



ALTERNATIVE REPORT TO THE UNITED  
NATIONS UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW  
(UPR) FOURTH CYCLE ON THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF CHILD RIGHTS  
RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE  
3<sup>RD</sup> CYCLE (37<sup>TH</sup> SESSION)

**Prepared By:**  
Coalition Umwana ku Isonga

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**MEMBERS OF THE CHILD RIGHTS COALITION UMWANA KU ISONGA: AGR, AJPRODHO JIJUKIRWA, ARCT RUHUKA, Association BAMPOREZE, AVP, BLAO, CLADHO, CVT, CHRD, COPORWA, HAGURUKA, Association KANYARWANDA, CFI, UMUSEKE Association, Collectif TUBAKUNDE, WATOTO VISION ON AFRICA, SAFI ORGANIZATION, Lawyers of Hope, UMUHUZA Organization, RCR, PCCR, YWCA, JKA, Bridge of Hope, GTH, SGO, TRI-Rwanda+.**

## **1. Executive Summary**

### **1.1. Introduction and Background**

1. This alternative report is submitted by the Coalition Umwana ku Isonga (CUI), a Non-Governmental Organization registered under certificate no 219/RGB/NGO/LP/04/2018 with the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB). CUI has been created with the purposes of networking and alliance building with a mandate to assess and report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) on one hand, and to coordinate all activities carried out by individual member organizations within the parameters of advocacy, implementing and reporting on mentioned treaty bodies in the other hand. Currently, CUI is composed of 27 member organizations. As a national coalition of child rights-focused civil society organizations, the Coalition Umwana ku Isonga (CUI) plays a critical role in assessing the Government of Rwanda's implementation of its international human rights commitments.
2. The Government of Rwanda underwent its 3<sup>rd</sup> Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in January 2021, during the 37<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council. Among the recommendations received, 21 specifically addressed the rights and welfare of children, with a focus on protection from violence and exploitation, access to quality education and health services, inclusive programming for vulnerable children, and legal and institutional reforms aligned with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other relevant international treaties.
3. This alternative report assesses the Government of Rwanda's progress in implementing some of the 21 UPR recommendations related to child rights. It highlights both best practices and remaining gaps, and issues practical calls to action for the Government of Rwanda to fully realize the rights of all children.
4. While notable achievements have been made in aligning legal and institutional frameworks with international child rights standards, challenges persist in enforcement and service delivery. Therefore, this report identifies areas of meaningful progress while drawing attention to challenges, structural gaps, and emerging threats that hinder the full realization of children's rights in Rwanda.
5. This alternative report is intended to complement the State's official report and bring the perspectives of children, caregivers, and civil society practitioners into the UPR process.
6. By offering an independent and evidence-informed assessment, this report aims to inform recommendations from UN Member States during the 51<sup>st</sup> Session and to support accountability and dialogue on child rights at national and international levels.

### **1.2. Methodology**

7. This report was developed through a consultative and participatory approach led by the Coalition Umwana ku Isonga (CUI). Between January and June 2025, the coalition engaged in the following activities:
  - **Document review:** Analysis of existing legal and policy frameworks, government reports, and sectoral strategies related to child rights.
  - **Stakeholder consultations:** Input was gathered from CUI member organizations working across Rwanda's districts, including practitioners in thematic areas such as civil rights and freedoms, right to family environment and alternative care, right to education, leisure and cultural rights; right to health and welfare as well as right to special protection in both development and humanitarian settings.

- **Children's voices:** The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga carried out various activities involving children in the Southern Province (Huye District) and the City of Kigali (Gasabo District) and their views were incorporated in this report. In addition, targeted focus group discussions and participatory workshops with children and adolescents from diverse backgrounds, including those in vulnerable situations were conducted by CUI member organizations experienced in child participation.
  - **Data triangulation:** The report incorporates findings from various sources including member activity reports, Government's survey and administrative data, and relevant academic and NGO studies as referenced in the Annex.
8. Each of the 21 recommendations is assessed using a uniform structure that highlights the Government of Rwanda's commitments and progress, the key challenges or constraints in implementation as well as a targeted call to action from CUI.

## 2. Implementation Status of UPR 37 Child Rights Recommendations

9. **Recommendation 134.20:** The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga **commends** the Government of Rwanda for demonstrating commendable political will in addressing child sexual exploitation and related offences. The CUI commends the Government for adopting the Ministerial Instructions N° 001/MINICT/2024 of 22/01/2024 on Child Online Protection purposed to promote the safety and protection of children while accessing online contents, to protect them against harmful contents and to raise awareness about parental control over child online activities and content filtering tools. CUI further commends the Government of Rwanda for its efforts in disseminating the 2025 Guidelines on the Implementation of the 2019 Child Online Protection Policy, led by the Ministry of ICT (MINICT) and the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF), and for its collaboration with civil society organizations in promoting awareness of the Policy. Rwanda has also domesticated several international human rights instruments, such as the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children and aligned national legal frameworks accordingly. In addition, institutional mechanisms such as the Isange One Stop Centres and the Rwanda Investigation Bureau's specialized units have been crucial in handling cases of child exploitation and abuse.
10. The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga is **concerned that**, despite the progress made thus far, several challenges hinder full implementation: *Inconsistent enforcement:* While the legal provisions exist, implementation remains uneven across districts. Some local law enforcement officers have limited skills and insufficient training to identify and process such cases effectively. *Limited public awareness:* Communities, especially in rural areas, are often unaware of the legal protections available to children or how to report cases. *Online exploitation risks:* With increasing internet access among Rwandan youth, the risk of child pornography and online grooming is rising. However, cybersecurity measures and investigative capabilities are not yet fully developed to address these threats. *Data gaps:* There is a lack of disaggregated data on offences related to the sale of children and child pornography, which hampers evidence-based policy-making and targeted interventions.

11. The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga **calls on the Government of Rwanda** to:
- Ensure that all offences relating to the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography are consistently criminalized and enforced across all legal and policy frameworks.
  - Strengthen the capacity of local law enforcement and judicial officers through training on child protection laws, including digital exploitation.
  - Launch a nationwide awareness campaign to educate communities, parents, and children about their rights and mechanisms for reporting child sexual exploitation.
  - Fast track the implementation of the Ministerial Instructions N° 001/MINICT/2024 of 22/01/2024 on Child Online Protection.
  - Invest in child-focused cyber protection mechanisms and enhance collaboration with international partners to track and eliminate online child pornography.
  - Improve data collection and monitoring systems to track progress and inform interventions on cases of child exploitation.
12. **Recommendation 134.25:** The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga **commends** the Government of Rwanda for adopting a progressive stance on climate change, evidenced by its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the revised Green Growth and Climate Resilience Strategy. Programs such as the Green Gicumbi Project and the Rwanda Green Fund (FONERWA) indirectly benefit children through environmental protection and climate adaptation. The education curriculum has integrated environmental awareness, including climate change. The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga also appreciates that the environment policy has been developed and engagement of all people including children has been ensured.
13. The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga is **concerned that**, despite the progress made thus far, several challenges hinder full implementation: Despite strong legal frameworks, linkage between environmental legislation and child rights is not clearly highlighted in the effective implementation and enforcement of both environmental and child rights laws. Climate adaptation measures do not always consider the specific vulnerabilities of children. The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga is also concerned, while the legal frameworks exist, there isn't always explicit and systematic integration of child rights considerations into environmental impact assessments or environmental policy-making processes. The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga is further concerned that children's voices are not always adequately heard in environmental decision-making processes that affect their lives. In addition, rural schools and communities often lack infrastructure and resources to engage meaningfully in climate-resilient practices.
14. The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga **urges the Government of Rwanda** to:
- Establish platforms for meaningful child and youth participation in climate-related policy processes.
  - Mainstream child-focused risk and vulnerability assessments into environmental and climate adaptation programs.
  - Ensure inclusive education and outreach campaigns on climate change, targeting rural and most vulnerable children.
  - Explicitly include the role of children in environmental protection/climate change in school curricula.

15. **Recommendation 134.66:** The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga **commends** that Rwanda has a robust legal framework combining national laws, policies, and international commitments aimed at fighting child trafficking. Continuous efforts are made to enforce these laws effectively, raise awareness, and strengthen victim protection. The Strategic Plan for Integrated Child Rights Policy (2019-2024) outlines measures to prevent child exploitation, trafficking, and abuse while the National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Persons provides a coordinated approach involving law enforcement, social services, and civil society to combat Human Trafficking including children. The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga also commends other relevant measures established such as the establishment of specialized units (for instance the Rwanda National Police’s anti-trafficking task force) and the victim support services through which the Government and NGOs provide medical, psychological, and legal assistance to trafficking victims.
16. The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga is **concerned that**, despite Rwanda’s legal frameworks and efforts to combat child trafficking, several gaps remain in the prevention of this crime. These gaps hinder the effectiveness of measures aimed at protecting children and eradicating trafficking networks.
- a. Many communities, especially in rural areas, have limited knowledge about child trafficking, its risks, and how to report it. Prevention campaigns and education programs are not widespread or sustained enough to reach all vulnerable populations. In addition, some cases of child trafficking go unreported due to stigma, fear, or lack of awareness about reporting channels. Furthermore, teachers, health workers, and community leaders may lack training to identify signs of trafficking or exploitation.
  - b. Economic hardship remains a major driver of trafficking from rural areas to urban cities. Families may be coerced or persuaded to send children away under false promises of work or education. In addition, insufficient social safety nets and poverty alleviation programs make vulnerable families more susceptible to traffickers.
  - c. Trafficking often involves cross-border networks, but coordination with neighbouring countries can be lacking or inconsistent. Furthermore, insufficient capacity at borders hampers detection of trafficked children being moved illegally.
17. The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga **urges the Government** to strengthen national efforts in raising public awareness about child trafficking, particularly in rural and vulnerable communities. Awareness campaigns should be consistent, inclusive, and far-reaching, utilizing community radios, schools, local leaders, and health centres to educate the population about the risks and signs of trafficking, as well as how to report it safely. Additionally, frontline workers such as teachers, healthcare providers, and local authorities should be equipped with adequate training to identify and respond to potential trafficking cases. Reporting mechanisms must be made more accessible, confidential, and widely known to encourage community members to take action without fear or stigma.
18. The Coalition **also urges the Government** to address the root causes of vulnerability by expanding social protection and economic support for at-risk families. Economic hardship is a key driver of child trafficking, and targeted poverty alleviation programs—such as cash transfers, livelihood support, and vocational training—can empower families to resist

deceptive offers. Strengthening school retention initiatives and providing real opportunities for education and employment in rural areas will also reduce the likelihood of children being trafficked under false promises.

19. Finally, the Coalition **urges the Government** to enhance cross-border cooperation and law enforcement capabilities in combating trafficking networks. Many trafficking operations involve cross-border movement, and effective collaboration with neighbouring countries is essential for prevention and prosecution. The Government should invest in capacity-building at border points, equipping officers with the tools and training needed to detect and manage trafficking cases. At the same time, monitoring and evaluation systems should be improved to ensure that anti-trafficking strategies remain responsive, data-driven, and inclusive of civil society input.
20. **Recommendation 134.104:** The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga **celebrates that** Rwanda has achieved near-universal access to primary education and expanded access to lower secondary through the 12-Year Basic Education (12YBE) policy. Tuition-free education and capitation grants have removed key financial barriers, while teacher recruitment and curriculum reforms continue to support quality improvement. The Coalition notes Government's various initiatives to advance its commitment to free, universal, and quality education through increased budget allocation, inclusive education initiatives, digital learning expansion, improved school feeding programs and revised school hours to enhance accessibility and learning outcomes for all children.
21. However, the Coalition Umwana ku Isonga is **concerned that**, despite high enrolment, learning outcomes remain low in literacy and numeracy, particularly in early grades. Classrooms are overcrowded in many schools, especially in urban and high-population districts, while children with disabilities, children in street situations, and those in remote or climate change-affected areas face significant barriers. Additionally, challenges persist in digital divide, where rural and poor households struggle with access to electricity, internet, and devices needed for e-learning.
22. The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga calls on the Government to:
  - a. Invest in teacher training and classroom resources to improve foundational learning outcomes.
  - b. Expand infrastructure in high-demand areas to reduce class sizes and improve learning environments.
  - c. Remove remaining physical, financial, and social barriers that prevent vulnerable children from accessing quality education.
  - d. Strengthen investment in inclusive infrastructure, ensure nationwide training and deployment of special needs educators, and expand community-based support for vulnerable learners.
  - e. Scale up affordable and accessible digital learning platforms, including distributing low-cost devices and enhancing off-grid energy solutions in remote areas. Further, continuous monitoring and data-driven policymaking should guide targeted interventions to bridge the remaining gaps.

23. **Recommendation 134.141:** The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga **commends** that the Government of Rwanda has demonstrated a strong political commitment to child protection, with dedicated budget allocations and programs targeting the most vulnerable children. The government's social protection schemes, supported by development partners, provide essential resources to mitigate vulnerabilities. Child-focused social protection programs such as *Vision 2020 Umurenge Program (VUP)* and *National Child Development Agency (NCDA)* services have improved access to basic services for vulnerable children. Further, the Government has demonstrated commitment by increasing domestic financing for ECD and nutrition programs.
24. However, The Coalition is **seriously concerned that** the budget allocation for child rights protection is still limited compared to the needed budget; key areas such as foster care, child mental health, and case management remain chronically under-resourced. Budget allocations often do not match local-level needs, particularly in remote or poor districts and child-specific budget lines are difficult to track across sectors.
25. The Coalition **calls on the Government to:**
- Increase and ring-fence budget allocations for essential child protection services.
  - Develop mechanisms to track and report child-focused expenditures across ministries.
  - Prioritize equitable allocation of resources to reach children from low-income families.
  - Strengthen domestic funding and resource mobilization.
  - Expand social protection coverage to reach all vulnerable children.
  - Enhance multisectoral coordination to optimize resource use and impact.
26. **Recommendation 134.149:** The Coalition **commends that** the Government of Rwanda, through the Rwanda National Child Development Agency (NCDA) and the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF), has implemented campaigns to remove children from the streets and place them in transit centers. Some rehabilitation programs, like those run through the Gitagata Re-education Centre, offer short-term shelter and vocational training. In 2022 alone, 91% of orphans and other abandoned children were reintegrated into households through a specialized program (Tumurerere Mu Muryango -Let's Raise them in Family), 30,000 community based child protection structure dubbed "Inshuti z'Umuryango (IZU)-Friends of the Family" have been trained and deployed in the community, and 68 social professionals and psychologists from all districts have been assigned to oversee the reintegration process.
27. The Coalition further **commends that** the National Child Protection Case Management (CPCM) was created to improve cooperation between courts, health, and education and welcomes the adoption and dissemination of the Presidential order no 045/01 of 8/3/2024 governing national rehabilitations services. Worth commending is the fact that, in rehabilitation centres, individuals receive training in various vocational skills, including carpentry, masonry, tailoring, agriculture, and literacy, alongside psychosocial and medical treatment, to prepare them for employment and reintegration into society.
28. Nevertheless, the Coalition is **concerned that** transit centres often lack long-term follow-up or reintegration plans and that children frequently return to the streets due to lack of family support or livelihood options. It's also concerning that few facilities provide consistent counselling or trauma-informed care for street-involved children.

### 29. The Coalition urges the Government to

- a. Enhance existing correctional approaches in response to the needs of street-connected children; by aligning them with child rights principles and ensuring they are child-friendly.
  - b. Invest in long-term, community-based reintegration programs including education, mentorship, and family tracing.
  - c. Scale up professional counselling and mental health services tailored to the needs of children in street situations
30. **Recommendation 134.159:** The Coalition **commends that** Rwanda maintains a progressive refugee policy and works closely with UNHCR and humanitarian partners to ensure refugee children have access to health, education, and protection services. The Gikondo Community Center and camps like Mahama provide temporary housing and services to unaccompanied minors.
31. However, the Coalition is **concerned that** child-friendly services are not uniform, reception centres and refugee camps vary in their ability to meet the specific needs of children, especially girls and children with disabilities. Equally, there are still limited legal safeguards whereby gaps persist in the legal frameworks to fully protect unaccompanied or separated children, including access to guardianship and asylum procedures.
32. Therefore, the Coalition urges the Government to:
- a. Ensure that all reception and refugee centres meet minimum child protection and gender-sensitive standards.
  - b. Strengthen the legal framework to guarantee timely refugee status determination and guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children.
  - c. Establish independent monitoring systems and complaint mechanisms to prevent and respond to abuse or neglect in refugee settings.

### 3. Conclusion

Rwanda has made meaningful progress in advancing the rights of the child since its last UPR in 2021, with notable improvements in legal reforms, access to education, and investments in nutrition and health. These gains are commendable and demonstrate a strong political will to uphold child rights principles. However, the persistence barriers such as poverty, inequality, limited awareness among communities, under-resourced institutions, and inadequate enforcement of laws—continues to threaten the realization of these rights for all children, particularly those in vulnerable situations.

The Coalition Umwana ku Isonga urges the Government of Rwanda to:

- Strengthen the implementation of existing laws and policies at decentralized levels.
- Increase public investment in child-focused services and systems, particularly for most vulnerable populations.
- Institutionalize child participation in all matters affecting them, including policy planning and monitoring.
- Strengthen data systems to ensure evidence-based decision-making.
- Ensure inclusive and equitable access to quality services across all sectors.

As Rwanda prepares for its 4<sup>th</sup> UPR in 2026, this report serves as a call to action—to continue prioritize children’s rights in legislation and in everyday practice and budgetary commitments. A Rwanda where every child is safe, heard, educated, and supported is within reach, and this review presents a timely opportunity to recommit to that vision.

**End**



## Annex A References

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7. National Child Development Agency (2023). *Consolidated Nutrition Budget Execution July 2023-June 2024*.
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**Annex B:** Table of Summary Recommendations and CUI Calls to Action (attached)



## CONTACT US:



+250788319614



[info@cuirwanda.org](mailto:info@cuirwanda.org)



[www.cuirwanda.org](http://www.cuirwanda.org)



KG 11, AV 16 Amahoro  
Village Rukiri II, Remera  
Sector Gasabo District,  
City of Kigali