



**Institute of Policy Analysis
and Research - Rwanda**

**Strengthening
Labour Inspections
for Decent Work
and Enterprise
Compliance in
Rwanda**

Policy Brief, 2025



Executive Summary

Labour inspection in Rwanda's construction and mining sectors plays an increasingly important role in ensuring decent work, protecting workers' rights, and promoting compliance with national labour standards. This study examined the effectiveness, challenges, and socioeconomic implications of labour inspections in these two critical sectors, both of which are central to Rwanda's industrialization and employment goals under the National Strategy for Transformation (NST2) and Vision 2050. The overall purpose of the study was to assess how effectively the labour inspection system contributes to occupational safety, legal compliance, and worker welfare, and to identify opportunities for strengthening institutional coordination, capacity, and monitoring mechanisms. The study also explored the broader business case for labour inspection including its contribution to productivity, formalization of employment, and sustainable economic growth.

The research adopted a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. Data were collected through surveys of 400 employees, employers, and labour inspectors across Rwanda's provinces and districts, as well as key informant interviews and focus group discussions with government officials, employers' and workers' organizations, and civil society actors. This inclusive methodology provided a comprehensive view of inspection practices, institutional performance, and worker experiences. The analysis focused on five key areas: the institutional and regulatory framework, inspection practices and coverage, effectiveness in promoting compliance, challenges faced by inspectors and enterprises, and policy recommendations for improvement.

The findings reveal that Rwanda's labour inspection system has made commendable progress in enforcing labour laws and promoting safe workplaces. Inspections have contributed to improved compliance with wage and social security regulations, reduced workplace accidents, and increased employer awareness of occupational health and safety standards. In districts such as Huye and Muhanga, the study found that use of personal protective equipment (PPE) increased significantly following inspection visits, while accident cases declined. Moreover, child labour has been largely eliminated in formal enterprises, and

awareness of safety requirements has risen among employers and workers alike. These achievements demonstrate that inspection has tangible benefits for both productivity and worker welfare.

However, several operational and institutional challenges remain. Coordination between agencies such as the Ministry of Public Service and Labour (MIFOTRA), Rwanda Mines, Petroleum and Gas Board (RMB), Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA), and district authorities remains limited, sometimes leading to overlapping functions and fragmented enforcement. Labour inspectors also face logistical constraints including inadequate transport, limited digital tools, and lack of sector-specific equipment, which affect coverage particularly in remote and mountainous areas. The inspection process is still largely manual, delaying data reporting and permit processing. Furthermore, inspections tend to focus on administrative compliance such as wage and pension verification, while preventive measures related to occupational safety, chemical exposure, and high-risk working conditions receive comparatively less attention.

Worker welfare has improved, yet important gaps persist. Many workers, particularly in small-scale or informal operations, remain unaware of their labour rights and safety obligations. Some continue to experience unpaid overtime, limited access to insurance, and inconsistent provision of protective gear. Informality especially in artisanal mining reduces legal compliance and limits access to social protection. While the study found a strong willingness among employers to comply when adequately guided, sustained awareness and practical support are necessary to strengthen a culture of prevention and safety at the workplace.

Despite these challenges, the study highlights that labour inspections generate significant economic and social returns. They contribute to reduced absenteeism, higher productivity, and stronger investor confidence in Rwanda's regulatory environment. The study therefore concludes that enhancing the effectiveness of labour inspections is not only a compliance issue but also a strategic investment in Rwanda's human capital and competitiveness. Building stronger linkages between inspection systems, social protection, and enterprise productivity will help consolidate Rwanda's progress toward inclusive and sustainable growth.

1. Background to the Problem

Rwanda's labour market has evolved rapidly in recent years, driven by industrialization, urbanization, and the expansion of the service sector. Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) now employ over 90 percent of the non-farm labour force, making them central to Rwanda's economic transformation agenda. However, alongside this progress, the country faces challenges of informality, weak enforcement of labour laws, and limitations in compliance with occupational safety and social protection standards. Many enterprises particularly micro and small firms operate with limited oversight and limited knowledge of labour regulations, exposing workers to unsafe conditions, low wages, and job insecurity.

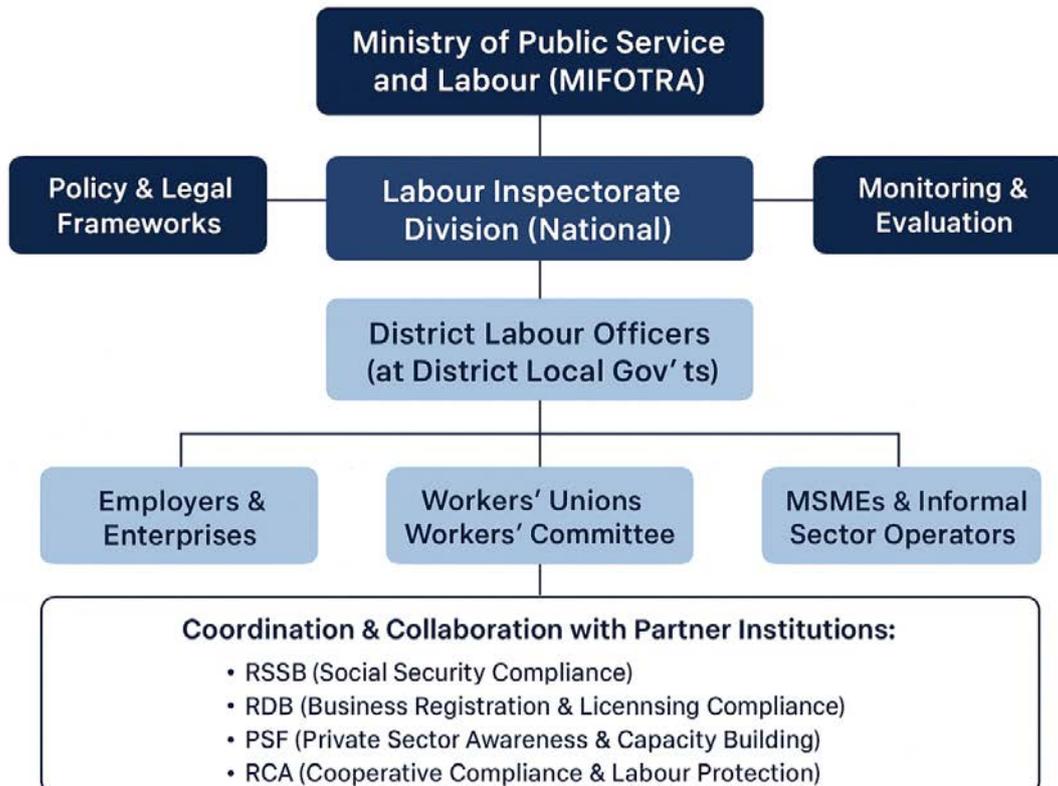
To address these concerns, the Ministry of Public Service and Labour (MIFOTRA) is mandated under the 2018 Labour Law and accompanying Ministerial Orders to enforce compliance through routine and special labour inspections. These inspections ensure adherence to minimum wage standards, occupational health and safety (OHS) guidelines, and employment contract obligations, while promoting decent work and fair treatment of employees. Despite this strong legislative foundation, the inspection system continues to face structural and operational weaknesses. Inadequate human resources, logistical constraints, poor data sharing between institutions, and a limited use of digital technologies have constrained effectiveness. These challenges threaten the achievement of national development objectives under the **National Strategy for Transformation (NST1 and NST2)** and **Vision 2050**, both of which emphasize job creation, fair labour conditions, and social inclusion. Strengthening labour

inspection mechanisms is therefore essential to bridging the gap between economic growth and decent employment outcomes.

1.1 Structure of the Labour Inspection System in Rwanda

The Rwanda labour inspection system operates under a **centralized-decentralized coordination framework** led by the **Ministry of Public Service and Labour (MIFOTRA)**. MIFOTRA provides policy guidance, standards, and overall supervision of inspection activities, while **District Labour Officers (DLOs)** carry out inspections at the local level. The system works in collaboration with institutional partners such as the **Rwanda Social Security Board (RSSB)**, the **Rwanda Development Board (RDB)**, and the **Private Sector Federation (PSF)**, who play complementary roles in promoting compliance, business registration, and social protection coverage. MIFOTRA provides national leadership, legal interpretation, and oversight of all inspection processes, ensuring compliance with national labour standards and ILO conventions. District Labour Officers serve as the operational arms of MIFOTRA, conducting workplace inspections, handling worker grievances, and reporting violations. Rwanda Social Security Board (RSSB) ensures compliance with social protection and occupational safety registration. Rwanda Development Board (RDB) links business registration and licensing processes with labour law compliance checks. The Private Sector Federation (PSF) supports awareness creation and self-regulation among employers and MSMEs. Rwanda Cooperative Alliance (RCA) oversees cooperatives and promotes labour protection in cooperative enterprises.

Labour Inspection System in Rwanda



2. Objectives of the Study

The study was designed to generate empirical evidence on how Rwanda's labour inspection system functions and identify practical policy recommendations that could enhance its effectiveness. Specifically, it examined the institutional and legal arrangements underpinning inspections, assessed operational and logistical challenges, and evaluated the extent to which inspections promote compliance and decent work. It further aimed to identify opportunities for improving inspection efficiency through capacity development, coordination, and digital transformation. The overarching goal was to strengthen Rwanda's ability to ensure fair and dignified work for all employees while supporting business competitiveness through compliance with national and international labour standards.

3. Methodology

The research employed a mixed-methods design that integrated quantitative and qualitative

approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the inspection system. Quantitative data were derived from inspection records, administrative reports, and MIFOTRA databases covering the period from 2019 to 2024. This was complemented by qualitative data gathered from 45 key informant interviews and 12 focus group discussions involving national and district labour officers, employers, trade union leaders, and representatives from social security and business registration agencies such as RSB and RDB.

The study sampled enterprises across various sectors and geographical regions, including large, medium, and small firms operating both formally and informally. Data collection tools included structured questionnaires, checklists, and interview guides focusing on inspection coverage, compliance trends, enforcement practices, and institutional coordination. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis, generating both quantitative insights and contextual narratives.

4. Key findings

4.1 The Institutional, Regulatory, and Policy Framework: A System Working in Silos

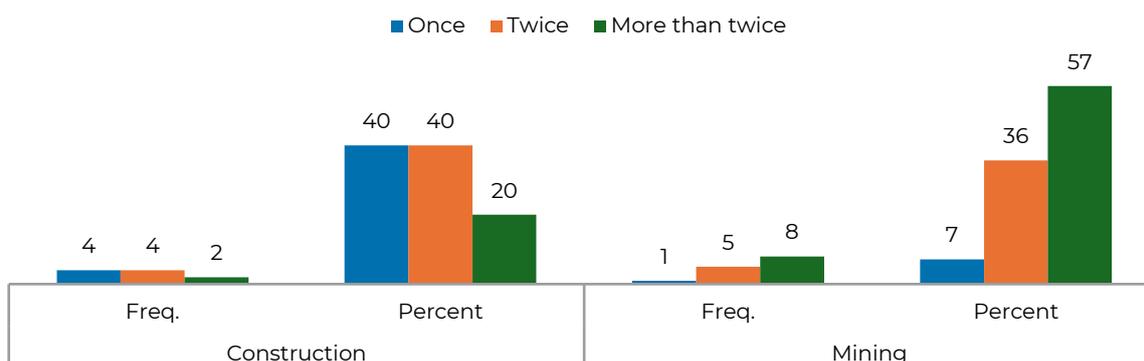
The foundational framework for labour inspection is established through laws and policies, yet its effectiveness is critically undermined by a lack of cohesive implementation. Key institutions, including the Rwanda Mining Board (RMB), the Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA), and district labour offices, often operate in parallel, leading to duplicated efforts and enforcement gaps. A telling example from Huye district revealed that REMA levied environmental penalties on a mine without the knowledge or input of labour inspectors, creating confusion and conflicting compliance

demands for the business. This institutional misalignment is exacerbated by geographic and logistical challenges, particularly in mountainous districts like Rutsiro, where practical application of regulations such as the 20-meter road setback becomes unfeasible. The current siloed approach wastes scarce resources, weakens the authority of the state, and fails to provide a unified, predictable regulatory environment for businesses and workers alike.

4.2 Labour Inspection Awareness, Engagement, and Critical Focus Areas

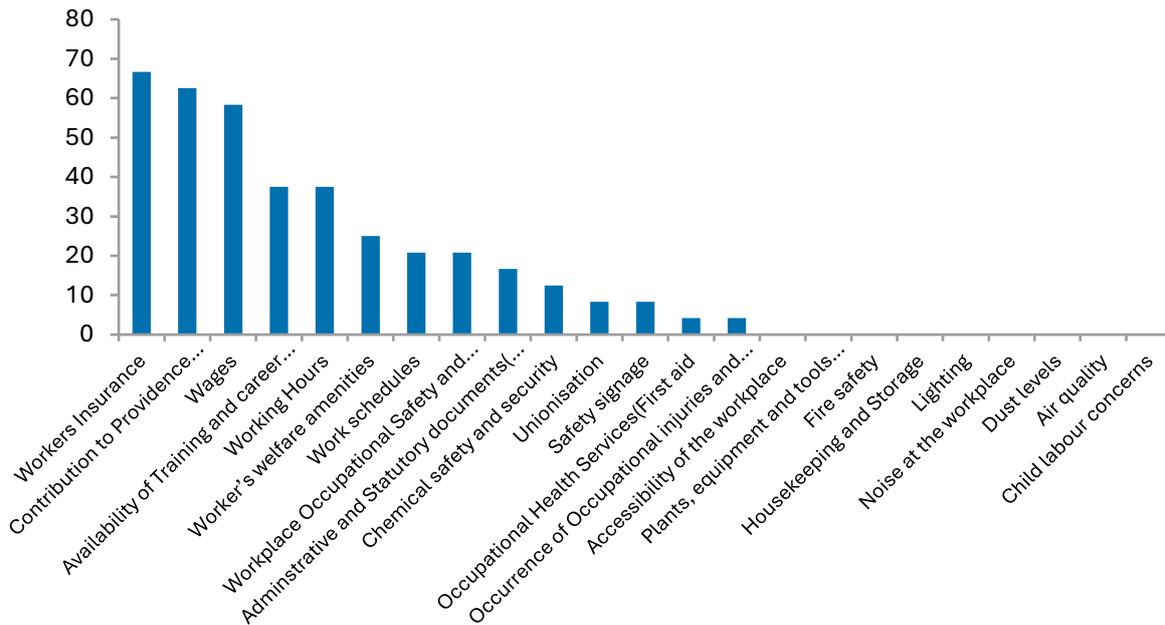
Awareness of labour inspectors is commendably high, exceeding 85% across both sectors, indicating successful communication of their existence. Furthermore, inspection frequency is reasonable, with over 50% of organisations receiving multiple visits over two years.

Visiting frequency of Labour Inspectors over the last 2 years



The limitation however lies in the fact that inspections are disproportionately focused on administrative compliance: wages and RSSB/pension contributions account for 58% of the inspection focus. In contrast, life-threatening hazards receive minimal attention; chemical safety is a focus in only 7% of visits, and child labour, a grave social ill, is the primary focus in a mere 4%.

Focus of the visits in the construction and mining sectors (%)

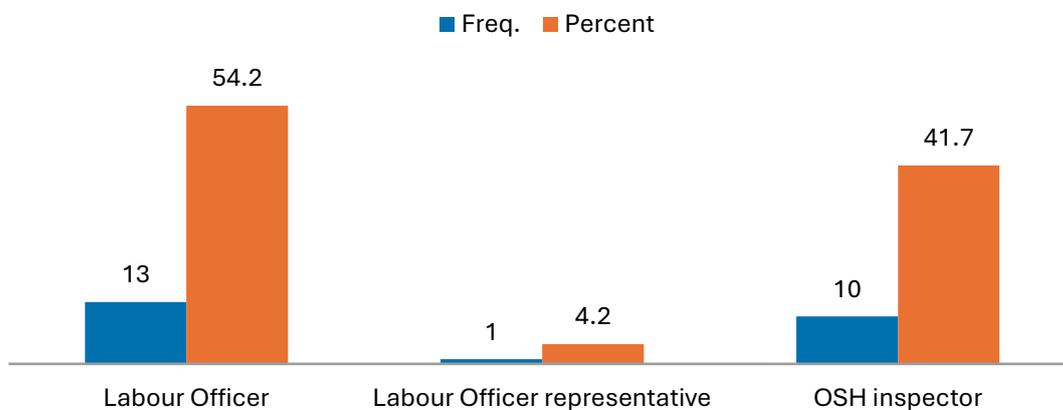


4.3 Compliance

Compliance is limited by the fact that specialized Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) officers participate in only 4% of visits, meaning the officials most qualified to identify technical risks like structural integrity or silica dust exposure are minimal. The system is efficiently checking boxes but has limitations in doing health checks where the risks are most acute. In terms of the officers who visited the organisations, the figure below shows imbalances in the composition of officers conducting labour inspections across Rwanda's

mining and construction sectors. Labour Officer representatives dominate inspections at **54.2%**, followed by Labour Officers at **41.7%**, while specialized Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) inspectors were underrepresented at just **4.2%**. The low absence of OSH inspectors (only 1 in 25 visits) leaves technical safety hazards in high-risk sectors systematically unaddressed. Labour Officers and their representatives focus primarily on broad compliance (e.g., wages, contracts), lacking the expertise to identify life-threatening risks like structural instability, toxic exposure, or machinery failures. (See figure below)

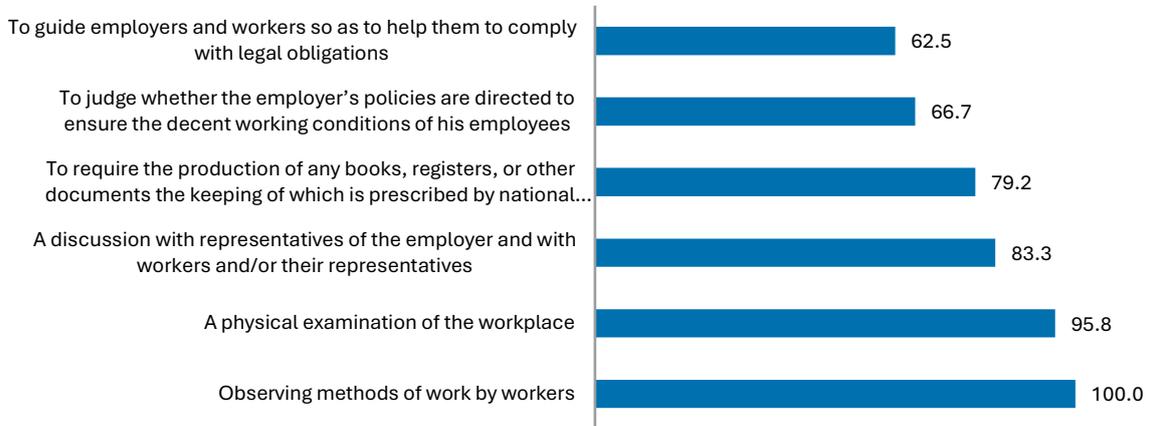
Officer who visited the organisation



4.4 Analysis of Inspection Activities and Enforcement Challenges

The methodology of labour inspection is largely reactive. Over 95% of activities involve physical examinations and observing work methods, while proactive interventions like guiding employers (67.5%) or evaluating safety policies (66.7%) are underutilized. This “tick-box” approach misses crucial opportunities to build a culture of safety from within organizations.

Activities included in the inspection (%)

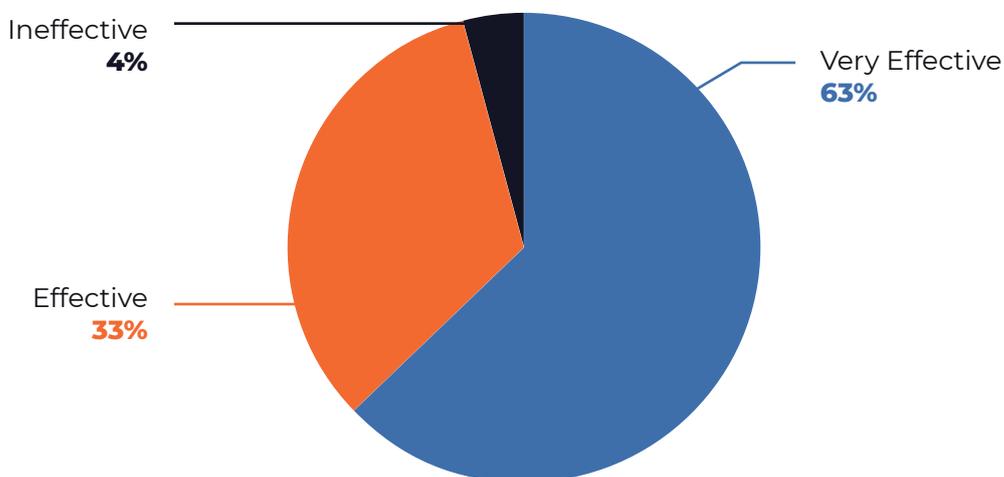


4.5. Effectiveness of labour inspection activities

Findings from the key informant interviews on the effectiveness of labour inspections demonstrate a positive impact on compliance and safety. Key stakeholders indicated that inspections effectively drive corrective actions; for instance, safety gear usage in Huye's mining sector increased by 60% following inspections. Companies often proactively adhere to standards in anticipation of inspections. This enforcement has led to tangible safety outcomes, including reduced accidents due to the enforced use of Personal Protective

Equipment (PPE) like helmets and boots, and increased insurance uptake (e.g., a Huye mining firm acquired insurance post-inspection). The cost-effectiveness of inspections is noted, with Rutsiro district highlighting “significant value” derived from risk mitigation and enhanced professionalism. The overarching implication is that proactive inspections foster a culture of compliance and significantly reduce workplace hazards. To build on this, there is need to increase inspection frequency (i.e. quarterly for mining, monthly for high-risk construction) and implementing joint inspections to consolidate resources and expertise.

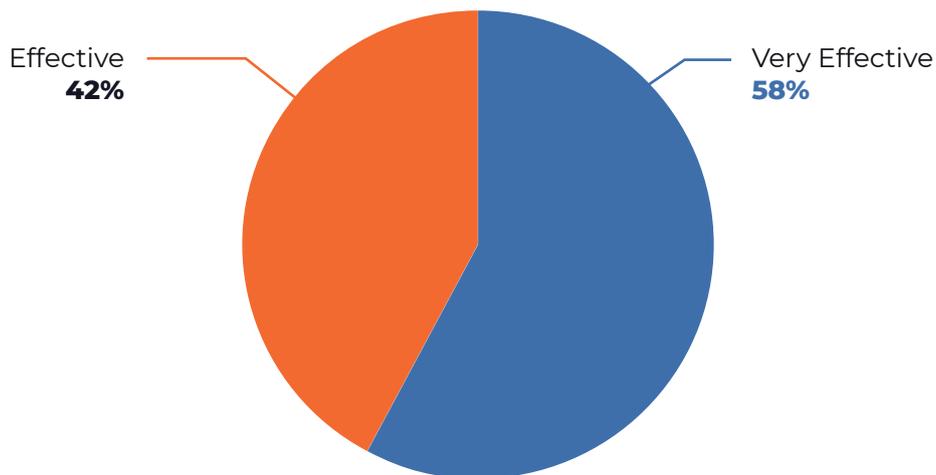
Organisations' ratings of Effectiveness of Inspection Activities in ensuring the safety and health of workers



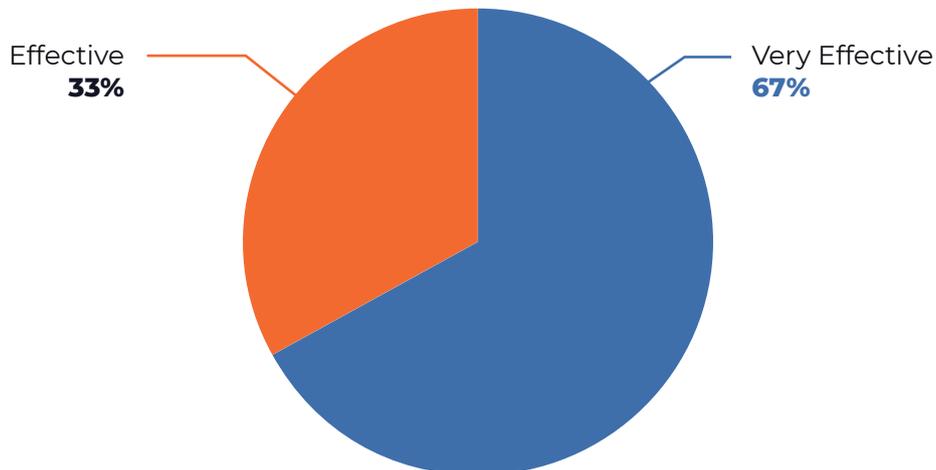
Survey findings on the effectiveness of the labour inspection activities in the mining and construction sectors in Rwanda shows that although respondents were optimistic about effectiveness of some activities, there are some contradictions indicating some deviations from the reality. Respondents had high ratings on effectiveness with 63% rating inspections as being very effective on attaining worker safety while 58% of the respondents rated inspections being very effective in reducing worker injuries. In addition, child labour

initiatives scored a very effective rating of 79%. Despite the high effectiveness rating on child labour initiatives, 13% of the respondents in the mining and construction sectors deemed child labour interventions *insufficient*, and high-risk hazards (chemicals, dust) were under-inspected. This suggests: that although there is trust in inspectors' authority, there is a potential disconnect between perceived and actual risk reduction attributed to the activities especially in informal sectors.

Effectiveness of Inspection Activities in reducing workplace injuries



Effectiveness of labour inspection activities in increasing employer and worker awareness of a particular OSH issue or risk



Enforcement is most challenging in the informal economy, particularly in artisanal mining, which constitutes 68% of the mining workforce. Illegal operations actively evade oversight, employing children and operating in hazardous conditions. Inspectors on the front line are severely handicapped, with 90% lacking essential tools like razor meters and reliable transportation, limiting physical coverage to approximately 60% of sites.

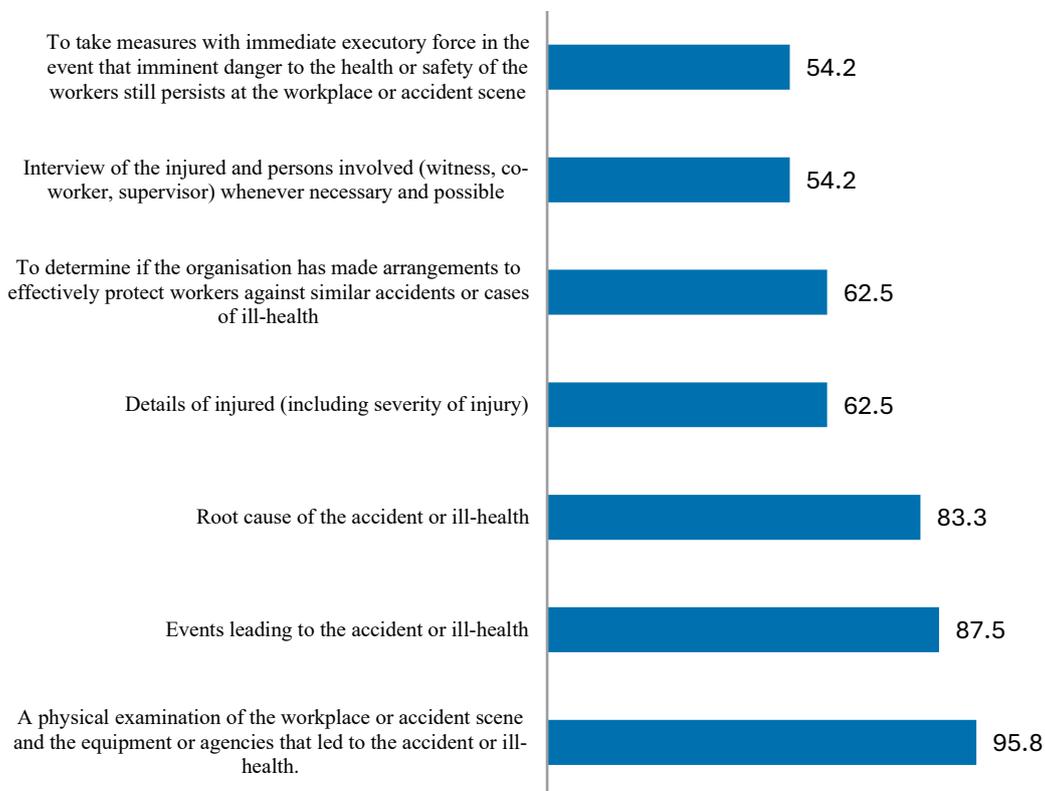
4.6. Accident Response Protocols

An analysis of the accident response protocols shows both strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of activities undertaken in cases on workplace accidents within the construction and mining sectors in Rwanda. In terms of strengths, physical accident scene examinations (95.8%) and root cause analysis (83.3%) were robustly implemented at 95% and

83.3% respectively. Areas of weakness in cases of workplace accidents were witnessed in implementing protocols which are necessary for preventing the re-occurrence of workplace

accidents such as interviews with witnesses/injured workers and immediate danger mitigation.

Procedures/ Activities undertaken in case of work-related accidents (%)

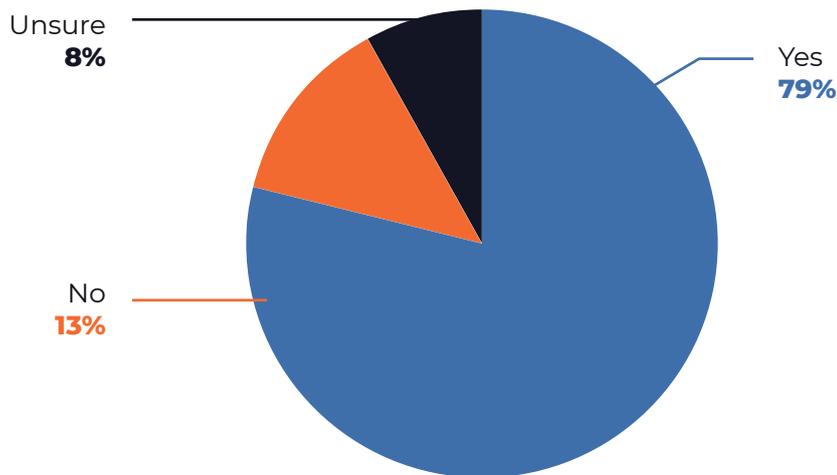


In terms of the effectiveness, the interviewed respondents in the mining and construction sectors rated of response protocols for ensuring health and safety of workers and those for reducing workplace injuries as very effective at 71% and 79% respectively (See chart below). These high effectiveness ratings indicate confidence, but low witness engagement risks incomplete investigations. However, protocols for raising employer and worker awareness of Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) risks were rated lower in terms of being very effective at 63% while 4% of the respondents indicated that they were ineffective.

4.7 The Persistence of Child Labour

While the formal regulatory stance against child labour is robust and no cases were formally reported in the studied districts, the problem persists in the shadows of the informal economy. Key informant interviews indicate that illegal mining operations deliberately employ children to evade detection, and poverty-driven factors, such as a lack of accessible childcare, force parents to bring children to worksites. Survey data reveals a telling discrepancy: while 79% of respondents rated child labour initiatives as effective, 13% believe these interventions are *insufficient* to eliminate the problem. This indicates a dangerous complacency and confirms that child labour remains a real but hidden threat in unregulated pockets of the sector, demanding targeted, community-based solutions.

Do you believe that the current interventions are sufficient to eliminate child labour in the mining and construction sectors



4.8. Challenges and Barriers

Based on findings from the key informant interviews, labour inspectors face substantial operational hurdles. Critical resource gaps exist, with approximately 90% of inspectors lacking essential tools (e.g., razor meters for material testing) and adequate transport, severely limiting coverage – only about 60% of sites in mountainous areas are reached. Awareness deficits among employers are another major barrier; mining employers in Huye were reported to “neglect policies for profit,” and construction firms frequently ignore safety protocols on small projects. Furthermore, the rugged terrain in areas like Rutsiro significantly impedes physical access to worksites. The implications of these challenges are clear: inadequate tools and terrain constraints drastically reduce inspection efficacy, increasing the risk of non-compliance and worker endangerment. Addressing these challenges requires policy actions and interventions such as equipping inspectors with motorcycles, digital devices, and sector-specific toolkits, and launching targeted awareness campaigns for small-scale employers using local radio and Kinyarwanda materials.

Challenges in implementing Standard Operating Procedures in Resolving labour disputes

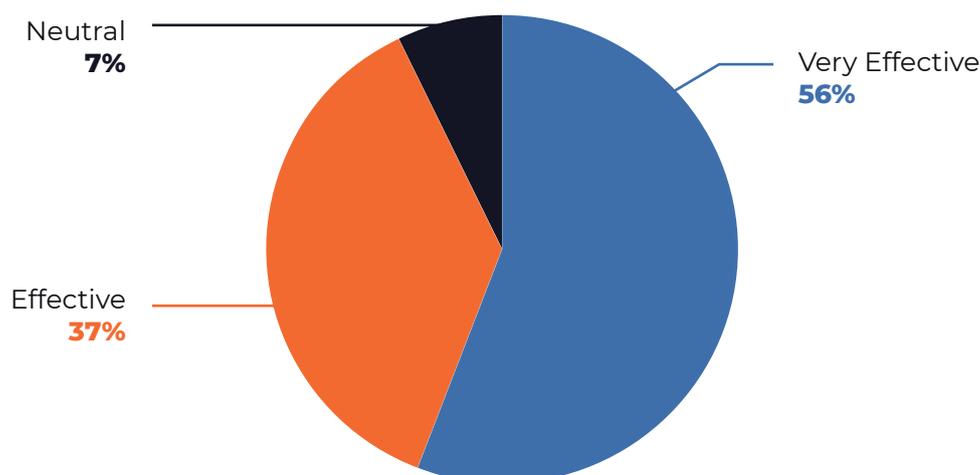
The key challenges to implementing SOPs and resolving labour disputes include; lack of awareness of labour laws and SOPs, negative attitudes or behavioural resistance, and

perception that inspectors do not make regular visits. Almost a quarter of the respondents disclosed ignorance of the law, and another quarter had no problems, possibly indicating lack of knowledge of SOPs in general. Behavioural issues such as negative mindsets, refusal to obey, and organisational conflicts within the organisation were cited. These findings are consistent with the fact that legal awareness and knowledge of dispute resolution procedures are mostly lacking, especially in mining

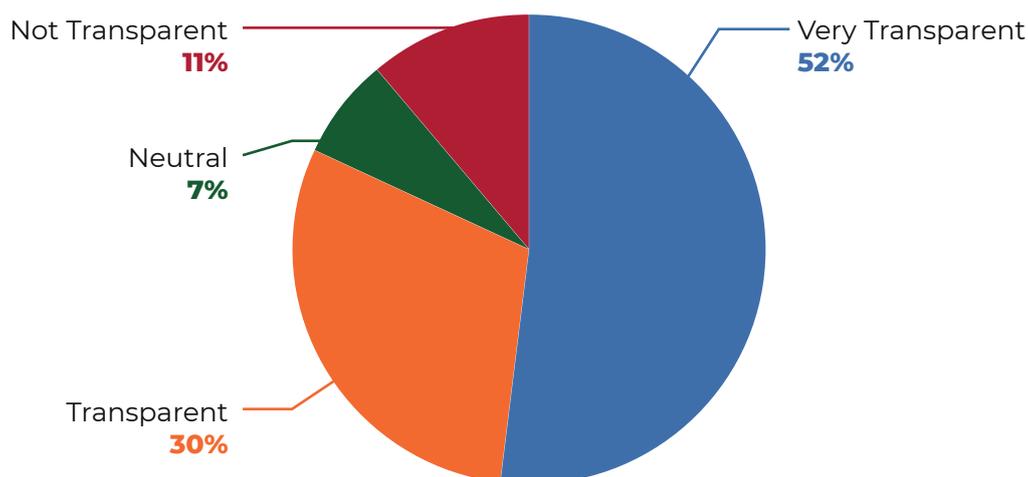
4.9 Monitoring & Evaluation: A Foundation of Trust with a Transparency Deficit

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework for labour inspection enjoys a high level of stakeholder trust, with 56% of respondents rating it as “Very Effective.” However, this perception of effectiveness is not matched by transparency. A concerning 11% of stakeholders find the inspectorate’s reporting on M&E activities “Not Transparent,” suggesting a communication gap that can erode trust over time. Operationally, the system is hampered by a reliance on manual reporting, creating backlogs exemplified by Muhanga district’s struggle with over 300 permits per month and preventing real-time data analysis for proactive intervention. Furthermore, low inspector salaries and inadequate logistical support create vulnerabilities, including potential corruption risks, that threaten the system’s integrity and effectiveness.

Ratings of the overall effectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation system for labour inspection activities in the Rwandan mining and construction sectors



Ratings on the transparency of the labour inspectorate's reporting on its monitoring and evaluation activities



4.10 Worker Welfare: The Voice of the Workforce

Focus Group Discussions with workers illuminate both the transformative power of these jobs and the systemic failures they endure. Workers reported escaping poverty, affording health insurance, and educating their children. Yet, this economic uplift is precarious. **Over 90% of workers are unaware of their rights under the Labour Code**, leading to widespread unpaid overtime and an inability to challenge unsafe practices. The near-universal lack of formal contracts

creates profound job insecurity, especially in construction. Workers consistently advocated for eight key improvements: (1) living wages; (2) universal formal contracts; (3) Kinyarwanda-language labour rights training; (4) enhanced, sector-specific safety gear; (5) protected worker representation committees; (6) skills training for career progression; (7) sector-specific retirement plans; and (8) practical water management in mining. Investing in these areas is not just a social good; it is a strategic imperative to boost productivity, reduce turnover, and build a stable, skilled workforce.

5. Policy Recommendations

The following integrated recommendations provide a concrete roadmap for transforming Rwanda's labour inspection system.

5.1 Strengthen Institutional Coordination:

We recommend the immediate establishment of a National Labour Inspection Task Force, led by MIFOTRA and comprising RMB, REMA, RSSB, and district representatives. This task force should harmonize policies and mandates. Furthermore, **quarterly joint inspections** should be institutionalized, supported by shared digital dashboards to eliminate redundancies and ensure a «one-government» approach to compliance.

5.2 Boost Inspection Capacity:

Targeted and increased investments are required to equip every inspector with essential operational tools, including motorcycles for rugged terrain, GPS-enabled tablets for digital data collection, and sector-specific toolkits (e.g., gas detectors for mining, sound level meters for construction). Concurrently, the Rwanda Innovation Fund should support the development and rollout of AI-powered risk mapping to analytically identify and prioritize sites with high incidences of child labour and chemical hazards.

5.3 Formalize Employment and Rights:

MIFOTRA and RMB need to enforce the use of **sector-specific employment contracts** that address sectoral particularities, such as profit-sharing formulas in mining and guaranteed overtime compensation in construction. To bridge the awareness gap, a nationwide program of quarterly, on-site labour rights workshops conducted in Kinyarwanda should be launched in partnership with districts and worker associations.

5.4 Promote a Preventive Safety Culture:

The inspection paradigm must shift from reactive checking to proactive prevention. We propose a directive that at least 50% of all inspection efforts be dedicated to high-risk areas like chemical exposure, fall prevention, and machinery safety. To combat a root cause of child labour, the government should scale up the model of community-linked childcare services (*irerero*) at major mining and construction sites.

5.5 Enhance Technology and Monitoring:

To move beyond manual backlog, we recommend the integration of the Building Permit Management Information System with RSSB's accident and compliance databases. This will enable real-time alerts for non-compliance and accident trends. Finally, the adoption of predictive analytics will allow the inspectorate to move from a reactive to a proactive model, targeting worksites with a high probability of violations before they occur.

Summary Table: Policy Recommendations and Implementation Priorities (2025–2030)

Table 1: Summary of recommendations and implementers

S/N	Strategic Pillar	Action	Implementer
1.	Strengthen Institutional Coordination	Establish <i>National Labour Inspection Task Force</i> to align RMB, REMA, and district policies.	MIFOTRA (Lead), RMB, REMA
		Mandate quarterly joint inspections with shared digital dashboards.	Districts, RSSB
2.	Boost Inspection Capacity	Equip inspectors with motorcycles, GPS tablets, and sector-specific toolkits.	MINECOFIN, Districts
		Roll out AI-powered risk mapping (targeting child labour/chemical hotspots).	Rwanda Innovation Fund
3.	Formalize Employment & Rights	Enforce sector-specific contracts (mining: profit-sharing; construction: overtime pay).	RMB, MIFOTRA
		Launch <i>Kinyarwanda-language labour rights workshops</i> at sites quarterly.	Districts, CESTRAR
4.	Preventive Safety Culture	Shift 50% of inspections to high-risk areas (chemicals, equipment safety).	RSSB, MIFOTRA
		Scale <i>Ubudehe-linked childcare</i> (irerero) at mining/construction sites.	MINALOC, Districts
5.	Technology & Monitoring	Integrate BPMIS with RSSB accident data for real-time compliance alerts.	MINICT, RSSB
		Adopt predictive analytics for injury reduction targeting.	National Cyber Security Authority

6.0 Conclusion

Rwanda stands at a pivotal moment. The current labour inspection system has built a solid platform of awareness but is not yet fully optimized as a tool for preventive protection and productive formalization. By embracing the coordinated recommendations outlined in this brief including; prioritizing proactive risk mitigation, empowering inspectors, formalizing employment, and leveraging technology, Rwanda can decisively shift from a system that documents infractions to one that prevents tragedies. This transformation is not just a regulatory upgrade; it is a strategic investment in the health of our workers, the integrity of Rwanda’s key economic sectors, and the nation’s sustainable and inclusive future. The time for decisive action is now.

