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End of mission statement by Mr. Olivier De Schutter
Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

Visit to Rwanda, 19 May-30 May 2025

Kigali, 30 May 2025

I. Introduction

The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Mr. Olivier De Schutter, conducted an official visit to Rwanda from 19 to 30 May 2025. He extends his sincere gratitude to the Government of Rwanda for its cooperation before and during the visit.

Throughout the mission, the Special Rapporteur met with high-level government officials, including the Prime Minister, Dr. Edouard Ngirente; the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation; the Minister of Justice; the Minister of Finance and Economic Planning; representatives from the Rwanda Revenue Authority; the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, the Rwanda Development Board, the Rwanda Social Security Board; and the Rwanda Cooperative Agency.

He also held meetings with the Minister of Local Government and representative of the Local Administrative Entities Development Agency; the Minister of Public Service and Labour; the Minister of Education; the Minister of Agriculture and Animal Resources , along with representatives of the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board ; the Minister in charge of Emergency Management; the First Secretary from the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion representatives of the Gender Monitoring Office ; and the National Child Development Agency .

Further engagements included meetings with the Minister of Health, the First Secretary and Director General of the Rwanda Biomedical Centre; the Minister of Infrastructure and representatives from the Rwanda Housing Authority , the Water and Sanitation Corporation, the Rwanda Energy Group , and the Rwanda Transport Development Agency ; and the Minister of Environment, along with representatives from the National Land Authority and the Rwanda Environment Management Authority .

The Special Rapporteur also met with the Governors of the Southern and Western Provinces; members of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, including the Speaker of Parliament; the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; and the Chief Ombudsman. He held discussions with representatives of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Bank, and the African Development Bank; as well as with the Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission, and representatives of trade unions, employers organisations, civil society organisations, activists, academia, and the Rwanda Inter-Religious Council.

During his visit, the Special Rapporteur travelled to the Southern, Western, and Kigali Provinces to engage with community members, cooperatives' members, farmers, and historically marginalised groups.

The Special Rapporteur is grateful for the support provided by the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the UN Country Team in Rwanda. He extends his deep appreciation to all individuals, communities, and groups who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights. He observed first-hand the resilience and strength of those who continue to mobilize, organize, and work collectively to improve their living conditions and claim their human rights.

II. State of poverty and inequality

A. Monetary poverty

Rwanda's progress in the fight against poverty is impressive. The Seventh Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (EICV7), conducted by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda

(NISR), uses two monetary poverty lines, both based on a cost-of-basic-needs approach. According to the national monetary poverty line set at RWF 560,127 per adult equivalent per year, 27.4% of the population –approximately 3.6 million people– lived below the poverty line in 2024, down from 39.8%, estimated for 2017 through imputation modelling. Thus, around 1.5 million Rwandans have been lifted out of poverty over this seven-year period. According to the extreme poverty line, set at RWF 356,432 per adult equivalent per year, 5.4% of the population –roughly 700,000 people– lived in extreme poverty in 2024, down from 11.3% in 2017.

Although monetary poverty declined in both rural and urban settings, important spatial inequalities remain: 31.6% of the rural population lives below the national poverty line, nearly twice the rate found in urban areas (16.7%). Similarly, extreme poverty in rural zones is estimated at 6.4%, more than double the 3.1% figure measured in urban areas. Overall, more than 4 in 5 poor Rwandans live in rural areas. Poverty is highest in the Western and Southern Provinces, both of which the Special Rapporteur visited, where 37.4% and 34.7% of the population live in poverty, and 9% and 7.4% in extreme poverty, respectively. In contrast, Kigali records the lowest poverty incidence at 9.1% (1.1% in extreme poverty).

Moreover, while the government has placed considerable emphasis on jobs creation as a means to reduce poverty, work does not always pay: one in four workers (25.3%) live in poverty. In-work poverty is most pronounced in low-skilled occupations such as elementary jobs and subsistence farming. In-work poverty is most concentrated agriculture: 31.4% of agricultural workers live in poverty, compared to 23.7% in industry and just 12.1% in services.

B. Multidimensional poverty

According to the 2023 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) published by UNDP and OPHI, 48.8% of Rwandans are multidimensionally poor and 22.7% vulnerable to multidimensional poverty, showing important improvements compared to 2015 (57.5% and 49.0%) and 2010 (66.8% and 50.6% respectively) . Key deprivations include lack of access to clean cooking fuel (48.7%), adequate housing (44.4%), electricity (36.5%), and assets (36.9%). Educational indicators also contribute very significantly to poverty, with 28.9% of the population deprived in years of schooling and 8% in school attendance. Nutrition remains a major problem with 23% of the population considered undernourished.

During his visit, the Special Rapporteur was informed that a new report on multidimensional child poverty, jointly prepared by UNICEF and NISR, will soon be published based on recent EICV7 data. He welcomes this forthcoming review, as earlier estimates indicated an alarming situation with 65.8% of children were considered multidimensionally poor, a rate significantly higher among children living in rural areas and in households with a high share of dependents. While monetary poverty affects men and women at comparable rates, multidimensional child poverty is higher in female-headed households compared to male-headed ones, a gap which is strongly associated with lower levels of education among mothers and household heads.

C. Inequality

According to the World Inequality Database, the richest 1% of Rwandans earn 20% of national income, nearly twice the share held by the bottom 50%. In terms of wealth, the top 1% control 30.3% of net personal assets, while the bottom half holds just 3.3%. While the national Gini coefficient reflects a moderate level of inequality (0.37), inequalities are far more pronounced

in urban (0.44) and in rural (0.26) areas. Poverty is spread equally in rural areas; wealth is spread unequally in cities.

While the Gini coefficient represents an apparent improvement from earlier estimates (0.47), which ranked Rwanda among the second most unequal low-income countries, methodological changes and data limitations make it difficult to reliably assess inequality trends over time. The Special Rapporteur would encourage the NISR to deepen its analysis of wealth inequality – including disparities in land ownership, financial assets, and immovable property– in addition to income inequality. Moreover, he recommends that future reporting on inequality complement the Gini coefficient with additional indicators that are more sensitive to the two extreme ends of the distribution ladder. In particular, the Palma ratio, which compares the share of the richest 10% to that of the poorest 40%, can usefully inform policies aimed at greater equity.

D. Measurement of poverty

The measurement and reporting of poverty data in Rwanda has been controversial in the past. The credibility of poverty statistics depends on the transparent and consistent application of sound methodologies, including the choice of inflation indices and the treatment of spatial price variations. Prices for basic goods and services vary significantly across rural and urban areas, and between provinces, affecting poverty estimates. While the current methodology applies spatial price deflators to household consumption to account for geographic variation in prices, the national poverty line remains uniform across the country. The Government should consider the introduction of regionally differentiated poverty lines to better reflect local cost-of-living differences. Doing so would enhance the accuracy of poverty estimates and support adequate policy responses.

It is vital that poverty data be open to scrutiny, rigorously produced, and accessible to civil society, academia, and development partners. Strengthening the integrity of official statistics will reinforce public trust and contribute to more effective, evidence-based policymaking. The Special Rapporteur thus encourages the authorities to ensure the continued full transparency, accessibility, and methodological consistency in the production of poverty data, including clear public documentation of how inflation adjustments and spatial deflators are applied.

III. Pro-poor macroeconomic choices

A. Investing in people

Rwanda has recorded strong economic growth, averaging 7.5% over the past decade and exceeding 8% annually between 2021 and 2024, well above the Sub-Saharan Africa average of 4.1% during the same period. This growth has been largely driven by substantial public investment, particularly in the services sector, with a strategic focus on ICT, trade, and the development of high-end tourism through the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry. Significant investment has also been directed toward the industrial sector (construction and manufacturing activities) and critical infrastructure, including roads, energy, water, sanitation, and transport, notably the national airline. These priorities, laid out in the NST-1 and further refined in NST-2, reflect the Government's ambition to rapidly transition to a service-, manufacturing- and export-led economy with the goal of becoming a knowledge-based, upper-middle-income country by 2035. In the agricultural sector, this vision is supported by ongoing efforts to move away from subsistence farming toward a

more commercial, mechanized, and technology-driven model aimed at boosting productivity and enhancing export potential. Over the years, the Government has also put efforts into fostering a business-friendly environment to stimulate private-sector led growth, gained a reputation for low corruption and was consistently one of Africa's top performers in the World Bank's ease of doing business rankings.

This growth strategy has mainly benefited a narrow formal sector elite. The link between economic expansion and poverty reduction has weakened over time. Educated urban populations have gained disproportionately, while those with lower levels of education or living in rural and remote areas feel they have been left behind. As acknowledged by the Government of Rwanda itself in a report prepared with the World Bank, the viability of a services sector-driven growth model in Rwanda remains inconclusive and evidence suggests that it is not delivering on its promises of long-term job creation.

Moreover, Rwanda's ambition to establish itself as a regional hub through high-profile investments, such as the Kigali Convention Centre, may generate short-term economic gains and international visibility but these ventures require substantial public funding that are regressive in nature, as they tend to benefit wealthier and foreign clientele while offering limited direct advantages for the broader population. Redirecting resources toward sectors such as agriculture could have a more immediate and tangible impact on poverty reduction and significantly enhance livelihoods for the rural majority, embodying a shift from a policy of "trickle-down development" to one focused explicitly on "inclusive, bottom-up development".

B. Ringfencing social investment

Reallocating scarce public resources towards initiatives that directly benefit the broader population, particularly in rural areas, demand that social investments be safeguarded in the face of pressing macroeconomic constraints.

By 1 January 2025, the public debt had reached 78.7% of the GDP. In order to avoid being moved to the "high risk" category of borrowers, the government has committed to reducing the public deficit from 6.9% of the GDP (2024) to 3.3% in the next two years. It is entering, in other terms, a "shock therapy".

This arrives, moreover, at the worst possible time. Support from external donors has become less predictable and the government will be reducing expenditures from development projects mainly funded by the countries that have halted ODA to Rwanda, in reaction to the ongoing conflict in the DRC, in addition to the U.S. global retreat of USAID. Graduation beyond LDC status, which the government hopes to achieve by 2035, will mean both a loss of trade advantages, and a further reduction of access to concessional lending.

It is vital that the government focuses on investing in its people and realizing economic and social rights for all. This requires increasing the mobilization of domestic resources, curbing lost revenues (eg. from offshore wealth and corporations' profit shifting), and ringfencing the budgets of social investment. Only by sustaining investment in healthcare and early childhood development, by improving access to quality education, by further extending social protection, and by strengthening workers' rights, including those of informal workers, will Rwanda be able to reap the demographic dividend of its young population in the next 10 years.

The most recent trends are concerning: health budgets have declined as a share of the national budget, from 10 per cent in 2020/21 to around 7 per cent in 2024/25. Social protection has seen a 22 per cent reduction in its 2024/25 budget allocation, although coverage is still patchy, and the 2025/2026 budget anticipates a further decrease of 30% in nominal terms. While budget allocations to water and sanitation have increased in recent years, they remain inadequate: the current allocation of RFW 8,036 per person would need to be more than doubled to enable Rwanda to meet its SDG targets linked to clean water and sanitation. Moreover, the funding of policies in areas such as healthcare and social protection depend largely on donors' support: a sustainable financing strategy for funding these sectors is urgently needed.

IV. Social rights as a compass

Weak human capital remains one of the biggest challenge the economic development of Rwanda, which ranks 160th out of 174 countries on the Human Capital Index (HCI), reflecting the combined effects of persistently low learning outcomes and high rates of child stunting. Investing in healthcare, education and nutrition are therefore essential to ensure that the economic progress of the last two decades leads to further meaningful reductions of poverty and inequality. Human rights provide a compass.

A. Education

The population of Rwanda is young: 58% are aged 24 or younger. If it is to prepare for a knowledge-based economy, it is essential that the country pursues its efforts to ensure "universal access to high-quality education", as expressed in the country's "Vision 2050". The gaps are known: the majority of the population (62.9%) have only attended primary school, 23.9% reaching secondary, and just 4.3% accessing tertiary education. Equally troubling, Rwanda has one of the lowest levels of education attainment in the region: UNESCO speaks of a "learning crisis". The World Bank's Human Capital Index shows students in Rwanda score 358 on a harmonized test score scale, where 625 represents advanced attainment and 300 represents minimum attainment. Expected years of school are 6.9 (ranking Rwanda 167 out of 175 countries in the Index) and learning-adjusted years of schooling (combining quantity and quality) are just 3.9 (ranking Rwanda 169). In other words, children attend 6.9 years of school on average, but learn only 3.9 years of content. Out of the total population aged 15 years and above, 24.2% are illiterate (26.4% for females compared to 21.6% for males; and 28.9% in rural areas compared to 13.1% in urban areas).

Three challenges stand out. Dropout rates remain high, despite some reduction achieved through the universalisation of school feeding since 2021: net enrolment rates at 94.3% in primary school, but just 39% in pre-primary and 26.4% in secondary. While primary and secondary schooling is free in principle, parents face "hidden costs", such as examination fees, school meal contributions and 'voluntary' parent-teacher association dues. Teenage pregnancy among girls and discrimination towards "historically marginalized people" are other factors explaining high dropout rates.

Repetition rates are high, absorbing one quarter of the total education budget: among the children who attended primary school during 2022/2023 academic year, 21% repeated the same grade in the 2023/2024 academic year, and the repetition rate was 10.7% in lower secondary, 4.3% in upper secondary. Completion rates remain low and are even worsening. High repetition rates are often attributed to poor school readiness (with the majority of children not having

attended pre-primary), stunting and undernutrition, and struggles to follow English as the language of instruction.

The poor quality of education is a third source of concern. Classrooms are often extremely crowded, with an average of 59 pupils per class in 2022 (a reduction from 71 in 2020). 64% of primary schools also operate on a double-shift system, with learners spending just 22 hours per week with teachers out of the recommended 42 hours.

Children from low-income households and in rural areas are disadvantaged in the education system. Children from families in the highest wealth quintile have greater access to preschool services (41.3%) compared to their peers in the lowest quintile (17.3%): they come therefore to school better prepared. Moreover, children from low-income background cannot afford the private schools, which provide the best education: 99.0% of children of the lowest quintile attend public or government-subsidized schools, whereas 34.4% of children of the highest quintile are in private schools, a gap which largely corresponds to a rural-urban divide: only 3.3% of children in rural areas attend private schools, while this is the case for 23.4% of children in cities. Finally, there is a huge gap in school attendance rates between children without disabilities (93% and 33.9% respectively at primary and secondary levels) and children with disabilities (62% and 13.7%): this shows the urgent need to make education more inclusive.

Alleviating the hidden costs of basic education and improving the quality of education and its relevance to the labour market should help to close these gaps, as the opportunity costs of participating in education can be high for poor households, not only in terms of the savings and investment opportunities which have to be foregone because of the financial costs of education, but also the income foregone by having children in school rather than earning.

B. Healthcare

Rwanda's health indicators reflect both impressive progress and persistent challenges. The country has achieved high coverage in essential services, with 94% of births attended by skilled health personnel and immunisation rates exceeding 95%. The prevalence of wasting among children under five has dropped dramatically (by 87% since 2000), now standing at just 1.1%. Maternal and under-five mortality rates are still high, however, and child stunting continues to affect one in three children under five, with 9% severely stunted.

Since 2006, the community-based health insurance (CBHI) system, *Mutuelles de Santé,* has been fully implemented: 87.9% of the population are now covered. Although coverage depends on payment of a premium, the minimum fee is relatively modest (3,000 RwF), and the vast majority of the households who cannot afford to pay (representing approximately 800,000 people) are supported by a government subsidy. The decentralised healthcare public service system allowed to reduce the travel time needed to obtain health care.

The number of skilled health workers remains low, however: there are 1.2 skilled health worker (physician, nurse of midwife) per 1,000 population, a quarter of the WHO recommended minimum health workforce density to achieve the SDGs by 2030 (4.45 per 1,000). Moreover, almost half of the healthcare's budget is from external financing in the form of loans or grants, and the budget dedicated to healthcare, as a share of the public budget, has been decreasing in recent years: it represented 6.6% in 2024-25, well below the Abuja Declaration committing States to dedicate at least 15% of their public budget to health.

C. Food

Food insecurity still affects 17 per cent of households, with 1 per cent facing severe food insecurity. It is most pronounced in the Western Province (particularly Rubavu and Nyamasheke district) and the Southern Province (notably Nyamagabe district), where the rates are 23 per cent and 16 per cent respectively. And while fewer people are starving, dietary diversity and the adequacy of diets remain problematic: 75.7% of Rwandans cannot afford a healthy diet, a figure higher than regional averages.

Nutritional deficits are particularly alarming during early childhood, a critical window for physical and cognitive development. In 2024, 30 per cent of children were stunted. Key drivers of stunting include low birth weight and preterm births, often linked to maternal malnutrition during pregnancy. Mothers' access to adequate nutrition, education, and health services significantly influences children's growth. Educated mothers are more likely to adopt appropriate infant feeding practices, ensure dietary diversity and meal frequency, and access health care for themselves and their children: children of educated mothers were found to be less likely to suffer from stunting.

Food insecurity remains highest in rural areas. While agriculture employs 61.6% of the workforce, a sector that accounts for 27% of the GDP, the vast majority of food producers are small-scale farmers depending on subsistence agriculture; most of them (77%) are women. Persistent structural barriers include widespread soil degradation, high post-harvest losses, demographic pressure, and the limited availability of arable land, as well as limited connectivity to markets.

While commendable efforts have been made to enhance agricultural productivity and environmental sustainability, Rwanda's agriculture continues to face structural and systemic challenges. Inadequate post-harvest storage infrastructure compounds seasonal food insecurity, forcing households to rely on markets during periods of elevated prices, thereby limiting consistent access to nutritious diets. Market linkages remain weak, infrastructure remains inadequate despite the spectacular progress achieved in improving the roads network, and climate change brings about new threats. This calls for greater investment in agricultural value chains and strengthened engagement with the private sector, particularly to ensure stable food supply and affordability during lean seasons.

While the government has been promoting monocropping, especially for maize, as a way to encourage a transition towards "commercial" agriculture, the Special Rapporteur cautions against the risk that this may increase production costs for farmers, and result in a dependency on external inputs that will become problematic once governmental subsidies will be removed; this approach also can damage soil health. In contrast, mixed cropping schemes, reliance on agroforestry and on leguminous plans to reduce erosion, capture moisture from rainfall and fertilize soils, may be more promising.

D. Housing

Rwanda seeks to address the growing need for adequate housing through large-scale urban and rural development programmes. In Kigali, the population of which has risen from 18 per cent of the country in 2017 to 28 per cent in 2024 (with a projection of 35 per cent by 2025), the Government has implemented a number of initiatives aimed at improving living conditions for those in informal settlements, including by relocating them into newly constructed vertical

apartment blocks, as in Mpazi. In rural areas, the Government is pursuing the Integrated Development Programme and the creation of "Rurban" settlements, which combine planned housing infrastructure with opportunities for economic participation.

Blindspots remain. In response to increasing climate-related disasters, the Government has undertaken relocations from high-risk areas, such as valleys and hillsides, often citing flood or landslide risks. While necessary from a public safety perspective, these relocations have frequently lacked transparency, participation, and basic procedural safeguards. The Special Rapporteur received reports from affected communities, indicating that they were given only a few days to vacate their homes before demolition, with no prior consultation, compensation, or alternative accommodation.

Additional concerns include the lack of meaningful consultation with affected communities, absence of legal recourse for those evicted, and the risk that land development prioritises commercial or aesthetic interests over the rights of the poor. In some cases, repurposing of land in high-risk areas for plantation use raises questions about equitable access and long-term sustainability.

Nonetheless, the Special Rapporteur acknowledges the Government's stated commitment to sustainable urbanisation and climate resilience. The integration of housing initiatives with broader social and economic goals, including shareholder models and rent support, offers promising avenues for rights-based development. Moving forward, ensuring that all housing policies are implemented with full respect for human rights principles, including participation, non-discrimination, and accountability, will be essential to avoid exacerbating poverty and exclusion. Greater attention to the needs of historically marginalised peoples, women-headed households, and persons with disabilities will further strengthen the inclusivity and effectiveness of Rwanda's housing programmes.

E. Social protection

Social protection is delivered through the Vision Umurenge Program (VUP), initially launched in 2008, and placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC). VUP benefits in total 500,000 households or 1.7 million households (13% of the population). It includes a public works component, with 85,000 persons covered under the classic PW programme and 72,000 covered under the expanded PW programme in 2024; a cash transfer component (direct support); a home-based early childhood development component (enabling low-income households with care work responsibilities to get paid while learning and caring for children with the support of early childhood development centres); a nutrition sensitive direct support (NSDS); a skills development component (training); and a productive assets transfer component (including the *Girinka* programme ('one cow per poor household')).

The Special Rapporteur discussed these programmes in depth, both with the beneficiaries and with the authorities tasked with implementation, in the Southern and Western provinces in particular. He provides the following comments.

a) Coverage and targeting

Overall, 35 percent of those in the poorest quintile and about 14 percent of those in the second quintile live in a household that receives at least one VUP transfer. Coverage remains weak, however: VUP benefits only 27 percent of households considered extremely poor and 23

percent of households considered poor. Adequate targeting is therefore especially crucial. The dynamic social registry (*Imibereho*) is now being rolled out, in order to address the insufficiencies of the earlier *Ubudehe* classification system and, in fact, to "activate" beneficiaries, rather than to encourage long-term dependency: it is therefore aligned with the 2022 National Strategy for Sustainable Graduation.

Under the new social registry, the identification of households in need of support is based on a mapping of households' needs, through the questionnaires parasocial workers fill in in their household visits, using a proxy-means testing approach; the listing of households at village level through the village chief (*mudugudu*); and the validation of the list at community meetings (the *inteko z'abaturage*, at village level). Households who feel that they should have been included can appeal against the decision not to include them in certain interventions, first at the level of the cell, and then at district level: this is an administrative remedy against exclusion.

Based on the extensive interviews he conducted; the Special Rapporteur finds that the targeting is essentially sound. There are three concerns, however. First, some individuals the Special Rapporteur spoke to mentioned that parasocial workers and/or village chiefs could receive small bribes (*ikisiriko*) to facilitate inclusion on the list of beneficiaries (the figure of 5,000 RwF was mentioned). Secondly, since inclusion for a form of support is validated at community meetings, individuals who feel that they have been excluded may fear for their status within the community if they challenge the assessment that has been made about their situation. Thirdly, households who are considered outsiders to the community do not fare well under this system, in particular the semi-nomadic Batwa. The underinclusion of the Batwa is not remedied in community meetings, since they usually don't take part in such meetings and are, in any case, pariahs to the community.

These concerns call for adopting a rights-based approach to the social support policies provided under the VUP, in line with ILO Recommendation No. 202 (2012) on Social Protection Floors. More clearly defining the beneficiaries, providing information in language and in a format that people can understand, and ensuring access to remedies in conditions that encourage people to use such remedies, could reduce the risks both of underinclusion and of corruption. For coverage to increase, however, sustainable financing options will have to be found. While funding increased slightly from 1.36 percent of GDP to 1.61 percent of GDP between 2016/17 to 2020/21, the share of expenditures funded by external sources nearly doubled during this period, from 17.4 percent to 30.5 percent. Moreover, the budgetary allocation to social protection has been falling in nominal terms in recent years.

b) Direct support

By 2024, 104,506 people were receiving direct support through the *ingoboka* cash transfer system, granted to those who are unable to work. The amount is set at 7,500 RwF per month (8,500 RwF for older persons, above the age of 65). This is inadequate and does not allow the beneficiary to survive without relying on solidarity networks. In order to allow the beneficiaries to be protected from extreme destitution, the *ingoboka* should be raised to at least 46,600 RwF per month, corresponding approximately to the national poverty line and to the wage paid under the public works programme. Moreover, the amount should be set taking into account the additional costs incurred by people with disabilities.

NSDS is a form of income support (7,500 RwF per month) going to pregnant and lactating women, in order to encourage the uptake of essential health and nutrition services for the 1,000 days between conception and the second birthday of the child. This component of the VUP cannot be underestimated. As of 2023/2024, the last period for which data were available at the time of the visit, 142,115 women were benefiting from the programme, across 20 districts. This, in addition to the home-based early childhood development component of the VUP, should be further expanded in the future, as stunting rates remain high in the country, affecting 49% of children from low-income households.

Reducing stunting will require combining a range of policies, including the introduction of child allowances and the provision of information to parents about adequate nutrition. The single most immediate improvement that could be made, however, concerns the Early Childhood Development centres. In his 2024 report, the Auditor General of State Finances found that 92.2% of the ECD centres he visited did not provide holistic ECD services to children under six years. 73% of the visited ECD centres did not have adequate caregivers, and more than one in four centres (27%) did not adequately feed children.

c) The future of VUP

While the progress achieved in realizing the right to social security is commendable, significant gaps remain. Both the coverage and the adequacy of social protection should be improved in order to comply with article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and to meet the standards set in the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention (No. 102), 1952, which is still awaiting ratification by Rwanda. The most significant gaps concern the complete absence of unemployment benefits (although 13.9 per cent of workers are unemployed), as well as of family benefits (child allowances), and maternity benefits; and the low coverage and inadequate amount of the minimum income scheme. Persons with disabilities, if unable to work, can claim direct support under the VUP programme, however this support is minimal. This is not to say that the categories concerned are left entirely to fence for themselves, without any support; but the support they do receive remains patchy and insufficient. Against this background, the recent (and significant) reduction of the budgetary commitments made towards social protection are particularly troubling: social protection is not an area in which Rwanda can afford stinginess.

V. Employment

The government has placed a strong emphasis on job creation, and the recent changes to the social protection system are guided by the hope to reduce dependency and to pressure beneficiaries into employment and thus to graduate out of poverty. Yet, much remains to be done to ensure the conditions of decent work in Rwanda. Three priorities emerge.

While the Labour Code provides for the establishment of a minimum wage, this provision remains unimplemented: as a result, the statutory minimum wage has not been updated since 1973. The government should act without delay, in collaboration with social partners, to establish a minimum wage applicable across all sectors, corresponding at least to the living wage, and regularly indexed to the cost of living in order to ensure all workers and their families with an adequate standard of living.

A second priority is to accelerate the transition from informal to formal work. 82.2 per cent of employment is informal. Rwanda should pursue a two-tracks approach towards formalization. First, the human rights of informal workers should be protected, in order to avoid instances of exploitation by unscrupulous employers: health and safety at work regulations, union rights, and the right to equal treatment, should be extended to informal workers and enforced by labour inspectorates; and so, should the statutory minimum wage, when it will be set. Secondly, specific incentives can be put in place to encourage formalization. Businesses that register already are granted tax exemptions for 2 years. In addition, the labour clauses included in public contracts could systematically refer to the duty of public contractors to ensure that their sub-contractors are not relying on informal workers: the Rwanda Public Proceurement Authority could ensure that all public contracts thus contribute to the transition towards formalization.

A third priority concerns the ending of child labour. Rwanda has adopted successive strategies for the elimination of child labour since 2014, and the Labour Code prohibits employment of children under the age of 16 and regulates work conditions for those between 16 and 18 years of age. The generalization of the school-feeding programme, which is a powerful tool to reduce school dropout, can also help. Much more could be done, however. Education could be made compulsory until the minimum age for admission to employment or work (16 years), consistent with Article 2(3) of the ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138), 1973, which Rwanda has ratified. Ministerial Order n° 02/MIFOTRA/23 could be amended to ensure that any "light work" authorized for children between 13 and 15 years of age does not prejudice school attendance, which obviously is incompatible with the current provision under article 39 of the Ministerial Order that allow the child aged 13 to 15 years to work up to six hours per day.

None of these improvements will be effective, however, unless two conditions are fulfilled: a strengthening of the enforcement of labour regulations, and of social dialogue. Progress could be made on both points.

The ability for labour inspectors to perform their duties is constrained by the relatively limited number of inspectors. Rwanda has 33 labour inspectors for a total number of 4.3 million workers, whereas on average, in Sub-Saharan Africa, there are 2.35 labour inspectors per 100,000 workers: in order to meet this average, the number of labour inspectors would need to be tripled. Labour inspectors should also be tasked to monitor not only enterprises in the formal sector, but also enterprises in the informal sector. Indeed, in order to accelerate formalisation, a specific body of labour inspectors, tasked exclusively with monitoring the informal sector, could be recommended.

Unions too could be allowed more space to operate freely, and to strengthen the bargaining position of workers. According to the latest statistics available (from 2019), only 5.9 per cent of workers were unionized, and only 5.7 per cent of workers were covered by collective bargaining agreements. Unionization efforts and social dialogue should therefore be further encouraged.

VI. Vulnerable groups

A. Women

Women face greater vulnerability driven by entrenched patriarchal norms and persistent gender-based power imbalances both within households and the wider community. This restricts

women's access to resources, opportunities, and participation in decision-making, while high rates of gender-based violence further compromise their safety and well-being.

Gender-based violence remains widespread. Among women aged 15-49, 37% have experienced physical violence at some point since the age of 15 and 23% have experienced sexual violence. The links between poverty and GBV are bidirectional. Poverty increases the risk of GBV: 44.6% of women in the lowest wealth quintile reported having experienced physical violence since age 15, compared to 29.6% in the highest wealth quintile. Conversely, intra-household conflict is a major source of impoverishment: poor women report that men routinely fail to pool earnings and divert their income to pay for their own consumption (alcohol, prostitutes, a second wife) rather than contributing to necessary household consumption and investment costs.

B. The Batwa

During his visit, the Special Rapporteur met with members of the Batwa community, Community members reported enduring inadequate housing, food insecurity, and limited access to essential services. Education remains out of reach for many Batwa children due to the inability to pay school-related fees, contributing to a cycle of intergenerational poverty. Livelihood opportunities are scarce pottery, once a vital craft, has declined due to restricted access to clay and reduced market demand. Agricultural or public works are irregular and poorly remunerated.

The Batwa are officially classified under the "Historically Marginalised Peoples" (HMP), a broad and undefined category encompassing groups perceived as historically excluded, including women, people with disabilities, Muslims, and the Batwa. This terminology reflects Rwanda's efforts to promote national unity and social cohesion in the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide, notably through the adoption of Law No. 47/2001 on the Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Discrimination and Sectarianism, commonly referred to as the "Divisionism Law," which prohibits the use of ethnic classifications in public discourse.

While the intention of promoting national unity is commendable, the current approach has had adverse consequences for the Batwa, effectively denying their recognition as a distinct indigenous and minority group. Without legal status or land rights, the Batwa remain highly marginalised. They been systematically displaced from their ancestral lands due to deforestation, violent conflict, and conservation initiatives. Communities were expelled from areas now designated as national parks including Volcanoes, Gishwati, and Nyungwe, without consultation, free, prior and informed consent, or adequate compensation. Most were resettled into mainstream society at the lowest socioeconomic level, with minimal support to rebuild their lives.

Echoing other UN human rights mechanisms' concerns, the Special Rapporteur deplores the continued marginalisation of the Batwa. Their status as an indigenous group is neither acknowledged nor protected under national law, hindering their ability to seek redress for structural discrimination.

C. Refugees

Rwanda has demonstrated commendable progress in adopting a rights-based approach to refugee protection. As of 2025, it hosts approximately 135,000 refugees and asylum seekers,

mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and Burundi. Around 90 percent reside in five designated camps i.e., Kiziba, Nyabiheke, Kigeme, Mugombwa, and Mahama. While vulnerable individuals evacuated from Libya are supported through the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) in Gashora. The government's legal framework, anchored in Law No. 042/2024 Governing Refugees, upholds key rights under the 1951 Refugee Convention, including access to education, health care, civil registration, documentation, and freedom of movement. Refugees are set to be included in the CBHI scheme (*Mutuelles de Santé*) by 2025.

Despite these legal guarantees, the Special Rapporteur is concerned that refugees, particularly those in camps, continue to face serious structural and practical barriers to realizing their rights. While the law affirms the right to work, most refugees have limited access to formal employment and rely on precarious informal jobs or humanitarian assistance. In urban areas, the absence of housing or financial support further entrenches poverty among refugee households. Land scarcity severely restricts opportunities for self-reliance through agriculture or resettlement outside camps. Discrimination and limited professional networks often hinder access to decent work, especially for those with higher qualifications.

The Special Rapporteur welcomes Rwanda's inclusive refugee policy and the steps taken to align domestic legislation with international standards. However, he urges the Government to expand livelihood opportunities, extend social protection schemes, and remove practical barriers that impede refugees' full participation in society—particularly for urban refugees, who remain underserved.

VII. Participation and accountability

Oversight mechanisms exist, to ensure public authorities are held accountable. The Special Rapporteur met with the National Ombudsman's Office, which performs an important role to tackle maladministration and corruption. The Office of the Auditor General (OAG) submits reports on schedule, which are reviewed by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of Parliament and the National Public Prosecution Authority (NPPA) within six months. These mechanisms contribute to a culture of transparency and deterrence.

Various tools are in also place to encourage community participation and improve accountability. At the national level, the Umushyikirano (National Dialogue Council) is held annually under the chairmanship of the President. At district level, local councils (*Inama Njyanama*) composed of elected representatives serve as an indirect channel for citizen engagement in decision-making. Joint Action Development Forums (JADF), also at district level, facilitate participatory planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation of district-level projects. Finally, citizens' assemblies (*inteko z'abaturage*) function every Tuesday as regular community meetings where village (cell) leaders engage with community members.

These tools are relatively effective in ensuring that local authorities are held accountable for the delivery of services, especially combined with the *Imihigo* system of performance contracts, under which ministers, district mayors, governors, and ambassadors sign annual contracts with the President, committing to specific development goals and publicly disclosed. Digital governance tools, notably the *Irembo* platform, have also enhanced transparency and reduced bureaucratic discretion in service delivery, the platform provides citizens with standardized information on service procedures and timelines.

Such tools depend on the participation of the population being meaningful. The Special Rapporteur received, however, troubling testimonies from community members who expressed fear of voicing dissent or criticizing government policies. Several interlocutors reported that challenging official decisions could lead to reprisals, including being labelled as criminals. As a result, participation is often superficial, with individuals attending consultations but engaging in self-censorship and refraining from expressing genuine concerns: while criticism of public service delivery is welcome, questioning government's policies is discouraged. Fears of being accused of "instigating divisions" or "causing civil unrest", undermine meaningful engagement and risk producing ineffective and wasteful policies.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

The Special Rapporteur commends the progress achieved so far in reducing poverty in the country. He identifies the following key recommendations:

1. In order to build human capital and ensure the general progress is more fairly distributed, maintaining and even increasing social investment, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the public budget, is essential.

2. Investing in education is vital. Improvements should be made to the training of teachers and to pupil-teacher ratios. To reduce dropout rates, in addition to continuing the schoolfeeding program, low-income households should be supported to meet the hidden costs in access to education. Education should be made compulsory until 16 years of age, the minimum age at which children can work. This will also help to reduce child labour.

3. To reduce the urban-rural poverty gap, more support should go to small-scale farmers, in particular by supporting agroecological and climate-resilient mixed cropping schemes, and by supporting farmers' cooperatives and connections to markets.

4. The Vision Umurenge Program (VUP) is a lifeline for 500,000 households, but it will only be effective in protecting from extreme destitution if the levels of direct support, both for those unable to work and for mothers under the NSDS, are increased. The services provided by the Early Childhood Development centres should be strengthened and their funding secured. This is the only way the high levels of stunting can be lowered.

5. To ensure that work pays, a statutory minimum wage should be established, corresponding at least to a living wage. The formalization of work should be further encouraged, by combining a protection of the rights of informal workers (discouraging their exploitation), and positive incentives for employers who declare their workers or businesses which seek registration.

6. Women in poverty are more at risk of violence, and intra-household violence and inequities deprive women of economic opportunities. Combating gender-based power imbalances and patriarchal norms is an essential tool in the fight against poverty.

7. The Batwa are the most marginalized group in the country. Consistent with the 2007 Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, they should be protected from forcible removal from their lands or territories and ensured that no relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent and just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return.

8. While various participatory mechanisms exist, allowing for accountability of officials and preventing the risks of corruption, dissent should be encouraged, not discouraged. This will ensure that the commendable development efforts of the governments are based on genuine feedback, strengthening both legitimacy and effectiveness.