

Spotlight: Rwanda

Context

Rwanda has achieved remarkable progress in improving maternal and child health outcomes. It has also made strides towards gender equality: women now occupy half the seats in the National Assembly and the government has made a clear commitment to end gender-based violence.

However, violence against children remains a challenge. Though statistics on violence against children in Rwanda are scarce, a selection of cases from police records in 2010 showed: 324 cases of rape, 1,654 cases of child sexual abuse, 549 cases of hitting and injuring, 35 cases of hitting resulting in death, 47 cases of family abandonment and irresponsibility vis-à-vis children, 20 cases of inhumane punishment of children and 22 cases of stealing a child. Statistics on cases treated at the multidisciplinary Isange One Stop Centre (OSC) in Kigali from July 2009 to May 2011 show that more than 65 percent of survivors of violence are children.¹ A fuller picture of violence against children in the country will be achieved upon completion of the ongoing Violence Against Children Survey.

“If we are to build a culture of peace and harmony – we shall have to begin with our children; we need to challenge beliefs and attitudes, we need to encourage new research, and we need to assist families in promoting positive parenting to ensure children’s growth and sound development.”

First Lady Jeannette Kagame²

AT A GLANCE³

Population: **11.9** million

Girls (0-19): **3** million

Boys (0-19): **3** million

GDP per capita: **US \$702.8**

Prevalence rates of violence against children: **N/A**

Selected Policy and Legal Framework

7-year Government Programme (2017-2023)⁴

Health Sector Policy 2015⁵

Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights Policy 2011-2015⁶

National Community Health Policy (2015)⁷

National Strategic Plan for Fighting Against Gender-Based Violence 2011-2016⁸

National Policy against Gender-Based Violence 2011⁹

Alignment with the WHO's Global Plan of Action

Pillar	Selected actions taken
Pillar I Strengthen health system leadership and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inclusion of efforts to fight violence against children in the government's <i>7-year programme</i> (2017) ● Inclusion of prevention and response to sexual violence as one of the priorities in both the <i>Health Sector Policy</i> and <i>National Reproductive Health Strategy</i> (2003 and 2015) ● Commitment to promoting and supporting policies that eliminate gender-based violence in the <i>Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights Policy 2011-2015</i> ● Development of the <i>National Policy against Gender-based Violence</i> (2011)
Pillar II Strengthen health service delivery and health workers/providers' capacity to respond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● One Stop Centre implementation and scale-up (ongoing)
Pillar III Strengthen programming to prevent interpersonal violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community health programming, including home visiting and parent support programmes that, strengthens positive relationships between parents, caregivers, and children (ongoing)
Pillar IV Improve information and evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implementation of the Violence Against Children Survey (ongoing) ● Inclusion of module on domestic violence in the 2014 Demographic and Health Survey

Policy and Legal Framework for Ending Violence Against Children

The government has committed to ending violence against children, following a national conference in 2011, and a comprehensive legal framework defines child abuse or violence against children to include physical, sexual, and psychological violence, neglect, and child marriage.¹⁰ Currently, no national statistics on violence against children are publicly available; however, the government completed the Violence Against Children Survey in 2015-2016. The government's *7-year programme 2010-2017* committed to continuing to "invest efforts in campaigns to fight violence against children and women and domestic violence so as to eradicate the culture of covering up those crimes."¹¹ Identified activities to achieve this goal include: improving the collection and analysis of medical evidence; organising town meetings on television and radio to increase the awareness of gender-based violence issues; and prosecution of sexual and gender-based violence cases.



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The government response to address gender-based violence is particularly robust. Within each Legal Advisory Bureau (MAJ) at district level, one of the three staff is specifically in charge of gender-based violence cases. Both the *National Reproductive Health Strategy* and the *Health Sector Policy* identify prevention and response to sexual violence as one of the priorities, as well as an essential service. Within the *Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights Policy 2011-2015*, the government commits to: promoting and supporting policies that eliminate gender-based violence; outlining specific guidelines in collaboration with all stakeholders to provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and programmes for adolescents and young people and ensure harmonised programming; and increasing resource commitments for adolescent and youth health. The government also developed the *National Policy against Gender-based Violence*, which reflects the government's "commitment to gender equality, the realisation of human rights for all, and the economic and social development of the country."¹² In order to address the situation of gender-based violence, the government committed, within the *National Policy*

against Gender-based Violence, to making appropriate medical, legal, and psychosocial services available and accessible to all, taking into account the individual needs of victims. Other services include providing opportunities for redress, coordinating services (including protection) across the various sectors, and conducting public awareness, advocacy, and training. Two technical working groups were established on gender-based violence: one in the Ministry of Health and one in the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion. With regard to response, medical facilities provide health-care services that address intimate partner violence and provide comprehensive post-rape care.¹³ This encompasses: HIV testing; counselling; provision of emergency contraceptives and anti-tetanus vaccines; and referral systems between health centres and the police. Service providers receive training on orientation and care to victims and on collaboration with other key stakeholders, like the police.¹⁴ Once a case of sexual or gender-based violence is identified, protocol demands automatic reporting to the nearest health facility within 72 hours.



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One-Stop Centres

In order to respond effectively to gender-based violence and child abuse, the government committed to establish a functional OSC in each district hospital.¹⁵ An OSC is a 24/7 free-of-charge referral centre, where victims of gender-based violence and child abuse can find holistic services ranging from medical care to psychosocial and legal support, including police investigation and forensic evidence collection. The flagship, award-winning OSC is Isange, located in Kacyiru Police Hospital in Kigali. It comprises one coordinator, nine psychologists, one gynaecologist, six social workers, three medical doctors with medical forensic expertise, four general practitioners, one psychiatric nurse and one police officer. Every victim is initially seen by a social worker who provides information and access to medical, psychosocial and police services. Once a victim is assessed and examined, the case proceeds according to the victims' needs. The Isange OSC also provides a basic safe house, with three beds and basic provisions.¹⁶ Between July 2009 and December 2012, approximately 4,725 victims of gender-based violence and child abuse

sought treatment at the Isange OSC, of which 2,151 were children and youth under 16. Quality of services is high, given the staff's training, number of staff COMMA and availability of drugs. Throughout this period, the government contributed 71.6 percent of funding, with additional funding received from UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women.¹⁷

Community Health

There are also new opportunities to end violence against children through Rwanda's well-developed community health programme, which has achieved the remarkable feat of nationwide coverage. All villages (14,837) have three community health workers, each with well-defined tasks. An innovative e-Health system with mobile phones is used to connect community health workers with health facilities, and new interventions supported by mobile phone communication are undertaken to promote adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights and to prevent gender-based violence.¹⁸

ENDNOTES

- 1 UNICEF, 2011, *Stop violence against children: Conference Book*. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/rwanda/RWA_resources_vac2011.pdf
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- 3 World Bank, 2016, *Data: Rwanda*. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/rwanda>
- 4 Government of Rwanda, 2018, *Rwanda in the next seven years (2017-2024)*. Available at: <https://rwandaembassy.org/rwanda-in-the-next-seven-years-2017-2024.html>
- 5 Government of Rwanda, 2015, *Health sector policy*. Available at: http://www.moh.gov.rw/fileadmin/templates/policies/Health_Sector_Policy____19th_January_2015.pdf
- 6 Government of Rwanda, 2012, *Adolescent sexual reproductive health and rights policy*. Available at: http://www.moh.gov.rw/fileadmin/templates/policies/ASRH_and_Right_policy.pdf
- 7 Government of Rwanda, 2015, *National community health policy*. Available at: http://www.moh.gov.rw/fileadmin/templates/policies/NATIONAL_COMMUNITY_HEALTH_POLICY.pdf
- 8 Government of Rwanda, 2011, *National strategic plan for fighting against gender-based violence 2011-2016*. Available at: http://www.migeprof.gov.rw/fileadmin/migrated/content/uploads/GBV_Policy_Strategic_Plan-2.pdf
- 9 Government of Rwanda, 2011, *National policy against gender-based violence*. Available at: http://www.migeprof.gov.rw/fileadmin/migrated/content/uploads/GBV_Policy-2_1_.pdf
- 10 Government of Rwanda, 2011, *National strategic plan for fighting against gender-based violence 2011-2016*.
- 11 Government of Rwanda, 2018, *Rwanda in the next seven years (2017-2024)*.
- 12 Government of Rwanda, 2011, *National strategic plan for fighting against gender-based violence 2011-2016*.
- 13 Interview with World Vision staff in-country
- 14 Interview with World Vision staff in-country
- 15 Government of Rwanda, 2018, *Rwanda in the next seven years (2017-2024)*.
- 16 Bernath, T. & Gahongayire, L., 2013, *Final evaluation of Rwandan government and One UN Isange One Stop Centre*. Available at: <https://gate.unwomen.org/EvaluationDocument/Download?evaluationDocumentID=3609>
- 17 Bernath & Gahongayire, 2013.
- 18 Government of Rwanda, 2015, *Health sector policy*.