



## SHADOW REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN RWANDA TO THE 51<sup>ST</sup> SESSION OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REPORT

PREPARED AND SUBMITTED

BY

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## **About the Coalition**

The Coalition of Women Rights Organizations in Rwanda (hereinafter referred to as the Coalition) takes this opportunity to submit its final report to the UPR Working Group of the Human Rights Council.

The coalition, established by HAGURUKA in April 2023, seeks to amplify advocacy on issues affecting women through the comprehensive assessment of Rwanda's implementation of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations regarding women's rights. The coalition is comprised of 16 prominent women's rights organizations, including HAGURUKA, Rwanda Women Network, Réseau des Femmes Ouvrant pour le Développement Rural, Empower Rwanda, Save Generations Organization, Duhozanye, AKWOS, Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe, Family Magazine, Rwanda Girls Guides, Rwanda National Association of Deaf Women (RNADW), SEVOTA, Hope for Single Mothers with Disabilities, Réseau de Développement des Femmes Pauvre, UNABU, and Girls Leaders Forum Rwanda.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report was prepared under the auspices of a coalition of women-rights organizations in Rwanda and serves to provide information on the status of the implementation of UPR recommendations accepted by the Government of Rwanda during the third UPR review in 2021. As such, this report highlights the progress accomplished, main areas of concern, and suggests actionable recommendations to improve the rights of women in Rwanda.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The Coalition draws on a comprehensive desk review and analysis of relevant studies, national reports, and official documents, including laws, policies, and national strategic frameworks to create this report. In addition, the report incorporates insights from qualitative interviews with officials from 15 institutions, including government ministries, public agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners. The report complements the mid-term report (reference: A/HRC/47/14) submitted by the coalition in December 2023 on a similar subject.

### **3. STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATIONS OF ACCEPTED RECOMMENDATIONS ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS**

#### **3.1. Women's Participation and Fight Against Discrimination (Recommendation No 134.21, 134.22, 134.109, 134.110, 134.111, 134.112, 134.116, 134.117, 134.118, 134.120& 134.121).**

1. The Coalition commends the Government of Rwanda efforts in advancing gender equality, women’s rights promotion, and empowerment through legal, policy, and strategic reforms that promote women’s empowerment and rights. The Coalition appreciates the inclusion and institutionalizing of gender equality at all levels in the National Strategy for Transformation (NST2 2024-29) priorities, notably, the strategy emphasizes institutionalizing gender equality at all levels of education, including bridging the gender divide in ICT, STEM, and TVET education programs, and enhancing women’s representation and participation in leadership and decision-making positions across both public and private sectors.

2. The Coalition welcomes the 2023 amendment of Rwanda’s Labour Law N° 66/2018, which introduced Article 24 *bis*, explicitly prohibiting the termination of employment contracts on the grounds of pregnancy.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the adoption of a Ministerial Order in 2023 extending maternity leave from 12 to 14 consecutive weeks, and importantly, expanding coverage to include cases of stillbirth, infant death after delivery, miscarriage, and premature birth, which is a fundamental step in protecting maternal rights.<sup>2</sup>

3. In regard to promoting women’s participation in leadership and decision-making positions, the coalition acknowledges the Government of Rwanda’s continued efforts to elevate women’s representation in public decision-making spaces. As of 2024, women constitute 61% in the Chamber of Deputies, and their representation in the Senate increased from 35% in 2019 to 53.8% in the fourth legislature.<sup>3</sup> These figures reflect the country's sustained commitment to gender parity in governance and political leadership.

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<sup>1</sup> Law n° 027/2023 of 18/05/2023 amending the Law n° 66/2018 of 30/08/2018 regulating labour in Rwanda

<sup>2</sup> Ministerial Order N° 02/MIFOTRA/23 of 01/08/2023 on occupational health and safety, organisations employees’ organisations and employers’ organisations, child employment, employment of a foreigner

<sup>3</sup> Gender Monitoring Office *The State of Gender Equality Progress for Sustainable Transformation* (March 2024)

4. The Coalition commends the National Bank of Rwanda (NBR) for developing guidelines in 2023 to deepen women's financial inclusion which contributed significantly in closing the gender gap in financial access where women's access to financial services increased from 92% in 2020 to 96% in 2024. Further, formal financial inclusion among women also rose from 74% in 2020 to 90% in 2024, driven largely by the growing use of non-bank formal financial services, particularly mobile money, which increased from 55% in 2020 to 73% in 2024.<sup>4</sup> These gains reflect targeted policy and regulatory efforts that prioritize inclusive financial ecosystems.<sup>5</sup>

### **3.1.1. Areas of Concern**

5. Despite notable progress in promoting gender equality, women's participation and empowerment, and addressing discrimination, the Coalition notes persistence barriers in achieving full gender equality, particularly in financial inclusion. Limited access to credit remains a key challenge due to women's restricted control over household assets, especially land, which is often required as collateral. In addition, limited financial literacy and a high concentration of women in the informal financial sector (73%) continue to limit women's economic agency.<sup>6</sup>

6. The gender gap in unemployment remains with women experiencing 17.5% compared to 12.2% for men as of November 2024. <sup>7</sup>This gap is exacerbated by systemic labor market inequalities and the burden of unpaid care work. Moreover, while digital finance has improved access to basic financial services, significant disparities persist in the use of formal financial products. According to the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, only 17% of women held bank accounts compared to 27% of men. Women's participation in more complex financial services remains limited with only 9% of women using bank credit, 7% using insurance, and 12% accessing savings or investment products. These tools are critical for long-term economic empowerment and resilience, underscoring the need for targeted interventions that address structural barriers, increase financial literacy, and promote inclusive financial ecosystems.

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<sup>4</sup> FinScope Survey (2024) Gender and Financial Inclusion Thematic Report

<sup>5</sup> National Bank of Rwanda "Guidelines to Women's Financial Inclusion Actions for Financial Institutions to deepen women's financial inclusion within the financial system" Retrieved from <<  
[https://www.bnr.rw/documents/Women\\_Financial\\_Inclusion\\_Guidelines\\_1.pdf](https://www.bnr.rw/documents/Women_Financial_Inclusion_Guidelines_1.pdf)>> Accessed on 23 June 2025

<sup>6</sup> FinScope Survey (2024) Gender and Financial Inclusion Thematic Report

<sup>7</sup> Rwanda Labour Force Survey (2024), NISR

7. In addition, the Coalition notes with concern the underrepresentation of women in local governance, accounting for only 30% of mayors and 15% of vice mayors in charge of economic affairs in 2024.<sup>8</sup> Hence the Coalition recommends the enforcement of a mandatory minimum quota of 30% women's representation within private sector leadership and local governance structures, accompanied by monitoring mechanisms to ensure effective implementation.

8. The coalition is also concerned with the burden of unpaid care and domestic work that continues to be a major hindrance to women's empowerment in Rwanda. Women, particularly in rural areas, spend a disproportionate amount of time on caregiving responsibilities such as childcare, water collection, cooking, and caring for the sick and elderly. This unequal distribution of unpaid care work limits women's time and opportunities for engaging in income-generating activities, education, leadership, and public life.

**3.2.Fighting against Gender Based Violence (Recommendation no. 134.121, 134.122, 134.123, 134.124, 134.125, 134.126, 134.127, 134.128, 134.129, 134.130, 134.131, 134.132, 134.133, 134.134, 134.135, 134.136, 134.137, 134.138, 134.139, 134.140 & 134.144).**

9. The Coalition acknowledges the various measures and initiatives implemented to prevent and respond to Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Rwanda. Notably, these include nationwide awareness campaigns, and the establishment of the Gender-Based Violence Management Information System (GBV-MIS) by the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) as a centralized digital platform designed to collect, manage, and analyze GBV case data. The GBV-MIS enhances coordination, case tracking, and timely response, while supporting evidence-based decision-making and accountability.

10. Additionally, the Coalition positively notes the adoption in 2024 of guidelines for the reintegration of GBV victims, whose main objective is to provide comprehensive approaches to anti-GBV actors to harmonize community reintegration services for GBV victims.<sup>9</sup> The Coalition

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<sup>8</sup> Gender Monitoring Office, Beijing +30 Rwanda Country Report

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion *Guidelines for Community Reintegration of Gender Based Violence Victims in Rwanda* (August 2024)

also positively notes the establishment of the Sex Offenders Registry in November 2021 which contains names of people who were convicted of sex offences.<sup>10</sup>

11. Furthermore, the continued provision of holistic, survivor-centered services through the Isange One Stop Centre (IOSC) remains critical. According to the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, from July 2022 to February 2023, 18,284 GBV survivors accessed IOSC services, including free medical care, psychosocial support, legal assistance, and reintegration support.<sup>11</sup>

12. More so, the Coalition commends the Government of Rwanda for launching the National Child Protection Case Management framework in 2023 that aims to strengthen the provision of protection to all children, including victims of violence, abuse, and exploitation.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.2.1. Areas of concern**

13. Despite commendable efforts to address GBV, significant challenges remain, particularly regarding access to quality services. Access to GBV-related services remains limited, especially for women and girls in rural and remote areas. For example, there are places where Isange One Stop Centers are available only at district hospitals, requiring victims to travel long distances, often compromising timely evidence collection and discouraging reporting. A 2024 study by HAGURUKA further revealed the absence of a standardized and consolidated GBV shelter policy framework, resulting in fragmented service delivery, inconsistent victim protection, and poor coordination among actors<sup>13</sup>.

14. Additionally, interviews with key informants during the development of this report revealed persistent barriers to reporting and seeking justice for GBV victims. These include low public awareness of GBV, particularly technology-facilitated abuse, poverty which also increases their

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<sup>10</sup> New Times “Prosecution publishes names of sex offenders”. Available at <<https://www.newtimes.co.rw/article/190194/News/prosecution-publishes-names-of-sex-offenders>>. Read also Rwanda Today “Sex offence registry: Youth, domestic workers top the list” Available at <<https://rwandatoday.africa/rwanda/news/sex-offence-registry-youth-domestic-workers-top-the-list-3589658>>

<sup>11</sup> MIGEPROF *Quarterly Newsletter 03*. Available at <<<https://www.migeprof.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=69753&token=137fb738c729ccbbc51dcfa6da9f52841d66b349>>>. accessed on 19 June 2025

<sup>12</sup> National Child Development Agency “Rwanda launches a framework to strengthen delivering of integrated child protection services” Retrieved from <<<https://www.ncda.gov.rw/updates/news-detail/rwanda-launches-a-framework-to-strengthen-delivering-of-integrated-child-protection-services>>>.Accessed on 20 June 2025

<sup>13</sup> HAGURUKA’s report “Assessment of GBV shelter services in Rwanda” 2024

dependency on perpetrators, and inaccessible justice processes for women with disabilities due to the absence of sign language interpreters, braille, and assistive communication tools. Further, a reliance on informal dispute resolution mechanisms, which prioritize reconciliation over accountability, often leads to impunity for perpetrators. Victims also face social stigma, victim-blaming, and pressure to protect family reputation, which further discourages them from coming forward. Despite efforts to improve the legal response to GBV, the overwhelmed court system often results in prolonged trials, with survivors waiting months, or even years, for their cases to be heard. This not only erodes trust in the justice system, but also weakens deterrence for perpetrators. Thus, the Coalition recommends the specialized GBV chamber to prioritize of GBV cases to ensure swift and survivor-centered justice.

### **3.3. Health (Recommendation no. 134.89, 134.91 & 134.93)**

15. The Coalition acknowledges the significant progress made in expanding access to healthcare services through community health workers, the widespread adoption of health insurance “Mutuelle de Santé” now covering over 84% of the population, and the innovative use of drone technology for delivering emergency health supplies enhanced service delivery.<sup>14</sup> This progress is reflected in the increased antenatal care coverage and the fact that 94% of births are now attended by skilled health professionals, contributing to safer deliveries and improved emergency obstetric care.<sup>15</sup> These efforts have led to a reduction in the maternal mortality ratio from 476 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010/11 to 203 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2019/20, as well as declines in neonatal and under-five mortality rates.<sup>16</sup> Overall, these advances have significantly improved access to primary and reproductive health services across the country, particularly for women and girls.

#### **3.3.1. Areas of concern**

16. Despite the progress made in expanding access to healthcare, women and girls in Rwanda continue to face persistent challenges in accessing comprehensive and inclusive sexual and reproductive health services. One notable area of concern is access to safe abortion services

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<sup>14</sup> Gender Monitoring Office, Beijing +30 Rwanda Country Report

<sup>15</sup> National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda *Statistical Year Book 2024*

<sup>16</sup> NISR, Demographic and Health Survey



because current regulations require the involvement of a medical doctor which can be a barrier, especially in rural areas. Moreover, informed consent in family planning is not always guaranteed, and enforced sterilization procedures, particularly affecting women and girls who are deaf, raise serious human rights and ethical concerns. Adolescents and unmarried women also face barriers, including limited access to youth-friendly reproductive health services, stigma, and persistent misconceptions, as noted in key informant interviews, which frame family planning as only appropriate for adults and married women.

17. Further, women with disabilities continue to experience physical and communication barriers when seeking reproductive healthcare, largely due to the lack of sign language proficiency among healthcare providers. Mental health also remains a critical concern, with data showing that mental disorders are more prevalent among women (23.2%) than men (16.6%), particularly major depressive episodes (12%), panic disorder (8.1%), and PTSD (3.6%). While awareness of mental health services stands at 61.7%, only 5.3% of women report having accessed these services, underscoring the urgent need for integrated, gender-sensitive, and accessible mental health care.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.4. Climate Change Action (Recommendation no 134.25).**

18. The Coalition commends the Government of Rwanda for adopting gender-responsive measures in its efforts to address climate change. Notably, the National Strategic Plan for the Environment, adopted in 2022, includes a clear commitment to enhancing gender inclusion in ecosystem restoration activities. The strategy also promotes the capacity building of private sector actors, community-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations on the intersections of gender equality, environmental sustainability, and climate change engagement. Furthermore, the Coalition welcomes the revised Green Growth and Climate Resilience Strategy, adopted in June 2022, which explicitly acknowledges the importance of integrating gender into early warning systems, thereby improving disaster preparedness and response in a gender-sensitive manner.

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<sup>17</sup>Kayiteshonga, Y., Sezibera, V., Mugabo, L. *et al.* Prevalence of mental disorders, associated co-morbidities, health care knowledge and service utilization in Rwanda – towards a blueprint for promoting mental health care services in low- and middle-income countries?. *BMC Public Health* **22**, 1858 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14165-x>

### **3.4.1. Areas of concern**

19. While Rwanda has made progress in addressing climate change, women particularly those in rural areas, remain disproportionately affected due to persistent gender inequalities and structural barriers. According to the 2022 Population Census, 77% of Rwanda's population is dependent on agriculture, with the majority engaged in subsistence farming, a sector highly vulnerable to climate variability. Women are especially at risk, as 52.1% of women reside in rural areas, compared to 47.9% of men, and they participate in agricultural employment at higher rates than men (63.9% vs. 44.3%)<sup>18</sup>. Despite their critical role in food production, rural women face limited access to climate information, and climate-smart solutions such as climate smart agriculture-inputs.

20. Their livelihoods reliant on seasonal agriculture and natural resources are increasingly threatened by climate-related events such as droughts, floods, and unpredictable rainfall, directly impacting food security and household well-being.

21. Moreover, their dependence on biomass (firewood and charcoal) for cooking contributes to environmental degradation and poses serious health and safety risks. A 2021 study by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation found that 91% of respondents identified limited livelihood opportunities as a major barrier to women's climate adaptation<sup>19</sup>. As such, women's lower adaptive capacity and constrained access to resources limits their resilience, reinforcing climate change as a threat multiplier that deepens existing gender disparities across economic, environmental, and social dimensions.

## **4. Recommendations to the Government of Rwanda**

The Government of Rwanda is encouraged to adopt a comprehensive and inclusive approach that addresses persistent structural barriers as coined in below recommendations. To accelerate progress toward gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, the government should:

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<sup>18</sup> National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda *5<sup>th</sup> Population and Housing Census Rwanda, 2022*

<sup>19</sup> Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, *Gender, Women's Rights, Environment and Climate Change in 2021*, available at <https://kvinna-till-kvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Womens-Rights-Gender-ECC-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Rwanda-2021.pdf>

- I. Strengthen women's economic empowerment by expanding targeted financial literacy programs for women and promoting the use of alternative forms of collateral to address structural barriers that hinder women's access to credit and financial inclusion.
- II. Enhance the capacity of women and promote structured mentorship programs that foster self-agency, leadership skills, and confidence with the aim of ensuring the meaningful informed and sustained participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels.
- III. Develop concrete measures to recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, which disproportionately falls on women and girls, by investing in family-friendly workplace policies and practices, in both the formal and informal sectors.
- IV. Establish dedicated Gender-Based Violence Special Chambers within the judicial system to ensure timely, survivor-centered, and specialized handling of GBV cases.
- V. Take measures to strengthen the capacity of decentralized and grassroots community structures to understand and support evidence collection and preservation in GBV cases and empower them to play a more active role in the access to justice chain. This includes building their ability to detect early warning signs of GBV, provide timely referrals, and link GBV victims to relevant authorities for appropriate legal and support services.
- VI. Ensure equitable access to affordable and clean cooking energy sources, particularly for women in rural areas, to reduce health risks, environmental degradation, and the burden of unpaid care work.
- VII. Promote the affordability and accessibility of climate-smart agricultural inputs for women, particularly the 52% who reside in rural areas and are disproportionately dependent on subsistence farming, by adopting gender-responsive agricultural subsidies that strengthen women's adaptive capacity and resilience climate smart agriculture.