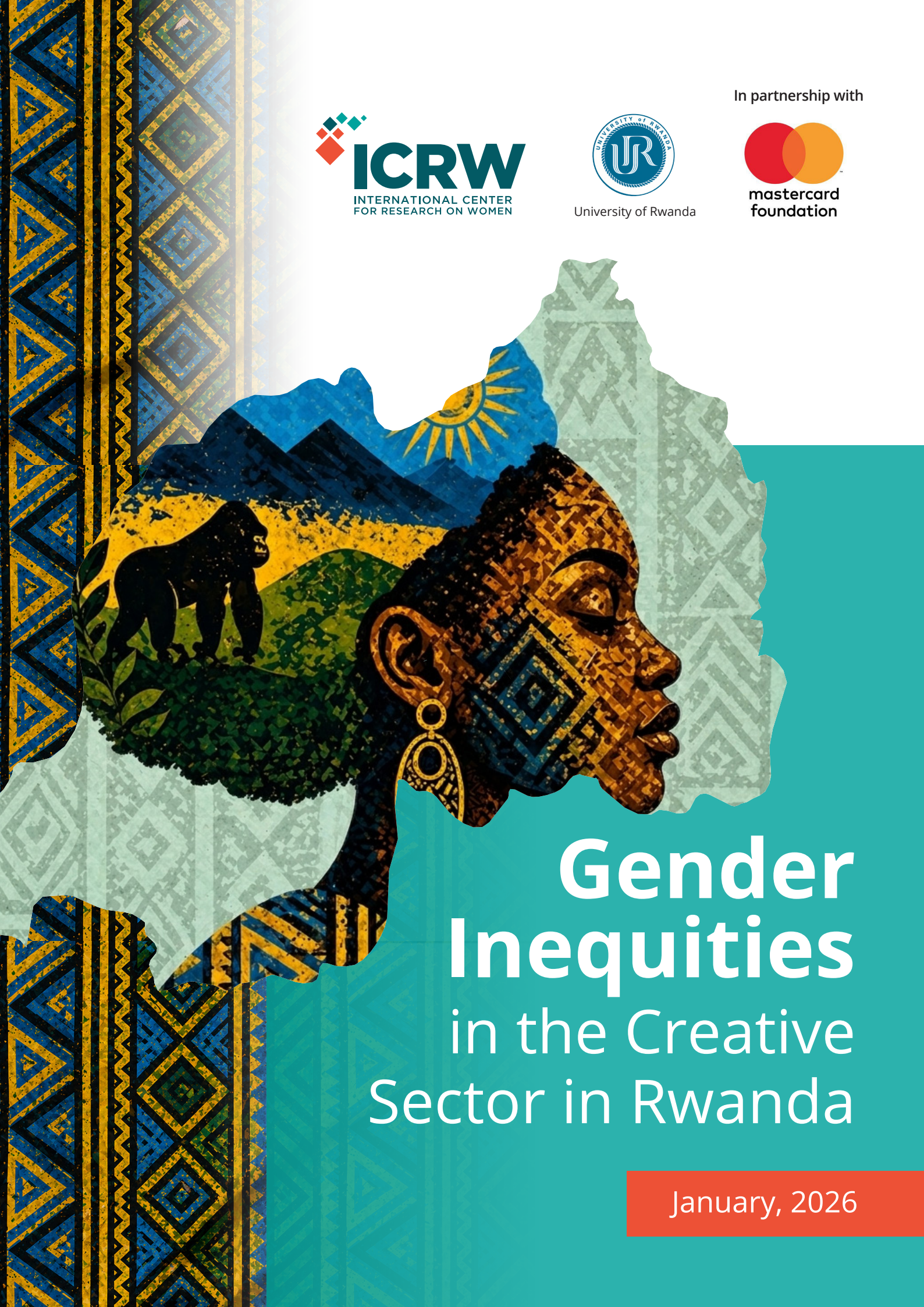




University of Rwanda

In partnership with



Gender Inequities in the Creative Sector in Rwanda

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Abbreviations

FGD:

Focus Group Discussion

IDI:

In-depth interview

KII:

Key Informant Interview

Executive Summary

This research study aimed to investigate gender inequities in Rwanda's creative sector using a mixed-methods design that combined quantitative and qualitative data collection. The study assesses barriers and opportunities affecting women's participation and advancement in the creative industry, analyzes the role of gender norms, and informs policy and programmatic responses.

The findings reveal that Rwanda's creative sector is highly youthful, with 90% of participants aged 18–30. While the industry provides opportunities for self-employment and skill development, persistent barriers limit women's full participation. Although 68% of respondents reported formal training, many lacked access to advanced opportunities, reflecting financial and institutional constraints.

Workplace experiences reflect a dual reality. On one hand, nearly 90% of women creatives expressed satisfaction with their professional growth, and on the other, they reported challenges such as discrimination, gender-related barriers, harassment, and unequal pay. Qualitative testimonies highlight systemic issues, including stereotypes about women's creative abilities, sexual harassment, and undervaluation of women's contributions.

Social media emerged as a significant enabler, offering visibility, networking, and market opportunities for women creatives. However, structural barriers such as limited childcare infrastructure, unequal household responsibilities, and occupational segregation persist. Despite recent policy improvements and gender-sensitive workplace practices, a significant gap remains between women's equality and their lived realities.

Overall, the study underscores the resilience and determination of young women in the sector but also highlights the need for targeted interventions to ensure that opportunities in Rwanda's creative economy translate into substantive gender equity.

1. Introduction

The creative sector in Rwanda holds significant potential for economic transformation, social cohesion, and youth empowerment. It provides opportunities for innovation, cultural expression, and job creation, particularly for young people who are increasingly turning to creative work as a livelihood pathway. However, anecdotal evidence indicates that this sector is also characterized by persistent gender inequities that limit the full participation and advancement of women and girls. Gendered barriers—ranging from discriminatory norms and practices (such as those that limit women from leadership roles, and sexual harassment), to unequal access to resources, networks, and markets—undermine efforts to build an inclusive and thriving creative economy. This study aims to expand the existing research base on gender in the creative sector in Rwanda, to gain a deeper understanding of the extent of gender inequality, its manifestations, root causes, and potential remedies through targeted programs and policies.

Conducted by the University of Rwanda in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), the research forms part of a broader multi-country initiative spanning seven African countries. The initiative aims to enhance understanding of how gender norms impact the world of work for young women in the creative industries, with the ultimate goal of fostering a gender-equitable creative sector that enables young people to participate actively, safely, and with dignity.

2. Background

Despite the growing recognition of the creative sector's role in sustainable development (UNESCO, 2013; UNCTAD, 2022), the industry in Rwanda remains marked by gender inequities that are not yet well documented or systematically addressed (Hawkins, 2021). Women and girls face multiple challenges that restrict their access to opportunities, resources, and benefits in creative work. These challenges are shaped by entrenched gender norms and intersect with broader socio-economic, cultural, and contextual processes (Mama, 2019; Ssendi et al., 2020). As a result, young women in the creative industry often face barriers to entry, limited career advancement, and exclusion from leadership and decision-making spaces (UNESCO, 2021).

Globally, the creative economy has been identified as a key driver for inclusive growth (UNCTAD, 2018; Cunningham & Higgs, 2020). However, in many African contexts, including Rwanda, gendered disparities constrain the transformative potential of this approach (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013; Ndemo, 2016). In Rwanda, policies promoting gender equality have made notable progress in political participation and education (Burnet, 2011; Republic of Rwanda, 2021), but less attention has been directed toward the creative sector. This knowledge gap hinders the design of targeted interventions that could address inequities and foster an inclusive creative industry (Umuhoza & Ndahiro, 2022).

3. Rationale of the Study

The creative sector is increasingly recognized as a critical driver of economic diversification, cultural innovation, and youth employment in Africa. In Rwanda, the sector has expanded over the last decade, creating new opportunities for young people to engage in entrepreneurship, cultural expression, and creative production. However, despite this potential, women and girls remain underrepresented and face significant barriers that limit their meaningful participation and advancement.

Existing national policies have made commendable strides in promoting gender equality in governance, education, and health. However, the creative sector has not received comparable attention, leaving a gap in both knowledge and policy action on gender equity within this industry. Without targeted evidence, programs and policies risk overlooking the structural and normative barriers that disproportionately affect young women, thereby perpetuating cycles of exclusion.

This study is therefore timely and necessary for three main reasons. First, it responds to a clear knowledge gap by systematically documenting gender inequities in Rwanda's creative sector, where robust empirical evidence is currently scarce. Second, it provides insights into the interplay among gender norms, socioeconomic conditions, and creative work, which are critical for designing effective interventions. Third, it contributes to a continental agenda by situating Rwanda's

experiences within broader regional efforts to foster inclusive and dignified work for young women.

Ultimately, the study aims to provide robust evidence to inform policymakers, industry leaders, and development partners in advancing gender-equitable policies, reforming workplace practices, and developing effective programmatic interventions. By eliminating the barriers and enhancing inclusive participation, Rwanda's creative sector can realize its potential as a space where youth—especially young women—can fully express their creativity, achieve dignified work, and contribute to national development (UNESCO, 2013; Republic of Rwanda, 2021).

4. Study Design

This study used a mixed-method design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component consisted of a structured survey administered to young women in the creative industry. The qualitative portion included in-depth interviews (IDIs), key informant interviews (KIIs), storytelling, creative representation (utilizing art forms to convey stories), and photovoice. The integration of these approaches allowed for both breadth and depth: the survey provided generalizable evidence on the extent and nature of gender inequities, while the qualitative methods captured the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and strategies of stakeholders in the creative industry.

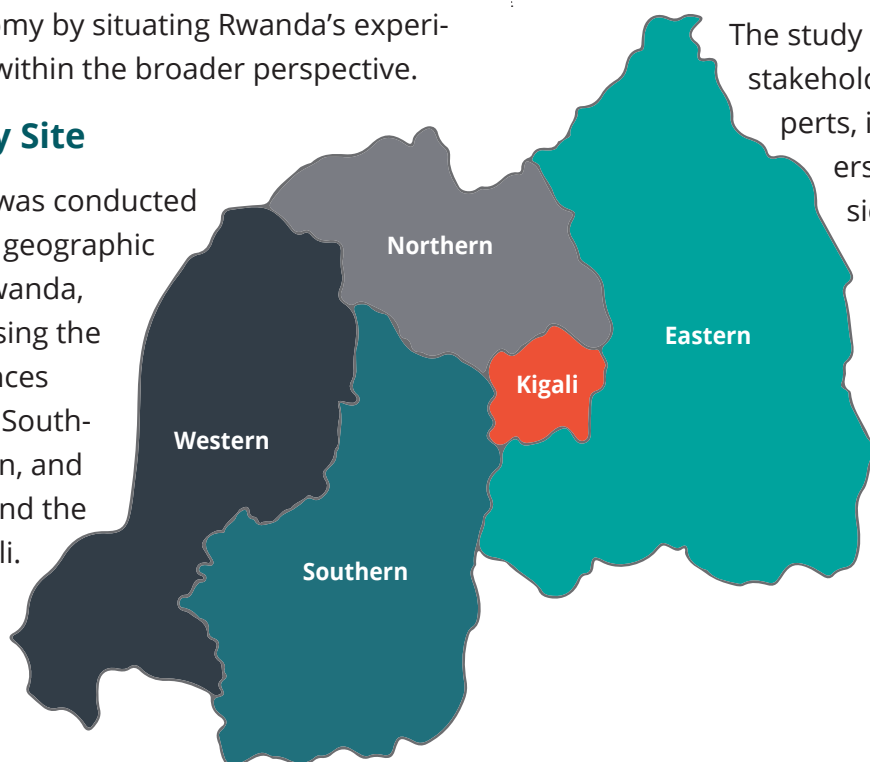
4.1 Study Objectives

The primary objective of this study was to investigate gender inequities in Rwanda's creative sector and to gather evidence to inform policies and programs that promote gender equity and inclusion. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Assess the nature and extent of gender inequities in Rwanda's creative sector, including barriers that hinder women's participation, representation, and advancement;
2. Explore the influence of gender norms and socio-economic dynamics on the work experiences of young women in the creative sector;
3. Identify opportunities and strategies that enable young women creatives to realize their full potential and actively participate in dignified, fulfilling work; and
4. Contribute to regional and continental knowledge on gender and the creative economy by situating Rwanda's experience within the broader perspective.

4.2 Study Site

The study was conducted across five geographic areas in Rwanda, encompassing the four provinces (Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western) and the city of Kigali.



4.3 Study Population and Sample

The study population consisted of young women creatives in Rwanda engaged in 11 different subsectors of the creative industry, including, but not limited to, fashion design, performing arts, music, visual arts, gastronomy, and digital content creation. Participants were selected using a purposive, stratified approach to ensure representation from diverse subsectors, regions (including both urban and rural areas), and career stages.

The dominance of Kigali in the sample (see Figure 1 for geographic distribution of sample) stems from the capital's role as the country's primary hub for creative industries, offering greater infrastructure, market access, and networking opportunities. The sample distribution ensured representation of both urban and rural contexts, reflecting the diversity of creative sector dynamics across different socio-economic, cultural, and infrastructural settings.

The study also engaged key stakeholders, including experts, investors, researchers, and policy/decision-makers, in areas related to the creative sector. These qualitative participants were purposively selected for their expertise as individuals or practitioners in the creative sector.

Representation in the sample

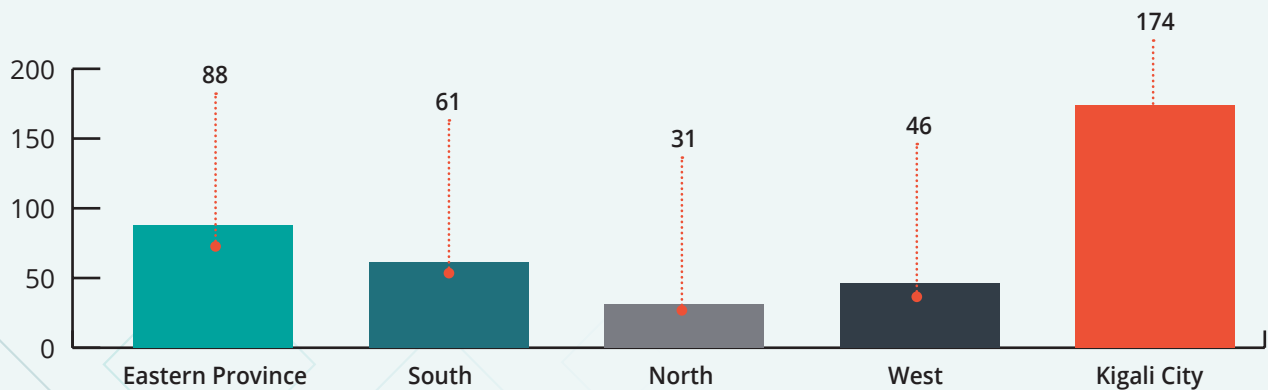


Figure 1. Geographical representation of the sample (N=400)

4.4 Data Collection Methods

Survey: A structured questionnaire was administered to 400 young women creatives aged 18–35 to collect quantitative data on their experiences, challenges, and opportunities within the creative sector. The questionnaire covered themes such as career pathways, access to resources, workplace experiences, and perceptions of gender equity.

Focus group discussions (FGDs): Seven FGDs were conducted with young women creatives (minimum eight participants per FGD, 55 people in total, aged 18–35) to explore shared experiences, community-level dynamics, and collective challenges related to gender inequities.

Key informant interviews (KIIs): Four KIIs were conducted with stakeholders, including investors, policymakers, and experts, focusing on structural and institutional factors influencing gender equity in the creative sector.

In-depth interviews (IDIs): Nine IDIs were conducted with young women entrepreneurs and practitioners aged 18–35 to capture detailed narratives and expert insights on gender norms, socio-economic barriers, and opportunities to promote equity.

All qualitative data collection was guided by semi-structured interview guides, which allowed for flexibility while ensuring consistency across respondents.

4.5 Data Analysis

Survey data were coded and analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) were generated to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and highlight patterns of gender inequity in the creative sector. Where relevant, cross-tabulations and comparative analyses were conducted to examine differences across subgroups (e.g., region, subsector, career stage).

Data from FGDs, KIIs, and IDIs were audio-recorded (with consent), transcribed verbatim, and thematically analyzed. Thematic analysis involved coding, identifying recurrent patterns, and categorizing themes related to gendered experiences, structural barriers, and opportunities for equity. Triangulation of data sources enhanced the validity of the findings, while integrating quantitative and qualitative results provided a holistic picture of gender inequities in the creative sector.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Rwanda after the research proposal was presented and reviewed by the Institutional Review Committee. All participants were informed of the study's purpose, their right to voluntary participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant before participation. Data were anonymized and securely stored to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Special care was taken during FGDs and interviews to create safe spaces for participants to express themselves freely, particularly when discussing sensitive gender-related issues.

5. Findings

Section A: Social Demographics

i. Self-identity

Respondents were asked to describe how they identify themselves in relation to their gender and social identity. The results indicate that 100% identified as female. This distribution was not surprising because the study deliberately targeted biological female respondents in Rwanda, where the gender binary is very common.

ii. Age groups

The study examined respondents' biological age to understand the demographic composition of participants in the creative sector. The results show that the majority (55.25%) of respondents were aged 18–24, followed by 35% in the 25–30 age group and 9.75% in the 31–35 age group. The mean age was 24.61 years (SD = 4.09), with a median of 24 years and a mode of 22 years, representing 12.75% of the sample. These statistics suggest that young people largely dominate the creative sector in Rwanda.

This distribution illustrates a creative ecosystem that is youthful in both age and professional experience. The predominance of early-career practitioners may be linked to increasing opportunities arising from digital media, cultural entrepreneurship, and youth-targeted innovation programs in Rwanda.

Age distribution of the sample

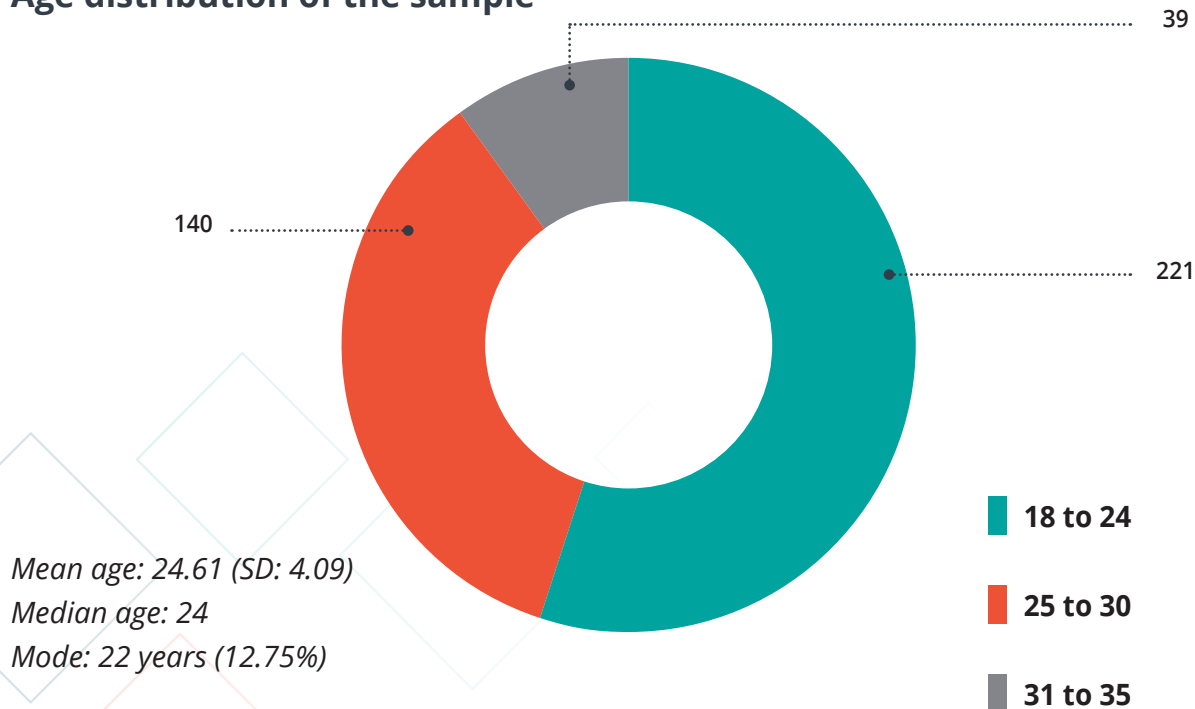


Figure 2. Age distribution of the sample

The youthful creative sector observed in the survey findings aligns with the general observation by respondents during the interviews, where, for example, a researcher in the creative sector indicated that the sector offers opportunities for job creation for young people:

"[...] I mean, the youth, because the creative sector actually employs the majority of them and is focused on job creation. That is the only way the government can really emphasize people coming up and creating their own jobs"

(KII, male researcher in the creative sector).

A producer, when talking about the music industry, similarly observed that most of the creatives were young women or girls:

"Now, going back to arts, as you said, most of the participants are still young women or girls [...] which is important"

(IDI, female creative in Kigali).

iii. Education level

A majority of survey respondents (57.00%) have completed secondary school, followed by 19.25% who have completed primary school, and 13.00% who hold a certificate or diploma. Smaller proportions hold higher academic qualifications: 9.50% have completed a bachelor's degree, and only 0.75% have postgraduate education (Figure 3). At the lowest end of the spectrum, 0.50% of participants reported having no formal education.

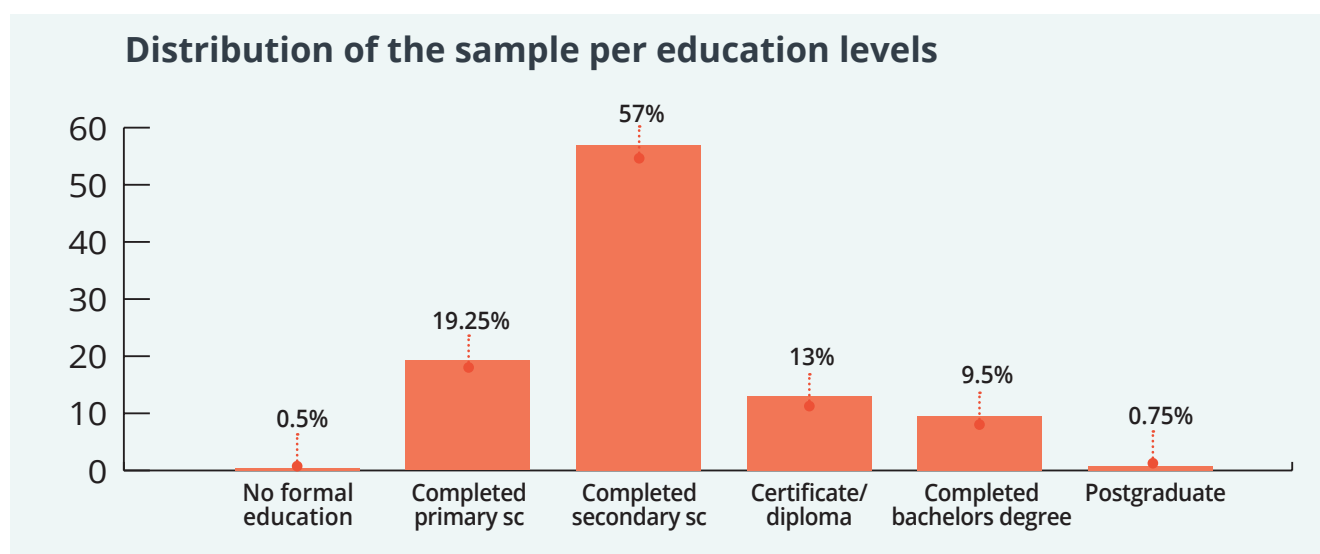


Figure 3. Distribution of the sample by education levels

The educational profile reveals a workforce with diverse educational attainment, predominantly at the mid-level.

iv. Training in the creative sector

Qualitative data indicate that most of the artists attended Nyundo Arts school: "I went to study at Nyundo in 2016, [...] I graduated from Nyundo in 2018," a young female painter responded. Also, some young artists were trained at the university level:

"I grew up on the creative side, and I joined the University of Rwanda, Department of Creative Design. I started at school, and then it turned into a career that I actually love"

(IDI, female interior design artist, Kigali).

Others received informal training after completing formal education:

"I joined this profession after completing the first level of secondary school around Senior Three, [...]. Honestly, it was not what I originally wanted to study, but I found myself in it. I began without really liking it, but later on I grew to love it"

(IDI, female, Kigali).

The study also assessed whether respondents had attended formal training related to their creative profession. Figure 2 shows that a majority of participants (nearly 70%) reported having undertaken such training.

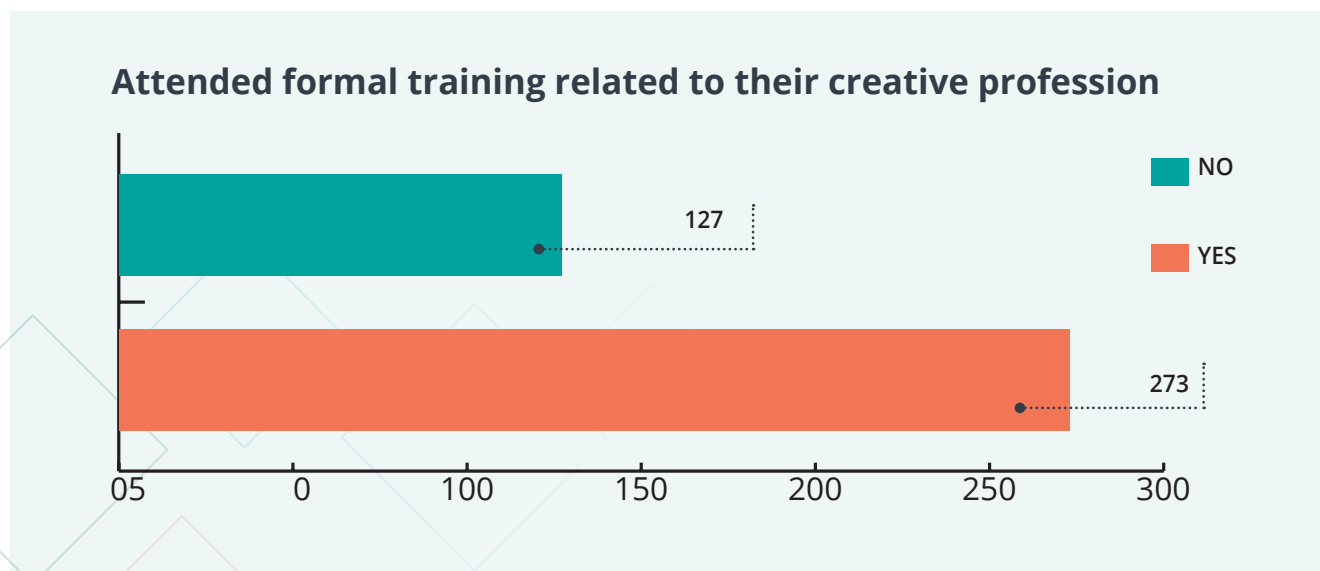


Figure 4. Whether you attended a formal training related to the creative profession

Qualitative data were collected on the organizations that provide training support to young artists. During the FGDs, it emerged that there are organizations, like Art Rwanda, which provide training:

"Yes, there are some organizations that train young people to help them develop their talents in areas like film, dancing, singing, and other creative skills. For example, Art Rwanda is one of them. It supports any child or youth who feels they have a talent and helps them to grow and improve it"

(FGD, female artist, Youth Center in Kigali city).

Similar comments emerged during KIIs where, for instance, an investor in the creative sector indicated that she organizes training for young creatives in new media and films.

"Aah, for young girls especially [...] Right now, we have created [...] a kind of training center where we teach people about acting, how to enter the film industry, how to behave in it, and how to use their social media to create good, impactful films that reach far. So for young girls especially, we show them their strength, their capabilities, whether in script writing, especially in the technical side of things, where women are usually underrepresented"

(KII, female, film producer, Kigali city).

v. Marital status

Most survey respondents were single and never married (82.75%, n = 331), followed by those who were married or in cohabitation (14.75%, n = 59). Only a small proportion were divorced (1.5%, n = 6) or separated (1%, n = 4).

Marital status distribution in creative sector

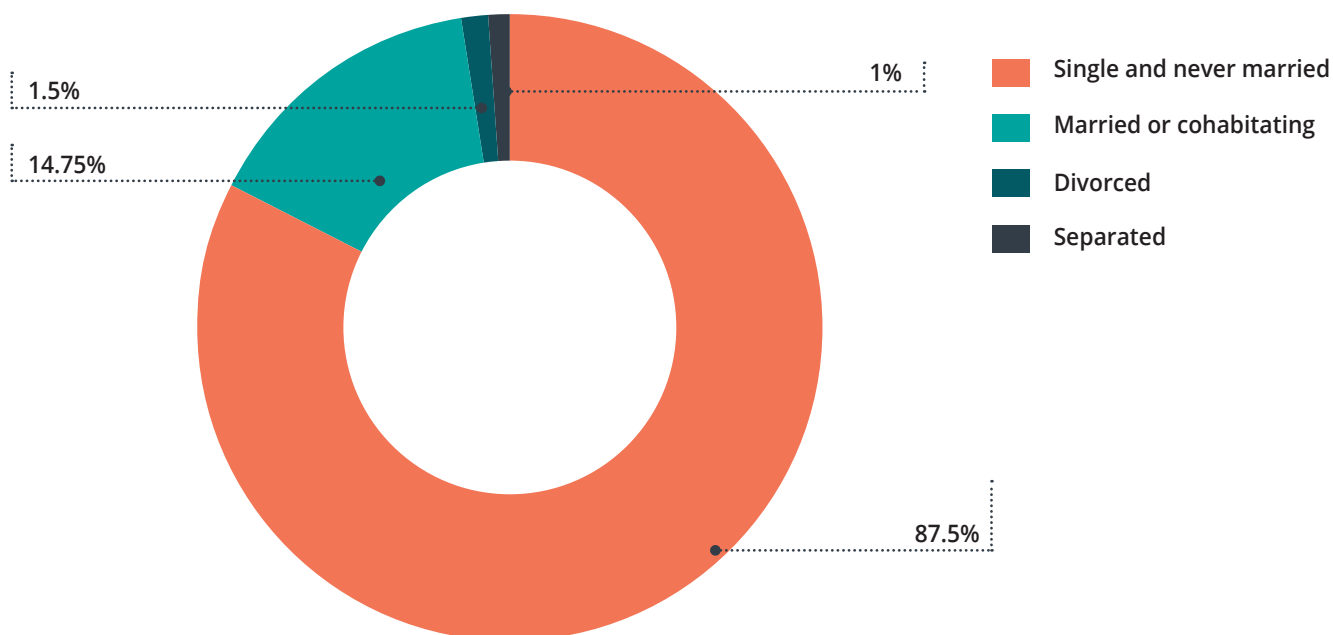


Figure 5. Marital status

During interviews, some creatives indicated that they decided to get married early for the sake of stab

"By the way [...] I am a mother! (laughs) [...] That is one of the reasons I chose to get married young. You see, feeling somewhat insecure —that is one of the things that pushed me to settle down early, to avoid many things. I am someone who values stability"

(IDI, female, Kigali).

The data suggest that the sector is predominantly composed of individuals without marital commitments, a factor that may influence work flexibility, mobility, and time allocation.

vi. Number of children

Respondents were asked about parental responsibilities, and 117 (29.2%) reported having children. Among these, the largest share had one child (55.56%, $n = 65$) or two children (30.77%, $n = 36$), while smaller proportions had three (7.69%, $n = 9$), four (5.13%, $n = 6$), or five children (0.85%, $n = 1$).

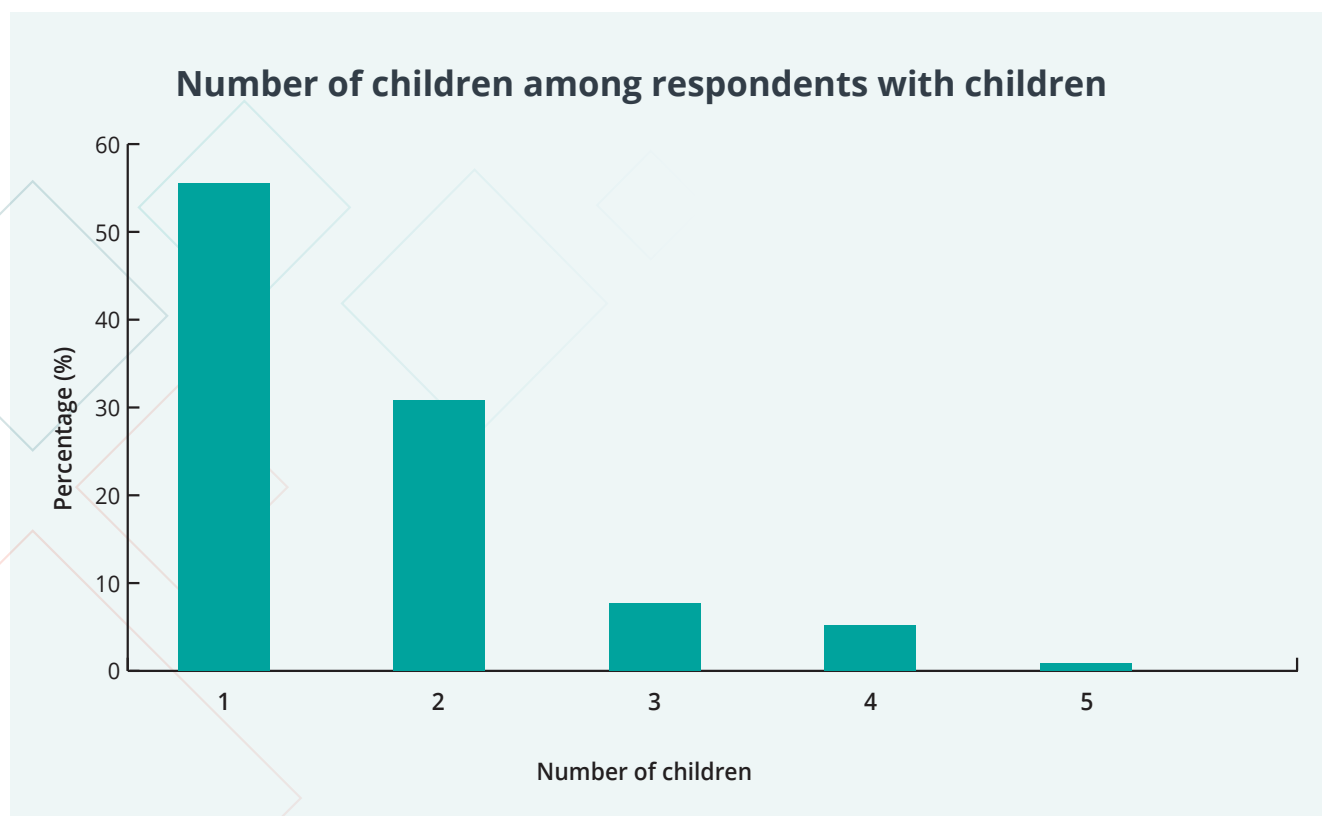


Figure 6. Number of children

vii. Care responsibilities

In terms of care responsibilities, the most common arrangement was engaging a babysitter or nanny (28.21%, $n = 33$), followed by unspecified arrangements (25.64%, $n = 30$). A notable proportion depended on children being at school (10.26%, $n = 12$) or taking their children to work (8.55%, $n = 10$). Daycare centers were used by 8.55% ($n = 10$), while a smaller group relied solely on a partner or spouse (3.42%, $n = 4$).

Care responsibilities among respondents with children

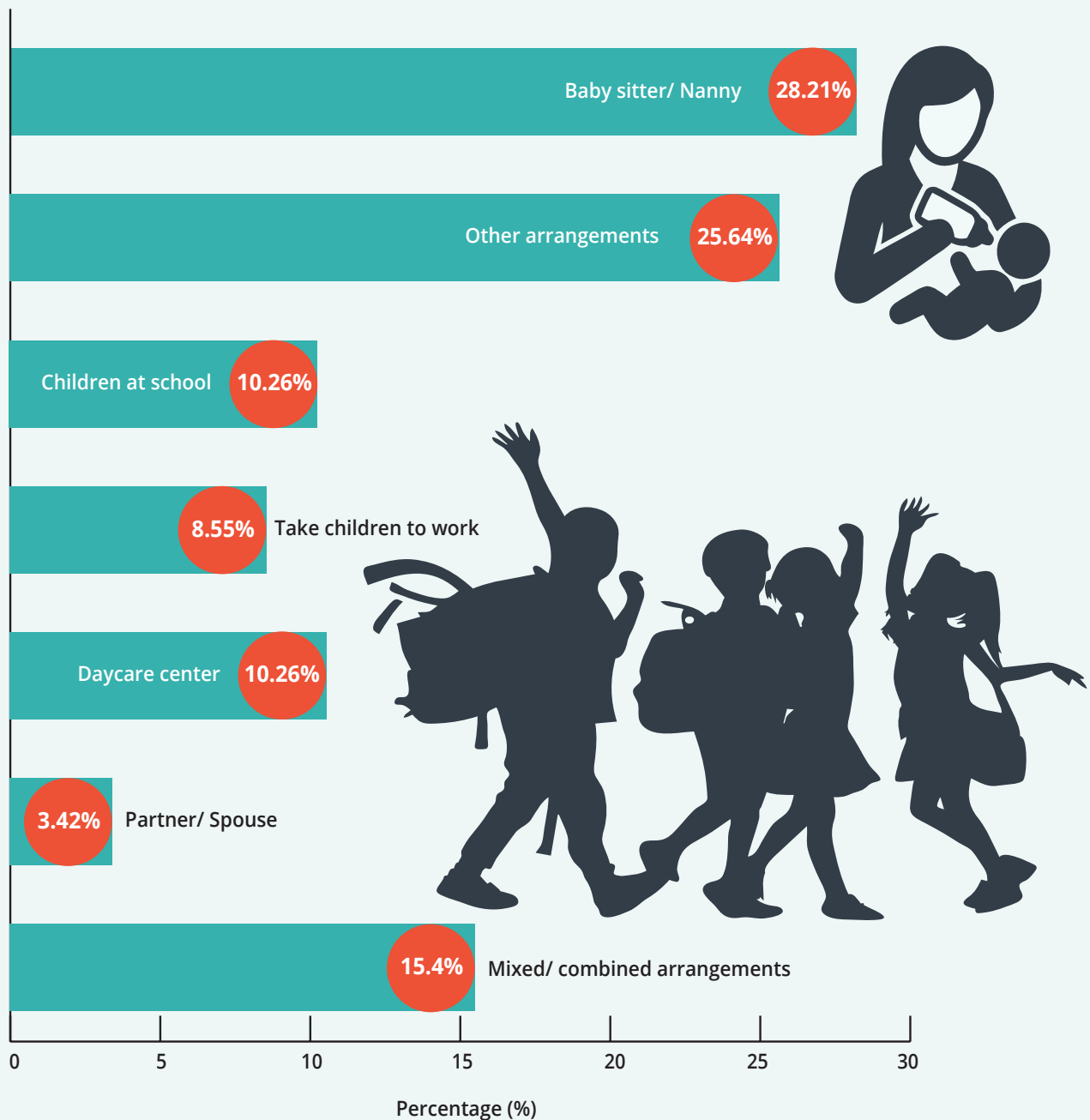


Figure 7. Care responsibilities among respondents with children

Some respondents combined multiple strategies—such as support from partners, older children, schools, or daycare—indicating flexibility but also the complexity of balancing work and family responsibilities in the creative sector.

Section B: Perceptions of the Workspace Environment in the Creative Sector

I. Creative subsector

The results shown in Table 1 reveal a diverse range of respondents across Rwanda's creative sectors. The traditional cultural expressions sector accounts for the largest share, engaging 34% of respondents, followed by the performing arts (25.8%), the visual arts (17.2%), and the design sector (13.6%). Cultural sites (5.4%), creative services (3.2%), and publishing and printed media (2.5%) remain relatively small.

Table 1. Distribution of the creative subsectors

Creative Sectors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Traditional cultural expressions	116	34
Performing arts	95	25.8
Visual arts	62	17.2
Design	48	13.6
Audiovisuals	38	10
Advertising and marketing	22	7.9
Cultural sites	21	5.4
New media	14	5
Creative services	9	3.2
Publishing and printed media	7	2.5
Others	12	4.3

Overall, the distribution highlights that Rwanda's creative landscape remains rooted in traditional and performing arts, while the modern and digital creative sectors—such as design, audiovisuals, and new media—are steadily expanding and diversifying the ecosystem.

ii. Time of work

Respondents were asked whether their engagement in creative activities was full-time or part-time. A majority of respondents (65.25%, $n = 261$) reported working full-time in the creative sector, while 34.75% ($n = 139$) worked part-time.

Table 2. Time of work in creative activities

	Frequencies	Percent
Full-time	261	65.25
Part-time	139	34.75

However, qualitative data show a consistent trend of part-time involvement in creative activities. The quotes below from two female artists reflect what was observed by participants in FGD, both from rural and urban areas:

“Most of us do not do this as full-time work; we do it as side gigs because we do not have consistent platforms or professional opportunities to grow our talent”
(FGD, female artist, youth center, Kigali).

“Yes, it is irregular, and it does not pay enough. And even when you do get the job, the money you receive is not enough to cover your basic needs”
(FGD, female artist, youth center, Rubavu, Western Province).

The data suggests a significant number of creatives engaged in creative activities full-time. However, qualitative insights from focus group discussions reveal that many creative workers—particularly young people—struggled to sustain their engagement due to limited professional opportunities, inconsistent income, and a lack of supportive platforms. As one participant from Kigali noted, creative work often serves as a side activity rather than a primary occupation. Others in rural areas highlighted the irregularity and insufficient pay associated with creative jobs. These findings suggest that despite significant full-time involvement, economic precarity and unstable employment conditions remain key challenges for young women in the creative sector.

iii. Use of social media

The study inquired about respondents’ presence and use of social media. The data in Table 3 show that use was nearly universal, with 91.5% (n = 366) reporting use in their professional work.

Table 3. Use of social media

	Frequency	Percent
Do you use social media?		
Yes	366	91.5
No	34	8.5

The qualitative data show that social media has become a platform to share creative products:

“Yes, the reason I say this is because, in the past, when you created a work of art, there was not really a place to showcase it. However, thanks to numerous social media platforms, including TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, and others, a significant amount of art is being shared and gaining more visibility. These platforms have given artists more opportunities to show their talents, and you can even find yourself getting noticed there. So, the main reason I say the creative sector is reaching a new level is because of social media”

(FGD, female, artist, youth center, Kigali)

Social media enabled women to progress rapidly in their work as creatives, as it transpired during an FGD with a team of young creatives in the Western province, as illustrated in the following quotation:

“Some have started to use social media to get timely information, which helps women to rise faster and gain confidence.”

Similarly, this experienced painter highlights the importance of social media for career progression:

“[On social media, people would ask] can I see the work you have done? So, if you do not have a portfolio [on social media] that is ready to show, oftentimes you will not get a job”

(IDI, female interior designer, Kigali)

iv. Gender domination/composition of the workspace (male or female)

Regarding the gender composition of the workplace, responses were almost evenly split between male-dominated environments (44.57%, n = 164) and female-dominated environments (43.48%, n = 160), while only 11.96% (n = 44) reported gender parity.

Table 4. Gender domination/composition of the workspace (male or female)

	Frequency	Percent
1. Mostly women	160	43.48
2. Mostly men	164	44.57
3. Approximately the same number	44	11.96

The split results may be linked to the sub-sector from which participants came, as some areas are male-dominated, while others are more female-dominated. However, during the FGDs, a consensus emerged that the creative sector remains male-dominated.

"For us singers, they do include women, but you find that women are like two, while men are like ten. You understand that more women need it, but to appear like they are being gender-balanced, they put in two women. I have never seen them working to balance it truly; they include two women to cover it up"

(FGD, female artist, youth center, Rubavu, Western province, Rwanda).

"As a young woman, breaking in is hard because the industry is primarily male. The environment is not always welcoming."

(FGD, female artist, youth center, Kigali).

"The creative industry in Rwanda is still underrepresented for girls and women, simply because many have not dared to show their talents in these fields"

(FGD Hanga Hub, Rusizi, Western Province).

As indicated above, participants noted that even where women are included, it is often tokenism rather than meaningful representation. Therefore, barriers such as limited opportunities and unwelcoming environments persist for women attempting to enter or advance in the creative industry, illustrating a discrepancy between formal gender composition and actual gender equity in workplace participation.

v. Overall sense of equality and equity in the sector

The creative sector in Rwanda exhibits significant gendered patterns, with both male-dominated and female-dominated subsectors. Insights from KIs and IDIs highlight how occupational perceptions and social expectations shape these dynamics. Several respondents emphasized the persistent male dominance in specific roles, particularly in positions traditionally associated with authority or technical skill. As one producer noted:

"For most people, especially men, when someone says, 'I am a producer,' it is easily accepted. Nevertheless, when it is a woman, people just do not get it [...] That is one of the reasons we still do not have many female producers in Rwanda"

(IDI, female, Kigali).

Female copywriters also highlighted the challenge of asserting themselves in predominantly male work environments:

"Yeah, for women copywriters, I think the biggest challenge is that we are outnumbered. You find yourself in a male-dominated industry [...] it requires you to be really tough. You must know how to stand your ground and speak up for yourself"

(IDI, female, advertising & marketing, Kigali).



Other subsectors present a contrasting pattern. For instance, fields like interior design are often perceived as mixed, with specific tasks considered “male” and others “female”:

“Well, that is quite interesting because when I started, it was more of a male-dominated field, especially when it comes to the practical aspect of interior design, but otherwise, design is seen as a female field” (IDI, female interior designer, Kigali).

In some areas, women constitute the majority, with work often framed as “female-oriented”:

“Being a girl is different from being a boy in this profession, but for me, it is clear because this work is generally seen as a job for girls” (IDI, female fashion designer, Kigali).

“Yeah... most of them are coming from the University of Tourism and Business, and East Africa University, and you will find that the majority are girls. For example, in one section, you might find six girls and only two boys. However, we are accustomed to it now, and we say, ‘Let us balance things two boys, two girls, it is not a problem,’ especially since the job does not involve much heavy lifting. So, 80% of the staff in that sector are women. Out of the 72 permanent employees I have, I can tell you that around 50 are women” (KII, male, culinary artist, Kigali).

Other professions, such as journalism and communication, remain heavily male-dominated, with very few women entering the field:

"I have noticed also that even in the area of journalism and communication, female students are very few. Regarding staff (laughing), it is even worse, because you would have only one female member"

(KII, male, academic, Kigali).

These accounts collectively illustrate the varied gender composition across Rwanda's creative sub-sectors. While some roles remain male-dominated, others have a strong female presence, reflecting the intersection of social perceptions, educational pathways, and workplace expectations in shaping gender dynamics.

Section C. Workspace Challenges

i Discrimination, especially that based on gender

Table 5 presents responses to the question of whether participants felt discriminated against because of their role as creatives. The majority (61%) reported some form of discrimination, with 35.5% (n = 142) agreeing and 25.5% (n = 102) strongly agreeing. However, a notable share also denied such experiences, with 20.25% (n = 81) strongly disagreeing and 16.5% (n = 66) disagreeing.

Table 5. Experiences of discrimination as creatives

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	81	20.25
Disagree	66	16.5
Neutral	9	2.25
Agree	142	35.5
Strongly Agree	102	25.5

This mix was also reflected in interviews. One participant insisted:

"The most important things are talent and meeting expectations. They [people] do not judge you based on where you come from or how you look; instead, they focus on the quality of the work" (FGD, female artist, youth center, Kigali).

Another shared a similar opinion:

"The creative sector in Rwanda has made real progress compared to how things used to be... They do not focus on whether you are male or female. If you are right for the role, they give it to you, without any bias" (FGD, female artist, youth center, Kigali).

In contrast, others emphasized persistent gender stereotypes:

"They say, this thing is not for women, it is for men, they are the ones who should be doing it" (IDI, female, designer, Kigali).

ii. Career progression challenges

Participants identified significant challenges affecting their career progression. Beyond issues of access to resources and markets, social perceptions and gender-based barriers emerged as recurring themes shaping opportunities and advancement within the sector.

Survey respondents reported experiencing discrimination in their professional journey, with 61% acknowledging some form of bias or unequal treatment. This finding highlights the persistence of social hierarchies and stereotypes that continue to shape the visibility and recognition of creative professionals. Although some creatives emphasized that success largely depends on talent, performance, and professionalism, others noted that gen-

der remains a structural barrier influencing access to opportunities, leadership roles, and equitable compensation. As one female designer in Kigali remarked:

"So, there is that aspect that they [men] have more hours in a day than I do, but also the other difference that I would say is, yeah, the networks like the way that they present themselves in a room is quite different from the way I present myself. I have to do more work than they do because I have to prepare more to be accepted and heard. Sometimes I will have a perfect presentation and still miss out on a job when someone who does not have one gets the job, simply because they are a man or they know someone. So, sometimes the work that we [women] do is at least double what our male partners do."

Such sentiments reflect enduring gendered stereotypes that marginalize women in certain creative domains perceived as male-dominated, such as design, audiovisual production, or technical arts. Further, the data in Table 6 show that 29% of survey respondents (n = 116) agreed and 19.75% (n = 79) strongly agreed that they had encountered gender-related barriers. Nevertheless, 31.5% (n = 126) disagreed, and 17.75% (n = 71) strongly disagreed, suggesting that barriers are not uniformly experienced.

Table 6. Encountered gender-related barriers

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	71	17.75
Disagree	126	31.5
Neutral	8	2.0
Agree	116	29.0
Strongly Agree	79	19.75

Qualitative evidence illustrates these challenges. A female artisan noted: *“There are times when a customer comes, sees you are a girl or a woman, and says, ‘No, I cannot give you my shoe to fix’... because they are not used to seeing girls or women doing that job”* (IDI, female, shoe-designer, Kigali).

Another respondent reflected more broadly on persistent social norms: *“Society already designed people and put them in boxes... A man is this, a woman is that... Even though now we have made some progress, some things have not ended”* (FGD, female, artist, youth center, Rubavu, Western province).

iii. Anti-discrimination policies and practices

Survey respondents were generally satisfied with current policies and practices to prevent gender discrimination (Table 7). Over half of respondents (55.75%) agreed or strongly agreed that such measures are adequate, compared with 32.25% who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 7. Adequacy of anti-discrimination policies

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	47	11.75
Disagree	82	20.5
Neutral	48	12.0
Agree	136	34.0
Strongly Agree	87	21.75

iv. Harassment

Reports of harassment or macroaggressions based on gender were less common but remain significant (Table 8). While 45.25% (n = 181) disagreed and 28.75% (n = 115) strongly disagreed, 15.5% (n = 62) agreed, and 7.5% (n = 30) strongly agreed.

Table 8. Experiences of harassment or macroaggressions

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	115	28.75
Disagree	181	45.25
Neutral	12	3.0
Agree	62	15.5
Strongly Agree	30	7.5

Qualitative accounts reveal the severity of these incidents. One young woman recalled:

"I was almost sexually assaulted by one of my employers because we were working an all-night and they had been drinking, and it was horrible, and I was the only woman around. So, somehow, naturally, they thought that they could try something, but that didn't work out [...] there are a lot of dangers, especially when you're working in an environment that is quite unsafe"
(IDI, female, interior designer, Kigali).

Others described systemic harassment in client relations and recruitment:

"For women, you often encounter inappropriate advances from men [...] If you refuse, he might not pay you after the job [...] Even in dance, a trainer might tell you, 'Before I put you on the performance list, you need to do something for me'"
(FGD, female traditional dancer, Eastern province).

"These days, for a woman to get a job without being asked for sexual favors is very difficult"
(FGD, Hanga Hub, Rusizi, Western province).

These accounts reveal the challenges that young women creatives encounter in their everyday lives. In response, most indicated that the best way to avoid it is to find another job. It is essential, therefore, that laws against sexual harassment and abuse are put in place to protect employees in the private and informal sector, in particular, women creatives.

v. Exclusion from decision-making

Despite the above challenges, feelings of inclusion in collaborative projects were high (Table 9). Nearly nine in ten respondents (89%) reported feeling included and valued, with 52% (n = 208) agreeing and 37% (n = 148) strongly agreeing.

Table 9. Inclusion in collaborative projects

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	18	4.5
Disagree	20	5.0
Neutral	6	1.5
Agree	208	52.0
Strongly Agree	148	37.0

Qualitative data supported these findings. For instance, one participant emphasized emerging opportunities:

"I actually want to highlight some of the really positive things... including subsidized loans from different banks that actually target women in entrepreneurship and in creative industries" (IDI, female, designer, Kigali).

The findings present a complex picture of gender equity in Rwanda's creative sector. While the majority of respondents report inclusion and acknowledge progress in anti-discrimination policies, substantial minorities highlight persistent gender-based barriers, client bias, and harassment. The qualitative data vividly demonstrate how cultural stereotypes and coercive practices continue to disadvantage women, particularly younger creatives. These results suggest that while policy reforms and inclusive practices are yielding positive outcomes, targeted interventions are still required to ensure that formal nods to equality translate into substantive equality in everyday work experiences.

Section D: Gender Pay Gap

i. Perceptions on the current state of the gender pay gap

The survey data in Table 10 reveal varied perceptions of gender-based pay disparities within Rwanda's creative sector. When asked whether they had ever been underpaid for their creativity because of gender, the majority of respondents either disagreed (43.75%) or strongly disagreed (30.25%).

Table 10. Gender pay gap

Frequencies	Percent	
Ever been underpaid for my creativity because of my gender		
Strongly Disagree	121	30.25
Disagree	175	43.75
Neutral	11	2.75
Agree	50	12.5
Strongly Agree	43	10.75

However, a notable proportion—12.5% who agreed and 10.75% who strongly agreed—reported experiences of underpayment linked to gender, indicating that nearly one-quarter of respondents perceive pay discrimination. Neutral responses were minimal (2.75%), suggesting that most respondents hold firm views on the issue.

ii. Experienced gender pay gap

Qualitative data provide insights into these perceptions. One participant noted:

"Sometimes I play many more roles than the man. However, because the man might be married, people often think he should be paid more than a young woman or an unmarried woman. They end up giving him more money. This is very common. Most of the time, men receive higher pay than women" (FGD, Hanga Hub, Rusizi, Western province).

Another respondent echoed this concern, emphasizing that inequality persists even when women and men perform the same tasks:



“There are times someone brings shoes to be repaired [...] and says, I’ll give you this little money, just to discourage you so you don’t do the job. He says, ‘If I give her a thousand Rwf for a shoe that deserves five thousand, she won’t do it.’ In the end, he goes and gives it to someone else [a man], and you find that person he gives it to is someone you work with, and he pays them a lot, while he refused to give that money to you” (IDI, female, shoe designer, Kigali).



Others highlighted that underpayment is not always framed directly in terms of gender but manifests in the form of long working hours and undervaluation of creative contributions:



“... as a singer who sings in a live band, sometimes we go to a hotel and come back late at night, we work long hours. Then when they come to pay you, they give you very little; we are not paid well”
(FGD, female dancer, youth center, Musanze, Northern province).



Further, women reported needing to prove their skills compared to men constantly and described unequal pay for similar work:



“For him, if he studied music, that is enough. People immediately trust him. But for me, I had to produce something to prove I was really a producer”
(IDI female producer, Kigali).

“There is a place I once worked where women were paid less than men... If you had two graphic designers doing the same job, the woman would be paid half”
(IDI, female advertising and marketing artist, Kigali).



iii. Systemic gender pay gap, by policy, practices, and procedures

Respondents were asked if they had experienced or were aware of practices, policies, and procedures that ensured or promoted equal pay for similar work for males and females. The responses to the statement are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Whether experienced policy and practice ensure equal pay

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	37	9.25
Disagree	69	17.25
Neutral	90	22.50
Agree	138	34.50
Strongly Agree	66	16.50

More than half agreed (34.5%) or strongly agreed (16.5%) that policies support gender pay equity. In comparison, 26.5% disagreed, and 22.5% remained neutral, suggesting that while many believe formal structures exist to promote fairness, a substantial minority remains skeptical or uncertain about their effectiveness. At the same time, there were positive examples in which institutional standards promoted equality. For instance, one key informant emphasized that collaboration between the Rwanda Development Board (RDB) and hotels ensures compliance with labor laws, including gender-sensitive provisions such as maternity leave:

“RDB works with NGOs that provide training... when they collaborate with hotels, the hotels understand and ask questions like whether employees have maternity leave. All these reports help, and all hotels follow the country’s labor laws”

(KII, male culinary artist, Kigali).

He reiterated that some sectors, particularly in high-end establishments, maintain strict pay parity. “

It is a five-star hotel, so everyone is paid the same”

(KII, male culinary artist, Kigali, City).

In summary, while quantitative findings suggest that most creatives do not perceive widespread gender-based underpayment and have moderate confidence in institutional safeguards, qualitative insights highlight persistent experiences of bias and undervaluation.

Together, these findings indicate that, despite formal frameworks for pay equity, gender-based disparities remain a lived reality for many female creatives, necessitating the enforcement of labor protections and a shift in cultural attitudes toward the value of women’s work.

Section E. Career Expectations of Young Women in the Creative Sector

Understanding career expectations and perceived opportunities among young women in Rwanda's creative sector provides a critical lens into the dynamics of gender equality, inclusion, and professional sustainability in this emerging industry. This section analyzes three dimensions: (i) satisfaction with current progression, (ii) perceptions of equality in career opportunities, and (iii) long-term career expectations.

i. Current progression in the creative sector

Survey data indicate that most respondents are satisfied with their career progression and opportunities as female creatives. As shown in Table 12, 88.25% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. In comparison, only 10% expressed dissatisfaction or uncertainty, suggesting a general sense of optimism among young women regarding their current growth and recognition within the sector.

Table 12. Level of satisfaction with my career progression and opportunities

	Frequency	Percent
Satisfied with my career progression and opportunities as a female creative		
I do not know	7	1.75
Strongly Disagree	26	6.5
Disagree	14	3.5
Agree	187	46.75
Strongly Agree	166	41.5

However, qualitative data suggest that satisfaction may coexist with ongoing challenges, particularly for women seeking stable and upward career mobility. Many young women acknowledged increased opportunities, while also noting systemic obstacles, such as unequal access to funding and mentorship. An FGD participant in Kigali said,

"There is space for women now, but we still face hidden barriers—connections matter more than talent."

"Female creatives are gaining visibility, yet structural inequities in project selection and exposure persist" (KII, Female Film Producer, Kigali).

ii. Equal or unequal opportunities to progress in the creative sector

When asked about equality of opportunity, 77% of respondents (Agree = 41%, Strongly Agree = 36%) affirmed that they are given equal chances for advancement as men. In comparison, 18.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 4.5% were unsure. These results demonstrate a perception of improving gender parity in career development within the creative industry.

Table 13. Perceived level of opportunities for career advancement

	Frequency	Percent
I have equal opportunities for career advancement, just like my colleagues of the opposite gender		
I do not know	18	4.5
Strongly Disagree	47	11.75
Disagree	27	6.75
Agree	164	41
Strongly Agree	144	36

Qualitative accounts support this perception but also underscore the persistence of informal gender hierarchies. A female filmmaker in Kigali made the following remarks during an FGD:

“Opportunities look equal on paper, but men still get more trust for big projects.” A key informant added, *“Gender equality is improving, but leadership roles in the creative economy remain male-dominated.”*

The data indicates that practical barriers continue to shape women’s access to high-level creative and managerial opportunities in the creative sector.

iii. Long-term career expectations

Findings show a long-term commitment among young women to remain in the creative industry. The majority (96.25%) reported having a goal of building a long-term career, with 71.5% strongly agreeing and 24.75% agreeing. Similarly, 89.75% of respondents reported feeling they are thriving in their creative careers. These figures suggest both resilience and a growing sense of belonging among young female creatives in Rwanda.

Table 14. Long-term career expectations

I have the goal of a long-term career in the creative industry		
	Frequency	Percent
I do not know	5	1.25
Strongly Disagree	6	1.5
Disagree	4	1
Agree	99	24.75
Strongly Agree	286	71.5
I feel that I am thriving in my career as a creative		
I do not know	4	1
Strongly Disagree	24	6
Disagree	13	3.25
Agree	134	33.5
Strongly Agree	225	56.25

However, qualitative narratives reveal that sustainability in creative careers depends heavily on access to financial stability and institutional support. During an FGD in Kigali, one young female designer stated, *“I want to stay in this field forever, but the uncertainty of income makes it hard to plan for the future.”* Another respondent, also in Kigali, emphasized the need for supportive structures: *“Women can thrive if there is mentorship and support. We need systems and structures that young women know and can go to for support. Without the support, it is easy to give up.”*

Across all three dimensions (career progression, equal opportunities to progress, and desire to stay in the field), the findings reveal optimism and ambition among young women in the creative sector, alongside uncertainty. While quantitative data show high satisfaction and confidence in career prospects, qualitative accounts highlight the persistence of structural barriers—particularly related to gendered access to resources, recognition, and leadership roles.

iv. Coping with the barriers

Qualitative data highlight the determination that sustains women despite financial and structural obstacles. As one FGD participant noted,

“The money we earn as models in Rwanda is often not enough ... but what keeps us going is passion, encouragement from family, and the strength to push on”

(FGD, female model, Kigali).

Similarly, a young writer explained how lack of trust in women's abilities forces her to persist against skepticism:

"No one is listening to you ... but what makes you keep pushing is because you want that thing and rest only when you reach it" (IDI, female writer, Kigali).

Such persistence is echoed in accounts of women viewing barriers as motivation to excel and become examples for others.

At the same time, respondents emphasized how evolving institutional practices and social attitudes are reshaping opportunities.

One key informant highlighted that the industry is becoming more accommodating in some institutions, providing *"breastfeeding spaces and flexible shifts for mothers"* (KII, male culinary artist, Kigali).



Others stressed that women's growing visibility is challenging long-held stereotypes:

"Women are just as capable ... the difference is that men entered the industry earlier" (FGD, female artist, youth center, Kigali).

However, barriers remain, including limited trust in women's work, greater household responsibilities, and, at times, exploitative practices such as sexual harassment in exchange for opportunities, as indicated above.

Overall, the combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence illustrates a dual reality. On the one hand, young women creatives in Rwanda report high levels of satisfaction, ambition, and resilience. On the other hand, their progress is tempered by enduring structural and cultural challenges, requiring continued institutional support, enforcement of protections, and broader societal change to translate optimism into sustained equity.

Section F. Experience of Harassment in the Workspace

Workplace harassment remains a critical barrier to gender equality and professional growth in Rwanda's creative sector. This section examines the nature and prevalence of harassment experienced by young women creatives, focusing on six dimensions: (i) uncomfortable comments, (ii) sexualized comments and communication, (iii) persistent sexualized behaviors, (iv) sexual propositions and actions, (v) denial of work following rejection of sexual propositions, and (vi) gendered task allocation. The data combine quantitative survey results with qualitative insights drawn from FGDs, IDIs with female creatives, and KIs with professionals and managers in the creative industry.

i. Uncomfortable comments

Over one-third of respondents reported being subject to uncomfortable comments sometimes (36.25%) or regularly (29%), while about 34.75% reported never experiencing such remarks (Table 15). These findings suggest that verbal discomfort is a common feature of workplace interactions in the creative sector.

Table 15. Experience with uncomfortable comments

	Frequency	Percent
0. Never	139	34.75
1. Yes, sometimes	145	36.25
2. Yes, regularly	116	29.00

Qualitative evidence suggests that uncomfortable comments often take subtle forms that are normalized in everyday work environments. In an IDI, a young female performer noted,

"Sometimes they say things that sound like compliments, but you feel it is not about your work — it is about how you look." Similarly, an FGD participant in Kigali remarked, *"You just learn to ignore it because if you react, they call you emotional or difficult."*

Such experiences illustrate how normalized verbal intrusions contribute to an uncomfortable environment for women.

ii. Sexualized comments, jokes, and communication

Experiences of sexualized comments, jokes, or communication were also significant. Table 16 shows that 18.00% of respondents reported encountering such behaviors sometimes, and 6.25% reported encountering them regularly. Although 75.75% reported never experiencing such incidents, a considerable minority still do.

Table 16. Experience with sexualized comments, jokes, and communication

	Frequency	Percent
Never	303	75.75
Yes, sometimes	72	18.00
Yes, regularly	25	6.25

Qualitative narratives reveal that such behaviors often emerge in informal settings, such as rehearsals, media production spaces, and collaborative projects. One IDI respondent, a visual artist, shared: *“In creative spaces, people excuse such jokes as being part of the industry culture — but it is harassment disguised as humor.”* In a KII, a film producer echoed this, noting: *“There is a thin line between being friendly and being inappropriate; many young women feel they cannot draw that line without risking their opportunities.”*

The blurred boundaries between social interaction and harassment can discourage women from fully participating in professional and informal networks, which play a significant role in securing “gigs” in the creative economy.

iii. Persistent sexualized comments, jokes, and communication

Persistent forms of sexualized behavior were reported by 40.5% of respondents sometimes and 18.5% regularly (Table 17). Such behaviors include verbal comments about the body or appearance, inappropriate flirting, or non-verbal cues such as prolonged staring and gestures with sexual connotations.

Table 17. Experience with persistent sexualised comments, jokes, and communication

	Frequency	Percent
0. Never	164	41.00
1. Yes, sometimes	162	40.50
2. Yes, regularly	74	18.50

An FGD participant in Kigali noted, *“You get used to it because it happens all the time — people think it is harmless, but it affects how safe you feel.”* In an IDI, a young designer also noted that *“When you reject those advances, they stop inviting you to projects.”* These repeated patterns reinforce a culture of tolerance for harassment and signal the need for stricter workplace codes of conduct in creative settings.

iv. Sexual proposition and actions

The majority of respondents (78%) indicated they had never experienced sexual propositions or actions, but a notable proportion (15%) reported that it happens sometimes, and up to 7% said it occurs regularly (Table 18).

Table 18. Experience with sexual propositions and actions

	Frequency	Percent
0. Never	312	78
1. Yes, sometimes	60	15
2. Yes, regularly	28	7

From the qualitative data, several women described situations where professional opportunities were tied to implicit or explicit sexual expectations. A female photographer revealed during an IDI that: *"Sometimes clients or producers suggest you could 'go far' if you become close to them. It is subtle, but you understand what they mean."* A KII female, film producer emphasized that such dynamics are not isolated: *"Power relations are at the center of this — women who depend on contracts or informal work arrangements are the most vulnerable."*

v. Forced sexual propositions and actions

Table 19 shows that 84.25% of survey respondents reported never experiencing forced sexual advances, and only 11.25% said such incidents occurred sometimes, and 4.5% regularly. Even if relatively infrequent, these figures represent serious violations of personal safety and professional integrity.

Table 19. Experience with forced sexual propositions and actions

	Frequency	Percent
0. Never	337	84.25
1. Yes, sometimes	45	11.25
2. Yes, regularly	18	4.50

Qualitative evidence, on the other hand, underscores that these coercive acts are often underreported. An IDI participant shared that, *"You cannot talk about it because people think you are exaggerating, and there is no system to protect you."* These accounts point to the need for confidential reporting mechanisms and institutional accountability to ensure safe work environments.

vi. Denial of work due to refusal of sexual propositions

The majority of survey respondents (71%) reported never being denied work due to refusing sexual propositions. In comparison, 22% indicated that it happens sometimes, and 7% said it occurs regularly, which reveals that although most participants have not encountered such experiences, a significant minority still face sexually coercive barriers in accessing employment opportunities.

Table 20. Denial of work due to refusal of sexual propositions

	Frequency	Percent
0. Never	284	71
1. Yes, sometimes	88	22
2. Yes, regularly	28	7

During an FGD in Kigali, a participant in the performing arts noted that *“When you say no, they just stop calling you for gigs.”* Similarly, a KII respondent said, *“Gatekeeping in the creative sector often hides behind personal relationships, and those who do not comply face silent exclusion.”* Such practices contribute to gendered inequities in access to work and undermine merit-based professional growth.

vii. Genderized tasks, such as making tea, welcoming visitors

Gendered task allocation remains another subtle form of workplace bias. About 29.75% reported performing such tasks sometimes, 9% reported doing so regularly, and 61.25% stated they had never faced this issue (Table 21).

Table 21. Genderized tasks, such as making tea, welcoming visitors

	Frequency	Percent
0. Never	245	61.25
1. Yes, sometimes	119	29.75
2. Yes, regularly	36	9

The qualitative narratives reveal that this pattern reflects enduring gender stereotypes. An IDI participant observed, *“Even in creative teams, women are the ones asked to host guests or prepare refreshments — it is seen as natural.”* A KII respondent added, *“These are small tasks, but they reinforce who is seen as professional and who is seen as supportive.”*

Such normalized practices perpetuate inequality and limit women’s recognition as core creative professionals. These stereotypes reinforce a sense of who belongs and who does not.

viii. Ever experienced harassment

Qualitative data illustrate how these experiences shape women's confidence and participation. As one dancer explained,

"When I go to audition or look for a gig, the first thing they ask is, 'Are you light-skinned?' ... Trainers even say things like, 'You are too big,' or 'Your stomach is too big.' That makes many young women lose interest in this career"

(FGD, female, model, youth center, Kigali).

Others noted how harassment operates through social stigma, with one respondent stating,

"People talk about how a woman who comes home at 3:00 AM was in a studio with men ... It is people's words that I have had to struggle with" *(IDI, female advertising & marketing artist, Kigali).*

Such attitudes reinforce stereotypes that equate female participation in the arts with immorality, particularly in fields such as acting or music.

More direct forms of harassment were also reported. Survey data show that between 15% and 29% of respondents experienced sexual propositions sometimes, and 7% and 12% regularly, while 22% indicated they had some-

times been denied work for refusing advances, and 7% regularly. Qualitative testimonies highlight how these behaviors often block career progress:

"Without beating around the bush ... sometimes a director will tell you, we need to sleep together first so I can help you get to that level" *(IDI, female performing artist, Kigali).*

Another young woman recalled,

"Our manager told me: 'You are the only girl who has not slept with me. No girl stays here without that.' After refusing, my pay was cut, and I eventually quit singing altogether" *(FGD, female, singer, youth center, Kigali).*

Such accounts demonstrate how harassment not only exploits individuals but also drives women out of the industry. Overall, while not all respondents reported direct harassment, the prevalence of uncomfortable comments, sexual propositions, and gendered tasks reflects deeply rooted structural and cultural issues that relegate women. The insights from FGDs, IDIs, and KIIs underscore that many women accept such behavior as part of industry culture, highlighting the urgent need for awareness programs, institutional safeguards, and gender-sensitive workplace policies to foster inclusive and respectful creative environments.

Section G. Gender Equity and Gender-based Challenges

Gender dynamics play a crucial role in shaping access to opportunities and career trajectories within Rwanda's creative sector. Although the industry is often portrayed as meritocratic and inclusive, the findings reveal that women continue to face structural and cultural barriers that influence their participation, visibility, and advancement. This section explores experiences of gender-based discrimination at different stages of creative work — from recruitment to workplace practices and recognition.

i. Ever experienced discrimination at a job interview or for opportunities

Survey results indicate that 42.5% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination during job interviews or when seeking creative opportunities, while 57.5% reported no such experiences (Figure 8).

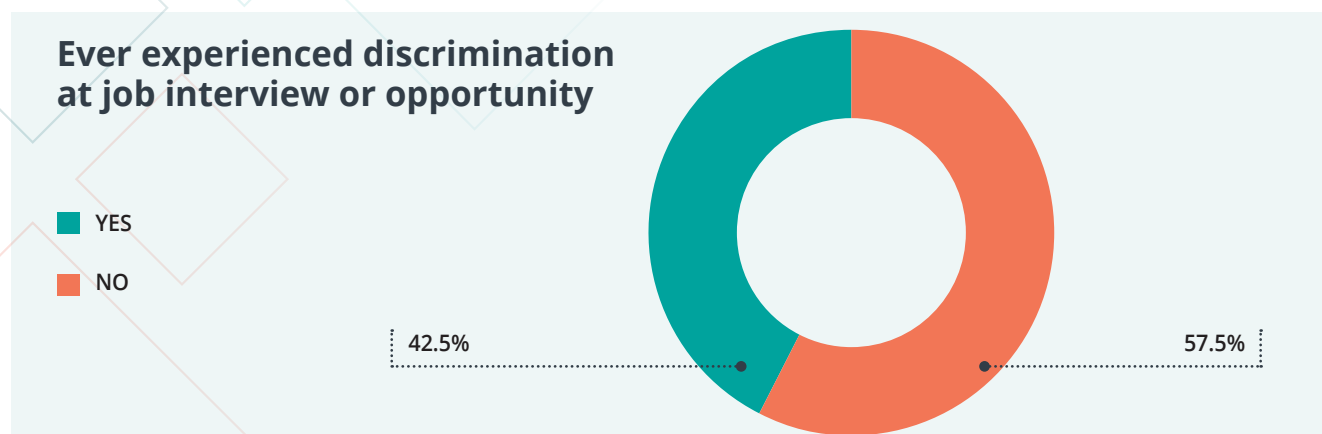


Figure 8. Ever experienced harassment at a job interview

Qualitative data underscore that such discrimination often manifests through appearance-based judgments, gender stereotypes, or biased assumptions about women's roles. As one FGD participant in Kigali explained:

"In places like hotels, they tend only to hire women who are considered physically attractive, with specific body shapes or sizes. Beauty does not mean someone is good at the job."

An IDI participant, a young performer, added:

"Sometimes they ask questions that have nothing to do with your skills — like your marital status or how you handle male attention."

These experiences highlight how recruitment processes often conflate professional merit with gendered and aesthetic expectations, reinforcing unequal access to creative opportunities.

ii. Know others who have faced discrimination.

Beyond personal experience, many respondents have witnessed or known others who have faced discrimination in creative spaces. In an IDI, a designer in Kigali said, *“You hear stories of women being asked for sexual favors to get opportunities. Even if it does not happen to you directly, it creates fear and discouragement.”*

Qualitative accounts also reveal that informal networks and favoritism often determine access to work, disadvantaging women who lack social connections or who resist exploitative norms. Women’s testimonies in this realm point to the persistence of indirect discrimination that undermines fairness and discourages women’s participation in competitive creative fields.

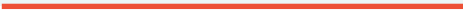
iii. Systemic or organized discrimination

Participants also identified systemic and organizational patterns that sustain gender inequality in the creative sector. These include unequal pay, limited leadership roles for women, and gendered assumptions about competence in technical or managerial functions.

A KII male respondent working in the media sector remarked:



“Women are still seen as suitable for administrative or supportive roles, while men dominate technical and decision-making positions.”



And an FGD participant in Kigali noted:



“When a woman becomes successful, people think it is because she had help from a man, not because she worked hard.”



Such perceptions reflect deep-rooted gender biases that shape employment outcomes and professional legitimacy and recognition.

Section H. Dignifying and Fulfilling Work

Figure 9 below depicts the findings across the three dimensions: dignifying work, fulfilling work, and safe workspaces. It shows consistently high positive responses, along with modest but notable disagreement regarding workplace safety.

i. Perception and experience of dignifying work

Regarding the dignity of work, 40.25% of respondents agree, and 52.25% strongly agree that their work is dignifying, while only 6.5% disagree and 1% remain neutral.

Qualitative responses reinforce these findings. One participant observed:

“For me, I would refer to my job as a dignifying one, because I studied to create innovations, so I feel that doing the things I studied [...] I would feel happy about it”

(IDI, female, designer, Kigali).

Another IDI in fashion design reflected:

This job of mine is respectable, because no one will despise you just because you are a tailor. They might look down on you, maybe seeing you as just an ordinary person, but people respect you because you earn an honest living [...] no bad behavior is involved. This job of mine is respectable, especially since it pays enough; it becomes even more decent.

ii. Perception and experience of fulfilling work

An identical pattern emerges for fulfilling work, with 92.5% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing. These results suggest that the creative sector fosters high levels of intrinsic job satisfaction. Furthermore, qualitative accounts highlight how dignity and fulfillment are closely tied to the opportunity to apply one's training and to align work with personal creative expression.

iii. Safe workspaces

Perceptions of workplace safety are similarly positive, though with slightly greater variation. As shown in Figure 9, 45.5% of respondents agree, and 42.75% strongly agree that their workspace is safe, while 8.25% disagree and 3.5% remain neutral.

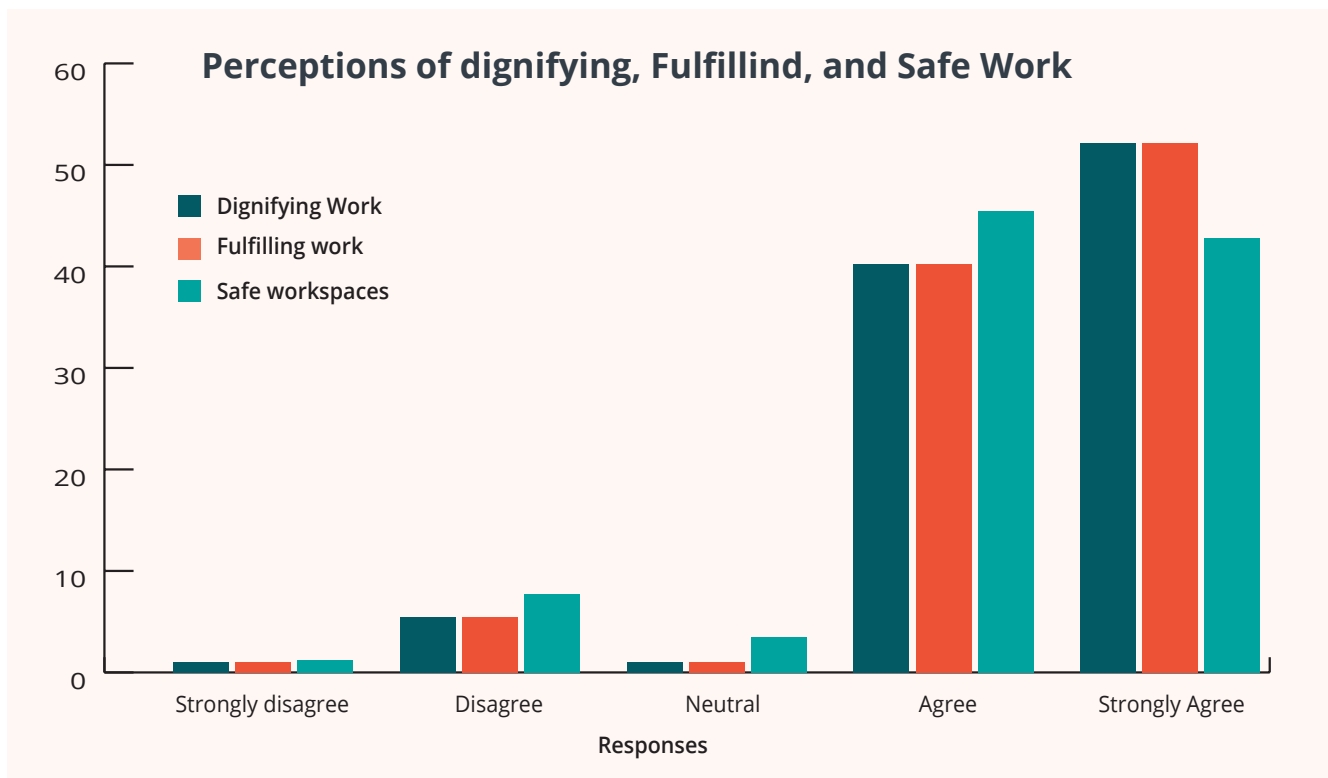


Figure 9. Perceptions of dignifying, fulfilling, and safe work

Despite these largely favorable perceptions, qualitative data suggest that systemic inequities continue to undermine inclusivity. Gender-specific challenges, in particular, remain salient. As one respondent explained:

If you are pregnant or have a newborn baby, and you have long working hours, there definitely should be something like a 'women's room' at work"

(FGD Hanga, Hub, Rusizi, Western province).

The data highlights how, despite widespread satisfaction, structural barriers in workplace design and access to opportunities persist, particularly for women.

In summary, the creative professionals report high levels of dignity, fulfillment, and safety in their work, reflecting deep intrinsic satisfaction and pride.

iv. Inclusion in workspaces

Qualitative data from women creatives in Kigali (FGDs), IDIs with emerging practitioners, and KIs highlight persistent barriers and enablers of inclusion in the creative sector.

Access to resources: Many female creatives reported that limited access to funding, studio space, and equipment restricts participation in professional projects. One FGD participant noted:

“Without access to proper tools or materials, it is impossible to compete with well-resourced peers”

(FGD, female photographer, Kigali).

An artist from upcountry similarly pointed to the impact of financial constraints: *“Travel and accommodation costs to attend city-based events often exclude talented individuals from rural areas from participating”* (IDI, Nyagatare, Eastern Province).

Some of the key informants also observed that limited funding channels disproportionately favor urban-based applicants.

Representation and voice: Inclusion is also affected by underrepresentation in decision-making and program selection. Most creatives highlighted that exhibitions and residencies tend to favor familiar networks, marginalizing rural-born and female creatives. One interviewee stated, *“Most projects are given to people the organizers already know, making it hard for new voices to emerge”* (IDI, Kigali). During an FGD in Nyagatare, Eastern province, most participants noted that selection committees rarely include diverse

perspectives from the countryside, inadvertently limiting equitable access for rural-based creatives.

Spatial and network barriers: Physical distance and social networks further shape inclusion. Youth creatives described difficulties in accessing urban-centric events due to transportation costs, while others noted that informal connections often determine who receives mentorship or commissions. *“If you are not part of the circle, opportunities rarely reach you,”* reported a participant during an FGD in Kigali.

Disability: Female creatives with disabilities were few in number, indicating under-representation of this group of creatives. However, some did participate in FGDs in Kigali, where one creative with physical disability observed that *“People with disabilities also have talent, but most of the time we are overlooked and lack support to thrive as creatives. Others are only exploited and paid very little for their creativity.”*

These findings suggest that inclusion in creative workspaces requires not only equitable representation and policies but also practical interventions such as decentralized programming, financial support for emerging and rural creatives, and deliberate network expansion to broaden access and inclusion.

5. Discussion

The findings resonate with broader research on gendered inequities in creative industries across Africa and beyond. The themes below provide a summary discussion of the findings.

i. Age, Retention, and Career Sustainability

The predominantly youthful profile of respondents (mean age 24.6 years) underscores both the vibrancy and precarity of Rwanda's creative sector. This pattern reflects a global trend in which creative industries attract younger entrants but struggle with retention, career progression, and long-term sustainability (Banks & O'Connor, 2020; Throsby, 2019). In Rwanda, the concentration of young creatives presents opportunities for employment generation and innovation. Yet, it also raises questions about the durability of creative careers and the inclusiveness of growth, particularly for women. It may also suggest that the creative sector appeals to early-career individuals but may not offer sufficient pathways for advancement or stability into later stages of life. These conditions are likely gendered, as women often face additional constraints in balancing creative work with caregiving and domestic responsibilities (Chant & Sweetman, 2012). This imbalance may help explain why older women are less visible in the creative workforce.

ii. Education, Skills, and Professionalization

The respondents' educational profiles revealed that many creatives have some level of formal or informal training. The pattern reflects the sector's openness to individuals without advanced academic credentials, consistent with global trends that value talent and practical experience over formal qualifications (Gill, 2014). However, the relatively low proportion of degree and postgraduate holders

may signal structural weaknesses within the sector, including limited opportunities for professional advancement and low income that deter highly educated individuals from pursuing long-term creative careers. Nonetheless, it is also possible that some creatives eager to obtain celebrity status and quick income have little patience to undergo years of training, particularly where certification is not required.

At the same time, the findings point to growing professionalization, as institutions such as Nyundo Arts School and the University of Rwanda's creative design programs expand access to formal training. However, many creatives—especially women and those in rural areas—continue to rely on short-term or informal training opportunities due to financial constraints and the limited availability of specialized programs outside Kigali. This unequal access to training reinforces skill gaps and perpetuates gendered disparities in career advancement and income generation (UNESCO, 2021).

iii. Gendered Care Responsibilities

The study revealed that most respondents are single and child-free, though a significant minority combine creative work with parenting. The prevalence of informal childcare arrangements, such as bringing children to workplaces or relying on extended family, points to the lack of affordable, accessible childcare systems. As women remain the primary caregivers in many Rwandan households, these constraints limit their capacity to engage in flexible, often irregular, creative work. This can hinder their career progression

and contribute to persistent gender inequities in the sector. Similar findings elsewhere suggest that inadequate work–life balance mechanisms contribute to women’s underrepresentation and slower career advancement in the creative industries (Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015). Policy measures that promote parental leave, flexible scheduling, and workplace childcare would therefore be crucial in addressing gender disparities in participation and progression.

iv. Workplace Dynamics, Gender Disparities, Discrimination, and Harassment

Workplace experiences highlight persistent gender disparities. Nearly half of respondents reported working in male-dominated environments, particularly in technical or leadership roles such as production and media, reflecting well-documented gendered divisions of labor within global creative markets, where women tend to be concentrated in lower-status or “feminized” subsectors (Morna & Makamure, 2010). Although digital platforms and social media have opened new spaces for visibility and entrepreneurship, women’s offline professional networks remain limited by stereotypes, unequal access to resources, and exclusion from leadership roles.

Discrimination and harassment emerged as significant barriers. Over 60% of participants reported some form of gender-based discrimination and bias in the workplace. While overt coercion is less common according to the findings, the cumulative effect of persistent comments, unwanted propositions, gendered expectations, and stereotypes correctly

undermines women’s confidence, sense of belonging, and safety at the workplace. These findings are echoed by UNESCO (2018), which reports on the persistent exclusion of women in cultural industries. Accounts of sexual harassment and coercion also align with what Miller (2016) calls “everyday sexism” in creative workplaces. These experiences are compounded by structural inequities—such as unpaid caregiving responsibilities—that further limit women’s professional mobility. Addressing these inequities requires not only the enforcement of workplace protections but also broader cultural change to dismantle gender norms that normalize bias and abuse.

v. Mentorship, Institutional Support, and Career Progression

The study also underscores the limited availability of mentorship and institutional support structures. Many creatives work in informal networks with minimal guidance or recognition, leading to highly individualized, uncertain career development. This lack of structured mentorship and professional pathways contributes to precarious employment, especially among women and young artists who often supplement creative work with other income-generating activities. The absence of institutional recognition of creative work as a legitimate career path further undermines motivation and long-term commitment.

Despite these challenges, the findings also reveal resilience and agency among Rwandan creatives. Many women expressed optimism about sustaining long-term careers, framing adversity as a source of determination

and innovation. This resilience aligns with evidence from other African contexts where women leverage entrepreneurial spirit and community networks to navigate structural inequities (Alper & Bussell, 2019). Emerging institutional practices, such as enforcing maternity leave and implementing targeted financial schemes for women creatives, signal progress, although significant implementation gaps persist.

vi. Cross-Cutting Structural Issues

The broader challenges shaping Rwanda's creative sector extend beyond gender to encompass systemic barriers related to funding, skills development, market access, inclusion, and regulation. Limited access to funding and material resources remains one of the most pressing constraints. In Kigali, competition for grants and studio spaces is intense, while rural creatives face geographical isolation that restricts participation in funding and markets. This pattern mirrors urban-rural disparities observed across Africa, where centralized creative infrastructures favor capital cities (Nantulya & Muriuki, 2021).

Skills development gaps continue to limit professional growth, particularly for those outside Kigali. Training opportunities are often inaccessible or not affordable, exacerbating inequities in technical capacity and innovation (UNESCO, 2021). Market access challenges further compound these limitations, as weak infrastructure, high transportation costs, and limited digital connectivity constrain commercialization and visibility (Nurse et al., 2021).

Inclusion and equity remain persistent concerns. Women, youth, persons with disabilities, and rural creatives are underrepresented in leadership, curatorial roles, and decision-making spaces. Such patterns reproduce systemic inequities and limit the diversity of cultural expression (UNCTAD, 2023; Banks & Milestone, 2011). Policy interventions must therefore target equitable participation, leadership development, and gender representation.

Finally, policy and regulatory gaps—particularly in intellectual property protection—undermine confidence in the sector. Many creatives remain unaware of their rights, and enforcement mechanisms are weak (WIPO, 2020). Strengthening legal literacy and IP protection is essential to promoting innovation, attracting investment, and securing fair compensation.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that Rwanda's creative sector presents a promising avenue for youth employment and women's empowerment; however, it remains marked by persistent gender inequities. While young women creatives demonstrate resilience, ambition, and increasing visibility, structural and cultural barriers continue to undermine their full participation. These include, but are not limited to, discrimination, harassment, occupational segregation, and unequal caregiving burdens for women creatives.

Recommendations

The following recommendations would help Rwanda to consolidate its gains in gender equity, empower young women creatives, while strengthening its position as a leader in gender equality programs and in Africa's growing creative economy.

- 1. Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks:** Enhance enforcement of labor laws and gender-sensitive policies, including mechanisms for addressing harassment, pay equity, and workplace discrimination.
- 2. Expand Training and Education Pathways:** Increase access to affordable, accredited training programs in creative disciplines, with targeted scholarships and mentorship for young women.
- 3. Promote Gender-Sensitive Work Environments:** Encourage creative sector organizations to adopt gender equity policies, including flexible working arrangements, safe reporting mechanisms, and childcare support.
- 4. Leverage Digital Platforms:** Support women's use of social media and digital tools for professional networking, market access, and portfolio development, while addressing online harassment.
- 5. Address Cultural Norms:** Implement awareness campaigns and community dialogues to challenge gender stereotypes that limit women's participation in creative fields.
- 6. Support Women Entrepreneurs:** Provide tailored financial products, incubation programs, and mentorship to strengthen women's creative enterprises and ensure sustainability.
- 7. Conduct Research and Monitoring:** Establish mechanisms for regular monitoring of gender equity in the creative sector, linking Rwanda's progress to regional and global initiatives on inclusion in the creative economy.

8. Policy and Programmatic Recommendations

The study recommends strengthening institutional and policy frameworks to advance gender equality in Rwanda's creative economy. Gender should be systematically mainstreamed into national creative industry policies to ensure inclusive participation and fair representation. Dedicated funding mechanisms or grants targeting women-led creative initiatives would help overcome financial barriers. At the same time, robust legal and regulatory frameworks addressing workplace harassment are needed to protect women creatives and promote safe, equitable work environments.

Empowering creative associations and guilds offers another pathway for transformative change. The interviews revealed that strengthening existing guilds and supporting the creation of new ones can enhance advocacy and professional solidarity. Gender-responsive and inclusive codes of conduct should be improved within these associations to provide structured mentorship and peer-learning opportunities for young women to build leadership capacity and confidence.

Inclusive employer practices should also be institutionalized. Policies must encourage the adoption of workplace anti-harassment measures, equal pay, transparent recruitment systems, and gender-sensitive leadership training. These measures would help shift industry culture toward fairness and accountability.

Cultural change and public awareness are equally vital; it can be done through national campaigns celebrating women creatives and their achievements to challenge stereotypes.

Integrating arts and gender equality education into school curricula and partnering with media to promote positive portrayals of women creatives will further reinforce inclusion and recognition.

Furthermore, the study recommends establishing support systems and coping mechanisms to sustain women's engagement in the sector. Peer networks and informal mentorship groups can offer solidarity and shared learning. Access to mental health and psycho-social support, along with training in financial literacy and business management, is essential for women, youth, and rural creatives. Establishing women-centered creative hubs or incubators would further enhance access to shared work spaces, resources, and professional opportunities.

Finally, advancing gender equality in the creative sector requires multi-stakeholder collaboration. The government, creative associations, the private sector, academia, and civil society should collaborate to establish a national platform for coordination and dialogue. Public-private partnerships can mobilize investment in creative enterprises, while regular consultations between policymakers and women or youth creatives can ensure that policies remain responsive and inclusive.

Overall, these recommendations highlight the need for systemic transformation—from gender-blind frameworks and male-dominated guilds to inclusive, empowering structures that recognize and value women's creative labor. Policy and programmatic actions should not only protect women's rights but also foster their visibility, agency, and leadership within Rwanda's growing creative economy.

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