

2.3. Women and girls

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2.3.1. Legal and social status

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria293 prohibits gender-based discrimination, and several laws have been enacted to promote the rights and improve the status of women.294 Nigeria is a signatory to several international and regional treaties on gender equality and women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)295 and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol).296 However, as of 2025, Nigeria has not yet incorporated the CEDAW into national law.297 Despite legal commitments, Nigerian women have continued to face widespread discrimination in both law and practice.298 Many existing legal frameworks either condone or fail to adequately address critical issues such as domestic violence and gender inequality. Discriminatory elements can be found in various legal sources, including the Labour Act, customary law, sharia law, and even within the Constitution.299 Some of these legal provisions discriminate women with regards to nationality, citizenship, health, education, marital and parental rights, employment,300 inheritance and property rights.301

Gender equality has remained a challenge in the country, with reports of widespread sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including child marriage and prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C).302 Lack of effective implementation of legal provisions, insufficient public awareness, and cultural traditions are among the key obstacles for achieving progress.303 Religion, tradition, and culture are frequently used to justify violations of women's rights, particularly in areas such as education, marriage, inheritance, property ownership, and protection from gender-based violence and harmful practices.304

Nigerian women face widespread discrimination also in areas such as access to education, employment and political representation.305 Levels of female participation in the labour force as well as in political and economic decision-making roles have remained low.306 In 2024, only four women secured seats in the Senate and 14 in the House of Representatives. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reported that women made up just 8 % of all candidates in the 2023 elections.307 Women's representation in ministerial roles dropped from 17.6 % in 2024 to 8.8 % in 2025.308

The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that, as of February 2025, about 8 million people in Nigeria, including 1.95 million women of reproductive age, were in need of humanitarian

assistance due to conflict, food insecurity, lack of sexual and reproductive health services, limited education.309 Abortion is only legally permitted when the woman's life is at risk, leading many to seek unsafe, illegal procedures that often result in medical complications. Those who suffer such complications frequently lack access to adequate follow-up care.310 Women and girls with disabilities face discrimination in accessing health, including sexual, reproductive health and maternal health.311 For more information see Healthcare.

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