

2.4. Children

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2.4.1. Legal and social status

Nigeria's Child Rights Act of 2003, aligned with international and regional child rights frameworks, is the main law protecting children's rights, development and well-being.[446] Although all 36 states have domesticated the Act, implementation has remained uneven nationwide.[447] Conflicting constitutional provisions and the partial adoption of the Child Rights Act by states applying Islamic law have impeded its full implementation.[448] Enforcement is further undermined by a shortage of trained personnel, particularly within law enforcement, and the absence of statutory limitation periods - meaning there is no defined timeframe for initiating legal proceedings. Additionally, limited public awareness prevents individuals from recognising and asserting their rights.[449]

Moreover, Nigeria's legal framework presents conflicting provisions regarding corporal punishment of children. While the Child's Rights Act prohibits it, the Criminal Code and the Penal Code continue to permit its use, both as a method of disciplining children and as a form of judicial punishment.[450] (See 2.18.1 Justice system for more detailed information on legal pluralism). Nigeria has pledged to end corporal punishment in schools as part of new global commitments to tackle violence against children. The move was announced ahead of the first UN ministerial conference on the issue, amid growing concerns over the harmful effects of corporal punishment. The pledge follows recent incidents, [451] including the death of a child in Nigeria after being flogged by a teacher.[452]

Children and adolescents aged 0-17 constitute nearly half of Nigeria's population, totalling approximately 105 million. The country has made significant progress in several areas, including improved birth registration rates, a reduction in child mortality, increased childhood immunisation coverage, reduced rates of FGM/C. However, persistent issues remain, such as high poverty rates, inadequate access to quality education, poor nutrition, elevated newborn mortality, and widespread violence affecting children.[453] In fact, sources report that cultural practices affecting children, such as child marriage and FGM/C,[454] forced labour, [455] trafficking and forced begging, [456] corporal punishment[457] and child witchcraft accusations[458] remain widespread across the country.[459]

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