

Children in KENYA

2022

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Overview

Kenya's future depends on its children and around half the population **(50%)** are under 18. This is **23.5 million** children.¹

Of these, more than half or **12.3 million** children are multidimensionally poor – meaning they are deprived of various needs, services and rights.² 16 million Kenyans **(30%)** still live on less than US \$2 a day, including **42%** of children.³

Children living in rural areas⁴ and those with living with disabilities⁵ are especially vulnerable.



Pregnancy and childbirth

In Kenya, around **5,360** women per year, or **0.48%** of women, die during pregnancy or childbirth.⁶ The maternal mortality ratio has declined by **52%** since 2000.⁷

However, it is not falling fast enough to allow Kenya to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.⁸

In 2021, **79%** of births were attended by skilled health personnel, up from **53%** in 2017.⁹



Around **1.4%** of children under the age of five die every year in Kenya. Almost **half** of these deaths occur in the 28 days after birth.¹¹

There has been limited progress in reducing neonatal mortality over the past twenty years. In 2014, there were 22 deaths per 1,000 live births.¹⁰

Diarrhoea, pneumonia and neonatal complications are the main causes of death.





Early years 0–5

In Kenya, around **83,000** children per year die before reaching the age of five. The main causes of death are diarrhoea, pneumonia and neonatal complications. Children living in the northern counties and urban informal settlements are most likely to die from preventable diseases.

However, these numbers have fallen dramatically over the past thirty years. The under-five mortality rate decreased by **57%** between 1990 and 2020.¹²

For every 1000 children born in Kenya, **43** still die before the age of five¹³ - and in some counties this rises as high as **109** per 1000 births.



Around **2 million** children in Kenya are malnourished.

From 2008 to 2014, stunting among children under five fell from 35% to **26%**, while wasting fell from 7% to **4%**.¹⁴ However, this has begun to rise again due to drought.

The most vulnerable children – including those living on the streets or in refugee communities – are the worst affected.

Almost **22 million** children, or **86%**, were fully vaccinated by the age of one in 2019/20. However, large numbers of unimmunised children have led to outbreaks of measles and polio.¹⁵



Primary school aged children

Kenya promotes educational inclusion, but children do not yet have equal access to education.

2.5 million children aged 4–17 have never been to school.¹⁶ Children living in hard-to-reach areas are more likely to have not attended school,¹⁷ along with those affected by child marriage, living with disabilities or on the street.



COVID-19 related school closures interrupted learning for over **17 million** children.

FGM rates have decreased from 38% in 1999 to 21% in 2014,¹⁹ although rates remain as

high as **98%** in north-eastern Kenya, compared with 1% in the western part of the country.²⁰



Around **3 million** children are engaged in child labour in Kenya. However, the proportion of children engaged in labour fell from 34% in 2014 to **13%** in 2018.¹⁸



Adolescents and young people

Kenya promotes educational inclusion, but children do not yet have equal access to education.

Secondary school enrollment is just

53%, lagging well behind the primary enrollment rate of 93%.²¹

4.2 million children were married before 18 years of age. The rate

decreased from 26% in 2008 to **23%** in 2014.²²



Overall, the number of new HIV infections among adolescents has declined to

5,300 people in 2021.

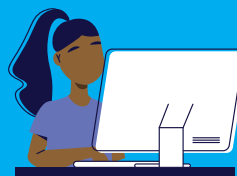
However, they remain as high as **19%** in Homa Bay in the west of Kenya.²³



Violence against children is pervasive.

Around one in two young women **(46%)** and young men **(56%)** experienced violence as a child.²⁴

Around **6%** of Kenyan children have shared naked images of themselves with other Internet users, and **14%** have gone to meet someone they encountered online.²⁵



Teenage pregnancy increased in 2020 compared to 2019, partly as a result of COVID-19 related school closures.²⁶



Communities and environment

In Kenya, **9.9 million** people drink directly from contaminated surface water sources and an estimated 5 million people practice open defecation.²⁷



In 2020, **62%** of Kenya's population had access to basic water services (up from 58% in 2015), while 33% had access to basic sanitation services (up from 32% in 2015).²⁸

Kenya is ranked 49th out of 163 countries in terms of the risk to children of climate change.²⁹



Primary health care and community health can meet up to **90%** of children's health needs. However, coverage of community health

services in Kenya is **59%**. In some counties it is much lower, at just 17%.³⁰



In 2020, a series of County Poverty Profiles and Budget Briefs found that **26%** of children were suffering from malnutrition, yet counties were spending less than **1%** of their budget on nutrition services for children.³¹

References

¹2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census Reports

²2020 Comprehensive Poverty Report (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2020)

³UNICEF Kenya Country Kit 2020-22 <https://www.unicef.org/kenya/reports/unicef-kenya-country-kit-2020-22>

⁴Dennis et al. 2020. Kenya - Systematic Country Diagnostic (English). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

⁵KNBS. 2020. Kenya Comprehensive Poverty Analysis: Children, Youths and Women in Focus (based on 2015/16 KIHBS and 2014 KDHS data)

⁶WHO. 2019. Trends in maternal mortality 2000 to 2017: estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and the United Nations

⁷The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is defined as the number of maternal deaths during a given time period per 100 000 live births during that same time period.

⁸Population Division. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO. KENYA COUNTRY PROFILE.

⁹DHIS2

¹⁰United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME), 'Levels & Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2020, Estimates developed by the United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation', United Nations Children's Fund, New York, 2020.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, Subnational Under-five Mortality Estimates, 1990–2019: Estimates developed by the United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, United Nations Children's Fund, New York, 2021, p.16.

¹³UN IGME, 2020

¹⁴UN IGME, 2020

¹⁵WHO. 2021. "Almost four million children set to receive measles rubella vaccine." (Press release, published 25 June 2021)

¹⁶2019 MoE Education Statistical Booklet

¹⁷Global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI): Kenya country study (April 2021)

¹⁸UNICEF Kenya Country Kit 2020-22 <https://www.unicef.org/kenya/reports/unicef-kenya-country-kit-2020-22>

¹⁹Ibid

²⁰KNBS. 2014. Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2014, Table 18.2

²¹January-March 2021 Social Intelligence and Reporting (SIR) assessment spanning 35 schools (18 primary schools, 15 secondary schools, two special schools and one private institution) across five counties

²²KDHS 2014

²³Kenya HIV Estimates 2022

²⁴2014 KDHS.

²⁵Disrupting Harm Kenya survey, which questioned more than a thousand children between the ages of 12-17 who use the internet.

<https://www.end-violence.org/disrupting-harm#country-reports>

²⁶<https://www.unicef.org/kenya/reports/unintended-pregnancies-and-hiv-among-adolescents-and-young-people-Homa-Bay>

²⁷<https://washdata.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/jmp-2021-wash-households.pdf>

²⁸2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census Reports

²⁹The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis, UNICEF <https://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis>

³⁰Kenya Community Health Strategy 2020

³¹Reports in support of devolution <https://www.unicef.org/kenya/reports/Government-of-Kenya-launches-poverty-and-budget-report>