3.14. Women and girls

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: March 2026

It should be noted that the different forms of violence against women (above 18 years old) and girls (below 18 years old) in Nigeria are often significantly interlinked. In such cases, the following subsections should be read in conjunction.

☐ 3.14.1. Gender-based violence (GBV)

This profile refers to women and girls at risk of GBV. For more specific forms of GBV see sub-profiles below 3.14.2. Female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) and 3.14.3. Child marriage and forced marriage. See also 3.13. Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings.

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI report: Country Focus 2025, 2.3. ; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

The Constitution prohibits gender-based discrimination and while Nigeria is signatory to international and regional treaties on women's rights, it has not yet incorporated the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) into national law. In 2015, Nigeria enacted legislation addressing various forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, rape, FGM/C, and child marriage. However, the law has not been adopted by all states, and its implementation remains uneven. The existence of shelters and services for abused women has been reported particularly in larger cities like Lagos and Abuja, however significant gaps were identified.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

Some acts to which women and girls could be exposed are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution. More specifically, women and girls continue to face

widespread and severe forms of physical violence throughout Nigeria. Reported acts include domestic violence, sexual violence including rape and sexual exploitation, sexual slavery and forced marriages, violence linked to socio-cultural practices and femicides.

Domestic violence is widespread and among married or cohabiting victims, 98 % experienced abuse by their intimate partners - which is often seen as a private matter. Legislation allows forms of domestic violence and under *sharia* law, 'beating of the wife is not a crime so long that the beating does not inflict serious injury or grievous harmful'. Underreporting of domestic violence against women and girls is common due to the risk of victim blaming.

Boko Haram has been responsible for serious violations of women's rights including forced marriages and rape. In 2024, Boko Haram militants abducted 400 individuals, the majority of whom were women and children during attacks on IDP camps. In 2024, over 900 cases of conflict-related gender-based violence were reported in the North-East, of which 65 % were children.

The severity and/or repetitiveness of other acts that women and girls could be subjected to and whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures, should be considered. More specifically, Nigerian women face widespread discrimination such as access to education, housing, employment, health care and other essential services. This combination may leave them vulnerable to isolation, poverty and struggle to secure basic needs.

Step 2: What is the level of risk of persecution?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for women and girls to face persecution in the context of gender-based violence should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as:

- **Home area**: Women and girls from North-East Nigeria, especially in conflict-affected states face a higher risk of persecution, even more so women in IDP camps (see also 3.1. Individuals within the reach of Boko Haram). In rural areas, lack of services, harmful practices and discriminatory laws may be more prevalent due to the reduced access to protection.
- **Age**: Young women and adolescent girls face a heightened risk of sexual exploitation.
- **Educational and economic background**: Women with limited or no education have increased vulnerability to violence.
- **Family status and disabilities**: Unmarried, widowed, divorced, unemployed women, as well as single mothers face abuse, stigma, social exclusion and

financial hardship or extreme poverty. Widows are often denied their late husband's property due to customary laws, exposed to gender-based violence through harmful traditions, and subjected to widowhood cultural practices, including levirate marriage, which have been also described as inhumane or unfair. Single women face severe barriers to accessing housing, employment, education and health care. Women and girls with disabilities face discrimination in accessing health care including for sexual, reproductive health and maternal health. Whereas some of these acts, as such, would not amount to persecution, they may render the applicant more vulnerable to other acts of violence.

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

Where well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated for a woman in the context of gender-based violence, this is highly likely to be for reasons of **membership of a particular social group**7 due to their innate characteristic (being a female) and distinct identity in Nigeria as indicated by the social, moral, and legal norms affecting specifically women in Nigeria. Persecution may also be for reasons of **religion** as some forms of violence against women can be driven by religious norms, including when Boko Haram is the actor of persecution.

☐ 3.14.2. Female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C)

This profile refers to women and girls who have not undergone FGM/C and assesses their risk to be subjected to the practice or the implications of the refusal.

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI report: Country Focus 2025, 2.3. ; Country Focus 2017, 4.2.5; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

While there are laws forbidding FGM/C, the practice is driven by deep-rooted cultural, religious, ethnic and social norms and remains widespread with low rates of reporting and prosecution. There is a lack of state resources and capacity among the government to curb the practice. Furthermore, a concerning trend of medicalisation of FGM/C has emerged, whereby the procedure is performed by healthcare providers in healthcare facilities, perpetuating the practice under the guise of safety.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

FGM/C amounts to persecution. Nigeria has the largest number of women and girls who have undergone FGM/C within the West and Central African region and has the third-highest prevalence of FGM worldwide. In some cultural contexts, victims may be labelled as unclean or disobedient and are subject to insults and accusations of dishonouring their families if they refuse FGM/C. Many victims face intense pressure from their families to partake in the practice. Coercion may take various forms such as physical assaults, threats, verbal harassment and financial oppression.

Step 2: What is the level of risk of persecution?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for women and girls to be subjected to FGM/C should take into account **risk-impacting circumstances**, such as:

- **Home area:** FGM/C is most prevalent in the South-East and South-West regions while the North-East records the lowest prevalence. Furthermore, it is more prevalent in rural areas. However, lately the risk has increased also in urban areas. The most affected states are Lagos, Kaduna, Imo, Kano and Oyo.
- **Ethnicity:** FGM/C occurs across all ethnic groups, with the highest prevalence among Yoruba and lowest among Tiv and Igala women.
- **Age:** FGM occurs across all age groups, although the prevalence is higher among girls aged 0–14.
- **Family perceptions and background**: A report of 2014 indicated that educated parents and parents choosing to send their daughters to school are less likely to want to subject their daughters to FGM/C. Families who choose not to subject their daughters may face intense pressure and other consequences such as disputes, ostracism, gossip or threats to carry out the procedure involuntarily. Those whose mothers and generally broader family, support the practice are at higher risk.

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

Where well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated for an applicant under this profile, this is highly likely to be for reasons of **membership of a particular social group** due to the common characteristic (not having undergone FGM in accordance with local traditions or who continue to refuse to undergo the practice) and their distinct identity in Nigeria, as they are viewed as ‘unclean’. Additionally, persecution may be for reasons of **religion**, since FGM/C is also driven by religious norms.

☐ 3.14.3. Child marriage and forced marriage

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI reports: Country Focus 2025, 2.3.; Country Focus 2024, 4.3.2.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

Forced and child marriage are prohibited by law. However, there is a lack of effective implementation of legal provisions and as such, child marriage remains widespread across the country. Nigeria has more than 24 million underage brides. Forced marriages remain common especially in the north regions of Nigeria.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

Forced and child marriage amount to persecution. Consequences of refusal to marry, such as physical violence and rape, would also amount to persecution. It also remains a barrier to education, particularly in northern Nigeria where cultural norms lead families to prioritise early marriage over education.

Step 2: What is the level of risk of persecution?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for women and girls to face persecution in the context of forced or child marriage should take into account **risk-impacting circumstances**, such as:

- **Home area**: North-West and North-East regions have the highest rates of women aged 20-24 who were married before the age of 18. Security and instability have continued to influence the prevalence of child marriage in the North-East of Nigeria and Boko Haram and other armed groups force many women and girls into marriage (see also 3.1. Individuals within the reach of Boko Haram).
- **Ethnic group**: Child marriage is particularly common among women from the Hausa ethnic group.
- **Age**: Young women and adolescent girls would have a higher risk of forced or child marriage.
- **Family background:** There is a strong link between poverty and early marriage. Child marriage is more prevalent among girls from low-income families, especially those living in rural regions or having limited access to education. Child marriage is commonly used by families as a protective measure against economic insecurity, abduction and sexual abuse.

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

Where well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated for an applicant in the context of forced or child marriage, this may be for reasons of **religion**, as forced marriage is permitted under customary or Islamic laws in parts of northern Nigeria, and/or **membership of a particular social group.**

For women or girls who refuse forced marriage or who transgress the social norm by ending that marriage, persecution, where it is substantiated, is highly likely to be for reasons of **membership of a particular social group**. Such women or girls share a common background that cannot be changed, as well as a distinct identity in Nigeria, as they are perceived as not complying with cultural traditions of their communities.

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  CJEU, *WS v Intervyuirasht organ na Darzhavna agentsia za bezhantsite pri Ministerskia savet*, case C-621/21, judgment of 16 January 2024, paras. 52 and 57.

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