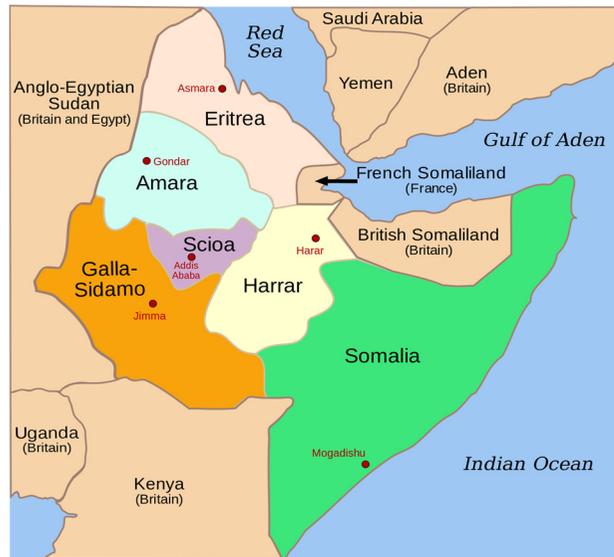


Fact Sheet: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Somalia



Somalia, officially the Federal Republic of Somalia, is a country in the Horn of Africa.¹ Somalia has a population of around 10.8 million. Around 85% of its residents are ethnic Somalis; ethnic minorities are largely concentrated in the southern regions. The official languages of Somalia are Somali and Arabic. Most people in the country are Muslim.

Current situation in Somalia

Somalia collapsed into anarchy following the overthrow of the military regime of President Siad Barre in 1991.² Since 2012, when a new internationally-backed government was installed, Somalia has been inching towards stability, but the new authorities still face a challenge from Al-Qaeda-aligned Al-Shabab insurgents. Somalia's long-running armed conflict continues to leave civilians dead, wounded, and displaced in large numbers.³ Despite positive commitments and policy developments from the Somali government, insecurity and political infighting continues to detract from concrete progress on justice and security sector reform.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

The findings in this fact sheet are based on various studies and reports, and existing rules and regulations in Somalia regarding Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). This fact sheet is intended as a summary of relevant data gathered from available sources; it does not claim to be complete.

Sexual violence

Somalia has laws prohibiting rape; however, they are very rarely enforced.⁴ There are no laws prohibiting domestic violence, spousal rape or sexual harassment. Most incidents of violence against women go unreported; there is a culture of impunity surrounding sexual and domestic violence.

Although there is a lack of prevalence data, sexual and domestic violence is reported to be a serious problem and recent reports suggest that it is increasing. Anecdotal reports from field workers suggest that although there has been a general increase in awareness about rape and sexual violence, there remains a reluctance to talk about gender-based violence. Police and militia members have been found to be perpetrators of rape against women and rape has been commonly practised in inter-clan conflicts. Women living in Internally Displaced Person camps are particularly vulnerable to rape, abduction and forced marriage; there is a pattern of sexual exploitation by troops, in which sex is exchanged for food or money.

Family planning, abortion

Often the woman's husband alone makes decisions regarding the couple's reproduction.⁵ Women have very limited ability to make decisions about the number, spacing, and timing of their children. Very limited information about and little access to contraception is available to women. According to the United Nations, an estimated 1.5 per cent of girls and women between the ages of 15 and 49 had access to a modern method of contraception.

Abortion is only permitted to save the life of the mother.⁶ It is not permitted even in the case of rape or incest.

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somalia>

² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094503>

³ <https://www.hrw.org/africa/somalia>

⁴ <http://www.genderindex.org/country/somalia>

⁵ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252727>

⁶ <http://www.eassi.org/somalia>

Rutgers is an international centre of expertise on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) founded and based in the Netherlands, but operating on both a national and international level. We envisage a world where all people are able to make their own sexual and reproductive choices, free from discrimination, coercion and violence.

Rutgers uses the definition of SRHR developed by the WHO: "Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled."⁷ Sexual rights include: the right to the highest attainable standard of sexual health; to sexuality education; to consensual sexual relations; and to decide whether, and when, to have children.

⁷ http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/sexual_health/defining_sexual_health.pdf

⁸ http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/country/documents/SOM_narrative_report_2015.pdf

⁹ <http://www.genderindex.org/country/somalia>

¹⁰ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/543670/CIG_-_Somalia_-_Women_fearing_GBV_-_v3_0.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.refugeelegalaidinformation.org/somalia-lgbti-resources>

¹² <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252727>

STDs/HIV

The number of people living with HIV is increasing and estimated at 35,000 (2014).⁸ The adult HIV prevalence rate in 2014 was 0.55%. The annual number of new infections is not reducing, remaining at around 3,200 new infections; annual AIDS deaths have remained at approximately 2,300 per year. Coverage of antiretroviral therapy (ART) is low, with 6% of adults receiving ART as a percentage of the total HIV population. Stigma and discrimination is prevalent and impedes access to and utilisation of HIV and AIDS services, particularly for those in rural areas and key affected populations.

In a 2011 survey, approximately one third of young people who reported multiple sexual relationships (35%) reported using a condom with their partner during their most recent sexual encounter.

Child marriage

According to the 1975 Family Code, the legal minimum age for marriage is 18 years for both men and women, but women can marry at the age of 16 years with parental authorisation.⁹ Despite the law, early marriage is practised in Somalia, with 2006 data showing that 22% of girls aged 15 to 19 were married, divorced or widowed.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The incidence of FGM in Somalia is over 90%.¹⁰ In South and Central Somalia no significant changes in FGM prevalence have been observed since the 1990s and the societal requirement for any girl or woman to undergo FGM is strong. In 2013, it was reported that FGM among children in northern Somalia is on the decline; a survey released by UNICEF found that 25 per cent of girls from the ages of 1 to 14 years old have undergone the practice, compared with 99 per cent of women aged 15 and above, in the northern regions of Somaliland and Puntland.

Sexual orientation

Homosexuality is illegal in Somalia and can be punished by up to three years of imprisonment.¹¹ Sexual orientation and gender identity are taboo topics in Somali society.¹² There are few reports of violence or discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity due to severe social stigma that prevents LGBTI individuals from making their sexual orientation or gender identity known publicly.