



SPOTLIGHT

January and February 2026



Working together for equitable access to
justice for all

Community Legal Empowerment

Our Reach (January – February 2026)

Call Center

Via our Free Legal Aid Helpline, we handled **88** cases, including **49** male beneficiaries and **39** female beneficiaries.

Legal Representation

We provided legal assistance to **135** people **3** women and **132** men by assigning lawyers to represent them in court.

Walk-ins

We provided legal assistance to **18** individuals who came to our offices seeking support, including **9** women and **9** men.

Community-Based Paralegals

Our Community-based paralegals handled **1502** cases, including **927** for women and **575** for men, some were referred to local authorities, others were resolved through mediation, and the rest received legal advice

ADR Center

We handled **119** cases at the ADR Center, including **18** for women and **101** for men, providing alternative dispute resolution services to the community. Among these cases, some were resolved through mediation and plea bargaining.

Interactive Voice Response

interactive Voice Response (IVR) recorded **160** individuals through legal awareness messages, including **63** women, **90** men,

Legal awareness

Paralegals played a critical role in raising legal awareness within communities. Through sensitization sessions, they reached **13,240** people, including **7,496** women and **5,744** men, educating them on different topics such as family law, land law, and gender-based violence.

Plea- bargaining

we handled over 166 cases through plea bargaining.

Advancing Access to Justice for detainees through Plea Bargaining in Correctional Facilities



On 26–27 January 2026, in partnership with the judiciary of Rwanda, we conducted mobile legal aid clinics in Muhanga and Musanze correctional facilities to facilitate plea bargaining sessions for detainees. The initiative aimed to promote access to justice, reduce prison overcrowding, and case backlogs by allowing eligible detainees to admit guilt in exchange for reduced charges or sentences. Our lawyers provided legal consultations, sensitized inmates on their rights, and supported court endorsement of plea agreements. 133 detainees received legal support free of charge, with majority of sentences partially suspended, fines reduced, and some inmates released after completing their terms. The sessions highlighted persistent challenges, including limited awareness of plea bargaining among inmates, prolonged pre-trial detention, and unequal access to legal aid for women. LAF recommends regular prison visits, legal aid desks within prisons, and legal education sessions to strengthen detainee rights and ensure fair outcomes.

Anti-Corruption Week to Strengthen Integrity in Justice Delivery



From 9 – 12 February 2026, the Judiciary of Rwanda organized activities dedicated to Anti-Corruption Week under the theme: “Poor service delivery creates a gateway to corruption. Share information, let’s fight it together. The week was officially launched on 09 February 2026 at the Supreme Court Headquarters, bringing together members of the judiciary, the Rwanda Bar Association, and other justice sector stakeholders. We joined the Rwanda Judiciary in these activities, demonstrating a shared commitment to promoting integrity and accountability within the justice system. During the opening event, Our Executive Director commended justice institutions for their continued efforts to strengthen transparency and accountability. He noted that Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) has played an important role in reducing opportunities for corruption within the justice sector by providing accessible and efficient mechanisms for resolving disputes.

During the closing ceremony, the Deputy Chief Justice reminded participants that although the week had ended, the fight against corruption never stopped. He emphasized that justice must be delivered freely and fairly because justice is not for sale. Lawyers and judges were urged to eliminate corruption in courts, uphold professional ethics, and safeguard against the integrity of the justice system. To conclude the week, participants joined a Walk Against Corruption, demonstrating a collective commitment to preventing and combating corruption in the justice sector.

The activities reinforced the message that poor service delivery creates opportunities for corruption and called for stronger accountability and ethical conduct within the judiciary.



Justice in Focus: raising awareness on ADR and Criminal Justice Policies



On 6th February, we joined the Rwanda Judiciary and the Ministry of Justice in a dynamic awareness-raising session focused on the implementation and significance of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Policy and the Criminal Justice Policy. The session brought together legal practitioners, civil society actors, and community representatives to discuss the transformative potential of out-of-court settlements, plea bargaining, and victim–offender mediation in Rwanda’s justice system. Discussions emphasized the critical role of civil society in supporting these mechanisms, from facilitating informed participation to promoting reconciliation and restorative justice outcomes. The session highlighted how ADR and plea bargaining not only reduce case backlogs and decongest correctional facilities, but also foster accountability, repair harm, and strengthen trust between offenders, victims, and communities. Participants engaged in interactive discussions, sharing experiences and best practices for implementing ADR initiatives, and exploring strategies to maximize access to justice for all Rwandans, particularly vulnerable populations. The live session served as an important platform for knowledge exchange, capacity building, and collective commitment to enhancing the fairness, efficiency, and human-centered approach of Rwanda’s criminal justice system.

Strengthening partnerships in advancing access to justice for women and girls

On 20 February 2026, we reaffirmed our long-standing partnership with the Gender Monitoring Office by signing a new five-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This agreement marks a renewed commitment to advancing gender equality, strengthening the rule of law, and expanding access to justice for women and girls across Rwanda.



The MoU establishes a strategic framework for collaboration, outlining shared responsibilities to enhance accountability for gender equality, support victims of gender-based violence (GBV), and improve the delivery of legal services to vulnerable women and girls.



Under the agreement, we will work closely with the Gender Monitoring Office to conduct legal assessments, raise awareness about rights and available services, provide direct legal aid to survivors of GBV and child abuse, and collect gender-disaggregated data to inform evidence-based interventions. Both parties are also committed to upholding core partnership values, including equity, accountability, integrity, and transparency, in all joint initiatives.



Our Voice in the Senate: Contribution in enhancing access to legal aid services for vulnerable populations in Rwanda



We reached communities through multiple channels to ensure accessibility, including our Legal Aid Call Center (1022), community-based paralegals, television and radio programs, and in-person consultations. During the presentation, key challenges were highlighted, such as the lack of specific legislation governing legal aid, limited capacity among service providers, and the absence of formal recognition for paralegals.

We also shared opportunities and recommendations to strengthen access to justice, emphasizing the importance of expanding legal aid frameworks, building provider capacity, and formally recognizing paralegals as key contributors to justice delivery. This engagement reflects our commitment to ensuring that all Rwandans, especially vulnerable populations, can access fair and effective legal support.

On 19 February, our Executive Director presented to the Senate Standing Committee on Political Affairs and Good Governance on our ongoing contributions to strengthening legal aid services for vulnerable populations in Rwanda.

From 2020 to 2025, LAF provided legal aid services to millions across the country, including legal advice and representation, DNA testing facilitation, and legal education and awareness programs.

Promotion & Protection of Human Rights

Engagement with Parliamentary Committee on National Unity, Human Rights, and the Fight against Genocide



On 15 January, we had the opportunity to present our views before the Parliamentary on National Unity, Human Rights, and the Fight against Genocide of the Parliament of Rwanda Committee on key issues contributing to persistent justice and human rights challenges in Rwanda. We highlighted that overcrowding in correctional facilities and detention centers managed by the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) has serious consequences, including adverse effects on the health, dignity, and overall well-being of detainees, and undermines compliance with national laws and international human rights standards. To address these concerns, we emphasized the need to strengthen the effective use of alternatives to imprisonment as a means of improving access to justice while reducing unnecessary and prolonged detention. These alternatives include plea bargaining, electronic monitoring, surrender of passports, compensation and restitution, negotiated settlements, orders to remain at a specific address, periodic reporting, suspended sentences, bail, community service, and fines without trial.

Some of our other recommendations included:

- Petty offences should, where appropriate, be resolved through community-based mechanisms, provided these comply with human rights standards and are accepted voluntarily by the parties involved.
- Mediation should be prioritized for minor offences, allowing disputes to be resolved amicably without resorting to formal criminal proceedings.
- Civil reparation or financial compensation should be encouraged, considering the financial capacity of the offender or their guardians.
- Offenders should, where possible, compensate victims through meaningful work or restitution, thereby promoting accountability, reconciliation, and restorative justice.
- Community service and other non-custodial measures should be preferred over imprisonment, particularly for minor and non-violent offences.
- Public awareness initiatives should be strengthened to improve understanding of alternative sanctions, their purpose, and their role in promoting justice, rehabilitation, and social reintegration.

In addition, we provided recommendations on systemic challenges affecting access to legal aid, particularly the absence of a comprehensive legal aid law and a dedicated legal aid fund. These gaps disproportionately affect children in conflict with the law and indigent persons, who often face criminal proceedings without adequate legal representation. We stressed the urgent need to establish a sustainable legal aid framework and funding mechanism to ensure fair trial rights and equal access to justice for all.



RWANDA'S REVIEW UNDER THE UPR MECHANISM

Geneva Mission, January 2026



Since 2014, the Legal Aid Forum is convener and chair of the Rwanda Civil Society Coalition on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) a platform bringing together civil society organizations engaged in human rights monitoring, advocacy, and follow-up on Rwanda's international human rights obligations. The Coalition plays a key role in building the capacity of CSOs to engage with international human rights mechanisms, as well as monitoring State compliance through evidence-based reporting on progress made in implementing recommendations.

On 21 January 2026, a select group of members of the Coalition attended Rwanda's 4th cycle review during the 51st session of the UN Human Rights Council's UPR Working Group at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. Participation in the review session allowed the Coalition to closely observe the dialogue between Rwanda and UN Member States and to better understand the recommendations made to the Government of Rwanda.

During this review, Rwanda received 286 recommendations from 100 delegations, addressing a wide range of human rights issues. Here are some of the recommendations:

- Accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- Continue to harmonize national legislation and policies with relevant international human rights obligations
- Continue strengthening citizen participation mechanisms for the continuous improvement of public policies
- Continue advancing gender equality, by reinforcing women's economic empowerment with particular emphasis on rural women
- Continue efforts to reduce prison overcrowding through the implementation of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms
- Continue to take measures to strengthen the legal framework for the promotion and protection of the rights of children

Following this review, Rwanda will consider the recommendations received in line with its Constitution, international obligations, national context, and development priorities. Rwanda will declare its position on the recommendations in June 2026, at the conclusion of the Human Rights Council session. This announcement will clarify which recommendations Rwanda accepts to implement.



CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON HOW TO IMPROVE PRO BONO AND LEGAL AID SERVICES



we joined the Rwanda Bar Association in a consultative meeting to strengthen pro bono and legal aid services in Rwanda. The meeting brought together leaders from multiple justice sector institutions as well as practicing lawyers to reflect on current practices, identify gaps, and develop practical, coordinated strategies to enhance legal aid delivery. Participants discussed the challenges faced by both institutions and individual advocates in providing pro bono services, while exploring ways to improve coordination, documentation, and accessibility of legal support for vulnerable and marginalized groups. Key discussions focused on promoting equitable access to justice, ensuring that children, persons with disabilities, victims of gender-based violence, and other vulnerable groups receive timely and effective legal assistance. Lawyers shared the difficulties they encounter in handling pro bono cases, while institutional leaders highlighted systemic barriers and resource limitations. Through collaborative dialogue, participants proposed practical solutions to overcome these challenges and ensure that activities and services are implemented efficiently.

The meeting also emphasized the importance of cultivating a strong pro bono culture within Rwanda's legal profession. This includes adherence to Rwanda Bar Association regulations requiring all practicing advocates to handle at least one pro bono case annually, strengthening capacity-building initiatives, and fostering greater collaboration among justice sector actors, civil society organizations, and development partners.

By the end of the meeting, participants had developed actionable recommendations to improve pro bono and legal aid service delivery, enhance child-focused legal support, and strengthen networks among stakeholders. The dialogue reinforced Rwanda's ongoing commitment to ensuring justice is accessible, fair, and effective for all, particularly for the most vulnerable in society.

Courtesy visit from a key partner



On 29 January 2026, we were delighted to receive representatives from Denmark for a courtesy visit, including Natalie Cass, Programme Officer (Governance, Human Rights & Reconciliation), and Viateur Karangwa, Programme Officer. Discussions centered on our new partnership to support Rwanda's justice sector in implementing key access-to-justice policies and human rights mechanisms. This collaboration reflects our shared commitment to strengthening legal aid services and promoting equal access to justice for all Rwandans.

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LEGAL AID HELPLINE



DIAL

1022



REMINDER

Call our free legal aid Helpline to get assistance from a lawyer or listen to legal aid Information