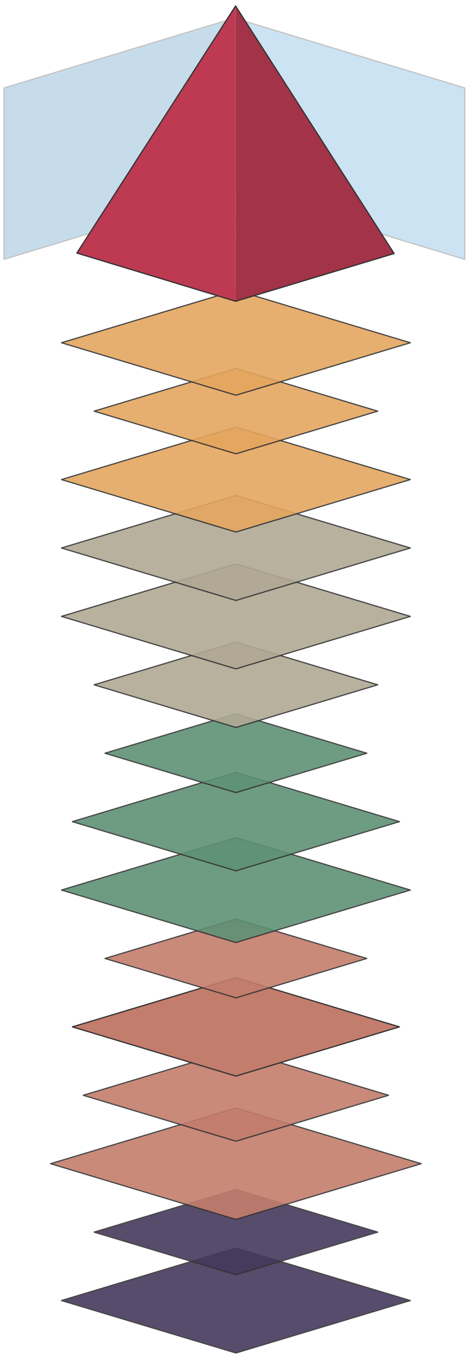
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

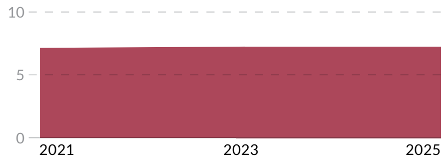
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

NIGERIA



7.32 ↗0.03
CRIMINALITY SCORE

8th of 193 countries ↘2
3rd of 54 African countries ↘1
1st of 15 West African countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS	**7.33**	↘0.03
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	8.00	↗0.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	6.50	↗0.50
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	8.00	0.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	8.00	↘0.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	8.00	0.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.50	↘0.50
FLORA CRIMES	6.00	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	7.50	↗0.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	8.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	6.00	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	7.50	↗0.50
CANNABIS TRADE	7.00	↘1.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	8.50	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	6.50	↘1.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	8.00	↗1.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS	**7.30**	↗0.10
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	6.50	↗1.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	8.00	↘0.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.00	↗0.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	7.00	↘0.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	7.00	0.00

This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.

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Funded by the European Union

ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

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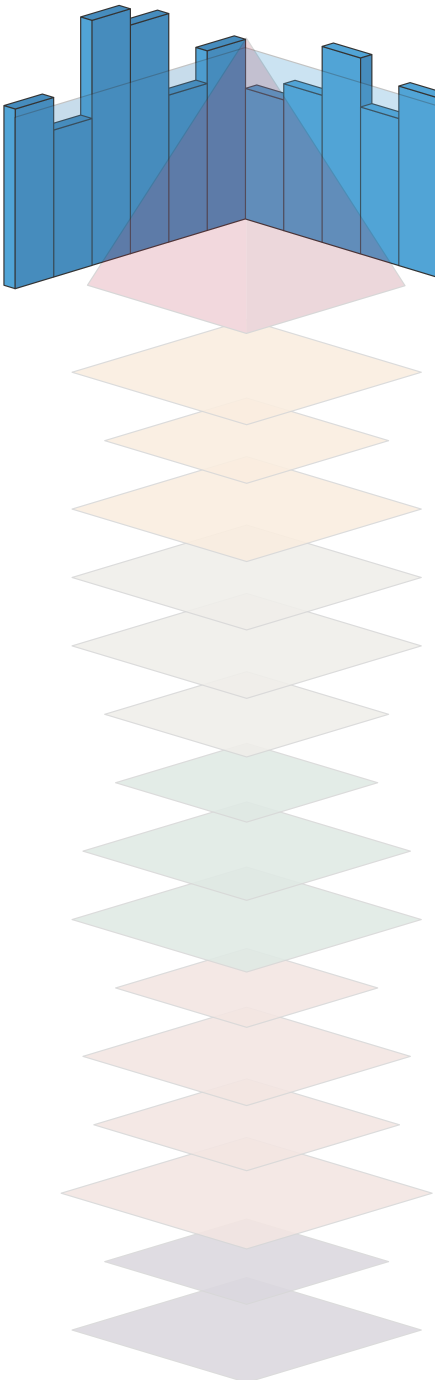
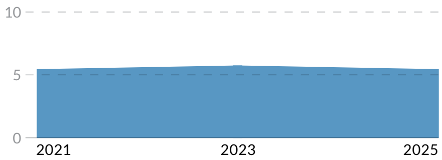
NIGERIA



5.46 ↘0.33

RESILIENCE SCORE

56th of 193 countries ↘11
5th of 54 African countries ↘3
3rd of 15 West African countries ↘1



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.50	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	4.50	↘0.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	7.50	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	7.00	↘0.50
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	4.50	↘0.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5.50	↗0.50
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	4.00	↘1.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	4.50	↘0.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	6.00	↘0.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.50	↘0.50
PREVENTION	5.50	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	6.50	↘0.50

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Nigeria is a major source, transit and destination country for human trafficking, driven by poverty, unemployment and insecurity. Traffickers primarily target women and children for sexual exploitation, forced labour and organ harvesting. Criminal networks operate domestically and transnationally, exploiting porous borders and corruption to facilitate movement. Child labour, including forced mining and domestic work, remains widespread despite legal prohibitions. Criminal groups, insurgents, such as Boko Haram and mafia-like organizations have a long history of trafficking women and children for sexual exploitation, which they use to finance their other activities. So-called 'baby factories' that deal in illegal adoptions are also becoming increasingly prevalent. Internal displacement, violence, growing poverty and inflation are all likely to exacerbate the vulnerability of trafficking victims and intensify trafficking activities.

Nigeria has emerged as a major source of irregular migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe, North America and other regions, due to economic challenges and limited legal migration options. Human smuggling has surged since 2023, after the removal of fuel subsidies led to acute hardship. Smugglers in exploit migrants' desperation, providing them with false documents through clandestine networks. Major routes pass northwards through hubs like Kano, a key transit point on overland routes through the Sahel towards Europe; southwards through Lagos, a key exit point by air and sea; and south-east via Cameroon. Although primarily a source country, Nigeria is also a destination for irregular migrants from within West Africa. These migrants often face exploitation, violence and the risk of being trafficked. Extortion and protection racketeering in Nigeria is pervasive, driven by the government's inability to secure conflict-affected areas. Bandits in the north-west use extortion to finance their operations and buy weapons. They have taken control of vast swathes of agricultural land, which they farm by exploiting local communities through a mix of forced labour and protection racketeering. A constellation of armed insurgent and violent extremist groups across various regions of Nigeria also extort and exploit the communities under their influence. Kidnapping, including mass abductions, remains a major revenue source for extremist and bandit groups alike. Profits from extortion fund the acquisition of arms from the Sahel. Bandits also invest in local transport to consolidate their control. Although primarily concentrated in the north-west and north-east, the banditry phenomenon is spreading to north-central regions, reflecting the evolution of criminal tactics and the persistent challenge of maintaining government control.

TRADE

Nigeria serves as a core destination and transit hub for illicit arms within West Africa and beyond the region. The trade is driven by a combination of political instability, conflict and organized crime. Corruption and porous borders are key enablers of the arms trade, while artisanal weapons manufactured in country further expand the market. Armed groups, including Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and armed bandits, play a number of key roles in the arms trade – as traffickers, transporters and users of weapons. Law enforcement operations have made sporadic seizures and uncovered illegal arms factories, but their overall impact remains unclear. Arms trafficking fuels a range of issues like violent crime, human trafficking, illegal mining and civil unrest. Major smuggling routes through Nigeria include corridors from Libya, Mali, Niger and Cameroon, as well as maritime routes through the ports at Lagos and Onne. The trade in counterfeit goods is significant, driven by weak regulation, corruption, economic hardship and the declining value of the Naira. Nigeria functions as both a transit and production hub, with counterfeit items primarily imported from Asia, particularly China and India. Key products include pharmaceuticals, with substandard antibiotics and antimalarials posing significant health risks. Counterfeit electronics are also widespread. Local production, including of fake cosmetics products, is expanding due to demand for cheaper goods and often involves experienced manufacturers who leverage online platforms for distribution. Despite occasional large-scale seizures and factory closures, counterfeit goods continue to proliferate, facilitated by criminal networks and limited law enforcement capacity. Nigeria struggles with the illicit cigarette and alcohol trade, exacerbated by weak border controls and high taxation which is aimed at reducing consumption. Smuggling networks involve foreign importers and domestic distributors, with border crossings facilitated through bribing officials. Sporadic seizures of cigarettes – originating from China end entering via Benin – and alcoholic beverages have highlighted the popularity of smuggled excisable goods, particularly in border states. Although Nigeria primarily acts as a destination for illicit goods, there is a limited export of locally produced cigarettes. Social acceptance and minimal enforcement foster an open retail market, where single-stick sales are more profitable than pack sales.

ENVIRONMENT

Nigeria's illegal logging industry, driven by domestic and overseas demand for timber, is facilitated by corruption and weak forest governance, the prevalence of armed groups, including bandits, and economic challenges. Criminal networks, private sector actors and foreign players, particularly from Asia, make significant profits from illegal logging and charcoal production. Bandit groups also profit indirectly, by taxing the networks and local workers involved in logging for access to protected forested areas. The industry serves as a vital financial resource for low-income communities despite the risks. Violent confrontations, including armed clashes and targeted attacks by militants, highlight the industry's volatile nature. Despite government efforts, illicit logging persists. The loss of primary forests, as a key national resource, and substantial carbon emissions through deforestation has both an environmental and socio-economic impact.

The country is also a major source and transit hub for illegal wildlife trafficking, particularly pangolin scales and ivory tusks destined for Asian medical markets. Weak enforcement, corruption and lack of public awareness facilitate trafficking, while illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing by foreign nationals threatens maritime resources. The growing demand for bushmeat endangers wildlife, with both physical and online markets evading detection. Recent investigations revealed the use of cryptocurrency in illicit transactions. Law enforcement operations since 2021 have led to significant seizures, including 11 tonnes of pangolin scales and ivory, and numerous arrests. Nigeria's role as a source and transit point for West, Central and Southern African wildlife to Asia is contributing to the loss of biodiversity and destruction of ecosystems across the continent, including the extinction of giraffes, rhinoceros and cheetahs. Nigeria is also a source and transit point for non-renewable resources. Illegal mining and petroleum smuggling are widespread, and involve criminal networks and armed groups like Boko Haram. These activities finance armed conflicts and fuel violent rivalries between groups for control. Authorities have seized minerals and crude oil, and dismantled illegal refineries but enforcement is undermined by corruption and the significant involvement of foreign nationals. Oil bunkering (supplying fuel to ships) sustains low-income populations but leads to environmental damage, including oil spills and land degradation. Efforts to curb illegal activities are counteracted by socio-economic pressures.

DRUGS

Illicit shipments of heroin arrive in Nigeria via East and Southern Africa from Asia. Although there is some, albeit limited, domestic consumption, shipments are largely for onward distribution to neighbouring states, Europe, Western Asia and North America. In late 2023, police operations dismantled a heroin trafficking network reaching across Africa, Europe and America, with record seizures at Lagos and Abuja airports. The heroin trade intersects with other illicit activities, including cocaine and cannabis trafficking, with proceeds being laundered through stock investments and real estate. This has led to asset seizures linked to the drugs trade. Nigeria is a major transit and emerging consumer hub for cocaine – strategically positioned between South America and the large consumer markets of Europe and, to a lesser extent, Western Asia. Nigerian traffickers collaborate with Latin American and European groups, utilizing airports, seaports and land borders to move cocaine through West Africa. Cocaine consumption (including in the form of crack) has risen significantly in major cities, and traffickers employ diverse money-laundering methods involving foreign companies, money couriers and financial institutions to hide the profits.

Nigeria is a large source, transit and destination country for cannabis, locally known as 'Indian hemp' or 'skunk'. Cultivation is concentrated in south-western states due to favourable growing conditions, and distributed throughout the country. Despite strict criminalization, domestic consumption remains high. Trafficking of cannabis from Ghana to Nigeria, usually via Benin, continues to be reported. Although authorities have reportedly destroyed hundreds of hectares of cannabis plantations in recent years, traffickers continue to smuggle the drug into and out of the country, often employing sophisticated concealment methods. Nigeria is also a manufacturing, transit and destination hub for an increasing variety of synthetic drugs. Tramadol and tapentadol are largely imported from overseas, particularly from India and Pakistan, by air and maritime routes. A proportion is trafficked north overland into neighbouring states. Domestic consumption is also significant. Methamphetamine production has traditionally been concentrated in the south, but may have spread to other areas as domestic consumption has increased, and is exported to international consumer markets. Ecstasy use is also reportedly on the rise, with imports from overseas. The range of synthetic drugs available on Nigerian retail markets is expanding, in line with regional trends.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Local organized crime groups, sometimes with the help of state and private sector actors, are engaged in cyber-dependent crimes. Recent reports have shown that malware aimed at stealing banking credentials online has been used by local cybercriminals. Most criminal groups have demonstrated sophisticated new tactics to breach security measures. Importantly, there is evidence of a growing convergence between cyber-dependent and cyber-enabled crimes, since most of the criminal actors involved in cyber-dependent crimes, such as cryptocurrency fraud and hacking, are also perpetrators of identity fraud and mass marketing scams. The core driver appears to be economic hardship, as the removal of fuel subsidies and devaluation of the Nigerian currency have pushed many young people towards cybercrime as a source of income. Cyber-dependent attacks tend to intensify during electoral cycles, with both domestic and international actors using distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks and other sophisticated methods to target government systems throughout the election period.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial fraud and corruption among public officials in Nigeria thrive due to weak accountability and monitoring systems, which enables embezzlement and illicit collaboration with private sector companies, including financial institutions and construction firms. Embezzled funds are often transferred abroad, facilitated by a culture of impunity and weak judicial oversight. Internet fraud, known locally as 'Yahoo Yahoo', is prevalent, targeting victims abroad, and to a lesser extent domestically, through scams, often involving false identities on social media. Some fraud schemes are linked to cult and gang activity, as fraudsters use so-called 'selectors' to handle stolen funds in their bank accounts and hire local gangs to intimidate third-party collectors who fail to hand over funds. Real estate and bogus consultancy firms are utilized for money laundering, with public officials exploiting these channels to conceal illicit wealth.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Boko Haram and ISWAP operate primarily in north-eastern Nigeria, controlling areas on the shores of Lake Chad and Sambisa Forest. They impose taxes on residents, extort fishermen and farmers, and exploit non-renewable resources. Both groups engage in arms trafficking, human trafficking, child soldier recruitment, and orchestrate deadly attacks. Clashes between the two escalated in 2024, while their expansion into north-western regions has heightened the potential for alliances with local bandit groups, creating complex security challenges. These groups operate across northern Nigeria amid a growing constellation of ideologically driven groups that also partake in criminal activity. Armed bandit groups engage in various illicit markets, with kidnapping for ransom – now increasingly shifting from rural to urban areas – serving as a key source of revenue for diverse criminal networks. Bandit groups are also increasingly involved in artisanal gold mining, both directly, and more commonly by taxing mining communities. In the south-east, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) militants mount attacks on both security forces and civilians. Some cultist groups also display mafia-style characteristics. Most operate in southern Nigeria and are involved in online fraud, human trafficking and drugs markets. For example, the Black Axe group, with its stronghold in Benin city, is deeply embedded in Nigerian politics and operates domestically and globally in trafficking, romance scams and other largely online fraudulent activities. Loosely structured criminal networks are also involved in various illicit markets such as drugs trafficking, arms trafficking, counterfeiting, extortion and exploitation of non-renewable resources. Corruption remains pervasive among political and corporate actors, particularly in public procurement. Financial misconduct is widespread in the public sector, involving senior civil servants, ministers and executives of state-owned companies. Common offences include embezzlement and procurement fraud, with stolen funds often transferred to foreign accounts to circumvent regulatory oversight. High-profile cases have revealed the complicity of public officials in laundering funds abroad, with repatriation efforts occasionally recovering substantial amounts. Corruption within law enforcement is a big factor in enabling organized crime, with some officials ignoring criminal activities or even directly participating in them. Media reports have highlighted the involvement of law enforcement and prison officials in drug trafficking. The role of state actors in organized crime thus continues to undermine governance and facilitate the entrenchment of organized crime in Nigeria. Foreign actors are also an important component of the criminal landscape, particularly as far as the non-renewable resources sector is concerned. Chinese nationals are heavily involved in illegal mining operations, leading to environmental degradation and community disruption. Their operations have been linked to mercury pollution and the destruction of farmland. Nigerien and Chadian actors also participate in illegal mining in the north-west. Foreign influence also extends to financial crimes, including grand corruption and fraudulent activities. The private sector, including real estate, financial institutions, transport and the stock exchange, is used by drug traffickers to launder illicit income. Meanwhile, terrorist financing is facilitated through Nigerian commercial banks, crowdfunding, betting platforms and faith-based charities, with funds channelled via online banking for ticket purchases, ransom payments and international crowdfunding.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The government has undertaken efforts to combat organized crime through law enforcement and policy development, but faces significant challenges from ethnic and religious tensions, political divisions, armed conflict and corruption. Security threats are exacerbated by transnational crime, particularly in areas significantly affected by conflict – such as the North West, North East and Niger Delta regions – where arms smuggling, drug trafficking and illegal mining are prevalent. Government officials have been linked to organized crime, and recent elections were marked by irregularities, widespread intimidation and political violence. Armed groups maintain control over large areas of territory, imposing informal governance, while citizens have little trust in government institutions. Despite government commitments, corruption is pervasive, especially in the petroleum sector, undermining public sector integrity. Nigeria's legal framework contains penalties and other anti-corruption measures, but is undermined by a cultural acceptance of bribery and facilitation payments. Public procurement remains particularly vulnerable. The oversight of the auditor-general is limited, and state legislatures face undue executive influence. Wealthy political patrons manipulate decision-making through their support networks and patronage systems. The Freedom of Information Act has empowered civil society to expose misconduct, but corruption remains entrenched. Smuggling and bribery are widespread at border crossings, fuelled by collusion from public officials.

Nigeria has demonstrated a strong commitment to international cooperation in combating organized crime. It has ratified numerous international conventions related to corruption, drug trafficking, arms trading and wildlife crimes, and maintains bilateral agreements with multiple countries on human trafficking and extradition. Nigeria works actively with international partners, such as INTERPOL and several national governments, leading to major joint operations like Operation Jackal III in 2024, which targeted the Black Axe network. The country also contributes significantly to UN peacekeeping missions. There is a comprehensive legal framework to combat organized crime in place, which aligns closely with the relevant UN conventions. Despite capacity challenges in gathering financial intelligence, investigations and prosecutions, the government continues to introduce new policies and revise existing its frameworks. Recent developments include new legislation on data protection and ongoing revisions to cybercrime laws to incorporate emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and virtual assets. Efforts to address environmental crimes include the 2022–2026 national strategy on wildlife and forest crime, emphasizing multi-stakeholder collaboration. However, the effectiveness of these measures has been limited by capacity constraints and inconsistent implementation.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system suffers with a complex court hierarchy, outdated legal doctrines, inadequate technology, limited resources and poor working conditions, leading to trial delays and prolonged pretrial detentions. Judges often lack standardized training, particularly regarding anti-trafficking laws, contributing to inconsistent legal outcomes and corruption. Political interference has eroded public trust, especially in electoral cases. Prisons suffer from overcrowding, corruption and poor conditions, leading to protests and violent incidents among inmates. Nigeria's law enforcement system comprises federal and state agencies tasked with general and specialized policing. The Nigerian Police Force is the primary federal force, while various dedicated agencies address specific issues, including anti-corruption, trafficking and public safety. State governments have frequently established quasi-independent security forces that operate with minimal accountability, creating conflicts with federal jurisdictions and hindering unified security efforts. Challenges include inadequate remuneration, poor housing, corruption and human rights abuses. Despite these issues, collaborations between local and foreign enforcement agencies have led to successful operations against organized crime, including human trafficking rings and internet fraudsters. Nigeria's porous and under-patrolled northern borders, particularly with Niger and Chad, have become hubs for organized crime and arms smuggling. The vast, forested and riverine terrain in these areas hampers enforcement, while only about half of approved international border points in the North East and North West regions are patrolled. Local authorities also cite border insecurity as enabling terrorism, kidnappings and communal violence.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Nigeria remains on the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) 'grey list' for increased monitoring, though progress has been noted in certain areas. The country has made strides in implementing some recommendations, including legislative improvements, enhanced risk assessments and the enforcement of targeted financial sanctions. Collaborative efforts, such as partnerships between the Central Bank and mobile money agents, aim to curb fraudulent transactions by integrating 'know your customer' measures into payment terminals. Authorities also examined illicit financial flows linked to drug trafficking. Discussions between key financial crime agencies have taken place to strategize an exit from FATF monitoring. Nevertheless, the widespread use of cryptocurrency in Nigeria, fuelled by the declining value of the Naira, has heightened the country's vulnerability to money laundering.

The business environment faces challenges from a lack of transparency and favouritism in licensing and public procurement processes. While recent reforms have improved credit access, registration processes and tax filing, bribery remains prevalent, which discourages business investment. High levels of inflation and currency depreciation continue to hold back the expansion of legitimate businesses, despite the Central Bank's efforts to maintain exchange rates. Land ownership is undermined by constitutional ambiguities, customary laws disadvantaging women and pervasive corruption, which has facilitated land grabs and complicated compensation claims. Despite efforts to diversify the economy, oil remains the dominant industry, while regulatory burdens limit private sector growth. Labour is concentrated in the public and energy sectors, reflecting structural stagnation and constrained economic freedom.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Nigeria has adopted protocols and minimum standards to improve the quality of care services for trafficked persons abroad and works with civil society to train authorities in victim support. Shelters, despite providing comprehensive care, face criticism for restricting residents' freedom of movement and housing suspects in proximity to victims. Anti-trafficking laws exempt victims from punishment for forced crimes, but inadequate identification of trafficking victims has led to some arrests and deportations. Legal aid hubs have been established in key states, and repatriation support provided. Drug abuse victims receive care from hospitals and clinics. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency operates a 24/7 addiction helpline and rehabilitation programmes for people with drug dependencies, including both facility-based treatment and community recovery initiatives. The agency continues to work with the government, private sector and NGOs to broaden access to rehabilitation services nationwide. There is no standalone law covering witness protection but it is incorporated in some legal provisions and procedural guidelines. Despite this, independent assessments note that practical implementation remains uneven. Trials are still undermined by witness intimidation, and many cases involving organized crime do not produce clear outcomes.

The government cooperates with foreign counterparts and conducts awareness campaigns on trafficking in major languages through various media. Nevertheless, significant issues persist. Corruption is prevalent within anti-trafficking institutions, and regulatory measures for private employment agencies are inadequate and fail to curb exploitation. The authorities have introduced dedicated databases and training programmes to strengthen counterfeiting and cybercrime prevention. Drug prevention efforts were intensified during the reporting period, emphasizing sensitization campaigns in schools, religious centres and workplaces. Civil society in Nigeria remains active despite funding challenges and political obstacles. However, many initiatives lack sustainable local support. The government encourages partnerships with civil society organizations in combating organized crime, but political affiliations sometimes undermine the credibility of these efforts. Moreover, civil society groups, often supported by foreign donors often advocate for reforms but lack contextual understanding, limiting their effectiveness. Media freedom, although constitutionally protected, is often threatened by government interference, censorship and violence against journalists, particularly during elections and periods of economic hardship. Human rights violations persist, including unlawful killings, torture, arbitrary arrests and gender-based violence.

This summary was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.