

2.1.3. Prison conditions and treatment of detainees

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Detention conditions in Nigeria are described as ‘harsh’, with provisions for food, healthcare, and other basic needs failing to meet the minimum standards established by the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and other international guidelines.99 In September 2024, the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture conducted its second visit to Nigeria to evaluate the treatment of detainees. The Subcommittee inspected various locations, including detention centres for men, women, and children, police stations, criminal investigation departments, and facilities operated by agencies addressing drug and human trafficking. Their assessment described conditions in most detention facilities as ‘abysmal’. Additionally, Nigeria had not yet established a National Preventive Mechanism as required under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, which Nigeria ratified in 2009. The Subcommittee called on Nigeria to urgently implement measures to prevent torture and ill-treatment, improve detention conditions -particularly in police stations and similar facilities - and enforce legal safeguards to end impunity for perpetrators of torture.100 As of March 2025, Nigeria's 240 prisons hold approximately 77 800 inmates, with two-thirds awaiting trial.101

Over the past decade, Nigeria has experienced a pattern of prison jailbreaks, resulting in thousands of inmates escaping correctional facilities nationwide. A recent incident in March 2025, at Koton Karfe Medium Security Custodial Centre in Kogi State, saw 12 inmates escape, with only six recaptured. This marked the fourth jailbreak at this facility in 13 years, where nearly 700 inmates have fled, including about 100 freed during a 2012 Boko Haram attack. Some observers attribute the repeated jailbreaks to security gaps, together with possible insider complicity, which exacerbate the prisons’ vulnerabilities, especially amid attacks by armed groups like Boko Haram. They also point to systemic issues such as overcrowding, outdated infrastructure, poor inmate conditions, slow judicial processes, and widespread corruption.102

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