



ECOWAS COMMISSION
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ECOWAS Child Rights Information Management System (ECRIMS)



Child Protection in West Africa Report 2023



Department Human Development and Social Affairs
Directorate Humanitarian and Social Affairs,
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This is an inaugural report of the ECOWAS Commission's Child Rights Information Management System. It provides a regional snapshot, and national overview of the mapping of data and information on the status of child protection in West Africa in 2023. The report compiled against the backdrop of the ECOWAS child rights strategy documents, draws attention to information about the member states child protection efforts, and the identified gaps, and priorities for action. It will also serve as a baseline for assessing over time, the progress of national systems development in terms of child protection legislation, policies and institutional frameworks, human resources, partnerships, services, social mobilisation, resource allocation and utilisation.

2023 ECOWAS Child Rights Information Management Systems Report

Department Human Development and Social Affairs

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Table of content

LIST OF ACRONYMS.....	5
PART 1: INTRODUCTION.....	8
1.1 ECOWAS Child Rights Strategy Instruments.....	9
ECOWAS Child Policy.....	9
ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems in West Africa.....	10
ECOWAS Regional Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour in West Africa [RAP].....	13
ECOWAS Support Procedures and Standards for the Protection and Reintegration of Vulnerable Children on the Move and Young Migrants.....	13
ECOWAS Roadmap on Prevention and Response to Child Marriage (2019 - 2030), and other relevant Texts.....	13
1.2 West African Regional Child Demographics.....	14
PART 2: Measures Adopted by Member States in Alignment with the ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Child Protection.....	16
2.1 In-Country Assessment of National Frameworks for Child Protection.....	16
2.2 Rules of Engagement for the Security Forces in Child Protection.....	17
2.3 Juvenile Justice Standards for Handling of Children in Contact with the Law.....	19
2.4 Compliance with International Legal Frameworks for Child Protection.....	22
Ratification of relevant International Legal Instruments by MS's.....	23
The regional ratings regarding the ratification of other notable Conventions are as follows.....	24
Domestic Laws promote child rights and ensure equal access to justice for all.....	25
Child Rights Enforcement Mechanisms are in place.....	29
Periodic Reporting on Implementation of Legal Frameworks.....	29
2.5 Strengthening of Policy and Institutional Frameworks.....	29
National Child Protection Policies and National Action Plans [NAPs] adopted.....	29
2.6 International and Regional Cooperation.....	37
2.7 Partnership, Networking, and Collaboration, and Child and Youth Participation.....	38
2.8 Human Resources and Capacity Building.....	41
2.9 Service Delivery to Children.....	44
2.10 Information Management Systems.....	45
2.11 Resource Mobilization, Allocation and Accountability.....	47
2.12 Communication and Social Mobilization.....	48
2.13 Regional Responsibilities.....	49

PART 3: IMPACT LEVEL ASSESSMENT OF THE DELIVERY OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES IN MEMBER STATES	52
3.1 Addressing Violence Against Children	53
3.2 Prevalence of Child Marriage	65
3.3 Combatting Child Labour	70
3.4 Improving levels of Birth Registration in under 5 Children	74
3.5. Services to Children on the Move	76
3.6. Budgeting for Child Protection	82
3.7. Access to Services in Education, Justice, health, Nutrition and Social Security.	83
Education:	83
Child Justice Services:	84
Child protection in emergencies:	84
3.8 Comparison of Global and Regional Child Benefits	91
PART 4: Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations	93
4.1 Findings on Good Practices Standards in child protection	93
1. Benin Republic: Addressing child labour in the agriculture and mining sector	93
2. Cote D’Ivoire: Budgeting for Child Protection	93
3. Cote D’Ivoire and Ghana: Information management systems for child protection	94
4. Nigeria: Child rights coordination/implementation mechanisms/ Structures	94
5. Togo: Integrated National Child Protection System	95
4.2 Conclusion	96
4.3 Recommendations	96
Compliance with International Legal frameworks:	97
Strengthening of Policy and Institutional Frameworks:	97
International and Regional Cooperation:	97
Partnerships, Networking and Collaborations; and Child and Youth Participation:	98
Human resources and capacity building:	98
Service delivery to children:	98
Information Management Systems:	98
Resource mobilisation, Allocation and Accountability:	98
Communication and social mobilisation:	98
REFERENCES	99

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACRWC African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

AoR Child Protection Area of Responsibility

APEVAC African Partnership to End Violence against Children

AU African Union

BRVS Birth Registration and Vital Statistics

CA Child Abuse

CBCPM's Community-based child protection mechanisms

CBOs Community Based Organizations

COM Children on the Move

CL Child Labour

CM Child Marriage

CP Child Protection

CPIE Child Protection in Emergencies

CPIMS Child Protection Information Management System

CPSS Child Protection System Strengthening

CRC United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

CSO Civil Society Organization

DHSA ECOWAS Directorate of Humanitarian and Social Affairs

ECOSOC Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

ECOWARN ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network

ECOWAS Economic Community of West African States

ECRIMS ECOWAS Child Rights Information Management System

FGM Female Genital Mutilation

FMM Free Movement of Persons & Migration

GBV Gender Based Violence

GNB Girls not Brides

GRPE/ RWGCP Regional working group for Child Protection in West Africa

IBCR International Bureau for Children's Rights

ICC International Criminal Court

ICCA Instituto Caboverdiano da Criança e do Adolescente [Cape Verde Institute for Children and adolescents]

ICMPD International Centre for Migration Policy Development

IDP Internally displaced persons

IFSW International Federation of Social Workers

ILO International Labour Organization

IOM International organization for Migrations

MOU Memorandum of Understanding

MS ECOWAS Member State

NAP National Action Plan

NAPTIP National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons in Nigeria

NHRI's National Human Rights Institutions [NHRI's] in West Africa

NGOs Non-Governmental Organizations

NSC National Steering Committee

RAP Regional Action Plan

RCPWG Regional Child Protection Working Group

TIP Trafficking in Persons

SCREAM Support to Children's Rights through Education, Arts, and the Media

SDGs Sustainable Development Goals

SF for CPSS ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Child Protection Systems Strengthening

SOM Smuggling of Migrants

SOP Standard Operating Procedures

UNHCR United Nations High Commission for Refugees

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

UWAC Union of West African Coalitions on Child Rights

VAC Violence against Children

VACS Violence against Children Survey

WA West Africa

WACSO West Africa Civil Society Organization

WACTIPSOM West Africa Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons & Smuggling of Migrants

WAN/RAO West Africa Network for the Protection of Children

WFCL Worst Forms of Child Labour

WURI West Africa Unique Identification for Regional Integration and Inclusion Program

Child Protection in West Africa Report 2023

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Child protection is a key component of the four clusters of child rights in the ECOWAS Child Policy of 2019. The others are child survival, child development and child participation. The cluster of protection rights are aimed at preventing and responding to all forms of abuse, neglect, violence, and exploitation of children. The protection rights are also designed to ensure the right to special assistance to those with disabilities, and children who are marginalised, excluded, or vulnerable.¹ This is a central theme in the Child Policy, and in 2017 ECOWAS made a significant move towards implementing a systems approach in addressing child protection across the region in a unified manner, while giving attention to five priority areas in the short term. Developed with the support of the regional working group for Child Protection [RWGCP/GRPE], the Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems to prevent and respond to Violence, Abuse and Exploitation against Children in West Africa, 2017 [Strategic Framework] and its Implementation Guidelines, was the first in a series of regional strategy documents for child protection. Others include the *ECOWAS Child Policy 2019*, the *ECOWAS Regional Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labour, and Forced Labour in West Africa 2021*, as well as the *ECOWAS Support Procedures and Standards for the Protection and Reintegration of Vulnerable Children on the Move and Young Migrants*.

Strong child protection systems are said to provide the surest safeguards against the various risks and vulnerabilities that children face as well as stronger capacities for ensuring sustainable case management². The Strategic Framework defines a child protection system as, *a set of coordinated formal and informal elements working together to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and other forms of violence against children. It is the set of laws, policies, regulations, and services needed across all social sectors – especially social welfare, education, health, security, and justice – to support prevention and response to protection-related risks...*

The framework rests on 10 pillars for strengthening national child protection systems, with focussed attention on the 5 critical issues of Violence against Children – sexual (including FGM/C, physical and emotional); Child Marriage; Child Labour; Birth Registration; and Children on the Move. The summary of these commitments as captured in the Strategic Framework are reflected below, and they provide the backdrop for the current evaluation of the regional status of child protection in this report.

There were some limitations experienced in the process of generating this report. This is underscored by the limited resources, particularly the dearth of government information that can be openly accessed in the region. Also, the submission of reports from the member

¹ 2019. *Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems to prevent and respond to Violence, Abuse and Exploitation against Children in West Africa*, Page 11.

² P. 16, Ibid

states to the ECOWAS Commission, which is expected as a primary source of information, are often long overdue. In addition, there is a major gap in record keeping especially regarding the numbers of children affected and reached, and the outcomes of measures adopted by the member states. In addition, the effort to collate information at the regional level is hindered by the absence of operational child protection information management systems in the individual member states, that are designed to feed into the ECOWAS system.

It is hoped that the creation of the simplified reporting templates under the ECRIMS which have been streamlined and can be administered to relevant government offices will enhance reporting in the future and generate more robust information. We were however aided greatly, by the existing valuable and accessible information and data sources of the regional development partners, UNICEF, ILO, and the IOM, USDOL and others that we could be drawn on.

1.1 ECOWAS Child Rights Strategy Instruments

ECOWAS Child Policy

The ECOWAS Child Policy is the overarching child rights instrument, and it directly endorsed the systems approach towards child protection. The protection goal statement in Section 3 is, *that every child is protected from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation and has access to prevention and response services*. The objectives of the Child Policy are further elaborated in four key areas geared towards ensuring that:

Member State laws, policies and institutions support prevention and response actions that protect children from violence, abuse, and exploitation in line with international and regional legal frameworks. [Here, the member states have committed to³ fully implement the Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems.

International Standards are met in relation to children in detention, and this measure is used as an absolute last resort.

At least three per cent budget allocation of national budgets goes to Ministries in charge of child protection to finance prevention and response actions to violence, abuse, and exploitation of children.

Key community institutions develop increased positive attitude to social protection programmes for children.

The ECRIMS annual situation of the child report is focused in the first instance on the protection rights only. The report is structured around the 4 protection objectives in the ECOWAS Child Policy Strategic Plan, with focused attention on the results matrix of the ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems. Embedded in the report are also findings with regards to unique elements of the Regional

³ See Priority Goal 3[Child Protection], and section 3.2 of its Strategic Plan of Action of the ECOWAS Child Policy

Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour [RAP], and the Guidelines and Support Procedures for Children on the Move. These documents encapsulate the benchmarks and standards for child protection in West Africa

ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems in West Africa⁴

The expected Outcome of the Strategic Framework for Child Protection is that, by 2030, girls and boys in the ECOWAS region are better protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect.

The Framework notes that effective child protection in West Africa depends largely on the efficient delivery of the 10 Commitments into tangible actions in in the fifteen Member States of ECOWAS. The 10 Commitments seek to create a system that helps to reduce child vulnerability, build children’s resilience, and prevent and protect children from abuse, exploitation, and violence⁵. The commitments are outlined as follows:

Commitment 1: Compliance with International Legal Frameworks

The necessary legal, policy and institutional frameworks need to be in place to guarantee children’s right to protection. International and regional obligations are to be translated at national level to ensure the protection of children’s rights. Member States will continue their efforts to comply with international obligations through ratification and domestication of policies and regulations related to child protection.

Commitment 2: Strengthening of Policy, Structures, Functions & Institutional Frameworks

A clear definition of the system’s structures, as well as of the mandates, coordination mechanisms and functions of all relevant departments and institutions and actors is vital to ensuring adequate protection. A solid national legal framework can only have effect if underpinned by the necessary policies and supported by well-functioning institutions at national and local level. Therefore, the Strategic Framework aims to motivate Member States to develop the necessary child protection policies and regulations that determine the system’s structures, mandates and functions needed to prevent and respond to child protection concerns. Appropriate institutions need to be strengthened and, where necessary, created. Roles and responsibilities need to be clearly defined.

Commitment 3: International Cooperation and Identification of Stakeholders:

Multilateral agreements and joint programming at regional level will allow for more effective resolutions of child protection challenges. Specifically, those having strong transnational characteristics such as the protection of children on the move and child trafficking. Regional cooperation is also useful in addressing other relating concerns that

⁴ See pages 18-19 ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Strengthening CP Systems in West Africa

⁵ Ibid

are shared among the region, including violence against children, child marriage, child labour or birth registration.

Commitment 4: Partnership, Networking, Collaboration and Child and Youth participation:

Member States need to adopt an inclusive and coordinated approach that involves engagement with all stakeholders, formal and informal community actors and children themselves. The role of children as actors in their own protection and that of their peers is extremely important in this respect, ECOWAS and Member States must prioritise ways that guarantees the participation of children and youth in coordination and decision-making mechanisms as well as review and accountability processes. For example, the recognition of child-led groups as partners and child protection actors is key to child participation. The strengthening of children’s resilience, life skills and participation will equip them with skills to contribute to their own protection and that of their peers.

Commitment 5: Human Resources and Capacity Building

The necessary human and financial capacities to provide quality child protection services needs to be ensured as well as recognizing the value of both formal and informal systems of protection, and a workforce that understands when each is most appropriate. The current gaps in social service workforce, in terms of sufficient staffing and capacities, needs to be addressed to guarantee access to quality child protection services such as alternative care for child survivors of abuse. ECOWAS and Member States will continue their efforts to identify gaps, key competencies, and training needs, and ensure the availability of a pool of qualified Social Welfare Officers. The key competency framework for child protection social actors, developed in collaboration with experts from ECOWAS member States, will serve as a basis for the review of training curricula of social work training institutes in the region. The competency framework will also serve as a guidance tool for any agency engaged in the organisation of in-service training. Human resources can also include recognizing the role of informal community actors, as above evidence clearly shows their vital role in the child protection system.

Commitment 6: Service Delivery:

Protection of children against violence, abuse, neglect, or exploitation also calls for ensuring all children, without discrimination, have access to adequate basic social services of quality such as (but not limited to) social welfare/social protection, education, health care, birth registration, nutrition, water, and sanitation. ECOWAS and Member States will seek to build linkages with these systems to make sure they address specific needs of children. ECOWAS and Member States will build bridges between formal and informal actors in the sector ensuring that indigenous practices and solutions are acknowledged and affirmed in the continuum of care and protection. Member States will foster a “circle of care” around children which includes positive and protective attitudes, values, behaviours and traditional practices, and a caring family. To this end, actions to address harmful practices in culturally and contextually appropriate ways, and to strengthen supportive social norms and practices, should be developed.

Commitment 7: Information Management Systems

The availability of reliable and comparable data on child protection concerns, gaps and existing services is essential for Well-informed decision making and actions for strengthening child protection systems. In addition, the protection of children requires suitable tracking and referral systems, across countries. Member States will continue their efforts to improve information management systems and will collect, coordinate, and publish routine administrative data on violence, exploitation, and abuse of children, including violent deaths and injuries, by sector. Increased efforts will be made towards improving transnational data collection, sharing, and using data for decision making and budgeting. The Member States also commit to harmonize their case management digital systems with the existing global and interagency initiatives to enhance the quality of social work in their respective countries and to facilitate transnational case management between States (both intra-regional and beyond ECOWAS region).

Commitment 8: Resource Mobilization, Allocation and Accountability

Child protection related budgets, such as social work and juvenile police allocations often make up a small percentage of national budgets, thus impeding adequate service delivery. The efficient allocation of national budget for child protection will be promoted and tracked. In addition, ECOWAS and Member States will continue to seek and identify opportunities for domestic and development cooperation resource mobilization including adequately resourcing SDGs 16.2, 16.9, 8.7, 5.2 and 5.3.

Commitment 9: Communication and Social Mobilization

Social norms are an important component of child protection systems. Member States will use multiple and innovative ITC tools and resources to raise awareness about child protection concerns and promote good practices in quality service provision. Member States shall institute special calendar moments and leverage on international dates such as the Day of the African Child on June 16 or World Day for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Violence against Children (VAC) in November each year. The aim is, to mobilize both formal and informal actors and to galvanize concrete actions to strengthen the national child protection system.

Commitment 10: Regional Responsibilities, Monitoring and Evaluation

Child protection systems strengthening should be based on sound evidence, information sharing and on-going national dialogues, learning and reflection sessions. Efficient knowledge management, intentionality to invest and learn through high quality research, information gathering, and management is an important key to inform decisions related to child protection. To that end, ECOWAS will establish an electronic CPSS Accountability Tool that will serve as a transparent barometer of progress for ECOWAS Member States and as an advocacy tool for Civil Society groups. The M&E component of the Strategic Framework will help both ECOWAS and Member States to evaluate efforts on a regular basis and uphold

a regular dialogue for showcasing promising practices and highlighting gaps and inadequacies identified through the CPSS Accountability Tool.

ECOWAS Regional Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour in West Africa [RAP]

In 2021 ECOWAS adopted an integrated approach towards the eradication of Child Labour and Forced Labour which have similar underlying root causes. However, the elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour [WFCL] remains a primary objective, and due attention is given to the agricultural and mining sectors where the WFCL persists. Important consideration was also given in the RAP, to addressing the heightened risks and vulnerabilities to child labour and other protection issues in the region resulting from conflicts, internal displacements, humanitarian crisis, fragilities, and emergencies such as the global lockdown due to COVID 19 in 2020. The major commitments adopted by the member states in the RAP, include implementing social protection; access to free qualitative Universal Basic Education; Child Protection in Emergencies; social mobilisation; and fair labour and decent work standards.

ECOWAS Support Procedures and Standards for the Protection and Reintegration of Vulnerable Children on the Move and Young Migrants

The ECOWAS support procedures and standards for protecting children on the move were adopted in recognition of the rights of every child in the region to be protected and his/her welfare promoted – whoever he/she is, and wherever he/she might be. It asserts that, this must be a reality regardless of whether the child is in his/her country of origin or might have migrated to and other countries. The document identifies eight steps [Reference of Standards] to support children on the move, designed as a quick reference guide to help support front-line practice by social workers. These are, 1. Identification of the child 2. Emergency support for the child 3. Study of the personal situation of the child 4. Assessment of the family and environmental situation of the child 5. Alternatives for placement of the child outside his/her family 6. Social, educational or professional reintegration of the child 7. Monitoring of the child after the return to his/her family and/or community 8. Family and Community Support. It sets out the key issues in the different stages of action –from identification, emergency care, assessment to intervention, referral through to re-integration.

ECOWAS Roadmap on Prevention and Response to Child Marriage (2019 - 2030), and other relevant Texts

In 2019, the *ECOWAS Roadmap on Prevention and Response to Child Marriage (2019 - 2030)* was adopted by the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS Member States in response to the high prevalent rate of Child Marriage in West Africa. The roadmap envisions an ECOWAS region without child marriage, where girls and boys have equal opportunities and can reach their full potentials in all aspects of their lives. The roadmap is a programming tool that provides direction over a period of ten years to ECOWAS member

states in prioritizing, mobilizing and allocating necessary resources to prevent and respond to Child Marriage in the region. Interventions are recommended in 7 priority areas namely, 1. Establish, implement and enforce laws and policies to prevent child marriage and support victims of child marriage; 2. Inclusion and participation of children and the youth in initiatives to end child marriage; 3. Involvement and Engagement of traditional and religious leaders; 4. Social behavioural change, awareness and use of communication and media to sensitise and amplify voices; 5. Access to formal and informal education, support services and economic opportunities; 6. Access to services for victims of child marriage; 7. Coordination and monitoring of national/regional implementation and follow up.

In addition to this, ECOWAS is committed to enhancing the protective environment for children and the implementation of International human rights, Humanitarian Law (IHL), peace, order and good governance in the region through the instrumentality of the ECOWAS Humanitarian Policy of 2012; ECOWAS International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Plan of Action 2018; Ecowas Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Person (2018- 2022), ECOWAS Youth Policy and Plan of Action; ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration; ECOWAS Social Protection Framework & Operational Plan; and the Women, Peace, and Security Architecture and Operations amongst others.

1.2 West African Regional Child Demographics

Total regional Population and children’s population: There is currently an estimated population of *445, 877, 757.00 persons* living in the 15 member states of ECOWAS according to the latest UN estimates of world population⁶. The global population figure put at 7, 840, 952, 880 has 5.5% West Africans with the largest population of 229,152,217.00 in Nigeria; while Cabo Verde with an estimated number of 604,461.00 is the least populated country in the region.

Children under the age of 18 years make up *209,745,000.00* of the total population in West Africa, of whom *67,728,000.00* are under 5 years of age.

⁶ The West African population of Monday, February 26, 2024, is based on the latest United Nations estimates *World Population Prospects (2022 Revision) - United Nations population estimates and projections*; <https://worldpopulationreview.com/continents/western-africa-population>; <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/western-africa-population/>

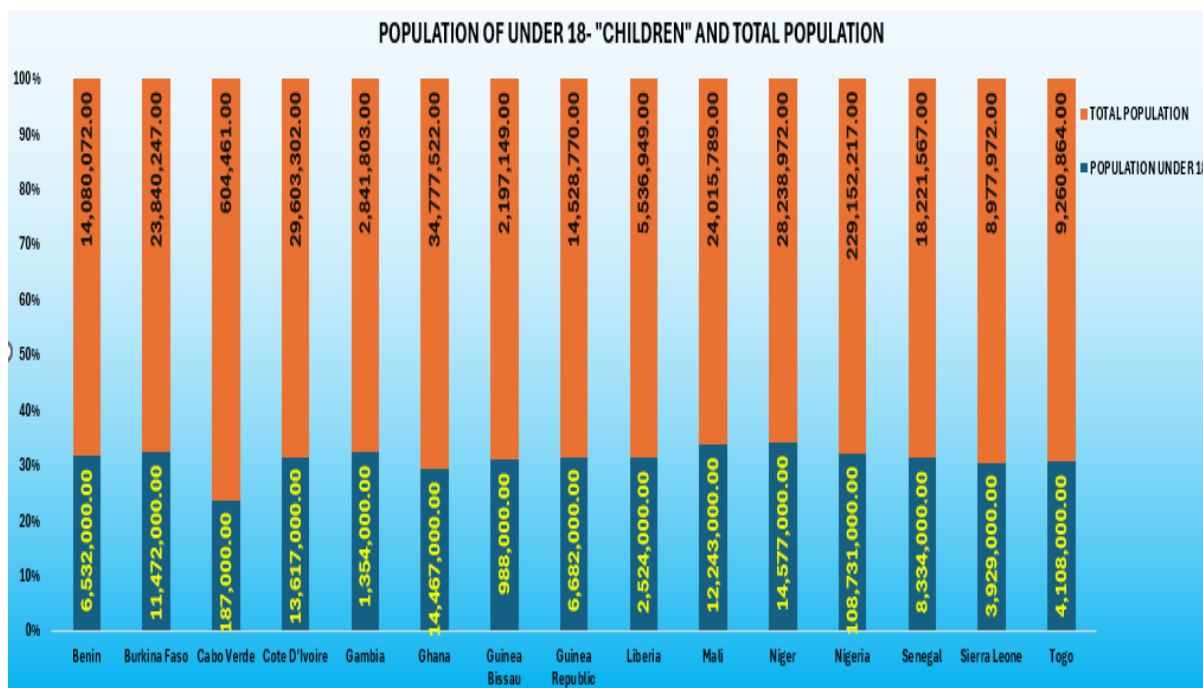


Figure 1: 2022 UN estimates of Population of Under 18 Children compared to total human population in West Africa.⁷

Child(ren) (under 18) **Population** ranges from **31%** (Cabo Verde) to **52%** (Niger). Overall % of Under 18 population for the entire region (West Africa) is 47%.



Figure 2: Percentages of Under 18 Children to the general population in West Africa.⁸

⁷ The West African population of Monday, February 26, 2024, is based on the latest United Nations estimates *World Population Prospects (2022 Revision) - United Nations population estimates and projections*; <https://worldpopulationreview.com/continents/western-africa-population>; <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/western-africa-population/>

⁸ 2022 UN estimates of West African population accessed Monday, February 26, 2024 at <https://worldpopulationreview.com/continents/western-africa-population>; <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/western-africa-population/>

PART 2: Measures Adopted by Member States in Alignment with the ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Child Protection

This section of the report applies the provisions relating to the protection clusters of rights in the ECOWAS Child Policy, and the 10 Commitments in the Strategic Framework for Child Protection, to evaluate the progress of ECOWAS Member States in Strengthening their National Child Protection Systems. A large part of the information here, is sourced from the member states reports on the level of implementation of the Strategic Framework, made by the Directors in charge of child protection in ECOWAS Member States, to ECOWAS Commission through the Child Rights Unit of the Department Human Development and Social Affairs.

2.1 In-Country Assessment of National Frameworks for Child Protection

To protect children from violence, abuse, and exploitation in the region, national laws and policies need to be aligned to international legal obligations. Therefore, the starting point for assessing the child rights situation in a member state is the conduct of a national legal review of the status of ratification and domestication of relevant legal instruments that establish international standards on child protection.

There has been no reported country-wide study in West Africa, that fully reflects the status of national laws and alignment of national policies with international legal obligations, and this needs to be addressed.

A few countries in the region have however conducted general in-country assessment of some aspects of national child rights and child protection, notably:

Cabo Verde Survey on Children and Adolescents, 2022 conducted by the Institute for Children and Adolescents and the National Statistics Institute.

Gambia conducted a Situational Analysis on Children in 2021, and the Gambia Labour Force Evaluation Survey of 2023.

Ghana's Children: From Text to Reality by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP)

Rapid Assessment of Knowledge on Child Protection in Ghana, September 2022 by MoGCSP

Needs Assessment on Children with Visual Impairments in Ghana, December 2022 by Visio International and MoGCSP

Ghana's Living Standards Survey [GLSS];

Multi-dimensional Child Poverty in Ghana Survey

Liberia's Social Service Workforce Assessment of 2021

Situation Report on Children on the Street in Liberia, 2022.

Situation Analysis of Foster Care in Liberia, 2023

Nigeria conducted a National Child Labour Survey in 2022 supported by the ILO.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted regional evidence-based mapping and assessment on the status of domestication and enforcement of all child protection laws and policies, and national action plans in Nigeria.⁹

Review of Nigerian human trafficking and forced labor legislation & policies by ILO.¹⁰

Sierra Leone's 2024 Annual Report on Child Protection [UNICEF Sierra Leone] serves as a reference for data.

Togo conducted a rapid assessment was conducted on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on homeless populations, particularly children, women, and persons with disabilities, in 2022 to inform a mitigation plan.

In 2021, an analysis of the national referral system for victims of trafficking in Togo was completed, along with a mapping of stakeholders.

In 2021, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), through its Togo office, conducted a national study on human trafficking and labor exploitation.

And in 2015, an evaluation of shelters and reception centers for vulnerable children was undertaken in Togo.

2.2 Rules of Engagement for the Security Forces in Child Protection

The ECOWAS Child Policy adopted strategies to avert the increasing grave violations of children's rights that occur in conflict situations by prohibiting the abduction, sexual abuse, and use of children by both state and non-state actors. A few countries have taken some commendable steps in this direction, but no measurable reduction or improvement has yet been recorded in the phenomenon of child soldiers, nor in the rampant abduction and sexual exploitation of children in conflict situations in the region. Although some member states have established *specialised child protection units / departments* in relevant security institutions.

⁹ <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-04/undp-africa-evidence-mapping-assessment-domestication-enforcement-law-policies-national-action-plans-EVAWG-2023-eng.pdf>

¹⁰ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_083149.pdf

In the Republic of Benin, officers attending the Police Academy receive specific training in protecting and promoting children's rights. A guide to determining the best interests of the child was developed, and 206 state professionals were trained in 2021 and 2022. Training sessions on caring for children in emergency situations were also organized.

Cape Verde has established a collaborative platform among prison officers, the police, and members of the armed forces, aimed at reinforcing knowledge of international, regional, and national human rights standards for the protection of citizens¹¹. The National Police and the Judiciary Police have been trained on child protection by the Instituto Caboverdiano da Criança e do Adolescente ICCA, [Cape Verde Institute for Children and adolescents], with special focus in 2023 on the approach to be adopted by the national, judicial, and the municipal police in protecting the rights of street children.

In Cote d'Ivoire specialized training on child rights and protection has been integrated into the basic training curriculum of police and gendarmerie schools since 2014.

Gambia has a specialized unit of the Gambian Police Force to handle issues of Children and Gender-based Violence¹² as well as an *interagency handbook* for proper networking and collaboration among child protection actors in Gambia.

Liberia established a National Commission on Small Arms by an Executive Order in 2006 and legislative Act in 2012 aims to protect children from armed conflict and provide them psychosocial support. In September 2022 the Commission publicly destroyed a total of 105,503 assorted weapons comprising 381 firearms, 105,032 rounds of ammunition and 82 explosives, including arms collected over the years under the “Organised Crime: West Africa Response to Trafficking (OCWAR-T) project”, and the AU-UN “Silencing the Guns” campaign which every September grants amnesty to gun holders to surrender illicit guns without legal or criminal consequences.

In **Mali**, progress has been recorded in the *mainstreaming of the standards of Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law, and child protection in the curricula of training institutions* of the armed forces, and other security forces. Child protection training modules have been integrated into the training programs of the Defence and Security forces, and a Soldier's Booklet containing rules of engagement with children during armed conflicts is in place. An Action Plan was also developed with armed groups in Mali to create awareness and promote negotiations and advocacy towards preventing the illegal and forceful recruitment of children in armed conflicts. And the minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces has been set at 18 years of age.

Nigeria provides training on disarmament, demobilisation and Re-integration to the armed forces, and training on the provisions of the Child Rights Act at the Police Academy. Nigeria established rules of engagement for the Nigerian Army in 2014, which aimed to align with

¹¹ Cape Verdes, *CNDHCO II National Action Plan for Human Rights and Citizenship*

¹² Gambian Children's Act 2005

international humanitarian laws, standards, protecting civilians, including children during armed conflicts.

Sierra Leone has trained Immigration Officers and other security sectors on Anti-Human Trafficking, Migration Policy, and other relevant laws for the protection of children and other vulnerable groups.

Senegal, in collaboration with the International Bureau for Children's Rights [IBCR], UNICEF and Save the Children has been committed to strengthening the capacities of the security forces in the protection of children's rights since 2010. In 2020, 23 judicial police officers were sensitised by the Ministry of Justice on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and in 2022 Senegal validated a training module on the protection of children online against abuse, harassment, and violence. Specialized training kits on child protection are being developed with the assistance of IBCR for use in the Judicial Training Centre, and the Police Training School which also trains prison administration agents.

Togo integrates child rights training into the curricula of security forces, making these modules mandatory and permanent to promote child-friendly practices.

Specific training modules have been developed for law enforcement and justice system actors, including police, gendarmes, and magistrates.

Ministerial Order No. 0235/MSPC-CAB of November 8, 2013 mandates the inclusion of a permanent and compulsory course on child rights and protection in police and gendarmerie training programs.

Since its implementation, 2,002 police officers and 2,600 gendarmes have received training on “child rights and protection.”

A reference document titled “National Guidelines for Juvenile Justice in Togo” has been developed.

Capacity-building sessions have been held for judicial police officers, magistrates, lawyers, notaries, and health professionals to support implementation of the Child Code.

In West and Central Africa, conflict continues to have a dramatic impact on the survival, well-being, and development of children. Over the past years the region has seen more conflict and adverse consequences on civilians. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated the vulnerabilities of children, due to the disruption of key social services leaving children at greater risks of violence, including **grave violations**. [UNICEF]¹³

2.3 Juvenile Justice Standards for Handling of Children in Contact with the Law

In line with the standards of the ECOWAS Child Policy, most member states have specialised juvenile justice systems. Notably, a few of them implement alternative to detention

¹³ <https://www.unicef.org/wca/protecting-children-in-west-central-africa>.

programs for children in conflict with the law. And the training of legal practitioners, security forces and child protection actors is also prioritized to enhance children's access to justice.

Some States have *distinct child justice administration systems* comprised of the Children's Court, special police units, welfare units, and other specialised agencies, but those units are yet to become operational in States such as Nigeria.

Benin Republic has established child-friendly courts and police units to ensure accessible and equitable justice for minors, whether as victims or offenders.

In Cape Verde, the legal regime protects children and adolescents in contact with the law, safeguarding their right to be heard, and to participation, while defining measures to promote child rights and protection¹⁴. In 2023, an educational play space was created at the headquarters of the National Police (PN) aimed at providing safe care for children and their families in contact with the justice system. And within the prison system, there are separate wings for children and young people aged 16-21 at national level.

Cote D'Ivoire's legal and regulatory framework has improved in line with her commitments to better manage the issue of children in contact with the judicial system. The new law on minorities involves the Judicial Protection Services for Children and Youth in collaboration with the magistrates, at the onset of all investigations, with a view to assisting minors involved in a case, whether as offenders, victims, or witnesses. Police stations are mandated to immediately refer any case concerning a minor to the Minors' Brigade, a specialized unit of the force where the officers have the necessary expertise in case management. Legal Clinics housed within the Ministry of Women, Family and Children, are key actors in the case management system at the local level supported by social workers. And with the age of criminal liability set at 13 years, minor offenders under the age of 13 are not penalized through prison sentencing, but rather subject to so-called educational measures within the Ivorian Minor Observation Centers (COM).

In the **Gambia**, the Children's Court is functional in 4 administrative areas across the country, and the Police applies an *after-arrest procedure guide*¹⁵ in handling children in conflict or contact with the law. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare in the Gambia, working in collaboration with the Prisons Department, the Police Child Welfare department, and the Children's Court, keeps detailed and up to date records of children in contact or conflict with the law. The country has also operationalized an interagency handbook for networking and collaboration between child protection actors developed by government, and a police training manual used by the police and other forces for training of new intakes. And the Ministry of Justice regularly conducts trainings for legal practitioners to enhance children's access to justice.

¹⁴ Cape Verde Law No. 19/X/2023

¹⁵ The Guide was developed by the Gambian Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare Ministry.

In **Ghana**, the Children’s Act section establishes the principle of the best interest of the child, while the Criminal Procedure Code 1960 prohibits imposition of the death penalty on juveniles aged 12-17 years; or young offenders aged 17-21 years. The maximum sentence permissible upon conviction of a juvenile (revised to 12-18 years) or young offender (revised to 18-21 years) under Section (46) (1) of the Juvenile Justice Act, for a crime that is normally punishable by death is three years sentence in a junior correctional centre. The Correctional Centre for children in conflict with the law, handles child offenders, through evidenced based therapeutic intervention programs, engaging inmates in a variety of academic and non-academic or vocational training programs for enhanced social functioning.

Liberia has a Juvenile Procedure Code was enacted in 2011 to provide procedures for the administration of justice for children. UNICEF in collaboration with the judiciary, through the JI. More than 70 child justice personnel from AFELL and other bodies have so far been trained. A Juvenile Court was established in Montserrado to hear only cases involving children. In other locations where children come into contact and/or conflict with the law magisterial courts administer child justice.

Mali operates a specialised criminal justice system for children premised on the fundamental principles of taking account of the best interest of the child in all cases involving children, and the protection and well-being of children always in the justice system. An offender under the age of 13 years is considered as a Minor who has acted without discernment and can only be tried before a special court for minors. The revised Penal Code of Mali operates on the principle of restorative justice, by enabling the joint resolution of disputes by the victim, the perpetrator, and a representative of the community, who agree on the appropriate reparation for the damage caused by the young offender, and how best to hold him/her responsible, while ensuring he/she is ultimately reintegrated into society again. Alternatives to detention options in Mali include, penal mediation, making restitution to the victim, paying compensation, written or verbal apologies, imposing work of general interest, placement in an institutional environment, or in an open environment, or in the community [family, school, or employment], and supervised release.

Nigerian law has provisions for specialised units/institutions to protect children in the justice systems, such as the Family Courts, Specialised police children’s units for handling gender cases, and the Legal Aids Council. These units are however not fully effective.

In **Senegal**, actors in the juvenile justice chain have been trained and sensitized on the need to uphold the principle of ‘the detention of children as a measure of last resort.’ Children under thirteen cannot be detained. And minors aged 13 to 18 years who are taken into custody, are immediately isolated from adult detainees in a special room by the Judicial Police Officer in the station or remand centers.¹⁶ While Dakar houses a designated detention center prison that is reserved for children, the regions maintain special prison quarters distinct from where adults are detained. Children in police custody are granted access to

¹⁶ Article 55 al 4 of the CPP

the assistance of a parent, and free legal assistance is provided if necessary. In terms of penalties, children above 13 years old who are found guilty of a contravention, a misdemeanor or a crime incur half the penalties due to an adult offender. The juvenile justice measures are monitored by the judges and the National Observatory of Places of Deprivation of Liberty (ONLPL) who make unannounced visits to prisons to ensure compliance with the rules.

Sierra Leone's Child Justice Strategy (2014 – 2018) has been reviewed to better enhance the quality of services to children in contact/conflict with the law. And in 2019, the Diversion Policy in was piloted in key Police Stations to remove children from the formal justice system into the informal child justice system and to provide alternatives to detention for children taken into custody by the law enforcement agencies.

Togo has made significant efforts to support children in conflict with the law, including:

Construction of the Child Access to Law and Justice Center (CADJE) in Cacavéli, dedicated exclusively to minors, ensuring separation from adult detainees.

All courts are equipped with juvenile judges to prevent systematic deprivation of liberty.

Emphasis on diversion and mediation to reduce juvenile detention and avoid formal judicial proceedings.

Establishment of 17 “Justice Houses” across the country to bring justice closer to citizens and reduce geographic, psychological, and financial barriers. Sixteen are currently operational and also handle child-related cases.

Development and dissemination of juvenile justice guides for children, parents, and communities, including comic books to raise awareness and promote non-stigmatization and alternative measures.

In 2021, Togo adopted a National Strategy for Child Justice to guide resource mobilization and improve the protective environment for children in contact with the law.

Children in conflict with the law, those at moral risk, or with behavioral issues are cared for at the Cacavéli Center for Orientation and Social Reintegration.

2.4 Compliance with International Legal Frameworks for Child Protection

Expected Outcome: By 2030, an effective legal framework is implemented at national and local levels in MS's.

Ratification of relevant International Legal Instruments by MS's

Information obtained from United Nations sources¹⁷ reveals the status of ratification by ECOWAS Member States of the key international treaties and protocols that are relevant to child rights and protection. These findings are reflected in the maps below.¹⁸

ECOWAS Member States score 100% in terms of ratification of some major child rights treaties and protocols. Notably,

UN Child Rights Convention,

ILO Conventions on minimum age; Worst forms of child labour and Forced Labour Convention 29.

United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Rome Convention of the International Criminal Court ICC.

Liberia is yet to accede to the United Nations Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict or the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography.



Figure 3: Status of Ratification: UNCRF; ILO WFCL, Minimum age, Forced Labour, Conventions¹⁹

¹⁷ <https://treaties.un.org>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/>; <https://opic.childrightsconnect.org/ratification>

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ <https://treaties.un.org>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/>;

The regional ratings regarding the ratification of other notable Conventions are as follows.

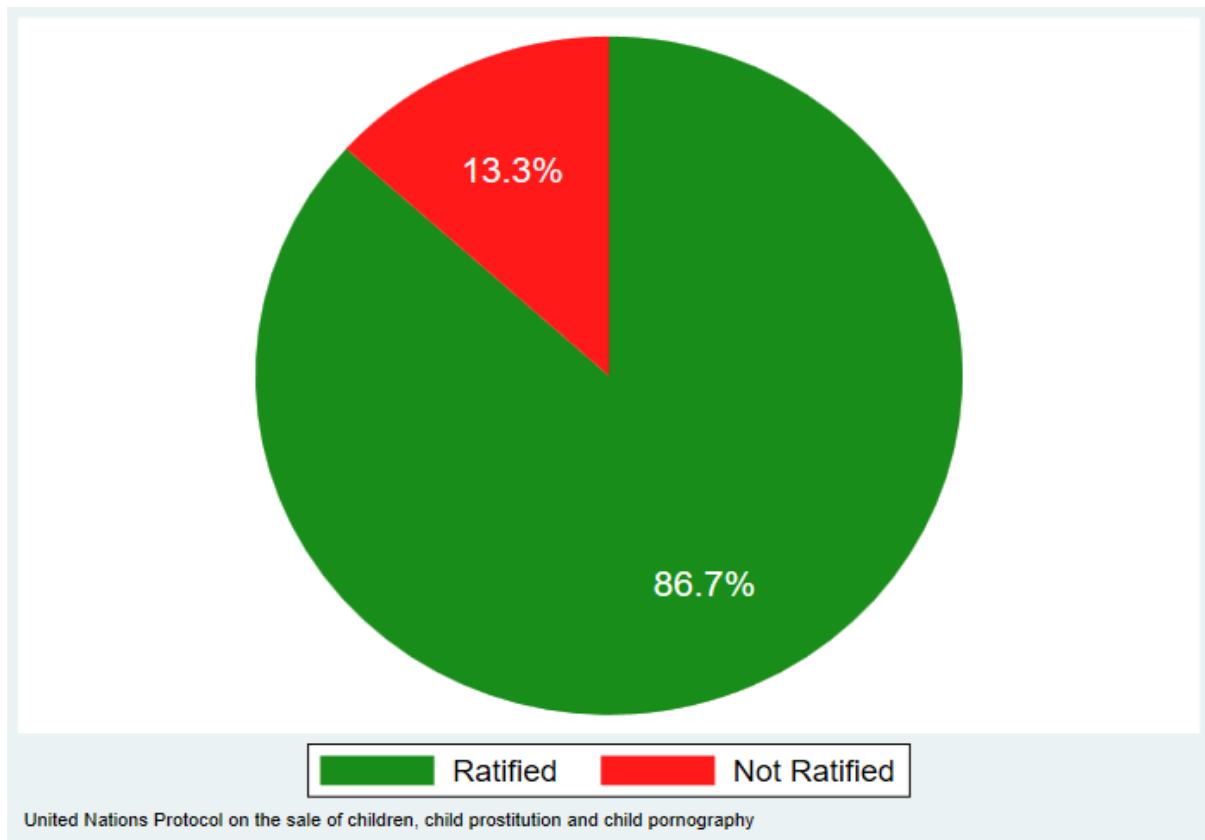


Figure 4: Ratification of CRC Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography²⁰

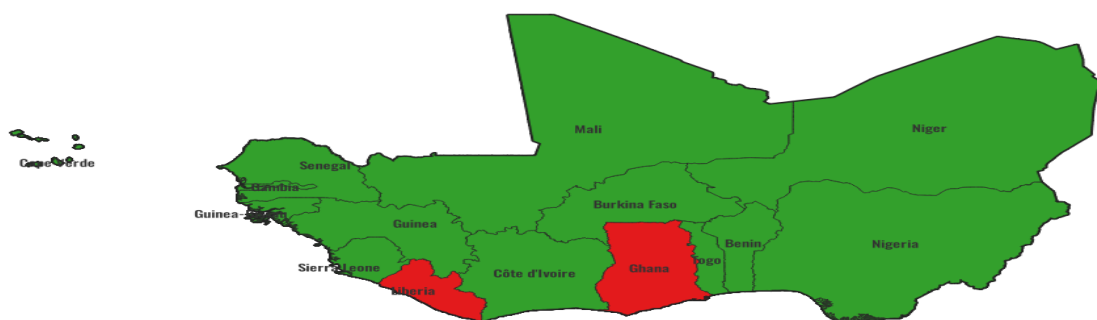


Figure 5: Ratification of CRC Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts²¹.

²⁰ <https://treaties.un.org>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/>

²¹ Ibid

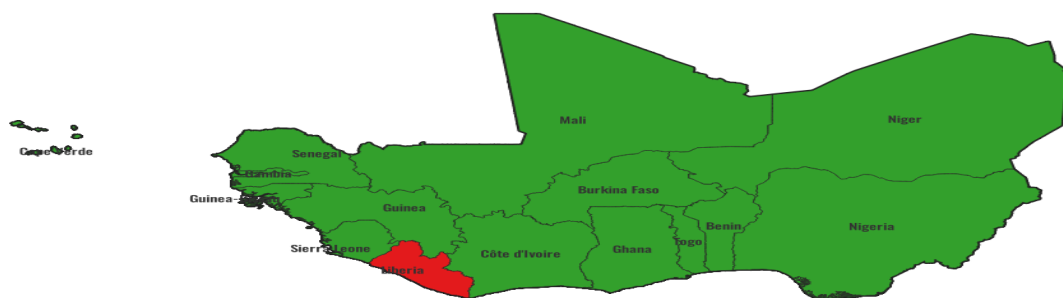


Figure 6: Ratification of UN Convention to Prevent and Suppress Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children²².

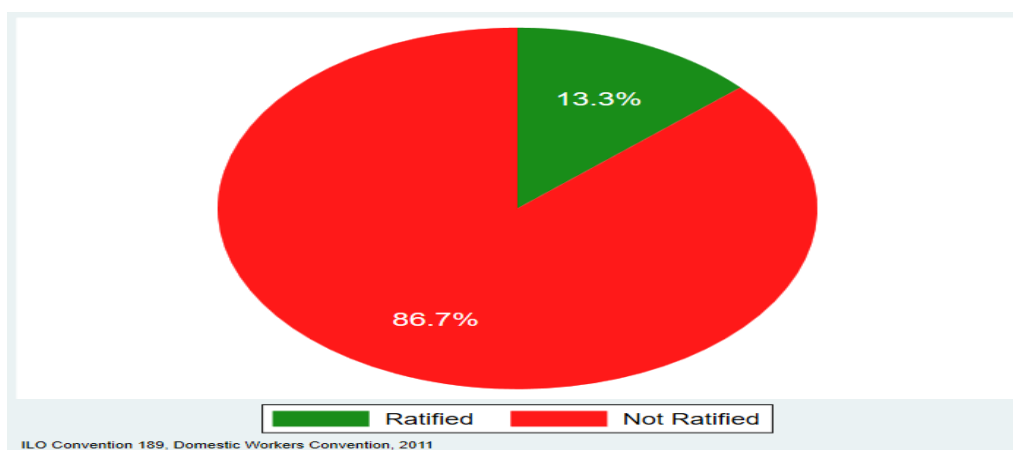


Figure 7: ILO Domestic Workers Convention 189²³.

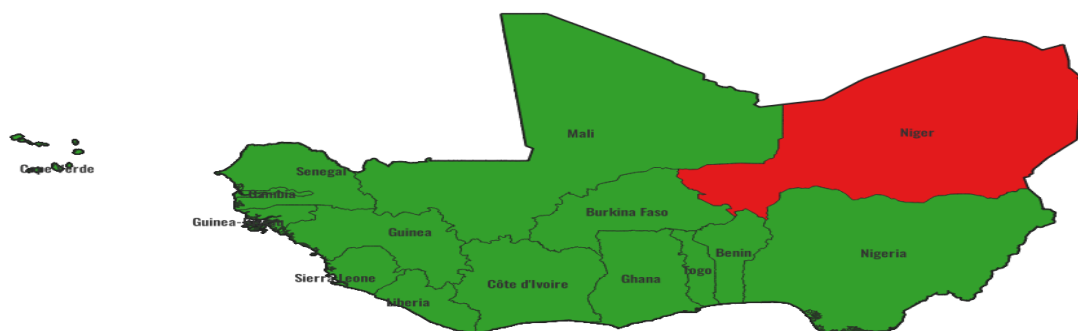


Figure 8: Ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa [Maputo Protocol] as of 2023²⁴.

Domestic Laws promote child rights and ensure equal access to justice for all.

Most countries in West Africa have domestic laws that prohibit the globally designated *grave violations of child rights*, including:

²² <https://treaties.un.org>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/>;

²³ <https://treaties.un.org>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/>;

²⁴ <https://au.int/newsevents/maputo> accessed December 2023

Commercial sexual exploitation of children,
 Compulsory recruitment of children in armed forces,
 Recruitment of children by armed groups, and
 Child trafficking.

There is however insufficient information for²⁵:

Guinea Bissau regarding the existence of laws prohibiting commercial sexual exploitation of children;

Liberia, Niger, and Sierra Leone regarding laws prohibiting compulsory recruitment of children by the armed forces; and

Ghana, Guinea Bissau, and Senegal regarding specific laws prohibiting recruitment of children by armed groups. [See below comment on Ghana]

Benin has a range of child protection measures included in the Juvenile Justice Act, Cybersecurity Act, Law prohibiting migrant trafficking and Disability Act. There is ongoing reforms in 2023 based on Law No. 2015-08 (Child Code), including specialized courts and protective measures. The Cybersecurity Act has strengthened judicial cooperation with the Court for Economic and Terrorism Offenses, leading to convictions. The Migrant Trafficking law has reinforced border controls and legal measures to combat trafficking, while the Disability Act 2017 is implemented through five decrees and ministerial orders, including the “Carte d’égalité des chances” for access to services.

Ghana’s 1992 Constitution, Article 28(1)(e) states that children and young persons shall not be subjected to exploitative labour or any work likely to be hazardous, interfere with their education, or be harmful to their health or development. While this does not explicitly mention armed recruitment, it provides the constitutional basis against it. Notably, the Armed Forces recruitment policies prohibit enlistment of anyone under 18, and the National Child Protection Policy (2015), classify child recruitment as a grave child protection violation. Also, the Children’s Act, 1998 (Act 560), Section 87(1) prohibits exploitative labour for children, including work that is hazardous or harmful to their development. Section 89(1) sets the minimum age for employment at 15 years, and 18 years for hazardous work. The recruitment or use of children in armed conflict falls under hazardous work and is therefore prohibited. In addition, the Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 694) prohibits the recruitment, transportation, or harbouring of children for exploitative purposes — which includes forced recruitment into armed groups. And the Ghanaian Criminal and Other Offences (Procedure) Act, provides for the prosecution of those who recruit or use children for any form of criminal or exploitative activity, including armed violence.

The Ghanaian Children’s Act 1998, (Act 650), classifies persons under 18 who are involved in commercial sex as victims of sex trafficking. The Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 694),

²⁵ https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2021

provides that exploitation includes induced prostitution and other forms of exploitation. And the Criminal Code, 1960 (Act 29), Section 274 prohibits prostitution as a business; while the Cyber Security Act 2020 (Act 1038), criminalizes Child online sexual abuse including viewing, distribution of Child sexual abuse materials, etc.

Liberia has a Children Law 2011, and a Domestic Violence Act 2019.

Mali has not explicitly prohibited using, procuring, or offering children for illicit activities, and the law there allows children under the age of 18 to be penalized for acts they were forced to commit as a direct result of being recruited and used by armed groups.²⁶

All the member states have established minimum age for work ranging between 12 years in Nigeria to 18 years in Gambia. They also have hazardous work lists and have set the age at 18 years.

Sierra Leone's Child Rights Act 2007, now reviewed and newly enacted in 2025, prohibits engagement of children in armed conflict in line with the International Standards.

In **Senegal**, the law specifically prohibits Female Genital Mutilation now, in *Law No. 99-05* of January 29, 1999] which amended provisions of the Penal Code that previously prosecuted FGM as assault and battery. FGM has since been classified as a distinct criminal offense. Senegal also adopted a national action plan for the abandonment of FGM, covering the period 2021–2026. The country adopted a Cybersecurity Legislation: *Law No. 2008-11* of January 25, 2008, addressing cybercrime. And Articles 1 and 3 of *Law No. 2005-06* of May 10, 2005, concerns the fight against human trafficking and related practices, as well as victim protection. Two draft bills are currently under review to distinguish between trafficking and the illegal smuggling of migrants. The 2005 law mistakenly classified migrant smuggling as trafficking, despite the absence of exploitation—a necessary condition for trafficking. The Senegalese Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure, along with *Law No. 2020-05* of January 10, 2020, criminalizes acts of rape and paedophilia.

Most countries like **Sierra Leone and Nigeria** have a national Child Rights Legislation that integrates both criminal prohibitions as well as welfare provisions²⁷, and they further enact distinct issues-based laws to protect children from child rights violations such as labour and trafficking laws²⁸. For example, they have Child Right Acts, and like most other countries have distinct Labour Laws, and Human trafficking prohibition Laws.²⁹ Table 1 below is drawn from the lists of child related national laws in the 2023 report by 9 Member States.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ In Sierra Leone, a robust Child Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2024 is expected to be tabled in Parliament.

²⁸ Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act, 2022 of Sierra Leone; and the Nigerian Trafficking in Person's Prohibition Act, 2015, and its Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (2015); as well as a Births, Deaths, and Marriages Registration Act (BDMRA) of 1992.

²⁹ Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act, 2022 of Sierra Leone; and the Nigerian Trafficking in Person's Prohibition Act, 2015.

Table 1: Child Protection Laws and Prohibitions in 10 ECOWAS Member States

Laws	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
The Children's Code/Act or Child Rights Act/Law									
Violence Against Persons/Women and Girls Law/ Domestic Violence Act									
Gender based offences and protection of women									
Prohibition of female genital mutilation Law									
Sexual Health and Reproduction Law									
Child Marriage Prohibition Law									
Labour Code prohibiting Child Labour									
Hazardous Work List									
Prohibition of child trafficking Law									
Code of Persons and Family Law/Marriage Act									
Birth/Civil Registration Law									
Compulsory Basic Education Law or Policy									
Juvenile Justice Act									
Cybersecurity Act									
Prohibition of Migrant smuggling Law									
Disability Act									
Sexual harassment and protection of victims Law									
Protection of students against sexual abuse Law									
Regulation on corporal punishment in schools									
Prohibition of sexual violence in public& private schools									
Regulation of Movement of minors									
Regulation of Entry of foreign children into MS									
Regulation on the Authorization for children in MS to leave the territory									
Code of Conduct to Protect Children from Abuse and Sexual Exploitation in Tourism and Travel									

Key:

- 1: Benin
- 2: Cape Verde
- 3: Cote d' Ivoire
- 4: Ghana
- 5: Guinea Bissau
- 6: Nigeria
- 7: Senegal
- 8: Sierra Leone
- 9: Togo

Child Rights Enforcement Mechanisms are in place.

Where the laws exist, implementation or enforcement of child protection laws is a major concern in the region. For example, some aspects of the 2003 Nigeria's Child Rights Act regarding the Family Courts and Children's detention Centres are yet to be implemented.

There is little variance amongst the ECOWAS Member States regarding the child rights enforcement mechanisms as follows:

The Police and the social welfare practitioners are the primary enforcers of the child rights law.

Anti-trafficking agencies enforce child trafficking prohibition laws.

Labour Inspectors enforce the child labour prohibition laws.

In some instances, a distinct child justice system exists with specialised units established in the Police, and Social Welfare Services alongside special Family/children's Courts to implement the child rights legal frameworks.

Periodic Reporting on Implementation of Legal Frameworks.

The Member States need to step up their reporting functions. Only 5 countries have submitted 2023 annual reports on the implementation of the ECOWAS Child Policy to the ECOWAS Commission. Reports were submitted by Cape Verde, Cote D'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, and Mali.

To foster better reporting, the reporting templates have been simplified and presented in sections for ease of administration, and referral to the relevant sources of information in the member states. The templates will also be available for regular updating on the ECRIMS dashboard all year round.

2.5 Strengthening of Policy and Institutional Frameworks

Expected Outcome: By 2030, national child protection policies are implemented, coordination systems are functional, and appropriate institutions are established to provide care and protection for children.

National Child Protection Policies and National Action Plans [NAPs] adopted.

Child Policies/Protection Policies:

Benin's National Child Protection Policy (2014–2025) is structured around seven pillars: education, social mobilization, prevention, detection, care, prosecution, and implementation mechanisms. **Burkina Faso's** 2020-2023 National Child Protection Strategy is currently due for review. **Guinea Bissau** implements a National Policy for Comprehensive Child Protection (PNPICA/GB, 2021 – 2032) with a 12-year Action Plan; while **Liberia's** National Child Welfare, Social Welfare, and Protection Policy is designed to ensure the implementation of Child Protection laws in the country. **Liberia** implements a Code of

Conduct for Teachers and Administrators, a Juvenile Procedural Code, and a hazardous work list. Liberia declared rape an emergency in 2020 with the adoption of its Anti-SGBV Roadmap (2020–2022) for prevention and response programming on ending SGBV. A National SGBV Taskforce was established, comprising of relevant ministries and agencies, local and international NGOs, relevant UN entities, and development partners. The task force meets once every month to review progress and share ideas or information on mitigating SGBV. Liberia has a revised NGP 2018-2022 which aimed to reduce and eliminate gender inequality, discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization, by addressing the needs and concerns of women, girls, men and boys. It creates opportunities for equitable distribution of resources and access to services, and establishes a clear vision to deliver services, policies, procedures and practices based on equality for women and men and girls and boys. There is also a National GBV Action Plan (2019). The country supports the Liberian National Children Representative Forum by providing consistent platforms for the voices of children to be heard at the local, county and national levels. The Liberian National Children Representative Forum was established in February 2008 to advocate, lobby, represent and speak out on issues affecting children’s rights. Article 3, Section 16.2 of the Children’s Law, protects the right of every child to express their view freely on matters of interest concerning them

In **Mali**, the PDDAFEF, *2020-2024 Ten-Year Plan for the Empowerment of Women, Children and Families* is a tool for the operationalization of Mali’s Gender Policy, National Policy for the Promotion and Protection of Children, and National Policy for the Promotion of the Family. It helps to improve consideration of the differentiated needs of women, children and families and promotes synergy between actors and coordinated responses to the holistic needs of children in need of protection. **Niger** interestingly has a National Social Protection Strategy designed to provide essential services to children. **Nigeria** adopted National Child Policy and National Child Protection Policy; and has a National Priority Agenda on Vulnerable Children, as well as National Guidelines on Alternative Care of Children. **Senegal** implements a National Strategy on Child Protection, while **Sierra Leone** adopted a Child Welfare & Alternative Care Policy, and recently the Strategic Plan of the National Commission for Children (2024-2028). Also interestingly, the country has a National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools, 2021-2026. Sierra Leone’s Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs is also implementing a Strategic Plan - 2022 - 2024.

Togo has a National Policy for Child Well-being (PNBE 2019–2030), supported by two five-year strategic plans. The policy was revised in 2023, and the goal is that by 2030, all children—without discrimination—enjoy adequate well-being in a protective environment where all stakeholders, including children themselves, actively contribute to sustainable development.

Violence against Children Policies:

Cape Verde currently implements a Violence against Children Prohibition Policy of 2022 to 2024; and a National Plan to Prevent and Combat Sexual Violence Against Children and Adolescents 2022-2024. **Guinea Bissau’s** National Policy for the Protection of Children and

Adolescents, 2021-2032 regulates all cases of violence and exploitation of children. **Nigeria** protects children from compulsory recruitment by the civilian joint task force that fights terrorists, through the National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism.

Senegal's National Child Protection Strategy 2012 underwent evaluation and technical validation in 2023. Its Policies to combat violence against children include, the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan for Community Health that also prohibits sexual violence, FGM, and child marriage. The National Action Plan for the Eradication of Gender-Based Violence [GBV] and Promotion of Human Rights [2015-2021] also supports these efforts. In addition, Senegal operates the Wallu 116 and RapidPro platforms for reporting, listening and addressing cases of violence.

Senegal's Policies/Action Plans on Child Labor, include the Project to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labor (PLPFTE), and the Framework Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labor (PCPETE) 2024–2028.

Togo implements a National Strategy to Eliminate Gender-Based Violence in Schools with its 2018-2022 Strategic Action Plan aimed at effectively addressing all forms of violence perpetrated against girls. In 2019, Togo updated its National policy for Gender Equity and Equality (PNEEG) and Strategic Implementation Plan to strengthen actions to combat gender-based inequalities. Togo has also developed a Program and Modules on Positive Parenting for parents (2024-2028) validated in March 2024, to combat violence in families.

Child Labour Policies/Action Plans:

Benin implements a 2019-2023 National Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labour, while **Burkina Faso** has a 2023 -2027 Child Labour/Forced Labour Strategic Plan in place of its extant 2019-2023 National Strategy on WFCL/FL. **Cabo Verde** has a National Action Plan for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labour. And **Cote D'Ivoire** has a National Action Plan that is due for review, to Combat Trafficking, Exploitation and Child Labor 2019-2023. **Ghana's** last reported NPA II on WFCL, is 2017-2021. **Guinea Bissau** recently adopted a National Emergency Plan to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Human Beings (2024-2028). **Liberia** has a National Action Plan on the Elimination of Child Labor, which lasts until 2030. **Mali** needs to finalise a new action plan to replace the 2018-2022 National Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons. **Nigeria** adopted a National Policy and a National Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labour, 2022-2030. **Sierra Leone** also has a 2021-2023 National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. **Togo** is currently implementing a National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 2020-2024.

Child Marriage Policies:

Child marriage is covered in most in the Member States National Child Policies or Child Protection Policies. However, **Benin** implemented the “Zero Tolerance Campaign” against child marriage (2017–2023) in seven departments, in partnership with UNICEF and civil

society. **Mali** has a costed multisectoral National Strategy to End Child Marriage. **Nigeria** has a National Strategy Document on Ending Child Marriage in Nigeria, while **Togo** is currently in the process of updating its 2015 to 2019 National Program to Combat Teenage Pregnancies and Marriages in School and Out-of-School Settings.

Birth Registration Policies:

Member states have a national policy for compulsory birth registration. The problem lies in the implementation of the policies. Some of the identified constraints to registration include ignorance of the values of birth certificate, lack of access to registration centres, and often the imposition of levies at the point of registration.

Policies for Children on the Move:

Benin's Law No. 2006-04 of April 10, 2006, regulates the movement of minors. **Mali** adopted a national referral mechanism in 2021 and developed Guidelines for Supporting the socio-economic reintegration of returning Malians. The country's "Children and Young People on Migratory Routes in North and West Africa Project," is aimed at sustainably strengthening national and regional systems of protection, education and socio-economic integration for children and young people on the move (EJM). Mali also has an established framework for consultations to ensure better coordination and synergy of actions in the field of migration. Under **Nigeria's** National Immigration Policy 2015, rescued migrant children are required to be kept in NAPTIP temporary Shelter until there are profiled and reunited with their families. Senegal's Law 2005-06 of May 10, 2005, relating to human trafficking and similar practices and the protection of victims, punishes perpetrators of mistreatment linked to the mobility of children and immigration who are prosecuted before the courts. **Sierra Leone** adopted a National Migration Policy in 2022 and has a Strategy for Addressing Children in Street Situation. **Senegal** implements a Program for the Withdrawal and Socio-economic Reintegration of Street Children.

Child Trafficking Eradication Policies:

Benin's 2020 -2024 Child Trafficking Policy expires this year. **Guinea Bissau** implements a National Plan to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Persons, and **The Gambia** has a 2021-2025 National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons, 2021- 2025 and the Trafficking In Person Act 2007 which was amended in 2010. **Mali** has adopted a National Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons. **Niger** has a National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons, 2019-2023. **Nigeria** also recently adopted a new National Action Plan on Human Trafficking, 2022-2026, under the operational supervision of the country's National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons. **Liberia** has an operational National Action Plan for Trafficking in Person, 2019-2024. **Senegal's** implements a National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, 2021-2023 which is due to be updated.

Child Protection in Emergencies [CPiE] Policies:

In **Ghana**, the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) is responsible for managing overall emergency situations in the country. However, children's protection

needs receive special attention by the *Working Group for Child Protection in Emergency* which was established in March 2023. The Working Group operates under the *National Child Protection Committee* and is in a process of developing a child in emergency framework for Ghana. **Liberia** implements a policy of documenting, reporting, and addressing the situation of children in emergencies, and records all incidents of SGBV and violence against children in those circumstances.³⁰ In **Nigeria**, there are diverse policies including the National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (2016); National Policy on Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2016); Guidelines on the Protection and Care of Children in Emergencies (2019); and the Guidelines for the Management of Unaccompanied and Separated Children in Emergencies (2014)

Togo has implemented measures to protect populations, including children, in emergency situations. Law No. 2020-007 bis of October 3, 2020, outlines conditions for implementing a state of emergency in Togo. Actions taken to support displaced children in the Savanes region affected by the Sahel security crisis, include expansion of the integrated child protection system, including the ALLO 1011 hotline, to the Savanes region to facilitate reporting and referral of child rights violations. And establishment of 23 “Child-Friendly Spaces” across eight districts in the Savanes and Kara regions. These spaces enhance community accountability through digital data collection by community health workers. Local authorities and communities use this data to improve integrated services in health, nutrition, water, hygiene, sanitation, and child protection.

Protection Policies in Agriculture, Mining and Domestic Work Sectors:

Although many working children are in household settings, only 3 ECOWAS countries have ratified ILO Convention 190 that seeks to regulate the domestic work sector. Consequently, the member states are yet to address the burning child protection issues in an informal sector that is largely unregulated. Other priority sectors are, however, receiving some form of attention, although action needs to be stepped up if the regional and global 2030 goals are to be achieved. **Ghana** has established Child Labour Free Zones in some agricultural communities and adopted relevant Protocols and Guidelines in this regard. To strengthen the capacities of out-of-school adolescents and youth, Togo is implementing a life skills training program. These modules aim to equip young people with the tools to face daily challenges effectively and constructively.

Social and Behavioural Change and Communication:

Benin implements a Strategy, a minimum Intervention Package to prevent violence, abuse, and exploitation of children. **Cabo Verde** has a National Communication Strategy for the Prevention and Combat of Sexual Violence. **Nigeria** adopted a 2020-2023 National Social Behavioral Change Communication Strategy for Elimination of Child Labor in Nigeria.

³⁰ For example, in September 2023, the MoGCSP partnered with other concerned stakeholders to provide food and non-food essential items to 600 persons [including 175 boys and 208 girls] who were affected by a flood in Kru Town, Grand Cape Mount County.

Juvenile Justice Policies:

Ghana adopted the Justice for Children Policy in 2016. **Togo's** National children's Justice Strategy (2021-2025) established a system for collecting complaints, giving detained minors the opportunity to file complaints about violence.

Education:

Benin operates Free primary education for all, and Free lower secondary education for girls and pilot free upper secondary education in 20 communes across 12 departments (2023). In 2017, **Ghana** extended the free universal basic education by adopting a Free Senior High School Policy. Ghana also implements a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Policy adopted in 2016. In 2018, **Liberia** adopted an Inclusive Education Policy to increase access to quality education for all children, including children with disabilities by eliminating environmental, attitudinal, policy, practice and resource barriers that prevent some students from attending their local school with their peers. The National Policy on Girls Education launched in 2006 and revised in 2013 guides affirmative action for the progressive reduction of gender disparities in education and training.

Policy to enforce safe travel for children with appropriate travel documents approved.

Few countries in West Africa have identifiable policy documents that are specifically targeted at protecting children on the move. **Benin** law and Policies ensure safe travel for children with proper documentation.³¹ **The Gambian** Tourism Authority has a Code of Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children. **Guinea Bissau** also has a Code of Conduct Against Sexual Exploitation in Tourism. Liberia has a standing policy at the MoJ requiring Exit Clearance for children leaving the country. Individuals traveling with children must present valid proof of relationship or legal authorization before they can do so. **Mali** implements a Child Travel Card program designed to provide proper identification of Malian children in transit and prevent child trafficking.

National Coordination Mechanisms exist for Child Protection.

A common practice in the MS's is to have issues based national coordination mechanisms for child protection and these often exists at the different levels of decentralisation. For example, in **Nigeria** the national steering committee for the elimination of child labour, now exists at the state levels and in currently being extended to the local government levels in some states.

Benin has a National Monitoring and Coordination Working Group for Child Protection; the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Technical Commission; as well as a National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor. **Burkina Faso** has a National Coordination Committee for the National Strategic Plan to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labour. While **Cabo**

³¹ Benin Law No. 2015-08 (Child Code), Law No. 98-004 (Labour Code), Law No. 2006-04 (Movement and trafficking of minors), and Decree No. 2009-694 (Entry conditions for foreign children)

Verde operates a National Committee for Child Labour Prevention and Eradication in Cabo Verde.

In **Cote D'Ivoire**, there is a National Monitoring Committee on Actions to Combat Trafficking, Exploitation and Child Labor in the country. **Gambia** has identifiable coordinating mechanisms for child labour, and on child trafficking. They are, the National Coordination Committee on Child Labor; and the National Task Force on Trafficking in Persons.

In **Guinea**, the National Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Similar Practices, essentially coordinates the government's anti-trafficking efforts. **Ghana** has a National Steering Committee on Child Labour, **Guinea Bissau** has an Inter-Ministerial Commission to Fight Child Labour, and **Liberia** has a National Commission on Child Labour.

Liberia's MoGCSP coordinates child rights policy through its CPN and has decentralized offices in the fifteen counties. The sub-offices implement issues and are headed by Gender Coordinators and Child Welfare Officers. The Gender Coordinators convene and chair monthly coordination meetings with the participation of various partners, including other government ministries, departments of the MoJ (police, prosecutors, immigration), and civil society organizations. There is also the Children Forum established in 2008 to coordinate children participation, create awareness on child rights and protection of counties. The Child Justice Section of the MoJ chairs the monthly Child Justice Working Group/Forum & Coordination Meeting.

Mali has 4 key national coordination mechanisms on child marriage, child labor and child trafficking. They are, the Committee for Monitoring and Coordinating AU Actions to end child marriage in Mali; the National Committee for Coordination and Monitoring of the National Emergency Action Plan to Combat Cross-Border Trafficking of Children; the Steering Committee for Monitoring the National Program to Combat Child Labor; and the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking and Similar Practices. **Niger** has a National Steering Committee to Combat Child and Forced Labour, as well as an Inter-ministerial committee to combat forced begging.

Nigeria has an extensive range of child rights coordination mechanism with the National and States level *Child Rights Implementation Committees* at the apex of it all. This is complimented by several other committees in different thematic areas, including the *National Technical Working Group on Ending Violence against Children*, and a *National Steering Committee for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour* that includes State Committees with further decentralisation ongoing in few States supported by the ILO/ACCEL/ACCLAWA projects at the community level. In addition, there is a *Task Force on Case Management on Children*, as well as a *Task Force on Ending Child Marriage in Nigeria*, and a *Civil Society Coalition on Ending Child Marriage in Nigeria*. Nigeria also has a *Committee on Alternative Care of Children* and another specialised mechanism that coordinates *Child Protection in Emergencies Response* in the troubled north-east region of the country.

Established in 2017, the Child Protection Area of Responsibility (AoR) is led by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development and co-led by the United Nations Children’s Fund. Its principal objective is to ensure that child protection services for children, including adolescents, and caregivers most affected by the humanitarian crisis are responsive, efficient, effective, and inclusive.

Senegal has a National Task Force against Trafficking in Persons.

Sierra Leone has established 'Child Welfare Committee' coordination mechanisms at National, Regional, and District levels respectively that bring together agencies, line Ministries, and Partners to discuss and take actions to address children issues with clear terms of reference (TOR).

Togo has a National Steering Committee to Combat Child Labour; while its National Committee for the Reception and Social Reintegration of Child Victims of Trafficking coordinates services to child trafficking survivors.

Togo: Sample of the policy and institutional framework of a national child protection system in West Africa: Programs, Structures and Challenges

Snapshot of Togo’s integrated National Child Protection System	
Programs/Structures/ Challenges	Existing Framework in Togo
1. Education and School feeding programs	School canteens serve to keep children in certain schools in rural areas.
2. Prevention Social safety net programs	Monetary transfer, Programmes d’Infrastructures à Haute Intensite de Main -d’oeuvre HIMO are implemented to vulnerable populations. Health Insurance is offered to students under the “School Assur” project
3. Victim identification, care, and Referrals	The green telephone “allo 1011,” a centralized service for the detection and referral of children in difficult situations, receives approximately 500 calls per day, approximately 25% of which are reports of violence against children. Care centers provide emergency accommodation for children in difficult situations and appropriate referral services.
Juvenile justice	A pilot network of foster families provides care for children deprived of parental care or at risk as an alternative to institutional care for children.
Institutional arrangements	The Directorate of Child Protection translates the government's policy on child protection into practice. A National Consultation Framework on the Protection of Children is constituted of the different ministries and civil society organizations involved in children's issues in Togo. National Steering Committee to combat child labor (CDN). The National Children's Advisory Council (CCNE) promotes child participation. National Child Adoption Committee. National Commission to Combat Trafficking in Persons (CNLTP).

	The National Commission for the Reception and Social Reintegration of Child Victims of Trafficking (CNARSEVT) has branches at the regional, prefectural, and local levels to protect victims of child trafficking. Specialized Child Protection Commissions at community levels.
Identified Challenges in the Togolese national child protection system	Lack of reception structures for victims (especially adults) Lack of resources for welcoming and caring for victims Insufficient numbers of support projects for social reintegration The systematic repatriation of Togolese children identified in host countries, notably Gabon and Nigeria are an obstacle to social reintegration and does not take the child's opinion into account. Unfortunately, prosecution of offenders is hindered for 3 main reasons: socio-cultural burdens hinder denunciation of child rights violations, difficulties in determining the age of the victim, and other structural and logistical obstacles such as inadequate resources for investigations and successful prosecutions of cases.

2.6 International and Regional Cooperation

Expected Outcome: By 2030, harmonised approach to implementation of relevant texts, effective cooperation, and coordination between member states, and bi- and multilateral child protection agreements are adopted and/or revised.

ECOWAS Member States have finalised and operationalised diverse Action Plans for cooperation and joint activities in law enforcement and child protection, most of which are signed by 2 or 3 neighbouring countries who share a land border. For example, the **Burkina Faso, Benin, and Togo** tripartite Cooperative Agreement to Combat Cross-Border Trafficking provides mutual assistance in the investigation of human trafficking offenses, including child trafficking.

A report, *Assessment of Transnational Cooperation Practices and Mechanisms in the Gulf of Guinea Countries in the Fight against Trafficking in Persons* commissioned by Expertise France was produced by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) in June 2021³². The report was produced within the framework of the regional Project to Support the fight against human trafficking in Gulf of Guinea countries - Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, and Togo. The assessment identified a total of twenty-one bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements for combating TIP,³³ majority of which focus on combating child trafficking and children on the move. Notably, amongst these agreements is that, 13 countries except Cape Verde and Gambia, signed a *2005 Multilateral Cooperation*

³² International Centre for Migration Policy Development Gonzagas 1 A-1010 Vienna Austria
www.icmpd.org

© 2021, International Centre for Migration Policy Development at p.39.

³³ Ibid. The table at page 39 of the report provides a snapshot overview of these agreements.

Agreement on the Fight against Child Trafficking in West Africa. And in 2017, Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania, Mali, Guinea, and Guinea Bissau [5+1 Network], signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the Anti-Trafficking Focal Points of the Six Countries. Benin, Burkina Faso and Togo signed a Cooperation Agreement to facilitate law enforcement data sharing and repatriation coordination.

2.7 Partnership, Networking, and Collaboration, and Child and Youth Participation

Expected Outcome: By 2030, community actors and CSO's are mobilised to provide adequate services to children; and coordination and synergies of child protection interventions are enhanced.

Strategic partnerships and collaborations at community, national and regional levels have been key to the advancement of child rights and protection in ECOWAS Member States. Thousands of children have benefitted from alliances involving governments, civil society organisations, private enterprises, local/international NGOs, and international development organisations in rural and urban communities.

Diverse forms of community level partnerships exist in the member states for promoting grassroots collaborations that are impactful in ensuring a protective environment for children's well-being and development. Community organizations, schools, and religious institutions collaborate across the region to promote child rights and protect children. They organize awareness campaigns, provide education, and advocate for child-friendly policies.

National and sub-regional efforts and collaborations between governments, civil society groups, and international development agencies also play a crucial role in effecting changes in legislation, policy, and practices towards strengthening the national child protection systems.

National child rights coalitions also exist in member states with the primary focus for civil society mobilisation on children's rights issues and act as a voice for children in their countries. These coalitions are networks of organisations, groups and people that share a common interest in promoting children's rights through monitoring and advocacy. They take a variety of forms in terms of membership, structure, and methods of work. There is no standard model, and these coalitions vary in their operations, but they have contributed to advancing child rights, justice, and development in west Africa.³⁴

In **Nigeria**, the *Child Protection Network [CPN]*, is a coalition of state and non-state actors including NGO's, community and professional associations and government agencies involved in child protection. It is a UNICEF initiative and exists in all the 36 states of Nigeria. CPN monitors, reports and coordinate responses to child rights violations and has led to the establishment of child rights committees in some local government areas. The participating government organs include the Ministries of Women Affairs and Social Development, Education, Labour, Health, Youth and Sports, Justice and agencies like the Police, Immigration services, the anti-trafficking agency, Human Rights Commission, and Legal Aid

³⁴ https://www.childrightsconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/CRIN-NGOCRC_WP1_en.pdf

Council. Also, the *Child Protection Area of Responsibility* in northeast Nigeria [Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States], is the coordinating forum working to ensure that children affected by humanitarian crisis receive responsive, efficient, effective, and inclusive services. The forum is led by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development and is co-led by UNICEF. Nigeria's National Child's Rights Implementation Committee established in line with section 260 of the CRA, 2003 is charged to prepare reports on the implementation of all child rights activities in Nigeria. The committee is established at the National, State and local Government levels, and their efforts are being complemented by the Child Protection Networks at all levels.

Togo in recognition of child protection as most effective when children are actively involved, established a National Children's Advisory Council (CCNE) in 2011, with regional (CCRE) and prefectural (CCPE) branches. This structure operationalizes the principle of child participation as outlined in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Articles 9, 29, 30, and beyond of Togo's Child Code. It also supports children's involvement in combating violence against them, in line with UN recommendations following the 2006 global study on violence against children.

In all the member states, existing and on-going partnerships, and collaborations between *the governments, and international development organisations* such as UNICEF, ILO, IOM, ICMPD, TDH, Save the Child, World Vision and the European Union have contributed immensely to child rights through diverse justice, health, education, and social sector programming in member states. For example, the European Union funded *Free movement and Migration Program*, the Netherlands government/ILO funded Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labour in Supply Chains in Africa [ACCEL Africa] Project; and the USDOL funded Action against Child Labour in Agriculture in West Africa [ACLAWA] projects.

These *international organisations* also create diverse partnerships to support countries and partners in developing systemic and multi-sector programs to address issues such as sexual or physical violence, school violence, child marriage, child labour and birth registration.

The EU and UNICEF are currently implementing a three-year program (2021–2024) covering *Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Nigeria*, to improve access to justice and provide child protection services for vulnerable children, including those on the move, child victims of violence, and children in conflict with the law. The program aims to prevent immigration detention and unnecessary pre- or post-trial detention of children, ensuring that children on the move receive child friendly justice. The ACCLAWA, a 4-year partnership project of USDOL, ILO and ECOWAS, 2023-2027, will provide technical assistance to ECOWAS in support of its regional plan of action to address child labor. Project work in Nigeria will support government's efforts to improve the legislative, enforcement and policy environment on child labor issues and promote local efforts to address child labor in some cocoa-producing communities. Prior to this, *the Dutch Committee for UNICEF's* 3-year project [April 2016 – March 2019] promoted the rights of children in the Cocoa Producing

Areas in Cote d'Ivoire. The project developed systemic, community-based interventions in selected cocoa growing communities, and engaged the private sector in Cote d'Ivoire, to increase awareness of holistic approaches to children's rights, and to increase action to respect and support children's rights in cocoa growing and processing.

At the regional level, there are several partnership initiatives driving the regional child rights agenda. The *Network of National Human Rights Institutions [NHRI's] in West Africa* comprises the NHRI's in all 16 West African states. It was established pursuant to the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, as a platform to ensure that they all present a common voice in protecting human rights. The *West Africa Network for the Protection of Children [WAN/RAO]* is a partnership of 16 countries, 158 CSO's, 96 grassroots community organisations, 127 security services, 40 international organisations, and 191 government social services, with 15,000 children in care³⁵. WAN is recognized by ECOWAS as a viable mechanism for the transnational protection and care of vulnerable children on the move in the ECOWAS region and Mauritania. Its vision is to "connect state and CSO child protection systems in West Africa to better identify, protect, reintegrate and monitor children/youth moving between countries in the sub-region." All ECOWAS Member States are represented within the Network and the standards developed by the WAN and validated by member states have been adopted by ECOWAS and are now the *ECOWAS Support Procedures and Standards for the Protection and Reintegration of Vulnerable Children in Mobility Situations and Young Migrants*, officially launched in November 2016.

The Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence Against Children is focused solely on Sustainable Development Goal 16.2: ending all forms of violence against children by 2030. A platform for collective, evidence-based advocacy and action, the partnership is a unique private-public coalition of over 750 organisations including governments, UN agencies, research institutions, international NGOs, foundations, local CSO's, private sector groups and faith networks, united around a single goal. Burkina Faso, Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea and Nigeria are pathfinder countries in the coalition.

Girls not Brides is a global partnership of civil society organisations committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfil their potential. It is comprised of over 1400 CSO's, 40% of whom are youth led, and 82% work in communities in 1000 countries around the world³⁶. In West Africa, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo have established national *girls not brides* partnerships or coalitions.

The *West Africa Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons & Smuggling of Migrants [WACTIPSOM]* is a coalition of CSO's across West African nations that have anti-trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants as part of their thematic areas.

The ***West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF)*** is focused on advocacy and promotion of children's rights in the region. The *Union of West African Coalitions on Child Rights (UWAC)* is a regional coalition

³⁵ <https://www.rao-wan.com/index.php/en/wan-figures>

³⁶ <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/>

of national coalitions in West Africa established in December 2010 with the support of Save the Children and Plan International. Currently UWAC has members in all the 15 member countries of the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS).

2.8 Human Resources and Capacity Building

Expected Outcome: By 2030, capacity of child protection actors is increased, and child protection is mainstreamed into the curricula of relevant training Institutes.

A robust human resource, both in quantity and the quality are important to the successful implementation of child protection laws, policies, strategies, or procedures in member states. In West Africa, child protection actors broadly comprise the social service workforce, including professional social workers as well as paraprofessionals such as NGO and CBO workers who work to prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation of vulnerable children and families. Most NGO/CBO staff and volunteers come from a variety of multi-disciplinary study backgrounds and are not necessarily professional social workers. The attempts to professionalise social work service with clearly defined roles and responsibilities based on certifications or qualifications is still a work in progress in most countries. The findings of a 2014 study³⁷ commissioned by UNICEF, on the training of the social service workforce in West and Central Africa, revealed that formal social workers' job descriptions and legal mandate are unclear in most countries in the region, and that the staffing levels are so low that social workers do not have the possibility to specialize in these contexts. This situation may not be significantly different today. On a positive note, the findings also revealed that there is general momentum for the training of the social service workforce throughout the region, with *growth in the number of training institutions* from simply a few to an increasingly large and diverse spectrum of formal training initiatives in the last decade in many countries throughout the region.³⁸

The viability of those training institutions is however dependent on the consistent and determined efforts of ECOWAS and the Member States to *identify gaps, key competencies, and training needs*, and address these to ensure the availability of a pool of qualified Social Welfare Officers. Member States should honor their commitment to apply the *key competency framework for child protection social actors* [developed in collaboration with experts from ECOWAS member States], as a basis for the review of training curricula of social work training institutes in the region. The competency framework should also serve as a guidance tool for any in-service training. The role of informal community actors should be clearly defined and recognized as vital in the child protection system.

³⁷ ³⁷ Canavera, Mark & Akesson, Bree & Landis, Debbie. (2014). Social Service Workforce Training in the West and Central Africa Region. 10.13140/2.1.3145.6008. study conducted for UNICEF by the CPC Learning Network.

³⁸ Ibid

The Ratio of social workers to the population was ranked very low indeed in a comparison of the numbers of existing social workers to the population in some ECOWAS States³⁹. It ranged from:

1 social worker to 9,976 persons in Burkina Faso
1 social worker to 13,919 persons in Benin
1 social worker to 14,067 persons in Nigeria
1 social worker to 31,542 persons in Cote D'Ivoire
1 social worker to 33,826 persons in Ghana
1 social worker to 39,005 persons in Senegal
1 social worker to 74,138 persons in Sierra Leone
1 social worker to 188,571 persons in Niger

Curriculum and training modules: The report of a study conducted for UNICEF West and Central Africa on Social Service Workforce Training in 2014 revealed the following details amongst others⁴⁰:

In **Benin Republic**, coursework on child rights and child protection modules is integrated into national police training curriculum at the Police training institution Ecole Nationale de Police (ENP). **Burkina Faso's** National Institute of Social Work Training [Institut National de Formation en Travail Social -INFTS] offers Education of Young Children for Middle Managers, Monitors Level C, and Educators Level B. While the National Institute for Training in Social Work (INFTS) – School of Senior Executives offers courses in Education of Young Children: at Inspectors (level A).

And in **Cote D'Ivoire**, coursework on child-friendly policing integrated into curriculum of the police training institution Ecole Nationale de Police (ENP). The Judicial Training Institute [JTI] in **Ghana** has training courses for judges and magistrates on child protection and child rights issues. And coursework on child rights, child protection, and child-friendly policing integrated into national police training in **Niger**.

Liberia has four universities offering social work training at degree level has quadrupled since the first Social Work degree program was established by the Mother Patern College of Health Sciences (MPCHS) in 2007 with an average of 50 students graduating each year. In 2021, MPCHS started a master program in social work with emphasis on counseling.

Nigeria has an approved National Innovation Diploma (NID) in early childhood care management, and coursework on child-friendly policing is integrated into curriculum of the Nigerian Police Force Training Institution. In **Nigeria**, Security officers are trained on the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Canavera, Mark & Akesson, Bree & Landis, Debbie. (2014). Social Service Workforce Training in the West and Central Africa Region. 10.13140/2.1.3145.6008. study conducted for UNICEF by the CPC Learning Network.

handover protocols, Child Friendly Interviewing and Gender Sensitive Care (SGBV) Awareness, Do no harm and documentation etc.

Senegal's National School of Specialised Social Workers [Ecole Nationale des Travailleurs Sociaux Spécialisés ENTSS], offers Diploma in Social Works students the option of 6 specialisations in either 1) community social work; 2) social work and business; 3) social work and family mediation; 4) social work for child rights; 5) family and community mediation; and 6) social work for the reintegration of disabled persons. The Judicial Training Center [Centre de Formation Judiciaire -CFJ] also in Senegal, runs a special program to promote the legal protection of minors for national police, military, and academic training agencies; and coursework on child-friendly policing integrated into curriculum of the Ecole Nationale de Police (ENP).

In Sierra Leone, 80 Social Workers have been trained and recruited by the Ministry of Social Welfare

Togo has institutionalized child rights training within the security forces' education programs training modules have been developed and integrated into the curricula for law enforcement, judicial authorities, and magistrates. Ministerial Order No. 0235/MSPC-CAB of November 8, 2013 mandates a permanent and compulsory course on child rights and protection for police and gendarmerie training. Since implementation, 2,002 police officers and 2,600 gendarmes have completed training on "child rights and protection." A reference document titled "National Guidelines for Juvenile Justice in Togo" has been developed to guide stakeholders.

Overall, there is still a lot to be done to improve the training curricula, this is because, they were generally perceived to be **inadequately adapted** to local realities (too theoretical training for instance); and the training materials are not regularly revised or updated.

Training of NGO workers, CBO workers, and other paraprofessional social workers have been found to be mainly conducted in short-term [3 to 5 days and only very rarely more than one week] and in an issue-focused manner.⁴¹ For example, in 2017 the UNODC supported a 4 weeks certificated training of members of the Network of CSO's on the Elimination of Trafficking in Persons and Child Labour (NACTAL) as Counsellors and Social Workers, but the focus was on the Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants.

Although ECOWAS Member States have made efforts to periodically improve the capacities of the child protection workforce both in terms of quantity and quality, there is need for increased investment in the recruitment figures and training of professionals for improved human and institutional capacity building in view of the magnitude of child protection challenges in the region.

The International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] has representation from eleven ECOWAS countries namely, Benin, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Niger,

⁴¹ Ibid.

Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. The Federation is the global voice for the social work profession, and the promotion of social work, best practice models and the facilitation of international cooperation. IFSW has 116 country members and has Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

2.9 Service Delivery to Children

Expected Outcome: By 2030, child victims of violence, abuse and exploitation have increased access to basic social services, welfare, and justice services, particularly in the 5 priority areas.

Protection of children against violence, abuse, neglect, or exploitation also calls for ensuring all children, without discrimination, have access to adequate basic social services of quality such as (but not limited to) social welfare/social protection, education, health care, birth registration, nutrition, water, and sanitation.⁴² The quality and scope of these services are relevant indicators of the government’s commitment, as well as the impact of its strategies in preventing and responding to child victims and children at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation.

The ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Child Protection seeks to measure the numbers of children accessing basic social services in areas such as education, health services, access to justice and social protection. Access to these, often influenced by a child’s social and economic circumstances, contributes to shaping the opportunities and quality of life in adulthood, and they are particularly critical for allowing the child to attain his or her full potential.⁴³

Effective child protection requires guaranteed access to social services and protection for all children in all circumstances, as a means of also addressing the causative factors of child abuse, neglect, violence, and exploitation. The linkages are well established and form a vicious circle. For example, child labour often deprives the victims of access to education, health, and recreation and is a major hinderance to child development. It perpetuates poverty and exposes the children to physical, psychological, and moral dangers.

An impact level assessment of service delivery to children is presented in the next chapter or section of this report.

⁴² ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems.

⁴³ “Dabalén, Andrew; Narayan, Ambar; Saavedra-Chanduvi, Jaime; Abras, Ana; Tiwari, Sailesh. 2015. Do African Children Have an Equal Chance? A Human Opportunity Report for Sub-Saharan Africa. Directions in Development--Poverty;. © Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/20458> License: [CC BY 3.0 IGO.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)”
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20458>

2.10 Information Management Systems

Expected Outcome: By 2030, an ECOWAS CPSS Accountability Tool, early warning systems in select communities, and reference data for the five priority issues exist and are being used for policy formulation.

The *ECOWAS CPSS Accountability tool* is in place and in use at the ECOWAS Commission. However, the ECRIMS framework provides an opportunity to further fine-tune and simplify the reporting process to enhance the level of compliance by the Member States to the reporting requirements.

Benin has launched a next-generation Integrated Data System for Family, Women, and Children, managed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance, to support planning and policy evaluation.

Cote D'Ivoire has two significant child rights-related information management systems. The G-PROTECT is an integrated data collection, storage and analysis system of the Ministry of Women, Families and Children. It is made up of the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) and the Child Protection Information System (SIPE). These different tools of this system allow the identification of an optimal reporting circuit which produces reliable data capable of guiding decision-making to reduce or even eradicate all vulnerabilities towards children. Unfortunately, the G-PROTECT information management system does not collect information regarding some notable indicators in the ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Child Protection such as on the number of children referred to basic social services (health, education, nutrition, social protection...) The ECOWAS indicators need to be integrated in the G-PROTECT system to support that country's monitoring and reporting system for the Strategic Framework.

Secondly, the SOSTECL is a Labor Observation and Monitoring system in Côte d'Ivoire, that helps identify and provide response services to children involved in hazardous work. The system collects and shares valuable information that is used to implement concrete actions towards the identified victims of child labour.

Gambia is in the process of establishing a child protection information management system.

Ghana has a web based Social Welfare Information Management System (SWIMS), developed to document and report on the provision of social welfare services (child protection, social protection and gender-based violence, [SWIMS : Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection \(mogcsp.gov.gh\)](#)). There is in addition, the Ghanaian Child Protection Social and Behaviour Change Programme Monitoring and Reporting System [LOGIN \(cptoolkit.net\)](#); as well as a *Data Gallery on Children in Ghana*.

In **Liberia**, child rights information management is fragmented, and issued based, although the country is in the process of setting up a standardized *CPIMS* supported by UNICEF. Information on children affected by Gender based violence is currently received in the

gender-based violence data base; while information on children affected by other issues such as institutional care, adoption etc. is collected in paper format by the Children's Division. The Social Registry collects information on social cash transfers to households which includes children.

In **Nigeria**, as in most other member states, there no single, comprehensive National Information Management System that is dedicated to child protection. Rather, child protection data forms part of broader systems of monitoring and evaluation in the areas of health, education, social welfare, and justice. For example, the health information systems collect data on child health, including immunization coverage, nutrition, and access to healthcare services. Birth registration data available at the National Population Commission helps establish a child's legal identity and support child protection efforts. Social welfare programs at the national and States Ministries of Women Affairs and Social Development collect data related to child protection and child welfare services; while the justice sector collects data on child protection cases, including child abuse, and other violations as well as records of the handling of children in conflict with the law.

In **Senegal**, the main institutional source of data is the National Agency for Statistics and Demography (ANSD), which completed a general census operation in 2023. Beyond that, the data is said to be fragmented, with each ministry managing its own data, which often forestalls active inter-agency collaborations in sharing data. However, the country is working towards establishing an integrated data collection system.

In **Sierra Leone**, the Government is supporting the development of data systems such as the Gender-based Violence, Information Management System + (GBVIMS+) and Child Protection Management Information System + (CPIMS+). There is plan underway to conduct a census on children in residential care. The country's challenges related to data collection and the need for disaggregated data is also being addressed through partnerships and collaborations between the MDAs and the development partners. Data on children with disabilities has been compiled in various districts of the country, as well as a census conducted by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to ascertain the numerical strength of children accessing education including those with disabilities.

Togo in a bid to enhance visibility and accessibility of its child well-being policies, has launched a dedicated website, the official site of the General Directorate for Child Protection (DGPE) available at www.dgpe.tg. The domain name has been secured, web pages are hosted and accessible, and administrative panel access codes are available for site management and updates. The website's source code is also available, ensuring full functionality and future scalability.

ECOWAS West Africa Unique Identification for Regional Integration and Inclusion [WURI] Program: a promising Tool for Accessing Services by all Children.

A World Bank financed project supporting some ECOWAS countries in the shift from regular paper identification to electronic ID's could hold the key to ensuring equitable access to

essential services for all children if implemented by all the member states. It is likely to have a massive effect regarding children on the move, children disadvantaged by lack of access to birth registration, and the consequent failure to access education, and social protection benefits, or suffer discrimination in the justice sector. The project captures a child's unique identifiers from birth and stays with him for life, and is issued at health centres. WURI has been piloted in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Togo since 2019.

2.11 Resource Mobilization, Allocation and Accountability.

Expected Outcome: By 2030, the government allocation for child protection is increased.

Increased government allocation; and Percentage of donor funding, and private sector entities funding for child protection initiatives.

It appears that there are some difficulties in assessing the level of funding for child protection in most countries as can be seen from the member states reports on funding for child protection in the next chapter. And the trend in funding for diverse field clusters of child protection is not as progressive as would be expected. For example, the level of education funding as revealed by UNESCO data, in a region where millions of children are out of school is not encouraging. Furthermore, the population receiving social security in West Africa as reflected in ILO data, is not commensurate with the level of poverty and deprivations and inequality across the region. See details in the next chapter below.

Also, the details of Humanitarian Response Plans Funding⁴⁴ published by OCHA for West and Central Africa shows that the value of unmet humanitarian response plans is on the increase as reflected in the table below. Of the total 6.6 billion dollars required for humanitarian response plan for between 2015 to 2022, 3.8 billion dollars [58%] was funded, while 2.8 billion dollars [43%] was unmet.

Table 2: Donor Funding Trend-Humanitarian Response Plan 2015-2022 [in US dollars]

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Funded %	49 %	52 %	58 %	54 %	56 %	51 %	52 %	57 %
Unmet \$	1.7bn	1.6bn	1.7bn	2.3bn	2.1bn	3.2bn	3.0bn	2.8bn
Funded \$	1.6bn	1.7bn	2.3bn	2.8bn	2.6bn	3.4bn	3.3bn	3.8bn

⁴⁴ <https://www.unocha.org>; www.reliefweb.int Financial Tracking Service (FTS). Donor funding to multilateral organisations, international and local NGO's, UN agencies, private entities etc. for humanitarian response planning.

2.12 Communication and Social Mobilization

Expected Outcome: By 2030, communication for behavioral change is improved, and society espouses norms and values supporting non-violence, respectful, nurturing and gender equitable relationships for children.

Successful implementation of government's social development policies is largely hinged on its ability to get the public buy-into the policy goals and objectives, because the belief system, societal values and acceptable conduct of any people influences the success or failure of government policy. Social mobilisation is therefore an integral part of policy implementation, and the content and manner of communication is crucial in social mobilisation.

In **all the member states**, a lot of public sensitisations against these vices are carried out in silos through NGO and civil society initiatives using diverse communication for development [C4D] tools and building relationships with existing community engagement platforms such as the religious leaders and other community gatekeepers. These approaches contributed largely to addressing the Ebola crisis in some countries, educational enrollment, increasing birth registration figures, and controlling child marriage, child labour, FGM and other harmful practices against children in communities.

Implementing a social and behavioral change communication strategy for child protection would help guide the design of all interventions, define the intended audience in each case, and the communication objectives. The messages, and activities would be well coordinated and consistent across all channels reaching multiple levels of society. But most ECOWAS States are yet to adopt national communication strategies targeting the elimination of all forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation of children.

A definitive national communication strategy for addressing child protection issues in the Member States is imperative to communicate the message that failure to protect children today can have serious consequences for national security and retard future development of the state.⁴⁵ Widespread public sensitization campaigns in the member states should happen within the scope of a well-defined national communications strategy that makes optimal use of all available media resources [including indigenous means of communication], and keeps financial expenditures within reasonable limits. The adoption and application of a *definitive national communication strategy* is essential towards creating change in societal attitudes, values and conduct towards children, and key social groups espouse norms and values supporting non-violent, respectful, nurturing and gender equitable relationships for children.

The communication strategy may be issues based, such as **Nigeria's National Communication Strategy on Ending all Forms of Gender Based Violence and Harmful Practices**

⁴⁵ ECOWAS Guidelines for Implementation of the Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems in West Africa.

against Women and Girls 2021⁴⁶, which is aimed at eliminating harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation etc. In doing so, this policy document captures the cultural views and peculiarities of all the regions, showcasing the factors that have promoted Gender Based Violence and Harmful Practices in all the Spotlight States, and then goes on to highlight effective strategies towards their eradication. **Nigeria** also recently adopted a *National Behavioral and Communications Strategy for the Elimination of Child Labour*.

2. 13 Regional Responsibilities

Expected Outcome: By 2030, the ECOWAS Child Policy and Plan of Action is implemented.

Since the adoption of the Child Policy, the ECOWAS Commission through the department of Human Development and Social Affairs has continued to actively advance the regional convergence of initiatives towards child rights. Some of its activities are noted here⁴⁷.

Table 3: Regional Responsibilities at the ECOWAS Commission

Initiative/Date	Theme
23 January 2019 ECOWAS child Policy, Plan of action and Road map towards the prevention of Child marriage, review, and validation meeting.	To review and validate the child policy. Identified child marriage as one of the five key priorities for immediate action in the Strategic Framework for Child Protection in West Africa as ECOWAS Member States have the highest prevalence rates of child marriage in Africa and second highest in the world, after South Asia.
26 th January 2019 ECOWAS Ministerial meeting – Children’s affairs Ministers	Adopted ECOWAS Child Policy and its Strategic Action Plan (2019-2023). Made a political declaration and took a common position against child marriage
Abuja, 13 October 2020 ECOWAS Regional Partners/CSOs/Non-State Actors Working Group against Gender Based Violence/Violence against Children (ECW-RPWG-GBV/VAC)	Established the Regional Partners/CSOs/Non-State Actors Working Group against Gender Based Violence/Violence against Children (ECW-RPWG-GBV/VAC).
17th November 2020 Abuja, 17th November 2020. The Directorate of Humanitarian and Social Affairs:	The two meetings deliberated on ways of minimizing the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Children in the ECOWAS region.

⁴⁶ The Nigerian National Communication Strategy on Ending all Forms of Gender Based Violence and Harmful Practices against Women and Girls, aligns with the provisions of the Child Rights Act, 2003, the VAPP Act, 2015 and others which condemn all forms of Violence Against Children, Women and Girls.

⁴⁷ <https://www.ecowas.int/>

Virtual meeting with the Regional Child Protection Partners Working Group (RCPWG) on the 16th of November; and Annual Consultation with Member States' Directors of Child on the 17th of November 2020.	
16 th -17 th August 2021 ECOWAS and Regional Working Group Against Gender Based Violence and Violence Against Children engagement meeting.	Department of Social Affairs and Gender 3rd Online Engagement with the ECOWAS Regional Partners/CSOs/NSAs Working Group Against Gender Based Violence/Violence Against Children (ECW-RPWG-GBV/VAC) with the theme: "Transforming Food Systems: Youth Innovation for Human and Planetary Health" (2021 theme for International Youth Day).
Abuja, 20-21 October 2021. ECOWAS Commission's two (2) day meeting for the Fourth (4th) Online Engagement with the ECOWAS Regional Partners/CSOs/NSAs Working Group Against Gender Based Violence/Violence Against Children (ECW-RPWG-GBV/VAC), today, Thursday, 21st October 2021.	Department of Social Affairs and Gender meeting with ECW-RPWG-GBV/VAC ECW-RPWG-GBV/VAC with the theme: "Girl force: Unscripted and Unstoppable"
03 March 2023 Abuja, Nigeria, March 2, 2023 ECOWAS 8th online engagement of the regional working group against gender-based violence and violence against children.	
07 April 2023 Ghana Stakeholders and ECOWAS meeting	Adopted A Roadmap to Institutionalise a Government and Society Wide Approach Towards Improving Protection and Human Security Within The Context Of The Covid – 19 Pandemic And Beyond In The Republic Of Ghana.
10 March 2023 ECOWAS labour minister's hybrid meeting on the regional action plan on the elimination of child labour and forced labour in west Africa.	ECOWAS labour ministers considered and adopted the ECOWAS regional action plan on the elimination of child labour and forced labour in west Africa, (2021– 2030), and approved the ECOWAS Commission's request of the extension of the implementation period of the ECOWAS Decent Work Regional Programme (EDWRP) to 2026.
17 April 2023 Cape Verdean stakeholders and ECOWAS meeting	Adopted a roadmap to institutionalise a government and society wide approach towards improving protection and human

	security within the context of the covid – 19 pandemic and beyond in the Republic of Cape Verde. As well as the establishment of an ECOWAS Integrated Protection and Human Security Coordination Mechanism (ECO-PHSICM).
16 May 2023 Lome, Togo ECOWAS Commission, in collaboration with the Government of Togo and support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) high level five-day regional training	On Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) and Disaster Recovery Framework (DRF) in Lomé, Togo. To enhance disaster recovery capacities and establish resilient recovery practices in the 15 ECOWAS Member States. To strengthen the PDNA and DRF Roster of Experts hosted by the ECOWAS Commission
Abuja, Nigeria, 01 June 2023 ECOWAS Commission Dialogue	Online Dialogue on 1 st June 2023 on Protection and Human Security issues in the region with the ECOWAS Permanent/Resident Representatives, ECOWAS National Offices and Partners. For the institutionalization of a whole of Government/State and Society approach in strengthening the protection web and guaranteeing protection and human security of the individual in the ECOWAS region
12 July 2023 Guinea-Bissau, ECOWAS, and ILO host stakeholder capacity building workshop	On international labour standards and conventions, and to promote the ratification and implementation of international labour standards by Guinea-Bissau,
12 th -13th Jul 2023 The ECOWAS Commission two 2-day Online Evaluation Meeting on implementation of the ECOWAS Child Policy with Directors Responsible for Child Protection.	Considered the validation of the draft ECOWAS Child Rights Information Systems (ECRIMS), assessment of levels of implementation of the ECOWAS Child Policy by Member States, building the capacities of Member States Directors in charge of Child Rights on implementation of the ECOWAS Child Policy and related child rights instruments and facilitation of the determination of key priorities and formulation of plans by Member States in advancing the rights of the Child in West Africa.
01 Aug, 2023. Lome (Republic of Togo)	On the Counter Trafficking in Persons Plus Approach.

ECOWAS Commission 3-day Regional Capacity Building Workshop for Law Enforcement Officials and Member States Counter Trafficking in Persons Focal Points	
ECOWAS Commission Lome (Republic of Togo) a 3-day Regional Capacity Building Workshop	For Law Enforcement Officials and Member States
30 th of November to the 1 st of December 2023. ECOWAS Directorate of Humanitarian and Social Affairs consultation with the Regional Child Protection Working Group in Dakar Senegal.	First physical meeting between ECOWAS and the Regional Working Group on Child Protection since the advent of the COVID - 19 Pandemic. For accelerating implementation of Child Protection Initiatives in the West Africa Region, and implementation of the Joint Operational Plan between ECOWAS and the Regional Working Group on Child Protection
October 10-13, 2023, in Lagos, Nigeria. ECOWAS Commission High-Level Retreat on Child Rights in West Africa	Retreat to develop an ECOWAS Inter-Sectoral Strategic Plan for the promotion and protection of child rights in the sub-region towards enhancing their safety and well-being.
23 Feb, 2024 Monrovia, Liberia. The Project Cooperation and Funding Agreement is in collaboration with the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Agriculture with implementing partner Welt Hunger Hilfe.	ECOWAS Emergency response action under its Post Disaster Humanitarian Assistance to Liberia to address malnutrition and stunting in Todee district, Liberia. Helps strengthen resilience and recovery of vulnerable children to reduce the effect of food insecurity and malnutrition; provide immediate food assistance including the distribution of fortified cereals; and create awareness and knowledge on cultural food habits and nutrition sensitive agricultural practices.

PART 3: IMPACT LEVEL ASSESSMENT OF THE DELIVERY OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES IN MEMBER STATES

An assessment of the impact on children’s lives, of child protection systems strengthening is better conducted against the background of three key questions aimed at discovering:

The prevalence rates of the key issues and occurrences of violence, abuse and exploitation of children at regional and national levels.

the availability of appropriate responses (quality of response and fitness for purpose).

The response rates (i.e. scope and coverage).

This level of assessment was not achievable in the present report, but will be possible in future ECRIMS reports, with the administration of the revised evaluation tools that are designed to elicit more and necessary information from the member states.

At the present time, the impact level evaluation in this section is presented as follows:

A review at regional and national levels, of *the most recent data for the five priority areas in the Strategic Framework*;

The *report of individual member states efforts in addressing those issues* where available, is summed up under each head after presentation of the current data;

A review of *government budgetary allocations to child protection* in member states; and

Findings on the level of implementation of cross cutting issues, namely *access to education, social security and child benefits* in the region. These issues guarantee better child protection services by addressing the structural barriers that put children at risk, and reducing childhood vulnerabilities to violence, neglect, abuse and exploitation in West Africa.

3.1 Addressing Violence Against Children

According to UNICEF, Violence, abuse, and exploitation of children are tragic aspects of childhood in **West Africa**, as most children experience violent discipline. Surveys reveal that in the region, nearly one in three teenage girls have been beaten or hit since the age of 15, and one in 10 raped or sexually abused.⁴⁸ Between 2016 and 2020, an average of 19 verified grave violations against children were reported every day in West and Central Africa. These grievous acts of violence include killing, maiming, recruitment, abduction, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access⁴⁹.

The number of children in forced recruitments in conflict situations in West Africa is put at over 21,000 children⁵⁰, and is ranked as the region with the highest numbers globally. This is in addition to the high records of abductions, sexual violence, and attacks on schools and hospitals in the region.

Physical, sexual, and psychological violence:

The African Partnership to End Violence against Children (APEVAC) attributes the alarming growth in the rates of physical, sexual, and psychological violence largely to the COVID-19

⁴⁸ ⁴⁸ <https://www.unicef.org/wca/what-we-do/child-protection> on West and Central Africa

⁴⁹ <https://www.unicef.org/wca/topics/violence-against-children>

⁵⁰ Recruited by armed forces and non-state armed groups between 2016-2021 in West and Central Africa. With high records of abductions, sexual violence, and attacks on schools and hospitals

pandemic and ongoing humanitarian emergencies⁵¹. Data published by APEVAC⁵² in 2021 also revealed disturbingly high rates of occurrence of different dimensions of VAC occurring on the continent, including physical and sexual violence, child neglect, sexual violence against children with disabilities, violence in the home, and bullying in school.⁵³

In West Africa, between 72 to 94% of children ages 1 to 14 years are reported to have experienced physical punishment and psychological aggression⁵⁴.



Figure 9: Percentage of Physical punishments/psychological aggressions - regional averages.⁵⁵

Female Genital Mutilation/cutting:

The WHO estimates in 2023, that over 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)⁵⁶ and that most are cut before the age of 15 years. And each year, more than 3 million additional girls are at risk of cutting, mainly for cultural, religious or social reasons.⁵⁷ This practice is predominant in the Middle East, Asia and 30 African countries, and is widespread across West Africa. Although it has been banned in most states, law enforcement appears to be the major challenge in most countries.

New and Emerging Trends in VAC in the Region:

The findings of a study conducted in 2020 by the African Partnership to End Violence Against Children (APEVAC), reveals some worrisome developments across the region that present

⁵¹ www.end-violence.org/articles/new-data-shows-violence-against-children-rising-across-african-continent

⁵² The data comes from three new studies published by APEVAC, which were released at a Together to #ENDviolence affiliate event on July 22, 2021. Available at <https://www.end-violence.org/articles/new-data-shows-violence-against-children-rising-across-african-continent>

⁵³ <https://www.end-violence.org/articles/new-data-shows-violence-against-children-rising-across-african-continent>

⁵⁴ <https://data.unicef.org>

⁵⁵ Data collated from UNICEF sources at <https://data.unicef.org>, as of December 2023

⁵⁶ World Health Organisation accessed at [http://www.who.int/teams/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-research-\(srh\)/areas-of-work/female-genital-mutilation/prevalence-of-female-genital-mutilation](http://www.who.int/teams/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-research-(srh)/areas-of-work/female-genital-mutilation/prevalence-of-female-genital-mutilation)

⁵⁷ Ibid

new challenges in combatting violence against children. The table below from the report illustrates new dimensions in incidences of VAC.⁵⁸

Table 4: Summary of country-specific new and emerging trends of VAC in VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN AFRICA: A Report on Progress and Challenges⁵⁹

Violence Against Children

Table 4: Summary of new and emerging trends specific to each country in CHILD VIOLENCE IN AFRICA: Progress and Challenges Report

⁵⁸ Source: A 2020 Report of the African Partnership to End Violence Against Children (APEVAC), which is hosted by African Child Policy Forum (ACPF), with key informants on the continent, including government officials, representatives of civil society organisations and child rights experts. Available at https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/2021/violence_against_children_in_africa_a_report_on_progress_and_challenges.pdf

⁵⁹ Ibid

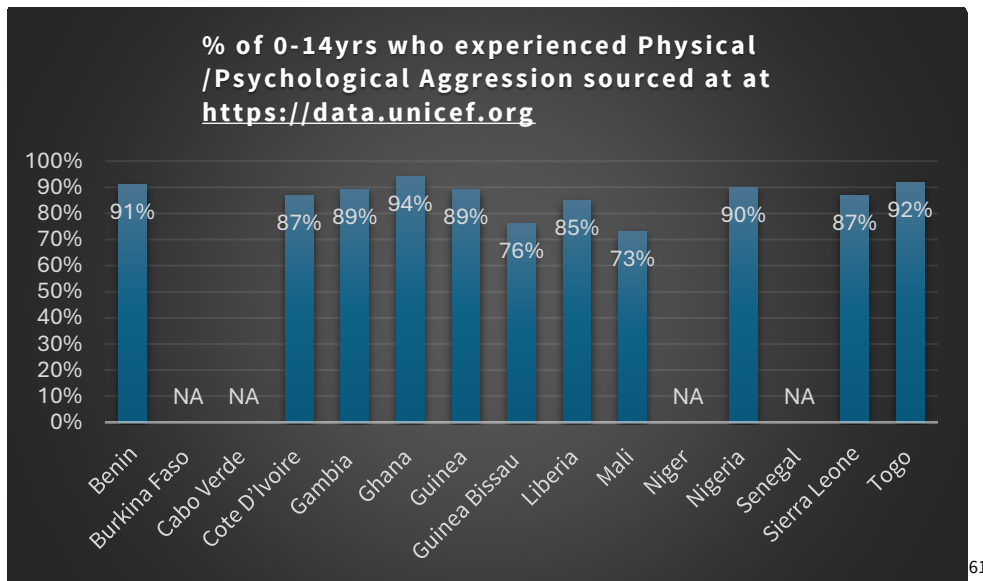
Country	New and emerging form of VAC
Cameroon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children accompanying their parents to prison • Ritual killings • Kidnappings • Maiming • Selling of unborn babies • Attacks on schools and hospitals • Online sexual violence • Economic exploitation of children
Central African Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment and use of children by armed groups • Restriction of access to humanitarian assistance • Attacks on schools and hospitals • Economic exploitation of children • Kidnappings • Forced and dangerous work
Cape Verde	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyber violence • Sexual violence
The Gambia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual abuse of boys • Sexual abuse or rape of very young girls • FGM/C of young babies • Sex tourism
Mali	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence involving religious and cultural practices • Forced recruitment into regular forces and armed groups • Kidnappings • Attacks on schools and hospitals • Forced closure of schools • Killings and maiming of children • Drug abuse
Mauritania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online sexual violence • Child pornography • Enslavement of black children • Sexual violence within family circles • Child suicide • FGM/C
Senegal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paedophilia • Pornography through social media • Violence arising from COVID-19 pandemic
Tunisia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence arising from COVID-19 pandemic • Online violence • Confinement as domestic workers

Source: Interviews with key informants.

Efforts to combat the violence against children at the regional levels, is largely dependent on the adoption and the effective implementation of joint *Action Plans for Cooperation*, and joint activities in law enforcement and child protection, amongst neighbouring countries. For example, a joint operation by the governments **of Benin, Burkina Faso, Togo, and Côte d'Ivoire**, in December 2022, resulted in the arrest of 15 suspected traffickers and the release and reintegration of 90 child trafficking survivors.

At the **national levels**, records are not available for the prevalence rates of physical punishment and psychological aggression against children in Burkina Faso, Capo Verde, and Niger; but Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo recorded alarming figures of over 90% violations⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ MICS data available at <https://data.unicef.org>



Benin Republic, citing the MICS 2022 data, recorded:

168 cases of punishment and aggression.

Parenting skills training was provided to 1126 persons.

69591 Orphans and Vulnerable Children, of which 29721 or 42.71% were supported;

685 child victims of trafficking recovered and reintegrated;

754 cases of economic exploitation of children of which 685 were rescued.

412 cases of sexual abuse or sexual harassment recorded and treated

02 cases of infanticide recorded; and

478 cases of kidnapping for various reasons and 430 were rescued.

The diverse forms of violence against children in Benin comprised of

Psychological violence 40.92%;

Sexual violence 23.05%;

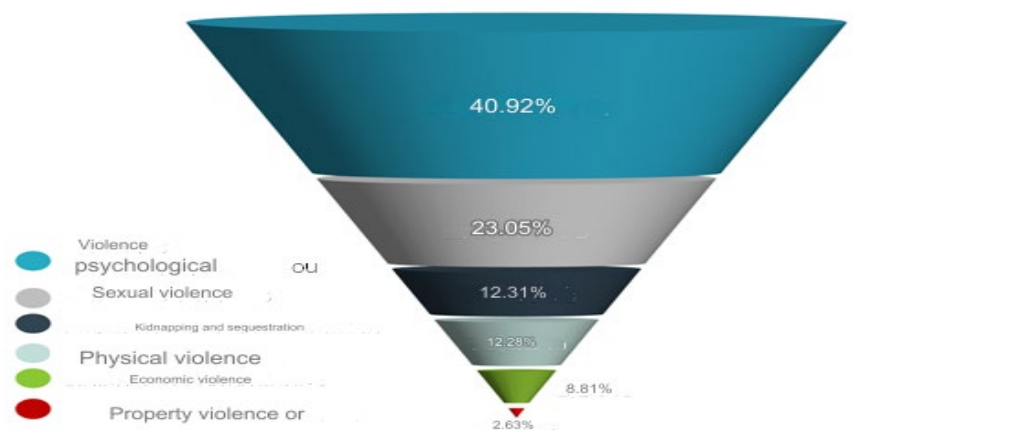
Kidnapping and sequestration 12.31%;

Physical violence 12.28%;

Economic violence 8.81%; and

Heritage or cultural violence 2.63%.

Graph 1: Distribution of types of VFE by predominant typology (Sidoffe-ng 2023 data):



Cape Verde: In 2023, a total of 194 reports of sexual violence against female children and adolescents, aged between 8 and 17 years was recorded. There was no data regarding the degree of connection with the aggressor.

Cote D’Ivoire

The distribution of forms of violence against children in Cote D’Ivoire was reported in the following proportions: victims of Physical Violence 26.71 %, victims of Sexual violence 46.58 %, and victims of psychological violence 26.71 %.

In terms of physical punishment and aggression, Cote d’Ivoire data from May 2024 reflects 20 cases in total comprising 17 cases [85%] of physical punishment and 03 cases [15%] of psychological aggression against children.

Sexual violence in Cote D’Ivoire against women and girls aged below 18 by persons other than an intimate partner, in the last 12 months, by age group and place of occurrence was reported as:

People other than an intimate partner	Sexual violence	Total	Proportion
Primary caregiver	55	1076	5,11 %
Family member (excluding caregiver)	108		10,03 %
Other member of the resident community	104		9,66 %
Neighbor	96		8,92 %
Family friend	91		8,45 %
Comrade	57		5,29 %
Other links	74		6,87 %
Unrelated	294		27,32 %
Unknown	197		18,30 %

Place of occurrence	Sexual violence	Total	Proportion	
Home of the attacker	437	1144	38,19 %	
Victim's home	172		15,03 %	
Road/Street	99		8,65 %	
Other home	94		8,21 %	
Bush/Forest	90		7,86 %	
School	30		2,62 %	
School path	44		3,84 %	
At the market	5		0,04 %	
At the field	20		1,74 %	
Hotel	40		3,49 %	
Others*	88		7,69 %	
Non applicable	25		2,18 %	

On corporal punishment or physical aggression in Cote D'Ivoire, by May 2024, there had been 20 cases recorded, comprising 17 cases [85%] of physical punishment, and 03 [15%] cases of psychological aggression. The 2018 Survey on Violence against Children (VACS 2018) recorded 19.2% of women and 11.4% of men aged 18 to 24 suffered sexual violence before the age of 18.

Gambia has established a Child Helpline 199, and the country generates child protection related data from the police, and through the case management system.

The country records 25 boys and 22 girls victims of violence who were reached by health, social work or justice/law enforcement services; and there were 13 reported cases of sexual violence were made.

The Gambian Foni crisis of 2022, affected 2,029 under 5yrs [962 Female & 1067 Male]; and 7,044 other children ages 6yrs-17yrs [1474 female & 1373 Male]. 1,583 children were also victims of the Floods in July - August 2022. In terms of response services, the country report reveals that Gender-Based Violence (GBV) response services were provided to 440 females and 468 males aged 50 years and above; 865 females and 907 males aged 36 to 50 years; and to 1189 females and 1228 males aged 18 to 35 years, during the two humanitarian crises. The country does not report on the number of children receiving GBV response services, but surprisingly, more men than women were affected by GBV in the adult categories.

Ghana's submission on incidences and responses *to violence against children* reveals:

Incidences of child abuse cases reported to Ghana's Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit

Year	2020	2021	2022
No. of cases	5,792	3,191	3,100

Source: Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit

Percentage of female genital mutilation cases addressed in Ghana

Year	2006	2011	2018
Percentage	1.4%	1.5%	0.6%

Source: MICS, 2018

Numbers of Trafficked children who were rescued in Ghana

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Male	225	185	407	511	431
Female	27	15	10	149	143
Total	252	200	417	660	574

Source: Human Trafficking Secretariat, MoGCSP

Ghana addresses violence against children through efforts in the implementation of laws and policy formulation; Inter-sectoral SOP's for use by all child protection agencies in handling cases of children; specialized training programs; community sensitizations to control harmful and abusive socio-cultural practices; Increased media campaign/publicity and strong advocacy network activities; focal units and desks in the various law enforcement agencies and Attorney General's office to handle issues of human trafficking, and increased research and documentation.

Guinea Bissau registered 1100 cases of human trafficking in the years 2023 to 2024.

Liberia implements a policy of documenting, reporting, and addressing the situation of children in emergencies, and records all incidents of SGBV and violence against children in

those circumstances.⁶² A total of 1,633 GBV cases were reported for the first three quarters of 2022, of which 1,189 were constituted of cases of sexual violence. Most cases are being reported by Health facilities, the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS) of the Liberia National Police [LNP/WACPS], and line ministries and agencies. The state has two temporary shelters that provide care and protection to children affected by neglect, exploitation, and abuse.

Liberia implements a Social Service Workforce Strengthening Strategic Plan and the National Road Map on SGBV Prevention and Response. The country has a National Child Justice Strategy and a Social and Behavioral Change Strategy to Address Violence Against Children. The demo version of the CPIMS+ for Liberia is being configured to meet the case management needs of the country. Key actors including MOH, MOJ, LNP/WACPS, CPN and MGCSP participated in the Demo Database development process. A MOU between UNICEF and MGCSP has been approval while a Terms of Use document is available for Case Management actors to sign before access granting. There is also a Drafted Road Map to Respond to the Needs of Children in Street Situation

Findings from the Social Service workforce mapping assessment (2022) with ratio being 100,000 to 3.6 Social Workers. Social Service workforce capacity strengthening plan has projected a minimum of 10 social workers per 100,000 child population.

During the SBC activities implementation period between December 2023-March 2024, there was Inter-personal (door-to-door) Social Behavior change awareness, P. A. System campaign, Radio Messages, Radio Talk stakeholder engagement meetings, and placing of posters with SBC messages in strategic public places. The Child Protection Network (CPN) in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection (MGCSP) and the Ministry of Youth and Sport (MYS) the Child Protection Network (CPN) conducted the Social Behavior Change (SBC) Campaign roll-out on between December 2023 and March 2024 with inter-personal communication out-reach activities using megaphones with prerecorded messages across the 15 counties in Liberia. The campaign started in Montserrado county within the 5 statutory districts, followed by Margibi County followed with its activities across four districts, and Grand Gedeh across 8 districts. Similar activities later scaled up to the rest of the 15 counties including Grand Cape Mount, Grand Bassa, Gbarpolu, Rivercess, River Gee, and Maryland counties respectively. Others include; Grand Kru, Sinoe, Nimba, Bomi, Bong and Lofa.

A total of **49,003** (Female - 29,517 Male - 19,486) were reached through the inter-penal communication awareness activities. 27 community radio stations played SCB prepared radio messages 4 times a day for 3 months each across the country, 560 (F-17 M-31) stakeholders were engaged through **258** stakeholder engagement meetings across the 15

⁶² For example, in September 2023, the MoGCSP partnered with other concerned stakeholders to provide food and non-food essential items to 600 persons [including 175 boys and 208 girls] who were affected by a flood in kru Town, Grand Cape Mount County.

Counties, and approximately 150,000 people were reached through Radio messaging and P. A. System campaign in marketplaces and major public streets across 5 counties.

Liberia's Vulnerable Girls Program Scholarship enrolled over 100 girls in the scholarship program at the Gbalatuah Girls Mission in Gbalatuah, Bong County. Seven (7) vulnerable Liberian students are benefitting from the Rochas Foundation Scholarship Program in Imo State, Nigeria. The EU/UN Spotlight Initiative, aimed at ending all forms of violence against women, girls and children and promoting girls' sexual and reproductive health rights, was officially launched on June 18, 2019 in Tiehne, Grand Cape Mount County and ends this year in December 2023. The initiative directly benefited about 613,578 men, women, boys and girls across the five (5) Counties (Grand Cape Mount, Nimba, Montserrado, Grand Gedeh and Lofa) selected for the Spotlight Initiative; while, indirectly benefitting 1,987,701 people.

In **Liberia**, between December 2023-March 2024, Inter-personal (door-to-door) Social Behavior change awareness Campaign was implemented to a total of **49,003** (Female - 29,517 Male - 19,486). 27 community radio stations broadcast SCB messages 4 times a day for 3 months each across the country, on 560 (F-17 M-31). 258 Stakeholders engagement meetings were conducted across the 15 Counties, and approximately 150,000 people were reached through Radio messaging and P. A. System campaign in marketplaces and major public streets across 5 counties.

Nigeria's submission on the occurrences of *violence against children* is based on the findings of the 2014 National Survey on Violence against Children in Nigeria. It is rather an outdated survey which reveals that, approximately 50%, half of all females and 50% or half of all males experience physical violence with about 80% experiencing multiple incidences of violence at the time. The proportion of victims of Sexual violence in the country is 1 in 4 females and 1 in 10 males; and the proportion of victims of psychological violence is 1 in 6 females and 1 in 5 males.

In response to this, the Government of Nigeria is carrying out interventions in the following areas:

Establishment of a Technical Working Group on Ending Violence Against Children;

Launching of the National Policy Dialogue on Ending Violence against Children

Zonal sensitizations and awareness creation on ending violence against children across the states in Nigeria.

Launching of the campaigns to end Female Genital Mutilation

Declaration of Nigeria as a path finder Country on Ending Violence against children

On *situation of children in conflict* and the recruitment of children as child soldiers in Northeastern Nigeria, the country reported some grave violation of child rights Act, 2003 and international humanitarian law. Children living in the conflict zone experience all forms of violence and engage in combat with great risk of death and chronic injury. They witness, suffer, and are often forced to take part in torture and killings. There are reports of substance

abuse with the attendant consequences on their physical and mental well-being, while girls are often subjected to [gender-based violence](#). A major cause for concern is the stigmatization and rejection of rescued children by their families and societies, as the communities lack the relevant skills to deal with the challenges and trauma resulting from the conflict situation. The country reports that children are involved as actors in conflict unwillingly and in grave violation of child rights for diverse reasons through threats, abduction, coercion, and manipulation by armed groups. Children living in poverty may also be lured by the prospects of generating income for their families or to protect themselves and their communities.

In response to this dire situation of violence against children in conflict zones, the Nigerian government with support of International NGOs provides safe spaces for children, as well as provision of community social services for case management, family tracing, reunification and psychosocial support, mental health services with specialized support. Special attention is given to survivors of gender-based violence. The government deploys peace and conflict Resolution mechanisms and addresses the drivers of child recruitment in the attempt at stopping violence before they occur. To address the educational needs of school dropouts in conflict zones, the children are provided with catch up classes and vocational opportunities. The Nigerian Government and her partners target providing life skills and social interventions to parents and care givers as well as making education free to encourage enrolment, retention, and completion of children.

And to address the need for effective parenting skills to mitigate violence, Nigeria implemented a sensitization and awareness campaign on Proper Parenting, which formed the theme for the celebration of the 2023 National Children’s Day. She has carried other campaigns including the awareness campaign on the Child Rights Act, 2003.

Senegal has absolutely prohibited corporal punishment in all schools the country, by virtue of Decree 79 – 1165 of December 20, 1965, as reinforced in 2019 by the Minister of Education’s circular to that effect. And the “Strengthening Support for the Protection of Children in Education (RAP) Project, is a national framework for the detection and management of risk situations affecting students in terms of school violence.

Holistic Care Centers for girls, victims of violence have been established in Dakar and Kaolack with Belgian cooperation (Enabel) to combat all forms of sexual *violence* following on the criminalization of rape and acts of pedophilia in 2020. The Ministry of Family and Solidarity also has reporting platforms, including an online platform called “BOLEKO” which means “Report it” in Wolof and a toll-free number available 24/7. The ALLO 116 line has a support system, charge and referencing in collaboration with the Association of Jurists of Senegal (AJS).

Plans are underway in Senegal, through the implementation of the *National strategy for the eradication of FGM* (2022-2030) and its five-year action plan 2022 -2026, to among other things, ensure the establishment of a multisectoral dialogue platform and data management, the insertion of a module on FGM in the police academy, raise public

awareness in favor of eradication of FGM through the media, socio-economic empowerment of women and girls as well as capacity building of judicial and educational actors.

Sierra Leone's Child Rights Act 2007 was enacted to protect the rights of *children in armed conflicts* in Sierra Leone. the country applies her Child Justice Strategy (2014 – 2018) to provide quality services to *children in contact/conflict with the law*. And with the piloting of the Diversion Policy in key Police Stations in 2019, children in conflict with the law are not detained under the formal justice system but rather enjoy alternatives to detention under the child justice system.

Togo detailed information on her efforts to implement the child protection laws through prosecution of child rights violators, and support and rehabilitation of the victims, as reflected in the chart below:

Categories of Violence and response measures in Togo	Numbers of affected children and/or Service Beneficiaries in Togo
Child victims of violence between 2020- 2022	2,762 including 1,282 girls
Children were withdrawn from Voodoo convents between 2020- 2022, to receive education and professional training	846
Conviction of perpetrators of violence against children between 2016 and 2021	260
Prosecution and conviction of cases of sexual assault outside the family environment	02 cases of incest and 77 cases of sexual assault
Prosecution of rape, indecent assault and sexual abuse cases committed by minors against children from 2015 to 2023	17
Convictions during the assizes for rape of a minor	07
“ONE STOP CENTER” offering victims of GBV integrated health, psychological and legal care	Multifunctional centers established across country
GBV Listening and Advice Centers	26 centers established
Allô 1011” hotline established in 2018	A platform for reporting cases of violence by SMS and for promotion of the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents

Togo's *Savanes Emergency Plan* supports communities that are affected by violence and terrorist attacks in the country. Togo has also established *toll-free lines* “8284”, “8828”, “8250” and “Allo 1011” (reinforced by the information platform on sexual and reproductive health for adolescents in 2018), to promote denouncing of all forms of violence, including GBV, child marriage, early marriage and forced marriage.

Togo's *Positive Parenting Program and Modules (2024-2028)* recently validated in March 2024 is geared towards improving social norms, beliefs, and behaviors for positive parental

practices. The training modules will equip parents and guardians on child protection, and against harmful cultural practices, gender, while providing education in values and sexual health (EVSS), among others. It is hoped that when duly implemented, the program will contribute to preventing all forms of violence against children, including early marriage by empowering parents to adopt better parenting strategies, and to respect the best interests of the child and child rights.

Togo’s pilot *network of foster families* that provide care to children deprived of parental care or at risk, is a valuable alternative to institutional care for children.

3.2 Prevalence of Child Marriage

Child marriage is a violation of human rights that has devastating consequences for girls’ education, health, and well-being. But despite the global and continental efforts to stem the tide, it remains a challenge in West Africa.

Available data revealed that **West and Central African region** has the highest prevalence of child marriage globally, with an estimated 37 per cent of young women married before age 18, and 12 per cent married before age 15⁶³. Nearly 60 million child brides are resident in West and Central Africa, with the largest share in Nigeria⁶⁴. Shockingly the surveys shows that if the current trends continue, almost half of the world’s child brides in 2050 will be African⁶⁵. Surveys also reveal that this region also has a quarter of all girl victims of female genital mutilation and cutting, and the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the world.



* % of marriages where girl was married by 18

⁶³ <http://data.unicef.org/resources/Child-marriage-in-West-and-central-africa-a-statistical-overview-and-reflections-on-ending-the-practice/>

⁶⁴ <http://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/child-marriage-in-west-and-central-africa-june-2022-unicef-web.pdf>

⁶⁵ <http://www.unicef.org/wca/reports/profile-child-marriage-africa>

Figure 10: Percentage of women who reported being married before 18- regional averages, from UNICEF sources⁶⁶

In comparison to other parts of the world, West Africa has the highest recorded figures of child marriage in 2022.

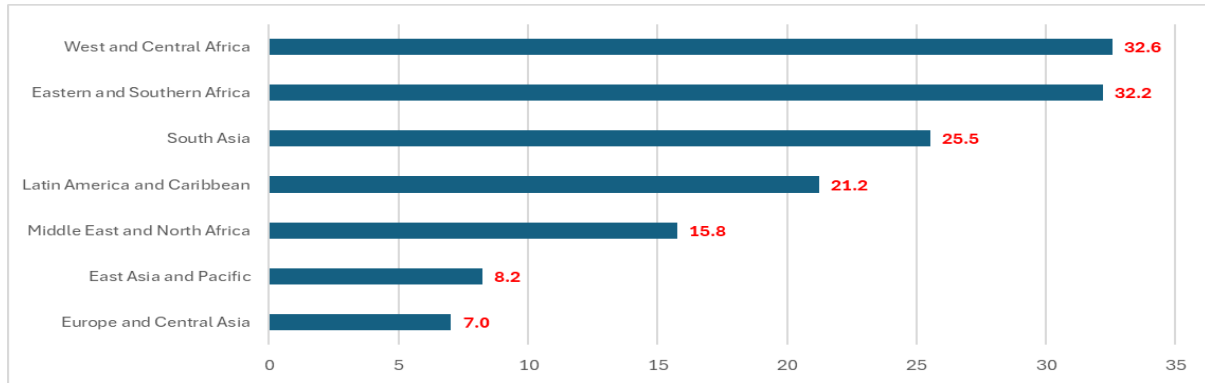


Figure 11: Regional Percentages of child marriage in the world June 2022, UNICEF⁶⁷

At national levels, the statistical overview of child marriage in West and Central Africa in 2022 revealed amongst others that, although levels of child marriage vary widely in the region, 7 of the 10 countries with the highest levels in the world are found here.⁶⁸ UNICEF estimates that **Child marriage** affects four in 10 girls aged 20–24 who were married before their 18th birthday.

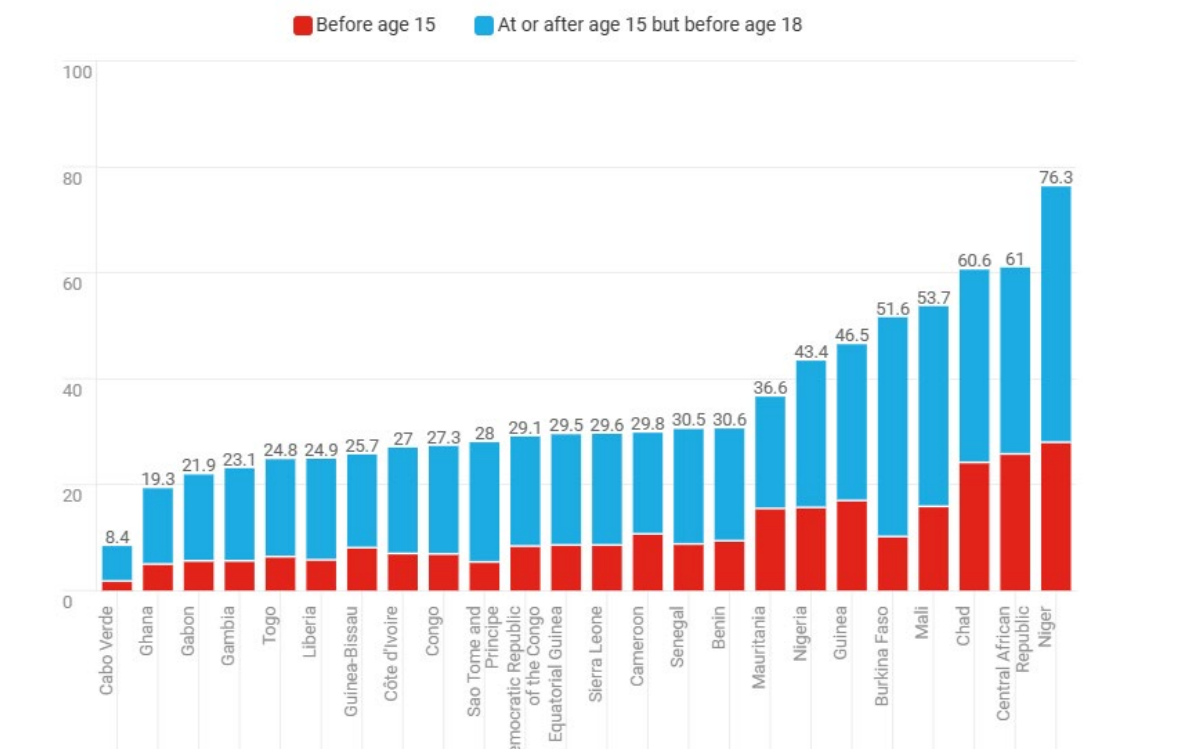
Figure 12 Percentages of persons aged 20 to 24 years, men who were married or in a union before 18 years, 2022, UNICEF⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Data derived from [child-marriage-in-west-and-central-africa-june-2022-unicef-web.pdf](#)

⁶⁷ <http://data.unicef.org/resources/Child-marriage-in-West-and-central-africa-a-statistical-overview-and-reflections-on-ending-the-practice/>

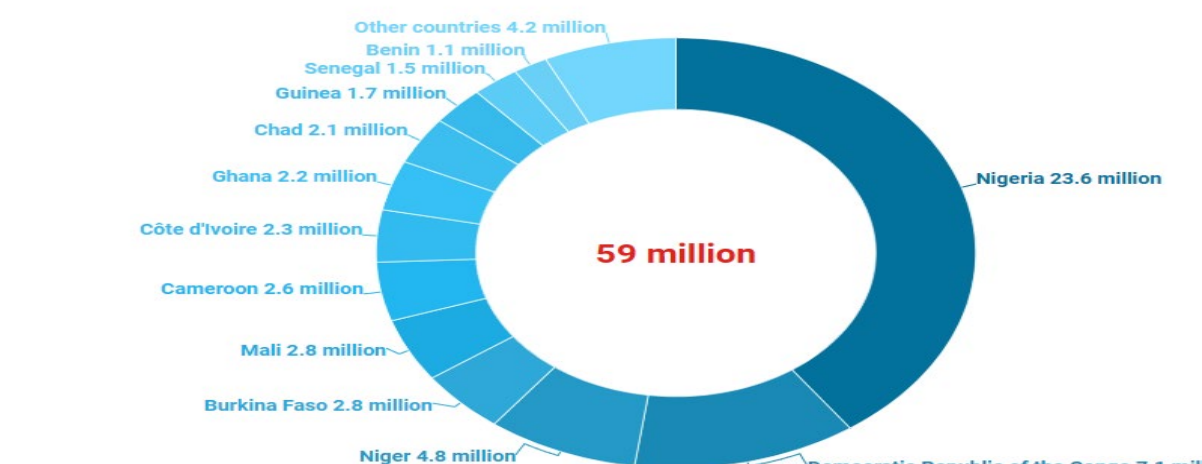
⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Ibid



The percentage of persons aged 20 to 24 years who reported that they were married or in a union before the age of 18 years ranges from 8.4% in Cabo Verde, to 76.3% in Niger. Three countries, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger recorded figures above 50%. However, the 43.4% recorded in Nigeria is also a cause for major concern in view of her large population. In real terms, about 59 million persons of all ages were married or in a union before age 18, with the highest figure of 23.6 million persons in Nigeria.

Number of girls and women of all ages who were first married or in union before age 18



Unsurprisingly, the West and Central African region is rated as being off track for reaching the SDG target of eliminating child marriage by 2030, because at the current rate, it is estimated that an additional 25 million girls in the region will become child brides in the

next decade. The pace of progress in eliminating child marriage has been so slow, that the rate of decline in the next decade is estimated at 2% from 37 to 35%; while in East and Southern Africa child marriage will possibly decline by 5%.⁷⁰

ECOWAS has a regional **Roadmap for Preventing and Responding to Child Marriage, 2021 – 2030**.⁷¹ This is a programming tool for priority actions on ending child marriage to be implemented over the ten years period. The vision is to have an ECOWAS region without child marriage, where girls and boys have equal opportunities and can reach their full potentials in all aspects of their lives. The ECOWAS approach in addressing child marriage is based on 4 broad strategies. These are, to Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks; Mobilize and Engage Communities towards social norms change; Promote increased access to education, health and other support services; Ensure Effective Coordination, Reporting, M & E and Accountability Mechanisms.⁷²

Girls Not Brides, a global partnership of over 1,400-member civil society organisations working to end child marriage in more than 100 countries around the world is visible in the region. *Girls Not Brides* member organisations in at least eight countries [Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo], have come together and are working collectively as National Partnerships or coalitions at the national and state levels, to accelerate progress to end child marriage in their countries.

Gambia launched a nationwide campaign against child marriage in 2016, resulting in the criminalization of child marriage in the Children's Amendment Act of 2016. But is yet to develop a costed National campaign against child marriage.

Ghana has reported revealed a slight drop in the rates of *child marriage* in the country as follows:

Percentages of young people aged 20-24 who married before age 18 in Ghana			
	2006	2011	2018
Women	22%	20.7%	19.3%
Men		3.5%	3.9%
Source: MICS, 2018			

The country attributes this progress to the measures adopted to address the issue of child marriage including, the development of a National Strategic Framework for the elimination of Early Marriage in Ghana; and the creation of platforms for awareness-creation,

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ ECOWAS Commission, Roadmap for Preventing and Responding to Child Marriage, 2021 – 2030.

⁷² Ibid

experience-sharing, learning, and strategizing around the elimination of child marriage. Others are the Increased public responsiveness to issues of child marriage through social communication; the Strengthening of response mechanisms through improved service delivery in shelters; and the establishment of a Monitoring and Evaluation System to measure progress; enhance learning; and improve results throughout the project.

Nigeria on the other hand, acknowledged her poor ranking as the third country globally on issues of Child marriage, but indicated that recent data suggests a decline in national prevalence from 44% to 30%, owing to the success of initiatives of government in collaboration with other stakeholders, such as:

Reviewed the National Strategy Documents on Ending Child Marriage;

Revitalised the Coalition of CSOs working to End Child Marriage in Nigeria

Established a Taskforce on Girl Child Education

Organised a high-level National Dialogue on Ending Child marriage in Nigeria.

Collaborating with the Wives of Governors as their pet project to end child marriage and promote Girl Child Education in their various States.

Annual celebration of the Nigeria's Summit to rededicate Stakeholders commitment to promoting Girl Child Education and ending Child marriage.

Senegal's *National action plan to combat child marriage* takes account of the plea for the adoption of the children's code, and the raising of the age of marriage for girls to 18 years.

Togo reports that 158,615 people including 82,713 women and 32,160 children were reached through public education campaigns on harmful practices and GBV, and that 12,854 children including 7,004 girls who were victims of said practices were supported in the country⁷³. Further details were provided on child marriage as follows:

YEAR	2018		2019		2020		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Child Marriage	40	246	11	308	10	325	940
Early pregnancies	-	114	-	48	-	84	246

⁷³ Report of a 2023 workshop reviewing actions to combat traditional practices harmful to children, including child marriage, [held as part of the celebration of 10 years of the Notsè declaration]

3.3 Combatting Child Labour

Globally according to the data jointly released by ILO and UNICEF in June 2021, an estimated 160 million children were victims of child labour in 2020, 79 million of whom are in hazardous work, 97 million are boys, and 63 million are girls.⁷⁴

Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest number of children affected by child labour, at an estimated 86.6 million, and 38.6 million of these are engaged in hazardous work in the continent. These figures are largely derived from West Africa which currently has the highest prevalence of child labour globally⁷⁵.

In West Africa, there were an estimated 86.6 million children aged 5 to 17 years, in child labour in West Africa in 2020, a rather disturbing 23% of the region's children.⁷⁶ Majority [60%] of the children engaged in child labour in Sub-Saharan Africa were aged 5-11 years⁷⁷. And more than 80% of child laborers are found in the rural areas, where they are primarily engaged in subsistence agricultural work, within the family⁷⁸.

The most recent results of 2015-2023 DHS, MICS and other national surveys collated by UNICEF⁷⁹ shows a marked increase to 26% of children engaged in child labour in West Africa, higher than the figure of 23% recorded for the worlds least developed countries.

Figure 13: Results of 2015-2023 DHS, MICS and other national surveys- UNICEF⁸⁰

⁷⁴ <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/child-labour-global-estimates-2020-trends-and-road-forward>

⁷⁵ <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-labour/> Child Labor Statistics

⁷⁶ ILO and UNICEF 2020 Global Estimates available at [Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward](https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/child-labour-reports.pdf) available at <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/child-labour-reports.pdf>

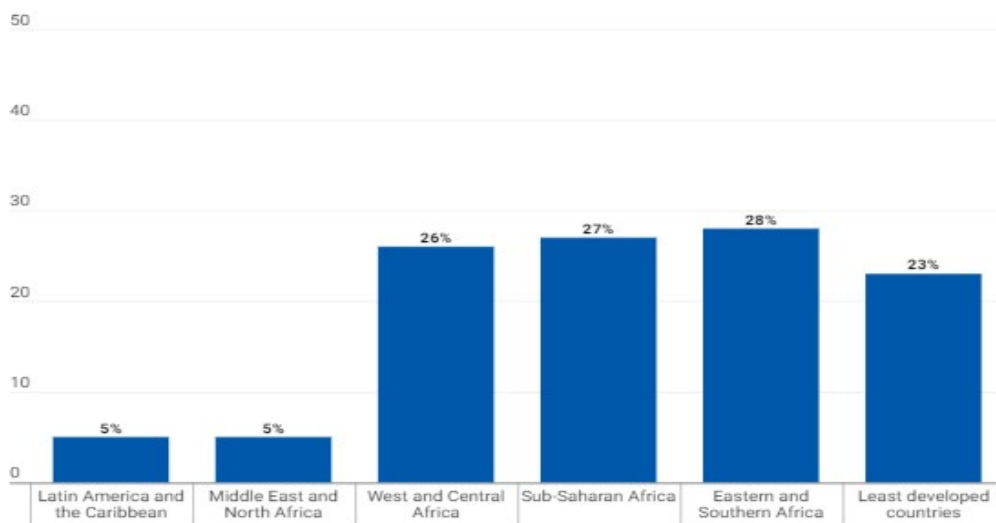
⁷⁷ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1247668/distribution-of-children-in-child-labour-in-sub-saharan-africa-by-age/>

⁷⁸ <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/action-against-child-labour-agriculture-west-africa>; [Action against Child Labor in Agriculture in West Africa](#)

⁷⁹ Source: UNICEF global databases, 2024, based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and other national surveys, 2015-2023.

⁸⁰ Source: UNICEF global databases, 2024, based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and other national surveys, 2015-2023.

Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years engaged in child labour at the moment of the survey, by region



Notes: Regional estimates represent data from countries covering at least 50 per cent of the regional population of children aged 5 to 17. Data coverage was insufficient to calculate a global estimate and regional estimates for the regions not shown.
 Source: UNICEF global databases, 2024, based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and other national surveys, 2015-2023.

Child labour is frequently associated with children being out of school. A large share of younger children in child labour are excluded from school despite falling within the age range for compulsory education. More than a quarter of children aged 5 to 11 and over a third of children aged 12 to 14 who are in child labour are out of school. This severely constrains their prospects for decent work in youth and adulthood as well as their life potential overall. Many more children in child labour struggle to balance the demands of school and child labour at the same time, which compromises their education and their right to leisure⁸¹.

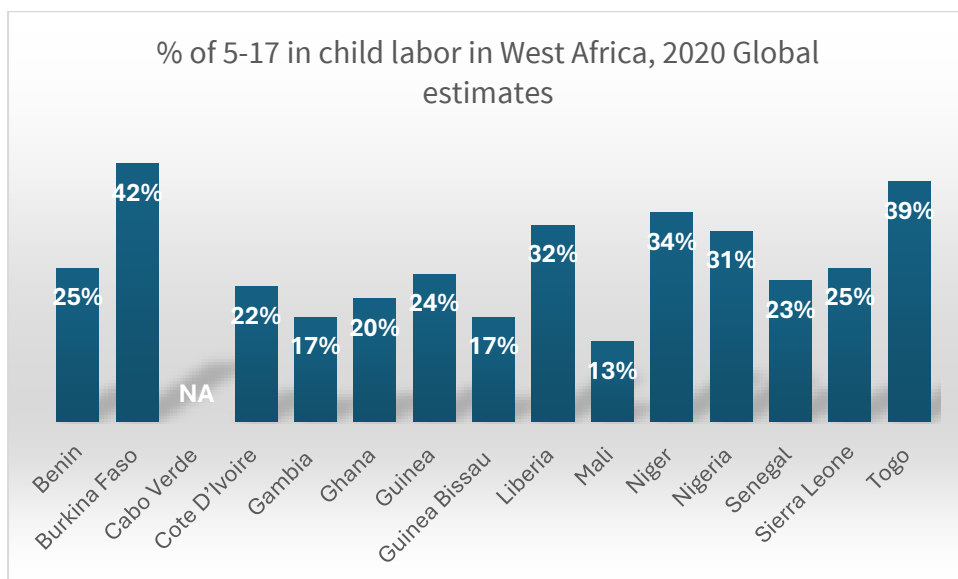
At the national levels, the percentages of children ages 5 to 17 who are engaged in child labour ranges from 13% in Mali, to 42% in Burkina Faso, and most are involved in the worst forms of child labour. Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, and Togo recorded over 30% involvement of children in child labour.⁸²

Figure 14: Percentage of children ages 5 -17 in child labour in West Africa in global estimates by 2020- ILO and UNICEF⁸³

⁸¹ Executive summary [Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward](https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/child-labour-global-estimates-2020-trends-and-road-forward), at P. 7 available at <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/child-labour-global-estimates-2020-trends-and-road-forward>

⁸² ILO and UNICEF 2020 Global Estimates available at [Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward](https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/child-labour-reports.pdf) available at <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/child-labour-reports.pdf>

⁸³ Source: UNICEF global databases, 2024, based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and other national surveys, 2015-2023 available at https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=BEN+BFA+CIV+CPV+GHA+GIN+GMB+GNB+LBR+MLI+NER+NGA+SEN+SLE+TGO.PT_CHLD_5-17_LBR_ECON-HC_T&startPeriod=2014&endPeriod=2024



Efforts by the member states to address the scourge of child labour is reflected in their reports, and summarised as follows.

Benin's, 2023 “Zero Tolerance Campaign” against child labour in high-prevalence sectors led to 6,151 people sensitized, 1,968 inspections, 11,328 children identified, 620 children withdrawn, 61 prosecutions, and 21 convictions

Gambia reported on steps adopted to strengthen the child protection system especially in the agricultural sector. The Child Labour Policy of 2023 now covers domestic workers, a sector where children are largely found in the region. Government is working to popularize child helpline, and prioritizes the training of border security personnel on case management and other migration-related interventions for children on the move. The Child Labour Unit of the Department of Labour under the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment with support from UNICEF in 2021 embarked on the following Programmes of activities to strengthen efforts geared towards the prevention and elimination of child labour:

Reactivation of the Child labour Steering Committee, Orientation

Meeting of Child Labour Unit on Child labour,

Child Labour Technical Committee Meeting-Review of the Child Labour Section in the Labour Bill,

Child Labour Inspection,

Training and Awareness Raising of police, Immigration, DLEAG, Army, and Customs on child labour,

Stakeholder Awareness Workshop on Child Labour at the National Level

Stakeholder awareness workshop on child labour across regions including Traditional Leaders, Mothers clubs, Women groups and TACs (Technical Advisory Committee), MDFTs (Multi-Disciplinary Facilitation Team) and Village development committees.

Training of Social Workers on Child Labour.

Ghana's 2021 Population and Housing Census report revealed that a total of 229,628 children aged 5-14 years (3.2%) are engaged in economic activity, a reduction in *child labour* activities from, one in every five children aged 5-17 years recorded in the 2018 MICS survey. This progress is attributed to the the implementation of a National Plan of Action Phase II towards the Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour 2017-2021, establishment of Child Labour Free Zones in Ghana and the development of Protocols and guidelines to address child labour.

Guinea Bissau registered 1100 cases of human trafficking in the years 2023 to 2024, with the coordinating entity, [i.e. the BMI], producing 104 of this data.

Nigeria cited data from the Nigerian *Child labour Survey, 2022*, showing that:

50.5% of children are in economic activities, [male (50.7%) female (50.2%)], amounting to 31,756,302 children.

39,2% of children are in child labour, [male (39.6%) female (38.8%) amounting to 24,673,485 children].

22.9% of children are in hazardous work [male (23.1%) female (22.7%)] totalling 14, 390,353 children.

In response to the child labour situation, the Nigerian National Policy on Child labour, and its National Action Plan (NAP) for the Elimination of Child Labour (2021-2025), which is aligned with the African Union and ECOWAS Regional Action Plan, reflects the Government's determination and political will to take decisive action against child labour. Furthermore, trainings organised by the International Labour Organisation in collaboration with the Nigeria Government utilises the Scream Module to *Support Children's Rights through Education, the Art, and the Media* (SCREAM) for the elimination of Child labour.

Senegal has in process, the draft text of a new article L 145 of the Labor Code for raising the *minimum age of admission to work*, which was validated by the advisory council for labor and social security, adopted by the Council of Ministers, and to be definitively adopted by the National Assembly. In addition, the Mining code⁸⁴ requires respect for human rights and prohibits child labor under penalty of withdrawal of the companies' Mining titles.

In **Togo**, 8 children were removed from their work situation in 2022, under the governance project in the informal sector, particularly in construction, extractive industries, and

⁸⁴ Law No. 2016-32 of November 8, 2016; particularly in its article 94.

commerce. Also 08 cases of *child trafficking* were reported including one (01) woman, all 08 cases were prosecuted, and 03 perpetrators were convicted.

3.4 Improving levels of Birth Registration in under 5 Children

Despite significant progress in improving civil registration and vital statistics systems, UNICEF estimates that less than half of all children under five in **West Africa** are registered at birth. An estimated 49 million under 5 children [53% of all children] in the region do not have their births registered,⁸⁵ and are thus officially invincible and deprived of protection services in many respects.

A birth certificate provides legal proof of a child’s legal identity, and of his/her legal existence in official government records. It safeguards many of the child’s civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights⁸⁶. Sadly, birth registration has not significantly increased in West Africa but rather declined in some cases, and the region has the lowest birth registration rate in the world.

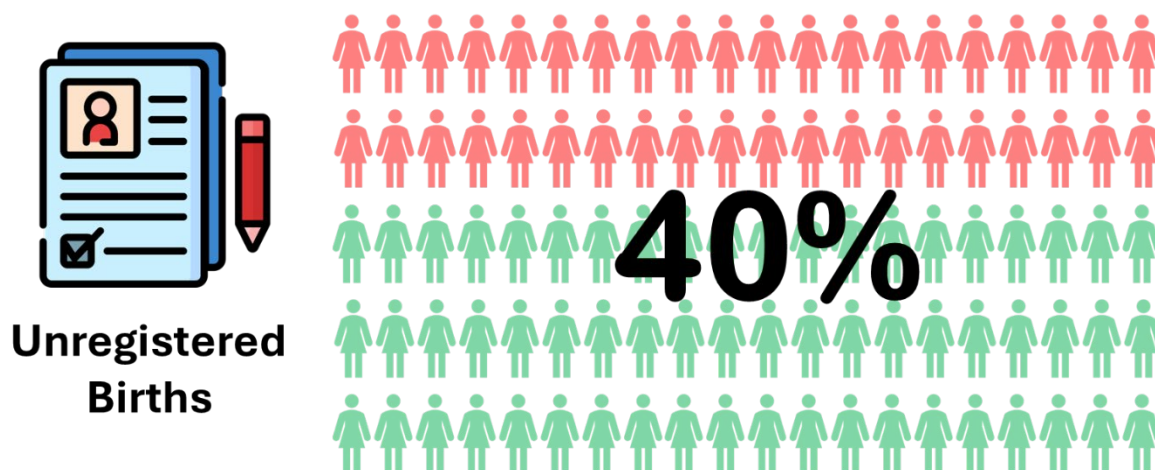


Figure 15: Percentage of unregistered births in West Africa- Regional Average, derived from UNICEF sources⁸⁷.

At the **national levels**, the gaps are glaringly in the range of 4% unregistered births in Cabo Verde, to 45% in Senegal and 84% in Niger.

Table 5: Numbers of Unregistered Births in ECOWAS Member States⁸⁸

⁸⁵ https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Africa-Birth-Registration-Brochure-Oct-2022_Final-LR.pdf

⁸⁶ <https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-statistical-profile-of-birth-registration-in-africa/>

⁸⁷ Source: https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Africa-Birth-Registration-Brochure-Oct-2022_Final-LR.pdf

⁸⁸ https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Africa-Birth-Registration-Brochure-Oct-2022_Final-LR.pdf

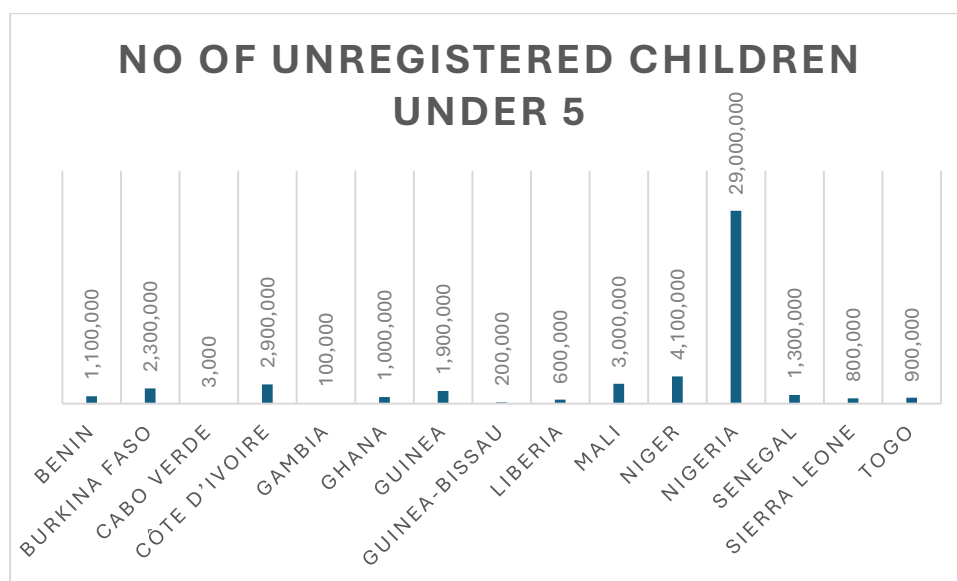
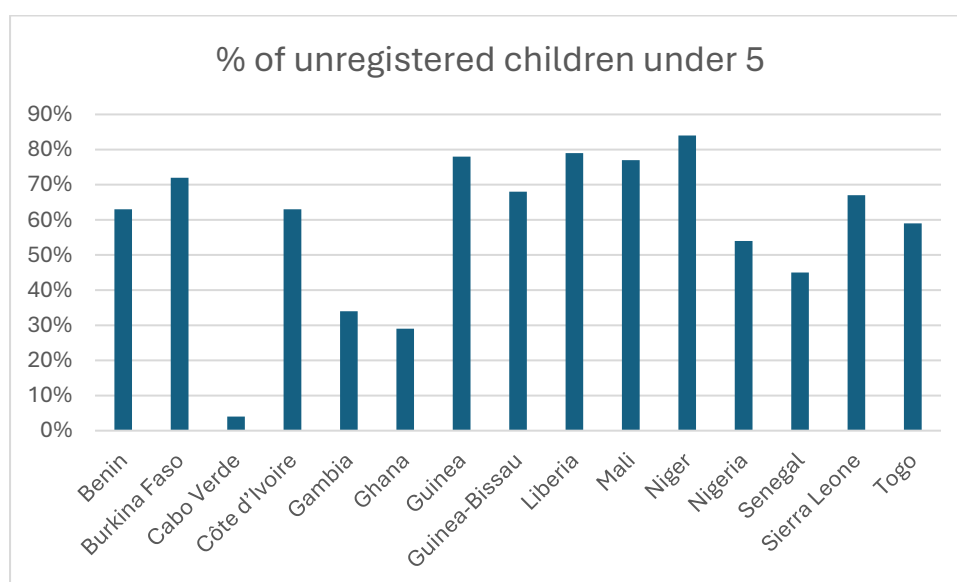


Table 2: Percentages of Unregistered Births in ECOWAS Member States⁸⁹



Ghana reported a total of 677,140 infant births registered in 2022, which is an increase by 7.6 percent from the 2021 figure of 629,537. On average, 1,855 births were registered daily across the country. Ghana is working on enhancing birth registration through improved efficiency and accountability in the registration of births and deaths; expanded access to BDR services, especially in remote and underserved areas; reducing turnaround time to collect and submit data from the field; having an independent review of organizational functions, structures, business processes, and ICT systems; and implementing organizational management and performance improvement initiatives.

⁸⁹ https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Africa-Birth-Registration-Brochure-Oct-2022_Final-LR.pdf

The challenges that affect child rights implementation in Ghana reportedly are:

Persistent socio-cultural practices, norms and societal attitudes negatively affecting the development of children.

Lack of respect for the views of the child in the community and family settings

Limited resources (logistics, financial and human capacity) for child protection programming.

Nigeria in its efforts to increase *birth registration* is implementing a digitalized birth registration process; Integrating birth registration into routine health service delivery, increasing awareness through state and community-level campaigns, and currently deploying members of the National Youth Service Corps [NYSC] scheme, as coordinators and supervisors across the States.

In Senegal, *birth registration* is free, and the national civil status strategy operated since 2022, changed the civil status department into a national agency, and thereby developed a national training plan for civil status agents, civil status officers, auxiliaries, and the community, archivists (3000) etc. With the cooperation of the European Union and UNICEF, Senegal is implementing the Support Program for the Strengthening of the Civil Status Information System (NEKKAL PROGRAM) which ensures construction and rehabilitation civil status centers and their computerization.

Togo has 1,139 civil status centers mainly located in cantons and villages as well as in health centers, and has attained an 87% birth registration rate. Free birth registration is guaranteed from January 1, 2022 by decree no. 2021-134 of December 14, 2021. Biometric identification of natural persons is operational law in Togo, while the Togolese nationality code is also being reviewed to combat statelessness.

3.5. Services to Children on the Move

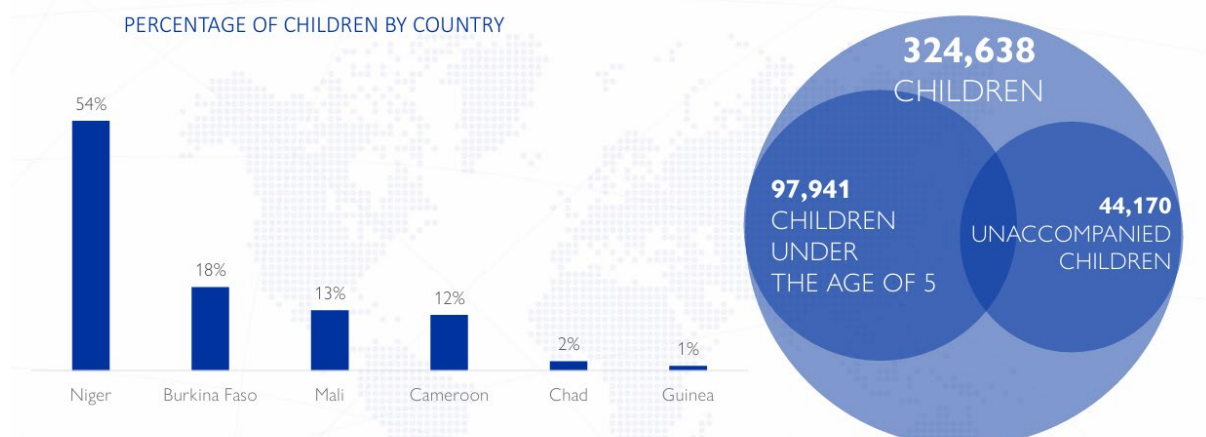
Children on the move migrate across borders or within their own countries, either alone or with their families, for various reasons such as conflict, violence, poverty, climate change, or lack of opportunities.⁹⁰ UNICEF asserts that plucking children from their homes, schools, and communities, migration can be hugely disruptive, stressful, and dangerous. These categories of children often lack access to education, health, and protection services and are exposed to the risk of separation from their families, exploitation, abuse, and child trafficking.⁹¹

⁹⁰ <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/young-and-move-west-africa/>

⁹¹ <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/overview-current-policies-and-practices-children-move-west-africa/>

CHILDREN ON THE MOVE IN WCA

PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN BY COUNTRY



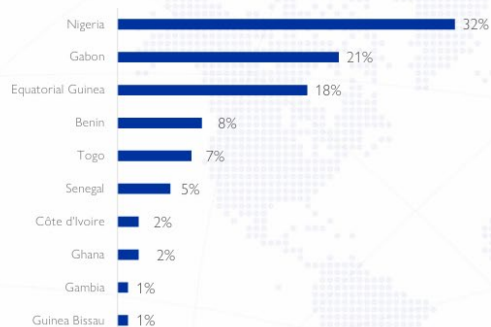
IOM's counting activities conducted in 2023 reported 324,638 children on the move within WCA. Most of them were observed in Niger (54%), followed by Burkina Faso (18%), Mali (13%) and Cameroon (12%).

The analyses are based on data collected in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, Mali, and Niger between January and December 2023.

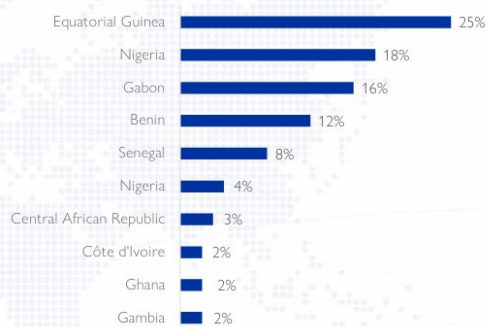


CHILDREN ON THE MOVE IN WCA

MAIN COUNTRIES OF DEPARTURE



MAIN DESTINATION COUNTRIES



During the activities, observations identified Nigeria (32%), Gabon (21%), and Equatorial Guinea (18%) as the main countries of departure of children. The same countries were identified as main destinations; Equatorial Guinea (25%), Nigeria (18%), and finally Gabon with 16%.

The analyses are based on data collected in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, Mali, and Niger between January and December 2023.



Percentages of children and the main countries of departure

Migration affects especially children in West Africa, and children on the move is a priority concern due to the high mobility rate within the region and more recently outside the region. There is an estimated 9.3 million children on the move in West and Central Africa, including 5.9 million internally displaced children, 1.1 million refugee children, and 2.2

million children migrating internationally⁹². This according to UNICEF is the highest number of children on the move in any region in the world⁹³.

Migrant Population: A review of the global migrant population⁹⁴ as at mid-2020, shows that 7, 370, 000.000 are West Africans, of which an estimated 1, 435,000 are children under 18 years of age. Cote D'Ivoire has the highest number of migrants at over 2 million, but Nigeria has the highest number of child migrants in the region.

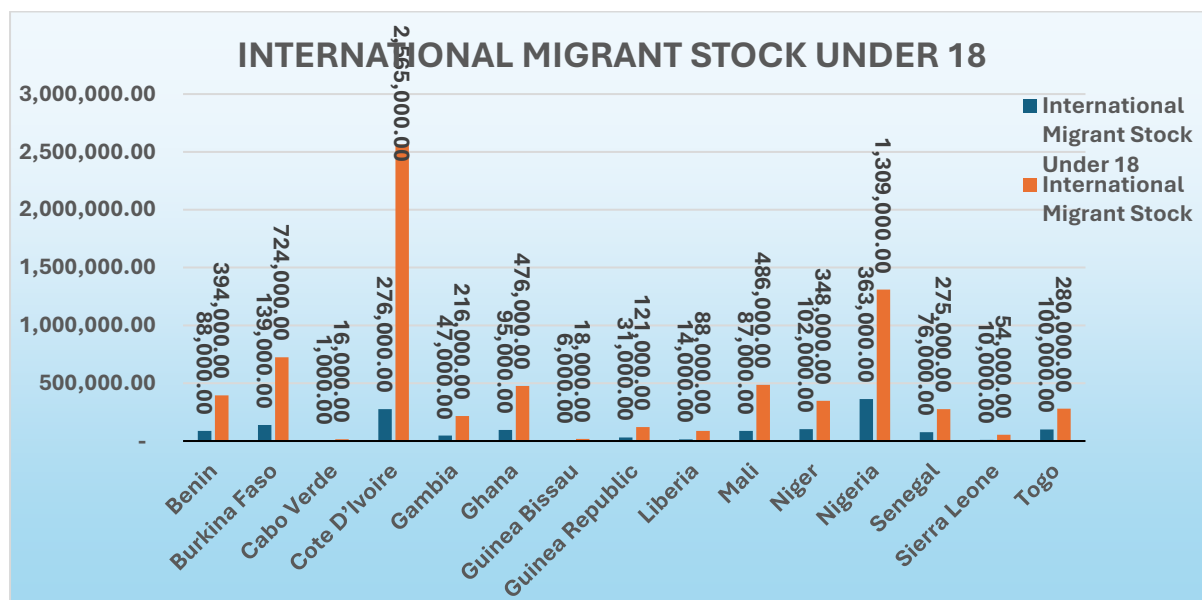


Figure 16: Population of Children in the International Migrant Stock, West Africa⁹⁵

In terms of percentages, Child(ren) (under 18) **migrants** of the total migration stock ranges from **6%** (Cabo Verde) to **36%** (Togo). Overall % for the entire region (West Africa) is 19%.⁹⁶

⁹² <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/overview-current-policies-and-practices-children-move-west-africa/>

⁹³ <https://www.unicef.org/wca/documents/reaching-partners-children-on-the-move>

⁹⁴ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock>; See also, <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/western-africa>

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock>

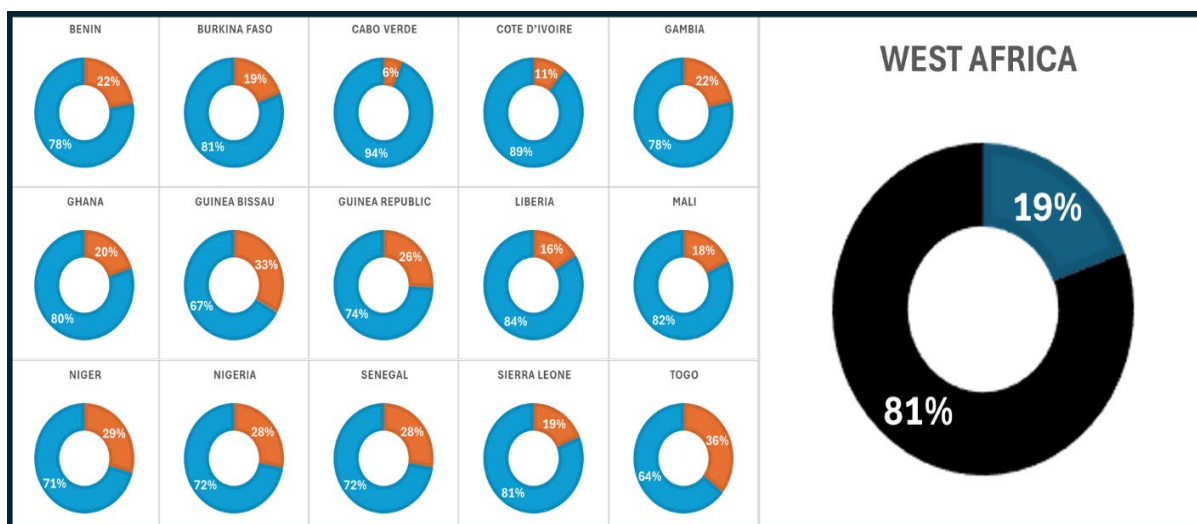
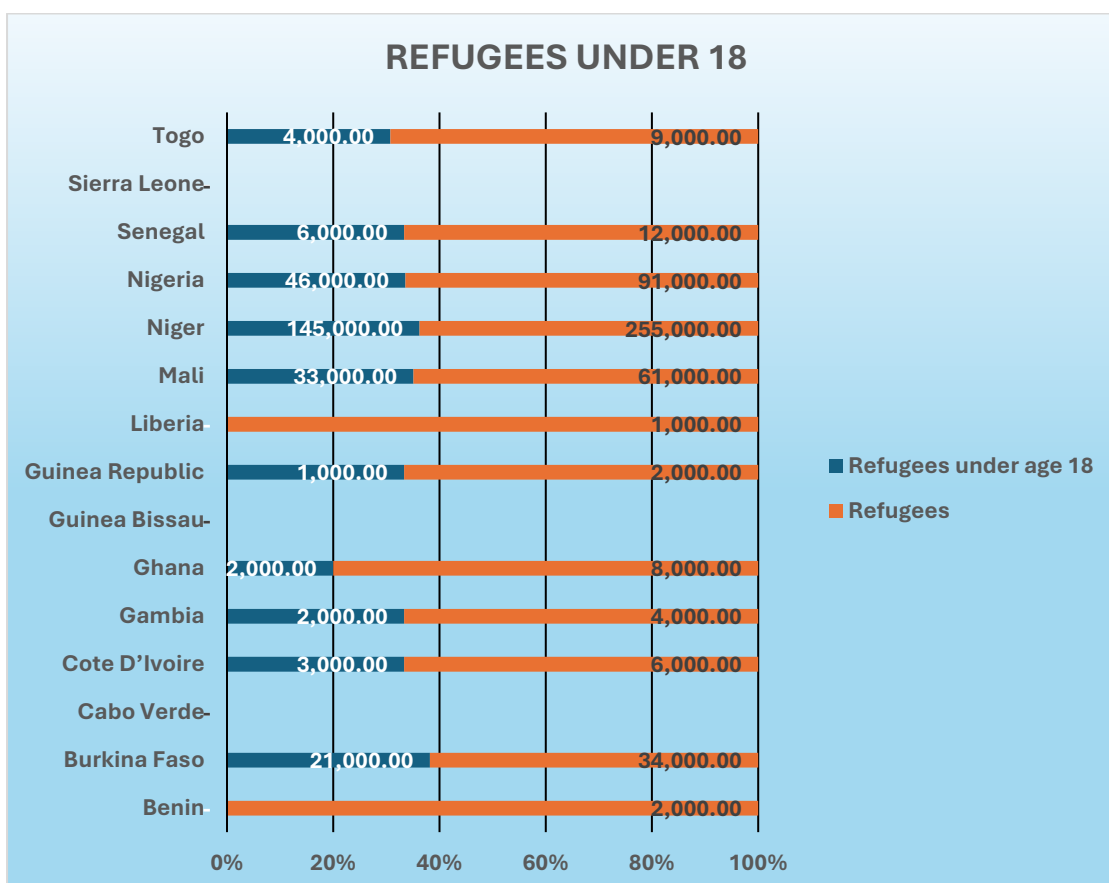


Figure 17: Percentages of child migrants, West Africa⁹⁷

Refugees' population: The regions refugee population is estimated to be 485, 000.00 comprising 263, 000 children.⁹⁸ Majority of the refugees are in Niger, which also has the highest child refugee figures.



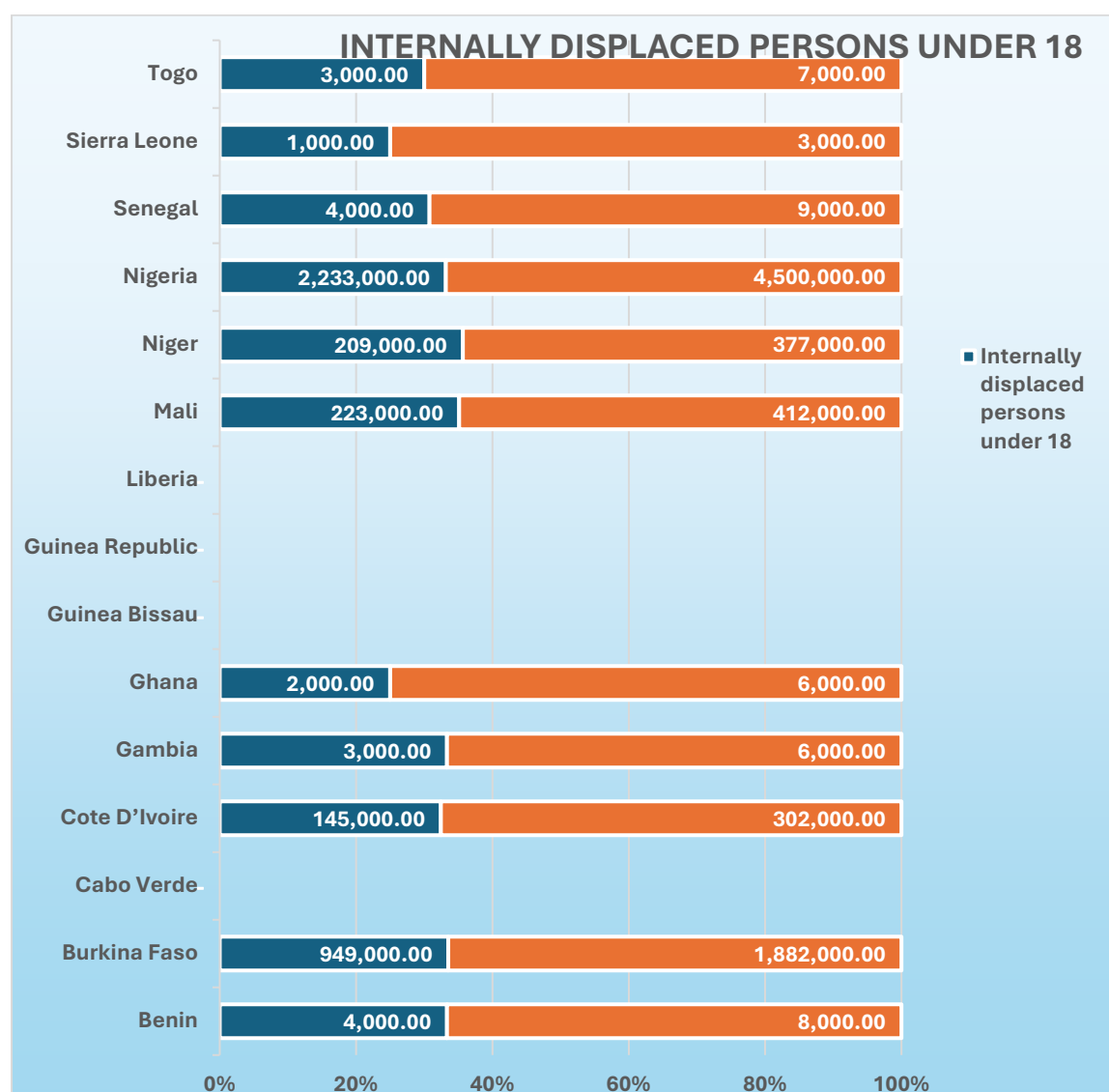
⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ UNHCR available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/countries/>

⁹⁹ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/countries/>

Internally Displaced Persons: An estimated 7, 512, 000 persons are internally displaced in the region, and an alarming number of 3, 776,000 of these are children under the age of 18.¹⁰⁰ Nigerian children make up 2, 233,000 of the children, while 994,000 are from Burkina Faso. There are however no available records for the internally displaced persons in Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Republic and Liberia.

Figure 18: Numbers of internally displaced Under 18 years among the total displaced population in West Africa.¹⁰¹



With the increase in terrorist attacks, conflicts and the attendant humanitarian crisis in several parts of the region, it is not surprising that fresh internal displacements increased by over 200%. There was a cumulative increase in Internal displacement by over 300% between 2014 to 2020.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Global internal displacement database available at <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database>

¹⁰² Ibid

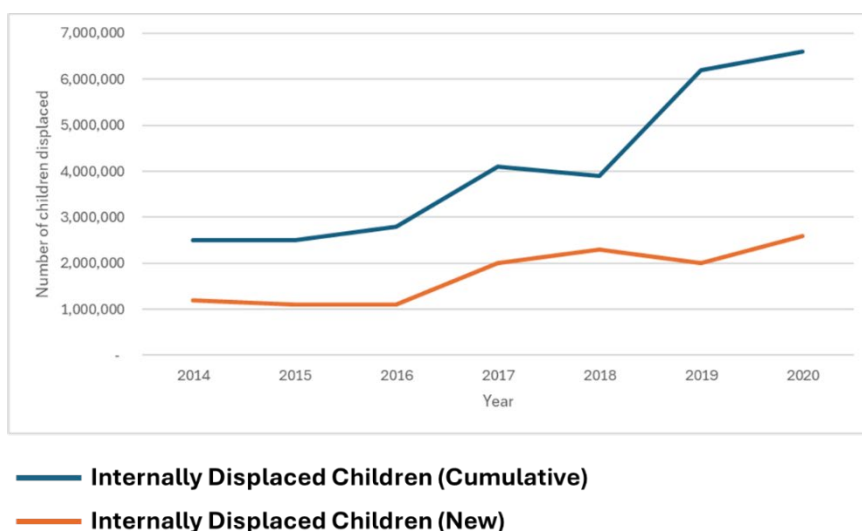
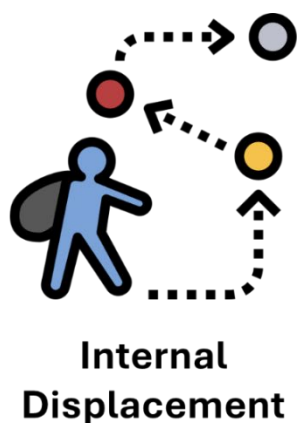


Figure 19: Cumulative increase in numbers of internally displaced children in West Africa¹⁰³

In Nigeria, children on the move are reportedly protected from violence and exploitation through formal and informal child protection systems. By 2016, children numbering 1,072,000 are on the move (in Borno, Yobe, Gombe and Adamawa).¹⁰⁴ These children are being supported in Child Protection programme of the government in collaboration with UNICEF, through psychosocial support, enrolment in schools, coaching classes, and treatment of those with acute malnutrition. Some Federal Ministries have also established a Nutrition Department to address malnutrition challenges of children on the Move.

Senegal’s National Commission for the Management of Refugees and Stateless Persons monitors all issues relating to refugees and stateless persons. The Inter-ministerial Committee to Combat Illegal Emigration (CILEC) created in 2021 works to implement the national migration policy by centralizing data and information relating to irregular migration. Also, Senegal’s Law 2005-06 of May 10, 2005 relating to human trafficking and similar practices and the protection of victims, punishes perpetrators of mistreatment linked to the mobility of children and immigration who are prosecuted before the courts. Capacity building sessions for judicial actors are often held in partnership with the National Cell for the Fight against Human Trafficking (CNLT).

In Sierra Leone, children are not detained for immigration purposes, but rather they are referred to the Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs or the Ministry of Social Welfare for alternative care placement while the family tracing and reunification processes are ongoing in line with the 2021 Migration Policy.

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ From the United Nations Office for the coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) crisis overview

3.6. Budgeting for Child Protection

There are some difficulties in assessing the level of funding for child protection in most countries, and there is no uniform template to help define which budget heads should be appropriately termed as child protection. **Nigeria** for example reports that there is an improvement in National Budgetary allocation for child protection across all sectors, but the details of this improvements are not captured in the country report. Also, there is no information provided on the number and categories of beneficiaries of the country's *School Feeding Programme*, the reported increased enrolment of vulnerable families on the *Social Register for Conditional Cash transfers* to parents to enable them take care of their children, and of the *Scholarship awards* to some vulnerable children.

Cote d'Ivoire's report on the other hand, detailed the precise level of national government budgeting for child protection in the 2023 financial year to the responsible Ministries as follows.

Côte d'Ivoire National Budgetary Allocation for Child Protection to Key Ministries in the 2023 Financial Year	
Ministry/Budget Head	Amount Allocated
Ministry of Women, Families and Children	5,778,620,158 FCFA
Ministry of the Interior and Security	4,947,797 FCFA
Ministry of Justice and Human Rights	129,913,550 FCFA
Ministry of National Education and Literacy	20,683,201,314 FCFA
Ministry of Health, Public Hygiene and Universal Health Coverage	37,568,559,835 FCFA
Ministry of Employment and Social Protection	817,853,700 FCFA
Ministry of Solidarity and the Fight against Poverty	160,786,348 FCFA
Total Amount intended for child protection in 2023.	65,143,883,302 F CFA
Additional Funding:	1.194 million FCFA
“Emergency Response Plan to the Phenomenon of Children in street situations”	Budgeted at 78,171,215,188 FCFA
National strategy for the Protection of Vulnerable Children and Adolescents, with its Action Plan validated in November 2022	

Senegal to an extent also details how that the child protection sector has been strengthened with progressive increase in budgeting since the establishment of the children's program budget in 2020, in the Ministry of Women, Family and Child Protection. This budget which is applied towards the integrated development of early childhood, child protection, the construction of school infrastructure for early childhood, the recruitment and supervision of facilitators, the acquisition of textbooks and caring for children in street situations, has progressively increased as follows:

4,429,060,351 FCFA in 2020,

10,159,045,120 FCFA in 2021, and

20,237,604,259,000 FCFA in 2023 and

The Ministry of Justice in Senegal has also increased the budget for the “Social and judicial protection” program from 3,000,210,455 in 2022 to 3,104,265,889 FCFA in 2023.

It is expected that in the development of future ECRIMS reports will elicit more detailed information from all the member states to enable better evaluation of the level of funding to child protection, as well as the resource allocation, utilisation, and impact for children.

3.7. Access to Services in Education, Justice, health, Nutrition and Social Security.

Education:

Available data from UNESCO indicates that there is gross shortfall in the level of government expenditure on education in West Africa, when viewed against the backdrop of a region that has the highest figures of out of school children. The government expenditure on Education [Total % of government expenditure] is summarised in the table below¹⁰⁵

Table 6: Government expenditure on education in West Africa, sourced at UNESCO

Country	Most Recent Year	Most Recent Value
Benin	2022	17.2
Burkina Faso	2022	22.0
Cabo Verde	2021	15.1
Cote D'Ivoire	2022	16.4
Gambia	2022	14.5
Ghana	2022	13.2
Guinea	2022	11.9
Guinea Bissau	2013	16.2
Liberia	2022	11.7
Mali	2022	18.2
Niger	2022	12.4
Nigeria	NA [See below]	NA [See below]
Senegal	2022	22.2
Sierra Leone	2022	33.4
Togo	2022	14.5

¹⁰⁵ UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). UIS.Stat Bulk Data Download Service. Accessed September 19, 2023. apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds available at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GB.ZS?locations=ZF&name_desc=false&view=map

The focal point in **Ghana** reports that in 2023, Ghana spent approximately 10.9% of total government spending on Education and spent 12% on its national budget on Education.¹⁰⁶

In **Nigeria**, the Federal government allocation to education in 2021-2023, according to analysis informed by UNESCO benchmarks, consistently fell short of the recommended 15-20% of the national budget, typically remaining in the 6-8% range.¹⁰⁷The percentage increases in the education budget annually remains lower than the 15% and 20% benchmarks recommended by UNESCO for developing countries. This development has implications for educational outcomes and achieving the global Sustainable Development Goal 4 for education.

To ensure the *rights to education*, **Togo** has instituted a policy of implementing positive discriminatory measures in favor of female students in public high schools and colleges by reducing their school fees; and protects the right of pregnant female students to continue their studies unless they are found to be medically unfit to do so. The “*School Assur*” project instituted in Togo at the start of the 2017-2018 school year, also offers health insurance to students.

Child Justice Services:

The number of children in detention per 100,000 child population is estimated at 8 per 100,000.¹⁰⁸In that regards, West Africa is the region with the lowest numbers globally. According to UNICEF however, record keeping on the number and characteristics of children in detention commonly remains incomplete and unsystematic, which affects the reliability of available country data as well as regional and global estimates based on them.

Guinea Bissau has prohibited international adoption of children from the country, by the order of the Council of Ministers in 2022.

Sierra Leone applies her Child Justice Strategy (2014 – 2018) to provide quality services to *children in contact/conflict with the law*. And with the piloting of the Diversion Policy in key Police Stations in 2019, children in conflict with the law are not detained under the formal justice system but rather enjoy alternatives to detention under the child justice system.

Togo’s pilot network of foster families provides care for children deprived of parental care or at risk as alternative to institutional care for children in contact/conflict with the law.

Child protection in emergencies:

Emergencies, conflicts and humanitarian situations remain a major challenge to improving the protective environment for children in the region. In December 2023, UNICEF forecasted

¹⁰⁶ African Education Watch Report, 2023

¹⁰⁷ As reported by Education Finance Watch, 2023

¹⁰⁸ https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Children-in-detention_Estimating-the-number-of-children-deprived-of-liberty_2021.pdf. West and Central Africa has the lowest figures, although as UNICEF highlights, record keeping on the number and characteristics of children in detention commonly remains incomplete and unsystematic, which affects the reliability of available country data as well as regional and global estimates based on them.

46.7 million children face another year of humanitarian need in West and Central Africa mainly due to ongoing conflict and insecurity, including in the central Sahel region and Congo¹⁰⁹.

UNICEF sums it up in the following terms for 3 countries¹¹⁰:

The people of **Burkina Faso** continue to experience a multidimensional humanitarian crisis that has worsened since 2019. More than 2 million people are displaced inside the country. A de facto blockade by armed groups of areas where more than 1 million people live or have sought refuge has deprived people of free movement and necessary supplies.

Mali is experiencing unprecedented and rising humanitarian needs. An estimated 8.8 million people, more than 40 per cent of the population, are projected to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2024.

The **Niger** continues to face a combination of crises: persistent armed conflicts, climate-induced disasters, nutritional emergencies and epidemics, all of which have been exacerbated by political instability following a military coup in late July 2023.

Armed conflict in **northeast Nigeria** continues to adversely affect the lives and prospects of 7.7 million people, 60 per cent of them children. Additionally, 474,000 people in the country's **northwest** and 489,000 in Benue State have been displaced due to armed violence, including farmer-herder violence.

In four West African **coastal countries** (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo), children and adolescents in northern regions are facing the humanitarian consequences, including population displacement, of the spillover of the Sahel crisis. In these four coastal countries the number of internally displaced persons, returnees and refugees is now estimated at 123,000, including 36,000 children. These numbers could increase given political and conflict dynamics across Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger.

“West and Central Africa is home to a large number of critically underfunded emergencies, and some of the most neglected humanitarian crises in the world for children. “Children do not cause conflicts but are powerless to stop them. We need to do more to build a lasting solution for the region’s children and give them hope as they grow up in the midst of chronic and forgotten crises.”

[UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Felicité Tchibindat.]

The handling of children during emergency is an indication of the states commitment to child protection generally.

Senegal, in the desire to protect *children in emergencies, conflicts and other humanitarian situations*, has developed its first contingency plan for the child protection sector 2017 – 2018 accompanied by an action plan which is budgeted at 1,280,085,000 FCFA and has seen

¹⁰⁹ UNICEF Publication, April 2023

¹¹⁰ Ibid

the participation of children at all stages of the process. The plan was reassessed and updated for the period 2020 – 2024 with a new action plan budgeted at 1,349,900,000 FCFA.

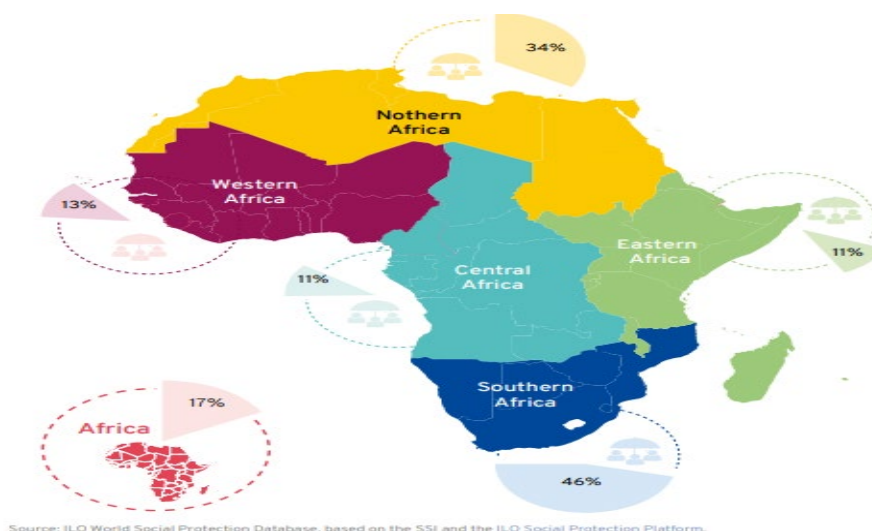
The response of **Sierra Leone** during the Covid-19 outbreak was cited as indication of this commitment as, no child was arrested or detained at the time in Sierra Leone. The office of the Ombudsman and the Human Rights Commission investigated and referred all complaints of alleged violence committed by the security forces in their efforts to effect Covid 19 guidelines to the Discipline and Internal Investigations Department (CDIID) of the Sierra Leone Police.

In **Ghana**, the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) is responsible for managing emergency situations in the country; and a working Group for Child Protection in Emergency was established in March 2023, which operates under the National Child Protection Committee and is in a process of developing a child in emergency framework for Ghana.

In **Liberia**, in September 2023, 600 persons were affected by a flood in Kru Town, Grand Cape Mount County, and the number included 175 boys and 208 girls. Partners along with the supervising ministry [MoGCSP] provided food and non-food items, PFA, as well as a promise to construct new homes in designated communities.

Social Security Programs: The population receiving social security in West Africa as reflected in ILO data, is also not commensurate with the level of poverty and deprivations across the region.

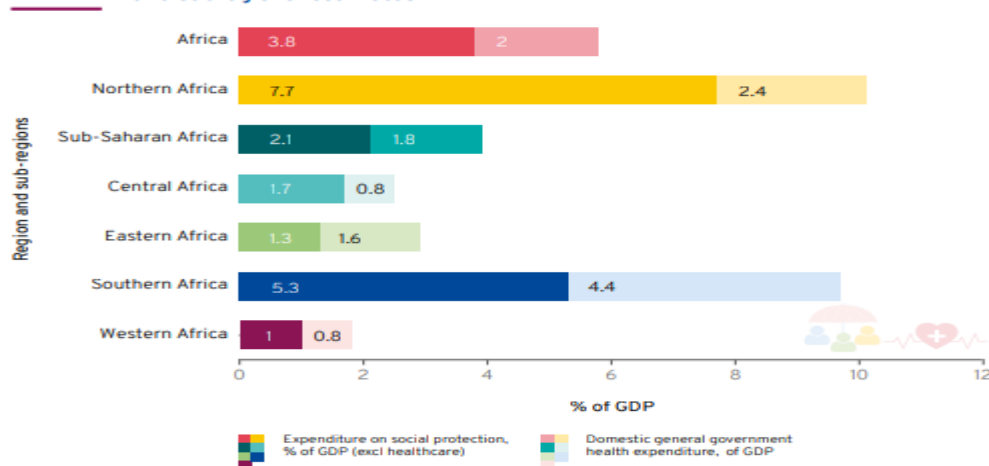
Population receiving at least one social protection cash benefit, 2020: ILO.¹¹¹



¹¹¹ 2020, ILO World Social Protection Database, based on the SSI and the ILO Social Protection Platform; accessed in September 2023.

And the ILO estimates that the regional expenditure on social protection as a percentage of GDP in West Africa, is lower than in other regions of the world¹¹².

Figure 9: Expenditure on social protection and healthcare as a percentage of GDP, regional and subregional estimates



Sources: ILO, World Social Protection Database, based on SSI, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and national sources.

At the **national levels**, the reports from the member states revealed some degree of efforts but the scope appears to be limited in terms of coverage across children in all localities.

Benin has operated an integrated National School Feeding Program, to 75 percent of schools. Benin implements a series of projects to curb school dropout, most notably are:

The Cash + Care project, a government initiative supported by UNICEF and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, to keep girls in school and combat early marriage. It provides financial support of 4,000 FCFA per month to girls aged 9 to 15 in public establishments. The project was piloted in the municipalities of Kandi and Tchaourou in 2020, and was extended to the 26 municipalities of the 04 departments of the North from 2022.

The SWEDD project provides school kits to 30,000 girls in Public Primary Schools (CM1 and 2) and CEGs each school year since 2020-2021 in each of the 77 municipalities, at an average cost of 65,000 FCFA. From 2022-2023, these girls have received additional conditional monetary transfers throughout the school year at the rate of 450fCFA per day per girl in primary school and 600f CFA per day per girl for 9 months on three years.

The 10 best girls per department receive university scholarships at the rate of 38,000 fCFA per month for 10 months, making a total of 120 girls for an annual amount of 45,600,000 fCFA for 3 years. These interventions are carried out in the 77 municipalities of Benin.

Cabo Verde's Institute for Children and Adolescents provided social assistance to a total of 3,279 children in 2023, but reports that the number is much higher, since there are several other social benefit programs implemented in the country by the Ministry of Family and Social Inclusion through Municipal Councils.

¹¹² ILO World Social Protection Database, based on SSI, the International Monetary Fund and other sources.

In **Cote D'Ivoire**, the world bank assisted *Productive Social Safety Net Program 2015-2024*, has provided cash transfers to about 127,000 households, and helped improve access to education among the poor. Also, 5,590 children in Cote D'Ivoire were reported to have benefited from social protection services; and 8,045 minor children benefited from justice services over the period October 2022 – July 2023. Associations exist *for the Promotion of Community Mutual Aid (AVEC)* in Abidjan and around the country for parents in difficulty, which helps in consolidating their capacity to mobilize resources for theirs and their families well-being. In addition, the social safety nets program is implemented under the 2014 National Social Protection Strategy (SNPS), granting over three years of non-refundable quarterly allowances of 36,000 F CFA (i.e., 144,000 F CFA per year) as support to families to enable them to send their children to school and meet their basic needs. About 105,000 new households are targeted to receive support in both rural and urban areas for the period 2024-2026.

In the **Gambia**, the government has implemented several initiatives including:

conditional cash transfers made to Islamic Religious schools for each child enrolled in the program on condition that the children are not forced to beg. an on-going 3-year cash transfer program targeting 15,606 extreme poor households in 20 districts in the Gambia, including children.

As part of COVID 19 response, food support was provided to 575 vulnerable households with children, in the greater Banjul Area with each family receiving 50kg bag of rice and 5liters of vegetable oil 78,434 households out of a target of 83,000 households benefited from cash transfers conducted in 30 Districts from the regions, with a bi - monthly payment of D3000.00 between July to November 2020.¹¹³

The Building Resilience through Social Transfers for Nutrition Security in The Gambia (BRest),” Department of social welfare project in collaboration with Nana was implemented to 6,176 beneficiaries (Lactating mothers) in three regions of North Bank Region, CRR and URR.

Food support and cash transfers were made to 1000 vulnerable families in three regions [NBR 420, CRR 210 and WCR 370]. Each family received a bag of rice, 5-liter oil and 3000 dalasi to help them in feeding during COVID. Five million dalasi was disbursed in this activity as support from UNICEF to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare.

Ghana has a Social Protection Policy supervised by the MoGCSP, and some initiatives that promote social protection include,

A School Feeding Programme providing one nutritious meal to pupils from Kindergarten to Primary 6

¹¹³ This was jointly conducted by NaNA, DCD and DSW with a \$10 Million funding from the World Bank in the regions of WCR the Fonis, LRR, NBR (Njain Sanjal) and Ballangar, CRR and URR.

Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) Programme providing cash grants and other services to the extreme poor.

Free Senior High School

Capitation Grants to Basic Schools

National Health Insurance

In **Liberia**, cash transfers were provided to a total of 7,163 beneficiaries in 2022 in Bomi and Maryland Counties. In 2020 the beneficiaries were 3,451. During the COVID, the total beneficiaries accounted for were 17,795 giving a total of twenty-four thousand nine hundred and fifty-eight (24,958) beneficiaries in Maryland, Grand Kru, Bomi and Montserrado Counties. The United States government funds 2 key social protection programs to ensure increased access to education for vulnerable children. They are USAID's School Feeding Program 11, and the Mc Govern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program.

In **Nigeria**, conditional cash transfers were made to 2.7 million households based on their children's school enrolment, under the National Social Safety Nets Project 2016-2022. This was a World Bank assisted education project that provided school lunches to keep children in primary schools. The World Bank also supported a multi-million-dollar literacy and improved access to education project to out of school youth in Nigeria from 2017 -2022. The National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) demonstrates the Government's commitment to the effective mobilization and efficient utilization of national resources to improve the quality of life of its citizens. It is designed for individuals and households throughout the life cycle to prevent and reduce poverty and socioeconomic shocks by promoting and enhancing sustainable development. The Technical Working Group on National Social Protection coordinates the implementation of the Policy across different sectors in Nigeria.

In **Senegal**, children who benefited from social protection and justice services in 2022 were a total of 35,450, distributed as follows:

Categories of beneficiaries	Number of child beneficiaries in Senegal
children in conflict with the law	3694
children at risk benefiting from educational, professional, or psychosocial support	16,599
children in conflict with the law or in danger in a professional situation	1,645
children benefited from protection in reception structures.	13,092
children taken off the street	420

The number of children referred to basic social services (health, education, nutrition, social protection) in Senegal in 2022 were detailed as follows:

Categories	Numbers of beneficiaries in Senegal
Children who benefited from nutrition services	1,037,039
Children in deworming care	2,258,268
Schools and daaras that benefited from school canteens	4,646
Students who benefited from school canteen services	409,907
children under 5 benefited from free care	1,631,549
Students who received a 50% subsidy from mutual health insurance (CMU)	440,088
Talibe who received a 50% subsidy from mutual health insurance (CMU)	47,489
wards of the nation that received a 50% subsidy in mutual health insurance (CMU)	789

Sierra Leone is tackling child poverty through the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), Pro Poor-Growth for Peace Consolidation and Youth Employment (GPCYE) Projects, with initiatives such as 'Feed Salone'. Sierra Leone adopted its National Social Protection Policy in 2011 and amended it in 2018 to include further vulnerabilities. The revised National Social Protection Policy of 2020 aims to protect the extreme poor and vulnerable, while the Medium-Term National Development Plan aims to achieve strategic targets in establishment of an integrated national identity card system, a social safety net fund for emergency response; ensuring social security for workers in the formal sector and providing social protection to at least 30 per cent of vulnerable populations.

Togo's Safety Nets and Basic Services Project is a school feeding project implemented in vulnerable communities, and unconditional cash transfers to the needy. The Education and School feeding programs serve to keep children in schools in some of the rural areas. Also, Togo implements social safety net programs where monetary transfers are made to vulnerable populations and health insurance is offered to students under the School Assur project.

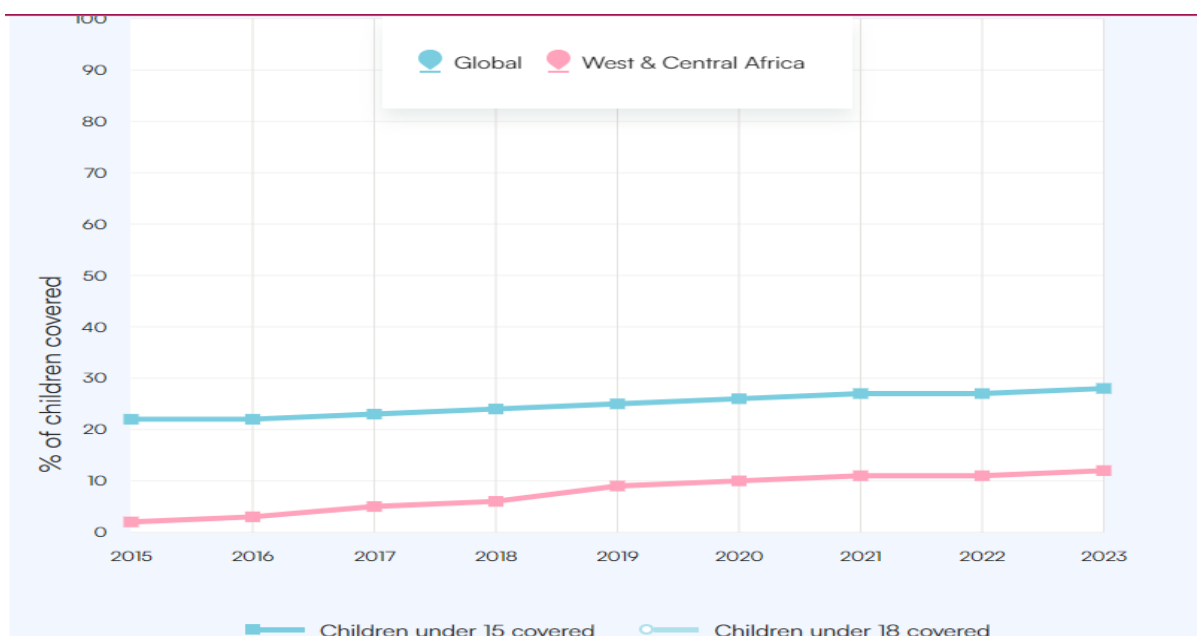
Togo's integrated national child protection system addresses diverse aspects of child protection, through extensive institutional arrangements as detailed here. It reflects the country's commitment to ensuring that all children are comprehensively safe from violence, abuse, and exploitation at national and sub-national levels, particularly if all aspects of the system are being duly implemented.

3.8 Comparison of Global and Regional Child Benefits

A comparison of relevant information about children’s access to social services and social protection across the globe would indicate that there is wide disparity in the provision of services to children in West Africa.

The [Global Child Benefits Tracker](#), launched in February 2024 as a one-stop-shop to track countries' pathways to expanding child benefits,¹¹⁴ recorded a modest increase in child benefits from 20% in 2009 to 28.1% of children aged 0-15 years globally in 2023. But there are glaring inequalities between low-income countries, with rates of coverage at around 9%, while 84.6% of children in high-income countries are covered, almost ten times as many as in low-income countries.¹¹⁵ Surprisingly, while less than 1 in 5 children are covered in almost all low-income countries, it is commendable that Togo is said to have increased her coverage of child or family benefits from 49% in 2019 to 74.5% in 2022.

Child benefits social coverage: global and in West Africa¹¹⁶



Global social security coverage: child benefits¹¹⁷

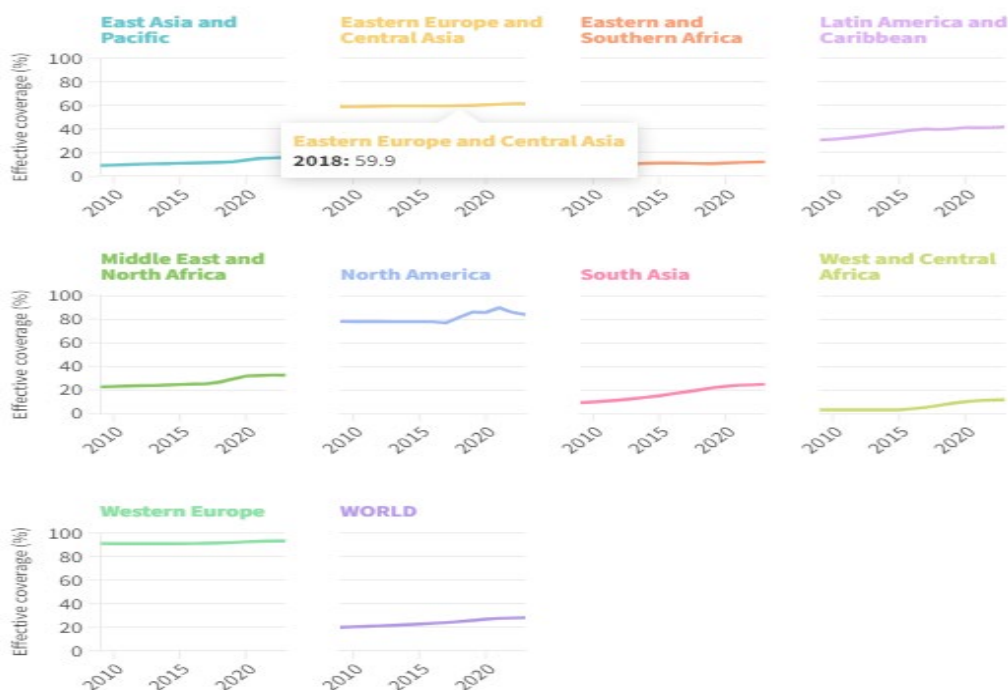
¹¹⁴ Launched by *Save the Children*, *UNICEF*, and *ILO*, **Child Atlas** described as a new tool to understand children's outcomes, crisis, and policy solutions, explores the situation of children, revealing how children fare globally and how they describe their experiences.

¹¹⁵ <https://www.childatlas.org/blog/social-protection>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.childbenefitstracker.org/>

¹¹⁷ ILO World Social Protection Database; available at <https://www.childbenefitstracker.org/>; ILO for Save the Children/UNICEF

Effective coverage for children by world region



Data: ILO for Save the Children/UNICEF

A detailed overview reveals more glaringly the need to step up the provision of equitable child benefits in West Africa.

Effective social protection coverage¹¹⁸	Global	West and Central Africa
1. Children covered by a child or family benefit, 2023	28.2%	12%
2. Total population coverage (2020)	46.9%	12.2%
3. Persons with severe disabilities covered (2020)		
4. GDP spent on social protection systems for children (2020)	1.1%	0.1%
Child Poverty¹¹⁹	Global	West and Central Africa
Children live in households with a per capita income of less than US\$2.15 PPP (2022)	15.9%	38.6%
Children live in multidimensionally child poverty (2024)	47.1%	67.4%

¹¹⁸ SOURCE ILO World Social Protection Database; available at <https://www.childbenefitstracker.org/>

¹¹⁹ SOURCE UNICEF / World Bank; UNICEF / Save the Children; available at <https://www.childbenefitstracker.org/>

PART 4: Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Findings on Good Practices Standards in child protection

1. Benin Republic: Addressing child labour in the agriculture and mining sector

Benin Republic has mandated a multidisciplinary team of social workers, republican police officers and psychologists to regularly carry out unannounced joint raid operations [organized by the General Directorate of Labor of the Ministry of Labor and Civil Service], in line with the procedures and protocols for monitoring child labor in Benin. The children rescued on these raids are then placed in reception and transit centers (Central Office for the Protection of Minors, Child Reception and Transit Centers, Child Reception and Protection Center) or families reception while waiting for their return to their families. The children receive support from officials of the One-Stop Social Protection Centers until their family reintegration and a life plan is developed depending on the case.

2. Cote D'Ivoire: Budgeting for Child Protection

Cote d'Ivoire's provided details of the 2023 national budget to child protection in all the responsible Ministries, and this is commendable. The report reflects that Cote D'Ivoire follows the budget and has identified budget heads for child protection.

Côte d'Ivoire National Budgetary Allocation for Child Protection to Key Ministries in the 2023 Financial Year	
Ministry/Budget Head	Amount Allocated
Ministry of Women, Families and Children	5,778,620,158 FCFA
Ministry of the Interior and Security	4,947,797 FCFA
Ministry of Justice and Human Rights	129,913,550 FCFA
Ministry of National Education and Literacy	20,683,201,314 FCFA
Ministry of Health, Public Hygiene and Universal Health Coverage	37,568,559,835 FCFA
Ministry of Employment and Social Protection	817,853,700 FCFA
Ministry of Solidarity and the Fight against Poverty	160,786,348 FCFA
Total Amount intended for child protection in 2023.	65,143,883,302 F CFA
Additional Funding: “Emergency Response Plan to the Phenomenon of Children in street situations” National strategy for the Protection of Vulnerable Children and Adolescents, with its Action Plan validated in November 2022	1.194 million FCFA Budgeted at 78,171,215,188 FCFA

3. Cote D'Ivoire and Ghana: Information management systems for child protection

Cote D'Ivoire's two significant child rights related information management systems, the G-PROTECT and the SOSTECI. The G-PROTECT is an integrated data collection, storage and analysis system of the Ministry of Women, Families and Children, comprising the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) and the Child Protection Information System (SIPE). These different tools produce reliable data capable of guiding decision-making. Unfortunately, the G-PROTECT information management system does not collect information regarding some notable indicators in the ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Child Protection such as on the number of children referred to basic social services (health, education, nutrition, social protection...) The ECOWAS indicators need to be integrated in the G-PROTECT system to support that country's monitoring and reporting system for the Strategic Framework.

Secondly, the SOSTECI is a Labor Observation and Monitoring system in Côte d'Ivoire, that helps identify and provide response services to children involved in hazardous work. The system collects and shares valuable information that is used to implement concrete actions towards the identified victims of child labour.

Ghana's web based Social Welfare Information Management System (SWIMS), documents and reports on the provision of social welfare services (child protection, social protection, and gender-based violence, [SWIMS: Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection \(mogcsp.gov.gh\)](http://mogcsp.gov.gh)). There is in addition, the Ghanaian Child Protection Social and Behaviour Change Programme Monitoring and Reporting System [LOGIN \(cptoolkit.net\)](http://cptoolkit.net); as well as a Data Gallery on Children in Ghana.

4. Nigeria: Child rights coordination/implementation mechanisms/ Structures

Nigeria's extensive range of child rights coordination mechanisms is commendable.

The National and States level *Child Rights Implementation Committees*

National Technical Working Group on Ending Violence against Children

National Steering Committee for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour that includes State Committees with further decentralisation ongoing in few States at the community level.

Task Force on Case Management on Children,

Task Force on Ending Child Marriage in Nigeria

Civil Society Coalition on Ending Child Marriage in Nigeria.

Committee on Alternative Care of Children

Child Protection in Emergencies Response Committee in the troubled north-east.

5. Togo: Integrated National Child Protection System

Togo's system is summarised below as a sample of the policy and institutional framework of a national child protection system in West Africa: Programs, Structures and Challenges. The system as reported, reflects an evolving system that should comprehensively address the needs of children and largely ensure efficient services delivery to all. This, however, is dependent on the full operationalization of the system programs and institutional arrangements therein.

Snapshot of Togo's integrated National Child Protection System	
Programs/Structures/Challenges	Existing Framework in Togo
1. Education and School feeding programs	School canteens serve to keep children in certain schools in rural areas.
2. Social safety net programs	Monetary transfer, HIMO are implemented to vulnerable populations. Health Insurance is offered to students under the "School Assur" project
3. Victim identification, care, and Referrals	The green telephone "allo 1011," a centralized service for the detection and referral of children in difficult situations, receives approximately 500 calls per day, approximately 25% of which are reports of violence against children. Care centers provide emergency accommodation for children in difficult situations and appropriate referral services for different forms of violence.
Juvenile justice	A pilot network of foster families provides care for children deprived of parental care or at risk as alternative to institutional care for children in contact/conflict with the law.
Institutional arrangements	The Directorate of Child Protection translates the government's policy on child protection into practice. A National Consultation Framework on the Protection of Children in Togo brings together the different ministries and civil society organizations involved in children's issues in Togo. The National Children's Advisory Council (CCNE) promotes child participation. National Child Adoption Committee, National Commission to Combat Trafficking in Persons (CNLTP) National Steering Committee to combat child labor (CDN); Specialized Child Protection Commissions function at community levels. The National Commission for the Reception and Social Reintegration of Child Victims of Trafficking (CNARSEVT) has branches at the regional, prefectural, and local levels to protect victims of child trafficking.

4.2 Conclusion

The data and information collected for the first report of the ECRIMS represents significant baby steps to collate and communicate the state of child protection in the region generally and provide a baseline for tracking progress in this area within the context only, of the ECOWAS Child Policy and the Child Protection Strategy documents. This was done within the limits of available information, which underscores the identified dearth of information about the important strides that are being made towards protecting children by local and international actors across the region. It is hoped that the publication of this inaugural report will generate more publicity, interest and an attendant drive for improved documentation and sharing of relevant information in the member states and collaborations by all child protection actors to enrich future reports.

Overall, the report does reveal some appreciable degree of efforts in the national child protection systems strengthening, such as in the ratification of relevant treaties and the consequential enactment of laws to domesticate those treaties, as well as the establishment of appropriate enforcement and coordination mechanisms. The challenge however is with regards to effectiveness of those mechanisms and the commitment to implementation of the laws. This gap contributes greatly to the identified shortfalls in terms of making appreciable impact on the lives of children. Efforts must be stepped up toward realizing children's rights in practical terms, more so as progress in this regard is also increasingly truncated by the social and environmental issues including increasing rates of population growth, poverty, conflicts, and internal displacements. Children affected or at risk of these occurrences are expected to be safe within the safety net provided by a strengthened child protection system, but this does not seem to be a reality yet in the region.

4.3 Recommendations

Our recommendations for improvement are mainly directed towards systems strengthening in line with the policy documents. The first recommendation however emphasizes the importance of reporting on the changes in children's lives in real terms.

The member states report is key, and provided some level of content for current ECRIMS report, but there is room for improvement to enable a better evaluation of the status of children in the region. To this end the new template for child protection data capturing focused on eliciting more detailed information and should be circulated early with sufficient enlightenment to the Directors of Child Protection to achieve the desired results.

Impact and outcome level assessment in future ECRIMS reports: with the administration of the new template for information sourcing, the impact level assessment should be conducted against the background of three key questions aimed at discovering:

The prevalence rates of the key issues and occurrences of violence, abuse and exploitation of children at regional and national levels.

the availability of appropriate responses (quality of response and fitness for purpose).

The response rates (i.e. scope and coverage).

With the establishment of a structured system for receiving child related data at the ECOWAS Commission through ECRIMS, Member states should be advised to upgrade their information with any new developments and relevant information in their states as the need arises, all through the year.

Better record keeping of the numbers, and services and outcomes to children in the member states need to be improved to enhance reporting.

Information specific to West Africa is scarce within the existing datasets of the major development partners and is only accessible within the wider African context or at best in the context of West and Central Africa. This gap needs to be addressed with the partner sources to facilitate data collation and disaggregation for the region

Compliance with International Legal frameworks:

Appreciable progress was recorded here as, member states have ratified and domesticated most of the key legal instruments for child protection. Notably, they all have legal prohibitions against the internationally recognised grievous offences against children. But the laws and policies generally remain in the books and must be brought off the shelves and applied or implemented to impact the lives of children in need of protection measures. It is recommended that future reports emphasise reporting in this area directly by the member states. Another significant gap is in the ratification of ILO Convention 189 on Domestic Work by most member states, even though working children especially girls in this sector are in dire need of protection.

Strengthening of Policy and Institutional Frameworks:

Member states need to report on the policies to control online violence against children and address hidden charges in birth registration offices and basic education institutions. There is need to also reflect the level of integration and implementation of child protection policies in their agriculture and mining policies and in the unregulated sectors of the economy where the worst forms of child labour often occur in many parts of the region.

International and Regional Cooperation:

More information is needed of the level of legal cooperation by the member states to curtail offences of a global nature; to arrest and prosecute offenders; prevent unnecessary detention of children on the move and refugees; and to identify victims and protect child rights in the justice system.

Partnerships, Networking and Collaborations; and Child and Youth Participation:

Details of partnership agreements implemented in member states among different groups of stakeholders should be documented and provided. Information about Child and youth participation are also scanty.

Human resources and capacity building:

information on compliance with the key regional competencies framework for social work should be the basis of future assessment of human capacity reports in the future. This as well as improvements recorded in the ratio of social workers to the population.

Service delivery to children:

This is the broadest area of the 10 benchmarks and requires to be closely monitored, as improvement in the status of children is the primary reason for system strengthening. There has been little or no noticeable progress with regards to the provision of basic social services to children across the region, neither in health, education, justice or social security. Focus should be directed at the increased adoption and implementation of effective social protection programs to address inequalities and break the circle of poverty that exposes children to increased risks of abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation. Member states should also clearly report on the level of service provision to child victims and their treatment in the justice system including the adoption of alternatives to detention mechanisms.

Information Management Systems:

the ECOWAS Commission should commit to providing technical support to the establishment or reinforcement of member states child protection information management systems that links up to the ECRIMS. Innovative approaches would be useful towards mining existing child related data and information from diverse sectors, and advanced monitoring and reporting systems.

Resource mobilisation, Allocation and Accountability:

A common mechanism is needed to define the full range of human and material resources that constitute child protection budgets/resources in the region as there may often be no direct budget head referenced as child protection. Member states should also document and report directly on both governmental and non-governmental sources of revenue available to child rights and financial as well as non-financial resources mobilized and deployed in a member state to protect all children from abuse, violence, and exploitation.

Communication and social mobilisation:

Reporting for this benchmark should reflect the adoption or steps towards the adoption of relevant numbers of definitive *National Communication Strategies* to be implemented through behavioural change communication experts in the member states.

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