

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has remained Rwanda's largest destination for domestic exports, with trade estimated at Rwf.1.89 trillion in the 2024–2025 fiscal years, according to new figures from the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MINICOM).

The annual trade report shows that Rwanda's exports continue to grow, driven by agro-processing, edible oils, and mineral production, while imports are increasingly shaped by industrial growth and a shift towards cleaner, sustainable transport.

Domestic exports rose by 16 per cent over the past year, with values increasing from Rwf 3.31 trillion to Rwf 5.06 trillion, MINICOM reported.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) ranked as the second-largest export destination at Rwf 371.7 billion, followed by China at Rwf 154.4 billion. Other key markets included Luxembourg (Rwf 76.5 billion), the United Kingdom (Rwf 76.5 billion), and the United States (Rwf 50.5 billion).

Over 10,218 export certificates were issued in 2024/25, an indication that formal trade channels are expanding. The export-to-import ratio improved from 61 per cent to 78 per cent, showing Rwanda is narrowing its trade deficit.

The report credits much of the export growth to local industries. Companies such as Eri Rwanda, Mount Meru Soyco Ltd, Manebu Industries, and Agri Value Chain Ltd have seen growing demand for edible oils and processed food products in regional and international markets.

Minerals, particularly tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold, generated around Rwf 2.31 trillion in export revenue. The increase was mainly driven by higher export volumes rather than higher prices, the report said.

Traditional exports, including coffee and tea, also performed well in markets such as Belgium, the Netherlands, and Japan. However, exports of maize flour and infant food declined due to logistical constraints and limited access to foreign currency.

"Our exporters are finding new ways to reach international markets, but infrastructure and currency access remain critical hurdles," MINICOM noted.

Imports during the period showed signs of industrial expansion and a growing focus on environmental sustainability. Purchases of petroleum, medical equipment, mining machinery, and cement all increased, while imports of rice, sugar, and wheat flour declined.

The report also highlights a sharp rise in the importation of electric and hybrid vehicles, supported by government tax incentives and new emissions rules, part of Rwanda's strategy to promote cleaner transport.

"Despite global challenges, our private sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience. By collaborating closely with development partners and key stakeholders, we are committed to creating a trade environment that is inclusive, competitive, and capable of benefiting every Rwandan." Minister of Trade and Industry Prudence Sebahizi noted.

Rwanda imported 3,726 hybrid vehicles in 2024, boosted by government incentives such as tax exemptions aimed at promoting cleaner transport. Fully electric vehicles were also imported, though in smaller numbers (218 units). These measures support countries' goal of a greener, low-carbon transport sector.

The government also deepened its participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), issuing 45 certificates of origin for goods such as coffee, fruit, mushrooms, milk, and spices.

In September 2024, a consolidated shipment of tea, coffee, avocado oil, and honey were exported to Ghana under the AfCFTA framework using RwandAir's promotional tariffs.

To support regional traders, MINICOM has set up an AfCFTA Desk at the Rwanda Development Board (RDB), launched training programmes for women and youth traders, and established a hotline for cross-border trade concerns.

Despite progress, analysts say the country's export growth remains vulnerable to fluctuations in global commodity prices, particularly minerals. Questions also remain about how effectively Rwanda can turn continental opportunities into tangible benefits for small and women-led enterprises.