



BE RWANDA WISE · DOING BUSINESS IN RWANDA

The guide for foreign and Rwandan investors

Chapter 7 of 11

Intellectual Property, Data & Technology

Rwanda protects intellectual property through a single 2024 statute administered by the Rwanda Development Board, regulates personal data through the National Cyber Security Authority, and governs online trade, payments and digital assets through a set of laws and regulations renewed in 2025 and 2026. Foreign businesses face the same rules as Rwandan ones, but registration, local representation and data storage requirements fall on them with particular force. This chapter sets out the rules on intellectual property, data and technology as they stand at 10 October 2026.

Reviewed 10 October 2026. Prepared by a commercial lawyer with over 30 years' international experience. Legal and tax information, not legal advice. Rates, thresholds and procedures change: confirm anything important with the relevant authority or an advocate registered with the Rwanda Bar Association before you act. Laws are published in Kinyarwanda, English and French in the Official Gazette; check the official text before relying on a translation.

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Contents

7 Chapter overview

7.1 The IP law and trade marks

7.2 Patents, utility models and designs

7.3 Copyright, software and digital content

7.4 IP enforcement and anti-counterfeiting

7.5 Licensing, franchising and technology transfer

7.6 Personal data protection

7.7 Cybersecurity and critical information

7.8 E-commerce, fintech and AI

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Intellectual Property, Data & Technology

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AT A GLANCE

Governing law

- [Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property \(in force 31 July 2024\)](#)
- [Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 relating to the protection of personal data and privacy](#)
- [Law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cyber crimes](#)
- [Law N° 26/2017 of 31/05/2017 establishing the National Cyber Security Authority](#)
- [Law N° 011/2026 of 26/02/2026 relating to competition and consumer protection \(e-commerce licensing and consumer rights\)](#)
- [Law N° 24/2016 of 18/06/2016 governing information and communication technologies \(electronic transactions and signatures\)](#)
- [Law N° 023/2026 of 25/05/2026 regulating virtual asset business](#)

Who you will deal with

- Rwanda Development Board (RDB), Office of the Registrar General, Intellectual Property Division: registration of trade marks, patents, utility models, designs and geographical indications, optional copyright registration, and recordal of assignments and licences
- National Cyber Security Authority (NCSA), under the Office of the President, and its Data Protection and Privacy Office: data protection registration, authorisations for transfer and storage abroad, breach notifications, cybersecurity standards and the national incident response team
- Rwanda Inspectorate, Competition and Consumer Protection Authority (RICA), the "Regulatory Authority" under Law N° 011/2026: competition, consumer protection and the licensing of e-commerce operators and online intermediaries
- Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA) and the Ministry of ICT and Innovation (MINICT): ICT licensing, electronic signature certification and the National AI Policy
- National Bank of Rwanda (BNR) and Capital Market Authority (CMA): payment service providers, regulatory sandboxes, cyber and outsourcing rules for regulated institutions, and virtual asset service providers
- Ministry of Youth and Arts, the Commercial Court and Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA) Customs: copyright royalties, IP litigation and border suspension of counterfeit goods

What changed in 2024–26

- Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property came into

Key figures

Trade mark protection	10 years from filing, renewable; 60-day opposition after Gazette publication
Patent, utility model, design	20, 10 and 15 years from filing
Copyright	Author's life plus 50 years; no registration needed
IP company tax rate	3% corporate income tax on foreign-sourced royalties (registered investors)
Data protection registration	Mandatory, no fee; certificate within 30 working days
Personal data breach	48 hours to NCSA; full report within 72 hours
Online purchase withdrawal	7 days from receipt; refund within 15 days
Digital services tax	1.5% of gross Rwandan-sourced revenue (implementing Order awaited)

force on 31 July 2024, replacing the 2009 law and introducing a 14-day cure period, six-month renewal grace periods, Madrid deemed acceptance, provisional patent specifications, pre-grant patent opposition and statutory trade secret protection.

- Law N° 014/2025 of 27/05/2025, published on 29 May 2025, inserted Article 50 bis into the income tax law, a 1.5% digital services tax on companies with a substantial national presence, pending a Ministerial Order on scope.
- Law N° 011/2026 of 26/02/2026 relating to competition and consumer protection, published on 4 March 2026, replaced Law N° 36/2012, required e-commerce operators and online intermediaries to be licensed by RICA and gave existing operators six months to comply.
- Law N° 023/2026 of 25/05/2026 regulating virtual asset business, published on 28 May 2026, made the CMA the licensing authority for virtual asset service providers, with implementing regulations still to come.
- Ministerial Order N° 001/MOYA/2026 of 08/09/2026, published on 9 September 2026, made the competent authority the collective management institution for copyright and related rights, covering non-members for broadcasting, public performance and digital uses.

Who this applies to. The intellectual property, data, cyber and e-commerce rules apply in the same way to Rwandan and foreign businesses, and Paris Convention, WTO and Berne Convention nationals enjoy national treatment. The differences are procedural but significant. A foreign applicant without a residence or principal place of business in Rwanda must file industrial property through an authorised Rwandan agent; a data controller or processor outside Rwanda that processes data of people in Rwanda must register with NCSA and appoint a representative in Rwanda; personal data must be stored in Rwanda unless the registration certificate authorises storage abroad; and an online seller must show a physical address in Rwanda and hold a RICA licence. Nationals and companies of East African Community (EAC) and COMESA states have no special regime and are treated as foreign.

Four regimes for the knowledge economy

Rwanda markets itself as a technology and services hub, and the law has followed. Four bodies of rules matter to an investor whose value lies in brands, inventions, software, content or data. **Intellectual property** is governed by Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property, which covers every category of right in one statute and is administered in practice by the Rwanda Development Board (RDB). **Personal data** is governed by Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 relating to the protection of personal data and privacy, supervised by the National Cyber Security Authority (NCSA). **Cybersecurity** rests on Law N° 26/2017 establishing NCSA and Law N° 60/2018 on cyber crimes, supplemented by sector rules of the National Bank of Rwanda (BNR). **Digital commerce** is governed by the electronic transactions provisions of Law N° 24/2016 governing ICT and, since March 2026, the e-commerce and consumer rules of Law N° 011/2026, with separate regimes for payments, regulatory sandboxes and, since May 2026, virtual assets.

Article 11 of Law N° 006/2021 of 05/02/2021 on Investment Promotion and Facilitation guarantees investors' intellectual property and technology-transfer rights, as explained in [The Investment Code 2021](#). The statutes in this chapter give that guarantee its content.

Registering and protecting brands, inventions and designs

Exclusive rights over industrial property arise only on registration, and between independent claimants the first to file wins (Articles 253 and 264 of the IP Law). A foreign applicant whose residence or principal place of business is outside Rwanda must act through an authorised Rwandan industrial property agent (Article 251). A trade mark application is examined, published in the Official Gazette within 30 days of examination and open to opposition for 60 days, and a registration lasts 10 years from filing, renewable indefinitely, but may be removed after three years of non-use. Rwanda is bound by the Madrid Protocol, and a designation of Rwanda is deemed accepted if no decision is notified within 12 months. These rules are in [The IP law and trade marks](#).

Patents last 20 years, utility model certificates 10 and registered designs 15. The 2024 law introduced provisional specifications and pre-grant opposition, and RDB's published procedure points applicants to the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization (ARIPO) for substantive examination. Two exclusions stand out: computer programs per se, with an applicant for a computer-implemented invention waiving copyright in the same subject matter, and pharmaceutical products, to be specified by an Order of the health Minister that had not appeared at 10 October 2026. Compulsory licences, the PCT and Harare routes and employee inventions are covered in [Patents, utility models and industrial designs](#).

Copyright, software and enforcement

Copyright arises without registration and lasts for the author's life plus 50 years. Computer programs and original databases are protected; economic rights in works created under a creative employment contract are deemed assigned to the employer and commissioned works belong to the commissioner unless a written contract says otherwise, but assignments and licences must be in writing, signed by both parties and state their territory, or they are presumed limited to the place of signature. Since 9 September 2026 a Ministerial Order has placed broadcasting, public performance and digital uses

under state collective management covering non-members, with royalties split 70% to right holders, 20% to administration and 10% to creative-industry promotion. See [Copyright, software and digital content](#).

Enforcement tools are strong on paper: ex parte court orders decided within three working days, destruction of counterfeit goods, damages or an account of profits, an order to name suppliers, customs suspension of counterfeit imports, and criminal penalties of up to five years' imprisonment with fines multiplied by ten for companies. The deadlines are tight, notably 10 working days after a customs notice to show that court proceedings have started, and goods in transit are outside the border measures. The Commercial Court hears IP disputes at first instance. See [IP enforcement and anti-counterfeiting](#).

Licensing, technology transfer and IP holding

Patent and trade mark assignments and licences become valid and enforceable only once recorded with RDB, which may refuse to record them if they contain anti-competitive clauses such as no-challenge terms, exclusive grant-backs, tying or export bans. The new competition law adds rules on vertical agreements and on the use of intellectual property to foreclose markets. Rwanda has no franchise statute, so franchising rests on contract law and the trade mark licence rules; trade secrets are protected as a form of unfair competition. On the tax side, the Investment Code offers a 3% corporate income tax rate on foreign-sourced royalties to a registered investor operating as an intellectual property company that meets substance conditions, and royalties it pays are exempt from withholding tax. See [Technology transfer, franchising and licensing](#) and [Investment incentives](#).

Personal data and cybersecurity

Law N° 058/2021 applies to controllers and processors in Rwanda and to those abroad who process the data of people located in Rwanda. Every controller and processor must register with NCSA, which issues a certificate within 30 working days and charges no fee; every company in practice needs a data protection officer; and a non-resident must appoint a representative in Rwanda. Personal data must be stored in Rwanda unless the registration certificate authorises storage abroad, and transfers abroad need an NCSA authorisation with safeguards or another statutory ground. Breaches must be reported to NCSA within 48 hours and fully within 72. Administrative fines run from RWF 2 million to RWF 5 million or 1% of global turnover, and criminal fines on companies reach 5% of annual turnover. See [Personal data protection](#).

NCSA sets minimum cybersecurity standards for public institutions, the financial sector and essential service providers, and Law N° 60/2018 requires service providers to report immediately when their systems are used to commit an offence and punishes companies with fines of 30% to 70% of the year's profits. Banks and other BNR-regulated institutions must notify BNR of a cyber incident within two hours. The Presidential Order designating critical information infrastructure had not been located. See [Cybersecurity and critical information](#).

E-commerce, fintech and AI

Electronic records, contracts and signatures are recognised under Law N° 24/2016. Since 4 March 2026 Law N° 011/2026 has required e-commerce operators and online intermediaries to be licensed by the Rwanda Inspectorate, Competition and Consumer Protection Authority (RICA), to show their identity, registration number and a physical address in Rwanda, and to give consumers seven days to withdraw from an online purchase, with refunds within 15 days. A 1.5% digital services tax has been enacted but awaits its implementing order. Payment service providers are licensed by BNR in four categories with capital from RWF 30 million to RWF 300 million, BNR's sandbox allows testing for up to 12 months, extendable by up to 12 more, and the Capital Market Authority (CMA) licenses virtual asset service providers under the May 2026 law. Rwanda has a National AI Policy, and Cabinet approved a National Artificial Intelligence Agency in June 2026, but there is no AI statute; the data protection rules on automated decisions and impact assessments apply. See [E-commerce, fintech and AI](#).

How to use this chapter

Start with what the business owns. Brand owners should read [The IP law and trade marks](#) before launch; technology and manufacturing businesses [Patents, utility models and industrial designs](#); software, media and venue operators [Copyright, software and digital content](#); and anyone facing copies or counterfeits [IP enforcement and anti-counterfeiting](#). Groups licensing rights into Rwanda or holding IP there should continue with [Technology transfer, franchising and licensing](#). Every business that holds customer or employee data should read [Personal data protection](#) and [Cybersecurity and critical information](#), and online sellers, payment firms and AI developers [E-commerce, fintech and AI](#).

Each section ends with the Be Rwanda Wise FAQs on the subject, the official sources and a question you can put to Rwandabot, the AI legal-information chatbot, about your own facts. The guide states the law at 10 October 2026. Much of this field is moving: new IP fee, agent and appeal orders (Cabinet approved a Ministerial Order on industrial property fees and customs security on 4 March 2026, but it had not been located in the Official Gazette), the health Minister's pharmaceutical order, collective management tariffs, RICA's e-commerce regulations, the digital services tax order, NCSA regulations and the virtual asset regulations were all awaited. Check the position again before relying on it in 2027, and take advice from a Rwandan advocate or authorised IP agent on any filing or dispute.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

- WIPO Lex: Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property (Official Gazette n° Special of 31/07/2024, English, French and Kinyarwanda texts) — <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/22672>
- Rwanda Development Board: business procedure, register a trade mark (steps, documents, fees and times) — <https://businessprocedures.rdb.rw/procedure/print/31/step/0?showRecourses=true&showCertification=false&l=en&embed=true&includeSearch=false>
- Rwanda Development Board, Office of the Registrar General: intellectual property fee tariffs — <https://org.rdb.rw/intellectual-property-rights/fee-tariffs/>
- Rwanda Development Board, Office of the Registrar General: intellectual property rights — <https://org.rdb.rw/intellectual-property-rights/>
- WIPO Lex: Rwanda profile (treaties in force, including the Paris Convention and the Madrid Protocol) — <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/members/profile/RW>
- Rwanda Development Board: business procedure, register a patent (formal examination, ARIPO substantive examination, fees) — <https://businessprocedures.rdb.rw/procedure/print/32/step/0?showRecourses=true&showCertification=false&l=en&embed=true&includeSearch=false>
- Rwanda Development Board: business procedure, register a utility model — <https://businessprocedures.rdb.rw/procedure/print/35/step/0?showRecourses=true&showCertification=false&l=en&embed=true&includeSearch=false>
- Amategeko law portal: Ministerial Order N° 001/MOYA/2026 of 08/09/2026 determining modalities for the collection and distribution of royalties derived from the exploitation of copyright and related rights (Official Gazette n° Special of 09/09/2026) — <https://amategeko.gov.rw/>
- Rwanda Development Board: business procedure, register a copyright — <https://businessprocedures.rdb.rw/procedure/print/33/step/0?showRecourses=true&showCertification=false&l=en&embed=true&includeSearch=false>
- National Cyber Security Authority: Law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cyber crimes — <https://cyber.gov.rw/index.php?elD=dumpFile&t=f&f=70&token=8a1cd43626bfcc2b99fba277aca01e6f2aaa1788>
- Rwanda Revenue Authority: customs services — <https://www.rra.gov.rw/>
- US Department of State: 2026 Investment Climate Statement, Rwanda (intellectual property enforcement) — <https://www.state.gov/reports/2026-investment-climate-statements/rwanda>
- RICA: Official Gazette n° Special of 04/03/2026, Law N° 011/2026 of 26/02/2026 relating to competition and consumer protection — https://rica.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/RICA/Publications/Laws/OG_n__Special_of_04.03.2026__lhiganwa_mu_bucuruzi_no_kurengera_umuguzi__1___1___1_.pdf
- Rwanda Revenue Authority: Law N° 027/2022 of 20/10/2022 establishing taxes on income, Articles 25, 41 and 60 — https://www.rra.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Income_Tax_law_of_2022.pdf
- Capital Market Authority: Law N° 006/2021 of 05/02/2021 on Investment Promotion and Facilitation (Annex, IP company regime) — https://cma.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Investment-code-2021.pdf
- Official Gazette n° Special of 15/10/2021: Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 relating to the protection of personal data and privacy — <https://archive.gazettes.africa/archive/rw/2021/rw-government-gazette-dated-2021-10-15-no-special.pdf>
- National Cyber Security Authority: Registration Guide for Data Controller and Processor — <https://dpo.gov.rw/fileadmin/DPO/ComplianceTools/registration-guide-for-data-controller-and-processor.pdf>
- National Cyber Security Authority: Data Protection and Privacy Office (registration, transfer and storage authorisations, breach reporting, standard contractual clauses) — <https://dpo.gov.rw/>
- National Cyber Security Authority: laws, regulations and standards — <https://cyber.gov.rw/documentation/>
- National Cyber Security Authority: Law N° 26/2017 of 31/05/2017 establishing the NCSA (Official Gazette n° 27 of 03/07/2017) — <https://cyber.gov.rw/index.php?elD=dumpFile&t=f&f=193&token=388512d958cb10ce563a7d2629169b38bdcdafdf>

- **National Cyber Security Authority: Minimum Cybersecurity Standards for Essential Service Providers, version 1.0 (28/07/2023)** — <https://cyber.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=410&token=83f75b828d0b04c0ed2a4047cfb5b5f6a73172a3>
- **National Cyber Security Authority: National Cybersecurity Strategy 2024-2029** — <https://cyber.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=429&token=d58f8a5199b59af444ea59b87fdff49c4145e929>
- **National Bank of Rwanda: Law N° 023/2026 of 25/05/2026 regulating virtual asset business** — https://www.bnr.rw/documents/Law_regulating_virtual_asset_business.pdf
- **National Bank of Rwanda: licensing requirements for payment service provider licences (Regulation N° 74/2023)** — https://www.bnr.rw/documents/Licensing_requirements_for_PSPs_3.pdf
- **National Bank of Rwanda: Regulation N° 41/2022 of 13/04/2022 governing the regulatory sandbox** — https://www.bnr.rw/documents/Regulation_governing_the_Regulatory_Sandbox_2022.pdf
- **Rwanda Revenue Authority: Ministerial Order N° 004/26/10/TC of 29/04/2026 (VAT on online services)** — https://www.rra.gov.rw/fileadmin/Folder_for_2025/Ministerial_Order_VAT_on_Online_Services_April_2026.pdf
- **Ministry of ICT and Innovation: National Artificial Intelligence Policy** — https://www.minict.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/minict_user_upload/Documents/Policies/Artificial_Intelligence_Policy.pdf

The IP law and trade marks: Law N° 055/2024 on the protection of intellectual property, who may file and the compulsory local agent, registrable signs and refusal grounds, RDB's search and filing procedure, Gazette publication and the 60-day opposition, ten-year terms, non-use, Madrid designations and RDB's published fees

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property came into force on 31 July 2024, the day it was published in the Official Gazette n° Special of 31/07/2024 (Article 387), and repealed Law n° 31/2009 of 26/10/2009 (Article 386); it covers patents, utility models, industrial designs, layout-designs, marks, trade names and domain names, geographical indications, secret information, copyright and related rights.
- The owner of industrial property, including a mark, enjoys exclusive rights only once it is registered (Article 253), the first applicant prevails between independent claimants (Article 264), and an applicant whose habitual residence or principal place of business is outside Rwanda must be represented by an industrial property agent authorised by the competent authority (Article 251(2)).
- An accepted trade mark application is published in the Official Gazette within 30 days of examination (Article 193), any interested person may oppose within 60 days of publication (Article 194), the applicant must answer within 30 days of notice or the application is deemed abandoned (Article 195), and a decision on opposition may be appealed to the Appeal Committee within 30 days (Article 196).
- A registered mark is protected for 10 years from the filing date and is renewable indefinitely for 10-year periods, with a six-month grace period on payment of a surcharge (Article 206), but it can be removed from the register if neither the owner nor a licensee has used it for three consecutive years from registration (Article 204).
- RDB's published procedure charges RWF 5,000 for a search and RWF 35,000 to file in one class plus RWF 3,000 for each additional class, and its tariff charges RWF 80,000 for renewal, RWF 20,000 for late renewal and for an opposition, and RWF 50,000 to record an assignment or a licence; these figures come from Ministerial Order N° 24 of 17/03/2016, which Article 384 kept in force only for six months after the new law was published.
- Rwanda has been bound by the Madrid Protocol since 17 August 2013, and an international registration designating Rwanda is deemed accepted if the competent authority does not notify the International Bureau of a decision within 12 months of receiving it (Article 229 of Law N° 055/2024).

The 2024 law: one statute for all intellectual property

Rwanda's intellectual property is governed by **Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property** (the IP Law), published in the Official Gazette n° Special of 31/07/2024 and in force from that date (Article 387). It repealed Law n° 31/2009 of 26/10/2009 on the protection of intellectual property "as amended to date" (Article 386). The IP Law runs to 387 articles and covers every category in one text: patents, utility models, industrial designs and layout-designs of integrated circuits; marks, collective and certification marks, trade names and second-level domain names; geographical indications; unfair competition and secret information; copyright and related rights; and, in its fourth title, civil enforcement, border measures and offences. Article 385 records that the law was drafted in English and adopted in Kinyarwanda, so where the three Gazette versions diverge the Kinyarwanda text is the adopted one.

The law speaks throughout of the **competent authority**, defined in Article 2 as "the organ in charge of protection of intellectual property". It does not itself create an intellectual property office, despite what some commentaries on the 2024 reform suggest. In practice the Intellectual Property Division of the Office of the Registrar General at the Rwanda Development Board (RDB) examines and registers industrial property, keeps the registers listed in Article 261 and takes filings at ipdesk@rdb.rw and through RDB's online services. The Minister in charge of intellectual property makes the orders the law requires on fees, agents, the appeal bodies and opposition procedure, and decides compulsory licences; the Ministry of Youth and Arts made the September 2026 copyright royalties order discussed in [Copyright, software and digital content](#).

Article 11 of Law N° 006/2021 of 05/02/2021 on Investment Promotion and Facilitation separately guarantees every investor's intellectual property rights and legitimate rights related to technology transfer, as set out in [The Investment Code 2021](#). That guarantee adds a treaty-style commitment, but the rights themselves exist only as the IP Law defines and registers them.

Registration is what creates the right, and the first to file wins

Article 253 is short and decisive: "The owner of industrial property enjoys exclusive rights on it only when it is registered." Article 264 adds the **first application principle**: where two or more persons independently develop the same invention, utility model, design, layout-design or mark, the first applicant takes the priority date. A foreign brand that has traded into Rwanda for years without filing therefore has no registered right to enforce, and a distributor, agent or opportunist who files first can obtain the registration. The investor's remedies are then indirect: opposition within the 60-day window if the filing is caught in time, invalidation in court for bad faith or imitation of a well-known mark (Article 200), or an unfair competition claim (Articles 269 to 277).

The well-known mark rule gives some protection without registration. Under Article 185 a mark is refused as **imitative** if it is identical or confusingly similar to, or a translation of, a mark or trade name well known in Rwanda for the same or similar goods, and for dissimilar goods where use would suggest a connection with the owner and damage its interests. Whether a mark is well known depends on recognition in the relevant sector of the Rwandan public, including recognition arising from advertising (Article 185(2)). That is a matter of evidence, and reputation earned only abroad may not be enough. The prudent course, repeated in [FAQ 84](#), is to file before launching and before appointing a local distributor.

Who may file, and the compulsory local agent

Article 250 opens the register to four groups: Rwandans habitually resident in Rwanda and legal entities with their headquarters or a real and effective establishment in Rwanda; nationals of states party to the Paris Convention or members of the World Trade Organization; nationals of other states who are domiciled or have a real and effective establishment in a Paris or WTO state; and anyone else to the extent that their country grants equivalent protection to Rwandans. Rwanda has been party to the Paris Convention since 1 March 1984, so almost every foreign investor qualifies.

The material rule for foreign applicants is Article 251(2): an applicant whose habitual residence or principal place of business is outside Rwanda **must** be represented by an industrial property agent authorised by the competent authority to practise in Rwanda, while a resident applicant may choose to use one (Article 251(1)). The appointment must be notified to the competent authority in writing (Article 251(3)), and a Ministerial Order is to set the modalities for agents and the form of the power of attorney (Article 251(4)); no such Order had been located at 10 October 2026. RDB's published procedure adds that a foreign company pays its fees through its local agent and files a notarised copy of its certificate of incorporation, and that a representative's power of attorney should be notarised. A Rwandan subsidiary of a foreign group, being headquartered in Rwanda, can file in its own name without an agent, which is one reason some groups hold Rwandan marks in the local company under a licence from the parent.

What can be registered, and why marks are refused

A mark is any sign or combination of signs capable of distinguishing one person's goods or services from another's (Article 182(1)). Eligible signs include words, proper names, letters, figures and abbreviations; figurative elements such as designs, packaging, product forms and shapes; colours and combinations of colours; and any combination of these (Article 182(2)). Goods and services are classified under the Nice classification, and RDB accepts multi-class applications.

Article 183 sets four tests: the mark must be distinctive, not imitative, not confusing and not descriptive. A mark lacking inherent distinctiveness may still be registered if the competent authority accepts that it has acquired distinctiveness through continuous use (Article 184(2)). A mark is **confusing** if it is likely to mislead about geographical origin, quality, nature, characteristics, manufacturing process or suitability, or contains a misleading geographical indication or a name similar to a registered trade name in the same business (Article 186). It is **descriptive** if it consists of words serving only to designate kind, quality, quantity, purpose, value, origin or time of production, or of terms in common use or common technical terms in the field (Article 187). Article 188 refuses applications made in bad faith and marks whose registration would lessen competition, restrain trade or abuse market power, and Article 189 excludes marks contrary to public order and morality and those reproducing state or intergovernmental emblems without authorisation. The competent authority may require, and the applicant may volunteer, a disclaimer of an unregistrable element such as a descriptive word within a logo (Article 192(2) and (3)).

The statutory timetable, from filing to certificate

An application is filed on the prescribed form with the prescribed fee (Article 190). If something is missing, the applicant has **14 days** from notification to complete it, the filing date becomes the date the missing elements are received, and an application not completed is treated as withdrawn (Article 191); the period under the 2009 law was seven days. The competent authority then examines the substance against Articles 183 to 189 and, if it refuses, notifies the applicant in writing within 14 days of its decision (Article 192(4)).

An accepted application is published in the Official Gazette within 30 days of examination (Article 193). Any interested person may then oppose within **60 days** of publication on any of six grounds: lack of distinctiveness, imitation, likelihood of confusion, descriptiveness, bad faith or unfair competition (Article 194). The competent authority sends the notice to the applicant within seven days; the applicant must answer within **30 days** of receiving it, failing which the application is considered abandoned; and after hearing both sides the authority decides within 30 days of the last hearing (Article 195). Either side may appeal to the **Appeal Committee** within 30 days of notification, its composition to be fixed by Ministerial Order (Article 196). From publication until registration the applicant enjoys the same rights as a registered owner, but those rights are void from the application date if an opposition succeeds (Article 197). On registration the mark is entered in the register, a certificate issues and the registration is published within 30 days (Articles 198 and 199).

RDB's published procedure gives a total of 31 to 91 days from search to certificate, most of it a 30 to 90 day wait after filing. That estimate sits uneasily with a 60-day opposition period that starts only on Gazette publication, so applicants should treat the RDB figure as a best case for unopposed marks and diarise the opposition window. The procedure page also cites Articles 142 to 148 of the IP Law for its trade mark steps, which are in fact the provisions on layout-designs of integrated circuits; the trade mark provisions are Articles 182 to 233.

Rights, limits, non-use and renewal

Registration gives the owner the exclusive right to use the mark in Rwanda and to prevent anyone using it without authorisation (Article 202), and the owner may sue anyone who uses the registered mark or an imitative mark, or facilitates or procures such use, without consent (Article 203). Remedies, interim orders and criminal penalties are covered in IP enforcement and anti-counterfeiting.

Article 205 sets two limits. First, rights do not extend to goods or services lawfully put on the market in Rwanda by the owner or with its consent, a rule of national exhaustion; informative use, such as comparative advertising that does not deceive, is also permitted. Second, the Minister may declare mark rights exhausted and authorise **parallel imports** of genuine goods where the product is unavailable in Rwanda, falls below required standards, cannot be supplied in sufficient quantity or is priced unfairly, or for other public-interest reasons, provided the goods were put on the foreign market by the owner or with its authority. The Minister in charge of health may also limit the use of marks to promote generic medicines (Article 205(6)).

Protection lasts **10 years from the filing date** and may be renewed indefinitely for further 10-year periods on payment of the prescribed fee; a six-month grace period applies after the deadline, subject to a surcharge, after which protection lapses (Article 206). An owner who misses a maintenance

deadline may ask for reinstatement on reasonable grounds within 12 months of the deadline (Article 263). The competent authority may, of its own motion or at the request of an interested person, start removal of a mark that neither the owner nor a licensee has used for **three consecutive years from registration**; the owner has 30 days from notification to show legitimate reasons for non-use, failing which the mark is removed (Article 204). Use by a licensee counts, which is a further reason to record licences: an unrecorded licence is not valid under Article 209(3), as explained in [Technology transfer, franchising and licensing](#).

Priority, collective and certification marks, trade names and domain names

An applicant who has filed in another Paris or WTO state may claim that earlier filing date, but for marks the priority period is **six months**, against 12 months for patents (Article 255(3)). The claim must state the date, number and state of the earlier application and be supported by a certified copy, translated into one of Rwanda's official languages if necessary, and missing documents must be produced within 30 days of a request (Article 256). The competent authority may, on a reasoned written request made before expiry and on payment of a fee, extend time limits for correcting or completing an application, appealing, opposing or seeking cancellation for non-use by up to the original period (Article 260).

Collective marks, held by an association for its members' goods or services (Articles 213 to 217), and **certification marks**, which anyone meeting the owner's published standards may ask to use but which the owner may not use on its own goods (Articles 218 to 221), follow the ordinary procedure; RDB charges RWF 30,000 to apply for either, or for a trade name. Under Article 222 a name may not be used as a trade name or a second-level domain name if it is contrary to public order, misleading, or identical or similar to, or a translation of, a mark registered or well known in Rwanda. A business name reserved on RDB's company registry is therefore no defence to a mark owner, and registering a company is not the same as protecting its brand. Registering a domain name in bad faith to profit from another's name or mark is a separate criminal offence under Law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cyber crimes, dealt with in section 7.4.

The international routes: Madrid, and why not ARIPO for marks

The Madrid Protocol has been in force for Rwanda since 17 August 2013. A Rwandan resident, a person with a real and effective establishment in Rwanda or a national of a Madrid member may file an international application with Rwanda as the office of origin (Article 223), based on an accepted Rwandan application or a Rwandan registration (Article 224); RDB verifies and certifies it and forwards it to the International Bureau of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) for a transmittal fee of USD 150 (Article 225). For five years the international registration depends on the Rwandan basic application or registration, under the Madrid Protocol's dependency rule, and RDB must tell the International Bureau if the basic mark ceases to have effect in that period (Article 232).

A foreign owner may instead designate Rwanda in its own international application. The designation is examined like a national filing, published and open to opposition, and the competent authority must decide within 12 months of receipt and notify the International Bureau; a provisional refusal must be notified within the same 12 months and must explain how to seek review within three months (Articles

226 and 227). If no decision is notified within 12 months, the registration is **considered accepted** (Article 229), and once accepted it has the same effect as a national registration from the international registration date (Article 231). If the international registration is cancelled at the request of the office of origin, the holder may refile nationally within three months and keep its original date (Article 233).

Rwanda is a member of the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization (ARIPO) and of its Harare Protocol on patents and designs, but WIPO's official treaty database does not list Rwanda as party to the Banjul Protocol on marks. An ARIPO trade mark application designating Rwanda should therefore not be relied on; use a national filing or a Madrid designation.

Trade mark fees on RDB's published tariff (October 2026)

Service	Fee	Law N° 055/2024	Comment
Availability search	RWF 5,000 per mark	None (administrative)	RDB answers by phone or email within 3 working days
Application, first class	RWF 35,000	Article 190	Figure from RDB's procedure page; the tariff page lists class fees of RWF 5,000 and RWF 3,000
Each additional class	RWF 3,000	Article 190	Multi-class applications accepted
Collective mark, certification mark or trade name application	RWF 30,000	Articles 213 to 222	Same procedure as an ordinary mark
Opposition	RWF 20,000	Article 194	Filed within 60 days of Gazette publication
Renewal (10 years)	RWF 80,000	Article 206	Due on the tenth anniversary of the filing date
Late renewal surcharge	RWF 20,000	Article 206(3)	Payable within the six-month grace period
Recording an assignment	RWF 50,000	Article 207	Assignment valid only once recorded
Recording a licence	RWF 50,000	Article 209	Licence valid only once recorded
Change of name or address, merger	RWF 20,000	Article 262	Keep the register current
Madrid transmittal (outgoing)	USD 150	Article 225	WIPO fees are paid separately

Registering a trade mark with RDB, step by step

1 Appoint an authorised agent

Mandatory if the applicant's residence or principal place of business is outside Rwanda (Article 251(2)). Give the agent a power of attorney and, for a company, a notarised certificate of incorporation.

2 Pay for and run a search

Pay RWF 5,000 to RDB's account at the Bank of Kigali and request the search with a reproduction of the mark and its Nice classes. RDB replies within 3 working days.

3 Pay the filing fee

RWF 35,000 for the first class and RWF 3,000 for each further class, paid at the Bank of Kigali, through the local agent for a foreign applicant.

4 File the application

Letter to the Registrar General, the application form, the representation of the mark, the company certificate, the payment receipt, the search notice, identity documents and the power of attorney. Claim any six-month priority now (Articles 255 and 256).

5 Cure defects within 14 days

If RDB notifies missing elements, supply them within 14 days; the filing date becomes the date of receipt, and an uncured application is treated as withdrawn (Article 191).

6 Publication and opposition

On acceptance the application is published in the Official Gazette within 30 days of examination, and third parties have 60 days to oppose. Answer any opposition within 30 days of notice (Articles 193 to 195).

7 Registration and certificate

The mark is entered in the register, the certificate issues and the registration is published within 30 days (Articles 198 and 199). Diarise renewal at 10 years from filing and the three-year non-use date.

DECISION GUIDE

National filing or Madrid designation?

A quick guide for a foreign brand owner choosing how to protect a mark in Rwanda.

Q1 Does the owner already hold a home registration or application in a Madrid Protocol member?

Yes A Madrid designation of Rwanda is available; continue.

No File nationally with RDB through an authorised Rwandan agent.

Q2 Is the home mark at risk of attack in its first five years?

Yes Prefer a national filing: under the Madrid system the designation falls with the basic mark during that period.

No Continue.

Q3 Does the owner want a decision within a fixed period without local prosecution?

Yes Designate Rwanda: RDB must decide within 12 months or the mark is deemed accepted (Article 229).

No Either route works; compare agent costs with WIPO fees.

Q4 Will the mark be licensed to a Rwandan distributor or franchisee?

Yes Whichever route is used, record the licence with RDB (RWF 50,000), because an unrecorded licence is not valid (Article 209(3)).

No Keep evidence of use by the owner to answer a non-use challenge after three years.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Protecting a software brand in three classes, with a priority claim

A United Kingdom software company filed its word mark in the United Kingdom on 1 June 2026 and wants protection in Rwanda in classes 9, 35 and 42. Its agent files on 16 November 2026. Fees are RDB's published tariff; agent fees and dates of examination are illustrative.

Priority	For marks the priority period is six months (Article 255(3)): from 1 June 2026 it runs to 1 December 2026. Filing on 16 November 2026 is in time, and the Rwandan application takes the 1 June 2026 date against later filers.
Official fees	Search RWF 5,000 + first class RWF 35,000 + two further classes 2 x RWF 3,000 = RWF 46,000, paid through the authorised agent.
Publication	If examination is completed on 15 January 2027, publication must follow within 30 days, by 14 February 2027 (Article 193). Assume publication on 10 February 2027.
Opposition window	Sixty days from 10 February 2027 ends on 11 April 2027 (Article 194). An opponent who files on 9 April 2027 must pay RWF 20,000; the applicant then has 30 days from notice to reply or the application is abandoned (Article 195).
Term and renewal	Protection runs 10 years from filing (Article 206). The filing date, 16 November 2026, gives expiry on 16 November 2036; renewal costs RWF 80,000, and payment by 16 May 2037 is still possible with the RWF 20,000 surcharge.
Non-use exposure	If registration is entered on 1 June 2027, the mark becomes removable for non-use from 1 June 2030 unless the owner or a recorded licensee has used it in Rwanda (Article 204).

Whether the priority claim fixes the effective date for the term is not addressed by Article 206, which counts from the filing date; diarise the later date and renew early.

A Madrid designation would avoid local prosecution, at the cost of WIPO's fees and dependence on the United Kingdom mark for five years.

Questions investors ask

Is a trade mark protected in Rwanda without registration?

Generally not. Under Article 253 of Law N° 055/2024 exclusive rights over industrial property arise only on registration, and the first applicant prevails (Article 264). A mark well known in Rwanda can block a confusing application (Article 185), and unfair competition rules may help, but both depend on evidence. Register before entering the market.

Does a foreign company need a Rwandan agent to register a mark?

Yes. Article 251(2) of Law N° 055/2024 requires an applicant whose habitual residence or principal place of business is outside Rwanda to be represented by an industrial property agent authorised by the competent authority. RDB's procedure also requires the agent to pay fees for a foreign company and asks for a notarised certificate of incorporation.

How long does trade mark registration take in Rwanda?

RDB's published procedure estimates 31 to 91 days for an unopposed mark. The law adds a 60-day opposition window running from Gazette publication, which itself follows within 30 days of examination (Articles 193 and 194), and an opposition adds at least a 30-day reply period and a decision within 30 days of the hearing.

How much does it cost to register a trade mark with RDB?

RDB's published figures are RWF 5,000 for the search and RWF 35,000 to file in one class, plus RWF 3,000 for each additional class, so RWF 40,000 for a single-class mark before agent fees. Renewal after 10 years costs RWF 80,000. The tariff derives from a 2016 Ministerial Order whose transitional life under Article 384 has expired, so confirm current fees before filing.

Can I designate Rwanda through the Madrid system?

Yes. Rwanda has applied the Madrid Protocol since 17 August 2013. A designation is examined, published and open to opposition like a national filing, and if RDB does not notify a decision to WIPO within 12 months of receipt the mark is considered accepted (Article 229 of Law N° 055/2024). ARIPO's Banjul Protocol route for marks should not be relied on for Rwanda.

Can my registered mark be cancelled if I do not use it?

Yes. Under Article 204 of Law N° 055/2024 the competent authority may remove a mark that neither the owner nor a licensee has used for three consecutive years from registration. The owner has 30 days from notification to give legitimate reasons for non-use. Use by a licensee counts, but the licence must be recorded to be valid.

Can a distributor register my brand in its own name?

It can try, and under the first-to-file rule it may succeed if the owner has not filed. The owner can oppose within 60 days of publication on grounds including bad faith and imitation of a well-known mark (Article 194), or later ask the court to invalidate the registration and transfer it to the true owner (Article 200(2)).

THE 2027 HORIZON

- A new Ministerial Order on fees under Article 383 of Law N° 055/2024: the 2016 fee order's transitional life ended about 31 January 2025, yet RDB still applies its tariff. Cabinet approved a "Ministerial Order relating to industrial property, security provided for application of suspension of suspected counterfeit goods and fee payable for service of protection of intellectual property" on 4 March 2026, but it had not been located in the Official Gazette or on the amategeko.gov.rw portal at 10 October 2026, and RDB's published tariff was unchanged. When it is published it could change every figure in this section.
- Ministerial Orders on authorised industrial property agents and the form of power of attorney (Article 251(4)) and on the composition of the Appeal Committee (Article 196(2)): until they are published, check agent status directly with RDB and expect appeals to be handled case by case.
- Watch RDB's online services for a fully electronic trade mark filing and search interface, and for correction of the procedure page that cites the layout-design articles for trade mark steps.
- No amendment to Law N° 055/2024 and no bill on marks had been located at 10 October 2026; ARIPO's Banjul Protocol status for Rwanda is worth rechecking on WIPO's treaty database before any regional filing strategy.

Terms you will meet in the documents

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Intellectual property	<i>umutungo bwite mu by'ubwenge</i>	<i>propriété intellectuelle</i>	The rights governed by Law N° 055/2024: industrial property, and copyright and related rights.
Mark	<i>ikirango</i>	<i>marque</i>	A sign capable of distinguishing one person's goods or services from another's (Article 182).
Opposition	<i>itambamira</i>	<i>opposition</i>	A third party's challenge to an application, filed within 60 days of Gazette publication (Article 194).
Authorised industrial property agent	<i>intumwa yabiherewe uruhushya mu byerekeye umutungo bwite mu by'inganda</i>	<i>mandataire de propriété industrielle autorisé</i>	The representative a non-resident applicant must use (Article 251).

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Competent authority	—	<i>autorité compétente</i>	The organ in charge of protection of intellectual property (Article 2); in practice RDB's Office of the Registrar General.
Trade name	—	<i>nom commercial</i>	The name identifying a business; it may not copy or translate a registered or well-known mark (Article 222).
Collective mark	—	<i>marque collective</i>	A mark registered by an association to distinguish its members' goods or services (Article 213).
Certification mark	—	<i>marque de certification</i>	A mark any qualifying person may use under the owner's standards, but not the owner itself (Article 220).
Right of priority	—	<i>droit de priorité</i>	The right to claim an earlier foreign filing date: six months for marks, 12 months for patents (Article 255).
First application principle	—	<i>principe de première demande</i>	Between independent claimants, the first to apply takes priority (Article 264).

FOREIGN V RWANDAN INVESTOR

The substantive tests, timetable, fees and rights are identical for Rwandan and foreign owners, and Paris Convention and WTO nationals are entitled to file on the same footing (Article 250). The difference is procedural: an applicant whose habitual residence or principal place of business is outside Rwanda must act through an authorised Rwandan industrial property agent (Article 251(2)), must file a notarised certificate of incorporation and pays its fees through that agent under RDB's procedure. A Rwandan resident or a Rwandan-incorporated company, including a foreign-owned subsidiary, may file directly.

Nationals and companies of other East African Community (EAC) and COMESA states are treated as foreign applicants: there is no regional trade mark, and the ARIPO Banjul route should not be relied on for Rwanda. Foreign owners gain one advantage through Madrid, where RDB's 12-month deadline and deemed acceptance (Article 229) give a certainty that a national filing does not.

WATCH OUT FOR

- Launching before filing: rights arise only on registration (Article 253) and the first applicant wins (Article 264), so a distributor or squatter can register the brand first.
- Treating RDB's 31 to 91 days as the legal timetable: the 60-day opposition period runs from Gazette publication, so diarise it and watch the Gazette for conflicting marks too.
- Missing the 30-day reply to an opposition: the application is deemed abandoned (Article 195(3)).
- Assuming a company or domain name protects the brand: Article 222 lets a mark owner stop conflicting trade names and domain names, not the other way round.
- Letting a mark sit unused or used only by an unrecorded licensee: after three years from registration it can be removed (Article 204), and an unrecorded licence is not valid (Article 209(3)).
- Relying on fee figures without checking: RDB's tariff comes from a 2016 Order whose transitional life under Article 384 has ended.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

- WIPO Lex: Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property (Official Gazette n° Special of 31/07/2024, English, French and Kinyarwanda texts) — <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/22672>
- Rwanda Development Board: business procedure, register a trade mark (steps, documents, fees and times) — <https://businessprocedures.rdb.rw/procedure/print/31/step/0?showRecourses=true&showCertification=false&l=en&embed=true&includeSearch=false>
- Rwanda Development Board, Office of the Registrar General: intellectual property fee tariffs — <https://org.rdb.rw/intellectual-property-rights/fee-tariffs/>
- Rwanda Development Board, Office of the Registrar General: intellectual property rights — <https://org.rdb.rw/intellectual-property-rights/>
- WIPO Lex: Rwanda profile (treaties in force, including the Paris Convention and the Madrid Protocol) — <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/members/profile/RW>

Patents, utility models and industrial designs: patentability and the exclusions for software and pharmaceutical products, provisional specifications, ARIPO examination and pre-grant opposition, annual fees and the 20-year term, compulsory licences, PCT and Harare filings, utility model certificates, design registration and employee inventions

Reviewed 10 October 2026 · Prepared by a commercial lawyer with over 30 years' international experience · Legal and tax information, not legal advice · [How we check](#) · [Open in the app](#)

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Under Articles 5 to 8 of Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property an invention is patentable if it is new, involves an inventive step and is industrially applicable, and disclosures by the applicant, or abusive disclosures by others, within the 12 months before filing do not destroy novelty (Article 6(3)).
- Article 23 excludes from patent protection, among other things, business methods, methods of medical treatment, plant and animal varieties, "pharmaceutical products" (to be specified by an Order of the Minister in charge of health) and "computer programs per se, software and their related databases", but computer-implemented process and product inventions remain patentable, and an applicant who seeks a patent for them waives copyright protection for the same subject matter (Article 23(3) and (4)).
- A patent application may start with a provisional specification, followed by a final specification within 12 months (Article 18); the application is published in the Official Gazette within nine months of meeting the requirements (Article 27), may be opposed before grant (Article 29), and a refusal is notified within seven days (Article 31).
- A patent lasts 20 years from filing, kept in force by annual fees due on each anniversary of the filing date with a six-month grace period (Article 41); a utility model certificate, which needs only novelty and industrial application, lasts 10 years with a maintenance fee after five (Articles 71 and 102); a registered industrial design lasts 15 years with fees at years five and ten (Article 128).
- RDB's published tariff charges RWF 10,000 to file a patent application with a provisional specification or RWF 30,000 with a final one, RWF 20,000 for publication and RWF 100,000 as the annual fee, RWF 250,000 to renew a utility model after five years, RWF 30,000 to register and publish a design and USD 150 for PCT national phase entry or a Hague transmittal.
- The Minister may grant a compulsory patent licence, after the applicant has failed to obtain a licence on reasonable commercial terms, where the invention is not worked or is insufficiently worked in Rwanda, is used anti-competitively or blocks a dependent patent (Articles 50 and 51), and may authorise use without consent for national security, public health or environmental protection, with compensation (Article 57).

Three registered rights for technical and design innovation

Title II of Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property (the IP Law), in force since 31 July 2024, protects technical and design innovation through five registered rights: **patents** for inventions (Articles 5 to 70), **utility model certificates** for lesser product innovations (Articles 71 to 104), **industrial designs** for the appearance of products (Articles 105 to 141), layout-designs of integrated circuits (Articles 142 to 181) and geographical indications (Articles 234 to 249). The general rules in The IP law and trade marks apply to all of them: exclusive rights arise only on registration (Article 253), the first applicant wins (Article 264), and an applicant based outside Rwanda must act through an authorised Rwandan industrial property agent (Article 251(2)).

Applications are filed with the Intellectual Property Division of the Rwanda Development Board's (RDB) Office of the Registrar General, which acts as the "competent authority". RDB's published patent procedure lists RDB itself, the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization (ARIPO) and WIPO as filing routes, refers substantive examination to ARIPO (which it says takes at least two weeks) and

states that formal examination may take three to six months. Rwanda is party to the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) and the Hague Agreement on designs (both since 31 August 2011), ARIPO's Lusaka Agreement and Harare Protocol on patents and designs (since 2011) and the Budapest Treaty on the deposit of micro-organisms (since 4 December 2023), so most foreign applicants reach Rwanda through an international or regional filing rather than a first national one.

What can be patented

An invention is patentable if it is **new**, involves an **inventive step** and is **industrially applicable** (Article 5). Novelty is absolute: prior art includes any disclosure anywhere in the world, by publication, orally, by use or in any other way, before the filing or priority date (Article 6(2)). Two safety valves apply. A disclosure in the 12 months before filing does not count if it resulted from the applicant's own acts or from an abuse by a third party (Article 6(3)), and the same 12-month protection covers goods shown at officially recognised international exhibitions held in Rwanda, provided proof is filed with the application (Article 6(4)). An invention involves an inventive step if it would not have been obvious to a person having ordinary skill in the art (Article 7), and it is industrially applicable if it can be made or used in any industry (Article 8).

Article 23(1) excludes ten categories even where they would otherwise qualify: discoveries, scientific theories and mathematical methods; schemes, rules or methods for doing business, performing mental acts or playing games; methods of surgical or therapeutic treatment and diagnosis practised on the human or animal body (but not products for use in them); substances isolated from nature (but not the isolation processes); new uses of known substances, unless the use results in enhanced efficacy; plant and animal varieties and essentially biological processes, but not micro-organisms or microbiological processes; inventions whose commercial use is contrary to public order or morality; **pharmaceutical products**; mere presentations of data; and **computer programs per se, software and their related databases**.

Two exclusions that matter to investors: medicines and software

The pharmaceutical exclusion in Article 23(1)(h) is unusual and is often misreported. The Gazette text excludes "pharmaceutical products" and leaves an Order of the Minister in charge of health to determine which pharmaceutical products are excluded (Article 23(2)). Some commentaries on the 2024 law describe pharmaceuticals as patentable unless excluded; the law reads the other way round, and no implementing Order had been located at 10 October 2026. Pharmaceutical companies should therefore expect product claims to face objection in Rwanda, should consider process claims (Article 23 excludes products, not processes) and should watch for the health Minister's Order. The parallel provisions on marks allow the health Minister to limit the use of marks to promote generic medicines (Article 205(6)), and Article 40(1)(e) and (3) protect pharmacy preparations and regulatory testing.

For software the law draws a line familiar from European practice. Programs "per se" are excluded, but Article 23(3) keeps patentable process inventions consisting of steps performed by a computer and directed by a program, and product inventions in computer-implemented form: program code stored on a tangible medium, a general-purpose computer whose novelty arises from its combination with a specific program, and a program with additional technical features or a technical application in industry combined with hardware. Article 23(4) then adds a trade-off with no common equivalent: an applicant

who files for such a computer-implemented invention **waives the right to seek copyright protection for the same subject matter**. A software company should decide, invention by invention, whether the 20-year patent is worth surrendering copyright in the same code, which is protected without formalities for the author's life plus 50 years, as [Copyright, software and digital content](#) explains.

Filing, provisional specifications and examination

An application contains a request, a description sufficient for a person skilled in the art, claims, an abstract and any drawings, and must relate to a single invention, with divisional applications allowed (Articles 9 to 17). The 2024 law introduced the **provisional specification**: an applicant may file with a provisional specification and then file the final specification within 12 months of the first application, in which case the priority date is the provisional filing date; if the final specification is not filed in time the application is treated as abandoned (Article 18). Several provisional applications for related inventions may be combined into one final specification filed within 12 months of the earliest (Article 19), and a complete application may be converted into a provisional one (Article 20). RDB charges RWF 10,000 for a provisional filing and RWF 30,000 for a final one.

Before substantive examination the competent authority checks exclusions and formalities; defects must be cured within 14 days of notification, the filing date moving to the date of the corrected application except for drawings, and an uncorrected application is treated as withdrawn (Article 24). For substantive examination it may rely on search and examination reports by a Rwandan specialised agency or an external organisation, on foreign search and examination results the applicant must supply under Article 252, and on international search and preliminary examination reports under the PCT (Article 26). The application is published in the Official Gazette **within nine months** of the requirements being met (Article 27), from which date the applicant has the rights of a patent owner, lost if an opposition succeeds (Article 28).

The 2024 law also introduced **pre-grant opposition**: any interested person may oppose the grant after obtaining the full contents of the application, the modalities to be set by Ministerial Order (Article 29). A decision on opposition may be appealed to the Commission of Appeal within three months of notification (Article 30). If the application meets the requirements the patent is granted and recorded; if not, the refusal is notified in writing within seven days of the decision (Article 31). After grant, a patent can be invalidated only by the competent court, on grounds of lack of novelty, inventive step or industrial application, excluded subject matter, lack of entitlement or insufficient description; the court may instead transfer the patent to a person who proves to be the true inventor (Article 34).

Rights, limits, term and annual fees

A patent confers the exclusive right to use the invention in Rwanda: for a product, making, importing, offering for sale, selling, using and stocking it; for a process, using the process and dealing in products obtained directly by it (Article 36). Each co-owner may sue infringers without the others' consent (Article 37). The rights do not extend to foreign vessels and vehicles temporarily in Rwanda, non-profit scientific research, a good-faith prior user who was using or seriously preparing to use the invention at the filing or priority date, private non-commercial acts, pharmacy preparations on prescription, or products put on the market **in Rwanda or abroad** by the patent owner or with its consent (Article 40(1)). That last limb is international exhaustion: parallel imports of genuine patented goods cannot be stopped

under the patent, a broader rule than the national exhaustion that applies to marks. Article 40(3) also permits use reasonably related to developing and submitting information required by regulators, the so-called regulatory review exception.

Protection lasts **20 years from the filing date**. An annual fee is paid in advance each year from the filing date, with each fee due on the anniversary of filing, a six-month grace period on payment of a surcharge, and lapse if the fee is not paid (Article 41). RDB's published tariff sets the annual fee at RWF 100,000 and the late-payment surcharge at RWF 30,000. A patent lost through non-payment may be reinstated on reasonable grounds if a written request is made within 12 months of the deadline (Article 263). Patents may be assigned and licensed in writing, but an assignment or licence is valid and enforceable only once recorded, and RDB may refuse to record one with anti-competitive clauses (Articles 42 to 47), as explained in [Technology transfer, franchising and licensing](#). An industrial property title may also be given as security (Article 267).

Compulsory licences and Government use

A person who has asked the patent owner for a licence on reasonable commercial terms and failed to obtain it within a reasonable period may apply in writing to the Minister, with the prescribed fee and proof of the refused request (Article 50); RDB's tariff lists RWF 100,000. After hearing the owner and consulting the competent authority, the Minister may grant a **compulsory licence** where the invention is not being industrially or commercially used in Rwanda; is insufficiently used because the product is not available, through manufacture or importation, in sufficient quantity, adequate quality or at a reasonable price; is exploited, or a licensee is allowed to exploit it, in a way that lessens competition, restrains trade, abuses market power or unduly limits the dissemination of technology; or is needed to work a later patent (Article 51). For dependent patents the later invention must represent significant technical progress of considerable economic interest (Article 53). Decisions may be challenged in court (Article 56).

Separately, the Minister may decide, without the owner's consent but with compensation reflecting the invention's economic value, that a State organ or a designated third party may use a patented invention for national security, public health or environmental protection, or where a court or the competent authority has found anti-competitive use (Article 57). For investors the practical lesson is that working the patent in Rwanda, including by supplying the market through imports at reasonable prices, is the best defence: Article 51(2)(b) measures sufficiency by availability "through manufacture or importation", not only local manufacture.

PCT, Harare and national phase entry

RDB acts as a receiving office for regional and international applications filed by persons entitled under Article 250 (Article 62) and as the designated office where Rwanda is designated under the PCT or the Harare Protocol (Article 63). To enter the national phase of a PCT application the applicant files the application, pays the prescribed fee and supplies a translation where necessary; if the fee or translation is missing, the applicant has **30 days** from an invitation to comply, failing which the application is treated as abandoned (Article 64). RDB's tariff charges USD 150 for national phase entry and collects

international fees of CHF 1,330 for outgoing PCT applications. An application filed in a language other than an official language of Rwanda must be translated into one of them or is considered abandoned (Article 66(3) and (4)).

RDB will not start processing a regional or international application before the PCT or Harare time limits expire unless the applicant pays to have it processed early (Article 66(1) and (2)). A patent granted regionally or internationally designating Rwanda has the same effect as a Rwandan patent **unless the competent authority notifies the regional or international bureau that the claims are excluded** from protection in Rwanda (Article 65). An ARIPO patent under the Harare Protocol is therefore a sound route, but the Article 23 exclusions, notably for pharmaceutical products and software per se, can still be raised by RDB against an ARIPO application designating Rwanda.

Utility models: a cheaper, faster right for incremental products

A **utility model certificate** protects an innovation that is new and industrially applicable (Article 71); no inventive step is required, which makes it suited to practical improvements to tools, equipment and consumer products. Processes cannot be protected as utility models, nor can anything excluded from patents (Article 82). Examination, opposition, grant and invalidation follow the patent provisions (Articles 83 to 95), and an applicant may convert a patent application into a utility model application once, before grant or refusal, keeping the original filing date (Article 85); RDB charges RWF 5,000 for the conversion.

The certificate lasts **10 years** from filing. Instead of annual fees, a single maintenance fee is due after five years to cover the remaining five, with a six-month grace period and surcharge, and the certificate lapses if it is not paid (Article 102). RDB charges RWF 10,000 to apply and RWF 20,000 to publish, RWF 250,000 to renew after five years and RWF 50,000 as the late surcharge, and its procedure page estimates 90 to 361 days to grant. Licences of right, compulsory licences and their challenge follow the patent rules (Article 104).

Industrial designs, layout-designs and geographical indications

An **industrial design** is an assembly of lines, colours or shapes that serves as a model for an industrial or craft product; it may be registered if it is new, but protection does not extend to features dictated solely by technical result, and designs contrary to public order or morality are excluded (Articles 105 and 107). Novelty is assessed worldwide, with a **six-month** grace period for disclosures by the applicant or abusive disclosures by others (Article 108), half the period allowed for inventions. The application is published in the Official Gazette after three months from the requirements being met (Article 113), and the applicant may ask for publication to be suspended for a period so that the design is not revealed before launch (Article 120). Opposition follows the patent model (Article 115).

A registered design lasts **15 years** from filing, maintained by fees due at five years and at ten years, each with a six-month grace period and surcharge (Article 128). RDB charges RWF 30,000 to register and publish, RWF 50,000 for each renewal, RWF 20,000 as the surcharge, and USD 150 to transmit a Hague international application; regional and international design filings follow the patent provisions (Article 129). Layout-designs of integrated circuits are protected for 10 years (Article 165), and geographical indications, on which RDB charges RWF 10,000 to apply, for renewable periods of 10 years

(Article 249). Plant varieties are outside the IP Law (Article 23(1)(f)); WIPO lists a separate 2016 law on plant varieties, and the ARIPO Arusha Protocol for plant varieties entered into force for Rwanda on 24 November 2024.

Who owns an employee's invention

Under Article 265, where an invention, utility model, design or layout-design is made by an employee in the course of executing an employment contract, the right to apply for registration belongs to the **employer**, unless the contract provides otherwise. If its economic value turns out higher than both parties could reasonably have foreseen when the contract was made, the employee is entitled to **equitable remuneration** reflecting that value. Where the employee makes an invention outside contractual duties but within the employer's field of activity, using data, means or knowledge available through the employment, the employee may apply for the title; the employer may ask for all or part of the rights in exchange for agreed remuneration, and if they cannot agree the court decides (Article 266).

Investors should therefore write invention clauses into Rwandan employment contracts and consultancy agreements, define the employee's inventive duties, and provide a mechanism for the equitable remuneration that Article 265(2) grants; unlike the ownership rule in Article 265(1), Article 265(2) is not expressed to yield to contrary contract terms, so a waiver in the contract may not be effective. Contractors and consultants are not employees, so their inventions need an express written assignment, recorded with RDB. Employment contracts are covered in [Employment contracts and probation](#).

The registered technical rights compared

Right	Test	Term	Maintenance	Key RDB fees
Patent	Novelty, inventive step, industrial application (Article 5)	20 years from filing (Article 41)	Annual fee each anniversary; 6-month grace	Filing RWF 10,000 provisional or RWF 30,000 final; publication RWF 20,000; annual RWF 100,000; surcharge RWF 30,000
Utility model certificate	Novelty, industrial application; no processes (Articles 71 and 82)	10 years from filing (Article 102)	One fee after 5 years; 6-month grace	Application RWF 10,000; publication RWF 20,000; renewal RWF 250,000; surcharge RWF 50,000
Industrial design	Novelty, with 6-month grace (Articles 105 and 108)	15 years from filing (Article 128)	Fees at years 5 and 10; 6-month grace	Registration and publication RWF 30,000; renewal RWF 50,000; surcharge RWF 20,000
Layout-design of integrated circuit	Originality (Article 143)	10 years (Article 165)	Maintenance under Article 166	Per RDB tariff

Right	Test	Term	Maintenance	Key RDB fees
Geographical indication	Origin-linked quality or reputation (Articles 234 to 236)	10 years, renewable (Article 249)	Renewal	Application RWF 10,000; opposition RWF 10,000
International routes	PCT, Harare Protocol, Hague Agreement	As national right	As national right	PCT national phase USD 150; Hague transmittal USD 150

Obtaining a Rwandan patent through RDB

1 Secure ownership and confidentiality

Confirm that employees and contractors have assigned their rights in writing and that no public disclosure has been made, or that any disclosure falls within the 12-month grace period of Article 6(3).

2 Choose the route

A national filing through an authorised Rwandan agent, an ARIPO application under the Harare Protocol designating Rwanda, or a PCT national phase entry (USD 150). Non-residents must use an agent (Article 251(2)).

3 File the application

Request, description, claims, abstract and drawings, with a provisional specification (RWF 10,000) or a final one (RWF 30,000). If provisional, file the final specification within 12 months (Article 18).

4 Cure formal defects

Answer any formalities objection within 14 days of notification (Article 24). RDB indicates three to six months for formal examination.

5 Substantive examination

RDB's procedure refers substantive examination to ARIPO; the competent authority may also rely on PCT and foreign search and examination reports (Article 26). Supply foreign search and grant documents when asked (Article 252).

6 Publication and opposition

Publication in the Official Gazette within nine months of meeting the requirements (Article 27), with a publication fee of RWF 20,000; third parties may oppose before grant (Article 29), with appeal to the Commission of Appeal within three months (Article 30).

7 Grant and maintenance

The patent is granted and recorded (Article 31). Pay the annual fee of RWF 100,000 on each anniversary of the filing date, within the six-month grace period at the latest (Article 41).

Before filing: an inventor's checklist

Points to settle before an application is filed in or for Rwanda.

☐ **Subject matter**

The invention is not within Article 23, or the claims are framed as a process or a computer-implemented invention rather than a pharmaceutical product or software per se.

☐ **Copyright trade-off**

For a computer-implemented invention, the business accepts that filing waives copyright in the same subject matter (Article 23(4)).

☐ **Right type**

A product innovation without a clear inventive step may be better protected by a utility model certificate, which costs less and needs only novelty.

☐ **Ownership**

Employee inventions belong to the employer under Article 265 unless the contract says otherwise; consultants have assigned in writing.

☐ **Deadlines**

Priority claims within 12 months of the first filing (Article 255), final specification within 12 months of a provisional one (Article 18), and PCT or Harare national phase dates diarised.

☐ **Working plan**

A plan to supply the Rwandan market by manufacture or import, to reduce the risk of a compulsory licence under Article 51.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Patent or utility model for a solar irrigation pump

A Rwandan agritech company has designed an improved pump housing. It files on 1 March 2027 and wants to know the official cost of ten years' protection under each right. Figures are RDB's published tariff; it is assumed that the final specification attracts the RWF 30,000 final-specification fee, that one annual patent fee is paid for each year and that fees do not change.

Patent: filing and publication	Provisional specification RWF 10,000 on 1 March 2027, final specification RWF 30,000 by 1 March 2028 (Article 18), publication RWF 20,000: RWF 60,000.
Patent: annual fees	Ten annual fees of RWF 100,000 each, due on 1 March of each year (Article 41): $10 \times \text{RWF } 100,000 = \text{RWF } 1,000,000$.
Patent: ten-year total	$\text{RWF } 60,000 + \text{RWF } 1,000,000 = \text{RWF } 1,060,000$, before agent and drafting fees. Protection could continue to 1 March 2047 at RWF 100,000 a year.
Utility model: ten-year total	Application RWF 10,000 + publication RWF 20,000 + renewal after five years RWF 250,000 = RWF 280,000 for the full ten years (Article 102).

Late payment	If the utility model renewal due on 1 March 2032 is paid on 15 July 2032, inside the six-month grace period, the surcharge of RWF 50,000 brings the renewal to RWF 300,000.
Choice	The utility model saves RWF 780,000 over ten years and does not require an inventive step, but it ends after ten years and cannot cover a manufacturing process (Article 82). If the housing is a real advance, file a patent and keep the right to convert to a utility model once before grant (Article 85).

Whether the first annual patent fee falls due at filing or on the first anniversary is not spelled out in Article 41; confirm with RDB before budgeting.

RDB's tariff derives from Ministerial Order N° 24 of 17/03/2016, whose transitional life under Article 384 has ended.

Questions investors ask

Can software be patented in Rwanda?

Not as such. Article 23(1)(j) of Law N° 055/2024 excludes computer programs per se, software and related databases, but Article 23(3) keeps computer-implemented process and product inventions patentable. Filing for them waives copyright in the same subject matter (Article 23(4)), so weigh a 20-year patent against copyright for the author's life plus 50 years.

Are pharmaceutical products patentable in Rwanda?

The Gazette text of Article 23(1)(h) of Law N° 055/2024 lists pharmaceutical products among exclusions, with the Minister in charge of health to determine which products are excluded by Order. No Order had been found at 10 October 2026. Process claims are not excluded, and some commentaries state the rule the wrong way round.

How long does a Rwandan patent last and what does it cost to maintain?

Twenty years from the filing date (Article 41 of Law N° 055/2024), provided an annual fee is paid in advance each year on the anniversary of filing. RDB's tariff sets the annual fee at RWF 100,000, with a RWF 30,000 surcharge for payment within the six-month grace period. Reinstatement may be requested within 12 months (Article 263).

Can I extend a PCT application to Rwanda?

Yes. Rwanda is party to the PCT and RDB acts as designated office (Article 63). National phase entry requires the application, the fee (USD 150 on RDB's tariff) and any translation, with 30 days to cure a missing fee or translation (Article 64). RDB waits for the PCT time limits unless early processing is paid for (Article 66).

What is a utility model certificate?

A 10-year right for a new, industrially applicable product innovation that need not involve an inventive step (Articles 71 and 102 of Law N° 055/2024). Processes are excluded. RDB charges RWF 10,000 to apply, RWF 20,000 to publish and RWF 250,000 to renew after five years. A patent application can be converted once into a utility model application.

Who owns an invention made by an employee in Rwanda?

The employer, where the invention is made in executing the employment contract, unless the contract provides otherwise (Article 265 of Law N° 055/2024). If the invention proves more valuable than either party could foresee, the employee is entitled to equitable remuneration. Inventions outside the employee's duties but using the employer's resources follow Article 266.

Can the Government license my patent without my consent?

Yes, in defined cases. The Minister may grant a compulsory licence after a failed request for a voluntary licence where the invention is not worked or insufficiently worked in Rwanda, is used anti-competitively or blocks a dependent patent (Article 51), and may authorise Government use for national security, public health or environmental protection, with compensation (Article 57).

THE 2027 HORIZON

- An Order of the Minister in charge of health under Article 23(2), listing the pharmaceutical products excluded from patent protection: its scope will decide whether pharmaceutical product patents are available in Rwanda at all.
- A Ministerial Order on the modalities for pre-grant patent opposition (Article 29) and on the Commission of Appeal (Article 30); until they appear, oppositions have no published procedure or fee scale.
- A new fee Order under Article 383, replacing the 2016 tariff that RDB still applies; Cabinet approved a Ministerial Order on industrial property and IP service fees on 4 March 2026, but it had not been located in the Official Gazette at 10 October 2026, and annual fee levels for patents could change when it is published.
- Watch ARIPO practice under Article 65, in particular whether RDB notifies exclusions for ARIPO patents claiming pharmaceutical products or software, and RDB's use of ARIPO for substantive examination.

Terms you will meet in the documents

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Patent	<i>impamyabuvumbuzi</i>	<i>brevet</i>	A title protecting an invention for 20 years from filing (Articles 2 and 41).

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Utility model certificate	<i>icyemezo cy'ubuvumbuzi buciriritse</i>	<i>certificat de modèle d'utilité</i>	A 10-year title for a new, industrially applicable product innovation (Articles 71 and 102).
Industrial design	<i>igishushanyo n'icyitegererezo bikorehwa mu nganda</i>	<i>dessins et modèles industriels</i>	The protected appearance of an industrial or craft product, for 15 years (Articles 105 and 128).
Provisional specification	—	<i>spécification provisoire</i>	An initial description securing a filing date, to be followed by a final specification within 12 months (Article 18).
Compulsory licence	—	<i>licence obligatoire</i>	A licence granted by the Minister without the owner's authorisation (Articles 50 to 61).
Layout-design of integrated circuit	—	<i>schéma de configuration du circuit intégré</i>	The protected three-dimensional arrangement of an integrated circuit, for 10 years (Articles 142 and 165).
Geographical indication	—	<i>indication géographique</i>	An indication of a product's origin linked to its quality or reputation (Articles 234 to 249).
Industrial property title	—	<i>titre de propriété industrielle</i>	The certificate evidencing a registered industrial property right; it may be given as security (Article 267).
Commission of Appeal	—	<i>commission d'appel</i>	The body hearing appeals on patent oppositions within three months (Article 30); its Order had not been published.

FOREIGN V RWANDAN INVESTOR

The tests, terms and fees are the same for everyone, and Paris Convention and WTO nationals file on equal terms (Article 250). A foreign applicant without a residence or principal place of business in Rwanda must use an authorised Rwandan agent (Article 251(2)) and will normally enter through the PCT or the ARIPO Harare Protocol, paying in United States dollars for PCT and Hague services. A Rwandan resident inventor can file directly and cheaply, using a provisional specification to secure a date.

Nationals of East African Community (EAC) and COMESA states have no regional patent of their own; they use ARIPO or the PCT like other foreigners. The compulsory licence ground of non-working applies to all owners, but it bites mainly on foreign owners who do not supply the Rwandan market; supply by import counts towards working (Article 51(2)(b)).

WATCH OUT FOR

- Publishing before filing: novelty is worldwide, and the grace period is 12 months for inventions but only six months for designs (Articles 6 and 108).
- Filing a software-related patent without weighing the copyright waiver in Article 23(4).
- Assuming pharmaceutical product claims will be accepted: Article 23(1)(h) excludes pharmaceutical products pending a health Ministerial Order.
- Letting a provisional application lapse: without a final specification within 12 months the application is abandoned (Article 18(4)).
- Missing annual fees: they fall due on each anniversary of filing, and after the six-month grace period the patent lapses (Article 41).
- Relying on the patent to stop genuine parallel imports: patent rights are exhausted by sales abroad by the owner or with its consent (Article 40(1)(f)).

OFFICIAL SOURCES

- WIPO Lex: Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property, Articles 5 to 141 and 250 to 268 — <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/22672>
- Rwanda Development Board: business procedure, register a patent (formal examination, ARIPO substantive examination, fees) — <https://businessprocedures.rdb.rw/procedure/print/32/step/0?showRecourses=true&showCertification=false&l=en&embed=true&includeSearch=false>
- Rwanda Development Board: business procedure, register a utility model — <https://businessprocedures.rdb.rw/procedure/print/35/step/0?showRecourses=true&showCertification=false&l=en&embed=true&includeSearch=false>
- Rwanda Development Board, Office of the Registrar General: intellectual property fee tariffs (patents, utility models, designs) — <https://org.rdb.rw/intellectual-property-rights/fee-tariffs/>
- WIPO Lex: Rwanda profile (PCT, Hague, Harare Protocol, Budapest Treaty, Arusha Protocol) — <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/members/profile/RW>

Copyright, software and digital content: protected works including computer programs and databases, protection without registration, moral and economic rights, ownership of employee and commissioned works, written assignments and licences, exceptions for software users, terms of protection, the 2026 state collective management order for music and digital uses, technical protection measures and online platforms

Reviewed 10 October 2026 · Prepared by a commercial lawyer with over 30 years' international experience · Legal
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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Under Articles 279 and 280 of Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property, protected works include literary works "including computer programs", audio-visual works, music, photographs, applied art and works derived from Rwandan national folklore, and collections of data "whether in machine readable form or other form" that are original by reason of their selection or arrangement, while ideas, methods and mere data are excluded (Article 282).
- An original work is protected "whether registered or not" from the beginning of its creation (Article 283); RDB offers optional registration, which its business procedures list without a fee, and the economic rights last for the author's life plus 50 years to the end of the calendar year (Article 307), 25 years for applied art (Article 311), while moral rights are perpetual and cannot be assigned or licensed (Articles 288 and 306).
- Economic rights in a work created under an employment contract that "aims at carrying out creative activity" are deemed assigned to the employer (Article 315(2)), economic rights in a commissioned work belong to the commissioner unless a written contract provides otherwise (Article 316), and the producer owns an audio-visual work (Article 317).
- An assignment of economic rights is valid only if in writing and signed by both parties and must state the rights, duration, territory and remuneration; without a stated territory it is presumed limited to the jurisdiction where the contract was concluded (Article 320), and licences follow the same rules (Articles 322 and 323).
- Ministerial Order N° 001/MOYA/2026 of 08/09/2026, published in the Official Gazette n° Special of 09/09/2026 and in force on publication, makes the competent authority the collective management institution on an extended basis covering non-members for broadcasting, public performance and digital uses, requires users to hold and display a licence, and splits royalties 70% to right holders, 20% to administration and 10% to creative-industry promotion, paid twice a year.
- Circumventing effective technical protection measures and dealing commercially in circumvention devices is prohibited (Article 351), and under Law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cyber crimes a service provider that fails to act on a take-down notification of data or activity infringing the rights of a third party, or of unlawful material, is liable to a fine of FRW 1,000,000 to FRW 3,000,000 (Article 50).

What copyright protects in Rwanda

Title III of Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property (the IP Law), in force since 31 July 2024, protects original literary, artistic and scientific works (Article 279). The list covers written works and their illustrations "published in whatever form, **including computer programs**"; lectures, speeches and other oral works; musical, dramatic and choreographic works; audio-visual works; drawings, paintings, sculpture and other artistic works; architecture; photographs; applied art, including handicraft and industrially produced works; maps, plans and technical drawings; and works derived from Rwandan national folklore. Translations, adaptations and arrangements are protected as derivative works, and collections, "such as encyclopaedia, anthologies, collections of data, **whether in machine readable form or other form**", are protected if their selection or arrangement of contents is an original intellectual creation (Article 280), without affecting the rights in the underlying works.

Protection does not extend to official legislative, administrative and judicial texts and their official translations, to news of the day, or to "any idea, procedure, system, method of operation, concept, principle, discovery or **mere data**", however expressed (Article 282). For a technology business the consequence is that source and object code, user interfaces with original expression, documentation, training materials and curated databases can be protected, but the underlying algorithm, business method or raw dataset cannot be. A database of customer or user records may be protected by copyright as a collection only if its structure is original; the personal data within it is governed by Law N° 058/2021, covered in [Personal data protection](#).

Article 281 fixes the territorial reach: Rwandan nationals, residents and companies, audio-visual works whose producer is Rwandan, works first published in Rwanda, buildings in Rwanda, works eligible under the Berne Convention or any other convention to which Rwanda is party, and works from countries granting Rwandan works equivalent protection. Rwanda has been party to the Berne Convention since 1 March 1984 and to the Marrakesh Treaty for print-disabled persons since 25 January 2022, so foreign works are protected on the same terms as Rwandan ones. WIPO's treaty database does not list Rwanda as party to the WIPO Copyright Treaty or the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty, although the IP Law already includes the digital-era rules those treaties require.

No formalities, and what registration adds

A work is protected when it is original, "whether registered or not", from the beginning of its creation, even if unfinished and even if not fixed in a medium (Article 283). A work is original if it originates from the author, is not a copy and is the product of the author's "skill, effort and judgment" (Article 284), a test closer to the common law tradition than to a strict creativity standard. The author is presumed to be the owner, and it is enough for the author's name, or an unambiguous pseudonym, to appear on the work (Article 285).

The IP Law nonetheless provides for **optional registration** on a prescribed form (Articles 286 and 287). RDB's Office of the Registrar General registers copyright works, and its business procedures list the service without a fee and with a processing time of 6 to 16 days; RDB's industrial property fee tariff contains no copyright fees. Registration does not create the right, but a dated registration certificate is useful evidence of authorship and of the date of creation in a dispute, in a customs application or in due diligence. Software houses and content businesses entering Rwanda often register flagship products for that reason, and because Article 285's presumption depends on the name appearing on the work, which code rarely shows.

Moral and economic rights

The author has three **moral rights**: to claim authorship and be named, to object to distortion or modification prejudicial to honour or reputation, and to remain anonymous or use a pseudonym (Article 288(1)). Moral rights "cannot be assigned or licenced" (Article 288(2)) and are perpetual and imprescriptible (Article 306). A licensee who heavily adapts a work, such as an advertising agency reworking an artist's illustration, should therefore obtain the author's written consent to the specific changes rather than rely on an assignment.

The **economic rights** are the exclusive rights to reproduce, translate, adapt or arrange the work; to rent or lend audio-visual works, works embodied in phonograms and **computer programs** (except for non-profit educational lending); to distribute copies; to transfer ownership; and to communicate the work to the public by any means, including broadcasting and public performance (Article 289(1)).

"Communication to the public" is defined widely in Article 2 to cover transmission by any means to persons outside the normal circle of a family, which includes streaming and on-demand availability. The distribution right is exhausted for copies put on the market with the owner's authorisation (Article 289(2)), and authors of original art and manuscripts have an inalienable **resale right** to a share of later sale prices, in an amount the competent authority is to determine (Article 289(3) and (4)). Profit-making use of works derived from national folklore attracts royalties fixed by the competent authority, 25% of which is reserved for promoting creative works (Article 290).

Who owns work made by employees, contractors and producers

Ownership rules decide whether a business owns the code, content and designs it pays for. For employees, Article 315 provides that the employed author keeps the moral rights unless the employment contract provides otherwise, and that the economic rights are "considered assigned to the employer" only where the work was created in executing an employment contract "which aims at carrying out creative activity". If the work is created without being stipulated in the contract, the employee owns the economic rights (Article 315(3)), and works created by a civil servant in the course of employment belong to the Republic of Rwanda (Article 315(4)). An employer should therefore describe creative and development duties in each job description and contract and add an express assignment of copyright in works created in the course of employment.

For contractors the default favours the client: if a work is commissioned in exchange for remuneration, the economic rights belong to the person who commissioned it, unless a written contract governing the commission provides otherwise (Article 316). The producer of an audio-visual work owns the economic rights, although contributors keep rights in separately exploitable contributions and pre-existing works (Article 317), and a photographer owns the economic rights in a photograph unless a written contract with remuneration transfers them (Article 318). Co-authors jointly own an indivisible work and may each sue (Article 313), and the person who initiated and directed a collective work owns it (Article 314). These defaults are generous to commissioning businesses, but a developer's standard terms that reserve ownership will displace Article 316, so foreign groups should check the terms before paying for software built in Rwanda.

Assignments and licences must be in writing

Economic rights may be assigned in whole or in part, by contract or by succession (Article 319). Under Article 320 an **assignment** is valid only if "made in writing and signed by both parties" and must state at least the specific rights assigned, the duration, the territorial scope and the remuneration and mode of payment. Without a stated territory, the assignment is presumed limited to the jurisdiction where the contract was concluded, and rights not explicitly mentioned are presumed reserved to the author (Article 320(3)). A **licence**, exclusive, semi-exclusive or non-exclusive, must likewise be written and

signed by both parties (Article 322) and state the rights, duration, territory and remuneration, with the same presumptions (Article 323). Giving away the original or a copy of a work does not transfer any economic right (Article 321).

These rules catch common practice. A clickwrap end-user licence is a contract formed electronically, which Rwandan law recognises, but whether a click satisfies "signed by both parties" in Article 322 depends on the electronic signature rules discussed in [E-commerce, fintech and AI](#); a group-wide intellectual property assignment that lists no territory may be read as limited to the country where it was signed. Publishing contracts have their own rules on duration and termination (Articles 326 to 329), and the competent authority may grant compulsory licences to translate or reproduce works in limited cases (Articles 330 to 336). Unlike patent and mark licences, copyright licences need not be recorded with RDB to be valid, but the tax treatment of royalties paid abroad is covered in [Withholding taxes and tax treaties](#).

Software: what users may do, and the patent trade-off

Computer programs are literary works (Article 279(a)) and carry the full set of economic rights, including the rental right (Article 289(1)(d)). Several exceptions are narrowed for software. The private copying exception does not extend to computer programs or to the whole or a substantial part of a database in digital form (Article 291(2)). The lawful owner of a copy of a program may, without authorisation or royalty, make a copy or adaptation needed to use the program for the purpose for which it was obtained, or for archiving and replacing a lost or damaged copy, but must destroy those copies within six months after the contract for possession ends (Article 299). Temporary copies made in the course of a digital transmission or to make a work perceptible, incidental to normal operation and deleted automatically, are permitted (Article 292), which covers caching and browsing.

The IP Law also forces a choice for inventive software. A patent cannot be obtained for computer programs per se, but computer-implemented inventions remain patentable, and an applicant who files for one "waives his or her right of seeking copyright protection for the same subject matter" (Article 23(4)). Copyright gives life plus 50 years without formalities; a patent gives 20 years of protection against independent development, at the price of disclosure and fees. The analysis is in [Patents, utility models and industrial designs](#).

Collective management after the September 2026 Order

Article 350 of the IP Law gives the competent authority the task of collecting licence remunerations and distributing them to right holders, with modalities set by Order of the Minister in charge of culture. That Order is **Ministerial Order N° 001/MOYA/2026 of 08/09/2026** determining modalities for the collection and distribution of royalties derived from the exploitation of copyright and related rights, published in the Official Gazette n° Special of 09/09/2026 and in force on publication (Article 39). The competent authority acts as the collective management institution (Article 3) and decides on applications for membership within 14 days (Article 4). Its mandate is an **extended collective management**: it covers non-members as well as members for broadcasting, public performance and digital uses (Article 5).

Users of works in broadcasting, public performance and digital services must obtain a licence and display it (Article 6), at tariffs published after consultation of an Advisory Committee (Articles 7 and 8). Royalties are distributed on the basis of broadcasts, performances and digital streams (Article 34) and split **70% to right holders, 20% to administration and 10% to promoting the creative industries**, paid twice a year (Article 35). The Order is very recent: what becomes of any private collective management society operating before it, and when the tariffs will be published, should be checked with the Ministry of Youth and Arts before signing a music licence. Related rights of performers, phonogram producers and broadcasters last 50 years for performances and phonograms and 25 years for broadcasts (Articles 340 to 342), and broadcasting organisations control rebroadcasting, fixation, reproduction and communication of their broadcasts (Article 346).

Digital protection, platforms and AI-generated content

Article 351 prohibits circumventing **effective technical protection measures**, such as encryption, scrambling or copy control (Article 352), and producing, importing, distributing, selling, renting, advertising or commercially possessing devices or services marketed for circumvention. A right holder must, on request, waive the measures to allow uses the law permits. Removing or altering rights management information, or distributing works whose information has been removed, is also prohibited (Article 353). Offences and remedies, including the fine of FRW 1,000,000 to FRW 2,000,000 for unauthorised communication of a protected work to the public (Article 377), are in IP enforcement and anti-counterfeiting.

Platforms carry duties under other laws. Law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cyber crimes requires a service provider informed by security organs or the cyber security organ of illegal or harmful information to remove it and suspend the service concerned (Article 6), and makes it an offence, punishable by a fine of FRW 1,000,000 to FRW 3,000,000, to fail to act on a take-down notification of data or activity infringing a third party's rights or of unlawful material (Article 50); and Law N° 011/2026 of 26/02/2026 relating to competition and consumer protection requires online intermediaries to keep the content they carry lawful (Article 45). A platform hosting user content should therefore operate, and keep records of, its own notice-and-takedown process.

The IP Law has no rule on works generated by artificial intelligence. It defines an author as "a person who created a work" and a person as a natural person or a public or private legal entity (Article 2), and requires originality in the sense of skill, effort and judgment (Article 284). Whether output generated with little human input is protected, and who owns it, is untested; businesses should allocate rights in AI-assisted output by contract and keep records of human contribution.

How long copyright and related rights last

Right	Term	Law N° 055/2024	Note
Moral rights	Unlimited	Articles 288 and 306	Cannot be assigned or licensed
Economic rights, individual author	Life plus 50 years	Article 307	Runs to the end of the calendar year of expiry

Right	Term	Law N° 055/2024	Note
Work of joint authorship	Life of last surviving author plus 50 years	Article 308	Each co-author may sue (Article 313)
Anonymous or pseudonymous work	50 years from making, first publication or making available	Article 309	Life plus 50 once the author is identified
Collective or posthumous work	50 years from making, first publication or making available	Article 310	Owned by the person who initiated a collective work
Work of applied art	25 years from making	Article 311	Consider design registration for 15 years as well
Performance	50 years	Article 340	Counted from January after fixation or performance
Phonogram	50 years	Article 341	Counted from January after publication or fixation
Broadcast	25 years	Article 342	Counted from January after the broadcast

Securing rights in software and content built in Rwanda

Points to cover before paying for, launching or acquiring software or content created in Rwanda.

- ☐ **Employee contracts**
State that the role involves creative or development activity and include an express assignment, so Article 315(2) applies without argument.
- ☐ **Contractor agreements**
Rely on Article 316 only if the contractor's terms do not reserve ownership; better, take a written assignment signed by both parties.
- ☐ **Assignment content**
List the rights, duration, territory (worldwide, if intended) and payment; anything not listed stays with the author (Article 320).
- ☐ **Moral rights**
Obtain written consent to anticipated modifications and to anonymous or white-label use, since moral rights cannot be assigned (Article 288).
- ☐ **Open-source and third-party code**
Inventory third-party components and their licences; a licence must be written and signed (Article 322) and copies made under Article 299 must be destroyed after the licence ends.

☐ Evidence

Register flagship works with RDB and keep dated repositories, since the presumption in Article 285 depends on the author's name appearing on the work.

☐ Music and broadcasts

Obtain and display the licence required by Ministerial Order N° 001/MOYA/2026 before playing music or streaming in public.

Licensing music and content for public use under the 2026 Order

1 Identify the use

Broadcasting, public performance in premises or at events, or digital use: all three are within the extended collective management of Article 5 of Ministerial Order N° 001/MOYA/2026.

2 Contact the competent authority

The authority acting as collective management institution issues licences; check with the Ministry of Youth and Arts which office handles applications and whether the tariffs under Articles 7 and 8 have been published.

3 Obtain the licence

Pay the tariff applicable to the category of use and receive the licence (Article 6).

4 Display the licence

Users must display the licence at the place of use (Article 6).

5 Report usage

Distribution is based on broadcasts, performances and digital streams (Article 34), so keep playlists and stream logs available.

6 Right holders: join

Authors and producers may apply for membership, decided within 14 days (Article 4), and receive 70% of collections twice a year (Article 35).

WORKED EXAMPLE

A Kigali hotel's music licence and its commissioned booking app

A foreign-owned hotel company in Kigali takes a public performance licence under the 2026 Order and commissions a booking app from a Rwandan developer. The licence fee is illustrative because tariffs depend on the authority's published scale; the split and contract rules come from the Order and Law N° 055/2024.

Annual music licence

Illustrative annual tariff for background music in public areas: RWF 1,200,000, paid to the competent authority (Article 6 of the Order).

Where the money goes	70% x RWF 1,200,000 = RWF 840,000 to right holders; 20% = RWF 240,000 to administration; 10% = RWF 120,000 to creative-industry promotion (Article 35).
Distribution	Paid twice a year: RWF 840,000 / 2 = RWF 420,000 per distribution, shared among members and non-members according to performance data (Articles 5 and 34).
App development fee	The hotel pays the developer RWF 18,000,000. Under Article 316 the economic rights in the commissioned app belong to the hotel unless a written contract provides otherwise.
The developer's terms	The developer's standard terms reserve ownership of the code and grant a licence for Rwanda only. That written term displaces Article 316, so the hotel holds a licence, presumed limited to the stated territory, not ownership.
The fix	The parties sign a written assignment of the economic rights, worldwide and for their full duration, for the same RWF 18,000,000, with the developer's written consent to future modifications; the developer keeps the moral right to be named, which it agrees not to exercise in the app's interface.

Had the developer been the hotel's employee hired to build software, the economic rights would have been deemed assigned under Article 315(2).

A royalty paid to a foreign licensor is subject to withholding tax; see section 3.3.

Questions investors ask

Do I need to register copyright in Rwanda?

No. Under Article 283 of Law N° 055/2024 an original work is protected whether registered or not, from the beginning of its creation. RDB offers optional registration, listed without a fee in its business procedures, which provides dated evidence of authorship that is useful in disputes, customs applications and due diligence.

Is software protected by copyright in Rwanda?

Yes. Article 279 of Law N° 055/2024 protects literary works including computer programs, and Article 280 protects original collections of data in machine-readable form. Ideas, methods and mere data are not protected (Article 282). Seeking a patent for a computer-implemented invention waives copyright in the same subject matter (Article 23(4)).

Who owns software written by an employee?

The employer owns the economic rights where the employment contract aims at carrying out creative activity (Article 315(2) of Law N° 055/2024); otherwise the employee does. The employee keeps the moral rights unless the contract provides otherwise. Describe development duties in the contract and add an express written assignment.

Who owns work done by a contractor or agency?

The person who commissioned and paid for the work owns the economic rights, unless a written contract governing the commission provides otherwise (Article 316 of Law N° 055/2024). Many contractors' standard terms do provide otherwise, so check them and take a written assignment stating the rights, duration, territory and payment (Article 320).

Must a copyright assignment be in writing?

Yes. Article 320 of Law N° 055/2024 makes an assignment valid only if in writing and signed by both parties, stating the specific rights, duration, territorial scope and remuneration. Without a stated territory it is presumed limited to the jurisdiction where it was concluded, and rights not mentioned are presumed reserved to the author. Licences follow the same rules.

Do businesses need a licence to play music in Rwanda?

Yes. Under Ministerial Order N° 001/MOYA/2026 of 08/09/2026, in force since 9 September 2026, the competent authority licenses broadcasting, public performance and digital uses on an extended collective basis covering non-members. Users must obtain and display a licence, and royalties are split 70% to right holders, 20% administration and 10% creative-industry promotion.

How long does copyright last in Rwanda?

For most works, the author's life plus 50 years, running to the end of the calendar year (Article 307 of Law N° 055/2024). Applied art lasts 25 years from creation, anonymous and collective works 50 years, performances and phonograms 50 years and broadcasts 25 years. Moral rights never expire.

THE 2027 HORIZON

- Tariffs and the Advisory Committee under Articles 7 and 8 of Ministerial Order N° 001/MOYA/2026: the first published scales will set the real cost of music and digital-use licences for hotels, broadcasters, events and platforms.
- The position of any private collective management society after the 2026 Order, and the first twice-yearly distribution under Article 35, expected in 2027.
- Determinations by the competent authority of the artist's resale share (Article 289(4)) and of royalties for profit-making use of works derived from folklore (Article 290(2)).
- Accession to the WIPO Copyright Treaty and the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty, which WIPO does not list for Rwanda, and any rule on AI-generated works following the National AI Policy; no bill had been located at 10 October 2026.

Terms you will meet in the documents

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Copyright	<i>uburenganzira bw'umuhanzi</i>	<i>droit d'auteur</i>	The moral and economic rights of the author in an original work (Articles 278 to 336).
Moral rights	—	<i>droits moraux</i>	Rights of attribution, integrity and anonymity; perpetual and not assignable (Articles 288 and 306).
Economic rights	—	<i>droits économiques</i>	Exclusive rights to reproduce, adapt, distribute, rent and communicate a work (Article 289).
Related rights	—	<i>droits connexes</i>	Rights of performers, phonogram producers and broadcasters (Articles 337 to 349).
Royalties	<i>ibihembo by'uruhushya</i>	<i>rémunérations de licence</i>	Payments for licensed use of works, collected and distributed under Article 350 and the 2026 Order.
Communication to the public	—	<i>communication au public</i>	Transmission of a work by any means to persons outside the family circle (Article 2).
Orphan work	—	<i>œuvre orpheline</i>	A protected work whose owner cannot be located; usable under a licence from the competent authority (Article 324).
Commissioned work	—	<i>œuvre créée sur commande</i>	A work made for remuneration; its economic rights belong to the commissioner absent written terms (Article 316).
Technical protection measures	—	<i>mesures techniques de protection d'une œuvre</i>	Access or copy controls whose circumvention is prohibited (Articles 351 and 352).
Expression of folklore	—	<i>expression du folklore</i>	Forms in which traditional cultural knowledge is expressed; works derived from it attract royalties (Articles 2 and 290).

FOREIGN V RWANDAN INVESTOR

Copyright does not discriminate. Works of foreign authors are protected under Article 281 through the Berne Convention, in force for Rwanda since 1 March 1984, or on reciprocity, without registration and for the same terms as Rwandan works. Ownership, assignment and licence rules are identical, and a foreign company may register works with RDB without the local agent that industrial property filings require.

Two practical differences remain. An assignment or licence signed abroad without a stated territory is presumed limited to the country where it was concluded (Articles 320 and 323), which can leave a foreign group without Rwandan rights; and foreign right holders are swept into the extended collective management of the 2026 Order for broadcasting, public performance and digital uses whether or not they join. East African Community (EAC) and COMESA nationals have no separate regime.

WATCH OUT FOR

- Assuming the employer owns everything an employee writes: only where the contract aims at creative activity (Article 315(2)).
- Assignments that omit the territory, duration or payment: the territory defaults to the place of signature and unlisted rights stay with the author (Article 320).
- Trying to buy moral rights: they cannot be assigned or licensed (Article 288(2)); take consents instead.
- Playing music or streaming in public without the licence required since 9 September 2026 by Ministerial Order N° 001/MOYA/2026.
- Patenting software-related inventions without weighing the copyright waiver in Article 23(4).
- Hosting user content without a takedown process: failing to act on a take-down notification of infringing data is an offence under Article 50 of Law N° 60/2018, with fines up to FRW 3,000,000.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

- WIPO Lex: Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property, Articles 278 to 353 — <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/22672>
- Amategeko law portal: Ministerial Order N° 001/MOYA/2026 of 08/09/2026 determining modalities for the collection and distribution of royalties derived from the exploitation of copyright and related rights (Official Gazette n° Special of 09/09/2026) — <https://amategeko.gov.rw/>
- Rwanda Development Board: business procedure, register a copyright — <https://businessprocedures.rdb.rw/procedure/print/33/step/0?showRecourses=true&showCertification=false&l=en&embed=true&includeSearch=false>
- National Cyber Security Authority: Law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cyber crimes — <https://cyber.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=70&token=8a1cd43626bfcc2b99fba277aca01e6f2aaa1788>
- WIPO Lex: Rwanda profile (Berne Convention, Marrakesh Treaty) — <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/members/profile/RW>

IP enforcement and anti-counterfeiting: ex parte provisional measures decided within three working days, seizure and destruction, damages and account of profits, the right of information, customs suspension of counterfeit imports and the 10-working-day deadline to sue, the Commercial Court, criminal offences with tenfold corporate fines, and cyber-squatting

Reviewed 10 October 2026 · Prepared by a commercial lawyer with over 30 years' international experience · Legal and tax information, not legal advice · [How we check](#) · [Open in the app](#)

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- On the request of a right holder or licensee the competent court may order a provisional measure to prevent infringement or preserve evidence, without hearing the defendant where delay would cause irreparable harm and the applicant gives security, and must decide within three working days of receiving the complaint (Articles 354 and 355 of Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property).
- The defendant may seek review of an ex parte measure within 15 days of notification and the court decides within two working days (Article 356), and the measure may be revoked if the applicant does not start proceedings on the merits within 31 days of notification (Article 357).
- Customs may suspend the release of suspected counterfeit goods on a right holder's written request or of its own motion, must notify the right holder and importer within five working days (Article 365), and releases the goods unless the applicant tells customs within 10 working days of notice that it has started court proceedings or obtained a provisional measure (Article 368); small non-commercial quantities and goods in transit are excluded (Article 370).
- Intentional commercial infringement of copyright, dealing in infringing goods or using another's mark is punishable by three to five years' imprisonment and a fine of FRW 3,000,000 to FRW 5,000,000 (Article 373), knowingly selling counterfeit products by a fine of FRW 300,000 to FRW 500,000 (Article 376), and a corporate body pays ten times the fine provided for the offence (Article 381).
- Disputes related to intellectual property, including trade marks and names, are heard at first instance by the Commercial Court under Article 81(10°) of Law N° 30/2018 of 02/06/2018 determining the jurisdiction of courts.
- Acquiring a domain name in bad faith to profit, mislead, damage reputation or block others, where it is identical or confusingly similar to a registered trade mark or another person's name (cyber-squatting), is punishable by one to two years' imprisonment and a fine of FRW 1,000,000 to FRW 3,000,000 under Article 27 of Law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cyber crimes.

The enforcement toolkit in the 2024 law

Title IV of Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property (the IP Law), in force since 31 July 2024, gives right holders a complete set of remedies in one place: provisional measures (Articles 354 to 357), corrective measures, damages and information orders (Articles 358 to 362), border measures by customs (Articles 363 to 370), measures ordered by courts against infringing goods (Articles 371 and 372), and criminal offences (Articles 373 to 382). Each right also carries its own civil action: for marks under Article 203, for patents under Article 37, for designs, utility models and layout-designs in parallel provisions, and for unfair competition, including misuse of secret information, under Article 277.

The starting point is registration. Article 253 gives exclusive rights over industrial property only once it is registered, so an owner who has not registered a mark, patent or design in Rwanda generally cannot use these tools, save through the well-known mark and unfair competition rules described in [The IP law and trade marks](#). Copyright needs no registration (Article 283), but an RDB registration certificate is useful evidence of title. Most enforcement is driven by the right holder: there is no general IP inspectorate, and customs action ex officio depends on officers recognising goods as counterfeit.

Which court, and how a case starts

Under Article 81(10°) of Law N° 30/2018 of 02/06/2018 determining the jurisdiction of courts, the **Commercial Court** (*Urukiko rw'Ubucuruzi*) hears at first instance "disputes related to intellectual property, including trade marks and names". The same court decides invalidation actions against marks (Article 200) and patents (Article 34), so a defendant sued for infringement can be expected to counterclaim for invalidity. Appeals lie to the Commercial High Court. The procedure and timescales are explained in [Commercial litigation step by step](#).

Arbitration is possible for contractual IP disputes, such as royalty claims under a licence, and is often preferable where the counterparty is the licensee; it cannot bind third-party infringers or produce a customs or criminal remedy. Licence and distribution agreements should therefore pair an arbitration clause for contract disputes with an express reservation of the right to seek interim and infringement relief from the Rwandan courts, as discussed in [Arbitration law and KIAC](#).

Provisional measures: urgent orders within three working days

On the request of an industrial property title holder, a copyright or related rights holder, or a **licensee**, the competent court may order a provisional measure to prevent an infringement from occurring or to preserve evidence of an alleged infringement (Article 354). The court may act **without hearing the defendant** where three conditions are met: any delay is likely to cause irreparable harm to the right holder or to the evidence; reasonably available evidence shows that the applicant is the right holder and that its right is being infringed or that infringement is imminent; and the applicant provides security or an equivalent assurance sufficient to protect the defendant and prevent abuse (Article 355(1)). The court must decide **within three working days** of receiving the complaint, and where it acts ex parte it must notify the parties without delay (Article 355(2)). The amount of security is to be fixed by Ministerial Order (Article 355(3)); no such Order had been located at 10 October 2026, so the court sets security case by case.

The defendant may ask the court to review an ex parte measure within **15 days** of notification, and the court, after hearing both parties, confirms, modifies or revokes it within two working days of receiving the request (Article 356). The applicant must then move quickly on the merits: if it has not started proceedings leading to a decision on the merits within **31 days** of notification of the measure, the defendant may ask the court to revoke it (Article 357). In practice an applicant should file the merits claim together with, or immediately after, the provisional application, and should have its evidence of title (registration certificates, recorded licences, assignments) and of infringement (test purchases, photographs, invoices, notarised screenshots) ready before it applies.

Final remedies: cessation, destruction, damages and information

On a finding of infringement of industrial property, the court may order the infringer to stop releasing and advertising the goods; order the goods to be disposed of outside the channels of commerce, without compensation, so as to avoid harm to the right holder; order materials and instruments used to make them to be disposed of in the same way; and order seizure, forfeiture or destruction of the goods and the materials (Article 358). Simply removing a counterfeit mark is not enough, save in exceptional cases, to allow the goods back into commerce (Article 358(b)). For copyright the court may order cessation and the seizure, forfeiture, destruction or disposal of infringing copies, packaging, equipment and business papers, but not of copies acquired by third parties in good faith (Article 359). Under Articles 371 and 372 the court may also order goods infringing rights protected in Rwanda to be disposed of outside the Rwandan market, suspend the commercial activity concerned or order destruction, after weighing proportionality and the interests of third parties.

Damages are available where the infringer knew or had reasonable grounds to know that it was infringing, and the court may alternatively or additionally order it to hand over the profits it made (Article 360(1) and (2)). A claimant who sues in bad faith must compensate the defendant (Article 360(3)). The court may order the infringer to disclose the identity of third parties involved in producing or distributing the infringing goods or services and their distribution channels, the **right of information** (Article 361), which is often more valuable than damages against a small retailer because it leads to the importer. In a process patent case the burden shifts: if the product is new, or there is a substantial likelihood it was made by the patented process and the owner cannot discover the process used, an identical product is presumed to have been made by the patented process unless the defendant proves otherwise, with protection for the defendant's trade secrets (Article 362).

Border measures: stopping counterfeits at customs

The Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA), as customs authority, may suspend clearance and release into free circulation of goods on the written request of a right holder with valid grounds to suspect the import of counterfeit goods, or on its own initiative (Article 363(1)). It may require the applicant to provide adequate evidence and a description detailed enough for officers to recognise the goods (Article 363(2)). Goods are **counterfeit** for this purpose if they infringe a registered mark or geographical indication, are unauthorised copies infringing copyright or related rights, or would otherwise infringe an IP right if imported or circulated (Article 364), so the procedure covers patents, designs and trade secrets as well as marks and copyright.

Customs must notify the suspension to the right holder and the importer within **five working days** of its decision (Article 365). It may let both sides inspect the goods and take samples for testing, and must tell the right holder the identity of the owner, importer or consignee and the quantity of goods (Article 366). Suspension requires **security** or an equivalent assurance covering customs' costs and compensation to the importer if no infringement is found; where customs acted of its own motion, the right holder must provide the security within 10 working days of notification or the goods are released (Article 367). The amount is to be fixed by Ministerial Order (Article 367(4)), which had not been located.

The critical deadline is in Article 368: the applicant must inform customs, **within 10 working days** after being served notice of the suspension, that it has started proceedings before the competent court or obtained a provisional measure prolonging the suspension; otherwise the goods are released once other formalities are complete. For designs, patents, layout-designs and trade secrets the importer may obtain release on posting security sufficient to protect the right holder if the period expires without a court decision (Article 368(3)), and if the applicant fails to start a civil action within 14 days of the suspension, the security is released (Article 368(4)). Customs and its staff are not liable for actions taken in compliance with the procedure (Article 369). Two categories are excluded altogether: small quantities of goods of a non-commercial nature, and **goods in transit** through Rwanda (Article 370). Customs procedures more generally are covered in [Customs and EAC trade](#).

Criminal offences and penalties

Chapter II of Title IV creates IP offences prosecuted under the general criminal procedure. The central offence is in Article 373: any person who, intentionally and for commercial purposes, uses intellectual property without the owner's consent by infringing protected copyright or related rights, by producing, selling, offering for sale or rent, owning or importing infringing goods, or by using another person's mark, is liable to imprisonment of three to five years and a fine of FRW 3,000,000 to FRW 5,000,000. Performing or publishing a work in a forged manner and fraudulently using an author's name or distinctive sign each carry three to five years and FRW 7,000,000 to FRW 10,000,000 (Articles 374 and 375). Knowingly selling counterfeit products is punishable by a fine of FRW 300,000 to FRW 500,000 (Article 376), and broadcasting or communicating a protected work to the public without authorisation by a fine of FRW 1,000,000 to FRW 2,000,000 (Article 377).

Granting another person the right to perform a work without the owner's authorisation, or acting under false authorisation, carries one to two years and FRW 500,000 to FRW 1,000,000 (Article 378). Stealing or fraudulently using "a formula of invention" carries three to five years and FRW 7,000,000 to FRW 10,000,000 (Article 379), which gives criminal teeth to trade secret protection, and an act of unfair competition with respect to intellectual property is punishable by a fine of FRW 7,000,000 to FRW 10,000,000 (Article 380). A **corporate body or legal entity** convicted of any of the offences in Articles 373 to 376 and 378 to 380 pays **ten times** the fine provided (Article 381), and the court may also order seizure, destruction or confiscation of items used to commit the offence (Article 382). A right holder starts the process with a complaint to the investigation authorities, supported by the same evidence it would use in civil proceedings.

Online infringement, domain names and platforms

Law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cyber crimes adds remedies for online infringement. It applies to offences committed abroad with effects in Rwanda (Article 2). **Cyber-squatting**, acquiring a domain name in bad faith to profit, mislead, damage reputation or deprive others of registering it, where the name is identical, similar or confusingly similar to an existing registered trade mark or to another person's name, or is acquired without authorisation, is punishable by one to two years' imprisonment and a fine of FRW 1,000,000 to FRW 3,000,000 (Article 27). A service provider notified of data or activity infringing the rights of a third party, or of unlawful material, commits an offence if it fails to act on the take-down notification, punishable by a fine of FRW 1,000,000 to FRW 3,000,000 (Article 50); a business entity convicted of an offence under that law is liable to a fine of 30% to 70% of the profits received in the accounting period of the year in which the offence was committed (Article 51), and the court may order confiscation and closure of the premises (Article 52). A right holder confronting a counterfeit online store should therefore send a documented notice to the hosting platform or payment service, preserve the evidence, and combine the takedown with the civil and criminal routes. Article 222 of the IP Law separately bars use of a second-level domain name that is identical or similar to, or a translation of, a mark registered or well known in Rwanda.

Online sellers are also subject to the e-commerce rules in Law N° 011/2026 of 26/02/2026 relating to competition and consumer protection, under which online intermediaries must keep the content they carry lawful (Article 45), and the Rwanda Inspectorate, Competition and Consumer Protection Authority (RICA) licenses e-commerce operators; see [E-commerce, fintech and AI](#).

Enforcement in practice

The United States Department of State's 2026 Investment Climate Statement for Rwanda reports that counterfeit goods, including counterfeit pharmaceuticals, reach the Rwandan market, that re-exports within the East African Community complicate action, and that investors have in the past complained of slow registration and enforcement. Rwanda's reliance on imports through regional corridors means that border action is the most effective lever, but the Article 370 exclusion of goods in transit leaves goods passing through Rwanda to neighbouring markets outside the customs procedure, and the right holder must then act in the destination country.

Three practical points follow. First, enforcement is only as good as the registrations behind it: register marks and designs in every relevant class, record licences so that licensees can act under Article 354, and keep certificates to hand. Second, build the evidence before acting, because the three-working-day court timetable and the 10-working-day customs deadline leave no time to gather it afterwards. Third, use the right of information under Article 361 to move from retailers to importers, and combine civil action with a criminal complaint where the infringer is a company, since the tenfold corporate fine under Article 381 changes the economics of settlement. Where counterfeits are also unsafe, such as medicines or electrical goods, the product regulators, including the Rwanda Food and Drugs Authority and the Rwanda Standards Board, are a parallel route worth raising alongside IP proceedings.

IP offences and penalties under Law N° 055/2024

Offence	Article	Individual	Corporate body (Article 381)
Intentional commercial infringement, dealing in infringing goods, using another's mark	373	3 to 5 years and FRW 3,000,000 to 5,000,000	FRW 30,000,000 to 50,000,000
Performing or publishing a work in a forged manner	374	3 to 5 years and FRW 7,000,000 to 10,000,000	FRW 70,000,000 to 100,000,000
Fraudulent use of an author's name or sign	375	3 to 5 years and FRW 7,000,000 to 10,000,000	FRW 70,000,000 to 100,000,000
Knowingly selling counterfeit products	376	FRW 300,000 to 500,000	FRW 3,000,000 to 5,000,000
Unauthorised communication of a work to the public	377	FRW 1,000,000 to 2,000,000	Article 381 does not list Article 377
Granting a right to perform without authorisation	378	1 to 2 years and FRW 500,000 to 1,000,000	FRW 5,000,000 to 10,000,000
Stealing or fraudulently using a formula of invention	379	3 to 5 years and FRW 7,000,000 to 10,000,000	FRW 70,000,000 to 100,000,000
Unfair competition with respect to IP	380	FRW 7,000,000 to 10,000,000	FRW 70,000,000 to 100,000,000
Cyber-squatting (Law N° 60/2018)	27	1 to 2 years and FRW 1,000,000 to 3,000,000	30% to 70% of the profits of the year of the offence (Article 51)

Stopping a counterfeit shipment at the border

1 Prepare the file

Registration certificates, recorded licences, a description and photographs of genuine and counterfeit goods, and known importers, routes and HS codes (Article 363(2)).

2 Request suspension

Apply in writing to RRA Customs with valid grounds for suspicion and offer security or an equivalent assurance (Articles 363 and 367).

3 Receive the notice

Customs notifies the right holder and importer within five working days of suspending the goods (Article 365); diarise the date of service at once.

4 Inspect and sample

Ask to inspect and take samples, and obtain the identity of the importer, consignee and quantities (Article 366). If customs acted of its own motion, post security within 10 working days (Article 367(3)).

5 Go to court

File in the Commercial Court for a provisional measure, decided within three working days (Article 355), and on the merits, then inform customs within 10 working days of the notice (Article 368(1)).

6 Obtain final relief

Seek destruction or disposal outside commerce, damages or profits and an information order (Articles 358 to 361, 372), and consider a criminal complaint under Articles 373 and 381.

DECISION GUIDE

Which enforcement route first?

A first-cut guide for a right holder who has found infringing goods or content in Rwanda.

Q1 Is the right registered in Rwanda (or is it copyright, which needs no registration)?

Yes Continue.

No Register now; meanwhile consider well-known mark or unfair competition claims (Articles 185 and 277).

Q2 Are the goods being imported, rather than made or sold locally?

Yes Apply to RRA Customs for suspension, unless the goods are only in transit (Article 370).

No Continue.

Q3 Is there a risk that goods or evidence will disappear?

Yes Apply ex parte for a provisional measure with security; decision within three working days (Article 355).

No Send a cease and desist letter with a deadline, then sue in the Commercial Court.

Q4 Is the infringer a company acting deliberately?

Yes Add a criminal complaint: corporate fines are ten times the individual fine (Article 381).

No Civil remedies and the right of information (Article 361) may be enough.

Q5 Is the infringement online?

Yes

Send the platform a take-down notification, which it must act on (Law N° 60/2018, Article 50), and preserve the evidence.

No

Proceed with the routes above.

WORKED EXAMPLE

A detained container of counterfeit chargers

RRA Customs suspends, of its own motion, a container of phone chargers bearing a foreign electronics group's mark registered in Rwanda, imported by a Kigali trading company. Dates assume no public holidays; fine ranges are statutory; the security amount is illustrative because no Order fixes it.

Suspension and notice	Customs suspends release on Monday 1 March 2027 and serves notice on the right holder's agent on Wednesday 3 March 2027, within the five working days allowed by Article 365.
Security	Because customs acted of its own motion, the right holder must post security within 10 working days of notification: by Wednesday 17 March 2027 (Article 367(3)). It posts an illustrative RWF 5,000,000 bank guarantee on 8 March 2027.
Court and customs deadline	It applies ex parte to the Commercial Court on Wednesday 10 March 2027; the court must decide within three working days, by Monday 15 March 2027 (Article 355). It informs customs of the order on 16 March 2027, inside the 10 working days after notice that end on 17 March 2027 (Article 368(1)).
Defendant's options	The importer may seek review within 15 days of notification of the order, decided within two working days (Article 356); the right holder must start the merits action within 31 days of notification or face revocation (Article 357).
Criminal exposure of the importer	As a corporate body convicted under Article 373, the importer faces ten times FRW 3,000,000 to 5,000,000: FRW 30,000,000 to 50,000,000 (Article 381), plus confiscation of the goods (Article 382).
Retailers	A shopkeeper who knowingly sold earlier consignments faces FRW 300,000 to 500,000 (Article 376); a retail company, FRW 3,000,000 to 5,000,000. An information order under Article 361 identifies the supply chain.

Had the container been in transit to a neighbouring country, the border measures would not have applied (Article 370).

Article 368(4) releases the security if no civil action is started within 14 days of the suspension; filing the merits claim early protects both the goods and the guarantee.

Questions investors ask

Can I get an urgent court order against an infringer in Rwanda?

Yes. Under Articles 354 and 355 of Law N° 055/2024 the competent court may order a provisional measure, without hearing the defendant where delay would cause irreparable harm, if the applicant shows its right and gives security. The court must decide within three working days. Merits proceedings must follow within 31 days of notification or the measure may be revoked.

Which court hears IP cases in Rwanda?

The Commercial Court hears disputes related to intellectual property, including trade marks and names, at first instance under Article 81(10°) of Law N° 30/2018 of 02/06/2018 determining the jurisdiction of courts, with appeal to the Commercial High Court. Invalidation of marks and patents is also decided by the court (Articles 34 and 200 of Law N° 055/2024).

Can Rwandan customs seize counterfeit goods?

Customs may suspend release of suspected counterfeit goods on a right holder's written request or of its own motion (Article 363 of Law N° 055/2024), notifying both sides within five working days. The right holder must post security and, within 10 working days of notice, show that it has started court proceedings or obtained a provisional measure, or the goods are released. Goods in transit are excluded.

What are the criminal penalties for counterfeiting in Rwanda?

Intentional commercial infringement or use of another's mark carries three to five years' imprisonment and a fine of FRW 3,000,000 to 5,000,000 (Article 373 of Law N° 055/2024). Knowingly selling counterfeits carries a fine of FRW 300,000 to 500,000 (Article 376). Companies pay ten times the fine (Article 381), and items used may be confiscated or destroyed.

Can I recover damages for infringement?

Yes, where the infringer knew or had reasonable grounds to know it was infringing (Article 360 of Law N° 055/2024). The court may also order the infringer to pay over the profits made. A right holder who sues in bad faith must compensate the defendant. The court can additionally order disclosure of suppliers and distribution channels (Article 361).

Can a licensee enforce the licensed right?

A licensee may apply for provisional and corrective measures under Articles 354, 358 and 359 of Law N° 055/2024. Because patent and mark licences are valid only once recorded with RDB (Articles 44 and 209), a licensee should ensure its licence is recorded before relying on it in court or at the border.

What can I do about a website using my brand as its domain name?

Acquiring a domain name in bad faith, to profit or mislead, where it is identical or confusingly similar to a registered trade mark is cyber-squatting, punishable by one to two years and FRW 1,000,000 to 3,000,000 under Article 27 of Law N° 60/2018. Article 222 of Law N° 055/2024 also bars domain names identical or similar to a registered or well-known mark, which supports a civil claim.

THE 2027 HORIZON

- Ministerial Orders fixing the security for provisional measures (Article 355(3)) and for customs suspension (Article 367(4)): Cabinet approved a Ministerial Order covering the security for suspension of suspected counterfeit goods, together with industrial property fees, on 4 March 2026, but it had not been located in the Official Gazette at 10 October 2026; until it is published, courts and customs set security case by case.
- RRA's handling of written requests under Article 363: watch for a published procedure or standing application process for right holders on the Electronic Single Window.
- Regional measures within the East African Community on counterfeit trade and re-exports, which affect the transit gap in Article 370; no instrument binding Rwanda had been confirmed at 10 October 2026.
- The first prosecutions and judgments under Title IV of the 2024 law, which will show how courts apply the three-working-day deadline, damages and the tenfold corporate fine.

Terms you will meet in the documents

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Provisional measure	—	<i>mesure provisoire</i>	An urgent court order to prevent infringement or preserve evidence, decided within three working days (Articles 354 and 355).
Counterfeit goods	—	<i>marchandises contrefaites</i>	Goods infringing a registered mark, geographical indication, copyright or other IP right (Article 364).
Suspension of release into free circulation	—	<i>suspension de mise en libre circulation</i>	Customs detention of suspected counterfeit imports (Articles 363 to 368).
Right of information	—	<i>droit d'information</i>	A court order requiring the infringer to name its suppliers and distribution channels (Article 361).
Competent court	—	<i>juridiction compétente</i>	The court with jurisdiction; for IP disputes, the Commercial Court at first instance.

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Commercial Court	<i>Urukiko rw'Ubucuruzi</i>	—	First-instance court for IP disputes under Article 81(10°) of Law N° 30/2018.
Infringement of intellectual property rights	—	<i>violation des droits de propriété intellectuelle</i>	The core criminal offence in Article 373, punishable by three to five years and a fine.
Unfair competition	—	<i>concurrence déloyale</i>	Acts contrary to honest commercial practice, including misuse of secret information (Articles 269 to 277 and 380).
Secret information	<i>amakuru y'ibanga</i>	<i>information confidentielle</i>	Information that is secret, valuable because secret and protected by reasonable steps (Article 276).
Cyber crimes	<i>ibyaha bikoreshejwe ikoranabuhanga</i>	—	Offences under Law N° 60/2018, including cyber-squatting (Article 27).

FOREIGN V RWANDAN INVESTOR

The remedies, courts, deadlines and penalties are the same for every right holder. A foreign owner's practical position depends on what it has registered in Rwanda: without a Rwandan registration of a mark, patent or design it has no exclusive right to enforce (Article 253), whereas a Rwandan competitor that registered first may enforce against it. Foreign owners also need a local team able to meet the three-working-day and 10-working-day timetables, and evidence in a language the court accepts; documents in other languages should be translated into an official language the court accepts.

Goods moving within the East African Community (EAC) and COMESA are imports for the purpose of Article 363 when they enter Rwanda for release, but goods in transit through Rwanda are outside the border measures (Article 370). A foreign group selling across the region should therefore register and act in each destination market as well as in Rwanda.

WATCH OUT FOR

- Missing the 10-working-day deadline after a customs notice: the goods are released if no court proceedings or provisional measure are reported (Article 368(1)).
- Obtaining an ex parte order and then not suing on the merits within 31 days: the defendant can have it revoked (Article 357).
- Expecting customs to stop goods in transit: Article 370 excludes them, as well as small non-commercial quantities.
- Relying on an unrecorded licence: patent and mark licences are not valid until recorded, which undermines a licensee's standing.
- Suing in bad faith or on weak evidence: the court may order compensation to the defendant (Article 360(3)), and security posted for the measure is at risk.
- Overlooking criminal leverage: companies pay ten times the fine (Article 381), which often brings an importer to settle.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

- WIPO Lex: Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property, Articles 354 to 382 — <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/22672>
- National Cyber Security Authority: Law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cyber crimes (Articles 6, 27, 50 and 51) — <https://cyber.gov.rw/index.php?elD=dumpFile&t=f&f=70&token=8a1cd43626bfcc2b99fba277aca01e6f2aaa1788>
- Amategeko law portal: Law N° 30/2018 of 02/06/2018 determining the jurisdiction of courts, Article 81 — <https://amategeko.gov.rw/>
- Rwanda Revenue Authority: customs services — <https://www.rra.gov.rw/>
- US Department of State: 2026 Investment Climate Statement, Rwanda (intellectual property enforcement) — <https://www.state.gov/reports/2026-investment-climate-statements/rwanda>

Technology transfer, franchising and licensing: recording patent and trade mark licences with RDB as a condition of validity, the anti-competitive clauses listed in Articles 47 and 212 of Law N° 055/2024, vertical restraints under Law N° 011/2026, trade secrets and know-how, and the 15% withholding tax, 2% deduction cap and VAT on royalties

Reviewed 10 October 2026 · Prepared by a commercial lawyer with over 30 years' international experience · Legal and tax information, not legal advice · [How we check](#) · [Open in the app](#)

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Under Articles 42(4), 44(3), 207(3) and 209(3) of Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property, an assignment or contractual licence of a patent or registered mark becomes valid and enforceable only when it is recorded in RDB's register, on filing the contract and paying the fee in RDB's published tariff (RWF 20,000 for a patent licence, RWF 40,000 for a patent assignment, RWF 50,000 for a mark licence or assignment).
- Article 47 of Law N° 055/2024 deems eight patent licence clauses anti-competitive, including exclusive grant-backs, no-challenge clauses, tying, fees for unused patents, compulsory purchases from the licensor, export bans and limits on markets, and Article 212 makes similar trade mark licence clauses a rebuttable presumption of unfair competition; RDB may refuse to record the contract, subject to appeal to the Appeal Committee within 30 days (Articles 46 and 211).
- Rwanda has no franchise statute or franchise disclosure law; a franchise is built from a recorded trade mark licence, know-how and copyright licences and Law N° 45/2011 of 25/11/2011 governing contracts, and since 4 March 2026 Article 5 of Law N° 011/2026 of 26/02/2026 relating to competition and consumer protection prohibits minimum resale price maintenance and vertical agreements preventing effective use of the internet to sell.
- Secret information is protected against disclosure, acquisition or use contrary to honest commercial practices if it is secret, has commercial value because it is secret and is protected by reasonable steps (Article 276 of Law N° 055/2024), and unauthorised use of a competitor's technical formula or manufacturing method is unfair competition (Article 275).
- Royalties paid by a Rwandan resident, defined in Article 41 of Law N° 027/2022 of 20/10/2022 to include payments for trade marks, software, patents and know-how, bear 15% withholding tax under Article 60 unless a treaty reduces it (10% in the treaties with China, Mauritius, Singapore, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates), and royalties and technical fees paid to related non-residents are deductible only up to 2% of turnover (Article 25).

No technology transfer or franchise statute: where the rules come from

Rwanda has no statute dedicated to technology transfer agreements and no franchise law: there is no franchise registration, no mandatory pre-contract disclosure document and no government approval of royalty rates. The United States Department of State's 2026 Investment Climate Statement records that the Government does not impose conditions on the transfer of technology. The rules that do apply are spread across five instruments, and a licensor that ignores any one of them can find its licence unenforceable, its clauses void or its royalties taxed twice.

The first is **Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property** (the IP Law), in force since 31 July 2024, which makes the recordal of patent and mark assignments and licences a condition of their validity, lists clauses that are treated as anti-competitive, and protects secret information. The second is **Law N° 011/2026 of 26/02/2026 relating to competition and consumer protection**, in force since 4 March 2026, which regulates vertical agreements and the use of intellectual property rights to exclude competitors. The third is **Law N° 45/2011 of 25/11/2011 governing contracts**, the general law on formation, interpretation and remedies described in [Commercial contracts in Rwanda](#). The fourth is the income tax and VAT legislation, which taxes royalties at source and limits their deduction. The fifth is the investment and foreign exchange framework, which governs payment of royalties abroad. Registration of the underlying rights is covered in [The IP law and trade marks and Patents, utility models and industrial designs](#).

Recording licences and assignments: validity depends on it

The IP Law adopts a strict rule. A patent or a pending patent application may be assigned by a **written contract signed by both parties**, and the assignment "becomes valid and enforceable if it is recorded in the register of patents" (Article 42(1) and (4)). A patent owner may grant an exclusive, semi-exclusive or non-exclusive licence by a written contract signed by both parties, and "the patent licence becomes valid and enforceable if it is recorded in the register of patents" (Article 44(1) and (3)). The same rules apply to registered marks: an assignment is valid and enforceable once recorded in the register of marks (Article 207(3)), and so is a mark licence (Article 209(3)). An unrecorded licence is therefore not merely unopposable to third parties, as in many systems; on the wording of the Law it is not valid and enforceable at all, which puts at risk the licensee's right to use the mark and the licensor's ability to sue on the contract in Rwanda.

The filing duty falls on the party acquiring the right. Upon payment of the prescribed fee, the **assignee** submits the signed assignment contract to the competent authority, which records the change of ownership and publishes the details (Articles 42(3) and 207(2)); the **licensee** submits a copy of the licence contract, and RDB records the subject matter of a patent licence, or the fact of a mark licence, and keeps the contract itself **confidential** (Articles 44(2) and 209(2)). In practice the filing is made to the Intellectual Property Division of RDB's Office of the Registrar General, and a party resident or established outside Rwanda acts through an industrial property agent authorised by RDB (Article 251(2)). A recorded licence is withdrawn from the register when the contract is terminated by either party or the patent or mark is invalidated (Articles 45 and 210), so the parties should notify RDB when a licence ends, or the register will continue to show a licensee that no longer has rights.

RDB applies the fees in its published tariff, which derives from Ministerial Order N° 24 of 17/03/2016. Article 384 of the IP Law kept the earlier fee orders in force for only six months from its publication, to about 31 January 2025, and no successor order had been located at 10 October 2026, so the amounts below are RDB's published tariff rather than a current Ministerial Order. Copyright and software licences are not recorded (Copyright, software and digital content).

What must be recorded with RDB, by whom and at what cost (10 October 2026)

Transaction	Who files	Legal effect of recordal	RDB published fee
Assignment of a patent or patent application	Assignee, with the contract signed by both parties	Valid and enforceable only once recorded; change published (Article 42)	RWF 40,000
Contractual licence of a patent (exclusive, semi-exclusive or non-exclusive)	Licensee, with a copy of the licence	Valid and enforceable only once recorded; contract kept confidential (Article 44)	RWF 20,000
Assignment of a registered mark	Assignee, with the signed contract	Valid and enforceable once recorded; refused if it would mislead the public (Articles 207 and 208)	RWF 50,000
Contractual licence of a registered mark	Licensee, with a copy of the licence	Valid and enforceable once recorded; contract kept confidential (Article 209)	RWF 50,000
Patent licence of right	Patent owner, by written request after grant	Any person may obtain a licence on approved terms; annual maintenance fee halved (Article 48)	Per RDB tariff
Compulsory licence of a patent	Applicant, to the Minister, after a refused request for a voluntary licence	Licence granted on statutory grounds (Articles 50 and 51)	RWF 100,000 request fee
Copyright and software licence	No recordal	Valid between the parties on its terms; assignments must be in writing (Article 320)	None

The competition screen: clauses RDB will not record

Recordal is not a formality. RDB does not record a patent assignment if a clause, or the contract as a whole, has the intention or likely effect of lessening competition, restraining trade, abusing a position of market power conferred by the patent or unduly limiting the dissemination of technology (Article 43(1)), and it does not record a patent licence that has an anti-competitive effect (Article 46(1)). Before deciding it may hear the parties and seek the advice of the organ in charge of competition regulation, which since March 2026 is the authority applying Law N° 011/2026, the Rwanda Inspectorate, Competition and Consumer Protection Authority (RICA). A refusal may be appealed to the **Appeal**

Committee within 30 days of notification (Articles 43(3) and 46(3)). A restriction on the licensee or assignee that is neither required by the IP Law nor reasonably necessary to safeguard the patent is considered anti-competitive (Articles 43(4) and 46(4)).

Article 47 then lists eight patent licence clauses that are considered to have an anti-competitive effect, and an Order of the Minister may add others. For marks, RDB refuses to record a licence that contains clauses constituting unfair competition, or where the licensing is likely to mislead consumers as to geographical origin, quality, nature, characteristics, manufacturing process or suitability for use (Article 211(1)); a restriction not reasonably necessary to safeguard the registered mark has the effect of unfair competition (Article 211(4)); and **Article 212** lists seven clauses that create a **rebuttable presumption** of unfair competition. The difference matters: a patent licence clause on the Article 47 list is treated as anti-competitive, while a mark licence clause on the Article 212 list can be defended with evidence, typically that it protects the quality the mark signifies, which Article 211 itself treats as a legitimate concern.

Clauses treated as anti-competitive in patent and mark licences

Clause	Patent licence (Article 47)	Mark licence (Article 212)
Exclusive grant-back of improvements to the licensor	Listed	Not listed
Licensee may not oppose or seek revocation or invalidation of the right (no-challenge)	Listed	Listed
Licence conditional on taking a licence of another industrial property right (tying)	Listed	Listed
Unreasonable fees for a patent or mark not yet used	Listed	Listed
Obligation to buy raw materials, intermediate products or equipment from the licensor	Listed	Listed
Export ban, or export only on payment of an unreasonable fee	Listed	Listed
Any limit on the licensee's opportunities to use the patent, or sell goods bearing the mark, on internal or external markets	Listed	Listed

Clause	Patent licence (Article 47)	Mark licence (Article 212)
Supplementary obligation with no connection to the subject matter of the contract	Listed	Listed
Effect	Considered anti-competitive; recordal refused (Article 46); Minister may add clauses by Order	Rebuttable presumption of unfair competition; recordal may be refused (Article 211)

Franchising: building the agreement from Rwandan law

A franchise in Rwanda is a bundle of rights granted under general law: a licence of the franchisor's registered marks, which must be recorded with RDB to be valid; a licence of copyright in the operations manual, recipes, software and designs, which needs no recordal but should be in writing; and a licence of know-how and secret information, protected by contract and by Article 276 of the IP Law. The contract itself is governed by Law N° 45/2011 of 25/11/2011 governing contracts, and the parties may choose a foreign governing law and arbitration, subject to mandatory Rwandan rules on competition, consumers, tax, currency and employment ([Arbitration law and KIAC](#)). The first step is therefore always to register the marks in Rwanda, nationally through RDB or by designating Rwanda under the Madrid Protocol, because only a registered mark can be licensed under Article 209.

Three common franchise clauses need care. **Territorial and channel restrictions:** a clause that limits in any way the licensee's opportunities to sell goods bearing the mark on internal or external markets is presumed to be unfair competition under Article 212(f), and Article 5 of Law N° 011/2026 separately prohibits vertical agreements that have as their object the prevention of effective use of the internet to buy or sell, so an outright ban on online sales by a franchisee is not available. **Approved suppliers:** an obligation to buy inputs or equipment from the franchisor is presumed unfair under Article 212(d); a quality specification that any supplier meeting the standard may satisfy is easier to defend than a purchasing tie. **Pricing:** Article 5 prohibits minimum resale price maintenance, while recommended prices are allowed if marked as recommended, and a franchisor may not fix the franchisee's minimum retail prices.

Where a restriction is commercially necessary, Article 6 of Law N° 011/2026 allows the competition authority to authorise an otherwise prohibited agreement on efficiency grounds, for a limited period (Article 7). Fines for prohibited agreements reach 5% of the preceding year's annual turnover (Article 66). A franchisee selling to consumers also carries the consumer duties of Law N° 011/2026, and, if it sells online, the e-commerce licence and disclosure rules described in [E-commerce, fintech and AI](#).

Trade secrets, know-how and software

Know-how is often the most valuable part of a technology transfer, and Rwanda protects it as **secret information** under the unfair competition chapter of the IP Law. Information is secret if it is unknown or not easily accessible, has commercial value because it is secret, and its holder has taken reasonable steps to keep it secret (Article 276(3)). Disclosure, acquisition or use without the holder's consent in a manner contrary to honest commercial practices is unfair competition, and Article 276(2) gives

examples: industrial or commercial espionage, breach of contract, breach of confidence, inducing any of these, and acquisition by a third party who knew of the wrongdoing. Unauthorised use of a competitor's patented invention, design, mark, technical formula or manufacturing method is also unfair competition (Article 275), and the holder may sue in the competent court for cessation and damages (Article 277). Theft of a formula of invention is an offence punishable by three to five years' imprisonment and a fine of RWF 7,000,000 to RWF 10,000,000 (Article 379), and enforcement is described in [IP enforcement and anti-counterfeiting](#).

Protection depends on the "reasonable steps" test, so a licensor should require written confidentiality undertakings from the licensee and its key staff, mark documents as confidential, restrict access and keep records of disclosure. Software is protected by copyright as a literary work (Article 279), and "computer programs per se, software and their related databases" are excluded from patent protection, although computer-implemented processes and products remain patentable and an applicant for such a patent waives copyright protection for the same subject matter (Article 23). A software licence or assignment is a copyright transaction: an assignment must be in writing and state the rights, duration, territory and remuneration, and rights not listed stay with the author (Article 320).

Licences of right and compulsory licences

A patent owner may ask RDB at any time after grant to record that a **licence of right** is available, after which any person may use the invention on terms agreed with the owner and approved by RDB, and the annual maintenance fee is halved (Article 48); the offer can be withdrawn if no licence has been granted or all licensees consent (Article 49). The reverse risk is a **compulsory licence**: a person refused a voluntary licence on reasonable terms may apply to the Minister in charge of intellectual property (Article 50) on grounds that include failure to work the invention in Rwanda or insufficient working in quantity, quality or price, anti-competitive use and dependent patents (Article 51), and the Minister may act on the Minister's own initiative for national security, public health or the environment (Article 57). A foreign patent owner that supplies Rwanda only by import should document why the market is adequately served.

Tax on royalties and paying them abroad

Article 41 of Law N° 027/2022 of 20/10/2022 establishing taxes on income (the Income Tax Law) defines royalty income broadly: payments for the use of, or right to use, copyright in literary, artistic or scientific works including films; trade marks, trade names, designs, models, computer applications, software and patents; industrial, commercial or scientific equipment; and information concerning industrial, commercial or scientific knowledge, which covers know-how. Royalties paid by a Rwandan resident bear **15% withholding tax** under Article 60, declared and paid within 15 days after the month of payment, and the payer is personally liable if it fails to withhold (Articles 64 and 66). The treaty texts published by the Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA) cap royalties at 10% for China, Mauritius, Singapore, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates, against a tax residence certificate submitted with the declaration ([Withholding taxes and tax treaties](#); FAQ 23).

Two limits apply to deductions and VAT. Under **Article 25(9)** of the Income Tax Law, management, technical service and royalty fees paid to a **related non-resident** are not deductible to the extent that, in aggregate, they exceed 2% of the payer's turnover, and related-party royalties must also be priced at

arm's length under Ministerial Order N° 003/26/10/TC of 29/04/2026 (Transfer pricing and international tax). The cap does not apply to royalties paid to an unrelated franchisor or licensor. For VAT, a licence is an intangible activity performed for payment, so royalties paid to a foreign licensor are an imported service on which the Rwandan business self-accounts for 18% VAT under the reverse charge in Article 14 of Law N° 049/2023 of 05/09/2023 establishing value added tax, recoverable only where the Minister has authorised the deduction for a service not available in Rwanda under Ministerial Order N° 003/24/03/TC of 08/03/2024.

Rwanda also offers an incentive for holding intellectual property in Rwanda. Point II of the Annex to Law N° 006/2021 of 05/02/2021 on Investment Promotion and Facilitation grants a **3% corporate income tax rate on foreign-sourced royalties** to a registered investor operating as an intellectual property company that spends at least USD 10,000 a year in Rwanda, has a physical office and a bank account in Rwanda, has Rwandan residents as at least 30% or three of its staff, whichever is higher, and as at least one or 25% of its directors, holds its strategic board meetings in Rwanda and has two qualified Rwandan resident board members (point II(5)), and point X sets withholding tax at 0% on dividends, interest and royalties paid by investors on the 15% and 3% regimes it lists ([Kigali International Financial Centre](#)). The investor must hold an RDB investment certificate; the rate is not available to an unregistered company. Payment of royalties abroad is a current transaction that banks process against documents, and Article 12 of the Investment Code separately allows an investor, once its tax obligations in Rwanda are met, to repatriate capital, profits, loan repayments, liquidation proceeds and other assets; the paying bank will ask for the contract, invoice and evidence of withholding tax ([Repatriating profits and capital](#)).

Putting a cross-border licence or franchise in place, step by step

- 1 Register the rights in Rwanda**
File the marks with RDB or designate Rwanda under the Madrid Protocol, and file any patents nationally, under the PCT or through ARIPO; only registered marks and granted patents can be licensed under Articles 44 and 209.

- 2 Screen the draft against Articles 47 and 212**
Remove grant-backs, no-challenge, tying and export clauses; recast territorial, supply and pricing terms so that they are justified by quality control and comply with Article 5 of Law N° 011/2026.

- 3 Sign in writing**
Both parties sign the licence or assignment; Articles 42, 44, 207 and 209 require a written contract signed by both parties, and Article 320 requires writing for copyright assignments.

- 4 Record with RDB**
The licensee or assignee files the contract with the Intellectual Property Division of RDB's Office of the Registrar General, with the fee in RDB's tariff and, for a non-resident filer, through an authorised agent; keep the recordal certificate.

5 Answer any objection within the time allowed

If RDB proposes to refuse recordal, make submissions; a refusal can be appealed to the Appeal Committee within 30 days of notification (Articles 43, 46 and 211).

6 Set up the tax and payment file

Obtain the licensor's tax residence certificate, withhold 15% or the treaty rate, declare within 15 days after the month, self-account for reverse-charge VAT and keep transfer pricing support for related-party royalties.

7 Protect the know-how

Put confidentiality undertakings in place with the licensee and its staff, limit access and mark documents, so that the information meets the reasonable steps test in Article 276.

8 Notify changes and termination

Record amendments and assignments, and notify RDB when the licence ends so that it is withdrawn from the register under Articles 45 and 210.

DECISION GUIDE

Will this licence be valid and recordable in Rwanda?

A decision guide for a licensor or licensee reviewing a draft patent, trade mark or franchise agreement. Answer in order.

Q1 Is the right a registered mark, or a patent or pending patent application, in Rwanda?

Yes Continue to Q2.

No Register it first; a licence of an unregistered mark relies only on contract and unfair competition law, and copyright and know-how licences need no recordal.

Q2 Is the agreement in writing and signed by both parties?

Yes Continue to Q3.

No It cannot be recorded; under Articles 44 and 209 an unrecorded licence is not valid and enforceable.

Q3 Does it contain a clause on the Article 47 list (patents) or the Article 212 list (marks), or a restriction not reasonably necessary to safeguard the right?

Yes Remove or justify it. For a patent, expect refusal under Article 46; for a mark, be ready to rebut the presumption, for example by showing that the clause protects product quality.

No Continue to Q4.

Q4 Does it fix minimum resale prices or prevent effective use of the internet to sell?

Yes Remove the clause, or apply to the competition authority for authorisation under Article 6 of Law N° 011/2026; fines reach 5% of turnover.

No File for recordal with RDB, pay the tariff fee and set up withholding tax on the royalties.

WORKED EXAMPLE

A foreign restaurant brand franchised to a Rwandan company

An unrelated franchisor resident in the United Arab Emirates grants a Rwandan company a ten-year franchise for a restaurant brand, with two registered marks, an operations manual and recipes. The franchisee's annual gross sales are RWF 1,200,000,000 and the royalty is 6% of gross sales. The franchisor supplies a current UAE tax residence certificate. Figures are illustrative.

Recordal of the mark licences	Two mark licences at RWF 50,000 each in RDB's tariff = RWF 100,000, filed by the franchisee before the first royalty is paid, so that the licence is valid and enforceable under Article 209(3).
Annual royalty	6% x RWF 1,200,000,000 = RWF 72,000,000.
Withholding tax	Domestic rate 15% = RWF 10,800,000; treaty rate 10% = RWF 7,200,000, declared with the residence certificate within 15 days after the month of payment.
Net paid to the franchisor	RWF 72,000,000 - RWF 7,200,000 = RWF 64,800,000, transferred through the franchisee's bank against the contract, invoice and withholding tax receipt.
Reverse-charge VAT	18% x RWF 72,000,000 = RWF 12,960,000 self-accounted by the franchisee; a cost unless the Minister has authorised deduction.
Deduction for the franchisee	The full RWF 72,000,000 is deductible because the franchisor is unrelated; if it were a related company, related-party royalties and fees above 2% of turnover (RWF 24,000,000) would be disallowed.
Clauses changed after review	A ban on delivery-platform sales and a mandatory purchase of all ingredients from the franchisor were replaced by brand standards for online ordering and an approved-supplier specification open to any supplier meeting it.

The franchisee bears the cost of a missed withholding personally under Article 66 of the Income Tax Law.

The franchise agreement can be governed by a foreign law with KIAC arbitration, but recordal, withholding tax and the competition rules apply regardless.

Questions investors ask

Must a trade mark or patent licence be registered in Rwanda?

Yes. Under Articles 44(3) and 209(3) of Law N° 055/2024 a patent or mark licence becomes valid and enforceable only when recorded in RDB's register, and assignments likewise under Articles 42(4) and 207(3). The licensee files a copy of the contract with the fee in RDB's tariff, RWF 20,000 for a patent licence or RWF 50,000 for a mark licence, and RDB keeps the contract confidential.

Does Rwanda have a franchise law?

No. There is no franchise statute, registration or disclosure document. A franchise combines a recorded trade mark licence under Law N° 055/2024, copyright and know-how licences, Law N° 45/2011 governing contracts and the vertical agreement rules in Article 5 of Law N° 011/2026, which prohibit minimum resale prices and bans on effective use of the internet to sell.

Which licence clauses are prohibited in Rwanda?

Article 47 of Law N° 055/2024 treats eight patent licence clauses as anti-competitive, including exclusive grant-backs, no-challenge clauses, tying, fees for unused patents, compulsory purchases from the licensor, export bans and market limits. Article 212 makes similar trade mark licence clauses a rebuttable presumption of unfair competition, and RDB may refuse to record either kind of licence.

What withholding tax applies to royalties paid from Rwanda?

15% under Article 60 of Law N° 027/2022 on royalties, which Article 41 defines to include payments for trade marks, software, patents, designs and know-how. The rate falls to 10% under the treaties with China, Mauritius, Singapore, South Africa and the UAE, against a tax residence certificate, and to 0% where the payer is on an Investment Code 3% regime.

Are royalties paid to a foreign parent fully deductible?

Not always. Article 25 of Law N° 027/2022 disallows management, technical and royalty fees paid to related non-residents to the extent that, in aggregate, they exceed 2% of the payer's turnover, and the royalty must be at arm's length under the transfer pricing rules. Royalties paid to an unrelated licensor are not subject to the 2% cap.

How are trade secrets protected in Rwanda?

Article 276 of Law N° 055/2024 treats disclosure, acquisition or use of secret information contrary to honest commercial practices as unfair competition, if the information is secret, has commercial value because it is secret and is protected by reasonable steps. The holder can sue under Article 277, and theft of a formula of invention is a criminal offence under Article 379.

THE 2027 HORIZON

- Ministerial Orders under Law N° 055/2024 were still awaited at 10 October 2026: a new fee order to replace the 2016 tariff whose savings lapsed in about January 2025 (Cabinet approved one on 4 March 2026, but it had not been located in the Official Gazette), an order organising the Appeal Committee that hears appeals against refusals to record licences, and any order adding clauses to the Article 47 list.
- RICA regulations under Law N° 011/2026 on the procedure for authorising otherwise prohibited agreements under Article 6, and on e-commerce licensing under Article 44, had not been published; franchisors should review exclusivity, supply and online-sales terms when they appear.
- The Independent Appeal Committee created by Article 64 of Law N° 011/2026 awaited its Ministerial Order; it will hear challenges to competition decisions, including those affecting licensing networks.
- The 1.5% digital services tax enacted by Law N° 014/2025 of 27/05/2025 awaited its Ministerial Order; licensors earning revenue from digital services in Rwanda should watch its definition of substantial national presence.

Terms you will meet in the documents

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Contractual licence (patent)	—	<i>Licence contractuelle du brevet</i>	A written licence of a patent, exclusive, semi-exclusive or non-exclusive, valid only when recorded (Article 44).
Assignment (patent)	—	<i>Cession de brevet</i>	Transfer of ownership of a patent or application by written contract, valid only when recorded (Article 42).
Mark	<i>Ikirango</i>	<i>Marque</i>	A sign distinguishing goods or services; its licences and assignments are recorded under Articles 207 and 209.
Licence of right	—	<i>Licence de plein droit</i>	A recorded offer by a patent owner to license any person on approved terms, halving the annual fee (Article 48).
Compulsory licence	—	<i>Licence obligatoire</i>	A licence granted by the Minister without the owner's consent, for example for non-working in Rwanda (Articles 50 to 57).
Secret information	<i>Amakuru y'ibanga</i>	<i>Information confidentielle</i>	Information that is secret, valuable because secret and protected by reasonable steps (Article 276).

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Technical know-how	—	<i>Savoir-faire technique</i>	Technical formulas and manufacturing methods whose unauthorised use is unfair competition (Article 275).
Unfair competition	—	<i>Concurrence déloyale</i>	Acts contrary to honest commercial practices; mark licence clauses in Article 212 are presumed to be unfair competition.
Royalties	<i>Ibihembo by'uruhushya</i>	<i>Redevances</i>	Payments for the use of IP and know-how (Article 41, Law N° 027/2022), subject to 15% withholding tax.

FOREIGN V RWANDAN INVESTOR

The licensing rules apply in the same way to foreign and Rwandan parties: a licence between two Rwandan companies must be recorded and screened exactly as a cross-border one, and the Article 47 and 212 lists do not depend on nationality. The differences are procedural and fiscal. A licensor or assignee resident outside Rwanda must act through an RDB-authorised industrial property agent (Article 251(2) of Law N° 055/2024), and royalties paid to a non-resident bear 15% withholding tax as a final tax, reduced only by a treaty, while a Rwandan licensor holding a tax clearance certificate is paid gross under Article 65 of the Income Tax Law and is taxed on its profit. The 2% deduction cap bites only on royalties paid to related non-residents. EAC and COMESA nationals have no special licensing status, although the COMESA and EAC competition regimes may apply to licensing arrangements that affect more than one member state, as described in [Merger control and competition law](#).

WATCH OUT FOR

- Paying royalties under an unrecorded licence: the licence is not valid and enforceable under Articles 44(3) and 209(3), which undermines both the licensee's right to use and the licensor's claim.
- Copying a standard global franchise agreement with territorial exclusivity, approved-supplier ties and online-sales bans; these clauses are presumed unfair under Article 212 or prohibited by Article 5 of Law N° 011/2026.
- Forgetting the 2% of turnover cap on related-party royalties and technical fees, which applies even when withholding tax has been paid on the full amount.
- Treating reverse-charge VAT on foreign royalties as recoverable without the Minister's authorisation under Ministerial Order N° 003/24/03/TC.
- Disclosing know-how without written confidentiality terms and access controls, which may fail the reasonable steps test in Article 276.
- Leaving a terminated licence on RDB's register, or relying on a patent that is not worked in Rwanda, which exposes it to a compulsory licence application under Article 51.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

- WIPO Lex: Law N° 055/2024 of 20/06/2024 on the protection of intellectual property (Official Gazette n° Special of 31/07/2024), Articles 42 to 57, 207 to 212 and 275 to 277 — <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/22672>
- Rwanda Development Board, Office of the Registrar General: intellectual property fee tariffs — <https://org.rdb.rw/intellectual-property-rights/fee-tariffs/>
- RICA: Official Gazette n° Special of 04/03/2026, Law N° 011/2026 of 26/02/2026 relating to competition and consumer protection — https://rica.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/RICA/Publications/Laws/OG_n___Special_of_04.03.2026__lhiganwa_mu_bucuruzi_no_kurengera_umuguzi__1___1___1_.pdf
- Rwanda Revenue Authority: Law N° 027/2022 of 20/10/2022 establishing taxes on income, Articles 25, 41 and 60 — https://www.rra.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Income_Tax_law_of_2022.pdf
- Capital Market Authority: Law N° 006/2021 of 05/02/2021 on Investment Promotion and Facilitation (Annex, IP company regime) — https://cma.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Investment-code-2021.pdf

Personal data protection: Law N° 058/2021 and its reach abroad, registration with the National Cyber Security Authority within 30 working days, the representative and the data protection officer, lawful bases and data subject rights, breach notice within 48 hours and a report within 72 hours, transfers abroad, the rule that data is stored in Rwanda, and fines of 1% and 5% of turnover

Reviewed 10 October 2026 · Prepared by a commercial lawyer with over 30 years' international experience · Legal and tax information, not legal advice · [How we check](#) · [Open in the app](#)

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 relating to the protection of personal data and privacy, in force since 15 October 2021 with a two-year conformity period that ended in October 2023 (Articles 67 and 70), applies to controllers and processors in Rwanda and to those outside Rwanda that process personal data of data subjects located in Rwanda (Article 2), and is supervised by the National Cyber Security Authority (NCSA).
- Every data controller and data processor must register with the NCSA (Article 29), which issues a registration certificate within 30 working days of a complete application (Article 31); the NCSA charges no fee, changes must be notified within 15 working days (Article 32) and renewal is applied for 45 working days before expiry (Article 33).
- A controller or processor established outside Rwanda designates a representative in Rwanda in writing (Article 39), and a data protection officer is required wherever processing is carried out by a public or private corporate body or legal entity, other than the courts, or involves large-scale monitoring or sensitive data (Article 40).
- A personal data breach is notified to the NCSA within 48 hours of the controller becoming aware of it, a processor informs the controller within 48 hours (Article 43), and the controller's report follows within 72 hours (Article 44); high-risk breaches are also communicated to the individuals concerned (Article 45).
- Personal data may be transferred abroad only on one of the grounds in Article 48, including NCSA authorisation, consent or contractual necessity, under a written contract (Article 49), and Article 50 requires personal data to be stored in Rwanda unless the registration certificate authorises storage abroad.
- Administrative misconduct, such as operating without a certificate, having no data protection officer or failing to notify a breach, carries a fine of RWF 2,000,000 to RWF 5,000,000 or 1% of global turnover, and 1% for a corporate body (Article 53); criminal offences by corporate bodies carry a fine of 5% of annual turnover (Article 62).

The law and who it reaches

Rwanda's data protection statute is **Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 relating to the protection of personal data and privacy** (the Data Protection Law), published in the Official Gazette n° Special of 15/10/2021 and in force on publication (Article 70). Article 67 gave controllers and processors already in operation two years from publication to conform, so the transitional period ended in October 2023 and the Law has been fully enforceable since then. It is modelled on the European approach, with registration requirements and a storage rule that go further. No amendment had been published by 10 October 2026 (FAQ 81).

The Law applies to the processing of personal data by electronic or other means, by a **data controller** (the person that determines the purposes and means of processing) or a **data processor** (the person that processes on the controller's behalf) established or resident in Rwanda, and also by a controller or processor that is neither established nor resident in Rwanda but processes personal data of **data subjects located in Rwanda** (Article 2). A foreign platform, software provider or group service centre that handles data of people in Rwanda is therefore within its scope even with no Rwandan entity. **Sensitive personal data** includes information revealing race, health status, criminal records, medical

records, social origin, religious or philosophical beliefs, political opinion, genetic or biometric information, sexual life and family details (Article 3), and its processing is allowed only on the narrower grounds in Article 10.

The supervisory authority is the **National Cyber Security Authority (NCSA)**, established by Law N° 26/2017 of 31/05/2017 and placed under the Office of the President, which acts through its Data Protection and Privacy Office (dpo.gov.rw). Its duties include keeping the register of controllers and processors, investigating complaints, deciding data subjects' appeals and imposing administrative sanctions (Articles 27 and 28). For Data Privacy Week in January 2026 the NCSA's theme was reported in the press as "Compliance is Beyond Registration", signalling a shift from counting registrations to checking how companies process data; no published administrative fines or prosecutions had been located by 10 October 2026.

Registering with the NCSA

Article 29 requires every person who intends to be a data controller or data processor to **register with the supervisory authority**. The application states the applicant's identity and single point of contact, its representative, the personal data and categories of data subjects, the purposes, the recipients, the countries to which data will be transferred directly or indirectly, and the risks and safeguards (Article 30). The NCSA issues the certificate within **30 working days** of receiving a complete application (Article 31). After that, any change in the grounds on which the certificate was issued is notified within **15 working days** (Article 32), renewal is applied for **45 working days before expiry** and answered within 30 working days (Article 33), and the NCSA may modify the certificate or cancel it for false information or non-compliance after giving 15 working days' notice (Articles 34 and 35).

The NCSA's Registration Guide sets out the practice. There are separate forms for controllers and processors, and a company that is both, for example a service provider that is a controller of its own staff data and a processor of its clients' data, files both and obtains two certificates. The form is accompanied by a letter to the Chief Executive Officer of the NCSA, the certificate of incorporation, any sector licence (for example from the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA)), the contract with the representative for a foreign applicant, and supporting documents such as processor contracts and the privacy notice. The documents are sent as PDF files by email to registration@dpo.gov.rw and dpp@ncsa.gov.rw. There is **no registration fee**. An incomplete or rejected application receives a reasoned refusal notice within seven working days, and a new application can be made once the defects are cured.

Two points need attention. First, the period of validity of the certificate is to be set by an NCSA regulation (Article 31), which had not been located at 10 October 2026; the Guide states that a certificate remains valid until the expiry date shown on it, so the date on the certificate governs the renewal timetable. Second, the application is the place to obtain authorisation for **storage outside Rwanda** and to disclose the countries of transfer, so an investor planning to host data abroad should say so in the application rather than seek authorisation later.

The NCSA registration file (Law N° 058/2021 and the NCSA Registration Guide)

Item	Requirement	Source
Who registers	Every controller and processor, including those outside Rwanda processing data of data subjects located in Rwanda	Articles 2 and 29; Guide
Form	Controller form, processor form, or both	Guide
Content	Identity and contact point, representative, data and data subjects, purposes, recipients, countries of transfer, risks and safeguards, storage outside Rwanda	Article 30; Guide
Documents	Letter to the NCSA Chief Executive Officer, certificate of incorporation, sector licence, representative contract (non-residents), processor contracts, privacy notice	Guide
Filing	PDF files by email to registration@dpo.gov.rw and dpp@ncsa.gov.rw, organisation name in the subject line	Guide
Fee	None	Guide
Decision	Certificate within 30 working days of a complete application; refusal notice within 7 working days	Article 31; Guide
Changes	Notify within 15 working days of the change	Article 32
Renewal	Apply 45 working days before expiry; NCSA answers within 30 working days	Article 33
Operating without a certificate or with an expired one	Administrative misconduct: RWF 2,000,000 to RWF 5,000,000 or 1% of global turnover	Article 53

The representative and the data protection officer

A controller or processor that is neither established nor resident in Rwanda but processes personal data of data subjects located in Rwanda must **designate in writing a representative in Rwanda** to comply with its obligations under the Law (Article 39). The representative contract is filed with the registration application, and an NCSA regulation on designation is foreseen but had not been located. In practice the representative is a Rwandan law firm, compliance firm or group company, and it should have authority to receive NCSA correspondence and coordinate breach notices within the 48-hour window.

A **data protection officer** (DPO) must be designated where the processing is carried out by a public or private corporate body or a legal entity, except courts; where the core activities consist of regular and systematic monitoring of data subjects on a large scale; or where they consist of large-scale processing of sensitive data or criminal conviction data (Article 40). Because the first limb covers any corporate body or legal entity, in effect **every company** that processes personal data, including its own employees' data, needs a DPO. A group may appoint a single DPO if the officer is easily accessible from each establishment, and the DPO may be an employee or an external provider under a service contract.

The officer must have professional qualities and expert knowledge of data protection, and the controller must publish the DPO's contact details and communicate them to the NCSA. The DPO informs and advises the business, monitors compliance, advises on impact assessments and is the NCSA's contact point (Article 41). Failure to designate a DPO is an administrative misconduct under Article 53.

Lawful processing, notices and data subject rights

Processing is lawful only on one of the grounds in **Article 46**: consent for purposes explained to the data subject; performance of a contract with the data subject or steps at the data subject's request before contracting; a legal obligation; vital interests; a task in the public interest or official authority; the duties of a public entity; legitimate interests not overridden by the data subject's rights; or research authorised by the relevant institution. Consent must be informed and provable, and a child under 16 is represented by a person with parental authority (Articles 9 and 26). Processing must also respect the principles of lawfulness, fairness, transparency, purpose limitation, relevance, accuracy and storage limitation (Article 37). On collection, the controller tells the data subject its identity, the purposes, recipients, whether supplying the data is voluntary, the right to withdraw consent, the rights of access and correction, any automated decision-making, the storage period, the right to appeal to the NCSA and, where applicable, that the data may be transferred outside Rwanda (Article 42).

Data subjects have rights of access to their data and information about its processing, source and any transfer abroad (Article 18), to object, including at any time to direct marketing and related profiling (Article 19), to **portability** (Article 20), not to be subject to a decision based solely on automated processing with legal or significant effects unless based on explicit consent, a contract or law with safeguards (Article 21), to restriction (Article 22), to erasure (Article 23), to rectification (Article 24), to designate an **heir** to their personal data by will (Article 25) and to representation (Article 26). For objection, portability, erasure and rectification, the controller must respond in writing or electronically within **30 days** of the request; a dissatisfied data subject may appeal to the NCSA within 30 days of the response, and the NCSA responds within 60 days (Articles 18 to 24). A business that serves consumers should have a written procedure, a single intake channel and a log of requests and replies.

Accountability: records, logs, impact assessments and security

The Law requires evidence of compliance, not only good practice. A controller and processor keep a **record of processing operations** (Articles 17 and 38) and log collection, alteration, consultation, disclosure and erasure of personal data (Article 16); failing to keep records or logs is an administrative misconduct under Article 53. A processor acts under a written contract with the controller (Article 4). A **data protection impact assessment** is required where processing is likely to result in a high risk, and in particular for systematic and extensive evaluation of personal aspects by automated processing, including profiling, on which decisions are based; large-scale processing of sensitive data; systematic large-scale monitoring of a publicly accessible area; processing the NCSA identifies as high-risk; and **new technologies** used to process personal data (Article 38).

Security is an obligation of result managed by process: the controller or processor identifies foreseeable risks, establishes safeguards, verifies them regularly and updates them in response to new risks (Article 47), and the NCSA may inspect and assess those measures where it considers that processing or transfer may infringe privacy. Personal data is retained only until the purposes of

processing are fulfilled, unless a listed ground such as a legal requirement, a contract, litigation or the data subject's consent justifies longer retention, and it must then be destroyed in a way that prevents its reconstruction in an intelligible form (Article 52). The cybersecurity standards and incident duties that sit alongside these rules are covered in [Cybersecurity and critical information](#).

Personal data breaches: 48 hours and 72 hours

Rwanda's breach timetable is short. The controller must communicate a personal data breach to the NCSA **within 48 hours** after becoming aware of the incident, and a processor that becomes aware of a breach must notify the controller within 48 hours (Article 43). The controller then submits a **report within 72 hours** with the facts available, describing the nature of the breach and, where possible, the categories and approximate numbers of data subjects and records, the DPO's contact details, the measures taken to address and mitigate it, its consequences and the remedial measures, and the controller's proposal and timeline for communicating the breach to the data subjects, for the NCSA's approval (Article 44). Where the breach is likely to result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of data subjects, the controller communicates it to them in writing or electronically, unless effective protection such as encryption, subsequent measures or an equally effective public communication makes this unnecessary, and the NCSA may require communication (Article 45).

Failure to notify, to report or to communicate a breach is each an administrative misconduct under Article 53. The NCSA's portal provides a breach reporting channel, and a breach that is also a cyber incident may need to be reported to the NCSA's Rwanda Computer Security Incident Response Team (Rw-CSIRT) and, for a financial institution, to the National Bank of Rwanda (BNR) within two hours under BNR's cyber security regulation. Groups with a global incident policy built around the European 72-hour rule should shorten the Rwandan clock to 48 hours for the first notice and require processors to report within the same period.

Transfers abroad and the rule that data is stored in Rwanda

The Law treats **transfer** and **storage** separately, and the difference matters for cloud hosting. Under **Article 48** a controller or processor may share or transfer personal data to a third party outside Rwanda if it has obtained the NCSA's authorisation after providing proof of appropriate safeguards; if the data subject has consented; or if the transfer is necessary for a contract with or in the interest of the data subject, for public interest grounds, for legal claims, to protect vital interests, for compelling legitimate interests where the transfer is not repetitive and concerns a limited number of data subjects with suitable safeguards, or for the performance of international instruments ratified by Rwanda. Each transfer requires a **written contract** setting out the parties' roles and responsibilities, whose form the NCSA may prescribe, and the NCSA may prohibit or suspend transfers to protect data subjects (Article 49). The NCSA's portal offers standard contractual clauses and applications for authorisation to transfer.

Article 50 is stricter: "The data controller or the data processor stores personal data in Rwanda", and storage outside Rwanda is permitted only if the controller or processor holds a valid registration certificate authorising it, issued by the NCSA. A business using a foreign cloud provider, a group data centre or an offshore software-as-a-service platform is storing data abroad and needs that authorisation on its certificate; reliance on consent or contractual necessity under Article 48 covers

transfer, not storage. In practice the NCSA's forms ask whether data is stored outside Rwanda, and the authorisation is sought in the registration or by amending the certificate. When a business changes or closes, the migration and management of its personal data will follow an NCSA regulation still to be adopted (Article 51). Financial institutions face an additional layer: BNR's outsourcing regulation allows offshore outsourcing only where BNR's access is not impeded, as described in [Cybersecurity and critical information](#).

Sanctions under Law N° 058/2021

Breach	Sanction	Article
No records or logs; no certificate or an expired one; change not reported; no DPO; breach not notified, reported or communicated	Administrative fine of RWF 2,000,000 to RWF 5,000,000 or 1% of global turnover of the preceding financial year; 1% for a corporate body or legal entity	Article 53
Accessing, collecting, using, sharing, transferring or disclosing personal data contrary to the Law	1 to 3 years' imprisonment and RWF 7,000,000 to RWF 10,000,000, or one of them	Article 56
Re-identifying de-identified data	1 to 3 years and RWF 7,000,000 to RWF 10,000,000	Article 57
Unlawful destruction, erasure, concealment or alteration	3 to 5 years and RWF 7,000,000 to RWF 10,000,000	Article 58
Sale of personal data contrary to the Law	5 to 7 years and RWF 12,000,000 to RWF 15,000,000	Article 59
Unlawful collection or processing of sensitive data	7 to 10 years and RWF 20,000,000 to RWF 25,000,000	Article 60
False information during or after registration	1 to 3 years and RWF 3,000,000 to RWF 5,000,000	Article 61
Any of the offences in Articles 56 to 61 committed by a corporate body or legal entity	Fine of 5% of annual turnover of the previous financial year	Article 62
Additional penalties	Confiscation of items and proceeds; temporary or permanent closure of the entity or premises	Article 63
Civil liability	Compensation for serious damage, unless the controller or processor proves it was not responsible	Article 65

Setting up a compliant data protection programme in Rwanda, step by step

1 Map the data

List the personal data, data subjects, purposes, lawful bases under Article 46, recipients, processors, countries of transfer and storage locations; this map becomes the Article 17 record and the registration form.

2 Appoint the people

Designate a DPO under Article 40 and, for a foreign controller or processor, a written representative in Rwanda under Article 39; publish the DPO's contact details.

3 Register with the NCSA

File the controller and, if relevant, processor forms with the supporting documents by email; ask for authorisation to store data outside Rwanda where any hosting is offshore. No fee; certificate within 30 working days.

4 Paper the relationships

Sign processor contracts (Article 4) and transfer contracts for each cross-border flow (Article 49), using the NCSA's standard clauses where suitable.

5 Publish notices and rights procedures

Issue privacy notices with the Article 42 content and set up a procedure to answer access, objection, portability, erasure and rectification requests within 30 days.

6 Assess and secure

Carry out impact assessments for high-risk processing and new technologies (Article 38), implement and test security measures (Article 47) and keep logs (Article 16).

7 Prepare for breaches

Adopt an incident plan that notifies the NCSA within 48 hours and reports within 72 hours, with processors bound to report within 48 hours.

8 Maintain the certificate

Notify changes within 15 working days, diarise renewal 45 working days before the expiry date on the certificate and review retention and destruction annually.

DECISION GUIDE

Can we host Rwandan personal data abroad?

A decision guide for a business that wants to use a foreign cloud, group data centre or offshore software platform. Answer in order.

Q1 Does the business process personal data of data subjects located in Rwanda, as a controller or processor?

Yes Continue to Q2.

No Law N° 058/2021 does not apply to that processing.

Q2 Is it registered with the NCSA, with a current certificate?

Yes Continue to Q3.

No Register first; operating without a certificate is an Article 53 misconduct, and storage abroad is permitted only under a certificate.

Q3 Does the certificate authorise storage of personal data outside Rwanda?

Yes Continue to Q4.

No Apply to the NCSA to amend the certificate before migrating; Article 50 requires storage in Rwanda without that authorisation.

Q4 Is each transfer covered by an Article 48 ground and a written transfer contract under Article 49?

Yes Hosting abroad is permitted; keep the authorisation, contracts and safeguards on file and notify changes within 15 working days.

No Obtain NCSA authorisation, consent or another Article 48 ground and sign the transfer contract before data moves.

WORKED EXAMPLE

A regional e-commerce company launches in Rwanda

A Kenyan-owned online retailer sets up a Rwandan subsidiary with 40 employees and about 60,000 customers in Rwanda; its customer data is hosted in a cloud region outside Rwanda and its customer service is run by a group company in Nairobi. The Rwandan subsidiary's global turnover for the preceding financial year is RWF 3,000,000,000. Figures are illustrative.

Registration	The subsidiary registers as a controller and asks for authorisation to store data outside Rwanda; the Nairobi company, a processor outside Rwanda, registers as a processor and appoints a representative in Rwanda. No fee; certificates within 30 working days.
People	The group DPO is designated for both entities under Article 40, provided the DPO is easily accessible from Rwanda, and the contact details are sent to the NCSA.
Contracts	A processor contract and an Article 49 transfer contract between the subsidiary and the Nairobi company, and a contract with the cloud provider.
Breach timeline	A misdirected customer file is discovered at 09:00 on Monday 2 November 2026: NCSA notice by 09:00 on Wednesday 4 November (48 hours), report by 09:00 on Thursday 5 November (72 hours), with a proposal for informing affected customers.
Administrative exposure	Operating without a certificate is a misconduct under Article 53; for a corporate body the fine is 1% of global turnover: $1\% \times \text{RWF } 3,000,000,000 = \text{RWF } 30,000,000$. The Law does not say whether several misconducts found together are fined separately.
Criminal exposure	An unlawful transfer under Article 56 committed by the company carries 5% of annual turnover under Article 62: $5\% \times \text{RWF } 3,000,000,000 = \text{RWF } 150,000,000$, with possible confiscation and closure under Article 63.

The cost of compliance is mostly internal: there is no registration fee.

Customer service staff in Nairobi accessing Rwandan data is a transfer, even though the data never leaves the cloud region; it needs an Article 48 ground and an Article 49 contract.

Questions investors ask

Does Rwanda's data protection law apply to foreign companies?

Yes. Article 2 of Law N° 058/2021 applies to controllers and processors outside Rwanda that process personal data of data subjects located in Rwanda. They must register with the NCSA and designate a representative in Rwanda in writing under Article 39, and they are subject to the same duties and sanctions as Rwandan businesses.

How do I register as a data controller in Rwanda, and what does it cost?

File the NCSA's controller form, and the processor form if relevant, with a letter to the NCSA Chief Executive Officer, the certificate of incorporation, any sector licence and supporting contracts, by email to registration@dpo.gov.rw and dpp@ncsa.gov.rw. There is no fee, and the certificate is issued within 30 working days of a complete application under Article 31.

Does every company need a data protection officer in Rwanda?

In effect, yes. Article 40 of Law N° 058/2021 requires a DPO where processing is carried out by a public or private corporate body or legal entity, other than the courts, and also for large-scale monitoring or sensitive data. A group may share one DPO if easily accessible, and the DPO may be external. The DPO's contact details are published and sent to the NCSA.

How quickly must a data breach be reported in Rwanda?

The controller notifies the NCSA within 48 hours of becoming aware of the breach, and a processor informs the controller within 48 hours (Article 43). The controller's full report follows within 72 hours, including a proposal for informing data subjects for the NCSA's approval (Article 44). High-risk breaches must be communicated to the individuals concerned (Article 45).

Can personal data from Rwanda be stored in a foreign cloud?

Only with authorisation. Article 50 of Law N° 058/2021 requires controllers and processors to store personal data in Rwanda unless they hold a valid registration certificate authorising storage abroad. Separately, each transfer needs a ground under Article 48, such as NCSA authorisation, consent or contractual necessity, and a written transfer contract under Article 49.

What are the fines for breaching Rwanda's data protection law?

Administrative misconduct, such as having no certificate or DPO or failing to notify a breach, carries RWF 2,000,000 to RWF 5,000,000 or 1% of global turnover, and 1% for a corporate body (Article 53). Criminal offences carry imprisonment of up to ten years for individuals and a fine of 5% of annual turnover for corporate bodies (Articles 56 to 62).

Do individuals in Rwanda have a right to data portability?

Yes. Article 20 of Law N° 058/2021 lets a data subject obtain the data provided to a controller in a structured, readable format and have it transmitted to another controller where technically feasible. The controller responds within 30 days, and the data subject may appeal to the NCSA within 30 days of the response; the NCSA responds within 60 days.

THE 2027 HORIZON

- NCSA regulations foreseen by Law N° 058/2021 had not been located at 10 October 2026, including those on the validity of registration certificates (Article 31), renewal requirements (Article 33), the designation of representatives (Article 39), the form of transfer contracts (Article 49) and the migration of data on a change or closure of business (Article 51); each will tighten a point now governed by NCSA practice.
- The NCSA's 2026 theme, reported as "Compliance is Beyond Registration", its five-day risk management training for data protection officers in July 2026 and the Tekana Online awareness campaign from 1 to 31 October 2026 point to inspections of registered entities in 2027, focused on records, DPOs, breach handling and storage authorisations.
- Sector-specific data regulations may be issued by competent authorities with the NCSA under Article 66; financial, health and telecommunications operators should watch BNR, Ministry of Health and RURA instruments.
- Rwanda's National AI Policy proposes rules on responsible AI that would sit alongside Articles 21 and 38 on automated decisions and impact assessments; no AI statute had been tabled by 10 October 2026.

Terms you will meet in the documents

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Personal data	<i>Amakuru bwite</i>	<i>Données à caractère personnel</i>	Any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (Article 3).
Sensitive personal data	<i>Amakuru bwite y'ibanga</i>	<i>Données à caractère personnel sensibles</i>	Data on health, criminal records, biometrics, genetics, beliefs, political opinion, sexual life and family details (Article 3).
Data controller	<i>Umugenzuzi w'amakuru</i>	<i>Responsable du traitement</i>	The person that determines the purposes and means of processing; registers with the NCSA (Article 29).
Data processor	<i>Utunganya amakuru</i>	<i>Sous-traitant</i>	The person that processes personal data on behalf of a controller under a written contract (Article 4).
Data subject	<i>Nyiri ubwite</i>	<i>Personne concernée</i>	The natural person to whom the data relates; holds the rights in Articles 18 to 26.
Data protection officer	<i>Umukozi ushinzwe kurinda amakuru bwite</i>	<i>Délégué à la protection des données à caractère personnel</i>	The officer every corporate controller or processor designates under Article 40.
Supervisory authority	<i>Urwego rugenzura</i>	<i>Autorité de contrôle</i>	The public authority in charge of cyber security, the NCSA, which registers, supervises and sanctions.

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Personal data breach	<i>Kuvogera amakuru bwite</i>	<i>Violation de données à caractère personnel</i>	A security incident affecting personal data; notified within 48 hours and reported within 72 hours (Articles 43 and 44).
Registration certificate	<i>Icyemezo cy'iyandikwa</i>	<i>Certificat d'enregistrement</i>	The NCSA's certificate authorising processing and, where stated, storage outside Rwanda (Articles 31 and 50).

FOREIGN V RWANDAN INVESTOR

The Data Protection Law applies equally to Rwandan and foreign businesses that process data of people in Rwanda, and the nationality of the owners makes no difference. Two duties fall mainly on foreign businesses: a controller or processor that is neither established nor resident in Rwanda must appoint a written representative in Rwanda (Article 39), and a group that hosts or accesses data outside Rwanda needs a transfer ground and contract for each flow (Articles 48 and 49) and an authorisation on its certificate to store data abroad (Article 50). A foreign investor operating through a Rwandan subsidiary registers the subsidiary as a controller, and the parent or group service companies that access the data usually register as processors. EAC and COMESA membership gives no automatic right to transfer or store data in another member state: Kenya, Uganda and other EAC states are "outside Rwanda" for Articles 48 to 50.

WATCH OUT FOR

- Treating registration as the end of compliance: records, logs, a DPO, impact assessments and breach procedures are separately sanctioned under Article 53.
- Using a foreign cloud on the strength of customer consent alone: consent can support a transfer under Article 48, but storage abroad needs authorisation on the NCSA certificate under Article 50.
- Applying a 72-hour global breach policy: the first notice to the NCSA is due within 48 hours, and processors must report within 48 hours.
- Forgetting that a group company abroad that only accesses Rwandan data is processing it and receiving a transfer, so it needs a contract and may need its own registration and representative.
- Letting the certificate lapse or failing to notify changes within 15 working days; using an expired certificate is itself a misconduct.
- Profiling customers for credit, pricing or hiring decisions without an impact assessment and without a route to human review under Article 21.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

- Official Gazette n° Special of 15/10/2021: Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 relating to the protection of personal data and privacy — <https://archive.gazettes.africa/archive/rw/2021/rw-government-gazette-dated-2021-10-15-no-special.pdf>
- National Cyber Security Authority: Registration Guide for Data Controller and Processor — <https://dpo.gov.rw/fileadmin/DPO/ComplianceTools/registration-guide-for-data-controller-and-processor.pdf>
- National Cyber Security Authority: Data Protection and Privacy Office (registration, transfer and storage authorisations, breach reporting, standard contractual clauses) — <https://dpo.gov.rw/>
- National Cyber Security Authority: laws, regulations and standards — <https://cyber.gov.rw/documentation/>
- amategeko.gov.rw: Rwanda law portal (status of Law N° 058/2021) — <https://amategeko.gov.rw/>

Cybersecurity and critical information infrastructure: the National Cyber Security Authority under Law N° 26/2017, service providers' duties to report, preserve data and take down illegal content under Law N° 60/2018 on cyber crimes, the NCSA minimum standards for essential service providers, BNR's two-hour incident rule for financial institutions, and corporate fines of 30% to 70% of profits

Reviewed 10 October 2026 · Prepared by a commercial lawyer with over 30 years' international experience · Legal and tax information, not legal advice · [How we check](#) · [Open in the app](#)

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- The National Cyber Security Authority (NCSA), established by Law N° 26/2017 of 31/05/2017 and supervised by the Office of the President (Article 5), sets cybersecurity guidelines and standards for public and private institutions, may audit critical information infrastructure, systems and networks, and investigates cyber threats (Article 10); critical information infrastructure is to be determined by a Presidential Order (Article 11).
- Law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cyber crimes applies to offences committed in Rwanda and to offences committed abroad that produce effects in Rwanda (Article 2), and requires a service provider aware that its systems are used to commit an offence to report immediately to the cyber security authority and preserve traffic information (Article 5).
- A service provider informed by security organs of illegal or harmful information must remove it, suspend or terminate the service and assist investigators (Article 6 of Law N° 60/2018), and failing to act on a take-down notification is punishable by a fine of RWF 1,000,000 to RWF 3,000,000 (Article 50).
- A business entity convicted of an offence under Law N° 60/2018 is liable to a fine of 30% to 70% of the profits of the accounting period in which the offence was committed (Article 51), and interference with data in critical national information infrastructure carries 10 to 15 years' imprisonment and a fine of RWF 10,000,000 to RWF 30,000,000 (Article 24).
- The NCSA's Minimum Cybersecurity Standards for Essential Service Providers, version 1.0 of 28 July 2023, gave essential service providers one year to comply, make Tier 1 controls mandatory for all of them and Tier 2 controls mandatory for those serving at least one million users, and institutions regulated by the National Bank of Rwanda (BNR) notify BNR of cyber incidents within two hours under Regulation N° 50/2022 of 02/06/2022.

The framework: three laws, standards and sector rules

Rwanda's cybersecurity rules are built on three statutes. **Law N° 26/2017 of 31/05/2017 establishing the National Cyber Security Authority and determining its mission, organisation and functioning** (the NCSA Law) creates the regulator. **Law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cyber crimes** (the Cyber Crimes Law), published in the Official Gazette n° Special of 25/09/2018, imposes duties on service providers, provides for the protection of critical information infrastructure and defines the offences. **Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 relating to the protection of personal data and privacy** adds security, breach notification and storage duties wherever personal data is involved (Personal data protection). Below the statutes sit NCSA standards and directives, and sector rules from BNR, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) and the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA).

There is no single cybersecurity licence or registration for ordinary businesses. What an investor must do depends on what it is: every business that processes personal data has data security and breach duties; every **service provider**, a term the Cyber Crimes Law defines broadly to include any entity that provides services by means of a computer system or processes or stores computer data on behalf of users (Article 3), has reporting and take-down duties; an **essential service provider** must meet the NCSA's minimum standards; a BNR-regulated institution must meet BNR's cyber security and outsourcing regulations; and an operator of **critical information infrastructure** will face the rules of a Presidential Order once it is adopted. The United States Department of State's 2026 Investment Climate Statement notes that foreign IT providers are not required to hand over source code or encryption technology.

The National Cyber Security Authority and its powers

The NCSA is placed under the **Office of the President of the Republic** (Article 5 of the NCSA Law) and enjoys administrative and financial autonomy (Article 8). Its responsibilities include advising public and private institutions on defending Rwanda's interests in cyberspace, conducting cyber intelligence, setting guidelines based on national, regional and international ICT security principles, coordinating national ICT security policy and preventing cyber-attacks on ICT infrastructure in general and critical information infrastructure in particular (Article 9). Its powers, in Article 10, are to set guidelines and standards for cyberspace protection and ICT security within public and private institutions; to carry out **audits** of critical information infrastructure, cyber systems and networks within public and private institutions where necessary to preserve national security and the public interest; to investigate cyber threats and take preventive action; to conduct cyber security operations; and to establish mechanisms for sharing information on threats and attacks.

The NCSA operates the national computer security incident response team, **Rw-CSIRT**, which receives incident reports through the NCSA's online form, and since 2021 it has also been the supervisory authority for personal data through its Data Protection and Privacy Office. A single regulator for cybersecurity and data protection means that a serious incident involving personal data is reported to the same authority under two laws, on two timetables. The NCSA's **National Cybersecurity Strategy 2024-2029** sets out its programme, including the identification of national critical information infrastructure and essential services.

Duties of service providers under the Cyber Crimes Law

The Cyber Crimes Law reaches beyond Rwanda's borders: it applies to all cyber crimes committed in Rwanda, and to those committed outside Rwanda if they produce effects in Rwanda (Article 2). Its prevention chapter places four groups of duties on service providers. An **electronic communications service provider** must take reasonable steps to inform clients of cybercrime trends that may affect them, establish procedures for clients to report cybercrimes, tell clients how to protect themselves, and disclose abuses to the victim and to the cyber security organ (Article 4).

Any **service provider** that is aware or informed that its computer, system or network is being used to commit an offence must **immediately report** it to the authority in charge of cyber security and **preserve** any information that may assist the investigation, in particular information showing the communication's origin, destination, route, time, date, size, duration and type of underlying service (Article 5). A service provider informed by security organs or the cyber-security organ of illegal or harmful information or activity must remove the information, suspend or terminate the service concerned and give investigators the information they request (Article 6). Failing to act on a take-down notification about data or activity infringing the rights of the recipient or a third party, or about unlawful material, is an offence punishable by a fine of **RWF 1,000,000 to RWF 3,000,000** (Article 50).

These duties are not limited to telecommunications operators. A cloud provider, a hosting company, a software-as-a-service platform, a marketplace or a corporate network that stores data for users can be a service provider within Article 3, and an online intermediary also has a removal duty under Article 46 of Law N° 011/2026 of 26/02/2026 relating to competition and consumer protection once it has actual knowledge of unlawful information (E-commerce, fintech and AI). Platforms should therefore have a documented take-down process, a log of notices and a preservation procedure that can be triggered without waiting for a court order.

Critical information infrastructure

Critical information infrastructure means virtual and physical information systems that provide services to citizens and serve as the backbone of the national economic, social and security life (Article 3 of the Cyber Crimes Law). Article 11 of the NCSA Law and Article 7 of the Cyber Crimes Law leave its identification and protection to a **Presidential Order**, which is to prescribe minimum standards on protection and preservation, general management, access to and transfer and control of data, integrity and authenticity, storage and archiving, data recovery plans, audits and inspections at any time, and other matters needed to protect critical data and resources.

No such Presidential Order had been located at 10 October 2026, and the National Cybersecurity Strategy 2024-2029 still lists the identification of national critical information infrastructure and essential services as work to be done. Until the Order is adopted, an operator cannot be formally designated, but the statutory consequences of an attack are already severe: interfering with computer data stored in critical national information infrastructure carries **10 to 15 years' imprisonment** and a fine of **RWF 10,000,000 to RWF 30,000,000** (Article 24). Investors in energy, telecommunications, water, transport, health, finance and government technology contracts should expect to be designated and should design systems that can meet the access, storage, recovery and audit rules the Order will set.

Minimum standards for essential service providers

The NCSA has issued minimum cybersecurity standards for public institutions, for the financial sector and for essential service providers, together with directives on software and networks, all published on its documentation page. The **Minimum Cybersecurity Standards for Essential Service Providers**, version 1.0 dated 28 July 2023 and issued under the NCSA Law, define an essential service provider (ESP) as an authorised or licensed entity that provides an essential service to the public, businesses or other organisations where the service depends on network and information systems and an incident would have significant disruptive effects. ESPs were to comply within **one year** of publication, and the standard is to be reviewed at least every four years.

The standard works in **three tiers**. Tier 1, basic requirements, is mandatory for all ESPs. Tier 2, industry-standard requirements, is mandatory for an ESP that provides a service to at least **one million unique users or beneficiaries**. Tier 3, advanced requirements, is for ESPs processing critical information whose failure could severely affect the nation. The tier is chosen after a risk assessment, but the NCSA may determine an institution's category with the competent authorities. Its eighteen control families run from security policy, access control, training, audit and accountability and identity management to incident response, risk and security assessment, protection of personal information, contingency planning and supply chain risk management, and it recommends source-code escrow for critical software. An ESP may waive a requirement that is impossible to implement or does not apply after risk assessment, but the waiver must be justified, documented, approved by top management and communicated to the NCSA. The standard expects Rw-CSIRT to be notified of every incident likely to have a significant impact on public health or safety, wide-scale critical services, socio-economic stability or national security.

Financial institutions, payment providers and outsourcing

The financial sector has the most detailed rules. **Regulation N° 50/2022 of 02/06/2022** of the National Bank of Rwanda (BNR) on cyber security in regulated institutions requires an institution to notify BNR of a cyber incident **within two hours** and to submit a full report **within 24 hours**. **Regulation N° 49/2022 of 02/06/2022** on outsourcing allows outsourcing outside Rwanda only where BNR's access to data and systems is not impeded (Article 18) and sets rules for cloud services (Article 20). Payment service providers licensed under Regulation N° 74/2023 of 18/09/2023 must comply with the cybersecurity and business continuity regulations, take account of international standards and maintain a business continuity programme with impact analysis, recovery strategies and alternative sites (Article 54), protect payment and personal data in line with the data protection law (Article 52) and follow the outsourcing regulation (Article 44); their licence applications include a security policy describing systems, data flows and controls.

For a bank, insurer, microfinance institution or payment provider, a single incident can therefore trigger three clocks: two hours to BNR, 48 hours to the NCSA for any personal data breach under Law N° 058/2021 and the immediate report under Article 5 of the Cyber Crimes Law if its systems are being used to commit an offence. Licensing and the wider regulatory framework are described in The financial system and regulators and Payments, currency and mobile money.

Who reports what, to whom and when

Event	Who reports	To whom and when	Source
Systems used to commit an offence	Any service provider	Cyber security authority, immediately; preserve traffic information	Article 5, Law N° 60/2018
Abuses affecting clients	Electronic communications service provider	The victim and the cyber security organ	Article 4, Law N° 60/2018
Notice of illegal or harmful content	Service provider	Remove, suspend or terminate and assist investigators; failure fined RWF 1,000,000 to RWF 3,000,000	Articles 6 and 50, Law N° 60/2018
Personal data breach	Controller (processor to controller)	NCSA within 48 hours; report within 72 hours; individuals if high risk	Articles 43 to 45, Law N° 058/2021
Cyber incident at a regulated financial institution	Bank, insurer, microfinance institution, payment provider	BNR within 2 hours; full report within 24 hours	BNR Regulation N° 50/2022
Incident with significant national impact	Essential service provider	Rw-CSIRT	NCSA ESP Standard v1.0 (2023)
Unlawful content on an e-commerce platform	Online intermediary with actual knowledge	Remove as soon as reasonably practicable; RICA or court may order removal	Article 46, Law N° 011/2026

Offences and penalties

The Cyber Crimes Law defines a wide range of offences. Intentional and unlawful access to computer or system data without consent or entitlement is punishable by **six months to two years** and a fine of RWF 1,000,000 to RWF 2,000,000 (Article 16). Altering, hindering or interfering with a computer, system or network, including by introducing malicious code, carries two to five years and RWF 1,000,000 to RWF 2,000,000, rising to five to seven years and RWF 3,000,000 to RWF 5,000,000 for data of a state security organ and to ten to fifteen years and RWF 10,000,000 to RWF 30,000,000 for critical national information infrastructure (Article 24). Cyber-squatting carries one to two years and RWF 1,000,000 to RWF 3,000,000 (Article 27), phishing one to two years and RWF 1,000,000 to RWF 3,000,000 (Article 36) and spamming three to six months (Article 37).

For companies the decisive provision is **Article 51**: a business entity convicted of any offence under the Law is liable to a fine equal to **30% to 70% of the profits** received in the accounting period of the year in which the offence was committed. Under Article 52 the court may also confiscate the computers, software and media used and the proceeds, and order the temporary or permanent closure of the premises or corporate body if the offence was committed with the knowledge of the owner or management. These sanctions sit alongside the data protection fines of 1% of global turnover for administrative misconduct and 5% of annual turnover for corporate offences under Law N° 058/2021, so an incident handled carelessly can expose a company under both laws.

Responding to a cyber incident in Rwanda, step by step

1 Contain and start the clock

Isolate affected systems and record the time the business became aware of the incident; the BNR, NCSA and data protection deadlines run from awareness, not from the end of the investigation.

2 Notify BNR within two hours

If the entity is a BNR-regulated institution, send the initial notice within two hours and the full report within 24 hours under Regulation N° 50/2022.

3 Report and preserve

If the systems are being used to commit an offence, report immediately to the NCSA and preserve origin, destination, route, time, size and duration information (Article 5 of Law N° 60/2018); essential service providers also alert Rw-CSIRT.

4 Assess personal data

Decide whether personal data was affected; if so, the controller notifies the NCSA within 48 hours and processors notify their controllers within the same period (Article 43 of Law N° 058/2021).

5 File the 72-hour report

Submit the breach report with the facts available, the measures taken and a proposal for informing data subjects, for NCSA approval (Article 44).

6 Inform affected people

Where the risk to individuals is high, communicate the breach to them in writing or electronically, unless an Article 45 exception applies.

7 Close out

Record lessons learned, update the risk assessment and controls, and report to the board; keep the file for any NCSA or BNR inspection.

Cyber readiness checklist for an investor's Rwandan operation

What a regulator, auditor or acquirer is likely to ask to see.

☐ Regulatory map

A note of whether the entity is a service provider, an essential service provider, a BNR-or CMA-regulated institution or a likely critical information infrastructure operator, and which rules follow.

☐ Incident response plan

A plan with the Rwandan clocks built in: immediate report under Article 5, two hours to BNR where applicable, 48 and 72 hours to the NCSA for personal data, and Rw-CSIRT contacts.

☐ **Take-down and preservation procedure**

A log of notices, named responders, and a method to preserve origin, destination, route, time, size and duration data without delay.

☐ **ESP tier assessment**

A documented risk assessment choosing the tier under the NCSA standard, with any waivers approved by top management and communicated to the NCSA.

☐ **Outsourcing and cloud file**

Contracts giving BNR (for financial institutions) and the NCSA access, the NCSA certificate authorising storage abroad, and exit and escrow arrangements.

☐ **Business continuity evidence**

Business impact analysis, recovery strategies and tested recovery sites, as Article 54 of Regulation N° 74/2023 requires of payment providers.

☐ **Board reporting**

Minutes showing management approval of the security policy and review of incidents, which supports a defence against corporate liability.

WORKED EXAMPLE

A ransomware attack on a Kigali payment provider

A Category II payment service provider licensed by BNR detects ransomware on its servers at 22:00 on Friday 6 November 2026; customer names and phone numbers may have been copied. Its profit for the year is RWF 600,000,000 and its global turnover RWF 4,000,000,000. Figures are illustrative.

BNR notice	Due by 00:00 on Saturday 7 November (two hours), with the full report by 22:00 on Saturday 7 November (24 hours), under BNR Regulation N° 50/2022.
NCSA notice of the personal data breach	Due by 22:00 on Sunday 8 November (48 hours), with the report by 22:00 on Monday 9 November (72 hours), including a plan for informing customers.
Rw-CSIRT and evidence	Report the attack to Rw-CSIRT and preserve logs and traffic information for investigators, consistent with Article 5 of Law N° 60/2018.
Customer communication	Because the stolen data enables phishing, the risk is high, so customers are told in writing or electronically under Article 45 of Law N° 058/2021.
Exposure if the breach is not notified	Administrative fine for a corporate body of 1% of global turnover: 1% x RWF 4,000,000,000 = RWF 40,000,000 (Article 53 of Law N° 058/2021).
Exposure if the company itself were convicted of a cyber offence	30% to 70% of the year's profit: RWF 180,000,000 to RWF 420,000,000 (Article 51 of Law N° 60/2018), with possible confiscation and closure.

The victim of an attack is not itself guilty of the attacker's offence; the corporate exposure arises from its own failures, such as not acting on a take-down notice or not notifying a breach.

BNR may also take supervisory action under the payment services regulation.

Questions investors ask

Who regulates cybersecurity in Rwanda?

The National Cyber Security Authority (NCSA), established by Law N° 26/2017 and supervised by the Office of the President. It sets standards for public and private institutions, audits critical information infrastructure, runs Rw-CSIRT and supervises data protection. BNR adds cyber rules for banks, insurers and payment providers, and RURA and the CMA regulate their own sectors.

Must a company report a cyber attack in Rwanda?

It depends on the facts. A service provider aware that its systems are used to commit an offence must report immediately to the cyber security authority (Article 5 of Law N° 60/2018). A personal data breach goes to the NCSA within 48 hours. BNR-regulated institutions notify BNR within two hours, and essential service providers report significant incidents to Rw-CSIRT.

What is critical information infrastructure in Rwanda?

Virtual and physical information systems that provide services to citizens and serve as the backbone of national economic, social and security life (Article 3 of Law N° 60/2018). A Presidential Order is to identify it and set protection rules (Article 7), but none had been located by 10 October 2026. Attacks on it carry 10 to 15 years' imprisonment.

What are the penalties for companies under Rwanda's cyber crimes law?

A business entity convicted of any offence under Law N° 60/2018 is fined 30% to 70% of the profits of the year in which the offence was committed (Article 51). The court may also confiscate equipment and proceeds and close the premises or company if management knew of the offence (Article 52). Failing to act on a take-down notice also carries a fine of RWF 1,000,000 to RWF 3,000,000.

Do the NCSA's essential service provider standards apply to my company?

They apply to an authorised or licensed entity providing an essential service that depends on network and information systems, where an incident would have significant disruptive effects. Tier 1 controls are mandatory for all such providers, Tier 2 for those serving at least one million users, and the NCSA can determine the category with sector regulators.

Can a Rwandan bank or payment provider use a foreign cloud?

Yes, within limits. BNR Regulation N° 49/2022 allows outsourcing outside Rwanda only where BNR's access is not impeded and sets cloud rules, and any personal data stored abroad needs an NCSA certificate authorising storage outside Rwanda under Article 50 of Law N° 058/2021. Payment providers must also meet the business continuity rules in Regulation N° 74/2023.

THE 2027 HORIZON

- The Presidential Order identifying critical information infrastructure and setting its protection rules, provided for by Article 11 of Law N° 26/2017 and Article 7 of Law N° 60/2018, had not been located at 10 October 2026; the National Cybersecurity Strategy 2024-2029 commits to identifying critical infrastructure and essential services, so designation of operators is likely during the strategy period.
- The ESP standard of 28 July 2023 is to be reviewed at least every four years, so a revised version can be expected by mid-2027; essential service providers should watch the NCSA documentation page.
- The NCSA's October 2026 awareness campaign and its 2026 accountability theme suggest closer supervision of registered entities and essential service providers in 2027, although no administrative fines or prosecutions of companies had been published by 10 October 2026.
- Law N° 033/2026 of 24/07/2026 governing the National Bank of Rwanda replaced BNR's 2017 statute; BNR's 2022 cyber security and outsourcing regulations, made under the earlier law, remain listed as current, and institutions should watch for replacement instruments.

Terms you will meet in the documents

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Critical information infrastructure	<i>Ibikorwaremezo by'ikoranabuhanga byihariye</i>	<i>Infrastructure d'information critique</i>	Information systems that serve as the backbone of national economic, social and security life, to be identified by Presidential Order.
National Cyber Security Authority (NCSA)	<i>Urwego rw'Igihugu rushinzwe Umutekano w'Ibijyanye n'Ikoranabuhanga mu Itangazabumenyi n'Itumanaho</i>	—	The cybersecurity and data protection regulator under Law N° 26/2017.
Cyber crimes	<i>Ibyaha bikoreshejwe ikoranabuhanga</i>	<i>Cybercriminalité</i>	Offences defined by Law N° 60/2018, which applies to offences abroad with effects in Rwanda.
Service provider	—	<i>Fournisseur de services</i>	A public or private entity or individual providing services by means of a computer system, or processing or storing computer data for users (Article 3).
Unauthorised access	—	<i>Accès non autorisé</i>	Intentional, unlawful access to computer or system data, punishable under Article 16.
Cybersecurity	—	<i>Cybersécurité</i>	Protection of computer systems from theft, damage or disruption; the subject of NCSA standards and Article 54 of Regulation N° 74/2023.

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Cyber-squatting	—	<i>Cyber-squattage</i>	Acquiring a domain name in bad faith to profit, mislead or harm reputation where it is similar to a registered mark or another's name, punishable under Article 27.
Phishing	—	<i>Phishing</i>	Using a website or electronic message to obtain confidential information for unlawful purposes, punishable under Article 36.

FOREIGN V RWANDAN INVESTOR

The cybersecurity rules apply to activities and systems, not to the nationality of their owners, so a foreign-owned service provider in Rwanda has the same duties as a Rwandan one. The reach abroad is wider than many investors expect: Article 2 of Law N° 60/2018 covers offences committed outside Rwanda that produce effects in Rwanda, and a foreign platform storing data for Rwandan users may be a service provider asked to remove content or preserve data. The practical differences are in hosting and access. A foreign group that runs its Rwandan operation's systems from abroad must reconcile group security policies with the Rwandan reporting clocks, obtain NCSA authorisation to store personal data outside Rwanda and, for financial institutions, ensure BNR's access to outsourced systems. EAC and COMESA status gives no exemption from these rules.

WATCH OUT FOR

- Assuming that only telecommunications operators are service providers: hosting, cloud, software and platform businesses can be caught by Articles 4 to 6 of Law N° 60/2018.
- Group incident policies that wait for forensic certainty before reporting, when BNR's clock runs for two hours and the NCSA's for 48 hours.
- Ignoring a take-down notice from security organs while seeking legal advice; failure to act is itself an offence under Article 50.
- Overlooking corporate exposure of 30% to 70% of a year's profits under Article 51, which can exceed the data protection fines.
- Treating the absence of a critical infrastructure Order as an exemption; Article 24 penalties for attacks already apply and the NCSA can already audit networks under Article 10 of Law N° 26/2017.
- Waiving ESP standard controls without documenting the reasons, obtaining top management approval and informing the NCSA.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

- National Cyber Security Authority: Law N° 60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on prevention and punishment of cyber crimes (Official Gazette n° Special of 25/09/2018) — <https://cyber.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=70&token=8a1cd43626bfcc2b99fba277aca01e6f2aaa1788>
- National Cyber Security Authority: Law N° 26/2017 of 31/05/2017 establishing the NCSA (Official Gazette n° 27 of 03/07/2017) — <https://cyber.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=193&token=388512d958cb10ce563a7d2629169b38bdcdafdf>
- National Cyber Security Authority: Minimum Cybersecurity Standards for Essential Service Providers, version 1.0 (28/07/2023) — <https://cyber.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=410&token=83f75b828d0b04c0ed2a4047cfb5b5f6a73172a3>
- National Cyber Security Authority: National Cybersecurity Strategy 2024-2029 — <https://cyber.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=429&token=d58f8a5199b59af444ea59b87fdff49c4145e929>
- National Cyber Security Authority: documentation (standards, directives and incident reporting) — <https://cyber.gov.rw/documentation/>

E-commerce, fintech and AI: the RICA e-commerce licence, seller disclosures and the seven-day withdrawal right under Law N° 011/2026, electronic contracts and signatures, BNR payment service licences and the regulatory sandbox, the 2026 virtual assets law administered by the Capital Market Authority, VAT on digital services and the pending digital services tax, and Rwanda's approach to artificial intelligence

Reviewed 10 October 2026 · Prepared by a commercial lawyer with over 30 years' international experience · Legal and tax information, not legal advice · [How we check](#) · [Open in the app](#)

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Since 4 March 2026, Article 44 of Law N° 011/2026 of 26/02/2026 relating to competition and consumer protection requires an enterprise wishing to engage in e-commerce or provide online intermediary services, whether through the internet, mobile applications or social networks (Article 41), to apply in writing to the Regulatory Authority for a licence, and gave existing operators six months from publication to conform (Article 73).
- An e-commerce enterprise must display its owner, registration number, physical address in Rwanda, telephone and complaint officer, state the full price including transport and taxes, issue an electronic proof of purchase and acknowledge complaints within 72 [hours] or answer within 15 days (Article 42 of Law N° 011/2026), and a consumer may cancel a distance contract within seven days of receipt and must be refunded within 15 days (Article 47).
- Payment services are licensed by the National Bank of Rwanda (BNR) under Regulation N° 74/2023 of 18/09/2023 in four categories with minimum capital of RWF 300,000,000 (large e-money issuer), RWF 100,000,000 (small e-money issuer or aggregator), RWF 30,000,000 (remittance) and RWF 50,000,000 (payment initiation and account information); the applicant must be a Rwandan company whose chief executive is a citizen or resident of Rwanda, and BNR decides within 90 days of a complete application (Articles 15 and 31).
- Law N° 023/2026 of 25/05/2026 regulating virtual asset business, in force since 28 May 2026, makes the Capital Market Authority (CMA) the licensing authority for virtual asset service providers, bars natural persons from virtual asset business, requires approval for token offerings, tokenisation and stablecoins, and fines an unlicensed entity RWF 70,000,000 to RWF 100,000,000 (Article 34).
- Non-resident suppliers of online services to customers in Rwanda must register for VAT or appoint a representative under Ministerial Order N° 004/26/10/TC of 29/04/2026, failing which banks and payment providers withhold the VAT, while the 1.5% digital services tax in Article 50 bis of Law N° 027/2022, inserted by Law N° 014/2025 of 27/05/2025, awaits its Ministerial Order.

The rulebook for Rwanda's digital economy

Rwanda regulates digital business by activity rather than through a single digital code. Selling goods or services online is governed by the e-commerce chapter of **Law N° 011/2026 of 26/02/2026 relating to competition and consumer protection**, in force since 4 March 2026, administered by the Rwanda Inspectorate, Competition and Consumer Protection Authority (RICA), which the Law calls the Regulatory Authority. Contracts and signatures made electronically rest on **Law N° 24/2016 of 18/06/2016 governing information and communication technologies** (the ICT Law) and the 2024 evidence law. Payments and e-money are licensed by the National Bank of Rwanda (BNR); virtual assets, since May 2026, by the Capital Market Authority (CMA). Data, cybersecurity and tax rules apply to all of them, and artificial intelligence is so far a matter of policy rather than statute.

Each layer adds a licence or a duty, and a single business model often needs several. An online marketplace with an in-app wallet needs an RDB company registration, a RICA e-commerce licence, a BNR payment licence or a licensed partner, an NCSA data protection certificate and VAT registration; if it accepts crypto-assets it also enters the CMA's regime. Sector and investment questions are covered in Sectors open to foreign investors and licensing, and data and cyber duties in Personal data protection and Cybersecurity and critical information.

E-commerce under Law N° 011/2026: scope and the licence

Chapter VI of Law N° 011/2026 is Rwanda's first general e-commerce regime. E-commerce is conducted where an enterprise sells, or an enterprise or consumer buys, a good or service in whole or in part by electronic means, whether or not an online intermediary is used and whether payment is made electronically or in physical form; electronic means include the internet, mobile commerce applications and social networks (Article 41). A business selling through its own website, a marketplace, a messaging app or a social media page with cash on delivery is therefore within the Law.

Article 44 provides that an enterprise wishing to engage in e-commerce or provide online intermediary services applies in writing to the Regulatory Authority for the corresponding licence, and that regulations of the Regulatory Authority determine the other licensing matters. Existing e-commerce operators had a period not exceeding **six months** from publication in the Official Gazette on 4 March 2026 to conform (Article 73), so the transition ended in early September 2026. RICA's implementing regulations, which will set the application procedure, documents and any fee, had not been located at 10 October 2026, and operators should approach RICA directly and keep evidence of their application. Engaging in e-commerce without authorisation or without complying with the applicable requirements, and displaying false information on a platform or refusing to remove it, are faults under Article 67, punished by administrative fines banded by the preceding year's turnover: RWF 30,000 below RWF 2,000,000; RWF 50,000 to RWF 100,000 up to RWF 20,000,000; RWF 200,000 to RWF 300,000 up to RWF 1,000,000,000; and RWF 500,000 above that, doubled for a repeat within two years and quadrupled for a third. An operator that wishes to close publishes a notice on its website at least 30 days before ceasing business (Article 48).

What an online seller must disclose and do

Article 42 lists the obligations of an e-commerce enterprise. On its online interface it must show the names of the owner, the name, registration number and place of registration of the enterprise, its **physical address in Rwanda**, telephone number, interface and email address, the mobile number for after-sales service, the name and mobile number of the **consumer complaint officer**, and its rules of procedure. Before the transaction it must show the total price including transport, taxes and other foreseeable charges; the terms on refunds, returns, delivery and payment; the right of withdrawal, guarantees, expiry dates and the complaint mechanism; the delivery time; the payment methods, their security, fees, cancellation and charge-back options and the payment provider's contact details; its privacy and payment security policy; how the consumer can keep a record of the transaction; the dispute resolution means; and any minimum contract duration.

It must then **acknowledge a complaint within 72 [hours]** of receipt (the Gazette text omits the unit) with an indication of the procedure, or respond within 15 days; record the consumer's consent to each purchase; refrain from submitting or commissioning false or misleading reviews, ratings or endorsements; issue an **electronic proof of purchase** received by the consumer in real time; publish how consumers can access, correct or delete their data or unsubscribe; make advertisements identifiable with a free opt-out from mailing lists; and comply with any further obligations RICA prescribes. The physical-address requirement means that a foreign seller targeting Rwandan consumers needs a local presence or a local operator, and the complaint officer must be reachable by a Rwandan mobile number.

Consumer rights and platform duties in e-commerce (Law N° 011/2026)

Rule	Content	Article
Pre-contract terms	Consumer may access the terms and conditions before concluding, and review and correct errors before confirming	47(1)(a), (b)
Defective or different goods	Refund, repair or replacement if damaged, defective, different from the order, not as advertised or unfit for purpose	47(1)(c)
Withdrawal	Cancel a distance contract within 7 days of receipt of the good or service; consumer bears the return cost	47(2)
Refund	Within 15 days of the date of withdrawal where payment was made in advance	47(3)
Complaints	Acknowledge within 72 [hours] with the procedure, or respond within 15 days	42(j)
Online intermediary disclosures	Own identity, registration, physical address in Rwanda and complaint officer; details of the e-commerce operators it serves; data protection procedures	43
Platform content	Intermediary must ensure content on its platform complies with the law; seller liable for its own information	45
Removal	Intermediary with actual knowledge removes unlawful information as soon as reasonably practicable; RICA or a court may order removal or cessation of service; good-faith removal is protected	46
Closing down	Notice on the website for 30 days before ceasing e-commerce business	48

Electronic contracts and signatures

The ICT Law, which repealed Law N° 18/2010 of 12/05/2010 relating to electronic messages, electronic signature and electronic transactions (Article 309), gives electronic records legal effect (Article 134) and provides that a contract may be formed by electronic messages **unless both parties agreed otherwise or where laws provide otherwise** (Article 158). Electronic records are admissible in evidence (Articles 145 and 146), every person has the right to use an electronic signature with certificate rules set by the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA) (Article 147), foreign certificates are recognised if they offer equivalent reliability (Article 148), electronic notarisation is provided for (Article 149) and the Law is technology-neutral (Article 150). Electronic certification service providers are licensed and may be accredited (Articles 175 to 179). Law N° 062/2024 of 20/06/2024 governing evidence gives an electronic signature the same probative value as other evidence (Article 42), as explained in [Commercial contracts in Rwanda](#).

Article 133 of the ICT Law contemplates a Prime Minister's Order listing transactions excluded from its electronic transaction rules, but no such Order had been located at 10 October 2026, and the exclusions often cited for land and wills belonged to the repealed 2010 law. Where another law requires a notarised, registered or handwritten document, as for the transfer of land or a will, that law's formalities

still apply by virtue of the proviso in Article 158. For online consumer contracts, the e-commerce rules on pre-contract information, consent records and electronic receipts in Law N° 011/2026 sit on top of the ICT Law.

Payments and e-money: BNR licensing

Payment services are regulated by **Law N° 061/2021 of 14/10/2021 governing the payment system** and by BNR's **Regulation N° 74/2023 of 18/09/2023 governing payment service providers**, with separate regulations on e-money issuers (Regulation N° 54/2022 of 01/09/2022) and remittance services (Regulation N° 64/2023), and Regulations N° 94/2026 of 11/05/2026 governing acquisition and amalgamation for payment service providers and payment system operators. BNR licenses an applicant that is a company incorporated under Rwandan company law, has a permanent place of business or registered office in Rwanda, and has a **chief executive officer or managing director who is a citizen or resident of Rwanda** (Article 15). The chair of the board and the chief executive may not be the same person or related parties.

BNR checks completeness and notifies missing information within **seven working days** (Article 30) and investigates and responds within **90 days** after receipt of a complete application (Article 31). A licence is perpetual unless revoked or suspended (Article 39) and is not transferable (Article 40). Licensed providers must interoperate with other providers (Article 47), may not enter **exclusivity agreements** unless BNR authorises them (Article 48), must notify material changes and violations immediately (Article 50), and must comply with BNR's outsourcing, data protection, agent, cybersecurity and business continuity rules (Articles 44, 52, 53 and 54). The application file runs to some 25 items, including a programme of operations, a three-year business plan, fit-and-proper documents for directors and significant shareholders, a security policy, data protection and AML/CFT policies and proof of payment of the licence fee. Rwanda's payments market and foreign currency rules are described in [Payments, currency and mobile money \(FAQ 92\)](#).

BNR payment service provider licences (Regulation N° 74/2023 and BNR's licensing requirements)

Category	Activities	Minimum initial capital	One-time licence fee	Board
I	Large e-money issuer (customer wallet limit above RWF 50,000 and e-money outstanding of at least RWF 1,000,000,000 for six months), with other services; trust arrangement required	RWF 300,000,000	RWF 5,000,000	At least 7 members, 4 independent
II	Small e-money issuer and/or merchant acquiring or payment aggregation; customer funds in escrow and insured or guaranteed	RWF 100,000,000	RWF 3,000,000	At least 5 members, 3 independent
III	Money remittance; insurance of at least RWF 100,000,000 for funds held	RWF 30,000,000	RWF 1,000,000	At least 3 members, 1 independent

Category	Activities	Minimum initial capital	One-time licence fee	Board
IV	Payment initiation and/or account information services; professional indemnity insurance	RWF 50,000,000	RWF 2,000,000	At least 3 members, 1 independent

Regulatory sandboxes

A fintech whose product does not fit an existing licence can test it under **BNR Regulation N° 41/2022 of 13/04/2022 governing the regulatory sandbox**, and Article 43 of the payment services regulation directs innovative or hybrid payment products there. The applicant must show that the product is innovative with clear potential to improve access, efficiency, security or risk management, or to open financing opportunities, and brings real benefits; that it does not clearly correspond to a currently regulated product or is a hybrid; that it falls within BNR's supervisory scope; and that the applicant has assessed it, has resources and a technical architecture, has a plan to deploy at scale and is run by fit and proper persons (Article 4). BNR calls for applications in **three cohorts a year** and acknowledges completeness within seven working days (Article 7). Testing lasts up to **12 months**, extendable by up to 12 months if the innovation has tested positively (Article 8), on a request made 30 working days before expiry (Article 13), within client and exposure limits set in the testing plan.

The CMA runs a separate capital markets sandbox under its Guidelines N° 002/CMA G/2023 of 27/04/2023, and Article 13 of the virtual assets law provides a sandbox for virtual asset business models not covered by that Law, with the application process set by the CMA's and BNR's frameworks; a participant that tests successfully may then apply for a licence or approval.

Virtual assets: Law N° 023/2026

Law N° 023/2026 of 25/05/2026 regulating virtual asset business, published in the Official Gazette n° Special of 28/05/2026 and in force on publication (Article 40), brings crypto-asset business under licence. A virtual asset is a digital representation of value that can be digitally traded or transferred and used for payment or investment; fiat digital representations, BNR-regulated payment instruments, securities, central bank digital currencies, closed-loop systems, unique non-fungible assets, anonymity-enhanced virtual assets and algorithm-based stablecoins are excluded from the definition (Article 4), as are technical assistance, hardware manufacturing and software engineering (Article 3). The **CMA** is the Regulatory Authority (Articles 2 and 5), cooperating with BNR (Article 8). A legal entity wishing to provide virtual asset services, such as operating a trading platform, clearing, exchange between fiat and virtual assets, transfer, custody, order execution or placement (Article 14), applies to the CMA for a licence; it must be incorporated in Rwanda, or incorporated abroad with registration and a local presence, and hold the minimum capital to be set by regulation, with effective AML/CFT controls (Article 10).

Article 15 sets the boundaries: **natural persons may not conduct virtual asset business**; virtual assets are not legal tender; they may be used for payments only with BNR's authorisation; virtual asset mining facilities, crypto ATMs and mixer or tumbler services need authorisation; and only licensed providers

and approved issuers may market virtual assets. Tokenising real-world assets requires the CMA's prior approval (Article 16), and sovereign assets, public infrastructure, personal identifiable information and artworks may not be tokenised (Article 17). An initial virtual asset offering or a listing on a Rwandan exchange needs approval and a white paper (Article 18), and a stablecoin issuer needs prior approval, a qualified valuer, reserves 100% collateralised, ring-fenced, held by a licensed custodian and segregated from the issuer's assets (Article 19). The penalties are heavy: a natural person in virtual asset business faces RWF 30,000,000 to RWF 50,000,000 and three to five years (Article 33); an unlicensed entity RWF 70,000,000 to RWF 100,000,000 (Article 34); unapproved issuance RWF 120,000,000 to RWF 150,000,000 (Article 35); unlicensed marketing RWF 15,000,000 to RWF 20,000,000 (Article 36); and unauthorised payments, mining, ATMs or mixers RWF 70,000,000 to RWF 100,000,000 for an entity (Article 38). The Law contains no transitional period for existing operators, and the CMA's regulations on capital and administrative sanctions (Article 32) were awaited at 10 October 2026.

Tax on digital business

Income from digital services is Rwandan-source income under Article 6 of Law N° 027/2022 of 20/10/2022 establishing taxes on income. Since **Ministerial Order N° 004/26/10/TC of 29/04/2026**, non-resident suppliers of online services to customers in Rwanda, including software, platforms and ride-hailing, streaming, online gaming, search, data monetisation, subscriptions, e-learning, hosting and marketplace supplies, must register for VAT or appoint a representative with a business in Rwanda, with no turnover threshold; the supply is in Rwanda if the customer or consumption is in Rwanda or the billing address, IP address, SIM or bank account is Rwandan; and where the supplier is unregistered, the bank or payment provider withholds the VAT. The three-month compliance window ended in late July 2026 ([VAT and electronic invoicing](#)).

The **digital services tax** of 1.5% of gross Rwandan-sourced revenue, inserted as Article 50 bis of the income tax law by Law N° 014/2025 of 27/05/2025, applies by its text to any company supplying digital services with a substantial national presence, Rwandan or foreign, but a Ministerial Order must define its scope and procedure, and RRA was reported in May 2026 as describing it as pending implementation; no implementing Order had been published by 10 October 2026 ([Capital gains, property and other taxes](#)). E-commerce sellers also issue invoices from an RRA-certified electronic billing system under Ministerial Order N° 006/26/10/TC, and fintechs should note the reported start on 1 July 2027 of the 15% excise on financial-transaction charges.

Artificial intelligence

Rwanda has no AI statute. The **National AI Policy** prepared by the Ministry of ICT and Innovation (MINICT) with RURA, and reported as approved by Cabinet in April 2023, proposes a Responsible AI Office, ethical guidelines from RURA and AI regulatory sandboxes. On 8 June 2026 Cabinet approved the establishment of a National Artificial Intelligence Agency to lead AI development, adoption, investment and governance, as reported by The New Times; its founding instrument, mandate and structure had not been published at 10 October 2026. Existing law already governs much of what AI systems do. Article 21 of Law N° 058/2021 gives individuals the right not to be subject to a decision based solely on automated processing, including profiling, with legal or similarly significant effects,

unless it rests on explicit consent, a contract or a law with safeguards; Article 38 requires an impact assessment for automated evaluation and for **new technologies**; and training data drawn from Rwandan users is subject to registration, transfer and storage rules.

Intellectual property questions are open. Law N° 055/2024 defines an author as a person who created a work and allows a legal entity to be a person, but it says nothing about works generated by AI, and no Rwandan decision on the point had been found (Copyright, software and digital content). Consumer law applies to AI-driven selling: Article 42 of Law N° 011/2026 prohibits false or misleading reviews and endorsements, which covers fabricated reviews however produced. Investors deploying credit scoring, recruitment screening or customer-facing chatbots should document a lawful basis, an impact assessment and a route to human review.

Launching an online business in Rwanda, step by step

- 1 Incorporate and register for tax**
Register a Rwandan company with RDB, obtain a TIN and register for VAT if turnover will exceed the threshold, and set up certified electronic invoicing.

- 2 Apply for the RICA e-commerce licence**
Apply in writing under Article 44 of Law N° 011/2026, with a physical address in Rwanda and a named complaint officer; keep proof of the application while RICA's regulations are awaited.

- 3 Decide how payments will be handled**
Use a BNR-licensed payment provider, or apply for a Category I to IV licence under Regulation N° 74/2023, or for the sandbox if the model is new; do not hold customer funds without a licence.

- 4 Register with the NCSA**
Register as a data controller, appoint a DPO and obtain authorisation for any storage of personal data outside Rwanda (Law N° 058/2021).

- 5 Build the storefront to Article 42**
Display identity, address and complaint details; show full prices and terms before checkout; record consent; issue real-time electronic receipts; publish data and unsubscribe procedures.

- 6 Set up returns and complaints**
Honour the seven-day withdrawal right and 15-day refund, acknowledge complaints within the Article 42 period and log them.

- 7 Check marketing and reviews**
Label advertisements, offer opt-outs and remove fake reviews; do not use minimum resale prices or online-sales bans in supplier terms.

DECISION GUIDE

Which regulator licenses this digital business?

A decision guide for a digital business entering Rwanda. Several answers can apply at once.

Q1 Does it sell goods or services, or run a platform matching sellers and buyers, by internet, app or social network?

Yes RICA e-commerce or online intermediary licence under Article 44 of Law N° 011/2026. Continue to Q2.

No Continue to Q2.

Q2 Does it issue e-money, hold customer funds, acquire or aggregate payments, remit money or initiate payments?

Yes BNR licence under Regulation N° 74/2023 (Categories I to IV), or a partnership with a licensed provider. Continue to Q3.

No Continue to Q3.

Q3 Does it exchange, hold, transfer, issue or tokenise virtual assets?

Yes CMA licence or approval under Law N° 023/2026; natural persons may not operate, and payments in virtual assets need BNR authorisation.

No Continue to Q4.

Q4 Is the product new and outside any existing licence?

Yes Apply to the BNR, CMA or virtual asset sandbox for up to 12 months of testing, then for a licence.

No No financial licence; data protection registration, tax and consumer rules still apply.

WORKED EXAMPLE

A regional marketplace launches in Kigali

A Ugandan-owned marketplace incorporates a Rwandan subsidiary to sell electronics online with mobile-money checkout through a BNR-licensed aggregator. In its first year its turnover is RWF 800,000,000. Figures are illustrative.

Licences

RICA e-commerce licence under Article 44; no BNR licence because a licensed Category II aggregator collects payments into an escrow account; NCSA registration as a controller.

If it built its own wallet instead	Category II small e-money issuer: minimum capital RWF 100,000,000, one-time licence fee RWF 3,000,000, a board of at least five with three independent members, and a Rwandan citizen or resident as chief executive.
A customer withdraws	A phone costing RWF 450,000 is delivered on 3 March 2027. The customer may cancel until 10 March 2027 (seven days from receipt), pays the return cost, and is refunded RWF 450,000 within 15 days of the withdrawal, so by 25 March 2027 for a withdrawal on 10 March.
Complaint	A complaint received on Monday 8 March 2027 is acknowledged within the Article 42 period with the procedure, or answered by 23 March 2027 (15 days).
Operating without the licence	With turnover of more than RWF 20,000,000 and not more than RWF 1,000,000,000, the fine under Article 67 is RWF 200,000 to RWF 300,000, doubled to RWF 400,000 to RWF 600,000 for a repeat within two years.
Accepting crypto at checkout	Not permitted without BNR authorisation under Article 15 of Law N° 023/2026; an entity using virtual assets for payments without approval faces RWF 70,000,000 to RWF 100,000,000 (Article 38).

The e-commerce fines are small; the commercial risk of operating unlicensed lies in orders to stop, platform removal and payment partners' requirements.

The Ugandan parent is outside Rwanda for data purposes: its access to customer data needs an Article 48 ground and an Article 49 contract.

Questions investors ask

Do I need a licence to sell online in Rwanda?

Yes. Since 4 March 2026, Article 44 of Law N° 011/2026 requires an enterprise engaging in e-commerce or providing online intermediary services to apply in writing to RICA for a licence. It covers sales by website, app or social network, however paid. Existing operators had six months to conform, and RICA's detailed regulations were awaited at 10 October 2026.

What return rights do online shoppers have in Rwanda?

Under Article 47 of Law N° 011/2026 a consumer may cancel a distance contract within seven days of receiving the good or service, bearing the return cost, and must be refunded within 15 days of withdrawal if already paid. The consumer may also demand a refund, repair or replacement for damaged, defective or different goods.

Are electronic contracts and signatures valid in Rwanda?

Yes. Article 158 of Law N° 24/2016 allows contracts by electronic messages unless the parties agree otherwise or another law provides otherwise, and Article 42 of Law N° 062/2024 gives electronic signatures the same probative value as other evidence. Transactions that another law makes subject to notarial or registration formalities, such as land transfers, still follow them.

How do I get a payment or e-money licence in Rwanda?

Apply to BNR under Regulation N° 74/2023 through a Rwandan company with a local office and a chief executive who is a citizen or resident of Rwanda. Capital ranges from RWF 30,000,000 for remittance to RWF 300,000,000 for a large e-money issuer, with one-time fees of RWF 1,000,000 to RWF 5,000,000. BNR decides within 90 days of a complete application.

Is cryptocurrency legal in Rwanda?

Virtual asset business is legal only under licence. Law N° 023/2026, in force since 28 May 2026, requires providers to be licensed by the CMA, bars natural persons from the business, states that virtual assets are not legal tender and requires BNR authorisation to use them for payments. An unlicensed entity faces a fine of RWF 70,000,000 to RWF 100,000,000.

Must foreign digital platforms pay VAT in Rwanda?

Yes. Ministerial Order N° 004/26/10/TC of 29/04/2026 requires non-resident suppliers of online services to customers in Rwanda to register for VAT or appoint a representative, with no turnover threshold; otherwise banks and payment providers withhold the VAT. The separate 1.5% digital services tax awaits its Ministerial Order, which had not been published at 10 October 2026.

Does Rwanda regulate artificial intelligence?

Not by statute. The National AI Policy proposes a Responsible AI Office, RURA ethics guidelines and AI sandboxes, and Cabinet approved a National Artificial Intelligence Agency in June 2026, whose founding instrument had not been published by 10 October 2026. Meanwhile Law N° 058/2021 limits decisions based solely on automated processing (Article 21) and requires impact assessments for new technologies (Article 38), and consumer law prohibits misleading reviews and endorsements.

THE 2027 HORIZON

- RICA regulations under Article 44(2) of Law N° 011/2026 on e-commerce licensing and further seller obligations had not been published at 10 October 2026; they will set the procedure, documents and any fee and may add disclosure duties.
- CMA regulations under Law N° 023/2026 on minimum capital, licensing procedure and administrative sanctions (Article 32) were awaited; until they appear, existing crypto businesses face a licensing requirement with no published route to compliance and no transitional period.
- The Ministerial Order bringing the 1.5% digital services tax into operation, and the Prime Minister's Order listing exclusions from the ICT Law's electronic transaction rules (Article 133), had not been located.
- The 15% excise on financial-transaction charges is reported to start on 1 July 2027, BNR published a central bank digital currency proof-of-concept report in February 2026, and the August 2025 draft Capital Market Business Bill would add a statutory capital markets sandbox.
- The founding instrument of the National Artificial Intelligence Agency approved by Cabinet on 8 June 2026, and the ethics guidelines proposed by the National AI Policy, had not been published at 10 October 2026; investors should watch MINICT, RURA and the new agency for guidance.

Terms you will meet in the documents

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Electronic commerce	<i>Ubucuruzi bukoresha ikoranabuhanga</i>	<i>Commerce électronique</i>	Buying or selling goods or services by internet, app or social network, licensed by RICA (Articles 41 and 44, Law N° 011/2026).
Electronic signature	<i>Umukono koranabuhanga</i>	—	A signature in electronic form; every person may use one under Article 147 of Law N° 24/2016.
Electronic transactions	<i>Ihererekanya koranabuhanga</i>	—	Transactions concluded by electronic messages, valid under Article 158 of Law N° 24/2016 unless agreed or legislated otherwise.
Payment services	—	<i>Services de paiement</i>	E-money issuance, acquiring, aggregation, remittance, payment initiation and account information, licensed by BNR (Regulation N° 74/2023).
Regulatory sandbox	<i>Igeragezwa ry'ibishya</i>	<i>Sandbox réglementaire</i>	Supervised testing of an innovative product for up to 12 months (BNR Regulation N° 41/2022; Article 13, Law N° 023/2026).

English	Kinyarwanda	French	Meaning
Virtual asset	<i>Umutungo koranabuhanga</i>	<i>Actif virtuel</i>	A digital representation of value that can be traded or transferred, regulated by the CMA (Article 4, Law N° 023/2026).
Virtual asset service provider	—	<i>Prestataire de services sur actifs virtuels</i>	A legal entity registered and licensed in Rwanda to provide virtual asset services (Article 2, Law N° 023/2026).
Initial virtual asset offering	—	<i>Offre initiale d'actifs virtuels</i>	A public issue of virtual assets requiring CMA approval and a white paper (Article 18).
Tokenisation of real-world assets	—	<i>Tokenisation des actifs du monde réel</i>	Representing a real asset as a virtual asset; needs prior CMA approval (Article 16).

FOREIGN V RWANDAN INVESTOR

The digital rules are largely nationality-neutral, but several require a Rwandan footprint. An e-commerce enterprise must display a physical address in Rwanda and a consumer complaint officer (Article 42 of Law N° 011/2026); a payment service provider must be a company incorporated in Rwanda with a permanent place of business and a chief executive who is a citizen or resident of Rwanda (Article 15 of Regulation N° 74/2023); and a virtual asset service provider must be incorporated in Rwanda or registered with a local presence (Article 10 of Law N° 023/2026). A foreign platform selling online services to Rwandan customers without a local entity must still register for VAT or appoint a representative, or have VAT withheld by banks. EAC and COMESA operators receive no passport into Rwanda for payments, e-commerce or virtual assets: a licence in Kenya or Uganda does not authorise activity in Rwanda, although the EAC Cross-Border Payment System Masterplan approved in May 2025 points to closer regional integration.

WATCH OUT FOR

- Selling through social media or messaging apps without a RICA licence: Article 41 covers social networks and cash-on-delivery sales.
- Holding customers' money in a marketplace wallet without a BNR licence; use escrow through a licensed provider or apply for Category I or II.
- Exclusive deals with mobile-money or payment providers, which Article 48 of Regulation N° 74/2023 prohibits unless BNR authorises them.
- Accepting or paying in crypto-assets, which needs BNR authorisation, or letting staff or founders run virtual asset business personally, which Article 15 of Law N° 023/2026 forbids.
- Treating the absence of a VAT threshold for non-resident digital suppliers as a de minimis exemption; Ministerial Order N° 004/26/10/TC has none.
- Relying on automated credit or hiring decisions without human review and an impact assessment under Articles 21 and 38 of Law N° 058/2021.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

- RICA: Official Gazette n° Special of 04/03/2026, Law N° 011/2026 of 26/02/2026 relating to competition and consumer protection (Articles 41 to 48, 67 and 73) — https://rica.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/RICA/Publications/Laws/OG_n___Special_of_04.03.2026__lhiganwa_mu_bucuruzi_no_kurengera_umuguzi__1___1___1_.pdf
- National Bank of Rwanda: Law N° 023/2026 of 25/05/2026 regulating virtual asset business — https://www.bnr.rw/documents/Law_regulating_virtual_asset_business.pdf
- National Bank of Rwanda: licensing requirements for payment service provider licences (Regulation N° 74/2023) — https://www.bnr.rw/documents/Licensing_requirements_for_PSPs_3.pdf
- National Bank of Rwanda: Regulation N° 41/2022 of 13/04/2022 governing the regulatory sandbox — https://www.bnr.rw/documents/Regulation_governing_the_Regulatory_Sandbox_2022.pdf
- Rwanda Revenue Authority: Ministerial Order N° 004/26/10/TC of 29/04/2026 (VAT on online services) — https://www.rra.gov.rw/fileadmin/Folder_for_2025/Ministerial_Order_VAT_on_Online_Services_April_2026.pdf
- Ministry of ICT and Innovation: National Artificial Intelligence Policy — https://www.minict.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/minict_user_upload/Documents/Policies/Artificial_Intelligence_Policy.pdf