

Evidence Brief

Young Women in Rwanda's Creative Sector: **Opportunities and Gender Barriers**



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Authors

Kadiata Gueye, El Hadji Mor SY, Jolly Rubagiza, Dieudonne Uwiyeze.

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Executive Summary



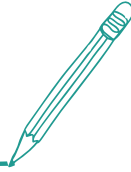
This evidence brief derives from a study of 400 young women creatives across diverse subsectors in Rwanda, highlighting both their contributions to the country's creative economy and the gendered constraints shaping their careers. The findings show that Rwanda's creative sector is generally youthful and increasingly professionalized, with nearly 90% of participants aged between 18 and 30 and approximately 68% reporting formal training in their field. Some creatives responded working full-time and expressed commitment to long-term careers in the creative industries.

However, beneath this optimism lies a pattern of structural and normative barriers that limit women's full participation and advancement. Participants reported experiences of discrimination, restricted access to technical and leadership roles, as well as professional recognition. While the majority expressed satisfaction with their career progression, qualitative accounts reveal persistent stereotypes, informal gatekeeping networks, and unequal pay practices that disadvantage women. Gender-based harassment, including sexualized comments, coercive propositions, and retaliation after refusal, emerged as a significant concern, compounded by the predominance of informal work arrangements. Additional constraints such as childcare responsibilities, unequal household labor, limited access to finance and equipment, and urban-rural disparities further shape women's participation and continuity in creative work.

Social media platforms have expanded opportunities for visibility, networking, and market access; yet digital engagement also exposes women to new forms of harassment and reputational risk. These inequities undermine individual career trajectories and the sector's broader potential for productivity and inclusive growth. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated, multi-level action across government institutions, creative associations, private enterprises, development partners, civil society, and educational institutions. Priority interventions include strengthening gender-responsive labour standards and enforcement mechanisms; institutionalizing anti-harassment frameworks and confidential reporting systems; expanding access to finance, training, and mentorship for women creatives; promoting women's leadership within industry bodies; supporting childcare and flexible work arrangements; and integrating gender equality and rights awareness into creative education and professional development programs.

Consequently, sustained and collaborative action would bridge the gap between Rwanda's formal commitments to gender equality and the lived realities of women in the creative sector. By eliminating structural barriers and fostering safe, inclusive, and equitable work environments, Rwanda can unlock the full potential of its creative economy as a space where young women participate actively, safely, and with dignity while contributing meaningfully to national development.

Introduction



In Rwanda, the creative sector is an avenue for economic diversification, youth employment, and cultural innovation. Over the past decade, it has expanded rapidly, driven by a youthful population, growing digital connectivity, and national commitments to entrepreneurship and innovation. Young people _aged 15–35_ are central to this growth. They contribute as performers, designers, digital content creators, cultural entrepreneurs, and custodians of traditional and contemporary artistic expression. Through their engagement in traditional cultural expressions, performing arts, visual arts, design, audiovisual production, advertising and marketing, cultural sites, new media, creative services, and publishing, they reinforce the sector's economic and social relevance while shaping Rwanda's evolving cultural narratives.

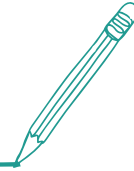
Despite this momentum, emerging empirical evidence indicates that Rwanda's creative sector remains marked by persistent gendered disparities. Gender norms and structural barriers, such as unequal access to resources, markets, and professional networks; limited representation in leadership and technical roles; discriminatory practices; and exposure to harassment, constrain women's full participation, career progression, and sustained engagement in creative enterprises. While Rwanda has made notable progress in advancing gender equality in governance, education, and policy frameworks, comparatively less attention has been paid to addressing inequities in the creative industries. This gap risks limiting the sector's potential as a space for inclusive and dignified work.

This evidence brief presents key findings from a multimethod study conducted in Rwanda as part of a broader seven-country African initiative spanning Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, and Uganda. In Rwanda, the study was led by the University of Rwanda in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). The research engaged 400 young women creatives across the four provinces (Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western) and the City of Kigali, representing diverse subsectors and career stages. Using a mixed-method design that combined a structured survey with in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, storytelling, creative representation, and photovoice, the study examined the nature, extent, and drivers of gender inequities in the sector.

This evidence brief aims to catalyze reflection and motivate action. It seeks to inform policies and programs that foster a gender-equitable creative sector in Rwanda by illuminating the lived experiences of young women creatives and identifying structural and normative barriers.

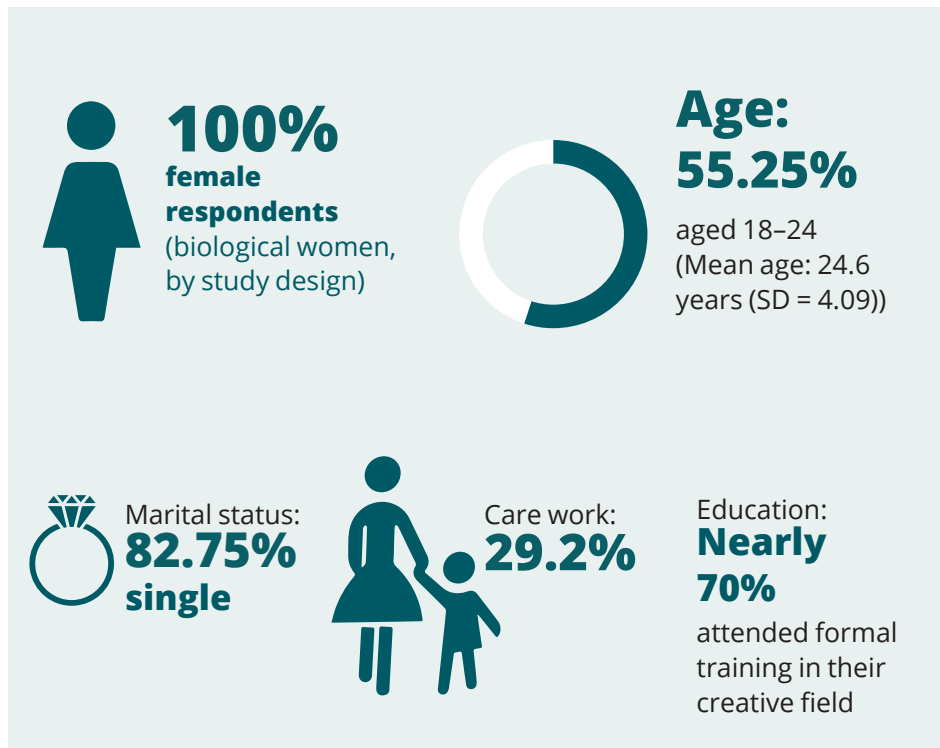
400
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Context and Study Profile



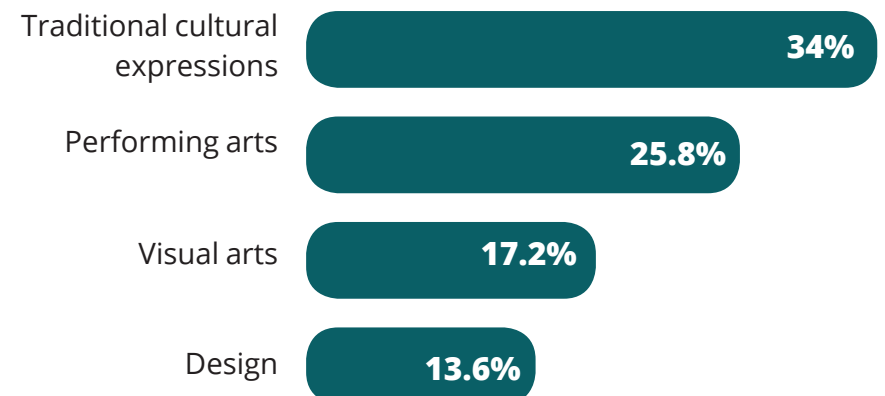
Rwanda's creative sector is a growing space for youth employment, cultural innovation, and entrepreneurship. This study reveals a complex reality for young women navigating the sector.

Characteristics of Interviewed Women Creatives:



Most of the respondents have completed secondary education (57%), with smaller proportions holding diplomas (13%), bachelor's degrees (9.5%), and postgraduate qualifications (0.75%). Training pathways include formal arts institutions, university-level programs, informal and NGO-supported training initiatives, and youth talent incubation programs.

1 Creative Subsectors:



Smaller shares in cultural sites, creative services, and publishing

2 Work Status



However, qualitative findings show that “full-time” often reflects identity rather than income stability. Many creatives experience irregular contracts, seasonal demand, and low or unpredictable pay.

3 Care Responsibilities



- **29.2%** had children,
- **22.7%** lived in households with at least one member requiring special care, such as the elderly or disabled.
- common childcare arrangements include: Babysitter/nanny (28.21%), school (10.26%), taking children to work (8.55%), day-care (8.55%), partner/spouse (3.42%), other arrangements (25.64%).

Many combine the above strategies. Women bear most childcare duties, limiting participation in irregular creative work, slowing career progress, and reinforcing inequality.

4 Social Media as Economic Infrastructure



91.5%
of respondents use social media professionally.

- Platforms function as portfolios, marketing tools, client acquisition platforms, and informal distribution channels.
- Digital visibility has reduced entry barriers but increased competition and exposure to harassment.

5 Gender Composition and Workplace Dynamics

Workspaces are reported as:



44.57% male dominated
43.48% female-dominated
11.96% gender-balanced

Despite near parity in distribution, technical and leadership roles remain male-dominated, and trust deficits persist in high-budget projects.

6 Discrimination and Career Barriers



Experiences include client bias, appearance-based judgments, unequal professional credibility, and extra burden of proof for competence.

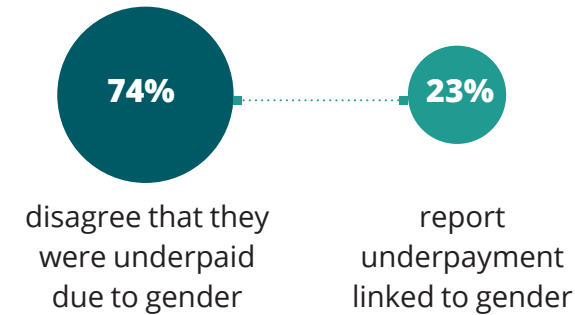
7 Harassment in the Creative Sector



- ☐ **36.25%** experience uncomfortable comments sometimes
- ☐ **29%** experience them regularly
- ☐ **29%** report sexual propositions sometimes
- ☐ **12%** report regular sexual propositions
- ☐ **22%** have sometimes been denied work after
- ☐ **7%** regularly denied work

Harassment often goes unreported due to a lack of formal complaint mechanisms coupled with informal contracting structures, fear of retaliation, and normalization of abuse.

8 Gender Pay Gap



Qualitative findings suggest that informal-sector practices undermine pay equity despite legal guarantees of equality.

9 Career Expectations and Aspirations

- 88.25%** were satisfied with current career progression
- 77%** believed opportunities are equal
- 96.25%** aim for long-term careers
- 89.75%** feel they are thriving

Young women demonstrate strong resilience, though sustainability concerns remain tied to income instability, limited mentorship, unequal access to funding, and informal gate-keeping networks.

10 Inclusion and Structural Inequities

Barriers extend beyond gender to include the following

- ☐ Rural creatives excluded from urban-centered opportunities
- ☐ Disability under-representation
- ☐ Limited access to equipment and funding
- ☐ Network-based project allocation

Inclusion requires structural—not only symbolic—interventions.

Policy Implications



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1. Strengthen Anti-Harassment Frameworks:

- Confidential reporting systems
- Clear sector-wide codes of conduct
- Enforcement in informal creative spaces

2. Improve Pay Transparency:

- Standardized rate guidelines
- Public awareness of pay equity laws
- Monitoring of informal contracting practices

3. Expand Inclusive Infrastructure:

- Decentralized creative hubs beyond Kigali
- Rural mobility grants
- Equipment access funds
- Disability-inclusive programming

4. Promote Women's Leadership:

- Mentorship networks
- Leadership incubation programs
- Gender-balanced selection committees

5. Address Unpaid Care Constraints

- Making funds for childcare services available, like community Early Childhood Centres (ECCDC) in creative hubs, & encourage family-friendly event scheduling.
- Pilot childcare support during festivals and training programs.
- Reward private sector creative businesses that address child care concerns in the workplace

Conclusion



Rwanda's creative sector presents a dual reality. On one hand, there is high dignity, strong ambition among young women, and expanding digital opportunities. On the other hand, persistent harassment, informal pay inequities, structural gate-keeping, and cultural stereotypes remain. Bridging this gap requires enforcement, institutional safeguards, and cultural transformation to ensure that creative work is equitable and safe for all women.

Reference

Uwizeye, D., & Rubagiza, J. (2025). *Exploring gender inequities in the creative sector in Rwanda (project report)*—University of Rwanda & International Center for Research on Women (ICRW).



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