



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
28 February 2025

Original: English

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Seventy-seventh session

Summary record of the 13th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 18 February 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports *(continued)*

(a) Reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant
(continued)

Fifth periodic report of Rwanda (continued) ([E/C.12/RWA/5](#); [E/C.12/RWA/Q/5](#);
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1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Rwanda joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Rwanda**, resuming his delegation's replies to the questions asked at the previous meeting, said that only a month earlier the Cabinet had adopted a resolution on expansion of the package of services provided by and additional financing for the community-based health insurance system. Under the resolution, the costs to be covered would include those for kidney transplants, cancer care, interventional cardiology, blood transfusions, hip and knee replacements, spinal and other forms of surgery, prosthetics and assistive devices. Many of the extra healthcare costs incurred by persons with disabilities were covered; dialysis and basic healthcare were available to all. Under a polyvalent community health model, more than 58,500 workers provided health services, including maternal and child healthcare, family planning, HIV management, mental healthcare and emergency care, in a total of nearly 15,000 villages.
3. Efforts had been made to help the families most vulnerable to poverty. Between 2017 and 2024, for example, direct support had been provided to approximately 1.1 million people from vulnerable families. Direct support was given, too, to vulnerable people over the age of 65 years, and in recent years more than 14,500 families had been provided with furnished houses. In addition, more than 120 model villages, which were comprehensive housing complexes with all the necessary amenities, had been established.
4. Turning to questions about his country's extraterritorial obligations under the Covenant, he said that, as the International Court of Justice had noted in its advisory opinion on the legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, the rights recognized in the Covenant were essentially territorial and a State could therefore be bound by the Covenant outside its territory only if it exercised effective jurisdiction over another State. In the case of *Loizidou v. Turkey*, the European Court of Human Rights had held that, in some instances, States parties to human rights instruments had extraterritorial obligations only in territories under their effective control. Rwanda had no territorial control or jurisdiction over any other State. The problems in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, about which his delegation had been asked, were internal problems. His country would continue to welcome persons fleeing the fighting; in fact, it had just provided safe passage for United Nations staff members and some 300 European mercenaries who had been hired by the Congolese authorities.
5. Social protection schemes other than community-based healthcare reached only workers employed in the formal economy, who accounted for less than 10 per cent of all working people. During the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, however, a number of lessons had been learned, and as a result steps had been taken to improve social protections for workers in the informal economy. A newly introduced savings scheme, for instance, which was open to all, was seeking to attract a million subscribers.
6. According to the most recent labour force survey, conducted in 2021, more workers were employed in market-oriented agriculture than in any other sector of the informal economy. Other major sectors of activity in the informal economy included wholesale and retail trade, motor vehicle repair, and transport and storage. A decent work country programme had been launched in cooperation with the International Labour Organization, which was planning to hire consultants to study the barriers to extending social protection to workers in the informal economy and make recommendations to address them.
7. **The Chair** said that, for a fuller picture of a State's extraterritorial obligations under international law, it would be necessary also to consider the judgment of the International Court of Justice in the case concerning military and paramilitary activities in and against

Nicaragua (*Nicaragua v. United States of America*) and the conviction of Duško Tadić by the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991.

8. **A representative of Rwanda**, turning to questions relating to articles 10–12 of the Covenant, said that the period of paid maternity leave had increased from 12 weeks to 14 in 2023. There was an entitlement to an additional month in the event of complications during labour. For 15 months after giving birth, working mothers had the right to breastfeeding breaks. Firing a woman on maternity leave was prohibited by law. Starting in 2023, men had had the right to seven days' paternity leave, up from four previously.

9. What was more, the start of the working day had been set at 9 a.m., and as a result more parents were able to take their children to school; flexible working arrangements introduced during the pandemic had, in addition, made it possible for some parents, including parents of children with disabilities, to work from home.

10. On average, there were more than 5,000 labour inspections a year, approximately 1,500 of which were inspections of employers active in the informal economy. Inspectors had access to the means of transportation they needed to cover the entire country, and a budget for their activities was drawn up. In 2023/24, 112 employers had been sanctioned for breaches of labour law, and the Rwanda Investigation Bureau had investigated 26 reports of violations of child labour laws. Eighteen of those cases had been referred to the courts, and five had led to convictions.

11. According to the integrated household living conditions survey of 2016/17, 3.6 per cent of children, down from 5.5 per cent in 2013/14, were engaged in prohibited child labour. As a result of the pandemic, the survey had not been conducted in 2020/21. The conduct of surveys had since resumed, however.

12. The Government had undertaken various social protection initiatives to eradicate extreme poverty. More than 102,000 vulnerable persons, including older persons and persons with disabilities, received monthly cash transfers, and more than 80,000 households benefited from flexible employment programmes. Under a national strategy adopted in 2022, holistic measures, including cash transfers, skills development and economic inclusion, were taken with a view to achieving a sustainable alleviation of poverty. More than 315,000 households had received support within the context of the strategy. The aim of the strategy, which was complemented by other social protection initiatives, was to help people transition from short-term assistance to sustainable income security.

13. A number of questions about the right to food had been asked. It was indeed difficult, as had been suggested, for small farmers in Rwanda to increase their yields to the point that they had surpluses to sell. The weather was increasingly unpredictable, and the products of the country's small farms often failed to meet quality standards. Research that would help small farmers transition into market-driven commercial agriculture was nonetheless under way. A pilot project initially involving only coffee had since expanded into maize and beans. In addition, the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board provided extension and advisory services.

14. As part of the Government's Crop Intensification Programme, farmers were organized into 2,400 cooperatives, thereby enabling economies of scale. It would be impossible for many small farmers, for example, to lease a tractor for their small plot, but by joining a cooperative they would have much easier access to tractors and other such agricultural equipment. The purchase of fertilizers was heavily subsidized, as was the supply of clean water, which had been made much more widely available.

15. In 2024, Rwanda had embarked on an effort to quadruple the healthcare workforce over a four-year period, with a view to achieving a ratio of 4 healthcare providers for every 1,000 persons. The number of students admitted to medical training programmes had more than trebled that year. There were 13,465 students enrolled in medical programmes, including 1,425 who were studying to become doctors and 5,294 who were studying nursing. A variety of services were offered under the community health programme, including those addressing maternal and child health, family planning, HIV management, non-communicable diseases

and mental health. The impact of the programme could be seen in the 90 per cent reduction in the incidence of malaria since 2017.

16. The draft legislation on health services that was before Parliament would lower the age at which parental consent was no longer required for healthcare services, including contraception and sexual and reproductive health services, from 18 years to 15. Although Parliament had rejected a similar measure a few years earlier, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Health had explained to members of Parliament the importance of reducing the age of consent for healthcare and had found them receptive. As a result of education and awareness-raising, the number of teenage pregnancies had been dropping since 2016.

17. **Ms. Lemus de Vásquez** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know whether any studies had been conducted recently on the country's housing shortage and whether any rent control laws were in place. She would also like to know what steps the State party was taking to address the socioeconomic inequalities that contributed to the prevalence of non-communicable diseases, expand healthcare infrastructure in areas where it was limited and enhance programmes to prevent communicable diseases.

18. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he would be grateful for more detailed information on the community-based health insurance system; the land registration system, including the extent to which it was gender-sensitive; the circumstances under which expropriation typically occurred; and any programmes, such as those promoting agrarian reform, that benefited groups who had been excluded from land ownership.

19. The demand made by the Human Rights Council in its resolution S-37/1 that the Mouvement du 23 mars should immediately cease all hostile actions in and withdraw from occupied areas and that the Rwanda Defence Force should cease its support of the Mouvement du 23 mars suggested that the State party had influence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the light of that resolution, he wondered whether the delegation could provide a further response to the questions that he had posed the previous day regarding illegal mining operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He would like to know whether the State party had made any effort to share the revenues from its mining exports, including of gold, which had risen sharply in recent years, with the areas where the resources were extracted.

20. **Ms. Rossi** said that she wished to know whether the State party planned to amend Law No. 68/2018 to decriminalize drug consumption, whether it had taken steps to develop a comprehensive evidence-based national harm reduction policy, whether any special training was provided to law enforcement personnel, health workers and others involved in the response to drug use, and whether any steps had been taken to address mental health as a part of primary healthcare.

21. **Ms. Pérez** said that she would be interested to find out whether the State party used the human rights indicators developed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the design and assessment of its public policies.

22. **Ms. El Yedri Afailal** said that she wished to know what percentage of the rural population had access to water and electricity and what steps the State party was taking to address desertification and the impact of climate change on the agriculture sector and food security.

23. **A representative of Rwanda** said that the Ministry of Infrastructure had conducted a survey on the housing shortage, the results of which the delegation would forward to the Committee. While the State party had no specific laws on rent control, landlords were prohibited from requiring the payment of rent in a foreign currency, which would result in rent fluctuations.

24. The Government had introduced semi-monthly car-free days during which certain roads were closed to traffic, encouraging the public to exercise, and members of the public could have their blood pressure checked, be tested for diabetes and receive other services free of charge. Community healthcare workers received basic training in addressing non-communicable diseases and also helped raise public awareness of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV. They were equipped with smartphones to allow them to consult with doctors as needed.

25. Individuals either paid a small premium to be covered by the community-based health insurance system or, if they were a member of a vulnerable group, received coverage free of charge. Covered persons then had access to healthcare services that were heavily subsidized by the Government.

26. Over 90 per cent of the land in the country had been registered, including land owned by women. Due to the scarcity of land in the country, there was a limit on the number of hectares that any one person could own.

27. The delegation took exception to the linking of Rwanda with the Mouvement du 23 mars and the placing upon Rwanda of the burden of human rights violations that were largely due to the acts and omissions of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The increase in the country's gold exports had been due to the opening of a gold refinery in Rwanda and the Government's promotion of conditions that created a safe environment for doing business in Rwanda.

28. The Government had decided to introduce an amendment to Law No. 68/2018 to ensure that drug consumption was not criminalized. Furthermore, prosecutors and the Rwanda Investigation Bureau had discretion as to the cases that they prosecuted, and it had been decided that persons involved in drug use cases should not be prosecuted but rather given access to healthcare services. Noting that the notion of human rights had not featured in the first National Strategy for Transformation but had been deliberately included in the second such Strategy, he said that his Government would consider also adopting a human rights-based approach in its assessments of development-related and other measures. According to a census conducted in 2022, over 80 per cent of all Rwandan households had access to an improved water source, although access varied according to region: for example, in Kigali, over 97 per cent of inhabitants enjoyed access to an improved water source, whereas just 75 per cent did in the western part of the country.

29. To address the effects of climate change on the agricultural sector, the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board had developed drought-resistant seeds that could be provided to farmers in difficulty to compensate for the losses suffered as a result of weather events related to climate change. The Government was also investing in water capture and management during heavy rainy seasons to avoid relying too heavily on the weather for a successful crop season. Regarding desertification control measures, the Government had taken steps to ensure that forest cover accounted for 30 per cent or more of the Rwandan territory.

30. **Mr. Abashidze** (Country Task Force) said that the figures on school enrolment and dropout rates provided by the State party did not allow the Committee to track overall trends. The Committee would be grateful for statistics for the last five years on how many children had been expected to enrol in primary school and what percentage of all primary school-age children that number represented, and how many primary school students had transitioned to lower secondary school and then to upper secondary school. If the dropout rates were significant, it would welcome an explanation of the reasons behind the rates and of the steps being taken to address the situation.

31. Regarding the enrolment of children with disabilities, he would like to know whether the figure of 0.9 per cent referred to in paragraph 142 of the State party's replies to the list of issues ([E/C.12/RWA/RQ/5](#)) represented the percentage of students with disabilities as compared to the total number of students in higher education or the percentage of young people with disabilities who were enrolled in higher education. He would also appreciate clarification of how the figure of 40,000 students with disabilities who had begun their studies in schools and universities during the 2022/23 academic year compared to the total number of children with disabilities who had been expected to start schooling during that academic year. It would be useful to learn whether there was a new strategic plan for sports and culture in place and, if so, what its objectives were.

32. Details of the overall state of school infrastructure would be welcome. Specifically, it would be helpful to learn whether schools, including the 22,500 newly built classrooms, met the minimum requirements for access to drinking water, nutrition, lighting and sanitation facilities, and how initiatives to upgrade infrastructure were funded.

33. The Committee would welcome clarification as to why no statistical data were available on the Batwa community. It would also appreciate updated statistical data disaggregated by rural/urban areas on school enrolment rates, completion rates and dropout rates at the primary and secondary levels of education, together with information on higher education enrolment and completion rates for students with disabilities, disaggregated by sex, rural/urban areas and economic status. It would also be useful to know whether teachers, especially those in rural schools, were qualified to teach their respective subjects, and whether there was a shortage of teachers in certain subjects and, if so, whether there were measures in place to ease the shortage.

34. He would be grateful for further information about the National Unity and Reconciliation Policy, particularly in respect of the issues of mutual respect and inclusivity. It would also be interesting to learn how measures to address inequalities in access to and the use of digital technology were funded: were such measures covered by the State budget or did the State party also receive international technical assistance to support them? Did private businesses also contribute to such measures and, if so, on what terms?

The meeting was suspended at 11.25 a.m. and resumed at 11.40 a.m.

35. **A representative of Rwanda** said that the number of teachers overall had increased by nearly 75 per cent in the last decade, and the number of primary school teachers had nearly tripled. A teacher management information system had been set up to identify teaching gaps; if such a gap was established, a teacher on the waiting list was dispatched immediately to the school.

36. The dropout rate continued to decline at all levels, from primary to upper secondary school, thanks to a number of government initiatives, including a school meals programme whose beneficiaries had increased from 500,000 in 2013 to some 4.3 million in the 2023/24 academic year. The Ministry of Education had developed child-friendly school infrastructure standards and guidelines, taking account of children with disabilities. Ventilation and lighting had been improved, ramps had been added, doorways had been widened, and blackboards had been lowered to ensure that they were accessible for children who were wheelchair users. The 22,500 newly built classrooms adhered to the guidelines and national building codes and were fully accessible to students with disabilities. Of the 4,986 schools in Rwanda, nearly 3,400 now met the accessibility standard – a significant improvement compared to the 764 schools that had met the standard in 2017. Continuous training in inclusive education practices was available to teachers, and special needs and inclusive education were a core component of the curriculum in teacher training colleges. Every school had at least one inclusive education focal point who had received specialized training in inclusive education and who shared his or her expertise with colleagues.

37. **Mr. Bouzid** said that he would like to know which language was used in primary school teaching. It would also be interesting to learn how many universities there were in Rwanda and whether they were public or private. Information on any international students who studied in Rwanda would be welcome, as would details of any scholarships made available to students, especially African students.

38. **Ms. Saran** (Country Task Force) said that, given the State party's unfortunate recent history, it was understandable that the Government would prefer to emphasize unity and national reconciliation over ethnic differences. However, if everyone was recognized as having one main ethnicity, "Rwandan", how did the State party promote the rich cultural heritage and history of all the ethnic groups that made up its population?

39. **Ms. Pérez** said that she would like to know whether statistics were collected on young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years who were neither studying nor working. That population often included many women who had abandoned their studies and failed to enter the labour market, making it all the more crucial for States parties to adopt comprehensive human rights policies.

40. **A representative of Rwanda** said that, under the Constitution, Kinyarwanda was the national language and one of the three official languages, the other two being English and French. Everyone in Rwanda spoke one language and enjoyed one culture, making them a unified people. That had also been the case before the arrival of the colonialists. The Tutsi,

Hutu and Twa were in fact groups of people with different occupations – the Tutsi were primarily cattle keepers, the Hutu were farmers and the Twa were potters. There were no true ethnic groups, but rather 20 or so clans, which cut across the Tutsi, Hutu and Twa. It was the colonialists who had introduced the notion of ethnicities, according to a divide and rule policy, going so far as to record the group to which a person supposedly belonged on his or her identity card. That had negated the possibility of moving from one group to another and disregarded the historical reality of the groups more generally. Unlike in other countries, the three groups were not found in any particular geographical location, but rather were scattered across the country, making for a symbiotic relationship between cattle keepers, agriculturalists and potters. There were thus no significant differences in culture.

41. All Rwandans, including those who had not attended school, spoke Kinyarwanda, which was the country's national and first official language. French was also an official language, as it had been the principal language of instruction during Belgian colonial rule. English, too, had been granted that status on account of many Rwandans' having sought refuge in English-speaking countries and acquired the language before returning to Rwanda after 1994. Even though legal studies were undertaken in English, Kinyarwanda was used in the courts to ensure that the entire population had equal access to justice and associated services. The Constitution provided that, in case of conflict between the languages in which a law was published, the language in which that law had been adopted would take precedence.

42. In schools, English tended to be the language of instruction, as proficiency in English was a marketable skill, particularly now that Rwanda had joined the East African Community and the Commonwealth. However, students were still encouraged to use Kinyarwanda to communicate with each other and the rest of the community. As at 2025, the country was home to 19 universities, 3 of which were public and 16 of which were private. Rwandan universities also welcomed international students. Since the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan, a boarding school for Afghan girls, the School of Leadership, had relocated to Rwanda so that its students could continue their education. Medical students who had fled the Sudan were also continuing their studies in Rwanda. Some of those students were already working as dentists and giving back to Rwandan society. Carnegie Mellon University Africa, which offered engineering and information technology-related courses in Kigali, provided scholarships to Africans and to refugees. Rwanda understood the plight of persons forced to flee their home country and would continue to welcome persons in need.

43. The Government had invested heavily in technical and vocational education and training as a means of improving the future employment prospects of young people who had not attended school and of preventing them from engaging in harmful behaviours or falling victim to human trafficking. Rwanda would continue to promote access to education within the limits of the resources available to it. Admittedly, more needed to be done to ensure the full realization of economic, social and cultural rights in Rwanda. To that end, it would be useful to receive from the Committee details of any best practices that it had gathered from different countries.

44. **Ms. Saran** asked how the State party ensured that refugees and asylum-seekers arriving in Rwanda could exercise their cultural rights and have access to education on an equal footing with Rwandans.

45. **Mr. Emuze** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would like to receive more information on the activities of the Rwandan troops that were currently on the ground in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

46. **Mr. Bouzid** asked whether Swahili was widely spoken in Rwanda and whether it had any official status in the country.

47. **A representative of Rwanda** said that Swahili had been granted the status of an official language under article 8 of the Constitution, which provided that an official language could be added or removed by organic law. Swahili was also a lingua franca within the East African Community and the African Union and was widely spoken and taught in schools in Rwanda. Asylum-seekers and refugees arriving in Rwanda were encouraged to share their culture, which they did by organizing cultural events within the community. Refugees and asylum-seekers also had a constitutional right to practise their religion freely.

48. Rwanda was not part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Following the 1884 Berlin Conference at which the European colonial powers had negotiated and formalized their claims to African territory and demarcated the borders of Rwanda and its neighbouring countries, a large number of Rwandans had found themselves living in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where they had acquired Congolese citizenship when the country had gained its independence, only to be deprived of it by a law passed in 1981. The individuals who had taken up arms in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, regardless of any cultural similarities with Rwandans, were not members of the Rwandan armed forces but Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese who were fighting for their survival after decades of discrimination. While the violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was deeply regrettable, the Government of Rwanda played no part in it and bore no responsibility for it. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone had jurisdiction over the events that were taking place in Congolese territory.

49. **Mr. Emuze** said that the Committee was grateful to the high-level delegation of Rwanda for the open and constructive dialogue that had taken place on a wide range of issues relating to the implementation of the Covenant in the State party.

50. **A representative of Rwanda** said that he wished to express his sincere appreciation to the Committee for the constructive dialogue and for the opportunity to share details of the progress made by Rwanda in implementing the Covenant. The dialogue had provided a number of valuable insights, which would help the Government to deal with the challenges that it was currently facing. Over the past decade, Rwanda had made significant strides in strengthening the legal and institutional frameworks necessary for the full realization of economic, social and cultural rights. The achievements made in relation to access to healthcare, education, employment and social protection were a testament to the Government's unwavering commitment to inclusive and sustainable development. In keeping with its national development agenda, the Government would continue to prioritize economic growth, social welfare and environmental sustainability to ensure the well-being of all persons living in Rwanda. However, more needed to be done to address inequalities, mitigate the effects of global crises and ensure that the economic gains made translated into tangible improvements in the lives of the most vulnerable. The Government was committed to working constructively with civil society, development partners and the international community to that end and looked forward to receiving the recommendations contained in the Committee's concluding observations. Any information that the delegation had been unable to provide during the dialogue would be submitted in writing.

51. **The Chair** said that the Committee appreciated the constructive spirit in which the delegation had approached the dialogue. While there might have been some points on which the Committee and the delegation had disagreed, she hoped that the Committee's recommendations would contribute to the fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights in the State party.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.