

BEYOND GEOGRAPHY



A Data-Informed Framework for Targeting Child Protection Investments in Nigeria
Prepared by: Child Policy and Information Centre (CPIC)
 Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development

1. Executive Summary

Sometimes public discussions in Nigeria often focus on whether northern states receive disproportionate development assistance and whether southern states are overlooked despite emerging vulnerabilities. These debates are frequently framed through political, regional, and historical lenses, often reinforcing perceptions of imbalance in the allocation of development resources. While such concerns reflect genuine frustrations around inequality and marginalization, they are often driven more by narratives than by systematic evidence.

Nigeria's development landscape is complex with different states facing distinct but equally serious social and economic challenges which highlight the need to move beyond perception-based arguments toward a more evidence-driven understanding of vulnerability. Rather than framing development assistance through a simplistic North-South divide, a more constructive approach is to assess where vulnerabilities are most severe and where policy interventions can deliver the greatest impact.

This policy brief uses child protection and human development indicators such as education access, birth registration, child labour, child marriage, violent discipline, conflict exposure, and service infrastructure capacity to identify where needs are greatest and which interventions are most suitable.



2. Evidence Shows that:

In February 2026 alone, 272 verified child rights violation incidents were recorded across 32 states in Nigeria, spanning eight categories of violations including sexual violence, abduction, child trafficking, and harmful practices. The distribution of incidents shows strong geographic concentration, with the North-West accounting for 115 incidents (42% of all reported violations), making it the region with the highest concentration of cases during the reporting period.¹

The Child Rights Violations and Monitoring Report also reveals a strong gender disparity: girls accounted for approximately 71% of reported victims,² indicating the disproportionate exposure of female children to sexual violence, trafficking, and harmful practices.

While a promising number of states have established domestic and sexual violence response centres, the sustainability and effectiveness of these efforts depend heavily on the existence of a dedicated institution with a clear legal mandate, funding structure, and coordination role. Response centres alone, while critical, are often project-based, donor-dependent, or embedded within broader facilities, which can limit long-term sustainability, coordination, and statewide coverage

1. Act to protect. Child Rights Violations and Monitoring Report | February 2026

2. Act to protect. Child Rights Violations and Monitoring Report | February 2026

What makes the difference in more advanced states is the presence of a dedicated Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency with the primary mandate of addressing GBSV issues across prevention, response, coordination, data management, and policy enforcement. At present, dedicated state-level domestic and sexual violence response structures exist in only a few states, most notably Lagos Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency.

Meanwhile, approximately 50 Sexual Assault Referral Centres operate nationwide, providing critical frontline services to survivors. However, many of these centres are often domiciled within Ministries, Social Development Centres, hospitals, or the Nigeria Police Force, rather than as independent agencies with a clear statewide mandate and sustainable funding framework.

Recently, Abia State commissioned the Nchedo Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), domiciled within Aba General Hospital, marking an important step in expanding survivor support services. While this reflects encouraging progress and increased state level commitment, there is still significant room to strengthen institutional coordination mechanisms to ensure sustainability, scale, and nationwide coverage.

“Aid distribution should therefore be based on indicators and vulnerability rather than region alone”.

3. Why This Matters

The key question is not “who needs aid more?” but rather “what type of aid is needed, where, and under what accountability framework?”

Nigeria's demographic growth, persistent insecurity, and mounting economic pressures are converging at a moment when the margin for policy error is shrinking.

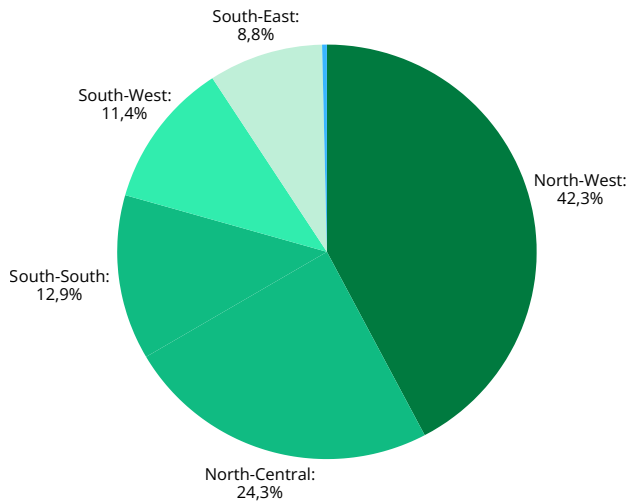
In this regard, poorly targeted aid does more than miss its mark; it risks entrenching the very problems it seeks to solve. When financial support is not tied to structural reform, it can reinforce patterns of dependency rather than catalyse institutional strengthening. At the same time, focusing exclusively on high-poverty zones can obscure emerging vulnerabilities in better-performing regions, particularly in rapidly urbanizing areas where violence, trafficking, and inequality are evolving in less visible ways.



3.1 Real-Time Child Protection Monitoring: Emerging Patterns of Violence

Regional distribution of violations

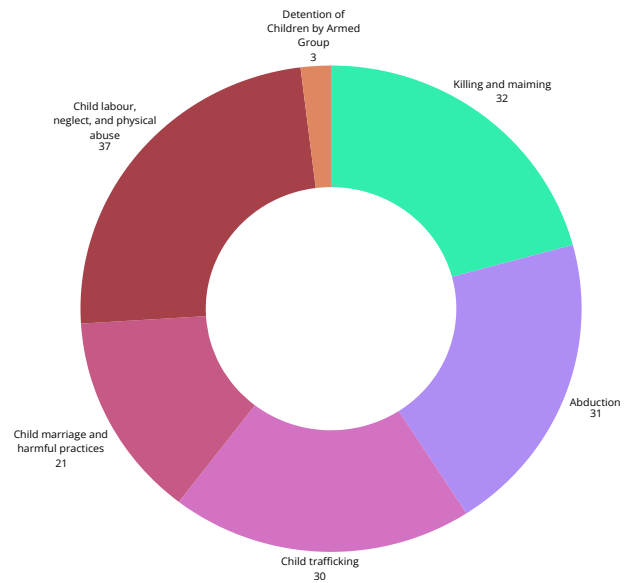
Source: Child Rights Violations and Monitoring Report | February 2026



This distribution reinforces broader vulnerability patterns, with North-West states experiencing the highest concentration of reported violations.

Most common types of violations

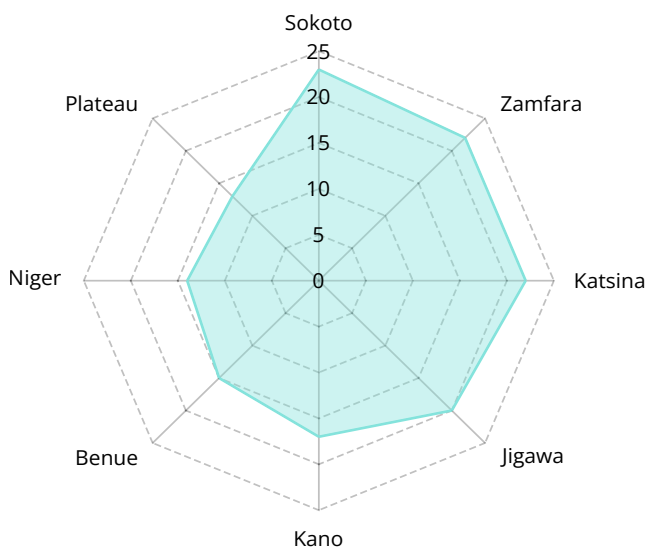
Source: Child Rights Violations and Monitoring Report | February 2026



These findings highlight that violence, exploitation, and trafficking remain major protection threats across multiple regions.

States with the Highest Incident Levels

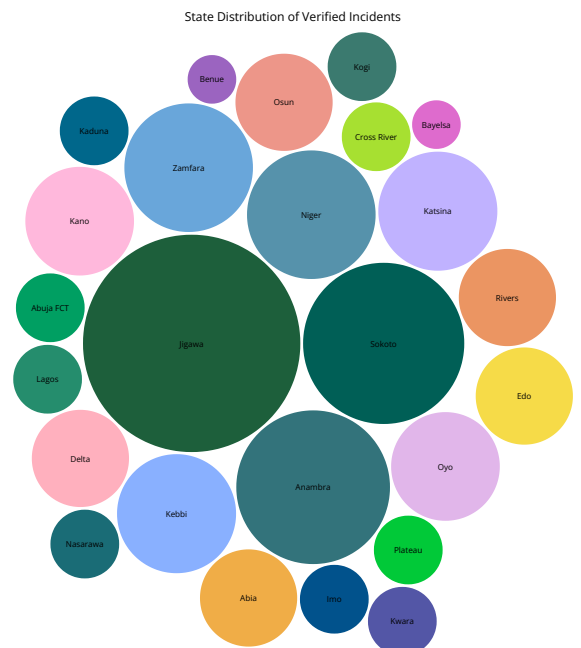
Some states recorded particularly high numbers of incidents
Source: Child Rights Violations and Monitoring Report



These patterns mirror broader child protection vulnerability indicators observed in national surveys and crisis analysis.

Sexual Violence

Source: Child Rights Violations and Monitoring Report | February 2026



The monitoring data shows that sexual violence is the most prevalent form of child rights violation, accounting for 117 incidents

4. Institutional Capacity and Protection Infrastructure

Beyond socio-economic indicators, the availability of protection infrastructure provides important insight into the strength of institutional responses to violence against children and families. While Nigeria has made progress in establishing legal frameworks and policy commitments for child protection,⁵ the institutional infrastructure required to deliver these protections remains uneven across states. Dedicated response mechanisms such as domestic and sexual violence response centres are still limited, highlighting the need for continued investment in survivor support systems and coordinated protection services. For some time, Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency stood out as one of the few structured, state-level institutions specifically mandated to coordinate responses to domestic and sexual violence. Its establishment demonstrated how a dedicated agency can strengthen reporting mechanisms, survivor support, and multi-sectoral coordination between law enforcement, health providers, and social services.

Encouragingly, other states are beginning to take similar steps. The Abia State Government in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, recently launched a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC),⁶ signaling growing recognition at the subnational level of the need for specialized services to support survivors of gender-based and sexual violence. This development represents a positive shift toward strengthening protection infrastructure and expanding access to critical support services. Other states have established Sexual Assault Referral Centres include Adamawa (3), Akwa Ibom (2), Anambra, Bayelsa, Borno, Cross River (5), Delta (3), Edo, Ebonyi, Ekiti (3), Enugu (2), FCT (2), Jigawa, Kaduna (4), Kano, Kebbi, Kwara, Lagos (3), Niger, and Ogun (1).⁷

Additionally, the recent Child Rights Violations and Monitoring Report also reveals that many violations occur within children's immediate social environments, with neighbours, relatives, and family members frequently identified as alleged perpetrators. This underscores the need for stronger community-based protection systems, reporting mechanisms, and prevention programs.⁸

These data-backed revelations imply that **Aid allocation must consider poverty, risk exposure, and institutional capacity deficits.** Minimum service guarantees should apply in every state. An allocation approach perceived as politically or regionally biased can also deepen regional resentment and erode public trust. In a country as diverse and complex as Nigeria, the legitimacy of development policy depends not only on outcomes but on fairness and transparency in decision-making. Without this, resource distribution debates, risk undermining national cohesion. **Transparency⁴ is not an administrative add-on; it is the foundation for sustainable reform and public trust.**

4.1 Striking the Balance

A balanced national approach to child protection investment in Nigeria can be guided by the implementation principles outlined in the World Bank Group Fragility, Conflict and Violence Strategy 2020–2025,⁹ which emphasizes strategy, programs, partnerships, and people as the core pillars for effective development interventions. Applying this framework to child protection suggests a multi-layered investment approach.

Firstly, at the strategic level, national policy direction should ensure equitable baseline allocations that enable every state to establish and maintain core child protection systems, including policy frameworks, reporting mechanisms, and coordination structures. Secondly, through programmatic targeting, additional resources can be directed to areas with higher vulnerability using evidence-based indicators such as the proposed Composite Child Protection Performance Index (CPPI), ensuring that investments respond to the severity of protection risks across states.

Another suggested consideration is to allocate a certain percentage of aid relying on improved performance of states based on child protection indicators. To this end, the Child Protection and Child Well-being Index that measures and ranks states on its child friendliness will be relevant. This is expected to promote healthy competition among states and provide rewards for improved performance.

5. Nigeria Child Right Act (2003)

6. Nigerian Government Launches Sexual Assault Referral Centre in Abia: <https://von.gov.ng/nigerian-government-launches-sexual-assault-referral-centre-in-abia/>

7. Directory of Sexual Assault Referral Centres in Nigeria (2025) International IDEA

8. Act to protect. Child Rights Violations and Monitoring Report | February 2026

9. World Bank Group Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence 2020–2025

Thirdly, partnerships between federal and state governments, development partners, civil society, and community institutions are essential for expanding the reach and sustainability of protection services. Strengthening these collaborative mechanisms helps align funding, technical assistance, and accountability systems across the child protection ecosystem.

Finally, development aid should target a system strengthening approach that seeks to build strong and resilient child protection systems. This is the key to building sustainable child protection systems based on the UNICEF Child Protection Systems Strengthening Approaches, Benchmarks and Interventions.¹⁰ The maturity of the child protection system over time will show the progress made by examining the seven intermediate outcomes of CPSS.

These include: the legal and policy framework; governance and coordination Structures; a continuum of services; minimum standards and oversight mechanisms; human financial and infrastructure resources; mechanisms for child participation and community engagement; and data collection and monitoring systems.

Sustained investment in these seven intermediate outcomes will improve the child protection system to assess maturity of the CPSS using the four-phase model of CPSS. These include system building, system enhancement, system integration and system maturity. This will promote a people-dimension that underscores the need for sustained investment in trained social workers, case managers, law enforcement officers, and service providers who form the frontline of child protection responses at all levels.

5. Strategic Recommendations

Operationalizing these four pillars could involve baseline allocations for core systems nationwide, targeted vulnerability-based funding, incentives for states that achieve measurable protection reforms, special support for conflict-affected areas, and infrastructure grants to expand essential services such as domestic violence response centres, shelters, and referral networks. Aligning child protection investments with this strategy-program-partnership-people framework can help ensure that Nigeria's protection systems are both equitable and responsive to the diverse risks faced by children across the country.

Some other recommendations may include:

- **Institutionalize structured engagement with the Child Policy and Information Centre (CPIC).** Federal and state governments should formalize regular technical consultations with the CPIC to support evidence-based policymaking, improve data utilization, and strengthen the translation of research and administrative data into actionable child protection policies and programs.
- **Strengthen community-based reporting and early-warning systems.** The Government can expand and support community-level protection mechanisms such as school reporting channels, local child protection committees, and community referral networks to improve early detection, reporting, and prevention of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Strengthening these grassroots systems will help bridge gaps between formal protection institutions and vulnerable households. Across the country, community-based child protection structures are being established and strengthened. Government recognition and support for these structures and the auxiliary social service workforce at community level will enhance linkages with existing formal structures will ensure prevention and promote response services.

- **Institutionalize budgetary allocation to child protection in state annual budgets.** Strengthening child protection systems through development aid, though commendable, is not sustainable in the long run. It is therefore important for states to introduce child protection line items in their budgets. Beyond allocations, they must ensure that allocations are released ownership and sustainability in the long term.

6. Conclusion

The question of “who needs aid more?” should not be framed as a regional competition but as a governance challenge that demands disciplined, evidence-based allocation. While several northern states face deeper structural and conflict-driven vulnerabilities requiring sustained investment, southern states confront complex urban inequality, trafficking risks, and service delivery gaps that also require targeted interventions. A just and effective aid framework must therefore be indicator-driven, transparent, performance-sensitive, conflict-aware, infrastructure-conscious, and supported by real-time monitoring systems. Allocation should reflect both risk exposure and reform commitment, ensuring that vulnerability is addressed while progress is rewarded with a view to ensuring ownership, sustained commitment and funding in the long term.

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.

Prepared by: Yewande Olu-Ibukun-Centre Coordinator, Child Policy & Information Centre (CPIC)

Contributors: UNICEF Child Protection, Programme Section Abuja