

# Mayors Dialogue on Growth and Solidarity

## City profile: Kigali, Rwanda



**Population:** 859,332 (2012)

**GDP per capita:** \$2,865 (2017)

**Major industries:** services, tourism

**Percentage of migrants:** 1.7% (2012)

**Mayor's name:** Pudence Rubingisa | **Next election date:** 2025

### Socioeconomic profile

Kigali is the capital of Rwanda and its largest city. Located at the centre of the landlocked nation, it is a city of hills and valleys nestled between two mountains. The city is made up of three districts: Gasabo, Nyarugenge and Kicukiro. The last census in 2012 recorded 1,132,686 inhabitants in these three districts (NISR, 2014). However, Kigali city proper – the urban area of the three districts – had 859,332 residents in 2012 (ibid.). The city has grown rapidly, at a rate of around 4% per year over the past two decades, driven by the country's high birth rate and increasing rural-to-urban migration (Baffoe et al., 2020). Kigali has a very young population, with 53.4% aged 14–35 years old, much higher than the national average (39.6%) (NISR, 2014). While the centre is known for its orderly nature, cleanliness and low traffic congestion, much of the physical expansion of the city has taken place at the periphery. In part due to Rwanda's strict zoning system and lack of affordable housing in the centre, this has led to the growth of informal settlements, which lack basic amenities and are often constructed on the steep slopes of the hills surrounding the city (Baffoe et al., 2020).

Kigali is Rwanda's economic hub, responsible for an estimated 41% of the country's GDP (World Bank, 2017). Kigali's GDP per capita was estimated at around \$2,865 in 2017,<sup>1</sup> compared with a national average of \$772 recorded that year (World Bank, n.d.). The economy relies mainly on services. The promotion of Rwanda as a destination for tourists and business travellers is a major plank of the government's economic development strategy. In particular, Kigali is being promoted as a location for meetings, conferences, exhibitions and events, a strategy that has been boosted by the construction of a new conference

centre. The government is also supporting the growth of manufacturing, including through the development of a new industrial zone. Poverty in Kigali is significantly lower than the rest of the country, ranging from 11.4% in the richest district (Kicukiro) to 15.8% in Gasabo, compared with the national average of 38% recorded in 2016/17 (NISR, 2018). Unemployment is a significant challenge: the unemployment rate in Kigali is rapidly increasing, with 28.4% of the workforce recorded as unemployed in 2016/17, up from 17.2% in 2013/14 (ibid.).

### Migration profile

According to the last census, the country hosts few foreigners. Only 14,911 foreign-born residents were recorded in 2012, 1.7% of the population of Kigali (NISR, 2014). Rwanda also receives refugees fleeing conflict, particularly from neighbouring countries. As of February 2020 there were 150,644 refugees in the country, hosted mainly in refugee camps but with 11,561 refugees registered in Kigali (UNHCR, 2020). The vast majority of refugees are from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (51%) and Burundi (48%), with small numbers from Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan (ibid.). Refugees in Rwanda have freedom of movement and the right to work. The government also promotes the integration of refugees into national health and education systems and via financial and economic inclusion strategies.

The government has partnered with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to support its Emergency Transit Mechanism, to receive and provide protection to refugees and asylum-seekers held in detention centres in Libya (McVeigh, 2019). After Niger, it is the second country in Africa to offer this support. Refugees are received in a transit facility outside Kigali. While

<sup>1</sup> Based on author's own calculations. GDP figure for Rwanda is taken from the World Bank database ([www.data.worldbank.org](http://www.data.worldbank.org)). The GDP figure for 2017 (\$19.253 billion) is used. The per capita figure for the city is calculated using the 41% benchmark contribution. Two per capita figures are calculated for the city and the wider area made up of three districts, given the large differences in population figures. Population figures for 2017 are projected using NISR projection scenarios published with the census in 2012 (medium scenario, urban). An average of the city and wider three districts' per capita GDP is then calculated.

some may stay in the country, others are helped to return home or resettle in third countries. With EU financial assistance this support programme aims to provide protection to about 1,500 refugees and asylum-seekers (European Commission, 2019). The Rwandan government also engages actively with the diaspora, encouraging Rwandan nationals who have spent years living as refugees or asylum-seekers abroad to return home. The diaspora is also encouraged to actively support the country's economic development, including via contributions to the Agaciro Development Fund, a sovereign wealth fund dedicated to increasing the financial autonomy of the country (International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds, n.d.).

## Governance structures

Kigali has a new governance structure with a city-wide council structure taking over from the three city districts that formerly held planning and budgeting responsibilities. District mayors have been replaced by district executive administrators and a new city council,

with 11 members. Six council members are elected by the public, two for each of the city's districts. The President of Rwanda appoints the other five.

Kigali City Council is responsible for developing and implementing strategies and action plans for the development of the city, including the Kigali City Master Plan, designed in 2013 (City of Kigali, 2020). Alongside new urban planning policies, the Master Plan forms part of an ambitious urban transformation agenda, with an emphasis on spatial planning and land redistribution. The city's transformation plans include a focus on low-carbon policies, as well as emphasising affordable housing and green spaces (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2016). Modernisation of the transport system is underway, including a shift to larger buses and new plans to replace petrol motorcycle taxis (a highly popular way to get around the city) with electric vehicles. The city council is also engaging in numerous innovative projects as part of a drive to become a 'smart city', a pioneer in this area in Africa (UN Habitat, n.d.).

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