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2.17. Children

COMMON ANALYSIS
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[Main COI reference: Targeting, 3.14]

Some of the particular risks Nigerian children may face include the following.

- **Violence against children (general):** Kidnappings of school children has become a security trend of serious concern for Nigeria, especially for the northern states. In addition to Boko Haram, different armed groups have also been involved in these incidents. [Security situation 2021, 1.4.1.1]. With regard to violence specifically against girls, see the section Violence against women and girls: overview**.** Violence also affects boys.

- **Children involved in student cults:** The phenomenon of student cults nowadays may also affect young primary or secondary school pupils [Targeting, 2.3.4]. See the profile Individuals targeted by student cults.

- **Children accused of being witches:** Children are one of the profiles at particular risk of being accused of witchcraft. Akwa Ibom state and Cross River state are the Nigerian states considered to be the epicentre of witchcraft-related incidents, particularly affecting children. [Security situation 2021, 2.34.2.1]. See the profile Individuals accused of witchcraft.

- **Violence against children by Boko Haram:** Children have been continuously targeted by Boko Haram through abductions, forced recruitment, forced marriage, sexual violence and repeated attacks at schools. The group has also been reported to recruit children for intelligence gathering and support roles. However, it should be noted that the number of new recruitments has significantly decreased since 2017. Boko Haram also kill and maim children and use children, particularly girls, to carry improvised explosive devices. [Security situation 2021, 1.3.2.1]. See the sections Individuals targeted by Boko Haram and Violence against women and girls by Boko Haram.

- **Children perceived as Boko Haram members or supporters:** Children suspected of association with Boko Haram were detained, with reports of harrowing violations, including sexual violence and torture. The UN has documented over 3 600 detentions of children, most of which were unlawful [Security situation 2021, 1.3.2.1]. See the profile (Perceived) Boko Haram members or supporters.

- **Child recruitment:** Apart from Boko Haram (see above), CJTF has also been accused of recruiting and using child soldiers [Targeting, 2.5.4.5; Security situation 2021, 1.3.1.7]. Children have been used for different tasks, including operating checkpoints, collecting information, or accompanying adult CJTF members in offensives. In 2017, the CJTF pledged to stop children from joining or fighting for the group and to identify and release any members who are under the age of 18 [Targeting, 2.5.4.5].

- **FGM/C:** FGM/C affects girls in various parts of Nigeria. See the section Female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C).

- **Child marriage:** Despite the legal age of 18 years, child marriage occurs in Nigeria. See the section Child marriage and forced marriage.

- **Child trafficking:** Children are vulnerable to trafficking situations. They may be victims of trafficking themselves or be vulnerable as children of victims of trafficking. See the profile Victims of human trafficking, including forced prostitution.

Risk analysis

Children could be exposed to acts which are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution (e.g. sexual violence, trafficking, child recruitment). Where the risk is discrimination and/or mistreatment by society and/or by the family, the individual assessment of whether this could amount to persecution should take into account the severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts or whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures. Being a child is to be taken into account in the assessment on whether an act reaches the threshold of persecution.

Under the abovementioned profiles, being a child may generally be considered as an important risk-enhancing circumstance.

For more guidance on the risk analysis related to the different circumstances above, see the relevant profiles.

Nexus to a reason for persecution

With regard to the nexus to a reason for persecution, the assessment should take into account the individual circumstances of the child. For example, depending on the profile, persecution may be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion (e.g. children perceived as Boko Haram members or supporters), religion (e.g. cases of children targeted by Boko Haram), or membership of particular social group (e.g. girls who have not undergone FGM/C or children victims of trafficking in human beings).

For more guidance on the nexus to a reason for persecution related to the different circumstances above, see the relevant profiles.

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