# Gender in Brief

Kenya has a population of approximately 41.8 million people from more than 40 ethnic groups. Most people live in rural areas (67.7%) and the majority of the population (62%) is 25 years old or younger.[[1]](#endnote-1) However, ongoing and increasing urban migration- particularly by men- continues to change the urban and rural divide and has led to significant changes in the roles and responsibilities of both women and men. As a result, women have had to increasingly take up the roles and work traditionally undertaken by men. Kenya has taken significant steps to advance gender equality and Kenya’s Constitution, which was passed in 2010, continues to provide a powerful legal and policy framework for advancing gender equality and women’s rights. While this is the case, Kenya continues to rank poorly in the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and there are a number of contributing factors that challenge progress.[[2]](#endnote-2) These include, but are not limited to, low political participation and representation; discriminatory attitudes and gender roles that limit women’s ability to access and exercise their economic, labor and land rights; harmful traditional practices such as early marriage, and Gender-Based Violence (GBV), including female genital mutilation/ cutting and domestic violence.1 In addition, the country is prone to drought, floods and disease outbreaks including cholera due to limited access to safe drinking water and poor sanitation and hygiene practices.

**Gender Roles and responsibilities:** In Kenya, women and girls are responsible for taking undertaking household work and caring for children, older people and the sick. Traditionally a rural population, women were also responsible for managing livestock products such as milk and also caring for pregnant cows, newborn calves and sick or injured animals and play an important role in animal disease detection and control. Men were traditionally responsible for keeping poultry and taking care of the exchange and care of livestock however, due to men’s ongoing and increasing rural to urban migration these roles are increasingly being taken up by women.[[3]](#endnote-3) Men control key assets including livestock and businesses and continue to hold decision-making responsibilities, particularly those involving spending, on education, health and agriculture.[[4]](#endnote-4) Patrilineal inheritance traditions mean that men own the majority of land and while it is now legal for women to inherit land women it is rare and not socially acceptable.[[5]](#endnote-5) As most assets are “owned” by husbands, men hold the majority of power over decisions both within and outside of the household.

**Education and Economic Empowerment:** Educational achievement has improved; however, differences still exist between girls and boys, and women and men. The 2014 DHS survey reports that on average, females complete less years of school (5.8 years) as compared to males (6.3 years). Attendance rates are higher among girls than boys during ages 5-10 years, however, once they reach age 15 and older, significantly more boys stay in school as compared to females. There is a large difference between people with no education between and within urban and rural regions (Urban: 8.6%; rural: 19.5%). The North Eastern region has the highest percentage of people with no education (69.0%). This also differs between the lowest and highest wealth quantiles (40.2% and 4.8%, respectively).1 High levels of men’s urban-rural migration continues to negatively affect education and has led to significant changes in traditional divisions of labor between men and women. For example, women and girls often stop going to school to take up their mother’s roles when their fathers have migrated to town, hence, denying them education. Men’s urban migration has also led to an increase in the number of women headed households, where one-third of households are now headed by women nationally (Rural: 36 %; Urban: 27 %).1 As a result, women are increasingly taking on men’s responsibilities within the household, such as crop production, livestock activities and care, and continue to provide food, water and fuel for their families. Currently, approximately 85 % of Kenyan females over seventeen years of age work regularly on the family holding, including subsistence crops and cash crops for the market, as compared to 54% of males. Yields obtained by women farmers could increase by more than 20% if they were given the same level of agricultural inputs and education as male farmers.[[6]](#endnote-6) While women account 83 per cent of Kenya’s informal economy, they still lack access to credit and resources, are still expected to consult with men on household decisions even when they are not present and are often overlooked in local community decision-making processes. All these factors place women at a higher risk of being engaged in risky and less secure work and heighten household insecurity, decision-making and mobility.

**Policy and Participation:** Kenya has ratified the CEDAW, the Rights of the Child and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and has created key policies and legislation on violence again women and the integration of gender mainstreaming and equality in national development processes.[[7]](#endnote-7) In 2010 Kenya’s Constitution, which is based on a devolved system, was passed and provides a powerful legal and policy framework for advancing gender equality and women’s rights. This has increased opportunity for greater representation and participation by women at both the County and National level, and has helped Kenya gain the status of the country with the most improved gender equitable laws in the world.[[8]](#endnote-8) The government has encouraged the formation of local women’s groups and women’s non-governmental and grassroots sector has been crucial to placing women’s issues on the national agenda. However, while positive steps have been taken there is still widespread ignorance of gender new equality laws4 and customary laws continue to be applied. In addition, women’s political participation remains low and in 2011 only 9.8% of national parliament members are women.2 As a result, policies and programs largely neglect the needs and rights of women. This is further increased by women’s inability, through no fault of their own, to access the justice system, due to high legal costs, traditional justice systems, illiteracy and limited knowledge of their rights. Discriminatory and traditional laws and harmful practices continue to exist, which, for example, can authorise early marriage, prohibit women’s access to property, resources and movement without consent from their husband, father or son.

**Gender Based Violence and Protection:** Violence Against Women and child protection is a major concern across Kenya. Approximately 45% of women aged 15-49 years have experienced violence and husbands remain the main perpetrators of physical violence against women. Sexual violence is also a major problem and 14% of women and 6% of men aged 15-49 report having experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. Violence against women is often accepted and condoned and in 2015, and both men and women believe wife beating is justified (36% and 42%, respectively). The acceptance of wife beating decreases with increased education and wealth.1 Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM) continues to be prevalent in Kenya with the DHS reporting that 21% of women aged 15-49 have undergone FGM. However, the prevalence differs within and between regions of Kenya with the highest rates recorded in former North Eastern Province (98%). Social acceptance and religion are commonly cited reasons for the FGM. The traditional practice of ritual “cleansing” of widows, which involves forcing them to have sex with a social outcast, usually without protection, still exists in some communities. Women living in the Internally Displaced Persons camps across Kenya are also particularly vulnerable to rape and other crimes of sexual violence. Early marriage (11% of women aged 15-19 years), early pregnancy (18% of women age 15-19 are already mothers or pregnant) and polygamy are found throughout Kenya. Women are also disproportionately affected by HIV/Aids with 6.9% of women aged 15 to 64 affected as compared to 4.4% for men and are frequently subject to violence. Same sex marriage is illegal in Kenya same-sex acts are recognized as crimes and punishable by the state. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual people are also marginalised by society and subsequently face many forms of violence. Disabled people are marginalised by society and face many forms of violence.

1. KDHA. 2014. The 2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR308/FR308.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. UNDP. 2011 Human Development Report. http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/human\_developmentreport2011.html [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.ijstr.org/final-print/june2015/The-Implication-Of-Mens-Rural-urban-Migration-On-Household-Decision-Making-In-Soy-Sub-county-Kenya.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. CEDAW. 2011. CEDAW 7th Country Report Kenya. Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Development <http://www.gender.go.ke/index.php/downloads1/viewdownload/9-gendermainstreaming/7-cedaw-7th-country-report-kenya> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. World Bank. 2003. The Kenyan Strategic Country Gender Assessment. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTAFRREGTOPGENDER/Resources/KenyaSCGA.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Pg. 436: http://www.ijstr.org/final-print/june2015/The-Implication-Of-Mens-Rural-urban-Migration-On-Household-Decision-Making-In-Soy-Sub-county-Kenya.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Other key policies and legislation include National Policy in Gender and Development (2006), National Gender and Equality Commission Strategic Plan, Sexual Offences Act (2006), Gender Policy for Education, Agriculture and other sectors, Children’s Act which outlaws FGM, National Policy on Abandonment of FGM, Adolescent Reproductive Health and Development Policy, National Reproductive Health Policy (2007), National Land Policy, Political Parties Act, Family Protection Act, Marriage Act, Employment Act, National Social Security Fund, Social Protection Fund and the Constitution of Kenya 2010 among others. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. World Bank. 2012. World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development. <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1315936222006/Complete-Report.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)