

HOW NIGERIAN STATES ARE ADVANCING CHILD PROTECTION AND WELFARE



Progress, Gaps, and Comparative Evidence from MICS 2021 and NDHS 2024
 Prepared by: **Child Policy and Information Centre (CPIC)**
 Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development

1. Executive Summary

Nigeria's child protection system is showing gradual, measurable improvement across several states, especially in birth registration coverage and reducing harmful practices like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). State-level evidence from the 2021 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and national trend data from the 2024 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) show that while serious protection challenges persist, some states and regions are making notable progress in strengthening child welfare outcomes.¹

Key areas of improvement include increased birth registration, declining FGM prevalence, expanding social protection coverage, and gradual change in attitudes toward harmful practices. However, progress remains uneven across states, with persistent disparities between northern and southern zones and between urban and rural areas.

This brief highlights where progress is being made, presents a comparative state picture of child protection outcomes, and proposes targeted policy actions to accelerate improvements nationwide using evidence from the Child Policy Information Centre (CPIC).



2. Why This Matters

Strengthening child protection is essential for Nigeria's human capital development, social stability, and progress toward national and global commitments under SDGs 5.3, 16.2, and 16.9. Understanding which states are improving and why provides a roadmap for scaling effective interventions and closing protection gaps.

3. Evidence of Progress Across States

3.1 Birth Registration - Gradual National Gains, Strong Southern Performance: NDHS 2024 National Trend shows that birth registration has improved from 30% in 2008 to 40% in 2024. However, this progress is highly uneven. Urban children are more than twice as likely to be registered (59%) compared to rural children (27%). Regionally, South West states are leading national performance, with registration rates approaching 68%, while South East and South South states also perform consistently above the national average. In contrast, the North East and North West lag significantly, with coverage as low as 28% in some zones.

These gains are largely driven by the integration of birth registration into health facilities, mobile CRVS outreach, digital registration network in 15 states: Bayelsa, Ebonyi, Kogi, Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Kebbi, Zamfara, Taraba, Gombe, Borno, Yobe, Niger, Lagos, and the FCT, and stronger collaboration with the National Population Commission (NPC). States that have embedded registration into routine maternal and child health services are achieving faster gains, an approach that can be replicated in lagging regions.

1. Nigeria Demographic Health Survey (NDHS) 2024, pg. 561-563
 2. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>



3.2 Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – Clear National Decline, Regional Concentration

NDHS 2024 shows a strong national downward trend in FGM prevalence among women aged 15–49, declining from 25% in 2013 to 14% in 2024. However, 14% of girls aged 0–14 remain circumcised, indicating that the practice continues to affect new generations.

Southern states including the South-East, South-South, and South-West show significant generational decline, while the North-West remains the highest-prevalence zone at 27%. Urban areas record lower prevalence and stronger opposition to continuation, whereas rural areas remain hotspots, with 27% of women believing FGM should continue and 21% believing it is religiously required.

Progress is being driven by sustained advocacy, stronger legal enforcement in southern states, and engagement of women’s groups and faith leaders. States that combine legal enforcement with community-based norm change are achieving faster reductions.

3.3 Violent Discipline – Behaviour Change Emerging in Some States

MICS plus 2023-2024 confirms that violent discipline remains widespread³ nationally. However, some southern and urban states are beginning to show lower prevalence, stronger rejection of physical punishment, and increased uptake of positive parenting practices. These improvements are linked to parenting education programmes, school-based child rights awareness initiatives, and CSO-led behaviour change campaigns. States investing in behavioural change communication are starting to weaken the social acceptance of violence against children.

3.4 Child Labour – Uneven Progress Linked to Poverty Reduction

Child labour remains highly prevalent in many northern and agrarian states, while lower rates are observed in urbanised southern states. Improvements are being driven by conditional cash transfer programmes,⁴ school feeding and retention schemes, and livelihood support for poor households. States that have expanded social protection coverage are reducing children’s economic vulnerability and improving school participation.

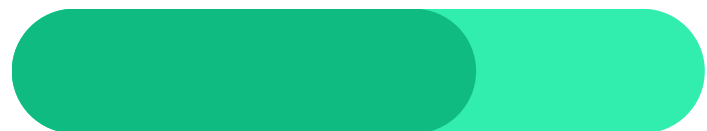
3.5 Child Marriage – Slow but Emerging Declines

Child marriage remains persistently high in several northern states, with early marriage before age 15 still significant.⁵ However, some states are showing early signs of progress, including lower prevalence among younger cohorts, increased school retention for girls, and growing community resistance to early marriage. Where education access improves and legal enforcement is strengthened, child marriage begins to decline.

3. MICS plus 2023-2024 Nigeria Multi Indicator Cluster Survey

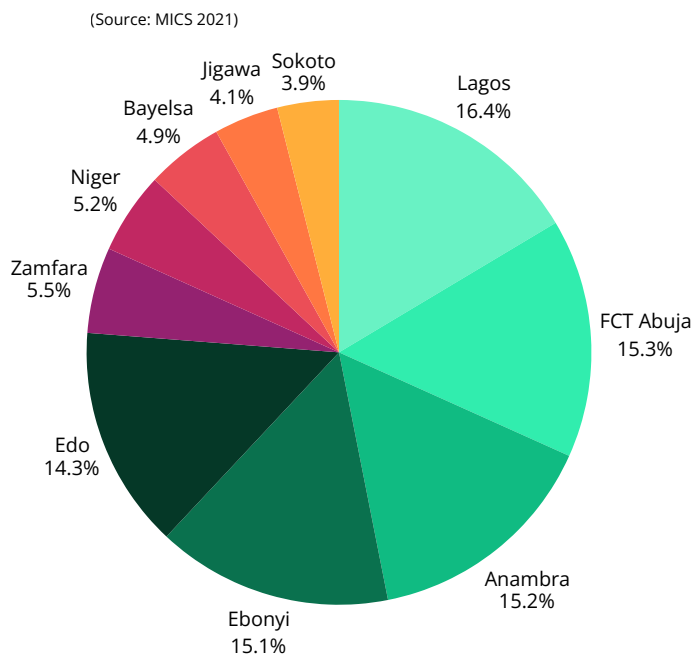
4. MICS 2021pg. 412

5. MICS 2021pg. 342



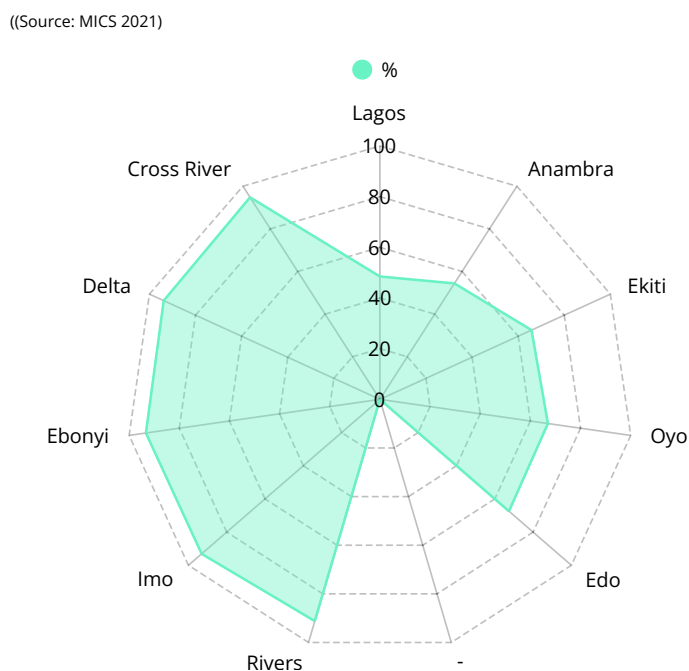
4. Comparative State Picture

A. League Table 1: Birth Registration Coverage Top 5 & Bottom 5 States
Indicator: Children whose births are registered with civil authorities



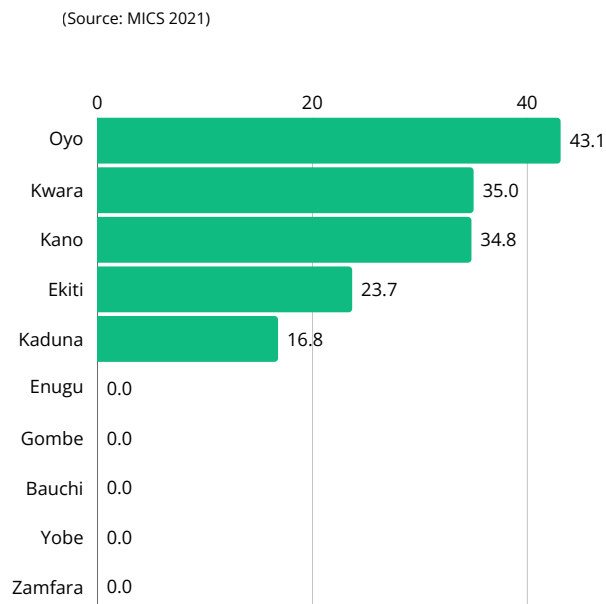
Key Insight: Birth registration coverage in Nigeria is uneven: Lagos, FCT, and South-East states lead due to strong Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) health facility integration and urban access, while North-West and North-East states trail because of insecurity, sparse registry networks, difficult terrain, and low public awareness.

C. Table 3: Violent Discipline (Lowest 5 to Highest 5 Prevalence)
Indicator: Any Violent Discipline.



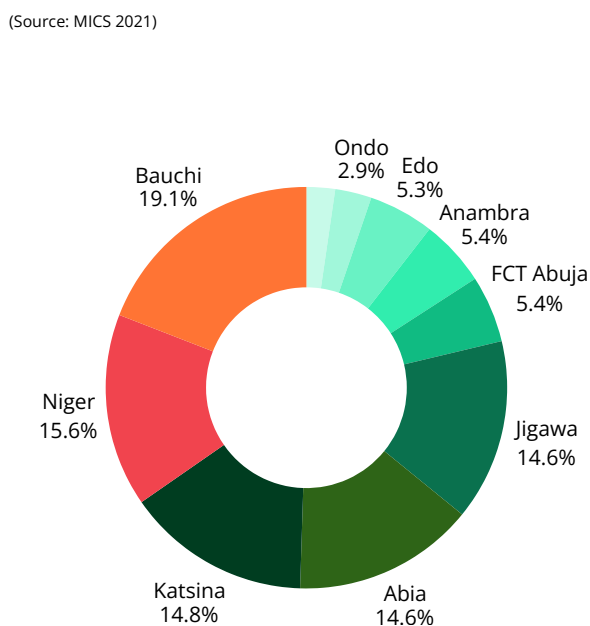
Key Insight: Violent child discipline is pervasive nationwide, with South-East and South-South states emerging as high-prevalence hotspots, while a few North-West states show comparatively lower rates but still remain well above acceptable child protection standards.

B. League Table 2: FGM Prevalence (Lowest 5 to Highest 5)
Indicator: Percentage of daughters who had any form of FGM



Key Insight: FGM prevalence shows stark state-level variation: a small group of states, including Enugu, Gombe, Bauchi, Yobe and Zamfara have very low cases through strong social norm change and deterrence, while high-prevalence hotspots persist in parts of the South-West and North-Central, driven by entrenched intergenerational norms and weak enforcement.

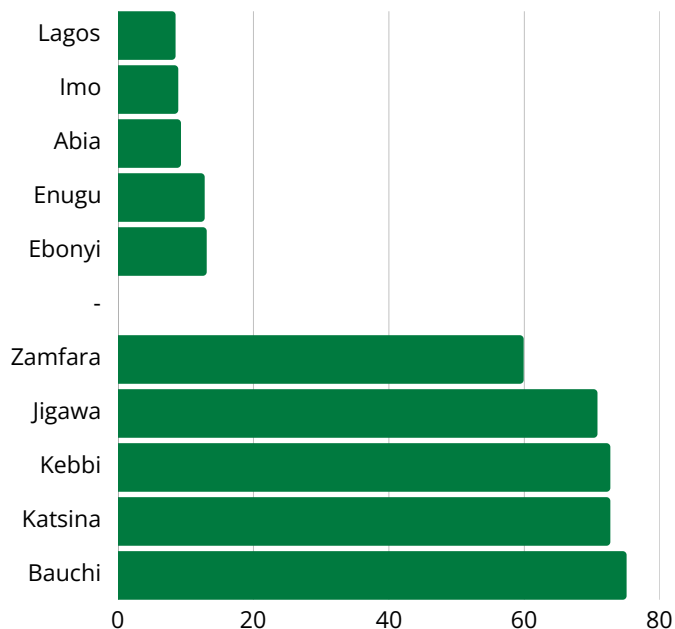
D. Table 4: Child Labour (Lowest 5 to Highest 5 Prevalence)
Indicator: Children 5–11 in Economic Activity (%)



Key Insight: Northern states dominate child labour hotspots due to agrarian poverty and low school retention, while Lagos and other urbanized states show significantly lower rates driven by stronger schooling access and social protection systems.

E. League Table 5: Child Marriage women (Lowest 5 to Highest 5 Prevalence)
Indicator: Married Before 18 (%) – Women 20–49

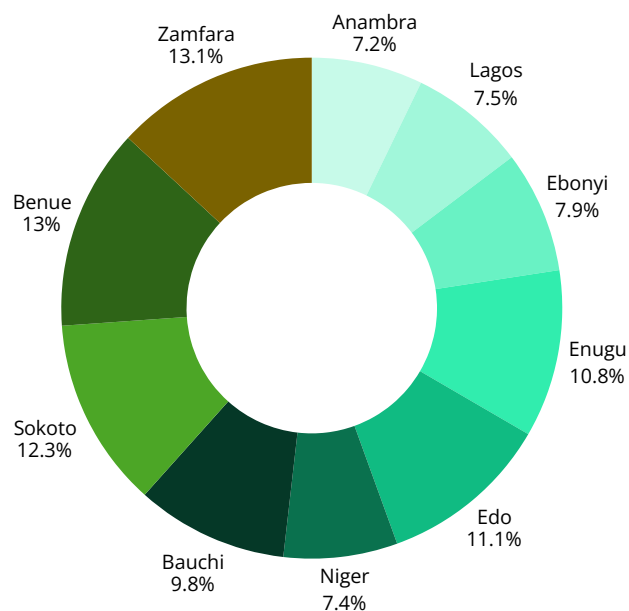
(Source: MICS 2021)



Key Insight: North-West and North-East states remain child marriage hotspots due to entrenched cultural norms and low female education, while southern and urbanized states show significantly lower prevalence driven by stronger schooling access and legal awareness.

F. League Table 5: Child Marriage men (Lowest 5 to Highest 5 Prevalence)
Indicator: Married Before 18 (%) – Men 20–49

(Source: MICS 2021)



Key Insight: Male child marriage is concentrated in North-West and North-East states due to entrenched cultural norms and low male schooling, while southern and urbanized states show near-elimination driven by stronger education access and social norm change.

G. Composite Child Protection Performance Index (CPPI)

(CPIC Proposed Index)

CPIC proposes a Composite Child Protection Performance Index (CPPI) that aggregates five indicators:

- Birth registration
- FGM prevalence
- Violent discipline
- Child labour
- Child marriage

Top 10 Performing States (Indicative)

Lagos, FCT Abuja, Anambra, Edo, Enugu, Ekiti, Ondo, Oyo, Ogun, Kwara

Bottom 10 Performing States (Indicative)

Nasarawa, Taraba, Yobe, Jigawa, Niger, Bauchi, Zamfara, Kebbi Sokoto, Borno

5. What Is Working

Across Nigeria, states seeing steady improvements in child protection outcomes share common reform features. One of the most influential is integrating birth registration into the health system. States such as Lagos, Edo, and Anambra have embedded registration into antenatal care, delivery services, immunization schedules, and primary health-care outreach. This ensures children are registered at or near birth and greatly reduces access barriers.

Progress is also driven by a dual approach that combines legal enforcement with social norm change. States like Enugu, Ekiti, and Oyo pair anti-FGM and child marriage laws with community dialogue, women's group mobilization, and faith leader engagement. This accelerates declines in harmful practices by shifting both behaviour and beliefs.

Urbanization and service density further amplify gains. Urban and peri-urban states, including Lagos, the FCT, and Ogun, benefit from closer proximity to services, stronger education systems, and higher legal awareness. This highlights the importance of replicating dense service delivery models in rural LGAs.

6. Policy Recommendations

At the federal level, priority actions include scaling nationwide CRVS–health integration with dedicated budget lines, strengthening enforcement of anti-FGM and child marriage laws, expanding national social protection coverage in high-risk states, institutionalizing CPPI as an official monitoring tool, and improving data harmonization across NPC, NBS, FM-WASD, and SUBEBs.

At the state level, governments should establish CPPI-aligned Child Protection Dashboards, expand mobile registration units in rural LGAs, scale positive parenting programmes to reduce violent discipline, integrate child labour prevention into poverty-reduction strategies, and partner with CSOs to drive community-led norm change.

7. Implementation Considerations

A successful reform will depend heavily on political leadership, particularly sustained ownership by Governors and Commissioners. Conflict-sensitive programming is essential in fragile states such as Borno, Yobe, Zamfara, and Niger, where humanitarian-linked delivery models are required. Sustainable financing must be embedded in state Medium Term Sector Strategy and annual budgets, while digital interoperability is needed to link CRVS, Health Management Information System and social protection systems. Finally, local capacity gaps remain a binding constraint, underscoring the need for continuous training and technical support for state and LGA data officers.

8. Conclusion

Nigeria's child protection story is not one of stagnation but of uneven progress. While serious challenges persist, multiple states demonstrate that meaningful improvement is possible through integrated service delivery, community engagement, behavioural change programming, and data-driven planning.

By scaling successful state-level models and institutionalising CPIC as Nigeria's national child protection evidence hub, Nigeria can accelerate progress toward equitable, sustainable child protection and welfare outcomes nationwide.

The Child Policy and Information Centre (CPIC)

The CPIC is Nigeria's central evidence-to-policy hub for child protection, linking fragmented data systems with frontline service delivery and high-level decision-making. Beyond data integration, CPIC will provide policy intelligence and advisory support through quarterly briefs, rapid-response analytics, and evidence-based budgeting guidance. CPIC will strengthen accountability and accelerate reform momentum across states.

This is a joint collaboration between UNICEF and Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Nigeria.

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