WORKERS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

RWANDA

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGs

#HLPF2026

WORKERS NEED SOCIAL PROTECTION AND CO-DECISION-MAKING

Rwanda utilizes a coordinated institutional framework for SDG integration, led by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN) in collaboration with the National Institute of Statistics, Parliament, and various sectoral ministries. SDGs are deeply embedded into national blueprints and planning frameworks, including Vision 2050, the National Strategy for Transformation (NST1), and the updated NST2 (2024-2029). While Rwanda has integrated SDG indicators into its national statistical system to track progress, which allows for robust data production, public resources remain insufficient for full implementation. Current progress remains uneven and insufficient to meet the 2030 Agenda goals.

SDG8 is prioritized through the National Employment Policy and NST frameworks, supported by labor law reforms and active labour market programs; however, their impact on promoting job creation, skills development and labour rights remains limited. The 2025 Sustainable Development Report indicates moderate but uneven progress, with gains in electricity, water access, and life expectancy, alongside GDP growth in services, industry, and agriculture. Challenges remain in fully protecting vulnerable workers, and trade union involvement in policy design and implementation is still limited.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

Rwanda demonstrates a high level of transparency regarding its SDG planning and reporting. While the Rwanda Workers' Trade Union Confederation (CESTRAR) reports complete access to official information and appreciates that reporting focuses on qualitative outcomes like decent work and inequality, a significant gap remains between the availability of data and meaningful trade union participation in actual decision-making, monitoring, and budgeting processes.

Engagement is primarily consultative and channeled through existing coordination structures, such as Sector Working Groups. However, this involvement remains irregular and ad hoc; trade unions are not consistently invited to all relevant consultations. Trade unions, including CESTRAR, actively contribute to the SDGs through advocacy for labour rights, social protection, and awareness campaigns. Their inputs—while acknowledged—are only partially reflected in final policies. Furthermore, trade unions report only indirect engagement with the UN Resident Coordinator on SDG implementation, limiting meaningful worker representation.

Tripartite social dialogue, coordinated by the Ministry of Public Service and Labour, effectively addresses broader employment policies that indirectly support the SDGs. However, the dialogue is mostly consultative, without opportunities for co-decision-making. Dialogue occasionally covers cross-cutting issues like gender equality, education and poverty reduction, but it remains predominantly centered on SDG 8. No dedicated, institutionalized mechanism exists for social partners, especially trade unions and workers, to directly influence the definition or implementation of specific SDG action plans or SDG governance.

TRANSPARENCY

Complete access to information

CONSULTATION

Informal or ad hoc consultation

SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Social partners submit joint contributions to government's SDG national plan

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IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

Trade unions call on the government to:

- **SDG 1:** Rwanda faces high levels of **poverty (1.1)**. 36% of the population lives below the international poverty line. Nearly half of the workforce lives below the national poverty level, indicating employment does not guarantee a decent livelihood. High rates of working poverty among women and youth underscore structural inequalities, low wages and informality that hinder poverty reduction. Trade unions are concerned that HDI levels will stall without stronger **social protection (1.3)** and better-quality jobs. Social protection coverage has declined, especially for vulnerable groups (children 0.8% and persons with disabilities 0.2%). **Public spending on essential services (1.a)** remains disproportionate: education receives 13.8%, while health (3%) and social protection (1.3%) spending is insufficient.
- **SDG 5:** Gender data gaps complicate progress tracking. The proportion of **women in managerial positions (5.5)** fell from 37.83% in 2023 to 33.2% in 2024, reversing previous gains and highlighting the structural instability in gender parity. While NST2 aims to reduce the disproportionate burden of **unpaid care work (5.4)** on women, monitoring data remains unavailable. **Gender budgeting (5.5)**, while institutionalized into national policies, has had limited impact on economic equality.
- **SDG 8:** High informality (8.3)—at 72% of non-agricultural employment—limits decent work. Disparities persist: women are more likely to be self-employed in low-quality, low-income roles without contracts. **Decent work (8.5)** is elusive. Despite rising average earnings, a 24.8% gender wage gap remains due to occupational segregation and lack of pay transparency. At lower skill levels, wages fail to meet living costs. High unemployment and underemployment among youth, women, and people with disabilities indicate systemic barriers to labour market entry and suggest high informal employment and precarious part-time work. In 2024, 27.3% of youth (15-24) were classified as NEET **(Not in Education, Employment, or Training, 8.6). Child labour (8.7)** persists but is relatively low at 3.4%. Limited disaggregated data hampers monitoring of **labour rights and safety (8.8)**. While Rwanda ratified core ILO treaties, implementation lags, as reflected in its score of 3 on the 2026 ITUC rights index **(16.10)**, reflecting **barriers to fundamental freedoms** like freedom of association and collective bargaining and interference in union activities.
- **SDG 10: Inequality (10.4)** remains high. The wealthiest 10% hold one-third of national income, while the bottom 20% hold only 7%. The labor share of GDP remains low at 39.7% in 2026, signaling that economic growth is not translating into workers' income. Trade unions point out that the statutory minimum wage is not a living wage. In terms of **migration policies (10.7)**, social partners sometimes participate in technical meetings, or provide input to the National Labour Council or parliament's social affairs commission; however, trade union engagement is not yet meeting objectives of "full participation" in the National Labour Mobility Policy. Under **SDG13**, the lack of institutionalized consultation prevents a fully inclusive Just Transition.

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TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Trade unions call on the government to:

- Shift the national policy focus from job quantity to promotion of job quality for decent work and sustainable employment
- Strengthen enforcement of labour rights and workplace safety, including through disaggregated data collection
- Formalize the informal economy by implementing targeted strategies to reduce informality and extend protections to informal workers
- Invest in future –oriented skills development for students and workers at all stages
- Establish a formal, multi-stakeholder SDG coordination platform that includes trade unions as permanent actors and active decision-makers in planning, monitoring, and budgeting.
- Institutionalize social dialogue for SDG implementation
- Expand inclusive social protection systems and reverse the decline in social protection coverage through increased budget allocation and stronger contributory and non-contributory schemes.

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