

U.S. Country Commercial Guides



Rwanda
2020

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Doing Business in Rwanda

Market Overview

Rwanda is a small but growing market, with a population of 12.3 million people and a Gross Domestic Product (GDP, Current) of \$9.5 billion, according to the World Bank. Rwanda enjoys strong economic growth, averaging over seven percent GDP growth annually over the last two decades. The Rwandan economy grew more than nine percent in 2019 thanks to strong growth in industry, construction, services and agriculture. Due to the global COVID-19 outbreak, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected Rwanda's economy would grow by only two percent in 2020. Despite the ongoing economic impact of COVID-19, there are many positive long-term economic signs: inflation was below five percent in 2019, the country maintains its reputation for low corruption, Rwanda's external debt-to-GDP ratio of 44 percent in 2019 is relatively low (but growing quickly), and the percentage of foreign assistance (external grants and loans) in the country's annual budget has dropped from over 80 percent a decade ago to 39.5 percent in the 2020/2021 National Budget. Rwanda enjoys relatively high rankings in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index, which ranked Rwanda 38th out of 190 economies in the 2020 report - or second-best in sub-Saharan Africa behind Mauritius.

Leading sectors include energy, agriculture, trade and hospitality, and financial services. Rwanda's economy is overwhelmingly rural and heavily dependent on agriculture. Strong growth in the services sector, particularly construction and tourism, has contributed to overall economic growth in recent years. GDP per capita was \$818 in 2019, according to the Rwanda National Institute of Statistics (NISR). The government has prioritized turning Rwanda into a regional trade, logistics, and conference hub. Pillars of this strategy include the construction of several new international business class hotels, a convention center in downtown Kigali, a brand new inland container terminal, and a bonded warehouse in Kigali. The government has also invested in expanding the fleet of the national carrier RwandAir and is pursuing U.S. authorization for a direct flight from Kigali to the United States. Construction of the new Bugesera International Airport is ongoing.

The value of Rwandan exports increased by 3.8 percent while the volume of exports increased 40.6 percent year-on-year in 2019, reaching \$1,164.5 million, according to the National Bank of Rwanda. The increase in value was attributed to good performance in non-traditional exports and re-exports, partly offsetting a fall in traditional commodity exports (coffee, tea, minerals, pyrethrum, hides and skins) largely driven by declining global prices. Commodities, particularly gold, tin, tantalum, tungsten, tea, and coffee, generated over 57 percent of Rwanda's export revenue, according to the National Institute of Statistics Rwanda (NISR). Rwanda earned \$86.3 million from tea exports in 2019, a 4.6 percent decrease from 2018. Over the same period, coffee accounted for \$69.2 million worth of exports, up 0.2 percent from the previous year. Major markets for coffee exports are the United States and Europe, while the Middle East and Pakistan are the main buyers of Rwandan tea. The value of Rwandan exports of mineral products decreased by 31.3 percent between 2019 and 2018. Tourism is the country's leading foreign exchange earner, with total revenues estimated at \$438 million in 2017, according to the Rwanda Development Board (RDB). This is due to successes in leisure tourism as well as rapid-growth in business tourism, also known as Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events (MICE).

Rwanda's small industrial sector contributes around 19 percent to GDP and employs less than three percent of the population. The services sector, which includes tourism, generates almost half of GDP (48 percent) and has grown at an average annual rate of around eight percent in recent years. Rwanda is highly import-dependent, and the Rwandan government faces chronic and large current account deficits. In 2019, imports totaled \$2.7 billion (an increase of 10.6 percent from the \$2.445 billion in imports registered in 2018) due to ongoing large infrastructure projects and growing industry. Import of capital and intermediary goods increased by 17.8 percent and 16.0 percent respectively, according to the National Bank of Rwanda (BNR). In 2018, principal imports included electrical machinery and parts; electronic equipment and parts; machinery, appliances, and parts; vehicles and accessories; cereals and other foodstuffs; pharmaceutical products; cement and construction equipment including iron and steel; and energy and petroleum products. China, Europe, Kenya, India, the United Arab Emirates, and Tanzania are among Rwanda's major suppliers.

U.S.-Rwanda bilateral trade has grown rapidly in recent years. After Rwanda implemented new higher tariffs on imports of secondhand clothing and footwear in 2016, the U.S. government partially suspended African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) benefits for apparel products from Rwanda, effective May 2018. Many other Rwandan exports to the United States are still eligible for trade preferences under the Generalized System

of Preferences and AGOA. Rwandan exports to the United States have grown significantly over the last 10 years. U.S.-Rwanda bilateral trade in 2019 totaled \$64.5 million (\$18.9 million in exports to Rwanda, \$45.6 million in imports from Rwanda) as compared to \$92.7 million (\$25.3 million in exports to Rwanda and \$67.4 million in imports from Rwanda) the year before; the decline was mostly due to fewer aircraft parts exports to Rwanda. Top U.S. exports to Rwanda include aircraft and parts; mechanical and electrical machinery and related parts; and medical, pharmaceutical, and scientific equipment and products.

Less than four percent of Rwanda’s total exports of goods went to the United States in 2019. In 2018, \$3.86 million in total Rwandan exports to the United States came under AGOA, up from \$2.16 million in 2017, 1.22 million in 2016 and \$435,000 in 2015. Rwandan exports covered by AGOA primarily consisted of apparel, travel goods, handbags, and arts and crafts).

In 2007, Rwanda joined the East African Community (EAC). Rwanda is also a member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Rwanda is the only nation in the region to have concluded a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) with the United States. Rwanda has also concluded a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) with the United States. The most recent meeting under the TIFA was in October 2019. In 2009, Rwanda became the newest member of the Commonwealth and was scheduled to host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2020, but the meeting was postponed to June 2021 due to COVID-19 outbreak. Rwanda joined the OECD Development Center in 2019.

Rwanda is a member of the Northern Corridor initiative, which includes Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, and Ethiopia as core members and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi, and Tanzania as observers. Rwanda is also at the forefront of the Central Corridor initiative, which also includes Burundi, DRC, Tanzania, and Uganda. Unlocking some of the larger infrastructure projects, such as rail transportation, envisioned under these initiatives could help to reduce the cost of conducting business and transporting goods across the region.

Rwanda benefits from low violent crime rates; its strong police and military provide a security umbrella that minimizes potential criminal activity and political conflicts.

Leading reasons to consider the Rwandan market for U.S. export expansion include:

- **Sustained high economic growth:** Strong average year-on-year GDP growth albeit from a low base, relatively low inflation, low (but growing) debt-to-GDP ratio;
- **Low corruption:** One of Africa’s four least corrupt nations and 51st in the world in the Transparency International’s 2019 Corruption Perception Index;
- **Easy to start a business:** Top global consistent reformer since 2008 and second easiest place to do business in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank Doing Business Report). Investors can register a business online or in person in as little as six hours through the Rwanda Development Board.
- **Access to markets:** Rwanda’s market of 12.3 million people has a growing middle class, and the EAC offers a customs union with a market potential of 177 million consumers. Close access to the eastern DRC market of approximately 35 million people.
- **Untapped investment opportunities:** Potential opportunities for investment are particularly attractive in the following sectors: infrastructure, energy, agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, information and communication technology, mining, financial services, real estate, and construction.

Summary of Basic Economic Statistics (2018/2019 figures)

Population Total :	12,301,939 (2018, World Bank)
Real GDP growth :	9.4 percent (2019, World Bank)
GDP at current prices :	\$9.509 billion (2018, World Bank)

	RWF 9,105 billion (2019, National Institute of Statistics Rwanda (NISR))
GDP per capita:	\$818 (2019, NISR)
Consumer price inflation:	In 2019, headline inflation increased by 2.4% on average, up from 1.4% in 2018 (BNR)
Total Exports:	\$1.165 billion (2019, BNR)
Total Imports:	\$2.703 billion (2019, BNR)
Exports to the USA:	\$45.601 million (2019, USTC)
Imports from the USA :	\$18.862 million (2019, USTC)
Exchange rate:	945.41 RWF on June 24, 2020

Market Challenges

- **Landlocked:** Rwanda is landlocked and transportation costs for imports and exports are among the highest in the world. The country lacks a link to regional railway networks, which means all trade is conducted by road or air. Non-tariff barriers add to high transportation costs leading to inflated prices of domestically manufactured products, as most raw materials used for manufacturing need to be imported. COVID-19 has introduced further logistical problems with the required testing and tracking of non-Rwandan truckers coming to Rwanda. Currently, non-Rwandan truckers have to transfer their cargo to a Rwandan operated-truck, resulting in delays.
- **Cost of electricity:** Rwanda's average residential and commercial electricity costs, at \$0.20 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) before tax, exceed the rate in other East African countries and rank in the top 10 most expensive tariffs in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Low purchasing power:** Annual per capita income at \$818 in 2019.
- **Low level of human resource development:** General shortage of skilled labor including accountants, lawyers, technicians, tradespeople, and other skilled professions.
- **Limited Access to finance:** High interest rates and limited local capital markets.
- **Competition from state-owned enterprises:** Some investors complain about competition from state-owned and ruling party-aligned businesses.
- **Investor aftercare issues:** While business registration is easy, implementation can be less smooth due to delays in government payments for services or goods delivered, changes in memorandum of understanding (MOU) conditions during contract negotiations, and/or additional tax assessments. Investors also face difficulty in obtaining or renewing work visas for expatriates due to the government's demonstrated preference for hiring local or EAC residents over third country nationals.
- **Taxation:** Investors have cited the inconsistent application of tax incentives and import duties as a significant challenge to doing business in Rwanda. Under Rwandan law, foreign firms should receive equal treatment with regard to taxes, as well as access to licenses, approvals, and procurement. Foreign firms should also receive VAT tax rebates within 15 days of receipt of relevant documents by tax authorities, but firms often complain that the process for reimbursement can take months or years and often involves lengthy audits by and negotiations with the Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA). Some investors express

frustration that audits are conducted with great frequency, even on businesses that have demonstrated excellent compliance.

Market Opportunities

- **Market access:** Rwanda, as an EAC member, has access to a regional market of over 177 million consumers as well as close access to the eastern DRC market of approximately 35 million people.
- **Energy:** The government has outlined a strategy to achieve universal access to electricity by 2024, supplied by a roughly even mix of on-grid and off-grid connections. While Rwanda's independent power producer projects are expected to generate more power than projected demand over the next decade, opportunities exist for U.S. companies to invest in off-grid projects along with transmission and distribution.
- **Infrastructure:** The government, in pursuit of its goal to position Rwanda as a regional hub for tourism, services, and logistics, has completed a number of high-profile infrastructure projects like the Kigali Convention Center and several international business class hotels. The government has ambitious plans for future projects including a new international airport at Bugesera, the "Kigali Innovation City" technology cluster, tourist facilities, wastewater treatment and potable water facilities, and large ticket items such as railways to Tanzania and regional oil pipelines.
- **Construction:** There is a significant gap in domestic production of concrete, steel, and other construction materials relative to the demand generated by Rwanda's construction sector, and there continues to be a need for construction of affordable homes that meet local standards.
- **Agriculture:** Rwanda's agriculture sector employs 68 percent of the country's population but contributes less than one-third of the country's national GDP. The government aims to boost agriculture's contribution to GDP through the addition of high-value horticultural processing (including coffee washing, roasting, and packaging), expansion of irrigation and mechanization, and increased production and processing of value-added agriculture goods (e.g., dairy, tomato ketchup, mushrooms, and honey). Rwanda also aims to move from subsistence crops to export-oriented commercial farming.
- **Information Communication and Technology:** Rwanda continues to be one of the fastest growing African countries in ICT and there are several avenues for growth for the ICT sector. These include e-commerce and e-services, mobile technologies, applications development and automation, training of ICT professionals in the region, and research. The government has stated its intent to provide internet access to the entire population. Rwanda has installed over 5,000 kilometers of fiber optic cable throughout the country, with regional links to neighboring countries. It is one of the few countries in Africa to have built a national high-speed 4G LTE wireless broadband network. Adequate numbers of skilled IT professionals are still lacking, but Carnegie Mellon University has established a campus in Kigali with a focus on this sector. Korea Telecom holds a 35 year contract to manage Rwanda's national telecom network.
- **Tourism:** Prior to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the government projected high tourism growth rates would continue for the next several years. Long-term opportunities still exist in hospitality, entertainment, tour operations, and training services. Rwanda's safe environment, its central location less than five hours from most African countries by air, the Kigali Convention Center, and a growing list of business class and luxury hotels are significant advantages in terms of attracting business, event, and conference tourism in the region. The government hopes to establish a direct flight to the United States by 2022, and it recently launched a push to lower prices for domestic tourists while the pandemic persists.
- **Mining:** The mining sector has expanded since privatization in 2007. The Rwandan government has set high targets for mineral exports over the next several years. Rwanda offers opportunities in exploration, extraction, and processing. Potential investors should note that Rwanda is subject to Section 1502 of the U.S. Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. Many emerging technologies, especially

those related to electric vehicles, are dependent on the tin, tungsten and tantalum (the 3Ts) that Rwanda produces.

Market Entry Strategy

Visiting Rwanda is critical for those considering entering into business in the country. We strongly encourage visitors to pay a courtesy call on the U.S. Embassy's Economic and Commercial Section for the latest information and market developments. The Embassy provides a variety of services to assist U.S. firms with market entry. For assistance, please contact the Economic and Commercial Section at +(250) 252-596-400 or by email at KigaliEcon@state.gov. Interested parties should also reach out their local Export Assistance Center at <https://www.trade.gov/commercial-services-offices-us>.

The Rwanda Development Board (RDB), Rwanda's development agency, is responsible for promoting investment and facilitating market entry for investors. The RDB is a good place to start when considering establishing a business in Rwanda. The RDB offers a range of services to potential investors, including assistance with acquiring licenses, certificates, approvals, authorizations, and permits required by law to set up and operate a business enterprise in Rwanda. Any agreements negotiated with RDB involving tax issues should be separately and fully approved by the Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA) before being finalized to improve enforceability of tax provisions. Visit the RDB's website at <http://www.rdb.rw> for further information. The Rwandan Private Sector Federation (www.psf.org.rw), a public-private partnership umbrella organization with strong ties to the government, the East African Business Council (www.eabc.info), the Rwanda Bankers' Association (www.rba.rw), and the Rwanda Tours & Travel Association (www.rttarwanda.org) can also provide information on potential local business partners. The American Chamber of Commerce in Rwanda can also be found at <https://www.facebook.com/AmChamRwanda/>.

Leading Sectors for U.S. Exports and Investment

Energy

Overview

About half of Rwandans currently have access to electricity (close to 100 percent in urban areas but less than 35 percent in rural areas). In a bid to position Rwanda as a services hub for east and central Africa, the Rwandan government committed itself to a large number of power purchase agreements with independent power producers to increase generation capacity. With power production projected to exceed demand by approximately 200MW in 2024, the government is shifting its focus to increasing access, stimulating demand, and strengthening the transmission network. By 2024, Rwanda plans to supply electricity to 100 percent of the population (52 percent through an expanded electrical grid and 48 percent through off-grid technologies). The government has also targeted improvements in the grid network, including reducing system losses and improving reliability, as well as connecting with neighboring countries and importing and exporting power across borders. Several U.S.-based or U.S.-owned micro-hydro, off-grid solar, and mini-grid firms are active here; there are many opportunities for firms providing innovative and affordable transmission and distribution systems and equipment. A U.S. company is expanding its electric motorcycle taxi business to take advantage of plentiful power to replace the estimated 100,000 gas-powered motorcycle taxis in Rwanda.

Power Africa Support: Power Africa is a market-driven, U.S. Government-led Public Private Partnership (PPP) aiming to double access to electricity in Africa. It offers private sector entities tools and resources to facilitate doing business in Africa's power sector. In 2016, the Electrify Africa Act institutionalized Power Africa. Learn more about the full [Power Africa toolbox](#) or other [opportunities offered by Power Africa](#).

Power Africa is supporting Rwanda's energy sector development through a range of support mechanisms in cooperation with the Government of Rwanda, international finance institutions, development agencies, and private sector partners. Power Africa provides technical assistance and capacity development to the utility and the regulator to ensure achievement of power sector milestones and strengthen operational capacity of the network. This assistance includes training for Independent Power Producers and PPP contracts, energy resource assessments, and tariff setting support. Along with other donors, Power Africa advises the government on the design and implementation of energy policies and programs, particularly in the dynamic off-grid sector. In collaboration with the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and the utility, Power Africa financed and designed an innovative results-based financing incentive program for off-grid solar home systems. The government intends to scale up this program to the entire country so as to accelerate progress towards its target of providing 48 percent of the population with off-grid access by 2024 through private sector efforts. It is also mobilizing off-grid finance through technical assistance and a loan guarantee agreement to local financial institutions. The U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF) has provided grant funding to women-owned Rwandan off-grid businesses. Power Africa has also launched the Women in Rwandan Energy (WIRE) Initiative, which seeks to increase the number and influence of women in the sector through training, apprenticeships, professional network opportunities and leadership development. Learn more about how Power Africa is partnering to address key challenges in Rwanda's electricity sector and supporting private sector investment in energy at: <https://www.usaid.gov/powerafrica/rwanda>.

For more information on energy in Rwanda, please visit:

Rwanda Ministry of Infrastructure: www.mininfra.gov.rw

Rwanda Development Board: www.rdb.gov.rw

Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority: www.rura.gov.rw

Rwanda Energy Group (REG): www.reg.rw

Energy Private Developers (EPD): <https://www.epdrwanda.com/>

Leading Sub-Sectors

- On and off-grid electricity access (solar home systems and mini-grids)
- Electricity transmission and distribution
- Regional electricity system integration and power trading
- Power sector policy development and planning
- Institutional capacity building
- Gender mainstreaming

Opportunities

- Power transmission and distribution equipment and services
- Off-grid energy solutions, including rooftop solar products and solar powered irrigation
- Technical assistance and services

Agriculture Sector

Overview

Agriculture has been a historical mainstay of Rwanda's economy. Contributing almost one-third of Rwanda's GDP and employing approximately 68 percent of the country's working population, it remains a key sector in Rwanda's efforts to foster private sector development.

Agriculture is a priority sector in Rwanda's Vision 2050 national development strategy. The government aims to replace subsistence farming with fully monetized and technology-intensive commercial agriculture and agro-processing by 2050. Principal agricultural exports are coffee, tea, and some value-added agricultural products such as canned tomatoes, honey, french beans, passion fruit, macadamia nuts, and mushrooms. Rwanda exports a large number of live animals, unprocessed meat, and dairy products to the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. The increase in flight routes in and out of Rwanda via RwandaAir and other carriers to Europe and Asia has facilitated an increase in exports of fresh agriculture products from Rwanda. Rwanda's agricultural advantages include its high altitude and a a climate that allows for year-round cultivation. In 2018, a study sponsored by USAID identified export opportunities in fresh crops such as passion fruit, snow peas, chili, and mushrooms. There are also opportunities in input provision, crop aggregation for export, and cold chain logistics. Rwanda will need to increase the extent of cultivated land under irrigation while importing increased amounts of inputs, such as seeds, fertilizers, and small-scale machinery to achieve its value-added agricultural development goals. Rwanda is landlocked and land is divided into small parcels. This poses a challenge to large commercial farming but can allow for the production of specialty crops.

Agriculture Sector Profile

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total Local Production*	1.394 trillion RWF= \$2.048 billion	1.547 trillion RWF = \$2.273 billion	1.722 trillion RWF= \$2.188 billion	2.027 trillion RWF = \$2.436 billion	2.043 trillion RWF = \$2.373 billion	2.191 trillion RW = \$2.437 billion
Total Exports**	\$212 million	\$238 million	\$248 million	\$356 million***	n.a	n.a
Total** Imports	\$349 million	\$323 million	\$322 million	n.a	n.a	n.a
Imports** from the US	\$648,925	\$1.6 million	\$1.4 million	n.a	n.a	n.a
Total Market Size	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
Exchange Rates	680 RWF = \$1	716 RWF = \$1	789 RWF = \$1	832 RWF = \$1	861 RWF = \$1	899 RWF = \$1

Source: *National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR), Statistical Yearbook, 2016 and 2019 editions. Note: Agriculture production here includes food crops, export crops and livestock.

Source:** UN Comtrade Database, May 16, 2017

Source:***Rwanda National Agriculture Export Board

Leading Sub-Sectors:

Leading subsectors include grains (such as maize and beans), vegetables, and livestock. Due to climate changes and Rwanda's proximity to large markets such as Uganda, and Eastern DRC, demand for food exports is often high, though cross-border trade has been impacted by COVID-19 and a political dispute with Uganda that began in February 2019.

Opportunities

- Agro-processing
- Storage facilities
- Fertilizers
- Pyrethrum (a natural, flower-derived insecticide) farming and processing
- Horticulture and plant propagation
- Farm equipment
- Education and farmer training

More information on agriculture sector in Rwanda can be obtained from:

Ministry of Agriculture: <http://www.minagri.gov.rw/>

Rwanda Development Board: www.rdb.gov.rw

National Agriculture Export Board: <https://naeb.gov.rw/index.php?id=1>

Mining and Minerals

Overview

Rwanda is one of the world's largest producers of tin, tantalum, and tungsten (3Ts), and also exports some gold and gemstones. Rwanda also possesses a variety of minerals such as silica sands, kaolin, vermiculite, diatomite, clays, limestone, talcum, gypsum, and pozzolan. Small-scale mining accounts for around 80 percent of the country's mineral output. The government is eager to formalize the sector, attract international mining investors, and increase processing of minerals in the country. The Rwanda Mining, Gas and Petroleum Board was established in 2017 to coordinate government efforts in these sectors. Potential investors should note that Rwanda is subject to Section 1502 of the U.S. Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, which includes the 3Ts and gold.

Minerals Sector Profile

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total Local Production	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
Total Exports	\$210 million	\$148 million	\$167 million	\$376 million	\$783 million	n.a
Total Imports	N/A	N/A	N/A	n.a	n.a	n.a
Imports from the US	N/A	N/A	N/A	n.a	n.a	n.a
Total Market Size	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
Exchange Rates	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: UN Comtrade Database, May 16, 2017 and July 9, 2020 (Commodity codes : 26 and 71)

Note: The most important sub-codes are 2609 (Tin Ore), 2611 (Tungsten), 2614 (Titanium), 2615 (Nobium Tantalum), 7108 (gold). For codes description and other details, visit <https://comtrade.un.org/db/mr/rfCommoditiesList.aspx>

Leading Sub-Sectors

- Tin Ore
- Tungsten
- Nobium-Tantalum

Opportunities

- Mineral exploration (Tin, Tungsten, Coltan, and Gemstones)
- Industrial mining equipment
- Targeting value-addition
- Partnerships with local mining companies
- Trade in minerals

Rwanda Mining, Petroleum & Gas Board oversees regulation and mining licensing. For more information please visit their website at <https://www.rmb.gov.rw/index.php?id=188>

Rwanda Development Board negotiates mining license contracts on behalf of the Government of Rwanda. More information can be obtained at www.rdb.gov.rw
More information on the Rwanda Mining Association can be found at <https://rma.co.rw>

Telecommunications

Overview

Rwanda continues to be one of the fastest growing African countries in ICT and there are several avenues for growth for the ICT sector. These include e-commerce and e-services, mobile technologies, applications development and automation, training of ICT professionals in the region, and research. The government has stated its intent to provide internet access to the entire population. Rwanda has installed over 5,000 kilometers of fiber optic cable throughout the country, with regional links to neighboring countries. It is one of the few countries in Africa to have built a national high-speed 4G LTE wireless broadband network. Adequate numbers of skilled IT professionals are still lacking, but Carnegie Mellon University has established a campus in Kigali with a focus on this sector. Korea Telecom holds a 35 year contract to manage Rwanda's national telecom network. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the use of mobile money, credit and debit cards has increased in Rwanda.

Leading Sub-Sectors

- Telecommunications
- Internet
- Software

Opportunities

- Business process outsourcing (BPO)
 - Technical training institutes for ICT specialized courses
 - Software development (mobile applications, innovative e-payment solutions)
 - Internet data centers (computer security management and disaster recovery planning facilities)
 - "Kigali Innovation City" technology cluster
 - SMART energy grid development
 - Access network/Last mile connectivity (fiber-to-the-home, curb, etc.)
 - ICT financing mechanisms
 - Business development centers
- COVID-19 has created a greater need for mobile money and cashless transactions. Rwanda has long wanted to develop this sector.

More telecommunication market and regulation information can be obtained at:

Ministry of ICT (MITEC): www.mitec.gov.rw/home/

Rwanda Development Board: www.rdb.gov.rw

Rwanda Information Society Authority: <https://www.risa.rw/home/>

Travel and Tourism

Overview

Rwanda has four national parks (Volcanoes, Nyungwe, Akagera, and Gishwati-Mukura) and its natural assets include six volcanoes, 23 lakes and numerous rivers, and rare species such as mountain gorillas. Tourism has been the leading foreign exchange earner for the country in recent years, aided by an increase in flights by major airline companies to Rwanda. Tourism earnings were estimated at \$438 million in 2017 compared to \$390 million in 2016 and \$368 million in 2015, according to the RDB and the National Bank of Rwanda. Rwanda is establishing itself as a regional and global hub for conferences and events, and it was scheduled to host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2020, but the meeting was shifted to June 2021 following the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 devastated the tourism sector, bringing it to a complete halt in April and May 2020. The government has responded by creating opportunities for domestic tourism by lowering hotel and trekking prices even as it seeks to attract international tourists once again. Moving forward, Rwanda may consider a two tiered tourism pricing scheme for Rwandans and resident expats while keeping the higher fees for foreign tourists.

Leading Sub-Sectors

- Hospitality and hotels
- Transportation and tourist services
- Tourist infrastructure

Opportunities

- Management and advertising for domestic and international meetings, conferences and conventions.
- Tourism and hospitality training schools
- Construction of a cultural village
- Creation of environmentally-friendly recreation parks in Kigali
- Tourism and sports activities around Lake Kivu
- Eco-tourism in Rwanda's national parks
- Development of exhibition centers in and around Kigali City

More resources and opportunities on tourism and travel can be obtained at: Rwanda Development Board (RDB) www.rdb.rw/; <https://www.visitrwanda.com>

Rwanda Convention Bureau: <https://rcb.rw>

Rwanda Travel and Tourism Association: <http://www.rtta.rw/>

Financial Services

Overview

There are currently 16 commercial banks in Rwanda as well as a number of microfinance institutions and rural savings and credit cooperatives. The sector is overseen by the National Bank of Rwanda. Growth potential remains strong with only 77 percent of the population engaged in the formal financial system, which includes the banking sector as well as insurance firms, mobile money networks, and microfinance institutions. As of 2020, 36 percent of adults in Rwanda are banked (an increase from 26 percent in 2016, 23 percent in 2012 and 14 percent in 2008). Banks wishing to establish a presence in Rwanda must apply for a license from the National Bank of Rwanda by presenting a business model showing that there is a gap in the market and demonstrating a minimum share capital of approximately \$8 million. In order to improve access to credit, a private credit reference agency has been set up, of which all banks and other financial institutions must be members. Other companies such as utilities can be voluntary participants.

The three largest commercial banks in descending order of market share are Bank of Kigali, Banque Populaire du Rwanda (BPR), and I&M Bank. Other foreign banks present in Rwanda include Ecobank, GT Bank, Equity Bank, Kenya Commercial Bank, NCBA (formerly the Commercial Bank of Africa (CBA)), Access Bank, Bank of Africa, CogeBanque, Urwego, Development Bank of Rwanda, and microfinance banks AB Bank, Zigama, and Unguka.

Opportunities

- Commercial bank products and services, particularly in rural areas
- Competitive loan facilities
- Agricultural products/services financing
- Development banks, especially to finance SMEs
- Microfinance opportunities
- Mortgage financing
- Investment banking services
- Training of financial sector professionals
- Insurance services especially re-insurance
- Equity and bonds purchases at Rwanda's capital market
- Provision of life policies and other innovative insurance products such as agriculture and medical schemes
- Special financing solutions, i.e., private equity funds
- Institutional and human capacity building in capital and financial markets.

For more information on the payment system and banking sector in Rwanda, please visit:

National Bank of Rwanda (BNR): <http://www.bnr.rw>

Rwanda Bankers Association (RBA): <http://rba.rw>

Rwanda Development Board (RDB): www.rdb.rw/

Customs, Regulations and Standards

Trade Barriers

There are no special barriers to U.S. trade and investment, but in July 2016 the government increased tariffs for used clothing imports from any country by 1000 percent. Constraints to increased trade and investment are limited infrastructure, bureaucratic procedures, shortage in foreign exchange, and high transportation and transaction costs.

Most imports and exports are shipped by road from the ports of Mombasa (Kenya) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), a distance of up to 1,500 km. Commercial traffic to and from the ports is subject to frequent delays, numerous weigh points, high transportation costs, and occasional theft. These hindrances can cause unpredictable delays when importing goods into the country. As such, shipping insurance and freight forwarding services may prove difficult to acquire in Rwanda. As a landlocked country, Rwanda's economy is vulnerable to potential disputes with neighboring countries; since 2019, political tension between Rwanda and Uganda has slowed some imports and exports. COVID-19 has further complicated shipments by truck in that as of August 2020, non-Rwandan truck drivers must deposit their cargo at the Rwandan border so that a Rwandan driver and truck may transport it into Rwanda. This has increased delays and added to costs.

Rwanda hopes to continue generating higher trade volumes under the Single Customs Territory (SCT), an initiative among EAC member countries. Under the SCT, customs revenues are collected at the ports of Mombasa and Dar es Salaam and remitted to the destination member state.

Import Tariffs

Rwanda is a member of the [East African Community](#) (EAC) customs union along with Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and South Sudan. Customs tariffs, rules of origin, import prohibitions, and trade remedy regulations have been harmonized through the EAC. Rwanda applies the EAC common external tariff (CET) on the CIF (cost, insurance and freight) value of imports. As part of the EAC, Rwanda uses a four band duty structure for imports from outside of the EAC:

Product	Rwanda/ EAC
Capital Goods and Raw Materials	0%
Intermediate Goods	10%
Finished Goods	25%
Sensitive Goods	Varying per country

Note: There are two exceptions to the CET: "Stay of Applications" and the "Duty Remission Scheme". A stay of application is a different rate of import duty from the CET available for specific products. These are negotiated on a country-by-country basis, but once agreed are available for all importing taxpayers. The stay of application rate can be higher or lower than the CET rate. Once approved, the stay of applications are published by product (using HS Codes) in EAC gazettes, available at: <http://www.rra.gov.rw/index.php?id=349&L=0>

The Duty Remission scheme is an exemption from import duty available to taxpayers who are importing goods to be used as inputs in the production of goods for export or in the production of particular goods for home consumption. The list of particular goods for home consumption covered by the Duty Remission scheme is contained within EAC gazettes, available at: <http://www.rra.gov.rw/index.php?id=349&L=0>

Taxpayers must apply for the Duty Remission scheme by writing a letter to the Commissioner for the Customs Services Department (CSD) to explain the reasons for application. If approved, the Duty Remission is valid for a period of twelve (12) months. For more information on conditions and recent changes in duty remission and stay of applications, please contact RRA.

In addition to import duty (applied to CIF value), other taxes and levies include: excise duty (varying rates depending on the product, applied to CIF plus import duty plus handling fees); VAT (18 percent applied on CIF plus import duty plus excise duty plus handling fees); withholding tax (varying rates depending on the product; applied to CIF value); infrastructure development levy (1.5 percent applied to CIF value); strategic reserves levy (applied only to fuel and petroleum products and assessed per liter); and, African Union Levy (0.2 percent applied to CIF value). VAT can be reclaimed, but this is often difficult and time-consuming. In addition to other taxes, motor vehicles pay a registration fee depending on engine capacity. Warehousing fees are paid directly to bonded warehouses for storing consignments, and rates vary depending on size, weight and length of storage time.

Clearing agents have access to the One Single Electronic Window and are trained by RRA to assess duties and provide required information to their clients. The RRA keeps an updated list of agents here: <https://www.rra.gov.rw/index.php?id=266>.

The RRA has expanded customs processing facilities, increased personnel, and introduced a computerized system to reduce corruption. Other trade facilitation schemes include Simplified Trade Regime, Gold Card Scheme, Authorized Economic Operator, Pre-Payment Facility, Quitus Fiscal, Pre-Clearance Facility, Immediate Release of Goods, Duty Remission Scheme, Cargo Tracking System and Mobile Cargo Scanners.

Detailed information on current taxes, including import tariff lists and facilitation schemes, can be found at the Rwanda Revenue Authority website: www.rra.gov.rw.

Border posts are located in Rubavu at the border with Eastern DRC, Kagitumba Musanze and Gatuna at the border with Uganda, Rusumo at the border with Tanzania, Akanyaru and Cyangugu at the border with Burundi, and Rusizi at the border with Eastern DRC. USAID (through Trademark East Africa) and other donors are supporting border post improvement and expansion projects. A map of border posts is available at <http://www.rra.gov.rw/index.php?id=222>.

Import Requirements and Documentation

Import documentation to Rwanda includes:

1. Air Way Bill (Airfreight) or Bill of Lading (Seafreight)
2. Commercial Invoice(s) or equivalent document(s)
3. Packing List
4. Import Declaration Form (IDF) from the importer
5. Importer's Tax Identification Number (TIN) and VAT numbers
6. Duties and Taxes Exemption Certificates, if any
7. National Drug Authority Certificate / Permit for import of drug and pharmaceuticals
8. Phytosanitary certificates for import of agricultural products
9. Registration / De-registration Card of country of origin of old/used vehicles
10. Gift Certificates, if gifted to any organization eligible for duty free clearance
11. Passport of the individual for clearance of personal effects

12. Certificate of Origin, especially for goods imported from COMESA countries

EAC rules of origin can be found here: <http://www.rra.gov.rw/index.php?id=244>

COMESA rules of origin can be found here: <https://rwandatrade.rw/media/Protocol-on-Rules-of-Origin-2015.pdf>

Since 2012, the RRA has employed the Electronic Single Window, an online system for filing, issuing, and modifying export and import declarations. Through scanning and uploading of key documentation such as certificates of origin or quality and customs declarations, the system allows importers, exporters, or their brokers to send or receive information or documents to the concerned agencies related with the clearing process at one point without moving from one agent to another.

More information on Electronic Single Window can be found here: <http://www.rra.gov.rw/index.php?id=46>

Import procedures for importation into Rwanda can be found at: <http://www.rra.gov.rw/index.php?id=51>

Customs clearance procedures can be found at the **eRegulations Rwanda** website: <http://rwanda.e-regulations.org>. Steps to follow include:

1. Obtain notice of arrival of the goods (avis d'arrivee)
2. Submit goods arrival notice for verification by Rwanda Standards Board
3. Obtain manifest
4. Submit import document to the clearing agent for tax calculation
5. Pay import tax
6. Obtain an invoice for warehouse handling fees
7. Pay warehouse fees for goods handling
8. Obtain goods exit note

In addition to document verification and physical verification at border posts, importing taxpayers may be subject to Post-Clearance Audits (PCA). PCA is explained in more detail here: <https://www.eac.int/sct/65-sector/customs/471-709-403-customs-post-clearance-audit-manual>.

Labeling and Marking Requirements

Information on labeling and marking requirements can be obtained by visiting the Rwanda Bureau of Standards (RBS) website: <http://www.rsb.gov.rw/>

Each product has its own labeling requirements. These may include:

- Name of the product
- Name and address of manufacturer
- Country of origin
- Net content/Net weight
- List of ingredients for some products
- Lot identification/Batch number
- Date marking for some products including foods, cosmetics, chemicals, paint, medicines, etc.
- Storage conditions for some products
- Instructions of use for some products
- Precautions on chemicals

Official language on labelling must be in the three languages below:

- Kinyarwanda
- English

- French

An exporter or manufacturer must comply with compulsory requirements of the standards or codes of practice. For more information please visit RSS Website: : <http://www.rsb.gov.rw/>

U.S. Export Controls

The United States imposes export controls to protect national security interests and promote foreign policy objectives related to dual-use goods through implementation of the Export Administration Regulations (EAR). The Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) is comprised of two elements: Export Administration (EA), which is responsible for processing license applications, counselling exporters, and drafting and publishing changes to the [Export Administration Regulations](#); and Export Enforcement (EE), which is responsible for the enforcement of the EAR. BIS works closely with U.S. embassies, foreign governments, industry, and trade associations to ensure that exports from the United States are secure and comply with the EAR. BIS officials conduct site visits, known as End-Use Checks (EUCs), globally with end-users, consignees, and/or other parties to transactions involving items subject to the EAR to verify compliance.

An EUC is an on-site verification of a non-U.S. party to a transaction to determine whether the party is a reliable recipient of U.S. items. EUCs are conducted as part of BIS's licensing process, as well as its compliance program, to determine if items were exported in accordance with a valid BIS authorization or otherwise consistent with the EAR. Specifically, an EUC verifies the *bona fides* of transactions subject to the EAR, to include: confirming the legitimacy and reliability of the end use and end user; monitoring compliance with license conditions; and ensuring items are used, re-exported or transferred (in-country) in accordance with the EAR. These checks might be completed prior to the export of items pursuant to a BIS export license in the form of a Pre-License Check (PLC), or following an export from the U.S. during a Post-Shipment Verification (PSV).

BIS officials rely on EUCs to safeguard items subject to the EAR from diversion to unauthorized end uses/users. The verification of a foreign party's reliability facilitates future trade, including pursuant to BIS license reviews. If BIS is unable to verify the reliability of the company or is prevented from accomplishing an EUC, the company may receive, for example, more regulatory scrutiny during license application reviews or be designated on BIS's Unverified List or Entity List, as applicable.

BIS has developed a list of "red flags", or warning signs, and compiled "Know Your Customer" guidance intended to aid exporters in identifying possible violations of the EAR. Both of these resources are publicly available, and their dissemination to industry members is highly encouraged to help promote EAR compliance.

BIS also provides a variety of training sessions to U.S. exporters throughout the year. These sessions range from one to two-day seminars that focus on the basics of exporting to coverage of more advanced, industry specific topics. Interested parties can check [This is a best prospect industry sector for this country](#). Includes a market overview and trade data [list of upcoming seminars and webinars](#) or reference BIS provided [online training](#).

BIS and the EAR regulate transactions involving the export of "dual-use" U.S. goods, services, and technologies. For advice and regulatory requirements, exporters should consult the other U.S. Government agencies which regulate more specialized items. For example, the U.S. Department of State's Directorate of Defense Trade Controls has authority over defense articles and services, or munitions. A list of other agencies involved in export control can be found on the [BIS website](#) or in Supplement No. 3 to Part 730 of the EAR.

The EAR is available on the [BIS website](#) and on the [e-CFR](#) (Electronic Code of Federal Regulations) and is updated as needed. The [Consolidated Screening List](#) (CSL) is a list of parties for which the United States Government maintains restrictions on certain exports, reexports or transfers of items. The CSL consolidates eleven export screening lists of the Departments of Commerce, State and the Treasury into a single data feed

as an aid to industry in conducting electronic screens of parties to regulated transactions. Exporters are encouraged to classify their items prior to export, as well as consult the CSL to determine if any parties to the transaction may be subject to specific license requirements.

Temporary Entry

The RRA Customs Department permits the temporary entry of machinery, equipment, and vehicles. Prior permission must be obtained by providing Customs with a written request and proof that the product in question will be taken out of the country and that duty and tax will be paid if the product is sold.

Clearing agents first execute bonds that act as guarantees to the RRA, then the goods are escorted to specified bonded warehouses. Goods declared for trade exemptions are not taxed unless sold. Warranty and non-warranty items leaving the country for repair pay VAT upon return.

Prohibited and Restricted Imports

The importation and manufacture of narcotic drugs, firearms, ammunition, explosives, pornography, and items infringing copyrights are prohibited. Exportation and importation of wild specimens of endangered flora and fauna are also prohibited. Importation of genetically modified products is restricted. A complete list of prohibited and restricted goods can be found at: <https://www.rra.gov.rw/index.php?id=232&L=784CustomsRegulations>.

Customs Regulations

The Customs Services Department under the Rwanda Revenue Authority has the primary function of collecting and accounting for import duties and taxes on imports.

All importers must use clearing agents to process goods through customs. Several private warehouses exist, and many businesses have their own warehouses. The cost of warehousing is based on handling charges and length of warehousing.

For further information on customs regulations, please contact:

Assumpta Mukabaranga
Kigali Field Operations
Customs Department Services
Rwanda Revenue Authority
P.O Box 718 Kigali
info@rra.gov.rw
Phone: +250 78 8185675
Website: <http://www.rra.gov.rw/>

Commissioner for Customs Services
Ms. Rosine Uwamariya
Rwanda Revenue Authority
Customs Gikondo Magerwa
1st Floor, P.O. Box 3987–Kigali
E-mail: rosine.uwamariya@rra.gov.rw
Telephone: +250 78 8185711

Mr. William Musoni
Deputy Commissioner for Customs Services
Rwanda Revenue Authority

1st Floor
Customs Gikondo Magerwa
P.O. Box 3987 - Kigali
E-mail: William.musoni@rra.gov.rw
Telephone: +250 78 8185840

Customs clearance procedures can be found at the RRA Website:
<https://www.rra.gov.rw/index.php?id=51&L=544>

Standards for Trade

Overview

The Rwanda Standards Board (RSB) is the government institution charged with the implementation of standards, testing, product certification, accreditation, labeling, marking, and technical regulations. Rwandan standards are flexible and market-driven. As RSB does not have the in-house capacity to develop standards, it largely relies on (and coordinates) technical committees made of researchers, manufacturers, academia, and other government institutions and consumer representatives that work together to develop standards. Some new standards are derived from international treaties that Rwanda has signed. There is a mix of mandatory and voluntary standards. Standards related to health, safety, and the protection of the environment are mandatory both for local production and import. RSB posts standards under review on its website and issues notifications. Parties that do not have a manufacturing presence in the market can participate in standards development work by filing comments and receiving feedback during public reviews. More information on RSB is available at <http://www.rsb.gov.rw/>

Standards

Rwanda develops domestic standards but also accepts international standards. Rwanda is a member of the EAC Standards Technical Management Committee. Approved EAC measures are generally incorporated into the Rwandan regulatory system within six months and are published in the National Gazette like other domestic laws and regulations. Rwanda is also a member of other international standardization organizations and accepts their standards. Those include:

- ISO - International Organization for Standardization
- IEC - International Electro-technical Commission
- IEEE - Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
- CODEX - CODEX Alimentarius International Food Standards
- ASTM - American Society for Testing and Materials
- ITU - International Telecommunication Union
- AOAC - Association of Analytical Communities
- OIML - International Organization of Legal Metrology
- COMESA - Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
- ARSO - African Organization for Standardization
- AFSEC - The African Electro technical Standardization Commission
- SADC - Southern African Development Community

Testing, Inspection and Certification

Generally, products enter the market freely. RSB is among the Rwandan government agencies using the One Single Electronic Window. Any imported product related to health, safety or environment requires an employee of RSB to authorize a Release Order from the customs using the One Single Electronic Window. To allow for quick release and avoid custom warehouse charges, RSB is able to conduct quality checks in the owner's premises before products are released into the market.

Publication of Technical Regulations

Proposed technical regulations are regularly published by the RSB. U.S. companies should contact the RSB with comments on any proposed regulations. Final regulations are published in the National gazette (<https://www.primature.gov.rw/index.php?id=42>). Time allowed to comment on proposed technical regulations varies between 30 and 90 days. RSB prepares an annual standards development work plan based on requests from the previous year.

A sample workplan can be found here:

https://www.rsb.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/files/pdf/RSB_WP_2019.pdf

Standards for public review are posted here: <https://www.rsb.gov.rw/index.php?id=145>

More information on testing can be obtained here: <https://www.rsb.gov.rw/index.php?id=20>

Contact Information

Rwanda Standards Board

KK 15 Rd, 49; PO Box: 7099

Kigali (Kicukiro)

Tel: +250 252-582945/586103, Hotline: 3250

Website: <http://www.rsb.gov.rw/>

Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are required under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) to notify the WTO of proposed technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures that could affect trade. **Notify U.S.** (www.nist.gov/notifyus) is a free, web-based e-mail registration service that captures and makes available for review and comment key information on draft regulations and conformity assessment procedures. Users receive customized e-mail alerts when new notifications are added by selected country or countries and industry sector(s) of interest and can also request full texts of regulations. This service and its associated web site are managed and operated by the USA WTO TBT Inquiry Point housed within the National Institute of Standards and Technology, which is part of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Trade Agreements

Rwanda is one of 19 members of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) (www.comesa.int) that offers preferential terms of trade for its members. Rwanda is also a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (www.wto.org), and it joined the EAC (www.eac.int) in 2007 and the Commonwealth (<http://thecommonwealth.org>) in 2009. It is also a member of the Economic Community of the Great Lakes and the Economic Community of Central African States. Rwanda hosted the signing ceremony for the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement in 2018, and it was one of the first countries to ratify that agreement, which entered into force on May 30, 2019. While the EAC now has a Customs Union and Common Market, the slow pace of regulatory reform, lack of harmonization, non-tariff barriers, and bureaucratic inefficiencies still hamper the free movement of goods, capital, and people. Except for apparel products, Rwanda is eligible for trade preferences under the AGOA (<http://trade.gov/agoa/>), which the United States enacted to extend duty-free and quota-free access to the U.S. market for many goods produced in eligible beneficiary countries. Rwanda qualifies for special tariff treatment under the Generalized System of Tariffs.

The United States and Rwanda signed a [Trade and Investment Framework Agreement](#) (TIFA in 2006 and a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT <https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/bilateral-investment-treaties/bit-documents>) in 2008. The most recent TIFA meeting was held on October 28-30, 2019.

Rwanda has active bilateral investment treaties with Germany (1969), Belgium-Luxemburg Economic Union (1985), and the Republic of Korea (2013). Rwanda signed bilateral investment treaties with Mauritius (2001), South Africa (2000), Turkey (2016), Morocco (2016), the United Arab Emirates (2016), and Qatar (2018), but these treaties have yet to enter into force (see <https://investmentpolicy.unctad.org/international-investment->

agreements/countries/176/rwanda). Rwanda signed the Economic Partnership Agreement between the EAC and the European Union; this agreement has not yet entered into force.

Licensing Requirements for Professional Services

Rwanda has numerous licensing requirements for carrying out insurance and other professional services, including:

- Licensing Requirements for banks: <https://www.bnr.rw/financial-stability/payment-system/licensing-and-accreditation-requirements/>
- Licensing Requirements for Mining exploration and exploitation: <https://www.rmb.gov.rw/index.php?id=188>
- Licensing Requirements of Customs Clearing Agencies: <http://www.rra.gov.rw/index.php?id=57&L=0>
- Licensing Requirements to operate a Bonded Warehouse: <http://www.rra.gov.rw/index.php?id=254&L=0>

License requirements for national TV stations/radio stations:

http://www.rura.rw/fileadmin/licenses/requirements/Broadcasting_requirements.pdf

Selling U.S. Products and Services

Distribution & Sales Channels

Overview Few non-agricultural products are produced in Rwanda, which leaves most distribution and sales channels reliant on import-export partners. No single company dominates the import-export business. Instead, numerous trading companies import goods, mostly from the region, as well as from Europe, China, India, and the United Arab Emirates. Construction of the Kigali Free Trade Zone (KFTZ) was completed in 2012. The KFTZ is designed to serve as a distribution platform to the entire Great Lakes region. The KFTZ's location allows for easy access to the main road corridors to Uganda (en route to Kenya's port of Mombasa) and Tanzania (en route to the port of Dar es Salaam), as well as to Kigali International Airport. It was also designed for easy access to the planned new international airport in Bugesera and future potential rail links. Currently, the nearest railway terminal is a dry port located in Isaka, Tanzania, almost 500 miles from Kigali.

Transport remains one of the biggest economic challenges in Rwanda. Transportation expenses in Rwanda are nearly twice as high as in most of its EAC neighbor countries, though they are lower than transportation expenses in Burundi and eastern DRC). Delays in delivery of imports and exports are common and manufacturers in Rwanda in time-sensitive industries often rely on expensive air transport to ensure timely receipt of inputs and timely export of finished goods. Government-owned airline RwandAir currently subsidizes cargo export rates in an effort to support the growth of export industries. On October 21, 2019, Dubai Port World and the Government of Rwanda inaugurated East Africa's first inland dry port. Transport cost and timing is expected to be reduced as a result of this new "port."

Using an Agent to Sell U.S. Products and Services

Using a local agent who speaks the national languages (Kinyarwanda, English, French, and Swahili) can help with licensing, locating warehouse space, hiring staff, and other administrative start-up tasks. Using an agent or distributor is not legally required in Rwanda.

In general, finding a reliable agent or distributor requires a visit to meet with local businesspeople. Through a contact list, Gold Key Service (GKS), or International Partner Search (IPS), the U.S. Embassy's Economic and Commercial Section can assist U.S. firms interested in a relationship with local partners. For more information on these services, please visit: http://www.export.gov/salesandmarketing/eg_main_018205.asp or contact the U.S. Embassy Economic and Commercial Section at (250) 252-596-400 or KigaliEcon@state.gov.

When interviewing potential agents, key criteria include contacts with the appropriate labor market, ability to secure warehouse space, knowledge of local competition, previous work experience, and proven ability to work with government officials and U.S. businesses.

When interviewing distributors, key considerations include the distributor's sales records, sales territory, sales force, product mix, facilities, marketing policies, and customer profile.

Establishing an Office

The RDB provides an efficient business registration service and potential tax incentives to investors in the energy, ICT, logistics, manufacturing, tourism, education, health, agro-processing, and export sectors. The RDB offers one of the fastest business registration processes in Africa. New investors can register online at the RDB's website and receive a registration certificate in person in as little as six hours at RDB's Office of the Registrar General. RDB's "one-stop shop" helps foreign investors secure required approvals, certificates, and work permits to start their businesses. Investors should be aware that RDB often is unable to enforce tax incentives it has offered – even those in contracts and formal legal agreements – and all such incentives should be reviewed and approved separately by the Rwandan Revenue Authority (RRA) in writing to improve enforceability. RDB is often unable to assist with long-term work and residence permits for expatriate and third country staff after the initial start-up phase of a business as well. For current regulations and/or assistance, contact the Rwanda Development Board at www.rdb.rw.

Franchising

Franchising is still uncommon in Rwanda, although Kentucky Fried Chicken, FedEx, MoneyGram, DHL, Western Union, and Jibu Water have established franchise operations here. Regulations in this sector are not yet well established.

Direct Marketing

Marketing is conducted primarily through word-of-mouth, radio, mobile phone ads, printed journals, and outdoor campaigns. The internet, social media, and mobile phones are emerging as important marketing media. The Rwandan postal system is insufficiently developed to support large-scale direct marketing.

Joint Ventures/Licensing

The government encourages joint ventures with foreign firms, particularly in sectors requiring expertise not available in Rwanda. Rwandan businesses seeking partners frequently attend investment conferences and carry out trade missions to Asia, the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. Over the past three years, the Rwandan government has exhibited strong interest in establishing public private partnerships (PPP), particularly in the energy and infrastructure sectors. The government has created a number of special purpose vehicles (SPVs) to facilitate PPPs and joint ventures with foreign investors.

Express Delivery

Rwanda's express delivery industry is a nascent and growing sector. E-commerce and online marketplaces continue to grow in importance and the number of Rwandans with internet access is increasing. FedEx, DHL, and UPS operate in the country through franchisees. High express shipment charges have made it very expensive to ship to Rwanda. Rates range from \$50 to \$112 per kilogram to ship products from the United States to Rwanda within 6-10 business days. To get an online quote for FedEx, DHL, and UPS, visit: <https://www.ipparcel.com/international-shipping.cfm/country/Rwanda.html>. The national postal service is interested in becoming the provider of the last mile for delivery services, similar to the U.S. Postal Service.

Customs barriers are particularly important to express delivery providers who offer guaranteed delivery times. Delays at customs reduce delivery speeds, potentially increasing costs for consumers who provide fast, on-demand, integrated, tracked, and door-to-door movement of shipments.

Due Diligence

U.S. companies should perform due diligence on potential local partners, distributors, or agents prior to any proposed business deals. The U.S. Commercial Service can provide valuable background information on Rwandan firms through its International Company Profile (ICP) service. Further information can be obtained by visiting http://www.export.gov/salesandmarketing/eg_main_018205.asp or by contacting your local U.S. Export Assistance Center (see contact numbers at the end of this guide). A list of local attorneys and consultancy firms can be found at the U.S Embassy's website at <https://rw.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/147/2018-List-of-Attorneys-1.pdf>. *Disclaimer: This list is not comprehensive, and inclusion does not constitute an endorsement or recommendation by the U.S. Government.*

eCommerce

Of Rwanda's 12.3 million estimated population, approximately 3.8 million have access to the internet, most commonly via mobile phone. Internet access and speed are improving, driven by the rollout of a national 4G LTE network and fiber optic lines. Korea Telecom has signed a 35 year agreement to manage the national network. Cell and internet providers such as MTN, Airtel, and Liquid must buy access from Korea Telecom. The most current plans involve 4G enhancements. There are no plans for launching 5G in Rwanda at the present time. The government is committed to developing eCommerce and has put in place measures to protect users of online services by adopting global standards like the proprietary information security standard, which is the payment card industry data security standard.

The Government of Rwanda provides services to both citizens and businesses through e-government portals like Irembo, which is the preferred method for paying taxes and fees. Many citizens and businesses still rely on traditional physical interactions, and many transactions are in cash. The government has heavily promoted the use of mobile money and internet banking to help contain the spread of COVID-19.

At present, the use of eCommerce for "Business to Client" remains limited to the airline, hospitality, banking, food delivery, and courier services sectors for the most part. eCommerce is relatively new in Rwanda, but the sector is growing quickly as local tech start-ups and international payers have entered Rwanda's market in the past few years.

China and the United Arab Emirates are the main eCommerce commercial partners and online ordering typically goes through Alibaba and Ali Express. Most Rwandan importers use these two long-term suppliers and orders are transmitted by email and phone. Payments are transmitted through Western Union, MoneyGram, and HubShil.

"Business to Business" eCommerce is limited in the goods market but more advanced in services, particularly financial services like the interbank market. Despite limited skilled labor in general, services in software engineering and web-designing are widely available. Carnegie Mellon University opened a campus in Kigali in 2012, its first in sub-Saharan Africa, and currently offers masters-level courses in information and communication technologies. Detailed information on intellectual property in Rwanda can be accessed here: <http://businessprocedures.rdb.rw/menu/30?!=en>

Popular eCommerce sites include:

<http://www.gurisha.com/> <http://vubavuba.rw> (grocery, food, travel, real estate and miscellaneous)

<http://www.gurisha.com/> (classifieds)

<http://grocewheels.com/> (Grocery)

<http://www.carisoko.com/> (vehicles)

Selling Factors & Techniques

Overview

Introducing new products to the Rwandan market requires extensive market research to identify potential customers' buying patterns and preferences. This applies particularly to unknown brand names. One way of launching a new product in Rwanda is by exhibiting at a trade show. Promotional "give-aways" are also popular. An editorial and/or advertisement in local newspapers, in specialized trade publications, or on the radio will also enhance awareness of the product. Although Rwanda has four official languages, promotional material is typically printed in English.

Members of the Rwandan business community typically speak English and/or French as second and third languages, though many Rwandan customers speak only Kinyarwanda, occasionally with some knowledge of Swahili. Experienced businesspersons recommend providing promotional materials in Kinyarwanda when marketing consumer goods, especially with new or unfamiliar products. The limited purchasing power of the majority of the population may require businesses to adjust their products, packaging sizes, and pricing

structure to fit local tastes and levels of disposable income. Rwanda has a small but growing number of consumers who can afford premium products, particularly high-end vehicles and consumer electronics.

Trade Promotion & Advertising

Government-owned mass media outlets (radio, television, and newspapers) and privately-owned magazines, newspapers, and radio stations are the major means of advertising. Radio advertising and outdoor campaigns are likely to reach a wider audience than television, as televisions remain rare in households outside of major towns. Local and regional newspapers in Kinyarwanda, English, and French enjoy relative wide circulation and sell advertising space. Advertising by e-mail, telephone, and text message has become popular.

The Rwanda Private Sector Association (PSF) organizes several international trade fairs in Rwanda each year. These events attract many foreign and local exhibitors. For more information, contact PSF at <http://www.psf.org.rw/>.

U.S. companies can also contact the U.S. Embassy Kigali's Economic and Commercial Office for a single company promotion service.

Please refer to the following list for more information. Disclaimer: This list is not comprehensive, and inclusion does not constitute an endorsement or recommendation by the U.S. Government.

The Private Sector Federation Rwanda

Address: Gikondo MAGERWA

Kigali- Rwanda PO Box 319

E-mail: info@psf.org.rw

Telephone: +(250)-252-570650 Fax: +(250)-252-570650

Website: <http://www.psf.org.rw>

Advertising agencies

- Alliance Media <http://www.alliancemediacom.com/>
- Creative Communications <http://www.cc-creativecomms.com/>
- Cube <http://www.cube.rw/>
- Colours Ltd <http://www.colours-printing.com/>
- Digital Creation <http://www.dcs.rw/>
- llume creative studio www.illumecreativestudio.com
- Irony Media & Communications
- Nomad <http://www.thenomad.agency/>
- Rwandan Broadcasting Agency <http://www.rba.co.rw/>

Newspapers/Online News

- The New Times Publications <http://www.newtimes.co.rw/>
- [The East African-Rwanda Today](#)
- IGIHE Ltd <http://www.igihe.com/>
- The Kigali Today Group <https://ktpress.rw/>
- News of Rwanda <http://www.newsofrwanda.com/>
- Taarifa <https://taarifa.rw/>
- The Chronicles <https://www.chronicles.rw>

Radio stations/ TV stations

- **Radio stations:** City Radio, Contact FM, Flash FM, Isango Star, Radio Izuba, Radio Maria, Radio 10, Radio Communautaire (RC) Huye, RC Nyagatare, RC Rubavu, RC Musanze, RC Rusizi, Radio Maria, Radio Salus, Sana Radio, Umucyo Radio, Voice of Hope, Voice of America, Radio Huguka, Radio Isangano , Royal Radio, Life Radio

- **TV stations:** Rwanda Television, Contact TV, Flash TV, TV 10, TV 1, Family TV

Pricing

Pricing formulas will vary from one product to another based on supply, demand, landed cost, margin expectations, and competitive alternatives. Prices in Rwanda are liberalized, aside from prices for petroleum products and certain commodities, which the government sets after limited consultation with industry stakeholders. The standard-rate value added tax (VAT) is 18 percent; however, there are some services and goods which are either zero-rated or exempt. The penalty for missing or late payment of VAT is 10 percent per month. The Rwanda Revenue Authority administers VAT: <http://www.rra.gov.rw>. The RRA Tax Handbook covers detailed steps to register, declare and pay taxes. The latest version can be found here: <https://tax-handbook.rra.gov.rw>. Prices of imported goods are high due to customs duties, transportation costs, and depreciation of the local currency (Rwandan francs) against the U.S. dollar.

Sales Service/Customer Support

Sales service is available for most products in Rwanda, but customer service levels are poor in comparison to international standards. Many firms in Rwanda do not give high priority to customer support and suffer from a lack of customer loyalty. The government and importers of sophisticated industrial equipment generally ask for after-sale service agreements. There are a growing number of small computer and electronics companies specializing in after-sales support, but most multinational companies in Rwanda service local clients via their offices in Nairobi or Johannesburg.

Foreign firms may increase market share by providing higher levels of service, including by offering professional repairs and maintaining a well-trained staff of service technicians capable of advising customers as well as repairing their equipment. It is helpful for companies to prepare their sales materials both in English and in the local language, Kinyarwanda.

Local Professional Services

Firms should retain a local attorney when doing business in Rwanda, particularly as Rwandan employment law can prove difficult for American firms to uphold correctly. Attorney lists are available from the U.S. Embassy in Kigali at <https://rw.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/147/2018-List-of-Attorneys-1.pdf>. Some large accounting and professional service firms including Deloitte and Touche, Ernst and Young, Price Waterhouse Coopers, KPMG, and Boston Consulting Group have a physical presence in Rwanda.

Principal Business Associations

The Private Sector Federation (PSF) – Rwanda is a professional organization dedicated to promoting and representing the interests of the private sector in Rwanda, but its chair is selected and appointed by the government and the organization receives funding from some government agencies. It is an umbrella organization that groups ten professional chambers. The PSF was established in December 1999, replacing the former Rwanda Chamber of Commerce and Industry. PSF's primary roles are to represent and serve the interests of the entire private sector through lobbying and advocacy, while at the same time providing timely and relevant business development services that lead to sustainable private sector-led economic growth and development. U.S. companies are welcome to join the PSF. See www.psf.org.rw for more information.

The East African Business Council (EABC) is the umbrella organization of the private sector in East Africa and is headquartered in Arusha, Tanzania. Established in 1997, EABC facilitates private sector participation in the integration process of the EAC to improve the region's trade and investment climate. See <http://www.eabc.info> for more information.

The Rwanda Bankers' Association (RBA): Any licensed banks in Rwanda are eligible for membership in the RBA. See www.rba.rw for more information.

The Rwanda Tours & Travel Association (RTTA) represents a wide spectrum of travel and vacation operators active in Rwanda. See <http://www.rtta.rw/> for more information.

The American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) was legally recognized by the Government of Rwanda in November 2019 and comprises over 50 members who are U.S. companies or associated with U.S. companies. See <http://amchamrwanda.com> for more information.

The European Business Chamber Rwanda (EBAR) serves to promote European business ties between Rwanda and the EU. See <https://www.facebook.com/eocrwanda.org/?fref=tag>

Limitations on Selling U.S. Products and Services

Rwanda has neither statutory limits on foreign ownership or control nor any official economic or industrial strategy that discriminates against foreign investors in selling products and services. Local and foreign investors have the right to own and establish business enterprises in all forms of remunerative activity. The Rwandan constitution stipulates that every person has the right to private property, whether personally or in association with others. The government cannot violate the right to private ownership except in the public interest and only then after following procedures that are determined by law and subject to fair compensation. In 2015 Rwanda's expropriation law was ostensibly amended to make it more protective of the rights of property owners in case of expropriation in public interest, but a number of property owners continue to claim that their property was expropriated in a manner that was not in accordance with the expropriation law, and that the compensation offered was below market value.

[The 2009 Company Act](#) establishes licensing regulations for business operations.

Trade Financing

In February 2020, Standard and Poor maintained Rwanda's rating at B+ (having awarded an upgrade from B in August 2019), citing strong and continued growth prospects. Fitch's credit rating for Rwanda was last reported at B+ with a stable outlook. In general, a credit rating is used by potential creditors and investors to gauge the credit worthiness of Rwanda or any country, thus potentially having an impact on the country's borrowing costs. The Government of Rwanda has increased its foreign debt level as it responds to the economic challenges of COVID-19. Previously, foreign debt amounted to 41 percent of GDP, but it is expected to increase to over 75 percent in the second half of 2020. Despite this marked increase, both the International Monetary Fund and Fitch rate Rwanda's outlook as stable.

Methods of Payment

Importers and exporters can comfortably choose from a wide range of payment methods. Below are some of the most common payment methods:

- **Letters of Credit (LCs)**, also known as Commercial or Documentary Credits: The letter of credit allows the buyer and seller to contract a trusted intermediary, in this case a bank, that will guarantee full payment to the seller provided the seller has shipped the goods and complied with the terms of the agreed-upon letter. The LC serves to distribute risk evenly between buyer and seller since the seller is assured of payment when the conditions of the LC are met and the buyer is reasonably assured of receiving the goods ordered. This is a common form of payment, especially when the contracting parties are unfamiliar with each other. LCs are irrevocable, which means that once the LC is established it cannot be changed without the consent of both parties. At least four parties are involved in any transaction using an LC: the buyer or applicant, the issuing bank or applicant's bank, the beneficiary's bank or receiving bank, and the seller or beneficiary.
- **Money transfer agents:** Exporters and their clients can send money internationally, process money orders, bill payments, and prepaid services through international money agents. Agents such as Western Union and MoneyGram offer these services in Rwanda and partner with several banks including Bank of Kigali, Banque Populaire du Rwanda (BPR)/Atlas Mara, Kenya Commercial Bank, I&M, and Ecobank.
- **Documentary Collection:** To collect payment from a foreign buyer using documentary collection, the seller sends a draft or other demand for payment with the related shipping documents through bank channels to the buyer's bank. The bank releases the documents to the buyer upon receipt of payment or promise of payment. It is generally safer for exporters to require that bills of lading be "made out to shipper's order and endorsed in blank" to allow them and the banks more flexible control of the merchandise. Documentary collections are only viable for ocean shipments.
- **Drafts (bills of exchange):** A draft (sometimes called a bill of exchange) is a written order by one party directing a second party to pay a third party. Drafts are negotiable instruments that facilitate international payments through respected intermediaries such as banks but do not involve the intermediaries in guaranteeing performance. Such drafts offer more flexibility than LCs and are transferable from one party to another. There are two basic types of drafts: sight drafts and time drafts.
- **Open Account:** Open account means that payment is left open until an agreed-upon future date. It is one of the most common methods of payment in international trade. Payment is usually made by wire transfer or check.
- **Credit Card:** Some banks now offer buyers special lines of credit that are accessible via credit card to facilitate purchases, including substantial ones.
- **Cash in Advance:** Cash in advance is risk-free except for consequences associated with the potential non-delivery of the goods by the seller. Cash in advance is usually a wire transfer or a check. Although an international wire transfer is more costly, it is often preferred because it is speedy and does not

bear the danger of the check not being honored. For wire transfers the seller must provide clear routing instructions in writing to the buyer or the buyer's agent. These include the full name, address, telephone, and telex of the seller's bank; the seller's full name, address, and telephone; the type of bank account; and the account number.

For more information about the methods of payment or other trade finance options, please read the Trade Finance Guide available at <https://www.trade.gov/trade-finance-guide-quick-reference-us-exporters>.

Banking Systems

Rwanda's banking system is highly concentrated but increasingly competitive as foreign banks look to enter the country. Around 76 percent of all bank assets are held by five of the largest commercial banks (Bank of Kigali, BPR Atlas Mara, I&M Bank, COGEBANQUE, and Equity Bank). The largest, Bank of Kigali (BoK, which is partially state-owned), holds more than 30 percent of all assets. Despite the COVID-19 crisis, the banking sector is currently stable and well capitalized, with an industry total capital adequacy ratio (total qualifying capital of banks to their risk weighted assets) of 24.1 percent, which is above the 15 percent central bank regulatory requirement. Rwanda's banking industry is composed of commercial banks, development banks, cooperative banks, and microfinance banks. As of February 2020, 16 banks were registered with the Rwandan National Bank (BNR): 11 commercial banks, three microfinance banks, one development bank, and one cooperative bank. There are 438 Savings Credit and Co-operatives (SACCOs) and 19 limited liability microfinance institutions. A list of licensed banks can be found at: <https://www.bnr.rw/financial-stability/bank-supervision/licensed-banks/>. Licensing Requirements for banks can be found at: <https://www.bnr.rw/financial-stability/payment-system/licensing-and-accreditation-requirements/>

Local banks operate in both local currency and dollar-based accounts. While most suppliers are paid through wire transfers to their domicile bank accounts, many investors eventually open a local account at one of the main local commercial banks.

Starting in 2018, the Rwandan Central Bank fixed a capital requirement of twenty billion Rwanda Francs (\$5.8 million) for commercial banks. In response to COVID-19, capital reserve requirements have been lowered from 5 percent to 4 percent and the Central Bank loan rate has been lowered from 5 percent to 4.5 percent. All commercial banks have international correspondent banks operating in major cities of the world. Availability of ATMs is limited as there are only 383 in all of Rwanda. Commercial banks are authorized to provide loans in foreign currency. The government has implemented a financial sector development plan that improves access to financial services and competition in the banking sector and in micro-finance. The IMF gives BNR, Rwanda's central bank, high marks for its effective monetary policy.

The private sector has limited access to credit instruments. Most Rwandan banks are conservative, risk-averse, and trade in a limited range of commercial products, though additional products are becoming available as the industry matures and competition increases. Credit cards are not used extensively, except in major hotels, grocery stores, and larger restaurants that cater to tourists. The number of domestically-issued credit cards in the country increased from 516 in 2011 to 3,687 in 2019. The number of debit cards issued in the country has grown since 2011, but it remains relatively low at 555,243. In December 2011, Visa International opened an office in Rwanda and announced a partnership with the central bank through which the company is working to expand electronic payment services throughout Rwanda. While the use of credit cards is becoming more popular, Rwanda, especially outside of Kigali, remains primarily a cash-based or mobile money-based economy. In 2015, 49 percent of ATMs and 86 percent of point of sale machines were located in Kigali. With COVID-19's contactless payment requirements, credit card usage is increasing in Rwanda, as is the use of mobile money and debit cards.

Foreign Exchange Controls

Foreign exchange is liberalized, and commercial banks are allowed to buy foreign currency following an administered floating exchange rate. Controls are limited to cash withdrawals for travelers. Exporters are required to repatriate all export earnings within three months of their export. Repatriated foreign exchange should match the value stated in the export declaration. The central bank aspires to maintain foreign currency reserves equivalent to a regionally agreed-upon level equivalent to 4.2 months of imports, but it has fallen short of this target in recent years.

There are no legal restrictions on capital transfers in and out of Rwanda. Investors can obtain foreign exchange and make transfers at any authorized bank in order to repatriate profits and dividends, and make payments for imports and services. However, some investors have reported problems with their ability to perform currency transactions. The National Bank of Rwanda holds daily foreign exchange sales that are freely accessible by commercial banks. Bureaucratic hurdles continue to cause delays in processing and effecting transfers. Although there is generally no difficulty obtaining foreign exchange in Rwanda, some investors have reported temporary but severe foreign exchange shortages and months-long delays in hard currency payments by the government for goods and services. Foreign exchange shortages are partly driven by the country's trade deficit, which has created instability in the domestic currency market.

U.S. Banks & Local Correspondent Banks

Most of the larger commercial banks in Kigali maintain correspondent relations with reputable U.S. banks.

Protecting Intellectual Property

In any foreign market companies should consider several general principles for effective management of their intellectual property. For background on these principles please link to the following article on [Protecting Intellectual Property](#) and [Stopfakes.gov](#), or contact ITA's Office of Intellectual Property Rights Director, Stevan Mitchell at Stevan.Mitchell@trade.gov.

Rwanda is not on the USTR's annual Special 301 Report.

Selling to the Public Sector

Selling to the Government

Government contracting and purchasing is a significant factor in the Rwandan economy as it addresses infrastructure deficits that include energy, transportation, communications, health, and education. Government spending accounted for 16.2 percent of Rwanda's economic activity in 2019, according to the National Institute of Statistics for Rwanda (NISR).

In 1997, the government established the National Tender Board, which issues and manages procurement rules, regulations, guidelines, and policies. In 2008, the National Tender Board was replaced by the Rwanda Public Procurement Authority (RPPA), which serves as the government's procurement agency and is mandated to ensure transparency in government tenders. On occasion, government entities bypass the RPPA and issue tenders directly. Oversight of government finances is carried out by the Auditor General's Office, which was established in 1999 to carry out continuous government audits. Annual audits are available on line at: <https://www.oag.gov.rw/index.php?id=2>. For more information, visit the RPPA's website at www.rppa.gov.rw. Government entities keep annual procurement plans and bidding information on their respective websites.

Rwanda is not a party or an observer to the WTO's multilateral Agreement on Government Procurement. The United States and Rwanda have a bilateral investment treaty, but Rwanda is not a party to a free trade agreement with the United States that contains commitments on government procurement. Many governments finance public works projects through borrowing from multilateral development banks. Please refer to the "Project Financing" section in the "Trade and Project Financing" chapter for more information.

U.S. companies bidding on Government tenders may also qualify for U.S. Government advocacy. A unit of the U.S. Commerce Department's International Trade Administration, the Advocacy Center, coordinates U.S. Government interagency advocacy efforts on behalf of U.S. exporters bidding on public sector contracts with international governments and government agencies. The Advocacy Center works closely with our network of U.S. Commercial Service posts worldwide and inter-agency partners to ensure that exporters of U.S. products and services have the best possible chance of winning government contracts. Advocacy assistance can take many forms, but it often involves the U.S. Embassy or other U.S. Government agencies expressing support for the U.S. bidders directly to the foreign government. Consult [Advocacy for Foreign Government Contracts](#) for additional information. Please contact the Embassy's Economic section for more information on how to access the Advocacy Center's services.

Financing projects

Most of major public infrastructure projects are financed by concessional loans and grants from traditional lenders such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank. Chinese and Indian Export-Import banks financed projects in the past. Rwanda has also benefited from European Union infrastructure funding from time to time. Local private projects are financed by local commercial banks and the Rwanda Development Bank.

Multilateral Development Banks and Financing Government Sales

The U.S. Commercial Service maintains Commercial Liaison Offices in each of the main multilateral development banks, including the World Bank and African Development Bank. These institutions lend billions of dollars in developing countries on projects aimed at accelerating economic growth and social development by reducing poverty and inequality, improving health and education, and advancing infrastructure development. The Commercial Liaison Offices help American businesses learn how to get involved in bank-funded projects, and advocate on behalf of American bidders. Learn more by contacting;

- [Advocacy Liaison Website for World Bank](#) and

- [Advocacy Liaison Website African Development Bank](#)

For more information on financing, please find more resources at:

- African Development Bank Group: [African Development Bank](#)
- Export-Import Bank of the United States: <http://www.exim.gov>
- Country Limitation Schedule: <https://www.exim.gov/tools-for-exporters/country-limitation-schedule>
- DFC: <https://www.dfc.gov>
- The World Bank: [World Bank](#)
- Trade and Development Agency: <http://www.ustda.gov>
- SBA's Office of International Trade: <http://www.sba.gov/oit/>
- USDA Commodity Credit Corporation: <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/about-fsa/structure-and-organization/commodity-credit-corporation/index>
- U.S. Agency for International Development: <http://www.usaid.gov>
- Development Bank of Rwanda (BRD): <https://www.brd.rw>

A list of licensed Banks in Rwanda can be obtained here: <https://www.bnr.rw/financial-stability/bank-supervision/licensed-banks/>

Business Travel

Business Customs

Rwandan business customs are mostly similar to those in the United States. It is common for people to wear business suits and to exchange business cards during meetings. Culturally, however, a direct “no” to a proposal is rare. Rwandan businesspeople may acknowledge the merits of a proposal when in fact their actual interest is limited. Oral commitments should not be considered contractually binding, including statements from government officials. Negotiations are often lengthy and contracts have been arbitrarily reopened after signature, especially those containing tax incentives and provisions. International arbitration and mediation clauses in original contracts have helped protect some U.S. investors from payment and contractual disputes. Retention of local legal advice is advised for those considering doing business in Rwanda.

Travel Advisory

The latest travel advisory information can be found at:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Rwanda.html>

Visa Requirements

General travel information to Rwanda, including visa requirements, can be found at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Rwanda.html>.

Rwanda requires that all U.S. citizens possess a visa to enter Rwanda. A visa valid for 30 days for the purpose of tourism can be purchased for \$30 upon arrival at Kigali International Airport or at Rwanda’s land borders. Accepted forms of payment include U.S. dollars printed after 2006 and Visa or Mastercard. For visa information, visit the Rwandan Directorate General of Immigration and Emigration at <http://www.migration.gov.rw>. As of August 26, 2020, all travelers arriving in Rwanda must have a negative COVID-19 certificate. The only accepted test is a SARS-CoV 2 Real Time Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) performed within 120 hours of departure (meaning travelers must be tested and get results within 5 days of their first flight). Other tests, such as Rapid Diagnostics Test (RDTs), are not accepted. A second PCR test will be conducted upon arrival, with results delivered after 24 hours. Travelers will remain in designated hotels at their own cost while awaiting test results. For more information see <https://www.visitrwanda.com/>

U.S. companies that require travel of foreign personnel to the United States should be advised that security evaluations are handled through an interagency process.

Visa applicants should go to the following links.

State Department Visa Website: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Rwanda.html>

U.S. Embassy, Kigali: <http://rw.usembassy.gov>

Currency

The Rwandan franc (RWF) is convertible for essentially all business transactions. U.S. dollars and Euros are accepted for international transactions. Credit cards are not used extensively, except in major hotels, grocery stores, and larger restaurants that cater to tourists. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Rwanda has promoted the use of mobile money. Debit cards are accepted in high end hotels and restaurants. The number of domestically-issued credit cards in the country increased from 516 in 2011 to 3,638 in 2018. The number of debit cards issued in the country has grown since 2011, but remains relatively low at 555,243. In 2015, 49 percent of ATMs and 86 percent of point of sale machines were located in Kigali.

ATM and point of sale machines are generally available in secondary cities in Rwanda. Many ATMs and point of sales in Rwanda are compatible with Visa and MasterCard debit cards.

Telecommunications/Electronics

Internet access is available throughout Rwanda, though poor connections outside of major cities and electricity outages may affect access. Rwanda is also one of the few countries in Africa to have launched a national high-speed 4G LTE wireless broadband network. There are few internet cafés outside of the major cities. Mobile phones are increasingly used and are the preferred medium of business communication. Many hotels and some government-owned facilities have introduced Wi-fi. Rwandan electricity is 220 volts. Plugs are type C/E/F (similar to most of Europe).

Transportation

Rwanda does not have railway transport, but the governments of Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda are discussing the potential extension of railways from Tanzania to Kigali and from Kenya to Kigali. Air transport options are growing rapidly, led by government-owned airline RwandAir.

Airline	Destination
Brussels Airlines	Brussels
Ethiopian Airlines	Addis Ababa, Bujumbura
Kenya Airlines	Bujumbura, Nairobi
KLM	Amsterdam
Qatar Airways	Doha
RwandAir	Abuja, Abidjan, Accra, Bamako, Bujumbura, Brazzaville, Brussels, Cape Town, Cotonou, Dar Es Salaam, Dakar, Douala, Dubai, Entebbe, Guangzhou, Harare, Johannesburg, Juba, Kamembe, Kinshasa, Kilimanjaro, Kinshasa, Lagos, Libreville, London (Gatwick), Lusaka, Mombassa, Mumbai, Mwanza, Nairobi, Tel Aviv, Zanzibar
Turkish Airways	Istanbul
EgyptAir	Cairo

Language

English and French are the accepted business languages in Rwanda, although many Rwandans may find English communication difficult. Interpreters are generally not required for business meetings. All Rwandans speak Kinyarwanda, and some speak Kiswahili to some degree.

Health

Medical and dental facilities are limited, and some medicines are in short supply or unavailable; you should carry your own supply of properly labeled medications to cover your entire stay. In Kigali, King Faisal Hospital (<http://kfh.rw/>) is a private facility that offers 24-hour assistance with physicians and nurses on duty in the emergency room. Ambulances are available in Kigali through the Service d'Aide Médicale d'Urgence (Emergency Medical Service, SAMU) by calling 912 from any mobile phone, or through King Faisal Hospital at (+250) 078 830 9003. Proof of yellow fever vaccine may be requested for all travelers over 9 months of age, especially those who have visited countries where yellow fever is endemic or has had a recent outbreak; travelers who cannot show proof of vaccination may not be permitted to enter Rwanda.

Malaria is endemic to Rwanda. You are strongly encouraged to take prophylactic medications to prevent malaria. For more information see <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/malaria/index.html>. Prophylactic medications should be initiated prior to entry into the endemic area. Some malaria prophylaxis medicines are not available in Rwanda and, because of possible counterfeiting of antimalarial medications, should be obtained from a reliable pharmaceutical source before arrival.

Regular U.S. health insurance may not cover doctors' and hospital visits in other countries. Medicare does not pay for any medical care received outside of the United States or its territories. Having coverage is important, as medical evacuation from Rwanda may cost more than \$80,000. For more information on international medical insurance, please visit: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Rwanda.html>

The U.S. Embassy maintains a [current list of physicians](#). For more information, visit <https://rw.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/doctors/>

Local Time, Business Hours and Holidays

Local Time: GMT + 2

Business Hours: 8am – 6pm Monday – Thursday; Friday 8am – 1pm

Rwanda observes a number of public holidays throughout the year. The week following Genocide Memorial Day on April 7 is designated as an official week of mourning. In addition, the last Saturday of every month is designated as the national day of community service, *umuganda*. Most businesses close down, and road traffic is prohibited until approximately midday.

The Government of Rwanda maintains an updated list of holidays here: <https://www.gov.rw/holidays>

Temporary Entry of Materials or Personal Belongings

Items contained in the personal luggage of travelers are exempt from custom duties when items are not for commercial purposes. Commercial samples are exempt from custom duties when their combined value does not exceed 100,000 Rwandan francs (approximately \$106), but they should be declared.

For a complete list of the items that are exempt from custom duties under Rwandan law and for a comprehensive list of the required accompanying documentation, please contact the Rwanda Revenue Authority.

Non-biodegradable single-use plastic bags are banned in Rwanda. Travelers carrying them upon arrival at the Kigali International Airport may have them confiscated. Passengers with luggage wrapped in plastic sheeting may be required to remove the plastic before they are allowed to depart the airport.

Useful resources for travelers:

[Personal effects and passengers' baggage](#)

[A list of prohibited and restricted goods](#)

[Information about merchandise in baggage](#)

[Exempted goods for travelers](#)

Investment Climate Statement (ICS)

The U.S. Department of State's Investment Climate Statements provide information on the business climates of more than 170 economies and are prepared by economic officers stationed in embassies and posts around the world. They analyze a variety of economies that are or could be markets for U.S. businesses.

Topics include Openness to Investment, Legal and Regulatory systems, Dispute Resolution, Intellectual Property Rights, Transparency, Performance Requirements, State-Owned Enterprises, Responsible Business Conduct, and Corruption.

These statements highlight persistent barriers to further U.S. investment. Addressing these barriers would expand high-quality, private sector-led investment in infrastructure, further women's economic empowerment, and facilitate a healthy business environment for the digital economy. To access the ICS, visit the U.S. Department of State's [Investment Climate Statement](#) website.

Political Environment

For background information on the political and economic environment of the country, please click on the link to the U.S. Department of State [Countries & Areas](#) website.