

Rwanda

Country Overview

Politics

Rwanda is a presidential republic in central Africa and shares a border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Tanzania, and Uganda. In 2015, a constitutional amendment was passed that would allow President Kagame to run for a third seven-year term and subsequently, for two new five-year terms.¹ While the amendment was passed with public support, it was reported that some of the 3.5 million people who had signed the proposal were coerced.²

In 2017, Paul Kagame was elected to his third seven-year term having won 99 percent of the vote.³ Political intimidation, unfair registration practices, and fraud were reported during the electoral process.⁴ Freedom House reported that in 2021 the Kagame regime continued to silence political opponents. Paul Rusesabagina, a political opposition figure who had been forcibly repatriated by Rwandan authorities in 2022, was sentenced to 25 years in prison following a trial which lacked due process.⁵

Economy

Rwanda is classified by the World Bank as a low-income economy.⁶ The CIA notes that agriculture accounts for approximately 63 percent of export earnings, alongside some mineral and agro-processing.⁷ According to the World Bank, Rwanda has experienced notable developmental success since the 1994 genocide and civil war. In the decade prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the country implemented two five-year Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategies, resulting in high growth-- around seven percent annually-- poverty reduction, and reduced inequality. Large-scale public investment has been the key factor behind growth.⁸ However, the COVID-19 crisis led to a 3.4 percent drop in GDP and increased poverty.⁹ Rwanda's Vision 2020 goal had been to reach middle-income status by 2020 and the government aimed to achieve this by private-sector led development; however, this was not achieved. Instead, inflation rose to 5.8 percent in February 2022 and inflation is expected to continue throughout the rest of the year.¹⁰

From late 2020, the Rwandan Government introduced policy reforms to promote economic growth, increase foreign direct investment and competitiveness, and attract foreign companies.¹¹ The country now aspires to Middle Income Country status by 2035 and High-



Income Status by 2050, which is to be achieved through the implementation of seven-year National Strategies for Transformation and initially commenced in 2017.¹² The Rwandan Embassy states that the “overarching objective of the economic transition is to accelerate economic growth and development founded on the Private Sector, knowledge and Rwanda’s Natural Resources.”¹³

The Rwandan Government is hoping to attract more foreign direct investment (FDI) through tourism, with plans of new high-energy infrastructure projects including a new airport as well as roads, hotels, and logistics. Despite Rwanda’s successes, some constraints to foreign direct investment (FDI) are present, including its landlocked location, which results in higher transportation costs, a small domestic market, limited access to affordable financing, and an inconsistent application of tax, investment, and immigration rules.¹⁴

Social/Human Development

The Rwandan genocide in 1994 was rooted in ethnic tensions dating back to Belgian colonial rule, when citizens were required to carry identity cards to distinguish their ethnic group—either Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa.¹⁵ Ethnic tensions came to a head in 1994, when militant Hutu factions attempted to wipe out the Tutsi population, resulting in a state-orchestrated genocide that killed nearly three-quarters of the Tutsi population.¹⁶ This event had a profound impact on the population of Rwanda, where it is estimated that at least 800,000 individuals, predominately of the Tutsi ethnicity, lost their lives and up to two million people were displaced.

As of September 2021, Rwanda hosted 127,163 refugees and asylum seekers.¹⁷ Rwanda is densely populated due to the combination of a small land mass, high population growth rate, and an influx of refugees from neighboring countries. Land scarcity is a source of strain for families in raising foodstuffs and accessing potable water.¹⁸

According to the World Bank, Rwanda’s positive economic growth (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic) has occurred alongside improvements in living standards which has included a two-thirds decrease in child mortality rates, near-universal primary school enrollment, an increase in life expectancy, a reduction in maternal deaths, and a decrease in inequality.¹⁹

However, the COVID-19 pandemic reduced growth and threatens poverty. It was estimated that the headcount poverty rate would rise by 5.1 percentage points in 2021.²⁰



U.S. Department of State TIP Report Summary (2021)

U.S. Department of State TIP Ranking: Tier 2

The *Trafficking in Persons Report* stated that while the Rwandan Government does not fully meet standards for the elimination of trafficking, they are working towards this aim. The report has noted progress on identifying more victims, increased awareness, and organizing a network of shelters. There has also been an increase in investigations into sex trafficking and the country's first conviction. However, Rwanda's actions were considered to be insufficient as few traffickers were convicted, male victims did not receive access to shelters, and no victim-witness support program was created.²¹

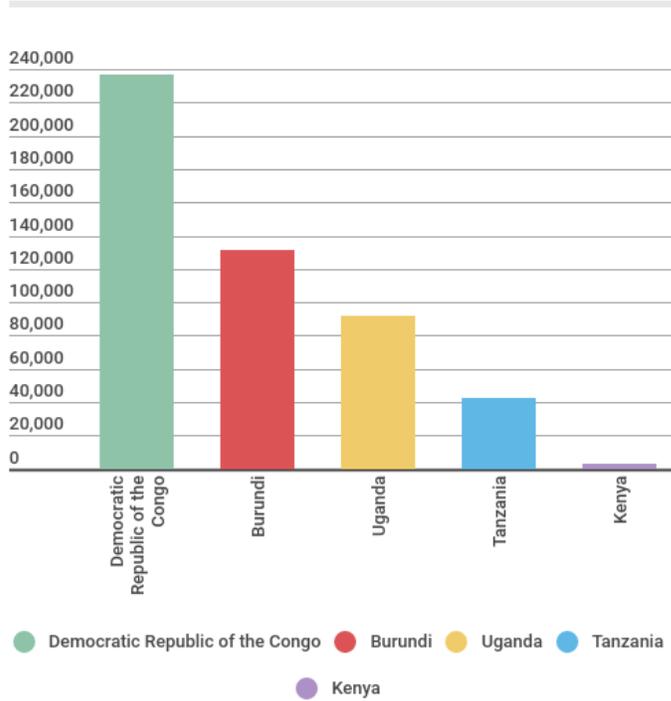
Read the full TIP Report at: www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/rwanda/²²

Migrant and Other Vulnerable Populations

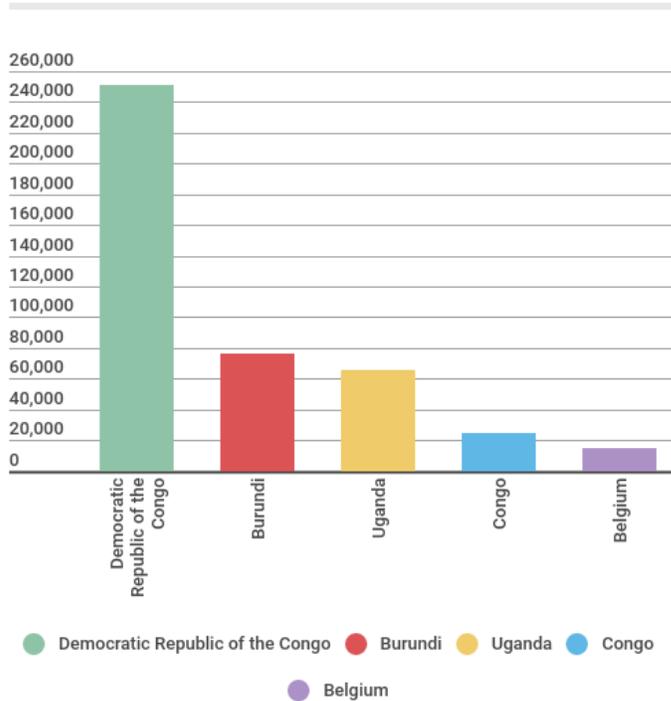
Experiencing relative peace since the 1994 genocide, Rwanda has become a destination country for refugees fleeing conflicts in other regions. As of September 2021, Rwanda accommodated nearly 121,000 refugees, mostly from DRC and Burundi.²³ Both migrants to and migrants from Rwanda principally travel between neighboring countries. As such, migrants residing within Rwanda come from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. Similarly, migrants leaving Rwanda travel to Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Uganda, the Congo, and Belgium.²⁴



Migrants to Rwanda



Migrants from Rwanda



Exports and Trade

According to mirror data, Rwanda’s top exports in 2022 were coffee, tea, ores, malt starch or extract, tin, and commodities not elsewhere specified.²⁵

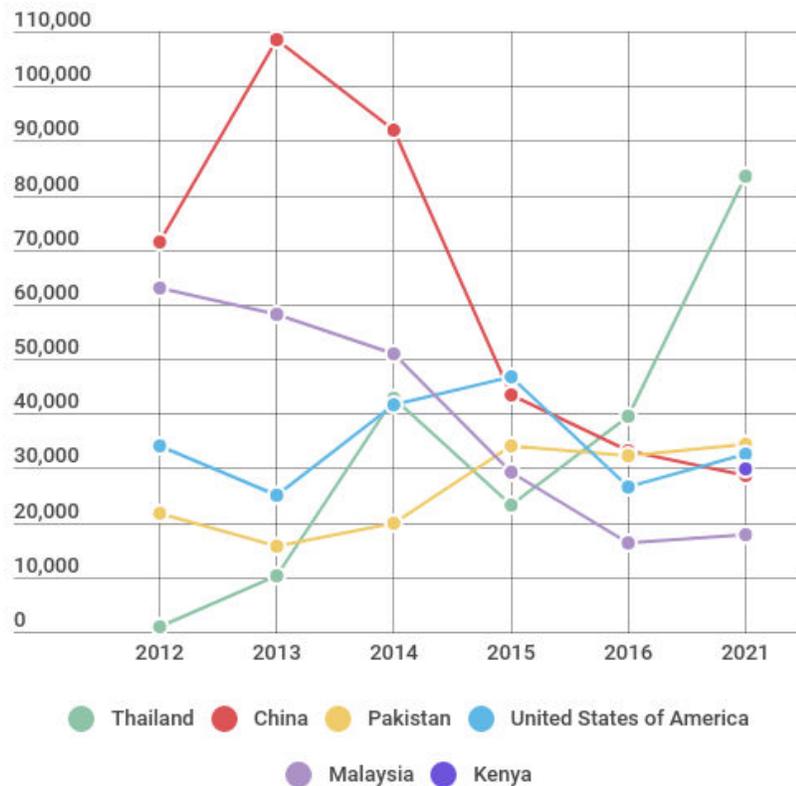
Top Commodity Exports (USD/Thousands)

2021



The top importers of all goods from Rwanda, according to mirror data, include Thailand, Pakistan, the United States, Kenya, and China.²⁶

Rwanda Export Partners (USD/Thousands)



Rwanda was the 143rd largest supplier of goods to the United States in 2019, and as of 2021, primarily exported coffee, tin, wicker and basketware, ores, leather goods, and pectates.²⁷



Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors Analysis

Legal/Policy Risk Factors

Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers' Rights

Freedom of Association

The Rwandan constitution provides for freedom of association; however, in practice this is greatly restricted. The government-controlled Rwandan Governance Board (RGB) can deny registration at its will and civil society organizations which do not collaborate with the government are often unable to register.²⁸

The law establishes that workers, except for military, police, or security staff, can “form and join unions and employer associations.”²⁹ Under the law, informal workers are afforded the same right to join unions, conduct strikes and bargain collectively but are not included under other protections. The government broadly defines essential services, including public transportation, security, education, water and sanitation, and telecommunication; thus, many workers are restricted in their right to strike.³⁰

The U.S. Department of State has reported that the government does not respect the right to freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, and the legal mechanisms in place to safeguard these rights are inadequate.³¹

While the National Labor Council passed a proposal to increase the minimum wage from the RWF 100 Rwandan Francs (USD 0.12) set in 1974, there is still no official minimum wage currently in place.³² Furthermore, the labor law does not generally penalize employers who fail to comply with minimum wage laws. However, in March 2020 a ministerial order was issued requiring employers to review contracts with their employees to confirm the contracts did not violate labor laws.³³ The standard workweek is 45 hours with 18 to 21 days of paid annual leave, in addition to official holidays. Formal sector workers generally work six days per week but violations in overtime did reportedly occur in both the formal and informal sectors.³⁴

Workers do not have the explicit right to remove themselves from hazardous situations without jeopardizing their jobs, which may be problematic considering the government does not require on-the-job training, which may in turn lead to occupational hazard.³⁵ It has been reported that workers employed in the subcontractor and business process outsourcing sectors are particularly vulnerable to exploitative working conditions. Mining is another sector that is prone to workplace hazards as there are inconsistencies in implementing occupational safety and health standards.³⁶ Overall, it has been reported that labor inspectors do not enforce standards effectively and penalties are not sufficient to prevent violations.³⁷



Discrimination

The Rwandan constitution highlights the importance of national unity through the eradication of ethnic, regional, and other divisions in society. This is particularly pertinent for the country, as ethnic tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi populations led to the 1994 genocide, which killed approximately three-quarters of the Tutsi population. Subsequently, the government has removed ethnic quotas for education, training, and government employment, with the aim of protecting all citizens despite differing ethnicity.

Rwandan law also proscribes the “use of speech, writing, or any other act” that may cause unrest or division within groups.³⁸ Members of the Twa indigenous peoples believe that the lost designation of their ethnicity has failed to fulfill their indigenous rights as an historically marginalized group.³⁹

Women have the same legal status and rights as men regarding family, labor, nationality, and inheritance laws.⁴⁰ The law proscribes discrimination against individuals with disabilities and the U.S. Department of State reported that these requirements were generally enforced by the Rwandan government. In terms of discrimination towards people suffering from incurable diseases, such as HIV or AIDs, discrimination was present, albeit rare. The government publicly advocated against the stigmatization of those affected by the diseases. Individuals with albinism also faced significant discrimination.⁴¹

In terms of labor, the Rwandan government prohibits discrimination of all forms, with the constitution necessitating “equal pay for equal work.” However, the government did not sufficiently enforce antidiscrimination laws, leading to reports of discrimination in relation to gender and disability.⁴² Women generally enjoy the same job opportunities as men, although evidence suggests a tendency towards women underreporting gender-based discrimination for fear of losing employment opportunities. Furthermore, while reports largely showed equal pay between men and women for the same jobs, wages varied depending on occupations. Migrant workers had the same protections as their counterparts but were reported to have experienced discrimination as a consequence of social bias and informal hiring quotas.⁴³

Forced Labor

Rwandan law prohibits forced labor; nevertheless, forced labor was reported in bars, restaurants, and mines.⁴⁴ In July 2021, the government released a trafficking-in-persons national action plan, which incorporated programs to address the issue of forced labor. Penalties for those convicted of forced labor were commensurate with those for other serious crimes, and authorities were trained to identify trafficking victims. However, the U.S. Department of State described enforcement as inconsistent.⁴⁵



Child Labor

Rwandan law prohibits forced or compulsory labor by children, as well as the worst forms of child labor. In Rwanda, the minimum age for fulltime employment is 16 and the law prohibits children who are under 18 from engaging in hazardous work. Children aged 13 to 15 can undertake light work through an apprenticeship. Younger children can undertake domestic tasks in the home environment.⁴⁶ As of 2020, Rwanda has 6 years of compulsory education and approximately 100 percent of children are enrolled in primary school.⁴⁷ However, UNICEF reports that only 73 percent of children are literate and only 71 percent of children complete their primary education, citing the principal barrier to education as labor. As of 2019, the Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor report stated that almost 5.5 percent of children aged 6-14 were working, and almost 5 percent of children aged 7 to 14 were combining work and school in Rwanda. As such, at least 1 in 10 Rwandan children 14 and younger were engaged in child labor. Child labor was principally prevalent in the agricultural sector and domestic services.⁴⁸ Within Rwanda, boys are placed in positions of forced labor undertaking plantation, mine, or agricultural work whereas the forced labor of girls typically involves commercial sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. Child labor has been further reported to also exist in cross-border transportation, construction, brick making, charcoal, rock crushing, and mining industries.⁴⁹

The Ministry of Public Service and Labor conducted inspections in the domestic and agricultural sectors and the government worked with NGOs to raise awareness of the issue. While the government did impose fines on parents who sent their children to work and employers who employed children, the U.S. Department of State considers this to have been done inconsistently. Further to national law, there exists regional legislation in relation to hazardous labor which enables the sanctioning of employers and parents in violation.⁵⁰ Generally, while there were some “mild advancements,” these were held back by the presence of gaps regarding child labor in policy, social programs, government efforts, labor law, and criminal law enforcement which contributed to child labor issues.⁵¹

Following school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, child labor has increased globally. Consequently, it is likely that child labor has increased in Rwanda too.⁵² However, the Rwandan government provided radio-based lessons and established back-to-school committees at the local level to encourage the return of vulnerable children to schools.⁵³ During 2020, the Rwandan government recognized the growing issue of child street begging.⁵⁴

Civil Society Organizations

There are some limitations on civil society organizations regarding free and transparent access to information. The U.S. Department of State remarked that freedom of association is restricted by the Rwandan government in relation to civil society organizations which do not collaborate with the government, or which may be perceived as a threat.⁵⁵ As of 2022, Human Rights Watch considers that the space for civil society remains closed. From 2019-2022, Human Rights Watch states that there have been over 30 instances of deaths, disappearances, or the



imprisonment of individuals who were opposition members, journalists, critics, or activists.⁵⁶ A particular instance of this from 2020 involves several members of the Dalfa-Umurinzi party who received prison terms of 7 to 10 years. One defendant who was acquitted is believed, as per the Freedom House report, to have been forcibly disappeared or killed. More recently, a former newspaper editor, Christopher Kayumba, was accused of rape soon after his establishment of a democracy-centered political party. The allegations against him were considered to be inconsistent and “politically motivated.”⁵⁷

Furthermore, many Rwandan journalists have fled the country. In 2018, cartoons and writings perceived to humiliate Rwandan leaders were criminalized, while defamation was decriminalized.⁵⁸

Freedom House also reports that multiple NGOs have been banned, encouraging an environment of self-censorship. Similarly, the government has sought to infiltrate human rights organizations.⁵⁹

Immigration Policies Limiting the Employment Options or Movement of Migrants

While the law in Rwanda does not place restrictions on the movement of asylum seekers, refugees have reported that there were delays in the issuance of their identity cards and convention travel documents, which inhibited their ability to move within and outside of the country.⁶⁰ Similarly, individuals awaiting the application of individual refugee status determinations were met with significant delays. The applications of those who were not *prima facie* eligible for refugee status were stalled by the infrequency of meetings of the interagency committee overseeing the applications.⁶¹

With regard to employment, no laws have restricted the employment of refugees, and the Rwandan Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs along with the UNHCR launched a joint effort aimed at helping refugees gain employment in the local economy.⁶² This is having some positive results with some migrants finding paid work or establishing their own businesses, and women, in particular, found that they received more respect.⁶³ Despite these efforts, it has been reported that few refugees are able to find local employment, with many citing their main obstacle as being a lack of a government-issued identity card.⁶⁴ A World Bank study from 2019 has found that many local authorities and businesses lack knowledge of the labor rights of refugees.⁶⁵



Ratification of ILO Conventions Related to Human Trafficking or Rights of Workers and Migrants

Conventions	Status
ILO 29 Forced Labor	In force
ILO 87 Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize	In force
ILO 98 Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining	In force
ILO 100 Equal Remuneration	In force
ILO 105 Abolition of Forced Labor	In force
ILO 111 Discrimination	In force
ILO 138 Minimum Age	In force
ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies	Not ratified
ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor	In force
ILO 97 Migration for Employment	Not ratified

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Political Risk Factors

Political Instability or Conflict

Rwanda scores an 83.7 in the 2022 Fragile States Index, placing it in the “Warning” Category. With an improvement of -7.1 points in the last five years, Rwanda ranks 41st out of 179 countries on the index. The index highlights a persistent issue in relation to their Group Grievance indicator, which focuses on “divisions and schisms between different groups in society.” The index indicates that the presence of Factionalized Elites and Economic Inequality are also negatively affecting the country’s score. Rwanda hosts refugees and asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi, which score sixth and 19th out of 179 countries, respectively.⁶⁷

Level of Crime and Violence

The World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report from 2019 found that Rwanda demonstrated improvement, overall, ranking Rwanda 35th out of 141 countries for security and 47th out of 141 countries for organized crime.⁶⁸ The Global Organized Crime Index gave Rwanda a Criminality score of 3.6, placing it at 159th out of 193 countries and 51st out of 54 countries in Africa. This means that the country was considered to have low criminality and a high level of resilience.⁶⁹ Security risk in the country is generally highest along the borders with Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo where armed conflict is present.⁷⁰ As of 2015, the homicide rate of Rwanda was 2.58 per 100,000 of the population.⁷¹



State Persecution

In 2017, the UNHCR removed the capacity for Rwandan possibility of applying for refugee status under the concept of “well-founded fear of persecution,” on the basis that there is no longer any need for international protection.⁷²

There are various reports relating to the repression of individuals or groups that do not directly collaborate with or are critical of the ruling party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front. It is believed that individuals have been subjected to intimidation and surveillance, arbitrary arrest and detention, fabricated charges, forced disappearances, and even assassinations. Furthermore, there have also been reports of abuses in detention to procure false confessions.⁷³

Level of Corruption

Rwandan law provides penalties for the conviction of corruption by official and private persons transacting business with the government, and according to the U.S. Department of State the law was generally well-implemented. There were some incidences of government corruption in 2021 and while the Rwandan government did take some steps to investigate and prosecute officials suspected of corruption, impunity generally prevailed.⁷⁴ The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index scores Rwanda at 53, ranking it 52 out of 180 countries on the index.⁷⁵ In April 2021, the American Enterprise Institute commented on the success of Rwanda in relation to the reduction of corruption since the Rwandan Genocide, detailing that it has been a key focus of President Kagame.⁷⁶

Socio-Economic Risk Factors

Level of National Economic Development

Rwanda scores in the low human development category, according to the UN Human Development Index, with a rank of 160 out of 189 countries and territories. Rwanda’s HDI score has significantly increased over the last few decades: between 1990-2019 the value grew from 0.248 to 0.543, having seen improvements in key human development indicators such as life expectancy and years of schooling. As of 2019, Rwanda’s HDI was comparatively lower than neighboring countries of Sub-Saharan Africa which had an average score of 0.547. When adjusted for inequality, however, the score lowers to 0.387, which is slightly higher than Sub-Saharan Africa’s average score of 0.380.⁷⁷

Level and Extent of Poverty

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the country’s economy expanded by 11 percent in 2021; however, poverty increased to a figure of 56.5 percent of the population and employment remained three percent higher than pre-pandemic levels. The World Bank states that Rwanda has “higher poverty rates than African peers with similar income per capita, and poverty



reduction has become less responsive to growth in recent years.” Despite this trend, poverty in Rwanda is believed to return to pre-pandemic levels in 2022 and the Rwandan government aspires to eliminate poverty by 2050.⁷⁸

Degree of Gender Inequality

The United Nations Development Program Gender Inequality Index scores Rwanda low for gender equality, ranking it 92 out of 162 countries in 2019.⁷⁹ Despite its ranking, in 2008, Rwanda became the first country in history to have more women in a national parliament than men. This figure has steadily increased and, as of 2021, 61 percent of the parliamentary seats are held by women.⁸⁰

Women are afforded the same legal status and rights as men, including under family, labor, nationality, and inheritance laws. The law permits women to inherit land from their fathers or husbands. However, in practice women face obstacles in obtaining property due to cultural biases against women, lack of knowledge regarding property claims, multiple spousal claims in the instance of polygyny, and the threat of gender-based violence.⁸¹ The law requires that women and men are paid equally and prohibits discrimination in hiring decisions. In practice, more women now work than men in Rwanda and the gender wage gap is 80.9% closed.⁸²

Women do not face formal legal restrictions when accessing credit but this right is limited in practice as men generally own a household’s greatest assets.⁸³ To combat the inequality that women face in accessing bank loans, the government has established several policies and programs to promote women’s financial inclusion; for example, the Rwandan Government instituted that 50 percent of microfinance mechanisms and bank loans should go to women to improve access to financial resources. The National Microfinance Policy, which ran from 2013-2017, was considered successful.⁸⁴

With regard to education, attendance is relatively similar among girls and boys; however, girls are more likely to drop out of school from secondary school level and, as of 2021, boys were found to significantly outperform their female counterparts at school.⁸⁵

Landlessness and Dispossession

In March 2015, a new expropriation law was announced where the government reserves the right to expropriate property “in the public interest” and for “qualified private investment.”⁸⁶ There have been frequent reports of land being expropriated for the establishment of roads, government buildings, and other infrastructure projects without timely and adequate compensation.⁸⁷ Households reported delays in receiving compensation ranging from five to 42 months.⁸⁸



The National Land Policy reports that customary laws are promoting the excessive distribution of land plots through the father-to-son inheritance system. Although women can inherit land from their deceased husbands, girls are not permitted to inherit land from their fathers. Further to this, the informal practice of polygyny has a pejorative effect on the women and children whose marriages are legally unrecognized, as they do not have an effective right to their husband or father's land or property.⁸⁹

Environmental Factors

Rwanda has a temperate climate with two rainy seasons. The principal issues affecting Rwanda in terms of the environment are deforestation, overgrazing, land degradation, soil erosion, soil exhaustion, water pollution, wetland degradation, and loss of biodiversity as well as widespread poaching.⁹⁰ With a population growth rate of around 2.4% per year, Rwanda is also experiencing a strain on its natural resources. A relatively high population density rate has led to greater land scarcity, and this land scarcity in turn has forced farmers to begin cultivating less fertile land with poor quality soil and irrigation sources.⁹¹

Climate change is projected to exacerbate socio-economic and political issues in Rwanda over the next few decades, as crop yields of maize, rice, and wheat will likely decrease-- although the increased temperatures may prove more suitable for soybean farming.

In 2016, more than 100,000 families in the Eastern Province districts of Rwanda suffered famine due to drought which impacted crop yields. While the government cited climate change for the difficulties that families faced, analysts reported that disappointing crop yields may instead be attributed to poor agricultural policies. Additionally, there is a regional disparity, with farmers occupying hilly terrain at a disadvantage as they are unable to irrigate their crops whereas those in marshlands have fared better.⁹²

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Key Commodity Supply Chains

Coffee

Coffee Overview

The majority of Rwandan coffee production occurs on smallholder farms, and there are an estimated 400,000 households that depend on the crop for their livelihoods. The average farm has approximately 450 trees.⁹³ The coffee industry in Rwanda has undergone drastic changes over the past decade, and key investments in coffee washing infrastructure to improve the quality of the final product has been beneficial to many farmers who grow the plant.⁹⁴



Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Coffee

A recent study found that coffee farmers, even smallholder coffee farmers, had high rates of hired labor, with an average of over 1.5 full time employees per hectare in Rwanda.⁹⁵ The study found that because smallholder coffee farmers earn low profit margins, they have little cash left to compensate hired workers.⁹⁶

There is limited evidence of child labor in coffee production.⁹⁷

Tea

Tea Overview

As of 2022, the tea industry employed roughly 60,000 people and supported the indirect employment of approximately 200,000 more.⁹⁸ Production is organized around 11 estates. There were around 27,000 smallholder farms producing tea in 2013, and these smallholders owned approximately 70 percent of the tea producing land. Day laborers are often employed to pick tea leaves on these small farms.⁹⁹

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Tea

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's 2020 *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*, tea is produced using child labor.¹⁰⁰ A study among child workers in the tea sector in Rwanda found that children are involved in the full range of tea production activities, including preparing land, pesticide application, and leaf harvesting. They have also reported being involved in ancillary activities such as gathering firewood for factories. Among children in this study, child labor was found predominantly on smallholder farms.¹⁰¹



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