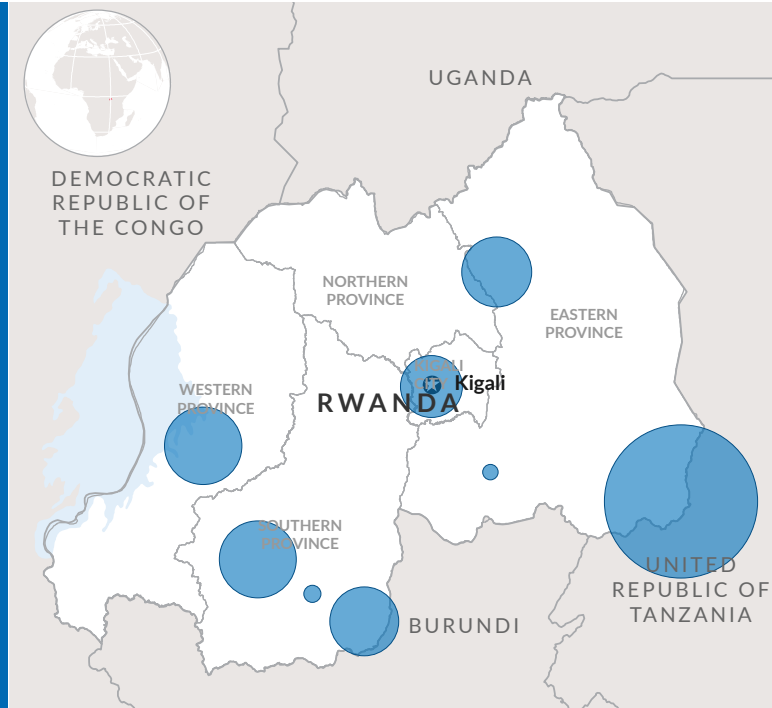


REPUBLIC OF RWANDA

As of 30 June 2023, Rwanda provided international protection to 127,619 refugees and asylum-seekers from 21 countries, with most coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi. Rwanda has continued to offer opportunities for socio-economic integration of refugees. This is reinforced by the fact that the economy in Rwanda has continued to experience rapid growth in the reporting period, even though the country is still classified as a low-income country (2022 HDI ranking 165).



Most refugees have continued to live in camps which are dispersed throughout the country, as well as in the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) (established through a Tripartite MoU signed in September 2019 between the Government of Rwanda, AU and UNHCR) which has provided protection and support to 1,737 refugees and asylum-seekers evacuated from Libya to date. In October 2021, Gihembe Refugee Camp in Gicumbi was closed due to landslide risks, leaving five remaining camps. A few refugees live outside of camps in rental arrangements in urban areas such as in Kigali, Nyamata and Huye. In 2023, the urban refugee population was estimated at 12,728, approximately nine per cent of the total refugee population. Refugees live near host communities with whom they have daily interactions.

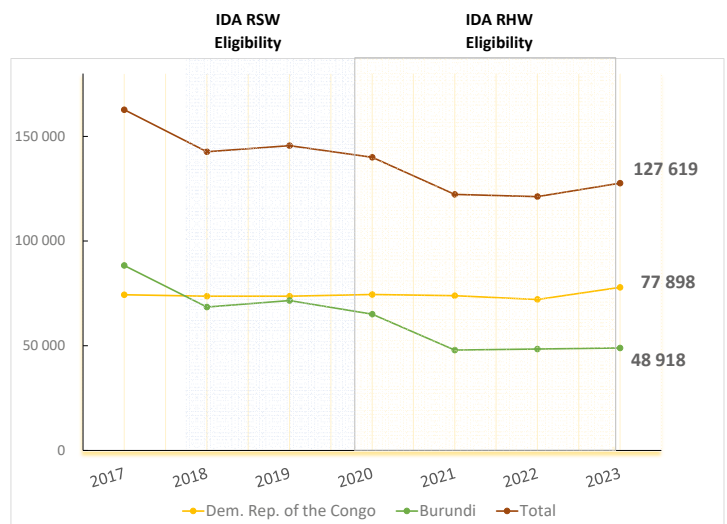
KEY POPULATION DATA (as of 30 June 2023)

118,502
Refugees

9,117
Asylum-seekers

0.96%
of the country's population
(13,246,394) are refugees
and asylum-seekers

IDA 18/RSW/IDA19 WHR
Eligibility: November 2018



RPRF Policy Dimensions

(as of 30 June 2023)

1. Host Communities

1.1 Support for communities in refugee-hosting areas

The strain placed on infrastructure by the presence of refugees and refugee camps in certain areas continues to require the interventions of the relevant ministries which also benefit host communities: the Ministry in Charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA) and the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) working with the Local Administrative Entities Development Agency (LODA) in coordination with the Ministry in Charge of Infrastructure (MININFRA). The District Development Plans also include refugees and cover the refugee camps.

The National Social Protection Policy and Sector Strategic Plan (2018/19–2023/24) has continued to provide social protection coverage for all Rwandan nationals, including through safety nets and social cash transfers. The Policy entrusts the [Ministry of Local Government \(MINALOC\)](#) with responsibility for citizens' social protection. While there are no specific support measures for host community members negatively affected by the presence of refugees, Rwandan nationals within the host community have continued to benefit from national programs during the reporting period. Furthermore, host community members can benefit from free services available to refugees in the camps. For example, Rwandan nationals are also a significant percentage of beneficiaries in nearby schools, health facilities, and livelihoods' programming available in the refugee camps in the reporting period.

1.2 Social cohesion

The applicable national policies that help in identifying, preventing, and mitigating potential social tensions in refugee-hosting areas have remained unchanged during the period. The [Ministerial Instructions no 02/2016 introduced in June 2016 to guide the management of refugees and refugee camps](#) highlight the importance of promoting social cohesion in refugee hosting areas by emphasizing the concept of “good neighborhood” between the Rwandan community and refugees. The instructions also focus on resolving disputes between refugees and local residents. These inclusive policies align with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and commitments made at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) and have continued to positively contribute to holistic social cohesion among refugees and host communities in Rwanda throughout the reporting period.

Pursuant to a Global Refugee Forum (GRF) commitment, joint agricultural projects between refugee and host community households were initiated from September 2018 to August 2021 in Mugombwa as part of livelihood promotion, targeting 1,427 farmer households, of whom 300 are refugees. The Misizi Marshland joint agriculture project model proved successful in enabling refugees and host communities to work together for improved income, food security and peaceful coexistence. Starting in 2020, the success of the Misizi project was an incentive for other refugee hosting districts to avail marshlands for replication of a similar joint agriculture project targeting 1,883 households on two other marshlands, namely, Mushishito marshland (70ha) in Nyamagabe District covering Kigeme refugee camp; and Nyabicwamba marshland (23ha) in Gatsibo District covering Nyabiheke refugee camp.

Overall, refugees living in camps and in urban areas continue to maintain social, economic, and family ties with the host community, with whom they share cultural and linguistic similarities. As a result, the Rwandan host population has remained with a positive attitude and a fair level of acceptance towards refugees, despite underlying issues that could challenge social cohesion such as overcrowding of schools, soil erosion and deforestation in and around some of the camps.

[Law No. 37/2016 of 08/09/2016 on Determining Organisation, Jurisdiction, Competence and Functioning of an Abunzi Committee](#) provides for committees at cell and sectoral levels (*Abunzi*) consisting of seven elected residents. These committees provide mediation services as a prerequisite before any party can bring an action before a competent court on any civil matter and on some specific criminal offences. They primarily operate for the benefit of Rwandan citizens, and refugees cannot be elected as *Abunzi* committee members. In refugee settings, there are separate refugee-led conflict resolution committees that continued to operate with the aim to prevent issues from escalating and to resolve conflicts informally. These are separate from the MINEMA-established refugee executive committee structure which provides representation for refugee communities. Conflicts between refugees and nationals are addressed by an *Abunzi* committee, alternatively, refugees can ask the camp manager from MINEMA or the legal partners of UNHCR for intervention/support.

The policy frameworks, including the Constitution of Rwanda (Articles 10, 15, and 16) continues to safeguard the equality of all persons before the law and their entitlement to the protection of the law without any discrimination.

1.3 Environmental management

The policy frameworks to mitigate the environmental impact of hosting refugees remain unchanged in this period. The [Biomass Energy Strategy](#), the Water and Sanitation Strategy and the Environmental Law ([Law No 48/2018 of 13/08/2018 on Environment](#)) have continued to provide the legal and policy framework for environmental management in Rwanda.

Based on the [Ministerial Instructions no 02/ 2016 of 1/6/2016 determining the management of refugees and refugee camps](#) that include environment management in camps and the restoration of the environment in refugee-hosting areas, refugees have continued to participate in activities intended to protect the environment, including participation in joint community work. Refugees participated in tree-planting activities over the past two years, with over 400,000 tree seedlings, mainly fruit trees, across the camps. Refugees also constructed soil and water conservation measures to protect against soil erosion.

In line with the October 2018 directive to cease the use of newly chopped firewood, and encouraging the adoption of cleaner cooking alternatives, in July 2021, Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) was introduced in Mahama and Mugombwa camps. Currently, about 64 per cent of the refugee population are using clean cooking methods (LPG). Additionally, pellets and clean cooking Higher Tier stove technology were introduced in camps hosting Congolese refugees and asylum-seekers through a market-based approach benefitting 4,200 families.

In line with [Law No 17 /2019 on single-use plastic items](#), the Government has continued to gradually replace plastic sheets with corrugated iron sheets in camps and settlements. This has affected the provision of refugee housing units, tents, and plastic tarpaulins as emergency shelter options. The construction of shelters using plastic tarpaulins have been gradually replaced by corrugated iron sheets, mainly in Kiziba, Nyabiheke and the now closed Gihembe camps.

These efforts align with Rwanda's GRF commitments made in December 2019 to provide renewable energy solutions, environmental protection, and resilient refugee settlements in both host communities and refugee areas. Resource limitations have hindered full implementation.

1.4 Preparedness for refugee inflows

The refugee emergency response is part of the National Contingency Planning framework regarding population influxes. The response to refugee inflows continues to be coordinated by MINEMA with significant support by UNHCR and partner funding, guided by inter-agency Refugee Response Plans (RRPs), which address primary emergency needs. MINEMA has proactively developed several contingency plans to respond to various potential situations including refugee inflows.

2. Regulatory Environment and Governance

2.1 Normative framework

During the reporting period, there were no legal or policy changes to the refugee law framework in Rwanda.

The [Law No 13ter/2014 of 21/05/2014 Relating to Refugees](#) complemented by [Prime Minister's Order No 112/03 of 2015](#) have continued to provide the overall national legal framework for protection of refugees in Rwanda. Article 18 of the [2014 Refugee Law](#) stipulates that 'without prejudice to other laws, any person having obtained refugee status in Rwanda shall enjoy the rights and liberties provided for by international instruments on refugees ratified by Rwanda'. By virtue of this broad formulation and in the absence of any contradictory legal provisions, refugees continue to be legally entitled to enjoy a wide range of social, economic, civil, and political rights in Rwanda. Additionally, Article 21 of the [2014 Refugee Law](#) enshrines the principle of non-refoulement.

While there have been no amendments to the above legislation during the reporting period, there is an opportunity for further improvements, particularly in specifying the rights and liberties granted to refugees and asylum-seekers. Providing a more detailed enumeration of these specific rights within the above law could be beneficial to foster socio-economic integration of refugees and create further legal awareness among all stakeholders.

Further, the Prime Minister's Order continues to provide for the functioning and composition of the National Refugee Status Determination Committee (NRSDC). Additionally to the [2014 Refugee Law](#) and the [2015 Prime Minister's Order, Article 47, last paragraph of the Law No.30/2018 on Determining the Jurisdiction of Courts provides jurisdiction to the High Court](#) to adjudicate cases relating to the applications for asylum. Over the past three years, there has been one known case of an appeal submitted to the High Court resulting in a positive ruling which has granted refugee status to the applicant.

The legislation outlined above sets essential standards for national refugee status determination. However, there are opportunities for strengthening the existing legal framework and improving its implementation to enhance the national asylum through technical assistance to DGIE (Directorate-General of Immigration and Emigration) and MINEMA, notably through regular meetings, inter alia under the Asylum Technical Working Group, with its inaugural meeting held in June 2023.

During the reporting period, certain improvements have been made to increase awareness of how to access asylum procedures. These include the publication of relevant laws on MINEMA and DGIE websites. In addition, UNHCR and NGO partners continue to provide legal information on access to asylum procedures and legal counselling. The information on the asylum process has further been updated on UNHCR's website help page in the commonly spoken refugee languages to increase awareness among asylum-seekers.

The Government, in collaboration with UNHCR and other partners, is making efforts to raise awareness on refugee rights to engage in wage-earning employment and to access socioeconomic opportunities.

2.2 Security of legal status

The Congolese population that arrived during the inflows of 1996 and in 2012–2013, as well as the Burundian nationals who arrived in 2015, continue to enjoy refugee status granted by the Government of Rwanda on a prima facie basis in line with Article 13 of the 2014 [Refugee Law](#). All newly arriving asylum-seekers who did not come at the time of the main influxes, irrespective of country of origin, undergo individualized refugee status determination (RSD). As of August 2020, the Government of Rwanda has ceased to grant refugee status on a prima facie basis for people originating from Burundi, whose case have since then been assessed and adjudicated through an individualized refugee status determination procedure by the National RSD Committee (NRDSC). Additionally, Rwanda has continued to receive new arrivals fleeing insecurity in

the DRC in numbers that exceeded 10,000 including during 2022 and the first half of 2023. Although their legal status is yet to be determined by the Government of Rwanda, these individuals have been registered as asylum-seekers and provided with the necessary assistance such as shelter, food, health, screening, and relocation in coordination with UNHCR and other humanitarian actors.

During the period under review, there have been no known cases of termination of refugee status by way of cancellation, revocation, or cessation.

Over the past three years, the accessibility of the national asylum procedures has remained inconsistent. DGIE has continued to conduct screenings of asylum-seekers and to decide whether to refer them to NRSDC to register and process their asylum applications. Consequently, some individuals who wished to seek asylum were unable to do so, leading to a risk of detention, deportation, and refoulement. UNHCR has highlighted to MINEMA and DGIE that these instances are at variance with the principle of non-refoulement found in Article 33 of the [1951 Refugee Convention](#) and other international human rights instruments. DGIE's role as per the Law includes reviewing asylum applications and referring them to NRSDC within 15 days but not screening out of any asylum applications. Several areas of improvement of the Rwandan asylum system have been identified. UNHCR has proposed to engage on these with the relevant authorities and to provide support for their capacity development. Enhancing the national asylum system is a long-term process that requires systems thinking and a shift in approach.

Due to COVID-related measures, all land borders of Rwanda were closed starting from March 2020, meaning that access to territory was restricted. The borders were gradually re-opened and as of October 2022, all borders were fully open.

All registered refugees on Rwandan territory continue to receive a Proof of Registration (PoR) from MINEMA and UNHCR. Like nationals, refugees above 16 years old except those in transit residing at ETM are also entitled to a (refugee) ID card, issued by the competent authority for identity management, National Identification Agency (NIDA) in collaboration with MINEMA. The refugee ID is considered to constitute a residence and work permit and it provides legal identity credentials permitting access to public and private services.

Registered asylum-seekers hold a temporary residence permit issued by DGIE with a validity of three months, which is renewable.

2.3 Institutional framework for refugee management and coordination

The coordination structure for refugee management continues to be primarily managed by the Ministry in Charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA) at national and local levels. MINEMA shares decision-making and operational responsibilities with other ministries and institutions, such as the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINCOFIN), the Ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI), the Ministry of Justice (MINIJUST), the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MINAFFET), the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), the Directorate General of Immigration and Emigration (DGIE), NIDA (National Identification Agency) and Rwanda National Police (RNP). All these Ministries and relevant State agencies contribute to operationalizing inclusion of refugees into national systems through a whole-of-government approach to poverty reduction and a gradual shift away from the traditional “care and maintenance” model for protracted refugee situations. These collaborations have been further strengthened since the introduction of the CRRF approach. MINEMA and UNHCR jointly continue to ensure coordination among donors through quarterly meetings. Additionally, MINEMA engages with other Ministries as needed to ensure a collaborative approach.

In practice, the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM) has continued to provide the institutional framework for refugee management. UNHCR co-coordinates the refugee response in Rwanda with the Ministry for Emergency Management (MINEMA) to ensure protection and basic assistance for all refugees in the country, as well as strong camp management, while also identifying appropriate durable solutions. As per the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM), an annual Refugee Response Plan (RRP) managed by UNHCR exists in Rwanda

to coordinate the interagency response, avoid duplication, and maximize complementarities. In 2023, 17 different organizations have confirmed their participation in the Rwanda country RRP. On a quarterly basis, partners and organizations who are part of the RCM meet to discuss the situation facing refugees in Rwanda as well as progress and challenges they are facing. The following sectors are also in operation in Rwanda: Protection, Education, Health & Nutrition, Food, Livelihoods, Shelter, Energy & Environment, WASH, and a Child Protection and GBV sub-sector. UNHCR is the lead coordinator, together with relevant government actors for all sector working groups apart from Food which is led by WFP.

Furthermore, four Technical Committees continue to meet regularly to implement the 2019 GRF pledges. These Technical Committees cover Health, Education, Energy and Environment, and Protection. These meetings involve UNHCR, MINEMA, other government institutions, and partners involved in the pledges. The discussions in these meetings focus on progress, challenges, areas for improvement, and recommendations. Consultations with stakeholders, including local authorities at district and sector levels in all 10 refugee hosting districts, are ongoing to advance the GCR at the field level and advocate for further refugee inclusion in programs and strategic development plans at the district level. These efforts contribute to achieving the first GCR objective related to burden sharing with refugee hosting countries.

Refugees are explicitly included in the Government-approved [United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework \(UNSDCF\) for Rwanda \(2018-2024\), with an emphasis on promoting a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach and promoting integration and self-reliance for refugees](#). Pursuant to SDG 16.9, refugees are part of the Government's objectives to achieve universal birth registration and access to proofs of legal identity for all, as laid out in the [2018 Law Governing Registration of the Population and Issuance of National Identity Card](#) and the [2023 Law Governing Population Registration in the National Single Digital Identity System](#). In March 2019, a Strategic Plan for Refugee Inclusion 2019–2024 (SP) was issued by the Government, providing for integration into national services such as education and health, as well as socioeconomic and financial inclusion.

The refugee community continues to have a structured, elected executive committee and chooses leadership at the blocks and village level. In addition to the refugee community leadership, there are different representation bodies in the camps, such as youth groups, women's groups, sports groups, etc. that have continued to provide refugee inputs and feedback to the Government. Elections are due to take place since the last election was in 2018. UNHCR works to ensure greater participation of refugee women in various community structures, including in leadership roles. Together with PFR (Prison Fellowship Rwanda), its implementing partner engaged in community-based protection, UNHCR also works to include non-DRC and non-Burundian displaced people in the leadership structure.

UNHCR Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms (CFM) continue to be used in the camps depending on the sectors of interventions. Refugees in camps can also approach the MINEMA offices and raise concerns directly with MINEMA staff. Additionally, MINEMA and UNHCR organize large community meetings at which refugees can ask questions on different policies and services, including newly introduced initiatives.

2.4 Access to civil registration and documentation

As per the [2008 Law Governing Registration of the Population and Issuance of National Identity Card](#) subsequently amended by the [Law No.44/2018 of 13/08/2018](#) Governing Registration of the Population and Issuance of the National Identity Card and by the [Law No.029/2023 of 14 June 2023 governing population registration in the national single digital identity](#), recognized refugees over 16 years of age have continued to be entitled to a refugee identity card during the reporting period. While refugees and asylum-seekers have already been included in the population register at par with nationals, the [Law No.029/2023](#) of 14 June 2023 has also included refugees and asylum-seekers into the digital identity system. In a bid to further implement the commitment from the 2016 New York Leader's Summit on Refugees to ensure 100 per cent coverage and the protection/documentation pledge made at the GRF in December 2019, NIDA with support of MINEMA are working together closely on ensuring full coverage and enhancing access at camp level. As of 30 June 2023, 83.4 per cent of eligible refugees were in possession of ID cards. Access to the Community-

Based Health Insurance scheme in urban areas requires refugees to have a valid refugee ID card. Having a refugee ID card also enables refugees to access other essential services such as telecommunications (SIM cards/contracts), banking and financial services, access to the labor market without any requisite work permit and other socio-economic opportunities as well as other services. In practice, refugee ID cards are well-recognized by all relevant authorities and private sector actors.

These cards are issued at a low cost of RWF 500 (approximately USD 0.50), which is still covered by UNHCR and is commensurate with the cost of issuance of national IDs. The cost of renewal is the same as for initial applications and the replacement cost in the event of loss is RWF 1,500 or approximately USD 1.50. The ID card is valid for a period of five years and can be renewed as long as the person holding it remains a refugee in Rwanda. The format of the card is the same as the ID card for nationals and foreign residents, with each individual being assigned a unique identifier.

The proof of registration (PoR) issued by UNHCR and MINEMA to all refugees on Rwandan territory (see sub-dimension 2.2) is a document including the family composition and biometric details of each individual, which enables them to access most humanitarian services. However, for access to national private and public services in the country, a refugee ID is required. Asylum-seekers admitted to the procedure are issued with a Temporary Residence Permit by DGIE which equally permits access to humanitarian assistance and some basic essential services provided by the host government (e.g., education, birth registration) except for registration for Community Based Health Insurance.

In line with [Law No 57/2018 on Immigration and Emigration](#), refugees have continued to be entitled to receive from DGIE Machine Readable Convention Travel Documents (MRCTDs) meeting International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards, for travel outside of Rwanda for business, schooling abroad and any other valid reasons, during the reporting period. The MRCTDs are valid for five years and cannot be renewed outside of Rwanda.

Refugees have continued to access civil registration services to register birth, marriages, divorces, and deaths occurring in Rwanda and to obtain corresponding civil documentation. In 2020, a National Statelessness Taskforce was created, and efforts are underway to ensure access to birth registration for all refugees born in Rwanda, irrespective of their age. Civil registration services are managed under the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC). Amendments to [Law No 32/2016 of 28/08/2016 Governing Persons and Family](#) in 2020 introduced a decentralized birth registration procedure to be carried out at health facilities and at cells (local administration) level to ensure that every child's birth is registered immediately after delivery. A personal unique identifier is assigned during the birth registration process and the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System is interlinked with other government systems, such as the National Population Registry, the Integrated Health Management system, and others. In the reporting period, the Government of Rwanda has redoubled efforts to ensure that each refugee born in Rwanda, irrespective of his/her age, has her birth registered and certified. The birth certificate is then recorded in the refugee database. As of 30 June 2023, birth registration coverage for refugees born in Rwanda, irrespective of age, has now reached 92 per cent.

Refugees not born in Rwanda whose birth has not been registered in their country of birth or who may have fled without their birth certificate may have access to substitute birth registration documentation. This practice is in line with administrative assistance to be provided to refugees under Article 25 of [1951 Refugee Convention](#).

2.5 Justice and security

In general, refugees have continued to enjoy a similar level of security to Rwandan nationals during the reporting period. MINEMA, in collaboration with the Rwanda National Police, has ensured the security of refugees living in camp settings. During participatory assessments with refugees and asylum-seekers, they reported that they mostly do not face serious security concerns, considering the strong level of safety and security in Rwanda. In line with trends in many countries, during COVID-19, some refugees reported an increase in domestic violence risks.

During the reporting period, in line with [Law No 68/2018 of 30/08/2018](#), which criminalizes gender-based violence in all its forms and prescribes heavy sentences for child defilement, marital rape, sexual violence, and harassment of a spouse, refugees have continued to be entitled to similar levels of protection as nationals. [Law No 71/2018 of 31/08/2018](#) relating to child protection has provided the legal framework for provision of necessary assistance to any refugee or asylum-seeking child to ensure enjoyment of their rights (Article 19). National structures, such as *Isange* One-Stop Centres run by Rwanda Investigation Bureau in coordination with hospitals, offer multisectoral responses to child victims of abuse and to Gender Based Violence (GBV) survivors across the country and have been fully accessible to refugees during the reporting period. Certain challenges remain, including social stigma and fear of retaliation leading to underreporting, as well as the distance from some refugee camps to *Isange* One Stop Centres and overstretched response services.

In addition, to complement the national systems, UNHCR and partners continue to implement GBV prevention and response activities for refugees and asylum-seekers, although resource constraints hinder full compliance with international caseload standards and limit full provision of needed services.

Article 15 of the Constitution continues to provide for equality before the law and equal protection of law for everyone in Rwanda. As per Article 18 of the [2014 Refugee Law](#) and Article 12 (f) of [the Ministerial Instructions Determining the Management of Refugees and Refugee Camps](#), asylum-seekers and refugees enjoy the right to access justice and legal representation. However, there is currently no legal instrument that specifically includes refugees which would make them eligible for legal aid on the same basis as nationals. While Article 12(f) of the Ministerial Instructions on the Management of Refugees and Refugee Camps guarantees the right of access to justice and legal representation for refugees, it does not specify whether this access is free. In terms of practical challenges, court fees and legal representation fees can be financial barriers for refugees seeking justice in court. Therefore, UNHCR and its partners provide free legal counselling and representation in certain categories of cases. To address this gap, UNHCR is also exploring cooperation with the Rwanda Bar Association and other legal aid actors to include refugees in pro bono legal aid services and to advocate for revision of the [2014 National Legal Aid Policy](#) to explicitly include vulnerable refugees as a beneficiary. There are language barriers with certain populations of asylum-seekers and refugees and when requested by the relevant authorities, UNHCR continues to support by providing the necessary language support.

3. Economic Opportunities

3.1 Freedom of movement

The national legal and policy frameworks governing freedom of movement and choice of residence remain unchanged in the prescribed period. Article 18 of the [2014 Refugee Law](#) enshrines into national law the enjoyment of all rights accorded to refugees by the [1951 Refugee Convention](#), including freedom of movement and residence. However, camp-based refugees need to request permission to leave the camp temporarily if they wish to maintain their residence in camps and access to assistance, in line with Article 25 (2) of the [2014 Refugee Law](#). In practice, refugees have normally settled in camps, as it enables them to receive humanitarian assistance. Asylum-seekers in possession of a Temporary Residence Permit can request relocation to a camp to receive assistance by approaching MINEMA.

This permission to leave the camp is issued in the form of a permit to leave the camp for a period of three months, on the MINEMA camp management's decision and must be renewed at the camp. In practice, this permit is readily accessible to refugees and can be renewed without challenges. If not renewed, the refugees lose their entitlement to camp-based assistance, except access to healthcare and legal support. While living outside the camp with such a permit and if the individual is in need of healthcare, the individual must return to the camp to access camp-based health care because he/she is not covered by Community Based Health Insurance (CBHI). In practice, once refugees have settled in a new place of residence, they must report to the local authority, as do citizens. Like nationals, refugees are expected to carry an identity document whenever moving around (PoR or refugee ID card).

During COVID-19, restrictions including curfews, movement and travel restrictions, and other regulations applied equally to all persons in the territory. As a result of the lockdown and suspension of non-essential services due to the pandemic, freedom of movement from camps was suspended for an extended period, negatively impacting refugees' self-reliance and livelihoods. For urban refugees, movement restrictions severely affected their ability to access their jobs. As many refugees lack resources such as computers/smart phones and/or internet access, the lockdown also hindered access to education. Other protection risks worsened because of COVID-19. For example, restricted access to camps and the reduced presence of UNHCR and partners aggravated the risk of GBV and affected the delivery of child protection services. The Government's COVID-19 response applied equally to everyone but had a particularly severe impact on refugees due to their already vulnerable socio-economic condition. However, as of the end of the reporting period, these restrictions have been lifted for the entire population, including refugees, thereby resuming freedom of movement. Similarly, restrictions to cross-border movement of people have also been removed, and trade across borders is slowly resuming.

3.2 Right to work and rights at work

Article 18 of the [2014 Refugee Law](#) continues to provide the legal framework for refugees' right to work and rights at work. In practice, refugees in Rwanda continue to be entitled to seek and obtain wage-earning employment without the precondition to obtain additional documents or work permits. The sole presentation of their national refugee ID card is sufficient to sign a labor contract with an employer.

During the prescribed period, a joint MINEMA and UNHCR strategy on economic inclusion of refugees and host communities in Rwanda for 2021-2024 was developed focusing on enhancing self-reliance and graduation from extreme poverty. Stakeholders are working on preparing for the next iteration of this strategy.

Refugees in possession of a driving license continue to stand a higher chance of finding employment because it is a marketable skill. Despite this enabling environment for refugees to access wage-earning employment, securing a job remains difficult to achieve for several reasons: employers' lack of awareness about refugees' right to work, inadequate skill sets, limited employment opportunities in the labor market in Rwanda and limited access to land for farming. There is also a challenge of lack of data on refugee employment in formal and informal sectors. Statistics on refugee employment are currently not available. UNHCR is in the process of engaging with the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) to include refugees in the national statistical system, which would enable systematic access to the available socio-economic data on refugees.

Refugees are allowed to open businesses in the same manner as nationals and formally register their businesses under their own name. They are issued with a certificate of registration and a Tax Identification Number (TIN) and have the same tax obligations as nationals, contributing to the development of the local economy. Access to national driving licenses and recognition of driving licenses from the country of origin, require possession of a refugee ID card.

The [2014 Refugee Law](#), as per Article 18, coupled with the [Labor Laws \(Law No 51/2001 of 30/12/2001, reviewed by the Law No 13/2009 of 27/05/2009, and subsequently revised by the Law No.66/2018 of 30/08/2018\)](#) have continued to provide recognized refugees with the same level of worker protection as nationals, including salary levels, working conditions, safeguards against forced labor, the right to safe and healthy work environment amongst others.

3.3 Land, housing, and property rights

Articles 34 and 35 of the [Constitution](#) continue to enshrine the inviolable right to private property, including the right to land.

During the prescribed period, the [Law No 27/2021 of 10/06/2021 Governing Land](#) has been passed. The new law entitles foreigners to emphyteutic lease and concession over land from a private person

or the State for public interest projects. The [new 2021 law](#) has limited the rights of foreigners in owning land, as it allows foreigners to own only one plot of land, as opposed to the previous law, which had no such restriction. Foreigners wanting to own larger plots, or more than one plot of land can only do it for investments purposes after getting the necessary permissions from the State.

This new law is also interpreted by the Government of Rwanda as applying to refugees, who are considered as foreigners, defined as someone who does not have Rwandan nationality. Therefore, read in conjunction with Article 18 of the [2014 Refugee Law](#), the new land law continues to enable refugees to enjoy the provisions relating to emphyteutic land leases for business and agricultural purposes as foreigners generally in the same circumstances in Rwanda. Only recognized refugees with the national Refugee ID card can exercise this right.

Furthermore, Article 12(c) of the [2016 Ministerial Instructions on Determining the Management of Refugees and Refugee Camps](#) has continued to provide for the right for refugees to own immovable and movable property in an equivalent way to citizens. However as immovable property also encompasses land, the Ministerial instructions could be considered at variance with the above [law No 27/2021](#) imposing restrictions equally to refugees for land property in line with the principle of hierarchy of norms. In practice, however, very few refugees can afford to buy a house. Refugees in camps continue to be provided with shelters and other basic needs but are not included in social housing programmes intended for Rwandan nationals, nor are they part of most other formal Government social protection initiatives, except for the Community Based Health Insurance, which remains only available for urban-based refugees and boarding school students, supported by UNHCR.

3.4 Financial and administrative services

During the reporting period, refugees have continued to be able to open bank accounts using their government-issued refugee ID cards. It is also possible with proof of registration as per a Central Bank waiver. Refugees have continued to access micro-finance and loans from formal financial institutions and social enterprises and may also use services relating to village savings and loans, remittances, and utility payments. To date, 93 per cent of the refugees have transactional accounts with formal financial service providers (Banks, MFIs, SACCOs) or mobile money (NBR, 2022). As of 2022, over 11,000 households have accessed various forms of financial services including saving products and business loans. Refugees often benefit from financial and business education as part of the provision of financial products and services. For instance, Inkomoko, World Vision, Umutanguha Finance Compagny (UFC), and others have trained over 100,000 in camps and host communities (2022). Also in 2022, 72 per cent of the beneficiaries self-reported increased income from their businesses compared to the previous year.

As of June 2023, all refugees and asylum-seekers in the camps can receive food and non-food assistance. Refugees receive this assistance as cash allowances directly to a bank account linked to a debit multi-wallet smart card, while asylum-seekers receive in-kind assistance. Refugees can obtain a SIM card with their refugee ID card, and in certain situations, this is possible based on a PoR. Asylum-seekers normally obtain SIM cards if they can present their national passport from their country of origin to use mobile money. For those who did not leave their country of origin with a national passport, access to a SIM card remains compromised. Any asylum-seekers residing in camps have access to shelter, food, and NFI assistance, as well as health care. The availability of mobile money facilities offered by the various phone companies has also expanded refugees' access to a wider range of digital financial services (payment, deposits, withdrawals, savings, receiving remittances, etc.). Approximately 92 per cent of the households in the refugee camps own at least one mobile phone.

Skills development initiatives are mainly provided by UNHCR implementing partners, with the support of MINEMA. Such initiatives focus on building refugees' skills and capacities to access wage employment or self-employment opportunities.

4. Access to National Public Services

4.1 Education

In line with Article 18 of the [2014 Refugee Law](#), refugee children in Rwanda have continued to enjoy full access to the national education system, from early childhood education and primary education to secondary education and tertiary education. The Government has been continuously making efforts to integrate refugee students into the national public education system. Over 90 per cent of the refugee children in primary and secondary schools are integrated into the national system where the Ministry of Education is managing refugee hosting schools except two schools in Kiziba camp that are still managed by UNHCR and its partners, with a clear roadmap in place to handover these schools to the management of the Ministry of Education. To this end, classrooms and related facilities have been constructed for over 43,000 refugee students.

The [2018/19–2023/24 Education Sector Strategic Plan](#) makes no reference to refugee education or education in emergency situations, however, in the absence of a specific policy document on refugee education, Article 18 of the [2014 Refugee Law](#) continues to apply in such situations. This provision provides refugee children access to learning in the same way as nationals. In practice, in Rwanda, refugee children access the national education system, from early childhood education and primary school to secondary and tertiary education, under the same conditions as nationals. As a result, over 90 per cent of refugee children are absorbed into the national education system, which is managed by the Ministry of Education. Currently, around 40 per cent of refugees are of school age (3-17).

As of 30 June 2023, 72 per cent of early childhood development (ECD)-aged refugee children are enrolled in ECD programmes, compared to 33.2 per cent for the host community. This higher enrolment rate in ECDs by refugees is partly due to ECDs' location within the camps and the fact that they are run by UNHCR partners free of charge for refugee children. In other locations, ECDs are often fee-based. For the school year of 2021-2022, the gross enrolment rates of primary school stand at 125 per cent. The gross enrolment rate for secondary education is 73 per cent while only 9 per cent of refugees are enrolled in higher education (including TVET). On an even more encouraging note, the gross enrollment rate for secondary education among refugees in Rwanda in 2022 increased to 73 per cent (78 per cent for males and 67 per cent for females), compared to a 62 per cent in 2020. This progress is noteworthy, especially when considering that the average gross enrollment rate for secondary education in the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region is 21 per cent.

Although the school tuition is free in public schools, in the camps, UNHCR and partners provide all-inclusive packages for the refugee children, given the inability of most parents to pay for school materials, while in urban settings, the parents must pay for school feeding, uniforms, and scholastic materials, making education less affordable for urban refugees. UNHCR and partners also cover tuition and other costs for over 750 students to attend upper secondary schools of excellence for cases where students cannot find appropriate subject combinations in their current schools.

The number of refugee students enrolled in universities is minimal (estimated at 6.8 per cent of the age group for tertiary education) due to unaffordable fees (approximately USD 4,000 per academic year, which is the same as for nationals) and the very limited number of scholarships available for refugees. While refugees pay similar amounts to nationals, refugees do not access student loan facilities available to nationals.

The Government pledged at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019 to improve the quality of education in refugee and host-community settings through upgraded infrastructure and increased equipment and teaching and learning materials, to expand technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and to support the country's TVET infrastructure and provide related equipment. Since this pledge, the Government of Rwanda constructed over 280 new classrooms and 288 latrines at major refugee-hosting schools through the World Bank-funded Jya'Mbere Project and UNHCR funding. Three additional ICT centers have been

established and equipped with ICT devices (computers, WiFi routers, other school connectivity materials). School connectivity to broadband internet is supporting access and improving learning through education technology in schools hosting refugee and host community students with trained teachers for connected learning. Five TVET schools are either under construction or being upgraded in refugee hosting districts.

Article 20 of the education [Law N° 010/2021](#) of 16/02/2021 governing the organization of education in Rwanda determines English as the medium of instruction. To ensure the adequate and timely integration of refugees into the national education system, refugee learners continue to be supported with language training in English by humanitarian education partners. Students who arrive after the start of the academic year are provided with catch-up classes supported by humanitarian actors.

Furthermore, the Government of Rwanda committed through its [Ministry of Education](#) to include refugees in Education Management Information System ([EMIS](#))/School Data Management System (SDMS). This system is used to capture both refugee and national students and to track their progress throughout their learning. However, the national data does not provide disaggregated data by status.

In schools, there are established leadership structures. Each school in the country has an Executive Committee consisting of five elected parents, who, along with other members, form a committee. All committees comprise parents from the host community and refugee parents in line with the refugee inclusion agenda. They meet regularly to collectively make educational decisions and oversee the proper [management and use of the education institution's finances](#).

Refugees can obtain administrative documents and certification of their foreign diplomas for employment or education purposes with a cost. The National Examination and School Inspection Authority (NESA) and the Rwandan Education Board have a dedicated certification process for foreign diplomas which include those of refugees.

4.2 Health care

The [Fourth Health Sector Strategic Plan of July 2018- June 2024](#) does not explicitly include refugees but mentions vulnerable groups. Since 2019, the Government of Rwanda has integrated urban refugees and students in boarding schools into the national Community-Based Health Insurance (CBHI). Urban refugees are entitled to be enrolled in the Community-Based Health Insurance system through UNHCR assistance provided they are issued with a State issued refugee ID card. As a result of their enrolment in the CBHI, urban refugees have continued to access health care at 10 per cent cost to all the health care services provided by public health facilities, and referral to secondary or tertiary level hospitals if required. Unfortunately, as asylum seekers are not issued with ID cards, they are excluded from CBHI and rely on UNHCR's assistance for medical care.

Refugees and asylum-seekers in camps have continued to receive health-care services from UNHCR-supported health facilities, through a parallel system run in collaboration with partner organizations and the Government, whose role continues to be related to implementation of national related health policies. These include primary health care, sexual and reproductive health services, mental health and psychosocial support, care for non-communicable diseases, and nutrition screening and management. Secondary-level health care is provided at district hospitals and is still supported by UNHCR and partner budgets. At tertiary level, one UNHCR partner has an agreement with various health facilities and receives refugee patients from across the country. However, refugees in general, including those living in camps, are included in the national hepatitis, malaria control, HIV and COVID-19 interventions and use the government-run referral hospitals.

Urban female refugees enrolled in CBHI have continued to access sexual and reproductive health services, including maternal and neonatal health services, and other women's services through the national health system during the reporting period. Even if not yet enrolled in CBHI, refugee women and girls can, like

Rwandan women, access sexual and reproductive services that are free of charge for nationals. Other sexual and reproductive health services are accessible, but they are not free, such as antenatal care, normal and C-section delivery, management of childbirth complications, treatment of sexually transmitted infections, etc. HIV and Hepatitis screening and treatment, as well as contraceptives, are available free of charge at public facilities for nationals and refugees equally, regardless of CBHI enrollment. In rural areas, all refugee and asylum-seeker women and girls continued to have the right to access sexual and reproductive health services through humanitarian NGOs. Refugees routinely avail themselves of the right to these services.

4.3 Social protection

Rwanda implements different schemes and programmes in the social protection sector as part of its economic development and poverty reduction strategy. As illustrated above, the main national scheme that applies to refugees is Community-Based Health Insurance (for urban refugees and students in boarding schools) supported by UNHCR. This is the only public social protection mechanism available to refugees despite being paying tax subjects if they are employed.

As of June 2023, approximately 15,849 refugees were registered with specific needs, representing 11.9 per cent of the refugee population in Rwanda. In urban settings, refugees have been supported to be enrolled in CBHI and access health services as Rwandans. Nationals with disabilities have access to specialized health and rehabilitation services if they are covered under CBHI. However, due to capacity constraints, not all devices or treatments are covered, and there may not be coverage for everyone. This includes certain assistive devices and rehabilitation provided in some health centers with pre-approvals from Rwanda Social Security Board (RSSB). While this is accessible for nationals, UNHCR's partner, Humanity and Inclusion, is currently exploring availability of this service for refugees under CBHI.

In the absence of inclusion into national social assistance programmes, identified vulnerable refugees, including elderly persons and those living with disabilities, are supported by UNHCR and have received cash assistance and access to specialized service (devices, supplementary feeding, psychosocial services, rehabilitation, etc.) provided by UNHCR partners. Finally, UNHCR provides limited financial support to the most at-risk urban refugees on a case-by-case basis. Some refugees have also formed their own risk-managing strategies of support, including saving groups that can support members in times of need.

The commitment of the Government to the [CRRF](#) provides a platform to initiate a dialogue between the authorities and international partners, with the aim of gradually aligning humanitarian aid and support with the objective of broader social and economic inclusion and fostering development opportunities for refugees and local communities alike. With many of the commitments in progress or already completed (e.g., the commitments on health and education), the Government has clearly demonstrated continuing engagement towards these responsibilities.

Other avenues that allow for dialogue between the authorities and a broad range of humanitarian and development actors on refugee inclusion and socioeconomic development through existing frameworks and strategic engagement, such as in DCF, linked to the [National Strategy for Transformation](#) (NST1), which focuses on economic and social transformation and transformational governance. The Government is currently finalizing NSTII and further strategies on financial literacy education, inclusion, and graduation, in which UNHCR is playing an active role in advocating for inclusion of refugees in national systems, including related to social protection.

4.4 Protection for vulnerable groups

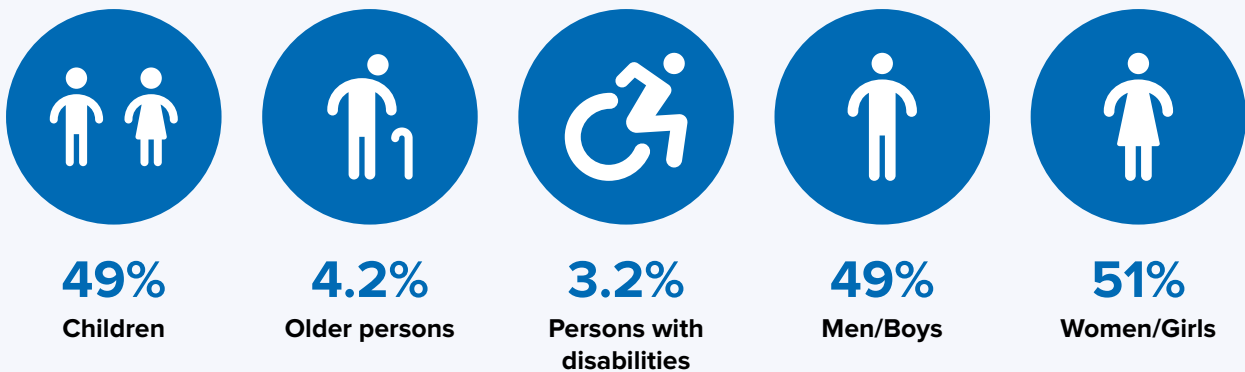
During the reporting period, the legal framework governing child protection continued to stem from Rwanda's ratification of the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and relevant international CP instruments, as well as [Law No 27/2001](#) Relating to Rights and Protection of the Child Against Violence and [Law No 71/2018](#) Relating to the Protection of the Child.

The Government of Rwanda continues to demonstrate strong commitment to child protection (CP) issues. During the reporting period, the Government established the Child Protection Technical Working Group, co-chaired by the National Child Development Agency and UNICEF, and attended by UNHCR, which aims to provide quality child protection programming across the country. In addition, the humanitarian CP/GBV Sub-Sector Working Group, led by UNHCR, has re-convened during the reporting period to coordinate CP/GBV programming in refugee settings, under the umbrella of the Refugee Coordination Model.

At camp level, UNHCR leads the protection response for at-risk refugee children in collaboration with the partners and authorities (MINEMA, DGIE, NCDA). In parallel, efforts have been made at the district level by the NCDA to engage with refugees and host communities on CP issues. The best interest determination process for refugee children involves government staff.

5. Cross Sectors

Characteristics of registered refugees and asylum-seekers in total refugee population
as of 30 June 2023



5.1 Gender

Rwanda continues to have a progressive legal and policy framework in terms of gender equality and women’s empowerment, which provides for the prevention of gender-based violence and for the protection of survivors of such forms of violence. Nevertheless, underreporting, and overstretched response services remain a challenge.

Rwanda’s approach to gender is aligned to the National Strategy for Transformation (2017-2024) aiming to achieve the SDGs, and the UNSDCF (2018 - 2024 includes a strong focus on gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE). In this framework, the Joint Programme on Gender (2019-2024) was developed by the One UN together with the GoR, particularly the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF). UNHCR is an active contributor to the Joint Programme on Gender and ensures the inclusion of refugee women and girls in both livelihoods programming and Gender Based Violence (GBV) prevention and response. The 2021 National Gender Policy underscores the need for gender-transformative programmes across sectors.

The most consequential sub-dimensions in which improvement of the policy implementation for gender considerations in the reporting period are as follows.

- a. Employment opportunities and livelihoods for refugee women
- b. Limited participation of refugee women and youth in representational and community structures.

5.2 Social inclusion

In general, Rwanda is progressive in inclusion of refugees into national services on an equal basis with nationals, particularly in the areas of education, and identity and civil registry services. However, tertiary education is expensive for both refugees and host communities, but because of relative income disparity and limited student loan options, refugees have extremely limited options to access tertiary education. Refugee women may also face disadvantages in terms of job opportunities and livelihood interventions because of their generally lower level of education. Strengthening access to protection services for vulnerable persons from both refugee and host communities, particularly persons with disabilities, elderly, unaccompanied and separated children, and victims of human trafficking is needed as well as increased participation of women and youth in representational and community structures.

The most consequential sub-dimensions with policy implementation differences or restrictions in terms of socio-economic development for this period are as follows:

- a. Access to tertiary education for refugees.
- b. Access to job opportunities and livelihoods for refugee women.
- c. Access to protection services for vulnerable persons from refugee and host communities.
- d. Low involvement of refugee women and youth in representational and community structures.