication of rumors. In February Idamange posted a series of videos on YouTube, originally containing complaints regarding the government’s COVID-19 response. The minister of culture reportedly visited Idamange to warn her to stop publicly criticizing the government, to which she responded with escalating frustration in several videos where she proceeded to accuse the government of misusing genocide memorials for its own interests without regard for victims. She further claimed that the president was “a dead body” and called on the RDF to take charge of the government. She was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

The law prohibits making use of speech, writing, or any other act that divides the populace or may set them against each other or cause civil unrest because of discrimination. Conviction of “instigating divisions” is punishable by five to seven years’ imprisonment and a substantial monetary fine. Authorities applied the laws broadly, including to silence political dissent and to shut down investigative journalism. The law also prohibits spreading “false information or harmful propaganda with intent to cause public disaffection against the government,” for which conviction is punishable by seven to 10 years’ imprisonment. The government generally investigated individuals accused of threatening or harming genocide survivors and witnesses or of espousing genocide ideology.

A revised law enacted in 2018 incorporates international definitions for genocide and outlines the scope of what constitutes “genocide ideology” and related offenses. Specifically, the law provides any person convicted of denying, minimizing, or justifying the 1994 genocide is liable to a prison term of five to seven years and a substantial monetary fine. Authorities applied the statute broadly, and there were numerous reports of its use to silence persons critical of government policy.

The RIB and RNP reported opening 83 new investigations related to genocide ideology statutes as of May, with 66 resulting in arrests as of September 16.

**Freedom of Expression for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media:** Vendors sold newspapers published in English, French, and Kinyarwanda. According to the RMC, there were 36 print media outlets registered with the government, although many of these did not publish regularly. Sporadically published independent newspapers maintained positions in support of, or critical of, the government, but a lack of advertisement revenue and funds remained serious hurdles to independently continuing operations. Most independent newspapers opted not to publish print editions and released their stories online instead. There were 35 radio stations (six government-owned community radio stations and 29 independent radio stations) and more than 13 television stations, according to the RMC. Independent media reported a difficult operating environment and highlighted the reluctance of the business community to advertise on radio stations that might be critical of the government.

The law regulating media provides journalists the freedom to investigate, express opinions, and “seek, receive, give, and broadcast information and ideas through any media.” The law explicitly prohibits censorship of information, but censorship occurred. The laws restrict these freedoms if journalists “jeopardize the general public order and good morals, an individual’s right to honor and reputation in the public eye and to the right to inviolability of a person’s private life and family.” Observers stated the government used ambiguities in these statutes to threaten journalists and suppress reporting deemed critical of the government. By law authorities may seize journalists’ material and information if a “media offense” occurs, but only under a court order. Courts may compel journalists to reveal confidential sources in the event of an investigation or criminal proceeding. Persons wanting to start a media outlet must apply with the “competent public organ.” All media rights and prohibitions apply to persons writing for websites. Independent YouTube journalists reported the government used media laws and registration requirements to criminalize citizen reporting and threatened individuals producing content deemed sensitive or critical of the government. The RMC maintained unaccredited individuals conducting interviews and posting them on personal YouTube channels did not qualify as journalists.

**Violence and Harassment:** Media professionals reported the government continued to use threats of arrests and physical violence to silence media outlets and journalists. Several journalists who fled in prior years remained outside the country. Failure to investigate or prosecute threats against journalists resulted in self-censorship.

In March Human Rights Watch reported on the cases of multiple independent YouTube journalists whom it believed were arrested and tried for making comments critical of the government. On October 13, police arrested Theoneste Nsengimana, the owner of Umubavu TV, a YouTube channel with more than 16 million views, for “spreading rumors intended to mobilize the public against the government.” Nsengimana’s YouTube channel presented content aligned with the unregistered opposition party DALFA Umurinzi.

**Censorship or Content Restrictions:** The law allows the government to restrict access to some government documents and information, including information on individual privacy and information or statements deemed to constitute defamation.

Observers reported harassment, suspicious disappearances, and the fear of prosecution pushed many journalists to engage in self-censorship. Reporters Without Borders continued to report that censorship remained ubiquitous, and self-censorship was widely used to avoid running afoul of the regime. Reporters Without Borders historically reported that foreign journalists were often unable to obtain the visas and accreditation needed to report in Rwanda, although foreign journalists traveled to the country without incident to cover prominent stories, including the trial of Paul Rusesabagina.

Radio stations broadcasted some criticism of government policies, including on popular citizen call-in shows; however, criticism tended to focus on provincial leaders and local implementation of policies rather than on the president or ruling party leadership. Some radio stations, including Radio 1, Radio Isango Star, Radio 10, and Radio Salus, had regular call-in shows that featured discussion of government programs or policies. For example, Radio Flash and Radio Isango Star hosted several debates in which participants criticized government policies on human rights and social topics.

**Libel/Slander Laws:** In 2019 parliament decriminalized the use of words, gestures, writings, or cartoons to humiliate members of parliament, members of the cabinet, security officers, or any other public servant, not including the president. Parliament later amended the law to make the provision apply to the president as well. Defamation of foreign and international officials and dignitaries remains illegal under the law, with sentences if convicted of three to five years' imprisonment. The law does not contain provisions criminalizing public defamation and public insult in general.

**National Security:** Under media laws, journalists must refrain from reporting items that violate “confidentiality in the national security and national integrity” and “confidentiality of judicial proceedings, parliamentary sessions, and cabinet deliberations in camera.” Authorities used these laws to intimidate critics of the government and journalists covering politically sensitive topics and matters under government investigation. After arresting Theoneste Nsengimana in October, the RIB issued a public statement urging citizens to be wary of social media commentators seeking to undermine national security and the government.

## **Internet Freedom**

The government restricted and censored some online content, and there were credible reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority. The government cited genocide denial, divisionism, and incitement statutes in some cases while taking legal action against digital content creators, particularly YouTube users, whom it accused of promoting hatred and disrupting national unity.

The law includes the right of all citizens to “receive, disseminate, or send information through the internet,” including the right to start and maintain a website. All provisions of media law apply to web-based publications. The government continued to monitor email and internet chat rooms. Individuals and groups could engage in the peaceful expression of views online, including by email and social media, but were subject to monitoring. In July Amnesty International and Forbidden Stories reported the government used NSO Group tools to monitor the communications of some citizens both within the country and abroad (see section 1.e., Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, and Coercion).

According to a 2010 law relating to electronic messages, signatures, and transactions, intermediaries and service providers are not held liable for content transmitted through their networks. Nonetheless, service providers are required to remove content when handed a takedown notice, and there are no avenues for appeal.

Government-run social media accounts were used to debate and at times intimidate individuals who posted online comments considered critical of the government. Advocates reported the government often enlisted purportedly independent individuals as proxies to harass government critics online. In some cases these proxies threatened critics’ safety or called on the government to take law enforcement action against them.

The government blocked access within the country to several websites critical of its policies, including websites of the Rwandan diaspora.

## **Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

The government generally did not restrict academic freedom or cultural events, but students and professors practiced self-censorship to avoid accusations of engaging in divisionism or genocide ideology. Local think tanks deferred to government officials in selecting subjects for research, and authorities often prevented or delayed the publication of studies that cast the government in a negative light. The government required visiting academics to receive official permission to conduct research.

### **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

The government restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association. The government's failure to investigate or prosecute attacks on human rights defenders also de facto increased such restrictions.

#### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The constitution and law provide for freedom of peaceful assembly, but the government did not always respect this right. The law criminalizes demonstrating in a public place without prior authorization. Conviction of violating this provision is punishable by a prison sentence of eight days to six months or a substantial monetary fine. The penalties are increased for illegal demonstrations deemed to have threatened security, public order, or health.

#### **Freedom of Association**

While the constitution provides for freedom of association, the government limited the right. The law requires private organizations to register with the Rwanda Governance Board. The International Center for Not-For-Profit Law reported that civil society organizations collaborating with the government's political and development plans were able to act relatively freely while those that did not faced difficulties. Although the government generally granted licenses to private organizations, it impeded the formation of political parties, restricted political party activities, and delayed or denied registration to local and international NGOs seeking to work on human rights, media freedom, or political advocacy (see section 3). In addition, the government imposed burdensome NGO registration

and renewal requirements, especially on international NGOs, as well as time-consuming requirements for annual financial and activity reports (see section 5). The law requires faith-based organizations to obtain legal status from the government before beginning operations. It also calls for their legal representatives and preachers with supervisory responsibilities to hold academic degrees.

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

### **d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country**

The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. The government accepted former Rwandan combatants who returned from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Rwandan Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, with international support, placed adult former combatants in a three-month re-education program at the Mutobo Demobilization Center in Northern Province. After completion, each adult former combatant was enrolled automatically in the RDF Reserve Force and received a cash allowance. The Musanze Child Rehabilitation Center treated former child combatants.

**In-country Movement:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government enforced a curfew that prohibited in-country movement during certain hours of the day. As of November, movements were prohibited between midnight and 4 a.m.

**Foreign Travel:** The law allows a judge to deprive convicted persons of the right to travel abroad as a stand-alone punishment or as punishment following imprisonment. Government officials must obtain written permission from the Office of the Prime Minister or the president before traveling abroad for official or personal reasons. The government restricted the travel of existing and former security-sector officials. The government continued to advise citizens to avoid traveling to Uganda due to safety concerns. The government at times characterized travel warnings as advisories rather than prohibitions, but nevertheless there were

reports authorities prevented some citizens from traveling to Uganda and Burundi.

### **e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons**

Not applicable.

### **f. Protection of Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. As of October the government hosted approximately 49,000 Burundian refugees and asylum seekers and more than 77,000 Congolese refugees and asylum seekers.

UNHCR, under an agreement with the government and 14 host countries, recommended in 2015 the invocation of the “ceased circumstances” clause for Rwandans who fled the country between 1959 and 1998 with an agreement with African states hosting Rwandan refugees that refugees were to be assisted in returning to the country or obtaining legal permanent residency in host countries by the end of 2017. The cessation clause forms part of the 1951 Refugee Convention and may be applied when fundamental and durable changes in a refugee’s country of origin, such that they no longer have a well-founded fear of persecution, remove the need for international protection. Approximately 3.5 million citizens had returned since the late 1990’s. The government worked with UNHCR and other aid organizations to assist newly returned citizens, most of whom resettled in their districts of origin.

**Access to Asylum:** The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. The government continued to grant prima facie refugee status to Burundian refugees who had fled instability after Burundi’s 2015 presidential election. For other nationalities, significant delays existed in the application of individual refugee status determinations. An interagency committee that makes individual refugee status determinations in cases where claimants are not eligible for prima facie refugee status met infrequently.



**Freedom of Movement:** The law does not restrict freedom of movement of asylum seekers, but refugees continued to experience delays in the issuance of identity cards and convention travel documents. Authorities sometimes restricted access to the camps for external visitors and international staff due to COVID-19 prevention measures.

**Employment:** No laws restrict refugee employment, and the government continued to support employment programs and financial inclusion initiatives benefitting both refugees and their host communities. Many refugees, however, were unable to find local employment. A 2019 World Bank study found local authorities and businesses often were unaware of refugees' rights with respect to employment.

**Durable Solutions:** The government assisted the safe, voluntary return of refugees to their countries of origin and sought to improve local integration of refugees in protracted stays by permitting them to accept local employment and move freely in the country and by establishing markets to facilitate trade between refugees and local citizens. In 2019 the government, UNHCR, and the African Union signed a memorandum of understanding to set up a transit mechanism for evacuating refugees from Libya. The mechanism provides a framework for the country to temporarily host these individuals, who would eventually be resettled in third countries, helped to return to countries where asylum had previously been granted, helped to return to their home countries, or granted permission to remain in Rwanda. More than 300 refugees were in the country under the auspices of the transit mechanism as of July. In cooperation with UNHCR and the government of Burundi, the government continued to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of refugees to Burundi, reaching a total of approximately 28,000 persons by September 1.

**Temporary Protection:** The government provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees. For example, after the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan, the government allowed some Afghans (notably scholars and educators) to temporarily relocate to the country.

## **g. Stateless Persons**

UNHCR reported providing technical support to the government to finalize a multiyear national action plan and to conduct a pilot survey to identify stateless persons in the country. UNHCR also supported the development of a training manual on statelessness to build capacity among key stakeholders, including government officials. In July the government finalized a new citizenship law. This law allows stateless persons to acquire Rwandan citizenship, provided they do not pose a threat to national security.

## **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The constitution and law provide citizens the ability to choose their government through free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage, but government restrictions on the formation of opposition parties and harassment of critics and political dissidents limited that ability. Additionally, broader restrictions on the political environment including limitations on freedom of expression by members of the media, freedom of association, and peaceful assembly inhibited citizens' exercise of their political rights. The law provides for voting by secret ballot in presidential and parliamentary – but not local – elections. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and allied parties controlled the government and legislature, and RPF candidates dominated elections at all levels.

### **Elections and Political Participation**

**Recent Elections:** In 2018 the government held parliamentary elections for all 80 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of parliament. Of those, 53 seats were filled through general voting; the remaining 27 seats were reserved for women, youth, and persons with disabilities and were allocated by special electoral colleges. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) claimed that 6.6 million voters participated in the general voting, which equated to a 93 percent turnout. According to the NEC, the RPF coalition won 74 percent of the vote and was awarded 40 of the 53 contested seats. The RPF-allied Social Democratic Party and Liberal Party claimed five and four seats, respectively. The Democratic Green Party of Rwanda (DGPR) and the Social Party Imberakuri (PS-Imberakuri) were awarded two seats each. Neither the DGPR nor PS-Imberakuri was represented in

the previous parliament.

As was the case in 2017 when the NEC announced voters had re-elected President Kagame to a third seven-year term with a reported 99 percent of the vote, irregularities and instances of ballot stuffing undermined confidence in the integrity of the results. Observers were unable to effectively monitor the process of vote tabulation at polling stations and vote consolidation at the sector, district, and national levels due to inconsistent levels of access and transparency. Ballots were not numbered or adequately controlled and accounted for, either at the individual polling station or at the sector, district, or national level. Observers noted reported results in some polling rooms exceeded the number of voters observed throughout the day. Some independent aspirants experienced politically motivated difficulties in obtaining the number of signatures required to register their candidacies ahead of the elections. For example, some independent candidates reported residents and local authorities attempted to prevent them from gathering signatures in certain areas. Four independent candidates managed to qualify for the ballot, but the compressed three-week campaign timeline and the prohibition on fundraising prior to the NEC's certification of candidacies severely hampered their ability to compete against registered parties. Of the four independent candidates, none received enough votes to obtain a seat in the chamber.

In 2019, 12 new senators were elected to the 26-member Senate via indirect elections. Members of district councils and sector councils elected the 12 via secret ballot. Faculty at public and private universities elected an additional two senators. President Kagame appointed another four senators, and the National Consultative Forum for Political Organizations designated two, in accordance with the constitution. In 2020 the National Consultative Forum designated two new senators, including a DGPR member.

In 2015 the government held a referendum on a set of constitutional amendments that allowed the president to run for up to three additional terms in office. The NEC reported 98 percent of registered voters participated, and 98 percent endorsed the amendments. The text of the amendments was not generally available to voters for review prior to the referendum, and political parties opposed to the amendments were not permitted to hold rallies or public meetings to express their

opposition to the amendments.

**Political Parties and Political Participation:** The constitution outlines a multiparty system but provides few rights for parties and their candidates. It was common for RPF principles and values to receive prominent attention during civic activities. Government officials often privately encouraged citizens to join the RPF. Political parties allied to the RPF were largely able to operate freely, but members faced legal sanctions if found guilty of engaging in divisive acts, destabilizing national unity, threatening territorial integrity, or undermining national security. Observers reported membership in the RPF sometimes conferred advantages for obtaining certain types of employment and business opportunities, including obtaining government procurement contracts. DALFA Umurinzi, an opposition political party that spun off from the FDU-Inkingi, remained unregistered. There were reports the government harassed or otherwise targeted DALFA Umurinzi and FDU-Inkingi members.

In February Christopher Kayumba, former editor in chief of *The Chronicles*, an independent media outlet, announced he was resigning from *The Chronicles* to start a new political party called the Rwandese Platform for Democracy (which as of November had been unable to register). The day following the formation of the party, the government publicized an investigation of Kayumba for sexual assault, which later resulted in his arrest (see section 1.d., Arbitrary Arrest). The timing caused some observers to suggest the government was using law enforcement tools to discourage political participation.

The government no longer required, but strongly encouraged, all registered political parties to join the National Consultative Forum for Political Organizations. The forum sought to promote consensus among political parties and required member parties to support publicly policy positions developed through dialogue. At year's end all 11 registered parties were members of the organization. Government officials praised it for promoting political unity, while critics argued it stifled political competition and public debate.

In accordance with the constitution, which states a majority party in the Chamber of Deputies may not fill more than 50 percent of cabinet positions, independents and members of other political parties allied with the RPF held key positions in

government, including that of prime minister. As of November, the PS-Imberakuri and the DGPR were not represented in the cabinet.

**Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups:** No law limits participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. The constitution calls for women to occupy at least 30 percent of positions in decision-making organs, including the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The government consistently implemented this requirement. The government also involved persons with disabilities in the political process. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) organizations reported barriers to open participation in the political process in that candidates and government officials were unwilling to engage openly on LGBTQI+ concerns.

## **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law provides criminal penalties for conviction of corruption by officials and private persons transacting business with the government that include imprisonment and fines, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption during the year, particularly related to road construction projects. The law also provides for citizens who report requests for bribes by government officials to receive financial rewards when officials are prosecuted and convicted.

**Corruption:** The government investigated and prosecuted reports of corruption among police and government officials. Police frequently conducted internal investigations of police corruption, including sting operations, and authorities punished offenders. For example, as of September 15, the RNP had dismissed 146 police officers for corruption-related offenses, and eight were on trial for criminal offenses. The Office of the Auditor General submitted a report to parliament's Public Accounts Committee in June covering the office's anticorruption efforts. The report identified multiple instances of irregular expenditures and diversion of funds in government spending. It reported approximately \$57,000 in funds diverted or fraudulently used and \$308,000 in unauthorized expenditures in 2020.

The NPPA prosecuted civil servants, police, and other officials for fraud, petty

corruption, awarding of public tenders illegally, and mismanagement of public assets. The law states corruption offenses are not subject to any statute of limitations. Specialized chambers at the intermediate court level handled corruption cases. During the year the government prosecuted four executive secretaries of local governments at the sector level for corruption offenses. Former senior officials from the ministries of finance and infrastructure remained in jail at year's end as their corruption cases continued in court. The RIB announced in December it had dismissed 27 officers for corruption offenses since 2018 and was in the process of investigating five additional cases.

The government utilized a “bagging and tagging” system to aid companies with regional and international due diligence requirements related to conflict minerals. The law prohibits the purchase or sale of undocumented minerals from neighboring countries. A 2019 UN report found irregularities in official statistics on exports of gold from the country to the United Arab Emirates, suggesting the country was not accurately reporting its gold exports. In June the UN Group of Experts on the DRC reported that gold from armed groups in the DRC had been exported internationally via the country. Government officials told the Group of Experts that they did not have records of such shipments by RwandAir, a government-owned airline. Observers and government officials reported smugglers trafficked an unknown amount of undocumented minerals through the country.

## **Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

Several domestic human rights groups operated in the country, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases, and international groups also published reports on human rights abuses. The government was often intolerant of public reports of human rights abuses and suspicious of local and international human rights observers, and it often impeded independent investigations and rejected criticism as biased and uninformed. Human rights NGOs expressed fear of the government and reported that state security forces monitored their activities and self-censored their comments. NGOs working on human rights and deemed to be critical of the government experienced difficulties securing or renewing

required legal registration. For example, HRW had no representatives operating in the country since the government had previously refused to renew its lapsed memorandum of understanding with HRW.

The government conducted surveillance on some international and domestic NGOs. Some NGOs expressed concern intelligence agents infiltrated their organizations to gather information, influence leadership decisions, or create internal problems.

Individuals who contributed to international reports on human rights reported living under constant fear that the government could arrest and prosecute them for the contents of their work.

Some domestic NGOs nominally focused on human rights abuses, but self-censorship limited their effectiveness. Most NGOs that focused on human rights, access to justice, and governance matters vetted their research and reports with the government and refrained from publishing their findings without government approval. Those NGOs that refused to coordinate their activities with progovernment organizations and vet their research with the government reported they were excluded from government-led initiatives to engage civil society.

A progovernment NGO, the Rwanda Civil Society Platform, managed and directed some NGOs through umbrella groups that theoretically aggregated NGOs working in particular thematic sectors. Many observers believed the government controlled some of the umbrella groups. Regulations require NGOs to participate in joint action and development forums at the district and sector levels, and local governments had broad powers to regulate activities and bar organizations that did not comply.

The NGO registration process remained difficult, in part because it required submission of a statement of objectives, plan of action, and detailed financial information for each district in which an NGO wished to operate.

The government sometimes used the registration process to delay programming and pressure organizations to support government programs and policies (see also section 2.b., Freedom of Association).

**The United Nations or Other International Bodies:** The government sometimes cooperated with international organizations, but it criticized reports that portrayed it negatively as inaccurate and biased.

In 2012 the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, based in Tanzania, transferred its remaining genocide cases to the IRMCT, which maintained an office in Tanzania and continued to pursue genocide suspects. From 1994 through July 2019, the tribunal completed proceedings against 80 individuals; of these, 61 were convicted and 14 were acquitted. Two cases were dropped, and in the remaining three cases, the accused died before the tribunal rendered judgment. As of October 1, six suspects remained fugitives. The government cooperated with the IRMCT, but it remained concerned by the IRMCT's past practice of granting early release to convicts, especially when those released had not professed remorse for their actions.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The Office of the Ombudsman was empowered to act on cases of corruption and other abuses, including human rights cases (see section 4). During the year the office did not, however, report carrying out any major human rights investigations.

The government funded and cooperated with the NCHR. According to many observers, the NCHR did not have adequate resources or independence to investigate and act on reported abuses and remained biased in favor of the government. Some victims of human rights abuses did not report them to the NCHR because they perceived it as biased and feared retribution by state security forces.

## **Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses**

### **Women**

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law criminalizes rape of men and women and spousal rape, and the government handled rape cases as a judicial priority. Penalties for conviction of rape range from 10 years' to life imprisonment with substantial monetary fines. Penalties for conviction of committing physical and sexual violence against one's spouse range from three to five years' imprisonment.



Domestic violence against women and children remained common. Civil society organizations and NGOs reported this trend appeared to increase during the COVID-19 pandemic, although precise data was unavailable. Authorities encouraged reporting of domestic violence cases, although most incidents remained within the extended family and were not reported or prosecuted.

Police headquarters in Kigali had a hotline for domestic violence. Several other ministries also had free gender-based violence hotlines. Each of the 78 police stations nationwide had its own gender desk, an average of three officers trained in handling domestic violence and gender-based violence cases, and a public outreach program. The government operated 44 one-stop centers throughout the country, providing free medical, psychological, legal, and police assistance to survivors of domestic violence.

The government continued its whole-of-government, multistakeholder campaign against gender-based violence, child abuse, and other types of domestic violence. Gender-based violence was a required training module for police and military at all levels and was included for all troops and police preparing for deployment to peacekeeping missions abroad. In September the president made remarks to judicial officials calling for tougher treatment of gender-based violence offenders.

**Sexual Harassment:** The law prohibits sexual harassment and provides for penalties of six months' to one year's imprisonment and monetary fines. The penalties are increased when the offender is an employer or other person of authority and the victim is a subordinate. Nevertheless, advocacy organizations reported sexual harassment remained common, and enforcement was lax.

**Reproductive Rights:** There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

According to the United Nations, the estimated maternal mortality ratio decreased from 373 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010 to 248 in 2017, with a lifetime risk of maternal death of one in 94. The most recent domestic surveys from 2020 put the ratio at 210 deaths per 100,000 live births. Major factors influencing maternal mortality included low clinical capacity of health providers, absence of equipment and commodities, and patients delaying seeking timely care. UN reporting

indicated that 94 percent of births were attended by skilled health personnel.

The UN Population Fund estimated 70 percent of girls and women ages 15 and 49 made their own decisions regarding health care, the use of contraception, and whether to engage in sexual activity. The United Nations reported 53 percent of women had access to modern family planning methods, whereas the most recent domestic surveys of 2020 reported 58 percent had access. Parental consent is required for minors (individuals younger than 18 years of age) to access family planning services. The country's adolescent birth rate was 41 births per 1,000 women between 15 and 19 years of age, according to UN sustainable development goal datasets. While there is no policy restricting reproductive health service access for LGBTQI+ persons, there are no protections, and LGBTQI+ persons and organizations reported societal discrimination as a barrier when seeking services.

In some households, there were cultural and social barriers to conversations regarding adolescents seeking reproductive health services.

Some women and girls missed classes at school due to economic factors that made it difficult for them to access menstruation hygiene products. By law schools are required to ensure pregnant girls continue their education, and the government enforced the law. Nonetheless, some pregnant girls stopped attending school due to social stigma.

The government provides sexual and reproductive health services (including emergency contraceptives) for survivors of gender-based violence via the country's network of Isange One Stop Centers.

**Discrimination:** Women have the same legal status and are entitled to the same rights as men, including under family, labor, nationality, and inheritance laws. The law allows women to inherit property from their fathers and husbands, and couples may make their own legal property arrangements. Women experienced some difficulties pursuing property claims due to lack of knowledge, procedural bias against women in inheritance matters, multiple spousal claims due to polygyny, and the threat of gender-based violence. The law requires equal pay for equal work and prohibits discrimination in hiring decisions. There are no known legal restrictions on women's working hours or employment in the same occupations,

tasks, and industries as men. Studies in previous years indicated few persons reported gender-based discrimination in workplaces, and most individuals were either unaware of it or unwilling to discuss it. Experts concluded gender-based discrimination remained underreported, in part because victims of discrimination feared losing their employment.

After the 1994 genocide that left many women as heads of households, women assumed a larger role in the formal sector, and many operated their own businesses. The law governing matrimonial regimes stipulates joint land title ownership for a husband and wife who are legally married. Nevertheless, men owned the major assets of most households, particularly those at the lower end of the economic spectrum, making bank credit inaccessible to many women and rendering it difficult to start or expand a business.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

The constitution provides for the eradication of ethnic, regional, and other divisions in society and the promotion of national unity. Long-standing tensions in the country culminated in the 1994 state-orchestrated genocide that killed between 750,000 and one million citizens, approximately three-quarters of the Tutsi population. Since 1994 the government has called for national reconciliation and abolished the policies of the former government that created and deepened ethnic cleavages. The government removed all references to ethnicity in official discourse except for references to the genocide, which was officially termed “the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda” in the country and at the United Nations, and eliminated ethnic quotas for education, training, and government employment.

The law protects all citizens regardless of ethnic affiliation, and the government does not recognize any ethnic affiliation. Genocide denial and divisionism statutes criminalize efforts to minimize or deny genocide crimes against the Tutsi population in 1994. The law makes it illegal to discriminate against anyone based on ethnicity or country of origin or otherwise create fissures in the society along ethnic lines.

Some individuals said the government’s reconciliation policies and programs failed to recognize Hutu victims of violence during the genocide or crimes committed by

the RPF after the end of the genocide, whereas others noted the government focused positive attention on Hutus who risked their lives to save Tutsis or members of mixed families during the genocide.

## **Indigenous Peoples**

After the genocide the government banned identity card references to Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa ethnicity and prohibited social or political organizations based on ethnic affiliation. As a result, the Twa, who during the year numbered approximately 34,000, lost their official designation as an ethnic group, and the government no longer recognized groups advocating specifically for Twa needs. Some Twa believed this government policy denied them their rights as an indigenous ethnic group in that it failed to provide them with adequate economic and social protections (access to higher education opportunities, for example) commensurate with their historically marginalized status in society dating back to the precolonial period.

## **Children**

**Birth Registration:** Children derive citizenship from their parents. Children born to at least one citizen parent automatically receive citizenship. Children born in the country to unknown or stateless parents automatically receive citizenship. Minor children adopted by citizens, irrespective of nationality or statelessness, automatically receive citizenship. Children retain their citizenship in the event of dissolution of the parents' marriage. Birth registrations were generally performed immediately at hospitals and birth centers. If a birth occurred elsewhere, the birth could be registered upon the presentation of a medical birth certificate at the sector level. The government cooperated with humanitarian organizations to conduct birth registration in refugee camps. There were no reports of unregistered births leading to denial of public services.

**Education:** The government provides compulsory and tuition-free universal public education for six years of primary education for boys and girls by law. By policy the government also provides six years of tuition-free secondary education, although only the first three years of secondary education are compulsory. Parents were not required to pay tuition fees, but they often had to pay high fees for

teachers' incentives and meal expenses, according to domestic observers. This at times posed obstacles for members of marginalized groups and others with limited economic resources.

**Child Abuse:** The law criminalizes abuse, including violence against children, child abandonment, and forced begging. Officials enforced the law, and the president made public remarks regarding the importance of prosecuting offenders. While statistics on child abuse were unreliable, such abuse was common within the family, in the village, and at school. The Rwanda Violence against Children and Youth Survey (2018) indicated most sexual abuse perpetrated against women ages 19 to 24 occurred in public urban areas such as on the street (42 percent of cases) or in the victim's home (32 percent). For men the main locations were the victim's home (27 percent), urban street areas (23 percent), and rural land areas (17 percent).

As in previous years, the government conducted a high-profile public awareness campaign against gender-based violence and child abuse. The government supported a network of one-stop centers and hospital facilities that offered integrated police, legal, medical, and counseling services to victims of gender-based violence and child abuse. In partnership with UNICEF, the National Commission for Children (NCC) maintained a corps of 29,674 community-based "Friends of the Family" volunteers (two for each of the country's 14,837 villages) to help address gender-based violence and child protection concerns at the village level.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The minimum age for marriage is 21; the government strictly enforced this requirement. Anecdotal evidence suggested child marriage sometimes occurred in line with traditional norms in rural areas and refugee camps but rarely in urban areas and not with government recognition.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** By law, sexual relations with a child younger than 18 constitutes child defilement (statutory rape), which is punishable by 20 years to life in prison, depending on the age of the victim.

The law prohibits sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. Conviction statistics were not available. The law prohibits the commercial sexual

exploitation of children.

**Displaced Children:** There were numerous street children throughout the country. Authorities gathered street children in district transit centers before returning them to their home areas or placing them in rehabilitation centers. In 2020 HRW reported authorities abused street children in the transit centers and held them under harsh conditions (see section 1.c., Prison and Detention Center Conditions). Conditions and practices varied at 29 privately run rehabilitation centers for street children.

UNHCR continued to accommodate in the Mahama refugee camp unaccompanied and separated minors who entered the country as part of an influx of refugees from Burundi since 2015. Camp staff provided additional protection measures for these minors.

**Institutionalized Children:** The country regulated and maintained facilities providing care for children with disabilities when needed. Studies in previous years stated some institutions lacked the capacity to provide adequate care for these children. The government took steps to transfer orphans from institutional settings to host families and to close centers not meeting standards of care for children with disabilities.

**International Child Abductions:** The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

## **Anti-Semitism**

There was a very small Jewish population, consisting entirely of foreigners; there were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

The law affords persons with disabilities the right of access to education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others, but the government did not always enforce the law. Government information and communication was not usually available in accessible formats.

The law mandates access to public facilities (including schools and transportation services), accommodations for taking national examinations, provision of medical care by the government, and monitoring of implementation by the NCHR. Despite a continuing campaign to create a barrier-free environment for persons with disabilities, accessibility remained a problem throughout the country, including in public buildings and public transport, although a limited number of public buses could accommodate persons with disabilities. The National Council on Persons with Disabilities and the Rwanda National Union of the Deaf reported working to compile a sign language dictionary.

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities, and the government generally enforced these provisions.

There were no legal restrictions or extra registration steps for citizens with disabilities to vote, and registration could be completed online. Braille ballots were available for the 2018 parliamentary elections. Observers noted some polling stations were inaccessible to persons with disabilities and that some election volunteers appeared untrained on how to assist voters with disabilities.

Many children with disabilities did not attend primary or secondary school. Those who attended generally did so with peers without disabilities. The Rwanda Education Sector Strategic Plan of 2013-18 confirmed that more children with disabilities had never attended school than those without disabilities (27 percent versus 14 percent). More children with disabilities dropped out of school than children without disabilities (9 percent versus 6 percent). Few students with disabilities reached the university level because many primary and secondary schools did not provide reasonable accommodations.

Some citizens viewed disability as a curse or punishment that could result in social

exclusion and sometimes abandoned or hid children with disabilities from the community.

## **HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

The law provides for imprisonment of up to six months or a monetary fine or both for persons convicted of stigmatizing a sick person without the intention to protect the sick person or others. There were no reports of prosecutions under this statute. In 2020 the country completed a survey to assess HIV-related stigma and discrimination and inform advocacy efforts and adjustments to program design. The survey reported discrimination against persons with HIV and AIDS occurred, although such incidents remained rare. The government actively supported relevant public education campaigns, including by establishing HIV and AIDS awareness clubs in secondary schools and making public pronouncements against stigmatization of those with the disease.

The law also provides stiffer penalties for conviction of rape and defilement in cases of transmission of an incurable illness. In most cases of sexual violence, the victim and alleged perpetrator both undergo HIV testing.

According to RDF policy and in keeping with UN guidelines, the military did not permit its members with HIV and AIDS to participate in peacekeeping missions abroad but allowed them to remain in the RDF.

## **Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

Advocates reported law enforcement officials routinely abused LGBTQI+ persons in transit centers, with transgender persons targeted for particularly severe hate speech and violence. The government did not report investigating these cases.

No laws criminalize sexual orientation or consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults. The law does not explicitly prohibit discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons in housing, employment, nationality laws, or access to government services such as health care. Cabinet-level government officials expressed support for the human rights of all persons regardless of sexual orientation, but LGBTQI+ persons reported societal discrimination and abuse,



including problems officially registering NGOs.

## Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Laws protecting persons with disabilities applied to persons with albinism, but persons with albinism continued to experience persistent societal discrimination.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law provides for the right to form and join unions and employer associations, bargain collectively, and strike, but it places restrictions on these rights. There were some excepted categories, including military, police, and security personnel. An employer may refuse a recognized union access to the workplace, although the union may appeal this to the labor inspector. A union must include a majority of workers in the enterprise. The law protects the right to unionize but does not automatically provide for reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. Labor disputes are mediated by local and national labor inspectors before they may be referred to a court, which may refuse to hear the case. The law applies to all employees with contracts. The law applies to informal-sector employees regarding occupational health and safety (OSH) and the right to form trade unions and employers' associations, but it does not address strikes in the informal sector.

A 2020 ministerial order defines the implementation of the 2018 labor law and specifies guidelines for labor inspections, provides the modalities of electing employee representatives, lists acts considered gross misconduct, determines the core elements of a written employment contract, and defines essential services that may not be interrupted by a strike or lockout.

The law and ministerial orders provide some workers the right to conduct strikes, subject to numerous restrictions. For example, civil servants, military, police, and security officials are not allowed to strike. The law states that employees have the right to strike when the arbitration committee allows more than 15 working days to pass without issuing a decision, the conciliation resolution on collective dispute was not implemented, or the court award was not enforced. The law further states all strikes must be preceded by a notice of four working days. The law states that a

strike or lockout must not interrupt the continuity of “essential services” as defined by the Ministry of Public Service and Labor. The ministry broadly defined essential services to include all modes of transportation and fuel sales, security, health, education, water and sanitation, and all forms of telecommunications, which severely restricted the right to strike in these fields. Employees and employers are prohibited from exercising a strike or lock-out within 10 days preceding or following elections in the country or during a state of national emergency. There were 35 labor unions organized into three confederations: 16 trade unions represented by the Rwanda Confederation of Trade Unions, 12 by the Labor and Worker’s Brotherhood Congress, and seven by the National Council of Free Trade Union Organizations in Rwanda. All three federations were officially independent of the government, but some maintained close links with the government.

The right to collective bargaining generally was not respected by the government or employers. The government and employers pressured employees to settle grievances on an individual rather than collective basis. The government did not enforce applicable laws effectively. Penalties for violations were commensurate with those for similar offenses but were rarely applied.

The government severely limited the right to collective bargaining, and legal mechanisms were inadequate to protect this right. Many private-sector businesses did not allow collective bargaining negotiations. The government also controlled collective bargaining with cooperatives and mandatory arbitration. No labor union had an established collective bargaining agreement with the government.

Collective bargaining occasionally was practiced in the private sector, although there were few recent examples. The International Trade Union Confederation reported the government intervened in the settlement of collective bargaining disputes.

There were neither registered strikes nor anecdotal reports of unlawful strikes during the year; the most recent recorded strike was by textile workers in 2013. In some cases the government acted to resolve labor disputes in workers’ favor to avert the threat of a strike. National elections for trade union representatives occurred on regular cycles depending on the trade union. The government usually

maintained a significant degree of influence with union leaders.

The law does not specifically protect workers from antiunion discrimination. There were no functioning labor courts or other formal mechanisms to resolve antiunion discrimination complaints, and labor disputes moved slowly through the civil courts.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The law prohibits forced labor and states it is unlawful to permit the imposition of forced labor. In July the government issued an updated trafficking-in-persons national action plan that included programs to address forced labor. A ministerial order provided details on the implementation of the law, to include interagency responsibilities for law enforcement and protection services for victims of trafficking and forced labor. The action plan builds on the 2018 law to prevent, suppress, and punish trafficking in persons. The law prescribes penalties of imprisonment and fines. Penalties for forced labor involving trafficking of a person were commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape, with the penalties being higher if the victim is a child or a vulnerable person. Penalties for exploiting forced labor that did not involve coercion were one to three years. Statistics on the number of victims identified in forced labor were not available. Suspected victims, including children, were reportedly sometimes detained in transit centers without proper screening or referral to care and assistance.

Responsibility for implementing plans to combat forced labor was divided among the justice, labor, and local government ministries. Police, immigration officials, local government officials, and labor inspectors received training on identifying victims of trafficking. Government enforcement was inconsistent, particularly in cases involving domestic workers. Although not widespread, forced labor reportedly occurred in bars, restaurants, and mines.

Also see the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

### **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

The law prohibits all the worst forms of child labor. The minimum age for full-time employment is 16, but children ages 13 to 15 are allowed to perform light work in the context of an apprenticeship. The law prohibits children younger than age 18 from participating in physically harmful work, including work underground, under water, at dangerous heights, or in confined spaces; work with dangerous machinery, equipment, and tools, or which involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads; work that exposes the child to unsafe temperatures or noise levels; and work for long hours or during the night. The 2018 labor law determines the nature of other prohibited forms of work for a child.

In addition to national law, some districts enforced local regulations against hazardous child labor and sanctioned employers and parents for violations.

The NCC took the lead role in designating responsible agencies and establishing actions to be taken, timelines, and other concrete measures in relation to the integrated child rights policy and various national commissions, plans, and policies related to child protection subsumed therein. At the local level, 149 child labor committees monitored incidents of child labor, and each district was required to establish a steering committee to combat child labor. At the village level, 320 volunteers were supported by 10 national protection officers appointed by the NCC and 48 social workers.

The Ministry of Public Service and Labor conducted labor inspections of sectors of the economy known to employ children, focusing on domestic work and the agriculture sector. In previous years the government removed children from hazardous work situations and fined employers accordingly. In addition to imposing fines, labor inspectors could also refer cases to the NPPA for prosecution, but this did not often occur. The RNP operated a child protection unit. District government officials, as part of their performance contracts, enforced child labor reduction and school attendance benchmarks. Observers noted considerable political will to address child labor within the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, and the RNP, but the labor inspectorate remained underfunded and understaffed.

The government worked with NGOs to raise awareness of the problem and to identify and send to school or vocational training children involved in child labor. The government's 12-year basic education program aided in reducing the incidence of child labor, although some children who worked also attended school because classes were held in alternating morning or afternoon shifts at some grade levels. The government fined those who illegally employed children or parents who sent their children to work instead of school.

The government enforced the law inconsistently. The number of inspectors was inadequate, but criminal penalties in cases where children were trafficked for labor purposes were commensurate with those for other serious crimes, such as kidnapping. Penalties in cases that involved child labor in prohibited sectors (but not children being trafficked for that purpose) were between two to five years in prison or fines if the offender was a company, institution, or organization. Most child laborers worked in the agricultural sector and as household domestics. Child labor also existed in isolated instances in cross-border transportation and in the mining industry. Children received low wages, and abuse was common.

Also see the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/> and the Department of Labor's *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods>.

#### **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation**

The law prohibits discrimination based on ethnic origin, family or ancestry, clan, race, sex, region, religion, culture, language, and physical or mental disability, as well as any other form of discrimination. The constitution requires equal pay for equal work.

There were no known legal restrictions to women's employment in the same occupations, tasks, and working hours as men. The government did not consistently enforce antidiscrimination laws, and there were reports of discrimination based on gender and disability. Women generally enjoyed equal pay for the same work as men, although pay varied across occupations. The law officially protected persons with disabilities from employment discrimination, but

persons with disabilities often faced discrimination in hiring and access to the workplace. Migrant workers enjoyed the same legal protections, wages, and working conditions as citizens, but they sometimes faced discrimination due to societal bias and informal hiring quotas tied to citizenship status.

### **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

**Wages and Hour Laws:** There is no official minimum wage. The law states the Ministry of Labor may establish a minimum wage by ministerial order, but as of November the ministry had not issued such an order. The labor law does not include penalties for noncompliance with minimum wage laws. Employers are required to enter contracts with their employees, and these contracts must be written in a language the employee understands. In March 2020 a ministerial order went into effect that requires employers to review their contracts with their employees to ensure those contracts complied with labor laws.

The law provides a standard workweek of 45 hours and 18 to 21 days of paid annual leave, in addition to official holidays. Most workers in the formal sector worked six days per week. The law provides employers with the right to determine daily rest periods. Most employees received a one-hour lunch break. The law states female employees who have given birth are entitled to a maternity leave of at least 12 consecutive weeks. A 2020 ministerial order states overtime is accrued after 45 hours worked per week and is compensated by a “rest period equal to the extra hours performed” within the following 30 days. If employees are not provided the rest period within 30 days, they are to be paid for hours worked. The rate for overtime work is the worker’s regular salary.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** The law states employers must provide for the health, safety, and welfare of employees and visitors, and enterprises are to establish OSH committees. Authorities conducted public awareness campaigns to inform workers of their rights and highlight employers’ obligation to register employees for social security and occupational health insurance and pay into those benefit systems. Orders from the Ministry of Labor determined appropriate OSH conditions and the establishment and functioning of OSH committees. Workers’ right to remove themselves from dangerous situations without jeopardy to their employment is protected by law, but enforcement was lax.

Workers in the subcontractor and business process outsourcing sectors were especially vulnerable to hazardous or exploitative working conditions. Statistics on workplace fatalities and accidents were not available, but ministry officials singled out mining as a sector with significant problems in implementing OSH standards. The Ministry of Labor maintained a list of dangerous professions subject to heightened safety scrutiny.

The government did not effectively enforce the law. The number of labor ministry inspectors was not sufficient to enforce labor standards effectively. Violations of overtime and OSH standards were common in both the formal and informal sectors. Penalties for violations were commensurate with those for similar violations, but there were few cases of the government applying penalties. The many violations reported to labor unions compared to the few actions taken by the government and employers to remedy substandard working conditions suggested penalties and enforcement were insufficient.

**Informal Sector:** The law was seldom applied in the informal sector. Families regularly supplemented their incomes by working in small businesses or subsistence agriculture in the informal sector, which included more than 75 percent of all workers, according to the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. Employers in the informal sector frequently failed to register employees for social security or occupational health insurance and pay into those benefit systems.