

Rwanda's early childhood development program has expanded rapidly over the past five years, growing from serving about 297,000 children in 2020 to more than 1.2 million today, officials said Wednesday.

Speaking at the opening of a conference on early childhood development, Rwanda's Minister of Gender and Family Promotion, Consolée Uwimana, said the increase reflects strong political commitment and cooperation among institutions and development partners.

"The program has grown from reaching more than 297,000 children in 2020 to more than 1.2 million today through over 32,000 ECD centers," Uwimana said. "This reflects progress, political will and strong collaboration."

The East African nation has prioritized early childhood development as part of broader efforts to improve education, nutrition and child welfare. ECD centers provide services that support young children's health, learning and overall development during their formative years.

Uwimana said the expansion marks significant progress but acknowledged that challenges remain, particularly in securing sustainable and efficient financing for ECD programs.

"Meetings like this are very important because they provide an opportunity to share experiences and learn from one another," she said.

Rwanda has increasingly promoted community-based childcare and nutrition programs in both urban and rural areas as part of its long-term development agenda. Officials say investments in early childhood services are intended to improve school readiness and reduce developmental inequalities among children.

The conference brought together policymakers and stakeholders to discuss strategies for strengthening and sustaining ECD programs across the country.