



The Child Rights Law was Passed in 2003



36 States + the FCT have domesticated



Under 18 is defined as a child by the law



7 States with strong implementation

## Background

The Child Rights Act (CRA) 2003 is Nigeria's most comprehensive legislation protecting the rights and welfare of children. It domesticates two major international instruments, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), affirming Nigeria's commitment to ensure that every child enjoys the rights to survival, development, protection, and participation.

The Child Rights Act recognises the vulnerability of children to poverty, harmful cultural practices, violence, conflict, and limited access to services. It transforms these concerns into enforceable rights and sets clear responsibilities for families, communities, institutions, and government.

Under Nigeria's federal system, child welfare falls under state jurisdiction. Although all states have now passed Child Rights Laws (CRLs), implementation remains uneven due to weak institutional structures, limited funding, cultural resistance, and poor coordination. These disparities continue to affect how children's rights are upheld across the country.

## Legal Framework

Nigeria's child protection framework is built on national and international laws:



Nigerian 1999 Constitution



Child Rights Act (CRA) 2003



Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015



Trafficking in Persons Act 2015



CRC (1991), ACRWC (2001), and SDGs.

### Who is a Child?

A child is any person below 18 years. The Child Rights Act guarantees the right to identity, birth registration, parental care, protection, survival, and development.

### Key Provisions of the Child Rights Act

The Child Rights Act provides rights and protections including:

- Protection and care by family, community, and state.
- Right to survival, development, and wellbeing.
- Right to name, nationality, and identity.
- Freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and association.
- Right to education, healthcare, leisure, and safe environments.
- Protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation, torture, and degrading treatment.
- Right to dignity, privacy, and parental care.

## State Domestication and Implementation Overview (2025)

As of 2025, all 36 states and the FCT have domesticated the Child Rights Act, a milestone in Nigeria's commitment to child protection. What differs is the strength and quality of implementation. The following section categorises states by their level of enforcement and capacity while also highlighting the contextual constraints that influence effectiveness.

**TABLE 1: Implementation of the Child Rights Law in Nigeria**

IMPLEMENTATION	STATES	JUSTIFICATION
<b>Strong</b>	Lagos, Kaduna, Plateau, FCT, Rivers, Edo, Ogun	States with comparatively functional family courts, child protection units, budgeted child welfare programs, higher incident reporting rates, and active partnerships with civil society and justice systems.
<b>Moderate</b>	Cross River, Anambra, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Gombe, Enugu, Ekiti, Oyo, Ondo, Bayelsa, Kwara, Nasarawa, Abia, Benue, Kogi	Family courts and welfare mechanisms function only in parts of the state. Progress is visible but reliant on CSO support or gradual institutional strengthening.
<b>Weak</b>	Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Niger, Kebbi, Adamawa, Yobe, Ebonyi, Imo, Osun, Sokoto, Zamfara, Borno, Bauchi, Taraba	Enforcement mechanisms are minimal or inactive. Cultural resistance, low reporting, limited institutional capacity, and insufficient funding restrict the functional delivery of child protection services.

**TABLE 2: Context-Based Constraints Affecting Implementation of the Child Rights Act or Law**

CONTEXT LAYER	STATES	RATIONALE
<b>Recently Domesticated</b>	Gombe, Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Niger, Kebbi, Adamawa, Yobe, Zamfara	Systems, family courts and child protection units are still being developed; rollout uneven and enforcement capacity expanding gradually.
<b>Cultural and Religious Resistance to Enforcement</b>	Sokoto, Kebbi, Katsina, Zamfara, Yobe, Bauchi, Jigawa, Kano, Adamawa, Taraba, Niger, Ebonyi, Imo, Osun, Imo, Borno, Delta, Kogi	Socio-cultural norms (early marriage, FGM, child labour, patriarchal community structures) reduce incident reporting and cooperation with formal justice systems.
<b>Conflict-Affected or Insecurity-Disrupted Implementation</b>	Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Zamfara, Kebbi, Niger, Kaduna, Plateau, Taraba, Benue, Nasarawa	Insurgency, banditry, farmer-herder conflict and displacement weaken institutions, limit monitoring, disrupt court processes and reduce access to protection.
<b>Low Awareness and Public Understanding of Law</b>	Relatively all states	Urban awareness exists, but rural understanding is low; values shift slowly; reporting is minimal; children often unaware of rights or services.

### Other challenges includes:

- Poverty and Economic Pressures
- Justice System Gaps
- Insecurity and Conflict
- Data Gaps

## Penalties and Enforcement

The Child Rights Act provides penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment for offences such as abuse, neglect, trafficking, exploitation, and forced marriage. Family Courts, where functional, ensure child-sensitive justice processes and prioritize the child's best interest and rehabilitation.

### National Recommendations for Strengthening the Law

1. **Standardise Legal Definitions and Laws:** Update the laws to include issues such as digital exploitation, and ensure uniform adoption of definitions across all states.
2. **Strengthen Institutions:** Establish and equip family courts, child protection units, and welfare systems nationwide.
3. **Increase Funding:** Allocate dedicated budgets for enforcement, awareness, shelters, and welfare services.
4. **Expand Public Awareness:** Leverage local languages, schools, community and faith leaders to promote understanding of child rights.
5. **Address Economic Drivers:** Provide social protection, poverty alleviation programs, and economic support to families.
6. **Promote Inter-State Collaboration:** Share best practices from strong-performing states like Lagos, Kaduna, and Plateau.
7. **Improve Data Systems:** Establish a national database for tracking child abuse, enforcement progress, and resource allocation.
8. **Integrate Child Protection into Development Plans:** Embed child rights into health, education, and social welfare policies.
9. **Encourage Cultural Change:** Work with traditional and religious leaders to align cultural practices with child protection principles.

## Conclusion

The Child Rights Act and Laws remain cornerstone of child protection in Nigeria, but cultural resistance, weak institutions, and poor funding limit the full implementation. States with stronger structures show that progress is possible through political will, community engagement, and investment in justice and welfare systems. Ensuring the Law delivers on its promise requires unified laws, functional institutions, sustainable awareness efforts, and partnerships across government and civil society. Ultimately, the Act's success will be measured by the safety, well-being, and opportunities available to every Nigerian child.

