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## Rwanda

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### Law & policies

Article 16 of the 2003 Constitution recognizes the equality of citizens before the law. In addition to the Constitution, Rwanda's National Legal Aid Policy seeks to improve access to justice for all citizens and specifically identifies the use of paralegals as a legal aid delivery model.<sup>1</sup> The Rwanda Bar Association Law of 2013 also expresses the government's interest in providing legal aid services in collaboration with the bar.<sup>2</sup>

### Ratio of lawyers to paralegals

The Rwanda Bar Association has a membership of over 1,450 lawyers.<sup>3</sup> The Legal Aid Forum is the umbrella organization of legal aid providers, including paralegal organizations in Rwanda.<sup>4</sup> The Forum has paralegals in every district but does not list the number of paralegals.

### Sources of funding

The main source of funding for paralegal work in Rwanda is donors.<sup>5</sup> The National Legal Aid Policy creates a legal aid fund<sup>6</sup> which could become a veritable source of funding for paralegal work. However, it has yet to be activated.

### Legal recognition

Paralegals are recognized in the Legal Aid Policy.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted in 2014

<[https://www.minijust.gov.rw/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Minijust/Publications/Policies/Legal\\_Aid\\_Policy.pdf](https://www.minijust.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Minijust/Publications/Policies/Legal_Aid_Policy.pdf)> accessed 9 May 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Articles 4 & 58.

<sup>3</sup> See Rwanda Bar Association website <<https://www.rwandabar.org.rw/about-rba>> accessed 19 May 2023.

<sup>4</sup> As of 22 May, it has 38 member organizations including the Rwanda Bar Association, Rwanda Women's Network and Human Rights First Rwanda Association. For a full list of member organizations, see <<https://www.legalaidrwanda.org/members.php>> accessed 22 May 2023.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Penal Reform International – with the support of European Commission and the Belgian government - launched a paralegal programme aimed at reducing prolonged pretrial detention and improving access to justice in 2009. See Penal Reform International, Paralegals in Rwanda: A Case Study by Penal Reform International, January 2012 <[https://cdn.penalreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Rwanda-paralegals-final-PDF\\_0.pdf](https://cdn.penalreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Rwanda-paralegals-final-PDF_0.pdf)> accessed 9 May 2023.

<sup>6</sup> (n. 30), pp. 27-28).

<sup>7</sup> Anyango Oyieke, Meetal Jain, Ebenezer Durojaye & Esther Gumboli, "African Centre of Excellence for Legal Empowerment: South Africa feasibility study." Report of 2016 field visit (on file with the author), p. 17. See also National Legal Aid Policy, 2014, p. 20.

### **Challenges of paralegals**

Paralegals confront several challenges in Rwanda. These challenges include the lack of knowledge about the work of paralegals by local leaders leading to suspicion. There is also the challenge of lack of communication between paralegals which often means that their jurisdictions overlap. A third challenge relates to data and documentation – the fact that paralegals struggle to collect and collate information in the field and inevitably do not properly document their work. As with other countries, paralegals in Rwanda also struggle with fundraising.

### **Opportunities for collaboration**

The proposed legal aid fund provides an opportunity to collaborate with state institutions to increase the pool of resources available to do paralegal work in Rwanda.

### **Recommendations**

Following the challenges identified in 3.6.4, paralegal organizations must embark on public enlightenment campaigns to sensitize people on the role of paralegals. For the paralegals, it is critical to improve communication so as not to create the impression that they are disorganized in terms of their approach to engagement with the communities. The challenge of funding is tangentially connected with how well or badly groups collect, collate and use data. Paralegal organizations are therefore encouraged to be more deliberate about data collection and documentation.