

RFLD REGIONAL REPORT 2026 · WEST AFRICA

Women, Land, Climate and Rights in West Africa

Land and climate, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and gender-based violence in sixteen West African countries.

Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement (RFLD)
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Women, Land, Climate and Rights in West Africa. RFLD Regional Report 2026.

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RFLD is a pan-African Afrofeminist network of 1,143 member organisations in more than 35 African countries. It holds Observer Status N°553 with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and is registered in Ghana, Senegal, Benin, Nigeria and The Gambia.

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Status of the information. Legal information reflects RFLD's country profiles as verified in October 2026. Laws change. This report is for information and advocacy and is not legal advice. Readers should check the official text before relying on any provision.

Photographs. All photographs come from RFLD's own library and show RFLD convenings, trainings and side events. They were taken with the consent of participants. No photograph in this report shows a survivor of violence, and no participant in the Conakry seminar is named.

Context of the report. The report is linked to the advocacy seminar on Indigenous women's land rights and feminist leadership held in Conakry from 24 to 26 November 2026, part of the Human Rights in Francophone West Africa project implemented by RFLD under the Society. Equality. Africa: the Transformation (SEA-T) programme. The views expressed are those of RFLD.

Language. This edition is in English. RFLD uses "DSSR" for droits en santé sexuelle et reproductive in its French publications, and "SRHR" in English.

Foreword

The women who came to Conakry this November did not come to learn that their rights exist. They came because they already know which field they lost, which court refused to hear them and which elder decided for them.

Across West Africa, a woman who farms a plot for twenty years can lose it the week her husband is buried. A girl of fifteen can be married in a country whose Constitution promises her equality. A survivor of rape can find that the only health service within reach is not allowed to help her. A defender who documents these cases can find her organisation suspended. None of this happens in a legal vacuum. In most of the sixteen countries covered by this report, the statute book says something better than what women live.

That gap between the text and the life is the subject of this report. We have tried to describe it precisely, country by country, using only adopted law, and to show where the four issues we work on meet. Land and climate meet when a woman without secure tenure cannot invest in the soil that feeds her family. Land and violence meet when dispossession comes with threats. Sexual and reproductive health meets violence every time a pregnancy follows a rape. Civic space meets all of them, because the women who push for change need to be able to speak.

The Conakry seminar brings together 35 women leaders, women's and Indigenous community organisations and public institutions. RFLD funds every place. We wanted the participants to arrive with a common evidence base, and we wanted the people they will speak to, in ministries, parliaments, land commissions and chieftaincies, to have the same document in hand. This report is that document.

I thank our member organisations, our country representatives and the regional programmes team who built the legal profiles on which this report rests. I also thank the institutions that accepted to sit at the table in Conakry. Their commitments will be published, and we will follow them.

We have also chosen to publish this report in a form that others can use without us. Every country profile can be read on its own, every figure names its source and every legal finding cites the text it rests on. If a ministry, a parliamentary committee or a village council disagrees with what we have written, the official text is there to settle the question. We welcome corrections, because a report that is right is more useful than a report that is ours.

The recommendations at the end of this report are specific. Most of them ask governments to apply texts they have already ratified. That is a modest request, and it is overdue.

Gloria AGUEH
Founder and Africa Director, Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement

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This report was prepared by RFLD's regional programmes team, with the Directorate of Strategy and Development, on the basis of the DƆNÙESÈ Data Center: the women's rights laws database covering the 55 African Union member states, the West Africa legal scorecard 2026, the West Africa legislative platform, the country fact sheets and the register of laws and policies RFLD helped change.

The legal profiles were compiled from official journals, national legal portals, documents shared by RFLD member organisations and the reports of United Nations and African Union treaty bodies. Each entry in the profiles names its source. RFLD thanks the member organisations that sent texts, corrections and case information, and the RFLD Country Representative in Guinea for preparing the Conakry seminar.

The seminar and part of the analytical work were supported under the Human Rights in Francophone West Africa project, implemented by RFLD within the SEA-T programme. RFLD is solely responsible for the content.

The charts and infographics were designed by RFLD from the sources named under each figure. The tile map of West Africa in Chapter 3 is a schematic representation and does not imply any position on borders.

In line with RFLD's ethics policy on shadow reporting and informed consent, this report does not identify survivors, seminar participants or individual defenders.



Figure 1. Members of the RFLD network celebrate together at a regional gathering in Benin, July 2026. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

Contents

Foreword iii

Acknowledgements iv

Acronyms and abbreviations x

List of figures and tables viii

Executive summary xii

PART I: FRAMING THE REPORT

1. Introduction: one struggle, four fronts 14

1.1 Why this report, and why now 15

1.2 Scope: sixteen countries, four themes 15

1.3 How the four themes connect 16

1.4 Structure of the report 18

2. Method, sources and ethics 20

2.1 Sources of evidence 21

2.2 International sources 22

2.3 Verification and the adopted-law rule 22

2.4 Limits of the analysis 23

2.5 Ethics and safeguarding 23

2.6 Referencing 23

3. The regional picture in 2026 24

3.1 The regional normative framework 25

3.2 Political transitions and the regional order 26

3.3 The scorecard at a glance 27

3.4 Women in the rooms where laws are made 28

3.5 Legal frameworks scores 29

PART II: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

4. Land, inheritance and women's tenure security 31

4.1 Legal pluralism: two systems on the same field 32

4.2 What statutory law provides 32

4.3 Inheritance: where land is lost 36

4.4 What the numbers show 38

4.5 Land and violence 39

4.6 Indigenous women and collective land 40

4.7 What would change outcomes 41

5. Climate, environment and women's stewardship 42

5.1 A region on the front line 43

5.2 Women in the agrifood economy 44
5.3 Why tenure is an adaptation policy 45
5.4 Women's knowledge as part of land management 46
5.5 Water, fisheries and the coast 46
5.6 Climate finance that does not reach women 47
5.7 Policy gaps across the region 47
6. Sexual and reproductive health and rights 48
6.1 The standard: Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol 49
6.2 Legal grounds for abortion 49
6.3 Reproductive health laws 51
6.4 Maternal health: the cost of the gap 52
6.5 Child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and FGM as SRHR issues 53
6.6 Survivors of sexual violence 53
7. Gender-based violence, harmful practices and trafficking 56
7.1 Laws adopted since 2020 57
7.2 The scale of violence 58
7.3 Dedicated laws on violence against women 59
7.4 Rape and marital rape 61
7.5 Sexual harassment and online violence 63
7.6 Female genital mutilation 65
7.7 Child marriage 67
7.8 Trafficking 70
7.9 From law to protection 72
8. Justice, civic space and representation 73
8.1 Access to justice and legal aid 74
8.2 Civic space and women human rights defenders 76
8.3 Representation: women where decisions are made 78
PART III: GUINEA AND THE CONAKRY SEMINAR
9. Guinea in focus 80
9.1 Political context 81
9.2 Treaty commitments 81
9.3 Land, property and inheritance 82
9.4 Violence against women 82
9.5 Sexual and reproductive health 83
9.6 Representation and parity 83
9.7 Access to justice and civic space 84
9.8 Reforms recommended for Guinea 84
10. The Conakry seminar: design, standards and follow-up 86

10.1 Purpose and participants 87
10.2 Expected results 87
10.3 The agenda 88
10.4 The barrier map 89
10.5 The advocacy toolkit 90
10.6 After Conakry 90
10.7 Place in the SEA-T programme 90

PART IV: COUNTRY PROFILES

1. Benin 91
2. Burkina Faso 97
3. Cabo Verde 101
4. Côte d'Ivoire 105
5. The Gambia 109
6. Ghana 114
7. Guinea 120
8. Guinea-Bissau 125
9. Liberia 129
10. Mali 134
11. Mauritania 139
12. Niger 144
13. Nigeria 149
14. Senegal 153
15. Sierra Leone 156
16. Togo 160
Key indicators across the sixteen countries 163
Country profiles: Benin to Togo 91

PART V: RECOMMENDATIONS AND ROADMAP

12. Recommendations 165
12.1 To West African States 166
12.2 To ECOWAS, the Alliance of Sahel States and the African Union 167
12.3 To traditional and religious leaders 168
12.4 To funders and development partners 168
12.5 To women's organisations and the RFLD network 168
12.6 Country-specific priorities 168
13. Roadmap 2027 and monitoring framework 170
13.1 Milestones 171
13.2 Monitoring framework 171
13.3 Roles 172

Annexes 173
Annex A. The West Africa legal scorecard 2026 in full 173
Annex B. Reforms pending and in progress 174
Annex C. Key provisions of the instruments used in Conakry 175
Annex D. Glossary 176
References 177

List of figures and tables

Figures

Figure 1. Members of the RFLD network celebrate together at a regional gathering in Benin, July 2026. 4
Figure 2. The Conakry seminar at a glance: three days of work, about 35 participants, eight thematic sessions, three international instruments and one advocacy 16
Figure 3. How the four themes of the report connect, with justice, civic space and representation as cross-cutting conditions. 17
Figure 4. Where women's land rights get blocked: the four groups of barriers used in the Conakry mapping exercise. The law itself, how the law is applied, custo 18
Figure 5. Participants in an RFLD training on women's political participation and the Maputo Protocol, May 2026. 19
Figure 6. A working session at the RFLD office in Dakar on the protection of women human rights defenders, June 2026. 22
Figure 7. An RFLD side event with the Institut National de la Femme at the 89th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Dakar, 27
Figure 8. West Africa at a glance: number of the seven scorecard questions answered "Yes" in each country (tile map, not to scale). 28
Figure 9. World Bank Women, Business and the Law 2026 legal frameworks scores recorded in RFLD's profiles (0 to 100). 30
Figure 10. Where RFLD grantees work: women-led organisations supported in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Senegal, Mali, Togo, The Gambia and Nigeria, plus regional 30
Figure 11. The advocacy toolkit for Conakry: the Maputo Protocol (articles 19 and 21), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (articles 22, 26 an 34
Figure 12. Senegal's laws on women, land and family: an RFLD country focus on violence, the family, inheritance and land. 38
Figure 13. Share of people in sub-Saharan Africa who fear losing their land or property against their will, overall and in the event of divorce. 39
Figure 14. A participant takes the floor during an RFLD training session, May 2026. 40
Figure 15. "African women already lead climate adaptation. We secure the land and the money to scale it." RFLD's economic justice and climate field of work. 43
Figure 16. Climate pressure on the region: four figures. 44
Figure 17. Women in sub-Saharan Africa's agrifood systems: shares of employment by segment. 45
Figure 18. A facilitator follows group work during an RFLD training session, May 2026. 46
Figure 19. Participants at an RFLD network gathering, May 2026. 50
Figure 20. Abortion in sub-Saharan Africa: scale, safety and the law. 50
Figure 21. Maternal and child mortality in West and Central Africa. 53
Figure 22. Women aged 20 to 24 who were married before 18, latest figure recorded in RFLD's profiles (Mauritania: all women married before 18). 54
Figure 23. The Maputo Protocol now speaks eight African languages: Hausa, Amharic, Yoruba, Lingala, Igbo, Twi, Zarma and Goun, with nearly 300 million speakers. 55
Figure 24. Timeline of laws on sexual violence and related protections adopted or protected in West Africa, 2020 to 2025. 57
Figure 25. FGM prevalence among women in the four countries where RFLD's profiles and scorecard record a figure. 65
Figure 26. RFLD's 16 Days of Activism 2026 campaign, 25 November to 10 December: ensure justice, protect survivors, end impunity. 67
Figure 27. The RFLD delegation at the 89th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Dakar, October 2026, where its panel "Defendi 76
Figure 28. Women leaders follow proceedings during an RFLD training on political participation and the Maputo Protocol, May 2026. 79

Figure 29. Banner of the RFLD advocacy seminar on Indigenous women's land rights and feminist leadership, Conakry, 24 to 26 November 2026. 82
Figure 30. Women leaders at an RFLD convening. RFLD member organisations in Guinea use these laws in their advocacy. 84
Figure 31. How the three days fit together: Day 1 Understand, Day 2 Organise, Day 3 Influence. Outcome: an advocacy roadmap for 2027, adopted by the participants 88
Figure 32. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 92
Figure 33. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 97
Figure 34. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 102
Figure 35. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 106
Figure 36. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 110
Figure 37. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 115
Figure 38. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 120
Figure 39. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 126
Figure 40. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 130
Figure 41. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 135
Figure 42. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 140
Figure 43. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 145
Figure 44. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 149
Figure 45. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 153
Figure 46. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 157
Figure 47. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. 161
Figure 48. Participants at the Dakar consultation on the protection of women human rights defenders, June 2026. 169

Tables

Table 1. Status of selected instruments on women's rights, by country 25
Table 2. The West Africa legal scorecard 2026 at a glance: fifteen countries, seven questions 27
Table 3. Statutory land and property provisions for women, by country 32
Table 4. Inheritance and succession rules, by country 36
Table 5. Legal grounds for abortion in the fifteen scorecard countries 49
Table 6. Abortion and reproductive health laws, by country 51
Table 7. Laws on sexual violence and related protections adopted or protected, 2020 to 2026 57
Table 8. Laws on gender-based and domestic violence, by country 59
Table 9. Laws on rape and sexual offences, by country 61
Table 10. Laws on sexual harassment, by country 63
Table 11. Laws on female genital mutilation, by country 65
Table 12. Child marriage and minimum age of marriage, by country 68
Table 13. Anti-trafficking laws, by country 71
Table 14. Legal aid and access to justice, by country 74
Table 15. Laws on human rights defenders and associations, by country 76
Table 16. Reforms recommended for Guinea by treaty bodies, national organisations and RFLD 84
Table 17. Guinea: key legal texts for the themes of this report 85
Table 18. Day 1, Tuesday 24 November: land rights, laws and lived realities 88
Table 19. Day 2, Wednesday 25 November: feminist leadership and solidarity 88
Table 20. Day 3, Thursday 26 November: advocacy, dialogue and influence 89
Table 21. The four groups of barriers to women's land rights, with examples from the region 89
Table 22. Benin: status of key regional and international treaties 92
Table 23. Burkina Faso: status of key regional and international treaties 98
Table 24. Cabo Verde: status of key regional and international treaties 102
Table 25. Côte d'Ivoire: status of key regional and international treaties 106
Table 26. The Gambia: status of key regional and international treaties 111

Table 27. Ghana: status of key regional and international treaties 116
Table 28. Guinea: status of key regional and international treaties 121
Table 29. Guinea-Bissau: status of key regional and international treaties 126
Table 30. Liberia: status of key regional and international treaties 131
Table 31. Mali: status of key regional and international treaties 135
Table 32. Niger: status of key regional and international treaties 145
Table 33. Nigeria: status of key regional and international treaties 150
Table 34. Senegal: status of key regional and international treaties 154
Table 35. Sierra Leone: status of key regional and international treaties 157
Table 36. Togo: status of key regional and international treaties 161
Table 37. Key indicators recorded in the sixteen country profiles 163
Table 38. Priority legal reforms by country 168
Table 39. Key dates for advocacy, November 2026 to July 2027 171
Table 40. Monitoring framework, 2027 171
Table 41. Country detail behind the scorecard: laws, ages, grounds and representation 173
Table 42. Definitions used for the seven scorecard questions 174
Table 43. Reforms pending in the region and reforms RFLD is pursuing 174
Table 44. Status of selected instruments on women's rights, by country
Table 45. The West Africa legal scorecard 2026 at a glance: fifteen countries, seven questions

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACERWC	African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
AES	Alliance of Sahel States (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger)
AU	African Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; also its Committee
CNT	Conseil national de la transition (Guinea)
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSW	United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
DSSR	Droits en santé sexuelle et reproductive (French for SRHR)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCT	Federal Capital Territory (Nigeria)
FGM	Female genital mutilation
GBV	Gender-based violence
GR	General recommendation (of the CEDAW Committee)
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MMR	Maternal mortality ratio
NAPTIP	National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (Nigeria)
RFLD	Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement (Women Leaders Network for Development)
SEA-T	Society. Equality. Africa: the Transformation programme
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UPR	Universal Periodic Review

VAPP Act	Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015 (Nigeria)	**WBL**	Women, Business and the Law (World Bank)
VSLA	Village savings and loan association	**WHO**	World Health Organization
WAFF	West African Feminist Fund		

A note on terms

"West Africa" in this report covers the fifteen countries of RFLD's legal scorecard (the membership of ECOWAS before the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger took effect in January 2025) and Mauritania, which the United Nations classifies in Western Africa. "Indigenous women" follows the self-identification of participants and the usage of UNDRIP and CEDAW general recommendation No. 39. "Vulnerable Groups" follows RFLD's usage on its website.

The report at a glance

16
countries profiled, 15 of them in the legal scorecard

7
scorecard questions asked of every country

4
linked themes: land, climate, SRHR and gender-based violence

13
laws adopted or protected since 2020 with RFLD's contribution

48
figures, charts and infographics

45
tables, including country law tables by theme

340+
national legal texts cited with their reference numbers

Oct 2026
date of verification of the legal information

Map of the report

Part	Chapters	What it answers
I. Framing	1 to 3	Why the four themes belong together, how the evidence was built, where the region stands in 2026
II. Themes	4 to 8	What the law says on land, climate, SRHR and violence, and what keeps it from working
III. Guinea	9 and 10	The country in focus and the design of the Conakry seminar
IV. Countries	Sixteen profiles	Laws, gaps and recommended reforms, country by country
V. Action	12 and 13	Who should do what, by when, and how progress will be measured

Executive summary

West African States have written many of women's rights into law. The problem this report documents is less the absence of law than the distance between law and life, and that distance is widest where land, the body and safety meet.

This report brings together, for sixteen West African countries, what the law provides on four linked themes: women's land and inheritance rights; climate and the environment; sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR, or DSSR in French); and gender-based violence, including harmful practices and trafficking. It rests on RFLD's legal profiles of the 55 African Union member states, verified in October 2026, on the West Africa legal scorecard 2026 and on the register of laws RFLD helped change (RFLD, 2026m; RFLD, 2026l; RFLD, 2026g). It also draws lessons from RFLD's advocacy seminar on Indigenous women's land rights and feminist leadership in Conakry, 24 to 26 November 2026 (RFLD, 2026f).

3 of 15
scorecard countries explicitly make marital rape a crime

3
countries have no dedicated law on violence against women: Guinea, Mali, Niger

4
countries have no statute banning FGM: Mali, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cabo Verde

3
countries let girls marry below 18: Niger (15), Mali and Senegal (16)

Key findings

1. Statutory land law mostly promises equality; practice does not deliver it. Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo all have land or civil code provisions that give women equal rights to own and administer land. Customary rules, family councils and procedures that ignore women's unpaid contributions still decide who keeps the field. In Burkina Faso only 32 per cent of women in unions held land in 2010 and 8.2 per cent held it alone; in Nigeria women own an estimated 4 to 10 per cent of land depending on the region (RFLD, 2026m). Inheritance remains unequal by law in Mauritania, in Muslim successions in Senegal and under customary and religious rules in The Gambia, and for surviving spouses in Guinea.

2. Land insecurity is a climate problem. Climate change has already reduced agricultural productivity growth in Africa by 34 per cent since 1961 (IPCC, 2022). Women make up 49 per cent of the agrifood workforce in sub-Saharan Africa, and in 28 of 33 countries with data men are more likely than women to own agricultural land (FAO, NRI and AWARD, 2025). A farmer without secure tenure has little reason or means to invest in soil, trees or water. Women's knowledge of seeds, soils and water is rarely counted in land and climate decisions.

3. Abortion law is the weakest point of SRHR protection. Senegal allows no exception; Nigeria and Sierra Leone allow abortion only to save a life. Only Benin and Cabo Verde allow abortion on request in the first twelve weeks. West and Central Africa records about 135,000 maternal deaths a year, more than half of the global burden (UNICEF, 2025). Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol requires States to allow medical abortion at least in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest and where the pregnancy endangers the mother's health or life (African Union, 2003).

4. Laws on violence have advanced since 2020, but gaps remain where risk is highest. Eight of the fifteen scorecard countries adopted or protected a law on sexual violence or a related protection between 2020 and 2026, including Senegal's criminalisation of rape (2020), Benin's 2021 laws and Sierra Leone's Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024 (RFLD, 2026g). Yet Guinea, where 95 per cent of women have undergone FGM and 47 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before 18, still has no dedicated law on violence against women and does not set out marital rape as a distinct offence (RFLD, 2026m).

5. Representation works where it is enforced. Cabo Verde (47.2 per cent), Senegal (41.2 per cent) and Guinea (40.8 per cent) have the highest shares of women in parliament, and all three have parity or allocation rules. Nigeria (4.2 per cent), The Gambia (8.6 per cent) and Liberia (11.0 per cent) have no quota and the lowest shares (RFLD, 2026l).

6. Civic space is shrinking where reform is most needed. Transitions in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Guinea-Bissau have suspended elected bodies. In Guinea, party dissolutions, media bans and enforced disappearances of opposition figures marked the 2025 and 2026 electoral cycle (RFLD, 2026m). Few countries have a law protecting human rights defenders.

Priority recommendations

1. **States:** apply the land and inheritance equality already in statute; register land jointly in the names of both spouses by default; value unpaid work in the division of marital property; and guarantee women at least a third of the seats on every land commission.
2. **Guinea, Mali and Niger:** adopt a dedicated law on violence against women that names marital rape, with a budget for enforcement.
3. **Mali, Niger and Senegal:** set 18 as the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys without exception; **Guinea** should remove the presidential exception.
4. **Mali, Liberia and Sierra Leone:** adopt a statute prohibiting FGM, with funding for prevention and enforcement.
5. **Senegal, Nigeria and Sierra Leone:** bring abortion law into line with Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol. **Niger:** ratify the Protocol.
6. **ECOWAS and the African Union:** make women's land tenure a core indicator of regional adaptation and food-security plans, and encourage ratification of the 2025 AU Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls.
7. **Funders:** channel climate and land finance directly to women-led organisations in Francophone West Africa, which receives less than 3 per cent of global funding for women's rights organisations according to AWID tracking cited by RFLD (RFLD, 2026j).

Chapter 12 sets out the full recommendations by actor and by country. Chapter 13 proposes a monitoring framework that RFLD will use from Conakry to the next update of the Maputo Barometer on 11 July 2027.



Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

CHAPTER 1

01

Introduction: one struggle, four fronts

From a seminar room in Conakry to sixteen countries: why women's land, climate, bodily autonomy and safety must be read together.

KEY MESSAGES

- Land, climate, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and gender-based violence are four entry points to the same problem: women's control over their lives and resources.
- Most of what women need is already in ratified texts; the gap is between law and life.
- The report covers sixteen countries and uses only adopted, published law.

Introduction: one struggle, four fronts

This report starts from a single activity in one capital city and widens the lens to a whole region. The activity is an advocacy seminar on Indigenous women's land rights and feminist leadership in Conakry. The region is West Africa, where RFLD's member organisations work in every country.

1.1 Why this report, and why now

From 24 to 26 November 2026, RFLD brings together in Conakry 35 representatives of women leaders, women's and Indigenous community organisations and public institutions (RFLD, 2026f). RFLD funds every place. The seminar asks a practical question: what stands between a woman in West Africa and the land she works, and what can the women who lead on land issues do about it in 2027?

That question cannot be answered with land law alone. When a widow is pushed off her late husband's field, the dispossession often comes with threats and violence. When a girl is married at fifteen, she usually loses her claim on her parents' land and her chance to decide whether and when to have children. When drought or flooding destroys a harvest, the woman with no title to the plot is the last to receive compensation or credit. Land, climate, sexual and reproductive health and violence are four doors into the same house.

The seminar coincides with the opening of the 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence on 25 November. RFLD's 2026 campaign theme is "Ensure justice, protect survivors, end impunity". The timing is deliberate. The day participants work on feminist leadership and land governance is also the day the region marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

1.2 Scope: sixteen countries, four themes

The report covers sixteen countries. Fifteen are the countries of RFLD's West Africa legal scorecard 2026: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo (RFLD, 2026l). The sixteenth is Mauritania, which the United Nations places in Western Africa and which shares with its neighbours the Sahel, the Senegal River basin and many of the same customary land systems. Mauritania is not part of the scorecard, so it appears in the regional analysis only where its profile gives comparable data.

The four themes are defined as follows.

- **Land and inheritance:** women's rights to own, use, administer and inherit land and other property, under statutory and customary rules, including the land rights of Indigenous and rural women.
- **Climate and environment:** the effect of climate change on women's livelihoods in agriculture, fisheries and water, women's role in environmental stewardship and their access to adaptation finance and decision-making.

- **Sexual and reproductive health and rights:** the legal grounds for abortion, maternal health, the reproductive health framework and the overlap with child marriage and FGM.
- **Gender-based violence:** laws on domestic and sexual violence, marital rape, sexual harassment, online violence, FGM, child marriage and trafficking, with the conditions for access to justice.



Figure 2. The Conakry seminar at a glance: three days of work, about 35 participants, eight thematic sessions, three international instruments and one advocacy roadmap for 2027. Source: RFLD.

Two cross-cutting conditions run through all four: whether women can reach a court and a lawyer, and whether women and the organisations that defend them can act in public. Chapter 8 deals with both.

1.3 How the four themes connect

The links between the themes are not theoretical. They appear in the cases RFLD's member organisations bring to its attention every month. Four connections recur.

Land and violence

Losing land often comes with pressure, threats and other forms of violence (RFLD, 2026f). Property grabbing from widows and daughters is itself a form of economic violence, recognised in Article 21 of the Maputo Protocol, which protects a widow's right to an equitable share of her husband's property and to continue living in the matrimonial house (African Union, 2003). Women who depend on a husband or male relative for access to land are also less able to leave a violent relationship.

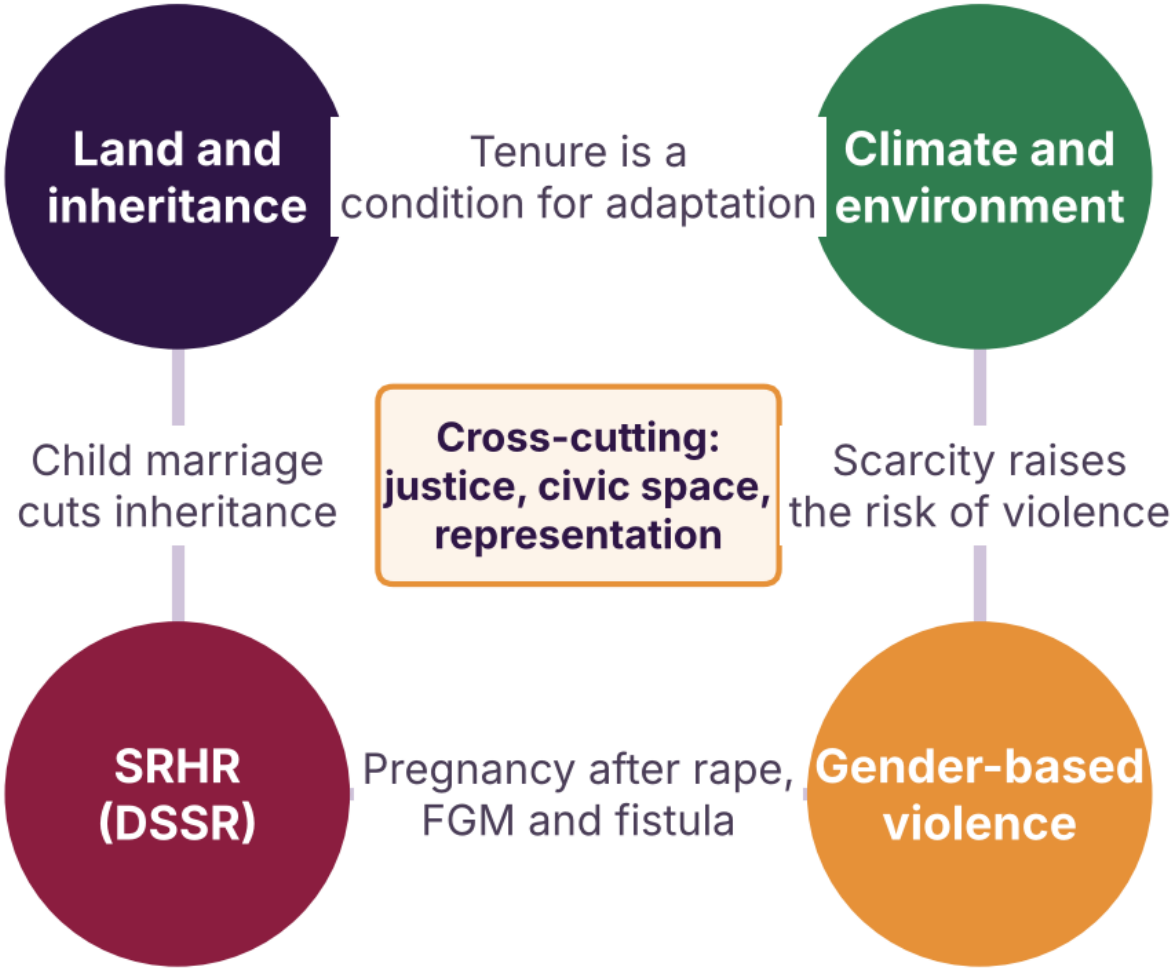


Figure 3. How the four themes of the report connect, with justice, civic space and representation as cross-cutting conditions. Source: RFLD analysis.

Land and climate

Secure tenure is a condition for adaptation. A farmer who may lose her plot at the next family dispute will not plant trees, build stone bunds or restore degraded soil. The CEDAW Committee's general recommendation No. 34 on rural women asks States to guarantee women's land rights precisely because they underpin food security and resilience (CEDAW Committee, 2016). Chapter 5 develops this point.

Bodily autonomy and land

Child marriage removes girls from school and from the line of inheritance, and exposes them to early pregnancy. In Niger, 76 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 were married before 18; in Mali the figure is 49 per cent and in Guinea 47 per cent (RFLD, 2026m). A girl who marries at fifteen rarely becomes a woman who holds a land title in her own name.

Climate and violence

Drought, displacement and the competition for water and pasture raise the risk of violence against women and girls, including on the long walks to fetch water and fuel. Insecurity in the central Sahel has displaced large populations and disrupted health services, including for survivors.

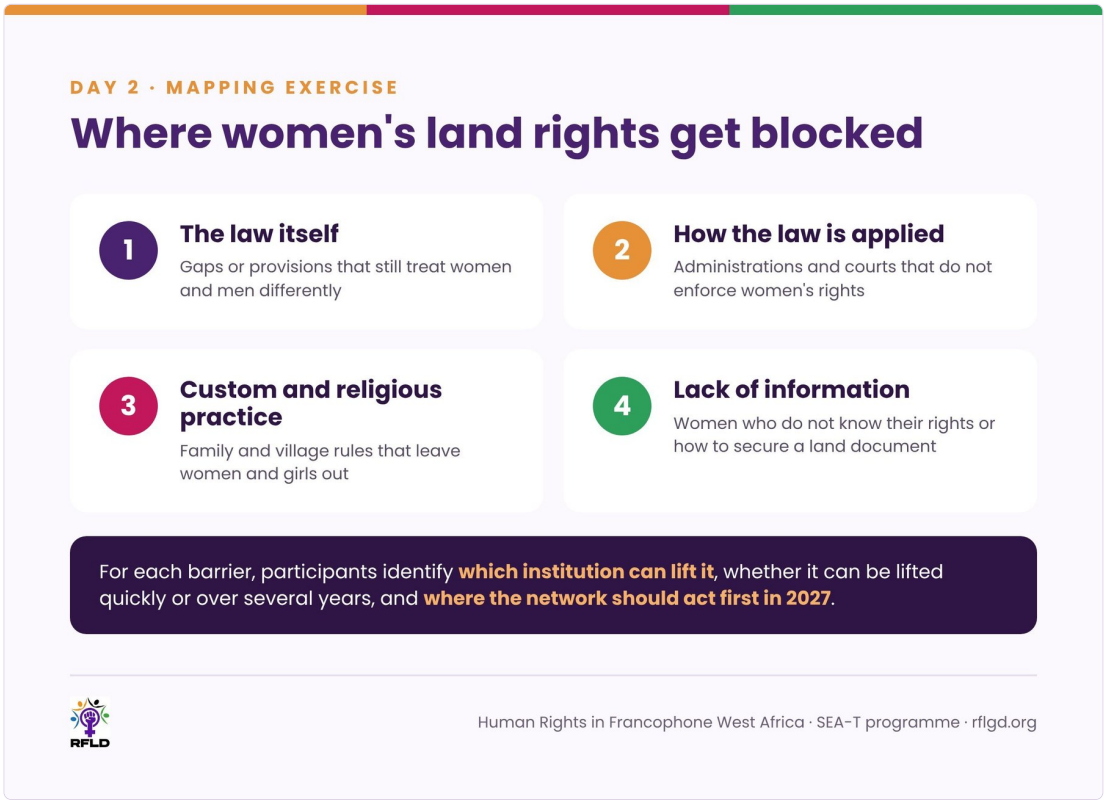


Figure 4. Where women's land rights get blocked: the four groups of barriers used in the Conakry mapping exercise. The law itself, how the law is applied, custom and religious practice, and lack of information. Source: RFLD.

1.4 Structure of the report

Part I frames the analysis. After this introduction, Chapter 2 explains the method and the ethics rules, and Chapter 3 draws the regional picture: treaty commitments, political transitions and women's representation.

Part II is thematic. Chapter 4 deals with land and inheritance, Chapter 5 with climate and the environment, Chapter 6 with SRHR and Chapter 7 with gender-based violence, harmful practices and trafficking. Chapter 8 covers access to justice, civic space and political participation.

Part III turns to Guinea. Chapter 9 sets out the country's legal framework and context. Chapter 10 describes the Conakry seminar: its objectives, its agenda, the standards it uses and the follow-up planned.

Part IV contains sixteen country profiles drawn from RFLD's database. They can be read on their own and are designed to be photocopied for use in national advocacy.

Part V sets out recommendations by actor and by country, and a monitoring framework for 2027. The annexes reproduce the full scorecard, the reforms still pending, the key articles of the instruments used in Conakry and a glossary.

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

- **Women's organisations** can quote the country profiles and the scorecard in alternative reports to the African Commission, in CEDAW and UPR submissions and in meetings with parliamentarians.
- **Officials and parliamentarians** can use the gap analysis in each profile to identify the provisions that need amendment or implementing decrees.
- **Traditional and religious leaders** can use Chapter 4 and Chapter 10 to see how statutory law and regional standards treat the customary rules they apply.
- **Funders** can use Chapter 5 and Chapter 12 to see where support to women-led organisations would change outcomes on land and climate.

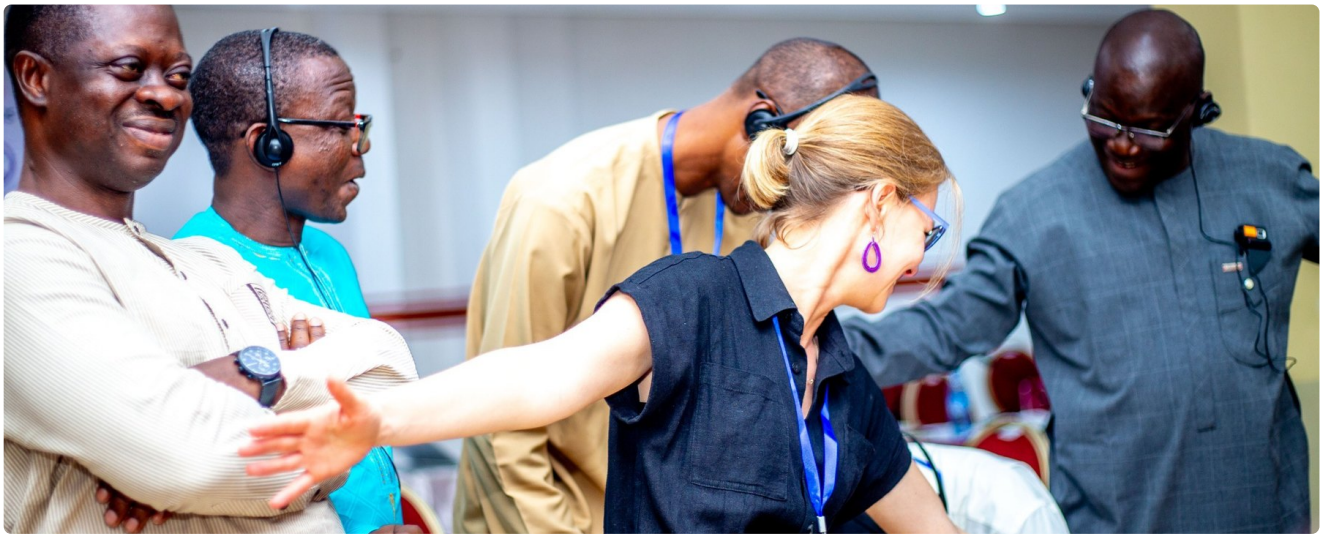


Figure 5. Participants in an RFLD training on women's political participation and the Maputo Protocol, May 2026. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

Reading the evidence

Two cautions apply throughout. First, a law recorded in this report is a law on paper: whether it protects women depends on budgets, institutions and the attitudes of those who apply it. Where RFLD's profiles record a gap in implementation, the report says so. Second, the absence of a law in a profile does not always mean that no law exists. RFLD is still verifying some topics, and it lists them at the end of each country profile. Readers who hold the official text of a law that is missing or misdescribed are invited to send it to programs@rflgd.org, so that the next edition of the score-card and the Maputo Barometer can correct it.



Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

CHAPTER 2

02

Method, sources and ethics

One rule guides the analysis: only adopted and published law counts. This chapter explains how the evidence was built and checked.

KEY MESSAGES

- Five RFLD evidence sources, cross-checked against UN, AU and World Bank data.
- A country scores only where an adopted legal text exists; drafts are context, not protection.
- No survivor, seminar participant or individual defender is identified.

Method, sources and ethics

The analysis rests on one rule: a country scores only where an adopted and published legal text exists. Bills, draft codes and policy statements are reported as context. They are never counted as protection.

2.1 Sources of evidence

The report draws on five bodies of evidence produced by RFLD and its members, cross-checked against international sources.

RFLD legal profiles of the 55 African Union member states

The core source is RFLD's database of women's rights laws, which holds a legal profile for each of the 55 member states of the African Union (RFLD, 2026m). Each profile lists the country's treaty commitments, its constitutional provisions on equality and quotas, and its national laws grouped by theme: land and property, inheritance, family and personal status, gender-based and domestic violence, rape and sexual offences, sexual harassment, FGM, child marriage, abortion and reproductive health, trafficking, political participation, labour and maternity, social protection, nationality, online violence, data protection, access to justice, human rights defenders, persons with disabilities and older persons. For each law, the profile records the reference number, what the law provides, the gaps identified and the source. The sixteen profiles used here were verified as of October 2026.

The West Africa legal scorecard 2026

The scorecard asks the same seven questions of fifteen countries: whether the Maputo Protocol is ratified; whether there is a dedicated law on violence against women; whether marital rape is a crime; whether FGM is banned by statute; whether girls' minimum age of marriage is 18 without exception; whether abortion is allowed after rape; and whether there is a quota or parity law (RFLD, 2026l). Chapter 3 and Annex A reproduce the results.

The register of laws and policies RFLD helped change

The register lists the laws, decrees and institutional decisions to which RFLD contributed, with the public evidence for each (RFLD, 2026g). An entry is added only when a public document shows both the change and RFLD's part in it. RFLD says "contributed" because each of these laws was the result of work by many actors, led by national women's organisations.

Country fact sheets and thematic pages

The country fact sheets summarise women's rights in law and practice on one page per country (RFLD, 2026b). RFLD's thematic pages on trafficking, harmful practices, maternal health, climate action and court decisions provide context and data from United Nations agencies (RFLD, 2026i; RFLD, 2026e; RFLD, 2026h; RFLD, 2026a; RFLD, 2026c).

The Conakry seminar design

The objectives, agenda and advocacy toolkit of the Conakry seminar shape Part III and the recommendations (RFLD, 2026f). Because the seminar takes place after this report is finalised, the report does not present its results. RFLD will publish the recommendations and the 2027 roadmap adopted in Conakry separately.



Figure 6. A working session at the RFLD office in Dakar on the protection of women human rights defenders, June 2026. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

2.2 International sources

Regional and global data come from the agencies that produce the reference series: UNICEF for child marriage, FGM and maternal and child mortality (UNICEF, 2017; UNICEF, 2024; UNICEF, 2025); WHO and its partners for maternal mortality (WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNDESA/Population Division, 2025); UNODC for trafficking (UNODC, 2024); FAO for women in agrifood systems (FAO, 2023; FAO, NRI and AWARD, 2025); the IPCC for climate impacts (Trisos et al., 2022; IPCC, 2022); the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law for legal frameworks scores (World Bank, 2026); and the Inter-Parliamentary Union for women in parliament (IPU, 2026). Where RFLD's profiles report a figure from one of these sources, the report cites the profile and names the original source in the text.

2.3 Verification and the adopted-law rule

Texts were checked against official journals and national legal portals, against documents shared by RFLD members and against RFLD's 2023 report on West Africa's legislative framework (RFLD, 2023). Three conventions apply throughout.

- **Only adopted law counts.** A bill that has passed one chamber, a draft code under consultation or a ministerial policy is reported, but the scorecard does not credit it.
- **Ambiguity is described, not scored.** Where a text is ambiguous, the gap is described in words rather than awarded a point. "Partly" means that the law exists with exceptions or applies only in part of the country. "Not recorded" means that the profile records no explicit provision.

- **Law is the first step, not the last.** For each legal finding, the report asks whether there are implementing decrees, a budget, trained police and judges, specialised units and reliable data. Where the profiles record such information, it is reported.

2.4 Limits of the analysis

A legal analysis has blind spots. It describes what the law provides and, through the gaps recorded, some of what blocks its application. It cannot measure how many women actually hold land, obtain a conviction or reach a safe abortion. Where survey data exist, the report uses them, but they are often old: Niger's child marriage figures date from 2012 and Burkina Faso's land figures from 2010. In countries under transition, published texts may be suspended or applied selectively, and official journals are sometimes hard to obtain. Customary law is by nature unwritten and varies from one community to the next; the report describes how statutory law treats custom rather than custom itself.

Nigeria's federal structure adds a further limit. The VAPP Act 2015 and the Child's Rights Act apply directly only in the Federal Capital Territory and in the states that have adopted them. National statements about Nigeria therefore need a state-by-state reading.

2.5 Ethics and safeguarding

The report follows RFLD's rules on ethics and informed consent in shadow reporting. It does not identify survivors, seminar participants or individual defenders. Photographs come from RFLD's own library and were taken with the consent of participants at public convenings. None shows a survivor of violence. Case descriptions are composites drawn from patterns documented by member organisations and contain no identifying detail.

> **DO NO HARM**
>
> Women who defend land, bodily autonomy or the environment in West Africa face reprisals. RFLD's policy brief "Defending without being exposed", presented on the main agenda of the African Commission's 89th Ordinary Session in October 2026, sets out the protection measures RFLD asks of States and funders. The same caution applies to anyone using this report: do not identify survivors, participants or defenders without their informed consent (RFLD, 2026l).

2.6 Referencing

The report uses the Harvard author-date system. In-text citations give the author and year, with a letter where RFLD published several sources in 2026. The full list of references is at the end of the report. Legal texts are identified by their official reference number in the country profiles and in Annex B. Online sources were accessed on 19 November 2026.



Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

CHAPTER 3

03

The regional picture in 2026

Fifteen scorecard countries and Mauritania: treaties, transitions and the share of women in the rooms where laws are made.

KEY MESSAGES

- Fifteen of sixteen countries have ratified the Maputo Protocol; Niger has not.
- Only three of fifteen scorecard countries explicitly make marital rape a crime.
- Quotas work where enforced: Cabo Verde, Senegal and Guinea lead on women in parliament.

The regional picture in 2026

West Africa entered 2026 with a dense web of treaty commitments on women's rights, a regional legal standard on equality and a political map redrawn by transitions. Women's representation varies from more than 47 per cent of parliament in Cabo Verde to just over 4 per cent in Nigeria.

3.1 The regional normative framework

Every West African State has ratified CEDAW. All but one of the sixteen countries covered here have ratified the Maputo Protocol, the African Union's Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, adopted in Maputo on 11 July 2003 (African Union, 2003). Niger signed it in 2004 and has not ratified it, which makes it the only scorecard country outside the Protocol (RFLD, 2026l).

The Maputo Protocol goes further than CEDAW on several issues covered by this report. Article 5 requires States to prohibit FGM. Article 6 sets 18 as the minimum age of marriage. Article 14 recognises the right to control one's fertility and requires States to authorise medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest and where the pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or her life. Article 19 guarantees the right to sustainable development, including women's access to and control over productive resources such as land. Article 21 protects widows' and daughters' inheritance rights (African Union, 2003). The African Commission's General Comment No. 2 explains what Article 14 requires of States in practice (ACHPR, 2014).

At the sub-regional level, the ECOWAS Supplementary Act on Equality of Rights between Women and Men for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, gives regional force to these protections, including on harmful practices, land and participation (ECOWAS, 2015; RFLD, 2026e). In February 2025, the African Union adopted a Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls (African Union, 2025). RFLD's profiles record that, as of the most recent AU status lists, only Ghana, Liberia and The Gambia had signed it among the sixteen countries, and none had ratified it (RFLD, 2026m).

Table 1. Status of selected instruments on women's rights, by country

Country	Maputo Protocol	CEDAW Optional Protocol	ILO C190 (violence and harassment)	AU Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls (2025)	Protocol on the African Court
Benin	Ratified 30/09/2005	Signed 25 May 2000 / ratified 27 Sep 2019	Not recorded	Not signed	Ratified 10/06/2014
Burkina Faso	Ratified 09/06/2006	Signed 16 Nov 2001 / ratified 10 Oct 2005	Not recorded	Not signed	Ratified 31/12/1998
Cabo Verde	Ratified 21/06/2005	Acceded 10 Oct 2011	Not recorded	Not signed	Not signed
Côte d'Ivoire	Ratified 05/10/2011	Acceded 20 Jan 2012	Not recorded	Not signed	Ratified 07/01/2003
The Gambia	Ratified 25/05/2005	Not a party	Not recorded	Signed 2025, not ratified	Ratified 30/06/1999

Country	Maputo Protocol	CEDAW Optional Protocol	ILO C190 (violence and harassment)	AU Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls (2025)	Protocol on the African Court
Ghana	Ratified 13/06/2007	Signed 24/02/2000 / ratified 03/02/2011	Not ratified	Signed 2025, not ratified	Ratified 25/08/2004
Guinea	Ratified 16/04/2012	Not a party	Not ratified	Not signed	Signed 2003, not ratified
Guinea-Bissau	Ratified 19/06/2008	Signed 12/09/2000 / ratified 05/08/2009	Not ratified	Not signed	Ratified 14/10/2021
Liberia	Ratified 14/12/2007	Signed 22/09/2004 / not ratified	Not ratified	Signed 2025, not ratified	Signed 1998, not ratified
Mali	Ratified 13/01/2005	Accession 05/12/2000	Not ratified	Not signed	Ratified 10/05/2000
Mauritania	Ratified 21/09/2005	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not signed	Ratified 19/05/2005
Niger	Signed 2004, not ratified	Accession 30/09/2004	Not ratified	Not signed	Ratified 17/05/2004
Nigeria	Ratified 16/12/2004	Signed 08/09/2000; ratified 22/11/2004	Ratified 08/11/2022	Not signed	Ratified 20/05/2004
Senegal	Ratified 27/12/2004	Signed 10/12/1999; ratified 26/05/2000	Not ratified	Not signed	Ratified 29/09/1998
Sierra Leone	Ratified 03/07/2015	Signed 08/09/2000; not ratified	Not ratified	Not signed	Signed 1998, not ratified
Togo	Ratified 12/10/2005	Not a party	Not ratified	Not signed	Ratified 23/06/2003

Source: RFLD legal profiles in (RFLD, 2026m), based on United Nations, ILO and African Union Commission status lists. AU status lists carry their own dates; a ratification deposited after the date of the list may not appear.

Three further gaps stand out in the table. Guinea, The Gambia and Togo are not party to the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, which allows individual complaints, and Liberia and Sierra Leone have signed but not ratified it. Nigeria is the only one of the sixteen recorded in RFLD's profiles as having ratified ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work. Several States have not accepted the Protocol establishing the African Court, which limits the routes open to women whose rights are violated.

3.2 Political transitions and the regional order

Since 2020, military-led transitions have taken place in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Niger, and Guinea-Bissau's institutions have also been suspended. In Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, elected parliaments have been replaced by appointed transitional bodies, so quota laws that apply to elections no longer operate (RFLD, 2026l). Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger withdrew from ECOWAS and formed the Alliance of Sahel States; the withdrawal took effect in January 2025. The scorecard keeps the fifteen countries together because the legal questions it asks do not depend on membership of a regional bloc, and because women's organisations in all three countries remain part of the same networks.

Guinea completed its transition in 2025 and 2026. A new Constitution was approved by referendum on 21 September 2025, the transitional leader won the presidential election of 28 December 2025 with major opposition leaders barred, and the National Assembly elected on 31 May 2026 convened on 17 July 2026, ending the transition (RFLD, 2026m). Chapter 9 looks at what this means for women.



Figure 7. An RFLD side event with the Institut National de la Femme at the 89th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Dakar, October 2026. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

3.3 The scorecard at a glance

The seven questions of the scorecard give a compact view of where laws protect women and where they fail. The results below are explained in detail in Chapters 4 to 8.

Table 2. The West Africa legal scorecard 2026 at a glance: fifteen countries, seven questions

Country	Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Benin	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Burkina Faso	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Yes	Not recorded	Yes	Yes
Cabo Verde	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Partly	Yes	Yes
Côte d'Ivoire	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The Gambia	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	No
Ghana	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Yes
Guinea	Yes	No	No	Yes	Partly	Not recorded	Yes
Guinea-Bissau	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	Yes	Partly	Not recorded	Yes
Liberia	Yes	Yes	No	No	Partly	Not recorded	No
Mali	Yes	No	No	No	No	Not recorded	Partly
Niger	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Partly
Nigeria	Yes	Partly	Not recorded	Partly	Partly	No	No

Country	Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Senegal	Yes	Partly	Not recorded	Yes	No	No	Yes
Sierra Leone	Yes	Yes	Not recorded	No	Yes	No	Yes
Togo	Yes	Not recorded	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not recorded

"Partly" means the law exists with exceptions or applies only in part of the country. "Not recorded" means the RFLD legal profile records no explicit provision. Source: (RFLD, 2026l), based on RFLD legal profiles verified in October 2026.

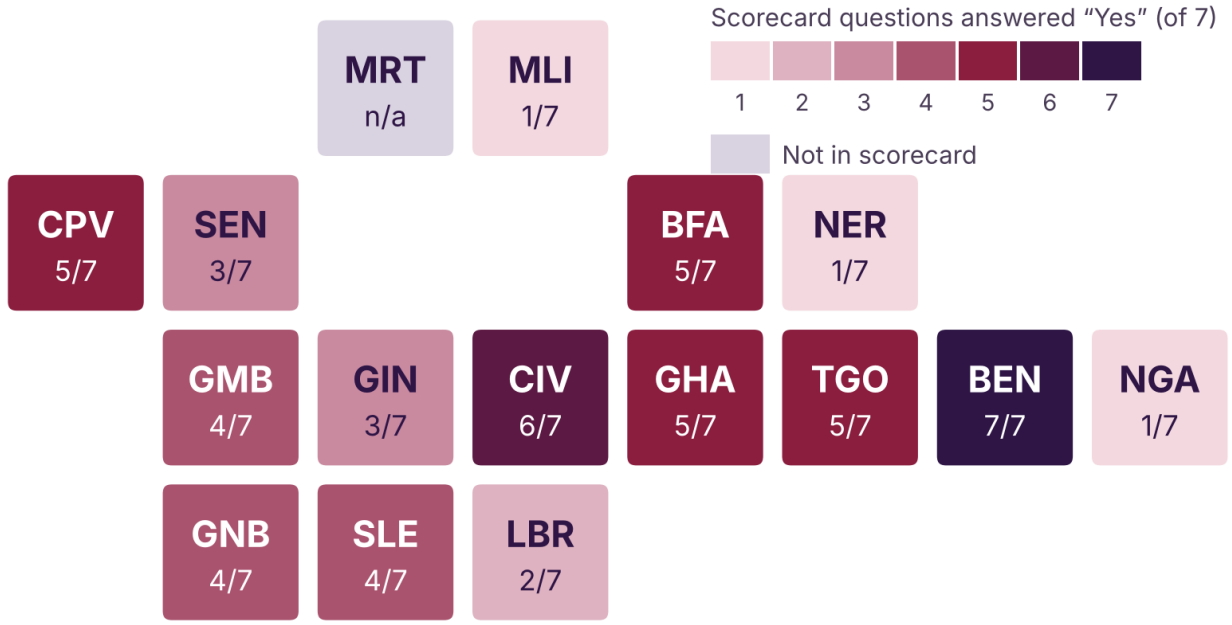


Figure 8. West Africa at a glance: number of the seven scorecard questions answered "Yes" in each country (tile map, not to scale). Source: RFLD, based on (RFLD, 2026l).

Five findings frame the rest of the report (RFLD, 2026l):

1. Three States still have no dedicated law on violence against women. Guinea, Mali and Niger rely on general Penal Code provisions.
2. Marital rape is explicitly a crime in only three countries: Benin (Law 2011-26), Cabo Verde (Law 84/VII/2011) and Togo (Penal Code 2015).
3. Girls can still marry below 18 in Mali and Senegal (16) and Niger (15). Cabo Verde, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Liberia set 18 but keep exceptions.
4. Mali, Liberia and Sierra Leone have no law banning FGM, and Cabo Verde has no specific offence.
5. Quotas work where they are enforced. The three countries with parity or allocation rules lead on representation.

3.4 Women in the rooms where laws are made

The share of women in national legislatures is a rough but telling indicator of whether women can shape the laws discussed in this report.

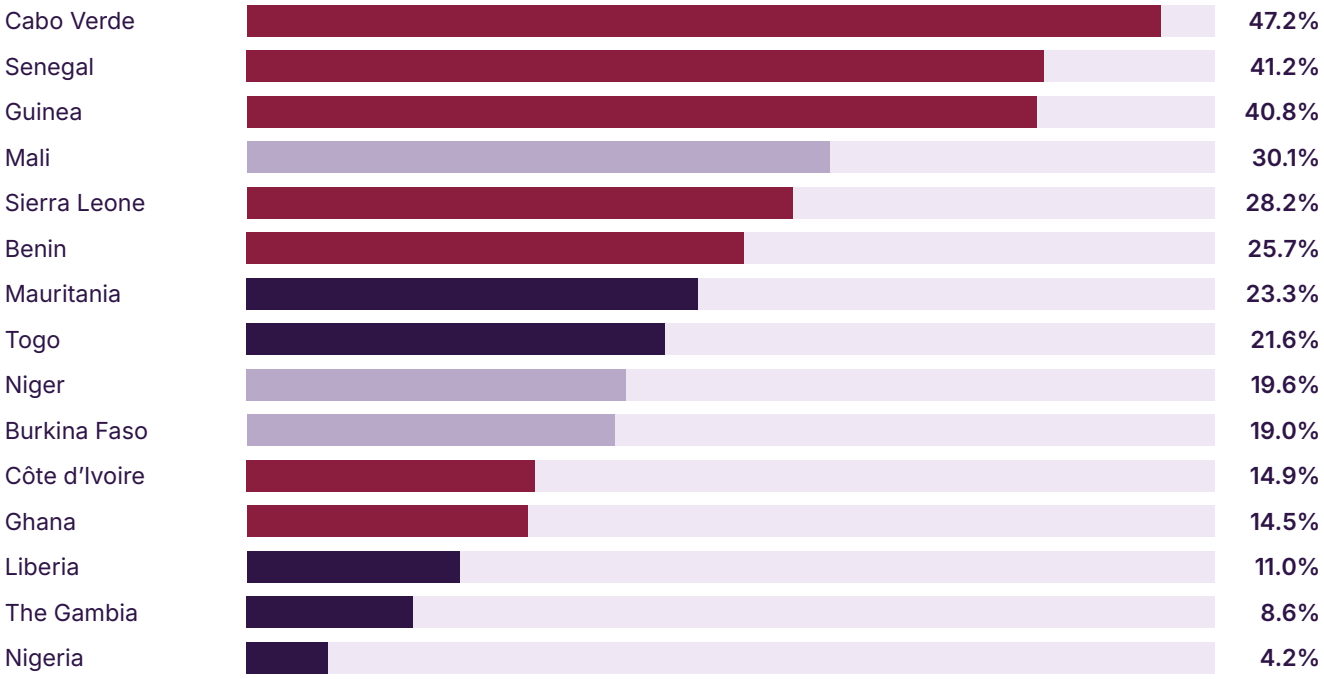


Chart note: deep red bars mark countries where the scorecard records a quota, parity or seat-allocation rule; dark purple bars mark countries where none is recorded; light bars are appointed transitional bodies. Guinea-Bissau: no data during the transition. Sources: (RFLD, 2026l; RFLD, 2026m), latest figures for 2025 and 2026.

Cabo Verde (47.2 per cent), Senegal (41.2 per cent) and Guinea (40.8 per cent) lead. All three have parity or allocation rules: Cabo Verde's 2019 law sets a 40 per cent threshold for candidates, Senegal has had parity on electoral lists since 2010 and Guinea's 2025 Constitution allocates proportional seats in favour of women candidates, building on the 2019 parity law. Nigeria, The Gambia and Liberia have no quota and the lowest shares: 4.2, 8.6 and 11.0 per cent. Ghana's Affirmative Action Act 2024 sets a path from 30 towards 50 per cent but had not yet changed the composition of parliament at the last election, where women took 14.5 per cent of seats (RFLD, 2026l).

WHY REPRESENTATION MATTERS FOR LAND AND CLIMATE

Land commissions, agricultural councils and climate committees are where the rules of tenure and adaptation are applied. Burkina Faso's 2009 rural land law and Sierra Leone's National Land Commission Act 2022 both require women on land bodies (RFLD, 2026m). The Conakry seminar devotes its second day to feminist leadership in land governance for that reason.

3.5 Legal frameworks scores

The World Bank's Women, Business and the Law index gives another comparative view. RFLD's profiles record the 2026 legal frameworks scores for several countries: Côte d'Ivoire 78.25, Cabo Verde 75.03, Benin 67.60, Burkina Faso 67.40, Ghana 66.72, Guinea 61.88, Liberia 58.95, The Gambia 57.50, Mali 50.33 and Guinea-Bissau 48.75 (RFLD, 2026m; World Bank, 2026). The index measures law, not practice, and its methodology differs from the scorecard's, but the ranking broadly matches what the scorecard shows: countries that have reformed their family and violence laws since 2010 score higher.

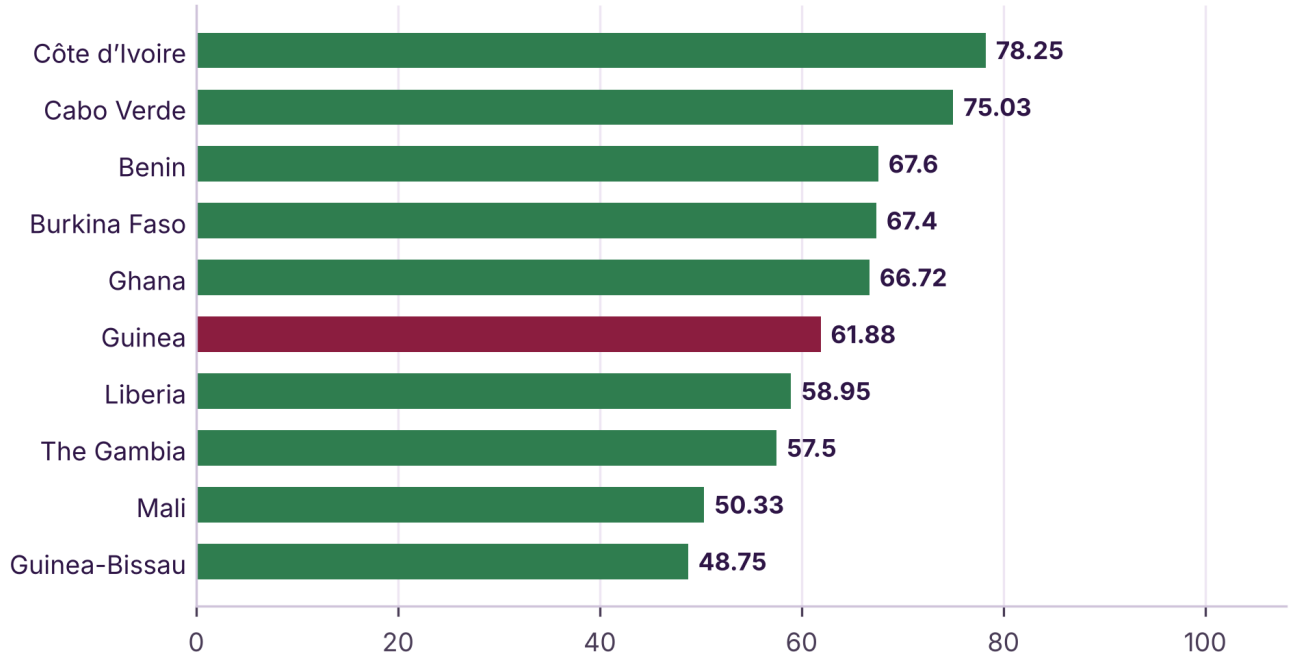


Figure 9. World Bank Women, Business and the Law 2026 legal frameworks scores recorded in RFLD's profiles (0 to 100). Source: RFLD legal profiles (RFLD, 2026m), citing (World Bank, 2026).

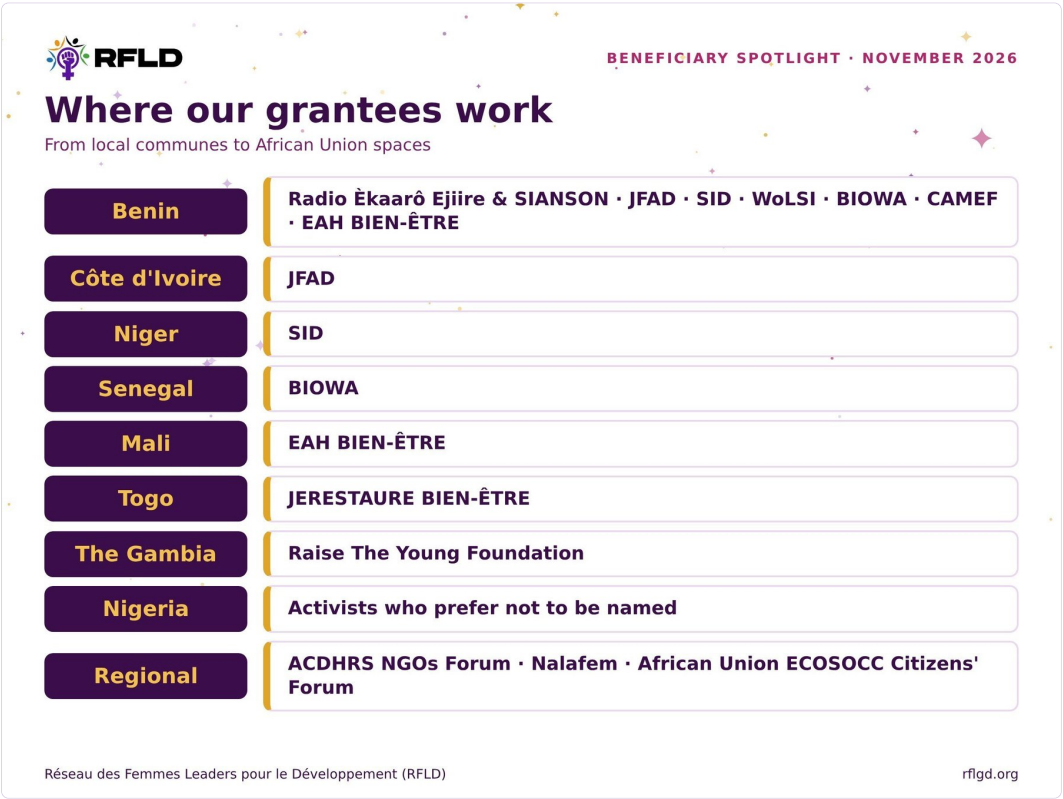


Figure 10. Where RFLD grantees work: women-led organisations supported in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Senegal, Mali, Togo, The Gambia and Nigeria, plus regional advocacy. Source: RFLD.



Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of p[illegible]

CHAPTER 4

04

Land, inheritance and women's tenure security

Statutory law in most of the region already promises equality. Custom, procedure and silence keep women off the land.

KEY MESSAGES

- Land codes in most countries promise equality; custom and procedure deny it.
- Married women, widows and daughters are the weak points of the system.
- 48 per cent of married women in sub-Saharan Africa fear losing their land at divorce, against 34 per cent of men.

Land, inheritance and women's tenure security

In most West African countries, a woman who reads her country's land code will find that she has the same right as a man to own land. The distance between that sentence and her life is made of custom, procedure, family councils and missing paperwork.

4.1 Legal pluralism: two systems on the same field

Across West Africa, access to land depends on the law and on custom at the same time (RFLD, 2026f). Land codes and civil codes set rules on ownership and inheritance. In many families and villages, however, land is still allocated according to customary rules that pass it through the male line. Under these rules a wife farms her husband's land, a daughter farms her father's land until she marries, and a widow's access depends on the goodwill of her late husband's family. Islamic law adds a third layer in matters of succession in several countries.

The result is that a woman's rights depend less on what the statute says than on which system is applied to her case and by whom. A land commission, a village chief, a family council, a cadi court and a civil judge may all claim competence over the same plot. Women are rarely present in any of these bodies, and they often do not know which one to approach.

The Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa, adopted by the African Union, recognises that land policy must address this pluralism and strengthen women's rights within both statutory and customary systems (AUC, ECA and AfDB, 2010). The CEDAW Committee's general recommendation No. 34 asks States to ensure that customary systems do not discriminate against rural women and to guarantee women's equal rights to land regardless of marital status (CEDAW Committee, 2016). General recommendation No. 39 extends this protection to Indigenous women and girls, including their collective rights to lands, territories and resources (CEDAW Committee, 2022).

4.2 What statutory law provides

The sixteen profiles show a broad movement towards formal equality in land and property law since the 1990s. The table below sets out the main provisions recorded.

Table 3. Statutory land and property provisions for women, by country

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Benin	Loi n° 2013-01 du 14 août 2013 portant Code foncier et domanial (arts. 14 and 316), as amended; Code des personnes et de la famille art. 185	Provides equal access to land and property for women and men.	None recorded
Burkina Faso	Loi n°034-2009/AN du 16 juin 2009 portant régime foncier rural, article 75	Secures rural land rights for all actors including women and guarantees equal property rights. It requires women's representation on rural land commissions.	Only 32% of women in unions held land in 2010 and 8.2% held it alone.

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
	Loi n°103-2015/CNT du 22 décembre 2015 on private rental housing	Guarantees access to private rental housing without discrimination based on sex; its implementing order was adopted in 2019.	None recorded
Cabo Verde	Código Civil, artigo 1638, e Decreto-Lei n.º 2/2007, artigos 5 e 8	Grants women equal rights to own and administer property and recognises non-monetary contributions in the division of marital property.	None recorded
Côte d'Ivoire	Loi n° 98-750 du 23 décembre 1998 relative au Domaine foncier rural, modifiée notamment par la loi n° 2019-868 du 14 octobre 2019	Governs rural land, including customary land, and the conversion of land certificates into title. The 2019 amendment revised the deadlines for that conversion, and the rural land agency AFOR was created in 2016.	None recorded
	Loi n° 2015-537 du 20 juillet 2015 d'orientation agricole, article 61	Provides for equitable access to land resources.	None recorded
The Gambia	Women's Act, 2010 (property access provisions)	Grants women equitable access to property.	The standard is equitable instead of equal, and customary tenure still excludes many women farmers from ownership.
Ghana	Land Act, 2020 (Act 1036), sections 38 and 47	Presumes that land acquired for value during marriage belongs to both spouses and treats a spouse holding title alone as a trustee for both. It requires written spousal consent to sell, mortgage, lease or give away such land.	The protection does not cover property acquired before the Act took effect in December 2020.
Guinea	Ordonnance n° 92/019 du 30 mars 1992 portant Code foncier et domanial, articles 1 and 2	Together with article 652 of the Civil Code, gives women and men equal rights to own and administer property.	Unpaid domestic contributions are not valued in marital property (Civil Code article 619).
Guinea-Bissau	Código Civil, artigos 1678.º e 1717.º a 1731.º	The Civil Code regulates marital property and recognises non-monetary contributions to the household when property is divided.	Married women do not have the same rights as men to own and administer immovable property.
	Land Act No. 5/98 (Lei da Terra)	The national land law governing land tenure and use rights in Guinea-Bissau.	None recorded
Liberia	Land Rights Act, 2018	Guarantees women equal rights to own land. It also guarantees them equal rights to access and use land. It protects the land rights of widows and requires women's representation on community land management committees.	Implementation is held back by entrenched customary practice.
Mali	Loi n° 06-40/AN-RM du 16 août 2006 portant loi d'orientation agricole	The agricultural orientation law removed legal barriers to women's access to and use of land.	The 2000 Land Code still applies customary law to succession and property administration.
	Loi relative au foncier agricole, promulguée le 11 avril 2017	Requires that 15 percent of developed public agricultural land be allocated to women's associations and other vulnerable groups, and recognises customary land rights.	The law contains no safeguard against gender discrimination within customary land management.
Mauritania	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Niger	Ordonnance n°93-015 (Principes d'orientation du Code rural), articles 8 à 10	Sets the guiding principles of the Code rural on land tenure.	Together with articles 1421 and 1428 of the Civil Code it does not give married women equal rights to own and administer property.
Nigeria	Land Use Act	Formally gives women and men equal access to land.	Patrilineal inheritance practices persist, and women own only a small share of land, estimated at 4 to 10 per cent depending on the region.
	Married Women's Property Act, sections 1, 2 and 5	The World Bank records equal property ownership rights for married women and men under these sections.	None recorded
Senegal	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Sierra Leone	Customary Land Rights Act, 2022	Recognises and protects rights in land held under customary tenure, including the rights of women and other marginalised groups, and sets up mechanisms to resolve land disputes.	Enforcement of women's equal access to land remains a challenge.
	National Land Commission Act, 2022	Creates land administration bodies at national and district level and requires a minimum number of women on their committees.	None recorded
Togo	Loi n° 2018-005 du 14 juin 2018 portant Code foncier et domanial	Guarantees women equal access to land ownership (articles 8, 13, 14 and 483).	None recorded

Source: RFLD legal profiles in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. "No provision recorded" means the profile does not yet record a law on this theme; it does not always mean that none exists.

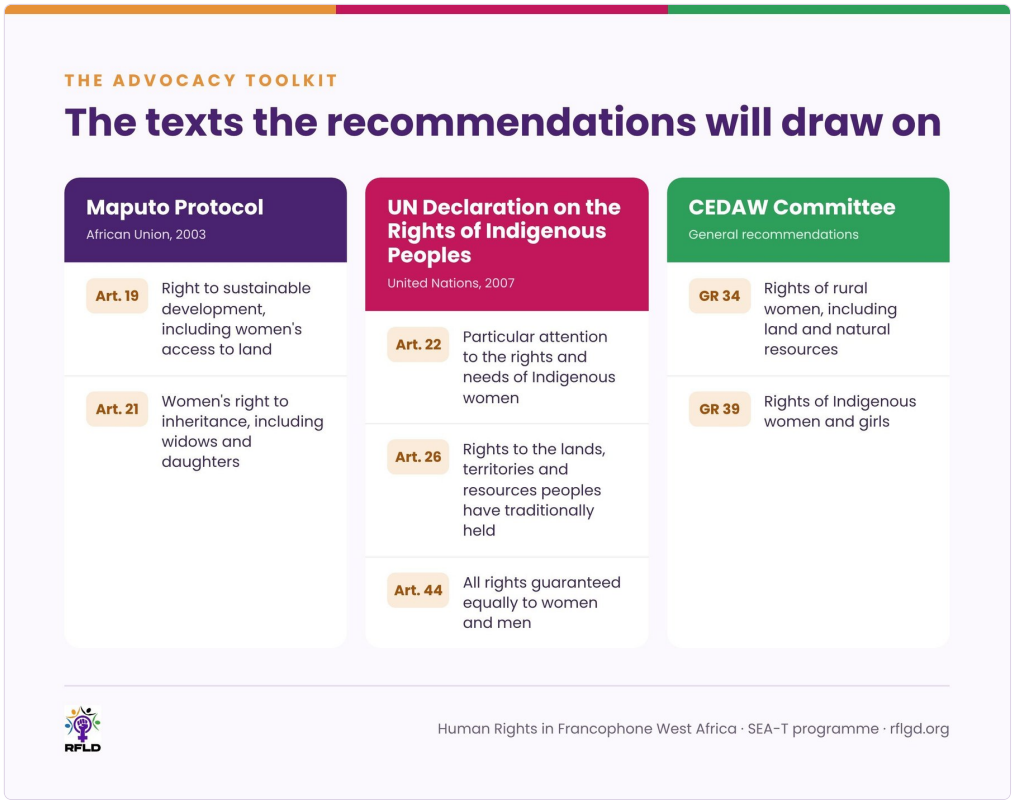


Figure 11. The advocacy toolkit for Conakry: the Maputo Protocol (articles 19 and 21), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (articles 22, 26 and 44) and CEDAW general recommendations 34 and 39. Source: RFLD.

Four patterns emerge from the table.

Formal equality is the norm in recent codes

Benin's Code foncier et domanial of 2013 provides equal access to land and property for women and men. Togo's 2018 Code foncier et domanial guarantees women equal access to land ownership. Guinea's 1992 Code foncier et domanial, read with the Civil Code, gives women and men equal rights to own and administer property. Cabo Verde's Civil Code grants equal rights to own and administer property and recognises non-monetary contributions to the household (RFLD, 2026m).

A new generation of laws reaches into customary tenure

The most significant reforms of the past decade engage directly with customary land. Liberia's Land Rights Act 2018 guarantees women equal rights to own, access and use land, protects the land rights of widows and requires women's participation in community land governance. Sierra Leone's Customary Land Rights Act 2022 recognises and protects rights held under customary tenure, including those of women, and its National Land Commission Act 2022 requires a minimum number of women on land committees at national and district level. Ghana's Land Act 2020 presumes that land acquired for value during marriage belongs to both spouses and treats a spouse who holds title alone as a trustee for both. Burkina Faso's rural land law of 2009 requires women's representation on rural land commissions, and Mali's 2017 law on agricultural land requires that 15 per cent of developed public agricultural land go to women's associations and other vulnerable groups (RFLD, 2026m).

Married women remain the weak point

Formal equality often stops at the door of the marital home. In Guinea-Bissau, married women do not have the same rights as men to own and administer immovable property. In Niger, the guiding principles of the Code rural, read with the Civil Code, do not give married women equal rights to own and administer property. In Guinea, unpaid domestic contributions are not valued in the division of marital property under article 619 of the Civil Code (RFLD, 2026m). A woman who has farmed, cooked, carried water and raised children for decades can leave a marriage with nothing.

Some codes accept the customary standard

The Gambia's Women's Act 2010 grants women equitable, not equal, access to property, and customary tenure still excludes many women farmers from ownership. Mali's 2000 Land Code still applies customary law to succession and property administration, and the 2017 agricultural land law contains no safeguard against discrimination within customary land management (RFLD, 2026m).

> *"A widow can lose the field she has farmed for years. A daughter can be denied her share of the family land."*
>
> RFLD, announcing the Conakry seminar (RFLD, 2026f)

4.3 Inheritance: where land is lost

Most women in West Africa do not buy land. They inherit it, or they lose it, at the death of a father or a husband. Inheritance law is therefore where land rights are won or lost.

Table 4. Inheritance and succession rules, by country

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Benin	Loi n° 2002-07 portant Code des personnes et de la famille, arts. 619, 630 and 634	Gives daughters and surviving spouses equal inheritance rights.	Customary practice continues to limit women's inheritance of land (CEDAW 2013).
Burkina Faso	Code des personnes et de la famille, adopted on 1 September 2025	Contains provisions that eliminate gender discrimination in inheritance, protecting women after divorce or the death of a spouse.	Customary rules continue to limit women's inheritance of land in practice.
Cabo Verde	Código Civil, artigos 2064, 2070 e 2072	Gives sons and daughters, and surviving wives and husbands, equal inheritance rights.	None recorded
Côte d'Ivoire	Loi n° 2019-573 du 26 juin 2019 relative aux successions	Improves the inheritance rights of the surviving spouse.	None recorded
The Gambia	Women's Act, 2010, section 45	Addresses women's inheritance and property rights.	The section subjects inheritance to customary and religious law, under which daughters receive half the share of sons.
	Cadi Appeals Panel Rules, 2009	Govern appeals in Sharia matters, including inheritance disputes.	Appeals have upheld unequal shares for daughters.
Ghana	Intestate Succession Law, 1985 (PNDCL 111)	Governs the distribution of property, including shares for the surviving spouse and children, when a person dies without a will.	Reform bills to improve the law have been pending for years and the law is applied inconsistently.
	Constitution of Ghana, 1992, article 22	Entitles a surviving spouse to reasonable provision from the estate of the deceased spouse and calls for laws on spousal property.	None recorded
Guinea	Loi L/2019/035/AN du 4 juillet 2019 portant Code civil, articles 666 to 680 and 695	Sons and daughters have equal inheritance rights.	Surviving spouses do not have equal inheritance rights (article 695), and family councils can discriminate in practice.
Guinea-Bissau	Código Civil, artigos 2133.º, 2139.º e 2147.º	Sons and daughters, and surviving wives and husbands, have equal rights to inherit under the Civil Code.	UNDP noted that customary law continues to be applied in family matters to the detriment of statutory law.
Liberia	An Act to Govern the Devolution of Estates and Establish Rights of Inheritance for Spouses of Both Statutory and Customary Marriages (Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law of 1998), approved 7 October 2003	Gives a widow one third of her late husband's property, with the remainder going to the children or other heirs, for both statutory and customary marriages.	None recorded

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Mali	Loi n° 2011-087 du 30 décembre 2011 portant Code des personnes et de la famille, articles 753, 770, 773, 798 and 800	The Code gives sons and daughters, and surviving spouses of either sex, equal inheritance rights under its statutory rules.	Customary rules on succession remain recognised through the 2000 Land Code and limit women's access to inherited land.
Mauritania	Personal Status Code (Law No. 2001-052), Articles 244 to 310	Regulates inheritance according to Islamic rules.	Women generally receive half the share of male heirs of the same degree.
Niger	Loi n°2018-37 du 1er juin 2018, article 72	The World Bank cites this provision as the basis on which divorce and remarriage are governed for women. It cites the same basis for inheritance.	Daughters and surviving wives do not have equal inheritance rights with sons and husbands.
Nigeria	Administration of Estates Law of Lagos State, section 50	The World Bank records equal inheritance rights for sons and daughters and for surviving spouses under this law.	The assessment covers Lagos State only.
Senegal	Loi n° 72-61 du 12 juin 1972 portant Code de la famille (successions de droit musulman)	The Family Code contains a separate regime for Muslim successions alongside the general law of succession.	Under the Muslim succession rules a daughter receives half the share of a son.
Sierra Leone	Devolution of Estates Act, 2007	The World Bank records equal inheritance rights for sons and daughters and for surviving spouses under sections 6 to 8.	None recorded
Togo	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		

Source: RFLD legal profiles in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. "No provision recorded" means the profile does not yet record a law on this theme; it does not always mean that none exists.

The table shows three groups of countries.

- **Equal statutory inheritance** for sons and daughters and for surviving spouses: Benin, Burkina Faso since the Code des personnes et de la famille adopted on 1 September 2025, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mali under its statutory rules, Sierra Leone under the Devolution of Estates Act 2007, and Lagos State in Nigeria (RFLD, 2026m).
- **Partial equality:** in Guinea, sons and daughters inherit equally but surviving spouses do not (article 695 of the Civil Code). In Liberia, a widow receives one third of her husband's property under the law on the devolution of estates and inheritance rights for spouses of statutory and customary marriages. In Ghana, the Intestate Succession Law of 1985 is applied inconsistently and reform bills have been pending for years (RFLD, 2026m).
- **Unequal by law:** in Mauritania, the Personal Status Code applies Islamic rules under which women generally receive half the share of male heirs of the same degree. Senegal's Family Code contains a separate regime for Muslim successions under which a daughter receives half the share of a son. In The Gambia, section 45 of the Women's Act subjects inheritance to customary and religious law, and the Cadi Appeals Panel has upheld unequal shares for daughters. In Niger, daughters and surviving wives do not have equal inheritance rights (RFLD, 2026m).

Even where the law is equal, practice lags. RFLD's profiles record that customary practice continues to limit women's inheritance of land in Benin, as the CEDAW Committee noted in 2013, and in Burkina Faso; in Guinea family councils can discriminate in practice; in Guinea-Bissau, UNDP has noted that customary law continues to be applied in family matters to the detriment of statutory law (RFLD, 2026m). Article 21 of the Maputo Protocol is clear: a widow has the right to an equitable share of her husband's property, to continue to live in the matrimonial house, and women and men have the same right to inherit their parents' property in equitable shares (African Union, 2003).

4.4 What the numbers show

Data on women's land ownership in West Africa are scarce and dated, which is itself a finding. Where they exist, they confirm the distance between law and practice.



Figure 12. Senegal's laws on women, land and family: an RFLD country focus on violence, the family, inheritance and land. Source: RFLD.

32%
of women in unions held land in Burkina Faso in 2010; 8.2% held it alone

4 to 10%
estimated share of land owned by women in Nigeria, depending on the region

28 of 33
sub-Saharan countries with data where men are more likely than women to own agricultural land

49%
of the agrifood workforce in sub-Saharan Africa are women

Sources: Burkina Faso and Nigeria from RFLD legal profiles (RFLD, 2026m); regional figures from (FAO, NRI and AWARD, 2025).

The FAO's 2025 report on women in agrifood systems in sub-Saharan Africa found that about 76 per cent of working women in the region are employed in agrifood systems, that women make up 49 per cent of the agrifood workforce, and that in 28 of the 33 countries with data men are more

likely than women to own agricultural land or hold secure land rights (FAO, NRI and AWARD, 2025). More than 90 per cent of employed women work in the informal sector. Women produce much of the region's food on land they do not control.

How secure women feel

Ownership figures do not capture the fear of losing land. The Prindex survey, which asked people in 140 countries in 2018 and 2019 how likely they were to lose their home or land against their will, found that in sub-Saharan Africa 48 per cent of married women feel insecure about their land or property in the event of divorce, compared with 34 per cent of married men. Across the region's 34 surveyed countries, 29 per cent of women and 28 per cent of men feel insecure overall on an unweighted basis, and sub-Saharan Africa is one of the regions where women feel more insecure than men (Prindex, 2020). The gap opens at the moments when marriages end, which are exactly the moments that family and inheritance law is meant to govern.

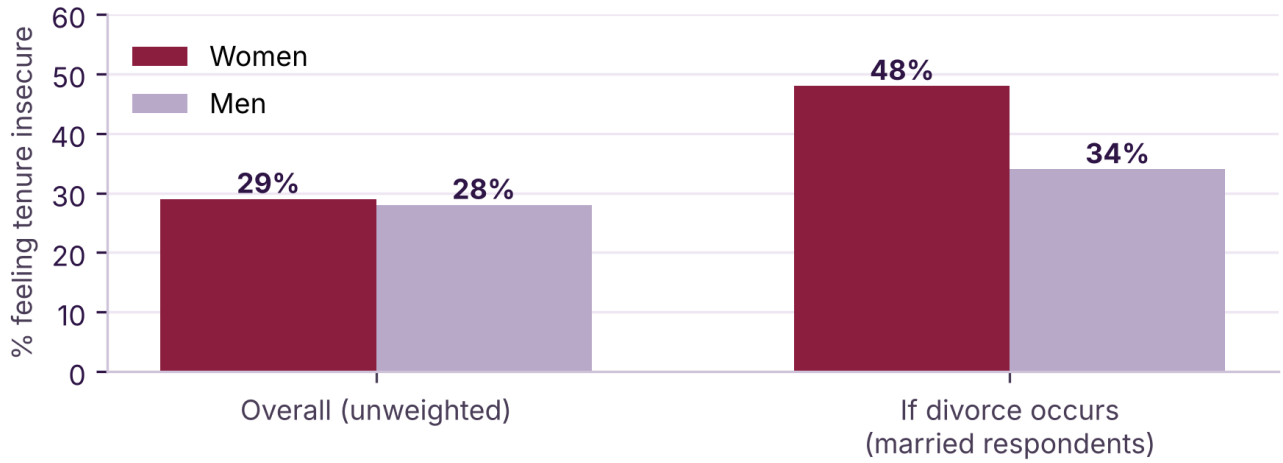


Figure 13. Share of people in sub-Saharan Africa who fear losing their land or property against their will, overall and in the event of divorce. Source: RFLD, based on (Prindex, 2020).

The Prindex findings matter for policy because perceived insecurity drives behaviour. A woman who believes she will lose her plot if her marriage ends is less likely to plant trees, improve the soil or use the land as collateral, whatever the land code says. Clear, publicised rules on the division of property at divorce and widowhood are therefore as important as rules on titling.

4.5 Land and violence

The link between losing land and gender-based violence is one of the three objectives of the Conakry seminar's first day (RFLD, 2026f). The cases documented by RFLD members follow recurring patterns.

- **Property grabbing after widowhood.** The family of the deceased claims the land and the house, sometimes within days of the burial. Resistance is met with threats, accusations of witchcraft or physical violence.
- **Exclusion of daughters.** Brothers or uncles refuse a daughter's share on the ground that she will marry into another family. Married daughters who return after divorce or widowhood find no land waiting for them.

- **Coercive control through land.** A wife whose access to a plot depends on her husband cannot leave a violent marriage without losing her livelihood.
- **Displacement by investment.** Large-scale land acquisitions for agriculture, mining or infrastructure negotiate with chiefs and male heads of household; women who farm the land are rarely consulted or compensated.

These patterns explain why RFLD treats land rights as part of its work against gender-based violence. A woman who knows where to find help when she is dispossessed is more likely to keep her land and her safety. The seminar aims to document real cases of dispossession and identify the places where a dispossessed woman can find help (RFLD, 2026f).



Figure 14. A participant takes the floor during an RFLD training session, May 2026. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

4.6 Indigenous women and collective land

Indigenous women hold knowledge on soils, seeds, plants and water that helps protect the land, but that knowledge is rarely taken into account when decisions on land are made (RFLD, 2026f). Their rights have a collective as well as an individual dimension. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognises the right to the lands, territories and resources that Indigenous peoples have traditionally owned, occupied or used (Article 26), calls for particular attention to the rights and special needs of women (Article 22) and guarantees that all its rights apply equally to women and men (Article 44) (United Nations, 2007). The CEDAW Committee's general recommendation No. 39 asks States to protect Indigenous women's rights to land and to ensure their participation in decisions about their territories (CEDAW Committee, 2022).

For many communities in the Sahel and coastal forests, the question is not only whether a woman can own a plot in her name. It is whether the community can keep its land at all, and whether women have a voice in how it is managed. The Conakry seminar addresses both levels: individual rights under national law and collective rights under UNDRIP.

4.7 What would change outcomes

Five measures, developed in Chapter 12, would make statutory equality real.

1. Joint titling by default for land acquired during marriage, as in Ghana's Land Act 2020, extended to customary marriages.
2. Recognition of unpaid contributions in the division of marital property, as in Cabo Verde and Guinea-Bissau, and equal inheritance for daughters and surviving spouses.
3. Women's representation on land commissions and customary land bodies, as in Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone, with a minimum of one third.
4. Legal aid, paralegals and mobile land clinics for women who contest dispossession, and land administration data by sex published every year.

> **PROMISING PRACTICE: THREE LAWS THAT REACH CUSTOMARY LAND**
>
> **Liberia, Land Rights Act 2018.** Guarantees women equal rights to own, access and use land, protects the land rights of widows and requires women's representation on community land management committees. Its weakness is implementation, held back by entrenched customary practice (RFLD, 2026m).
>
> **Ghana, Land Act 2020 (Act 1036).** Presumes that land acquired for value during marriage belongs to both spouses and treats a spouse who holds title alone as a trustee for both. It does not cover property acquired before December 2020 (RFLD, 2026m).
>
> **Sierra Leone, Customary Land Rights Act and National Land Commission Act 2022.** Protect rights held under customary tenure, including those of women, create land bodies at national and district level and require a minimum number of women on their committees (RFLD, 2026m).
>
> What the three have in common is that they do not stop at a declaration of equality. They place women inside the institutions that allocate and register land, and they presume joint ownership instead of asking women to prove it.

Questions for the Conakry participants

The evidence in this chapter suggests four questions that women leaders can put to land administrations and traditional authorities in their own countries. Who is recorded as the owner when a couple acquires land, and can both names be entered? What happens to the land a widow farms when her husband dies, and who decides? How many women sit on the land commission or the customary council, and how were they chosen? Where can a woman who has been dispossessed go for free legal advice? The answers will show where the law is applied and where the barrier map in Chapter 10 should focus.

None of these measures requires new international commitments. Each applies texts that States in the region have already ratified.



Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

CHAPTER 5

05

Climate, environment and women's stewardship

Women feed the region and hold its knowledge of soils, seeds and water. Climate policy rarely asks them, and climate money rarely reaches them.

KEY MESSAGES

- The Sahel is warming 1.5 times faster than the global average.
- Women are 49 per cent of the agrifood workforce but rarely hold secure land rights.
- Secure tenure for women is one of the most cost-effective adaptation measures available.

Climate, environment and women's stewardship

West Africa did little to cause climate change and is among the regions that feel it most. Inside the region, the people who grow, process and sell most of the food are women, and most of them farm land they do not hold in their own name.

5.1 A region on the front line

The IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report found that climate change has already reduced agricultural productivity growth in Africa by 34 per cent since 1961, more than in any other region (IPCC, 2022). Warming above 2°C would reduce yields of staple crops across most of the continent compared with 2005 levels, and reduced fish harvests would leave millions of people exposed to nutrient deficiencies (Trisos et al., 2022; IPCC, 2022). Africa contributes less than 4 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions (RFLD, 2026a), and it received only 3.8 per cent of global climate-related research funding between 1990 and 2019 (IPCC, 2022).

In West Africa these trends take specific forms. In the Sahel, rainfall has become more erratic, with dry spells during the growing season and intense storms that wash away topsoil. Along the coast from Senegal to Nigeria, erosion and rising seas threaten fishing communities, mangroves and the rice fields of the estuaries. In the forest zones, the expansion of cash crops and mining puts pressure on community land and water. Each of these changes reaches women first through the tasks they carry: growing food crops, fetching water and fuel, processing fish, caring for the sick.

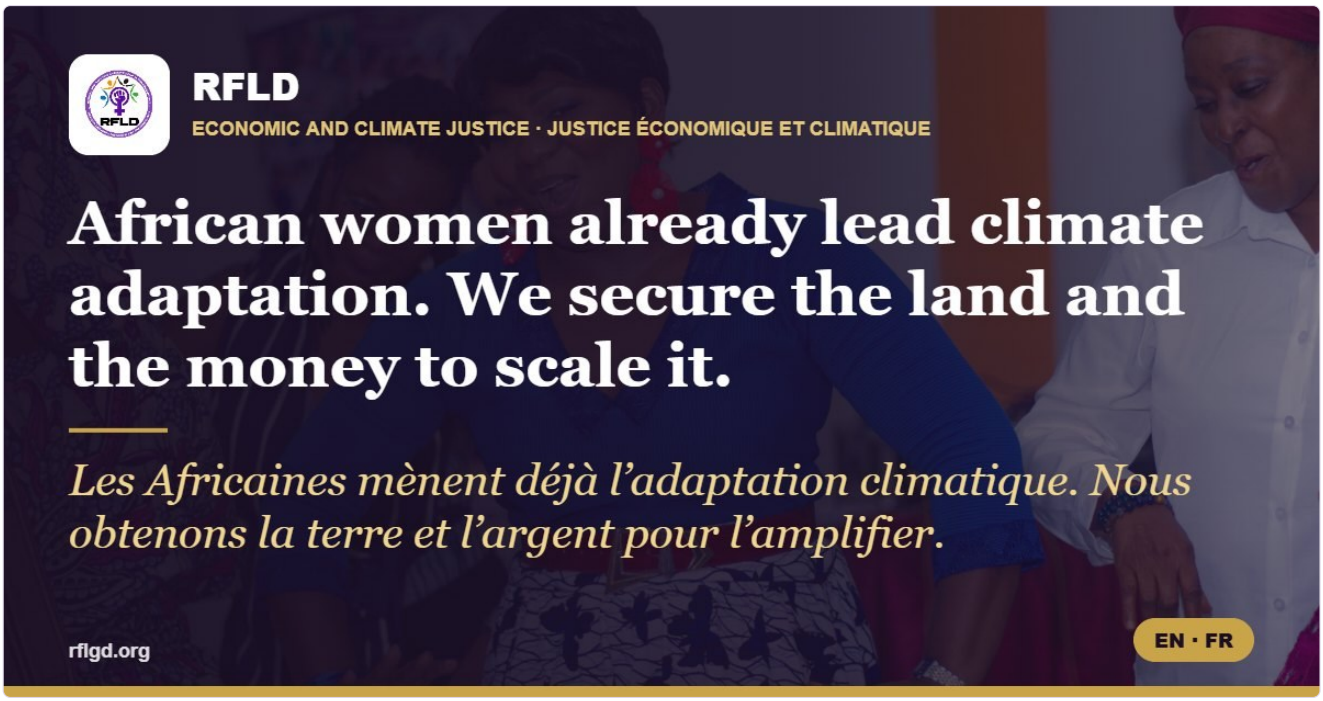


Figure 15. "African women already lead climate adaptation. We secure the land and the money to scale it." RFLD's economic justice and climate field of work. Source: RFLD.

The Sahel: warming faster than the world

The Sahel is one of the places where these trends are most acute. UNDP reports that temperatures in the Sahel are rising 1.5 times faster than the global average, that more than four-fifths of its territory is already affected by desertification and that almost 70 per cent of the population depends directly on natural resources for survival. In the Lake Chad Basin, competition over water and grazing land has contributed to the displacement of more than three million people (Zammarieh, J., 2025). When land and water become scarce, the claims of those with the weakest tenure are the first to give way, and in most Sahelian communities those are women's claims.

UN Women's 2023 report on feminist climate justice estimates that climate change could push up to 158 million more women and girls could be pushed into poverty by 2050 and 236 million more into hunger (UN Women, 2023). The report calls for a framework built on recognition of women's rights and knowledge, redistribution of resources, women's representation in climate decisions and reparation for climate harm. Each of these elements has a land dimension in West Africa.

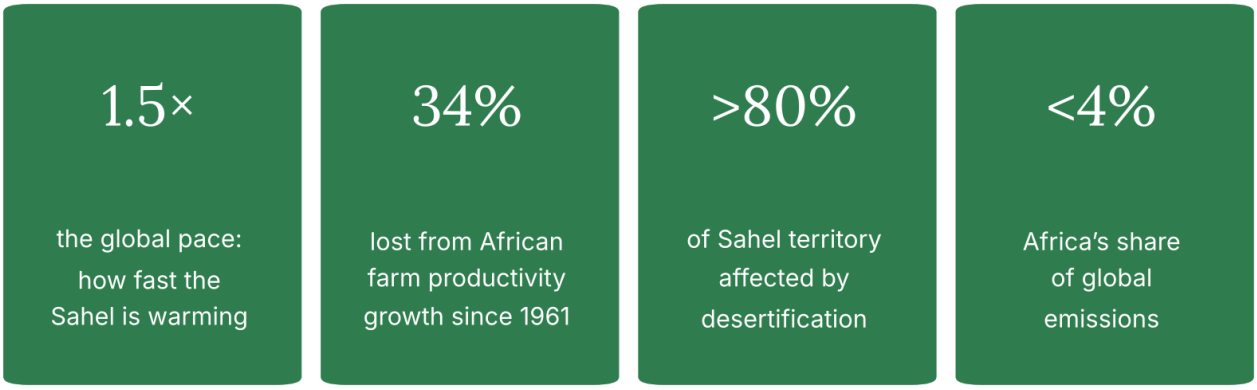


Figure 16. Climate pressure on the region: four figures. Sources: RFLD, based on (Zammarieh, J., 2025; IPCC, 2022; RFLD, 2026a).

5.2 Women in the agrifood economy

The FAO's 2025 regional report gives the clearest recent picture. About 76 per cent of working women in sub-Saharan Africa are employed in agrifood systems, and women make up 49 per cent of the agrifood workforce. Women's share of off-farm segments such as processing and distribution rose from 21 per cent in 2005 to 29 per cent in 2022. Women make up 73 per cent of the food processing and services workforce but only 3 per cent of transport. More than 90 per cent of employed women work in the informal sector (FAO, NRI and AWARD, 2025).

The same report found that about 64 per cent of the population faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2024, with 11.2 million more women than men affected, and that almost 40 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 are anaemic (FAO, NRI and AWARD, 2025). The FAO's global report of 2023 had already shown that closing the gender gap in farm productivity and wages in agrifood systems would raise global output and reduce food insecurity, and that women's empowerment and secure access to natural resources increase their resilience to climate and other shocks (FAO, 2023).

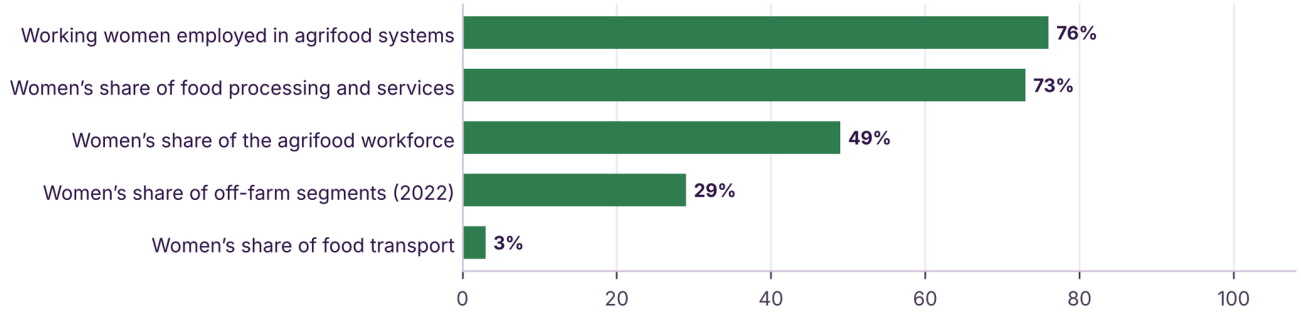


Figure 17. Women in sub-Saharan Africa's agrifood systems: shares of employment by segment. Source: RFLD, based on (FAO, NRI and AWARD, 2025).

5.3 Why tenure is an adaptation policy

Most of the practices that help farms withstand drought and floods are investments in the land itself: planting and protecting trees, building stone lines and half-moons to hold water, restoring organic matter, managing fallows and protecting wetlands. These investments pay back over several years. A woman who may lose her plot at the next family dispute, at divorce or at widowhood has little reason to make them, and lenders have little reason to finance them.

Tenure security also decides who receives support when disaster strikes. Compensation schemes, input distributions and climate-smart agriculture programmes usually register the head of household or the titled landholder. Women who farm borrowed plots, or plots held in the name of a husband or brother, are easily left off the lists. Chapter 4 showed that statutory law in most of the region already gives women the right to hold land. Applying that right is one of the most cost-effective adaptation measures available to West African governments.

STANDARDS THAT LINK LAND AND ENVIRONMENT

- **Maputo Protocol, Article 18:** the right to live in a healthy and sustainable environment, and the duty of States to ensure greater participation of women in the planning, management and preservation of the environment.
- **Maputo Protocol, Article 19:** the right to sustainable development, including women's access to and control over productive resources such as land, and their participation in development policy at all levels.
- **CEDAW general recommendation No. 34:** rural women's rights to land and natural resources, and their participation in climate and disaster risk policies.
- **UNDRIP, Articles 26 and 29:** Indigenous peoples' rights to their lands and resources and to the conservation and protection of the environment.

Sources: (African Union, 2003; CEDAW Committee, 2016; United Nations, 2007).

5.4 Women's knowledge as part of land management

One of the expected results of the Conakry seminar is that Indigenous women's knowledge of soils, seeds and water should be recognised as part of land management (RFLD, 2026f). This knowledge is practical. It includes which local seed varieties tolerate a late start to the rains, which trees restore soil fertility, where water can be found in the dry season and how wetlands should be shared. It is held mostly by older women and passed on informally.

When land decisions are made by commissions and investors without women, this knowledge is lost twice: once because it is not consulted, and again because the land that supports it is converted. The first day of the seminar includes a session on Indigenous knowledge and women's role in sustainable land management, with a reading of UNDRIP articles 22, 26 and 44 (RFLD, 2026f).



Figure 18. A facilitator follows group work during an RFLD training session, May 2026. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

5.5 Water, fisheries and the coast

Along the West African coast, women lead fish processing, smoking and trading (RFLD, 2026d). Their livelihoods depend on access to landing sites, on wood or improved ovens for smoking, and on the health of fish stocks. Coastal erosion, competition from industrial fleets and the conversion of beaches for tourism and infrastructure all reduce that access. RFLD's economic justice work calls for public investment in rural and peri-urban water, accountability for industrial water pollution, women's participation in transboundary water governance and recognition of women's role in the blue economy (RFLD, 2026d).

Water is also a question of time and safety. Where wells and boreholes are far from homes, women and girls spend hours each day fetching water, time taken from school, rest and paid work. Long walks in insecure areas expose them to violence. Investment in water close to homes is therefore a climate, education and protection measure at once.

5.6 Climate finance that does not reach women

The IPCC notes that annual adaptation finance flows for Africa are billions of dollars below the lowest estimates of adaptation costs, and that concessional finance is needed for adaptation in low-income settings (IPCC, 2022). Very little of what does flow reaches women-led organisations. Funding for women's rights organisations in Francophone West Africa is particularly thin: less than 3 per cent of global funding for women's rights organisations reaches the sub-region, according to AWID tracking cited by RFLD (RFLD, 2026j).

RFLD's Climate Action Platform calls for direct access to loss and damage and adaptation funds for grassroots women, community ownership of decentralised energy and recognition of unpaid care work in climate policy (RFLD, 2026a). Its member organisations run village savings and loan associations that already finance small adaptation investments. The West African Feminist Fund re-grants flexible money to women-led organisations, including urgent action grants decided within five business days (RFLD, 2026e).

5.7 Policy gaps across the region

RFLD's legal profiles show that national land, agriculture and environment laws rarely contain explicit gender provisions beyond a general principle of equality. Mali's 2017 agricultural land law, with its 15 per cent allocation to women's associations and other vulnerable groups, and Burkina Faso's requirement of women on rural land commissions are exceptions (RFLD, 2026m). National adaptation plans and nationally determined contributions in the region typically mention women as a vulnerable group but rarely set targets for women's land tenure or for the share of adaptation finance that reaches women-led organisations.

Four gaps recur across the region:

1. **No tenure target.** Few climate or food-security plans set a measurable target for women's secure tenure, even though the evidence shows it is a condition for adaptation.
2. **No seat at the table.** Women are under-represented on the committees that allocate land, water and adaptation funds, at local and national level.
3. **No direct finance.** Adaptation finance flows through ministries and large agencies; women-led organisations receive little, late and with heavy conditions.
4. **No data.** Land administration and climate programmes rarely publish data by sex, which makes it impossible to know who benefits.

WHAT RFLD ASKS ON CLIMATE AND LAND

- ECOWAS and its member States should include women's secure tenure as a core indicator of regional adaptation and food-security plans.
- National adaptation plans should set a target for the share of adaptation finance reaching women-led organisations, and report on it.
- Land commissions, water committees and climate committees should include at least one third women, including Indigenous women.
- Funders should channel a share of climate and land finance directly to women-led organisations in Francophone West Africa, with flexible and multi-year grants.



Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

CHAPTER 6

06

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

Where the law limits abortion to saving a life, women die of unsafe procedures. Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol sets a clearer floor.

KEY MESSAGES

- Senegal allows no ground for abortion; Nigeria and Sierra Leone only to save a life.
- 77 per cent of abortions in sub-Saharan Africa are estimated to be unsafe.
- West and Central Africa carries more than half of the world's maternal deaths.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

Sexual and reproductive health and rights decide whether a woman can choose when to have children, survive childbirth and recover from violence. In West Africa, the legal framework is weakest on abortion and the health data are among the worst in the world.

6.1 The standard: Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol

Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol recognises women's right to health, including sexual and reproductive health. It covers the right to control one's fertility, to decide whether to have children, their number and spacing, to choose a method of contraception and to receive information and education on family planning. Article 14(2)(c) requires States to protect women's reproductive rights by authorising medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the foetus (African Union, 2003). The African Commission's General Comment No. 2 sets out what States must do to make these rights effective, including removing legal and administrative barriers to safe abortion services within the permitted grounds (ACHPR, 2014).

Every country covered by this report except Niger has ratified the Protocol and is therefore bound by Article 14. In French, RFLD refers to these rights as DSSR (droits en santé sexuelle et reproductive).

6.2 Legal grounds for abortion

The scorecard records the legal grounds for abortion in each country (RFLD, 2026l). The picture is uneven.

Table 5. Legal grounds for abortion in the fifteen scorecard countries

Grounds recorded	Countries	Compliance with Article 14(2)(c)
On request in the first 12 weeks	Benin (2021, in situations of distress), Cabo Verde (1986)	Goes beyond the minimum
Life, health, rape, incest and foetal impairment	Togo; Burkina Faso (rape or incest up to 14 weeks)	Meets the minimum
Life and rape	Côte d'Ivoire	Partly: incest and health grounds not recorded
Life, health and foetal impairment	Niger	Partly: rape and incest not covered; Protocol not ratified
Life only	Nigeria; Sierra Leone (1861 law)	Does not comply
No exception	Senegal	Does not comply
Not recorded in the profile	The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali	To be verified against the official text

Source: (RFLD, 2026l), situation as of October 2026. "Not recorded" means the RFLD profile records no explicit provision; it does not mean that abortion is permitted or prohibited.

Benin's Law 2021-12 of 20 December 2021, amending the 2003 law on sexual and reproductive health, is the most significant reform in the region in recent years. It widens legal access to safe abortion, including after rape or incest, and on request up to 12 weeks where the pregnancy causes distress (RFLD, 2026g). At the other end, Senegal's law allows no exception, and Sierra Leone still applies an 1861 statute inherited from the colonial period. The scorecard asks Senegal, Nigeria and Sierra Leone to allow abortion at least in cases of rape, incest and risk to the woman's health, as Article 14 requires (RFLD, 2026l).



Figure 19. Participants at an RFLD network gathering, May 2026. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

What restrictive law produces

Restrictive abortion laws do not stop abortions. They make them unsafe. The Guttmacher Institute estimates that the annual number of abortions in sub-Saharan Africa roughly doubled from 4.3 million in 1995 to 1999 to 8.0 million in 2015 to 2019, a rate of about 33 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15 to 49 that varies little between Western, Eastern, Middle and Southern Africa. About 77 per cent of these abortions are estimated to be unsafe, some 6.2 million a year, and the region records about 185 maternal deaths per 100,000 abortions. Ninety-two per cent of women of reproductive age in the region live where abortion is highly or moderately restricted (Guttmacher Institute, 2020).



8.0 million	abortions a year in sub-Saharan Africa (2015–2019)
6.2 million	of them unsafe each year
185	maternal deaths per 100,000 abortions
92%	of women aged 15–49 live under restrictive laws

Figure 20. Abortion in sub-Saharan Africa: scale, safety and the law. Source: RFLD, based on (Guttmacher Institute, 2020).

The figures show that legal reform is a public health measure. The argument applies with particular force to Senegal, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, where the law permits no ground beyond saving a life, or none at all.

6.3 Reproductive health laws

Most countries in the region adopted a framework law on reproductive health in the 2000s, often modelled on a regional template. These laws recognise the right to reproductive health services and information, and many prohibit FGM and other violence affecting the genital organs. The table below lists the texts recorded in RFLD's profiles.

Table 6. Abortion and reproductive health laws, by country

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Benin	Loi n° 2003-04 (2003) on sexual and reproductive health, as amended by Loi n° 2021-12	Abortion is allowed on request up to 12 weeks where pregnancy causes material, educational, professional or moral distress, and without a time limit on medical grounds; earlier grounds (rape, incest, fetal impairment, health) remain. A 48-hour reflection period applies and minors need guardian consent.	Afyanahaki reports no implementing decree clarifying access conditions, approved facilities and costs.
Burkina Faso	Reproductive Health Act, Act No. 049-2005/AN (2005); Penal Code	Abortion is permitted to save the woman's life or health and for fetal impairment without a time limit, and in cases of rape or incest up to 14 weeks.	Abortion on request or on social grounds is not permitted.
Cabo Verde	Law of 31 December 1986 on the voluntary termination of pregnancy	Allows abortion on request up to 12 weeks, and later on health and foetal grounds.	None recorded
Côte d'Ivoire	Loi n° 2019-574 du 26 juin 2019 portant Code pénal, article 427	Allows abortion when necessary to save the life of the woman and, at her written request, when the pregnancy results from rape. Two doctors must certify the conditions.	Abortion remains a crime in other cases, including incest and fetal impairment, with penalties for the woman of six months to two years.
The Gambia	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Ghana	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Guinea	Loi L/2000/010/AN du 10 juillet 2000 relative à la santé de la reproduction, articles 6 and 13	Sets the framework for reproductive health and protects women and men against violence affecting the genital organs, including FGM.	None recorded
Guinea-Bissau	Lei n.º 11/2010, de 17 de setembro (Saúde Reprodutiva e Planeamento Familiar)	Recognises the right of couples to decide freely on the number of children and the right to information on contraception. It also prohibits sexual violence.	None recorded
Liberia	Public Health Law (revised 2019)	Makes sexuality education mandatory, with a comprehensive curriculum from grades 3 to 9.	A reproductive health bill was still under review at the 2015 CEDAW review.
Mali	Loi n° 02-044 du 24 juin 2002 relative à la santé de la reproduction	Sets the legal framework for reproductive health services and rights in Mali.	None recorded

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
	Loi n° 06-028 du 29 juin 2006 fixant les règles relatives à la prévention, la prise en charge et le contrôle du VIH/SIDA	Regulates HIV prevention and treatment.	The CEDAW Committee asked for a review from a gender perspective, including protection of women in prostitution.
Mauritania	Law No. 2017-025 of 15 November 2017 on reproductive health; Penal Code Article 293	Declares reproductive health a universal fundamental right (Article 7).	Abortion is banned except when the pregnancy threatens the woman's life, with no exception for rape (Article 22 and Penal Code Article 293).
Niger	Loi sur la santé de la reproduction au Niger, adoptée le 24 mai 2006, articles 2, 15 et 16	Recognises equal rights in reproductive health and authorises contraception. It permits abortion when the pregnancy endangers the woman's life or health or in case of serious fetal impairment.	Abortion is otherwise prohibited.
Nigeria	Criminal Code Act, Cap. 77, sections 228 to 230; Penal Code (Northern States) Federal Provisions Act, Cap. 345, sections 232 to 236	Both codes allow abortion only to save the woman's life. Under the Criminal Code a woman who attempts her own abortion faces seven years' imprisonment.	In June 2025 the Federal High Court in Abuja recognised that pregnancy resulting from rape or incest harms women's physical and mental health, though the codes were not changed.
Senegal	Loi n° 65-60 du 21 juillet 1965 portant Code pénal, articles 305 et 305 bis	Criminalises abortion for the provider and for the woman, with one to five years' imprisonment for providers and six months to two years for a woman who induces her own abortion. Article 305 bis punishes promoting abortion.	The Penal Code contains no exception for rape or incest, which the Maputo Protocol requires.
	Loi n° 2005-18 du 5 août 2005 relative à la santé de la reproduction	Defines reproductive health services, which include action against female genital mutilation and sexual abuse (article 4), and states that all forms of violence and sexual abuse are punishable (article 13).	Reports point to weak enforcement and a lack of dedicated budget lines for young people's access to services.
Sierra Leone	Abortion law dating from 1861 (life-saving exception only); Safe Motherhood bill pending	Abortion is banned unless the woman's life is at risk. In July 2022 the President announced support for a bill allowing abortion after rape or incest and where the pregnancy endangers the woman's health or life.	A liberalising bill passed by Parliament in 2015 was not signed into law.
Togo	Loi n° 2007-005 du 10 janvier 2007 sur la santé de la reproduction, article 42	Allows termination of pregnancy where continuing it endangers the woman's life and health, or at her request where the pregnancy results from rape or incest. A serious condition of the fetus is a further ground.	None recorded

Source: RFLD legal profiles in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. "No provision recorded" means the profile does not yet record a law on this theme; it does not always mean that none exists.

6.4 Maternal health: the cost of the gap

The consequences of weak reproductive health protection are measured in deaths. UNICEF's 2025 snapshot for West and Central Africa reports about 135,000 maternal deaths a year in the region, more than half of the global burden, with a maternal mortality ratio of 629 per 100,000 live

births, the highest in the world (UNICEF, 2025). The region also records about 1.78 million deaths of children under five each year, 40 per cent of the global total, and about 1.13 million newborn deaths and stillbirths (UNICEF, 2025).



Figure 21. Maternal and child mortality in West and Central Africa. Source: RFLD, based on (UNICEF, 2025); global estimates in (WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNDESA/Population Division, 2025).

Three countries, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Chad, account for 74 per cent of maternal deaths and 67 per cent of under-five deaths in West and Central Africa. Niger records the highest neonatal and under-five mortality rates in the region. Benin, though more stable, still has a maternal mortality ratio above 400 per 100,000 live births (UNICEF, 2025). Ghana's profile records a ratio of 234 per 100,000 live births in 2023 (RFLD, 2026m). Unsafe abortion is one of the direct causes of these deaths, alongside haemorrhage, hypertensive disorders and infection.

The Abuja Declaration of 2001, in which African Union heads of State committed to allocate at least 15 per cent of their national budgets to health, remains the reference for RFLD's advocacy on health financing, alongside Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol (RFLD, 2026j).

6.5 Child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and FGM as SRHR issues

Child marriage and FGM are treated in Chapter 7 as forms of violence. They are also central SRHR issues. A girl married at 15 is likely to become pregnant before her body is ready, which raises the risk of obstetric complications, including fistula, and of maternal death. FGM causes immediate and long-term harm to sexual and reproductive health, including complications in childbirth.

West and Central Africa has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world: about four in ten women in the region were married before 18, and at the pace of reduction measured in 2017 it would take more than a century to end the practice (UNICEF, 2017). RFLD's profiles record that 76 per cent of women in Niger, 49 per cent in Mali, 47 per cent in Guinea and 37 per cent in Mauritania were married before 18 (RFLD, 2026m).

6.6 Survivors of sexual violence

For a survivor of rape, SRHR protection means emergency contraception, post-exposure prophylaxis against HIV, treatment of injuries, psychological support and, where she becomes pregnant, access to safe abortion. Where the law allows abortion only to save the woman's life, a survivor

who becomes pregnant may be forced to carry the pregnancy or seek an unsafe procedure. This is why the scorecard treats "abortion after rape" as one of its seven questions, and why Article 14 names rape and incest explicitly (RFLD, 2026l; African Union, 2003).

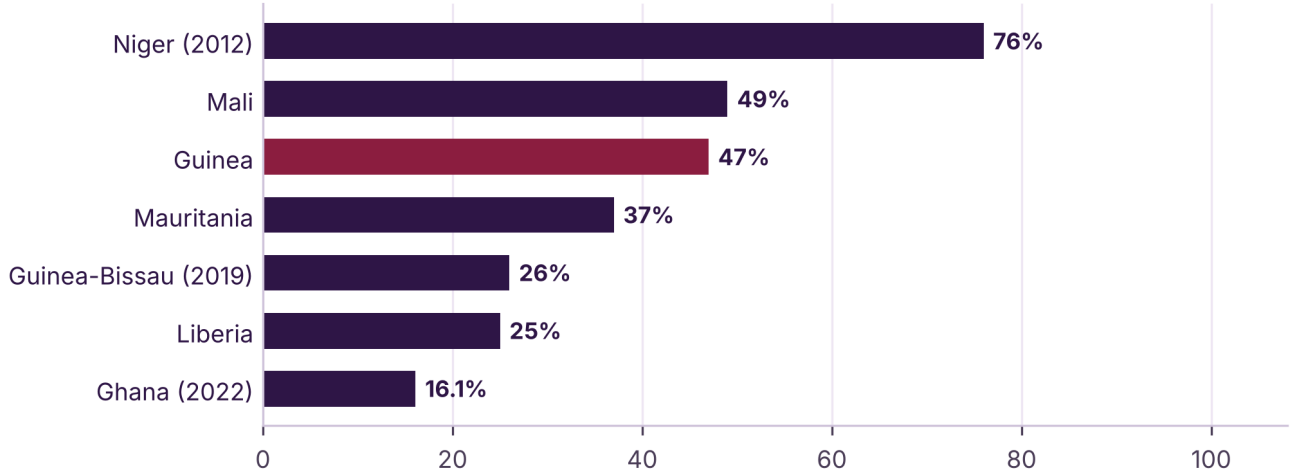


Figure 22. Women aged 20 to 24 who were married before 18, latest figure recorded in RFLD's profiles (Mauritania: all women married before 18). Source: RFLD legal profiles (RFLD, 2026m), citing UNICEF and national surveys.

WHAT RFLD ASKS ON SRHR

- Senegal, Nigeria and Sierra Leone should allow abortion at least in cases of rape, incest and risk to the woman's health, in line with Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol.
- Niger should ratify the Maputo Protocol without reservation.
- All States should publish guidelines that make the legal grounds usable in practice: who can authorise an abortion, within what time and without what proof.
- All States should guarantee post-rape care, including emergency contraception, in every health district.
- States should move towards the Abuja target of 15 per cent of budgets for health and protect funding for family planning.

PROMISING PRACTICE: BENIN'S 2021 REFORM

Law 2021-12 of 20 December 2021, amending the 2003 law on sexual and reproductive health, widened legal access to safe abortion, including after rape or incest and on request up to 12 weeks where the pregnancy causes distress. It was adopted the same day as Law 2021-11, which defines rape, sexual harassment, FGM and forced or early marriage and sets heavy penalties. Taken together, the two laws treat bodily autonomy and protection from violence as parts of one framework (RFLD, 2026g). Benin also adopted a decree on legal aid in 2024, a condition for survivors to reach the courts.



Figure 23. The Maputo Protocol now speaks eight African languages: Hausa, Amharic, Yoruba, Lingala, Igbo, Twi, Zarma and Goun, with nearly 300 million speakers. Source: RFLD.

What General Comment No. 2 asks of States

The African Commission's General Comment No. 2 on Article 14 sets out practical obligations that apply to every State party to the Maputo Protocol (ACHPR, 2014). States should bring their criminal and health laws into line with the grounds in Article 14(2)(c), remove procedural barriers such as requirements for a court order or police report before a survivor of rape can obtain an abortion, ensure that health workers who refuse to provide services on grounds of conscience refer women to another provider, and provide post-abortion care in all circumstances. They should also guarantee comprehensive information and education on sexual and reproductive health, including for adolescents. These obligations give women's organisations a precise checklist for advocacy with ministries of health and justice.

Taken together, the evidence in this chapter points to a simple sequence for national advocacy: secure the legal grounds required by Article 14, publish the guidelines that make them usable, fund post-rape and post-abortion care in every district, and protect family planning budgets. Each step can be monitored with data that ministries already collect.



Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

CHAPTER 7

07

Gender-based violence, harmful practices and trafficking

Laws have multiplied since 2020. Gaps remain on marital rape, FGM, child marriage and the funding that turns a statute into protection.

KEY MESSAGES

- Eight countries adopted or protected laws on sexual violence between 2020 and 2026.
- Guinea, Mali and Niger still have no dedicated law on violence against women.
- FGM affects 95 per cent of women in Guinea, where 35 per cent of girls are cut by health workers.

Gender-based violence, harmful practices and trafficking

Since 2020, West African States have adopted more laws on violence against women than in any comparable period. The gaps that remain are concentrated where violence is most widespread and where the State is weakest.

7.1 Laws adopted since 2020

Eight of the fifteen scorecard countries adopted or protected a law on sexual violence or a related protection between 2020 and 2026. RFLD and its member organisations contributed to the advocacy in all fifteen countries, through national coalitions, alternative reports, meetings with parliamentarians and statements at the African Commission (RFLD, 2026g).



Figure 24. Timeline of laws on sexual violence and related protections adopted or protected in West Africa, 2020 to 2025. Source: RFLD, based on (RFLD, 2026g).

Table 7. Laws on sexual violence and related protections adopted or protected, 2020 to 2026

Year	Country	Law and reference	What it changed
2025	**Burkina Faso**	Code des personnes et de la famille, adopted on 1 September 2025	Sets 18 as the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys and makes the consent of both parties the basis of marriage.
2024	**Sierra Leone**	Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2024	Prohibits marriage of anyone under 18, regardless of parental consent, with minimum prison terms of 15 years.
2024	**Benin**	Décret n° 2024-1275 du 23 octobre 2024 portant réglementation de l'aide juridique	Organises legal aid, a condition for survivors to reach the courts.

Year	Country	Law and reference	What it changed
2024	**The Gambia**	Women's (Amendment) Act 2015, sections 32A and 32B (ban upheld in July 2024)	The National Assembly upheld the ban on FGM after a repeal bill.
2023	**Sierra Leone**	Employment Act, 2023, with the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019	Covers sexual harassment in employment.
2022	**Sierra Leone**	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act, 2022	Measures to prevent and respond to GBV, stronger support services and a 30 per cent quota for women in public office.
2022	**Sierra Leone**	Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act, 2022	Creates a national task force and a trust fund for victims.
2022	**Guinea**	Loi L/2022/12/CNT du 23 septembre 2022 portant aide juridictionnelle	Organises legal aid for people who cannot pay for justice.
2021	**Benin**	Loi n° 2021-11 du 20 décembre 2021	Defines rape (5 to 10 years, life where the victim is under 13), sexual harassment, FGM and forced or early marriage (10 to 20 years).
2021	**Benin**	Loi n° 2021-12 du 20 décembre 2021	Widens legal access to safe abortion, including after rape or incest.
2021	**Côte d'Ivoire**	Loi n° 2021-894 du 21 décembre 2021	Protection measures for survivors of domestic violence, rape and other sexual violence.
2021	**Liberia**	Revised Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons, 2021	Criminalises trafficking with minimum sentences of 20 years.
2020	**Senegal**	Loi n° 2020-05 du 10 janvier 2020	Makes rape and paedophilia crimes tried as felonies; before, rape was a crime only when it caused death.

Source: (RFLD, 2026g), with reference numbers from RFLD legal profiles.

Reforms still pending include Mali's draft law on gender-based violence, under discussion for years; Niger's draft revision of the Penal Code on rape, FGM, sexual harassment and wahaya, pending since 2024; the adoption of the VAPP Act by every Nigerian state; and The Gambia's Cyber Crime Bill 2023, still before the National Assembly in 2025. No new law on sexual violence has been recorded since 2020 in Togo, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau or Cabo Verde (RFLD, 2026g).

7.2 The scale of violence

The WHO's 2018 prevalence estimates, published in 2021, found that about one in three women worldwide, around 736 million, have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner in their lifetime. In sub-Saharan Africa, 33 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime, and in the least developed countries the average is 37 per cent. Violence starts early: one in four young women who have been in a relationship will have experienced intimate partner violence by their mid-twenties, and recent violence is highest among women aged 15 to 24 (WHO, 2021).

1 in 3
women worldwide have experienced partner or non-partner violence

33%
of women aged 15 to 49 in sub-Saharan Africa have experienced partner violence

37%
average in the least developed countries

16%
of women aged 15 to 24 experienced partner violence in the past year

Source: (WHO, 2021).

These estimates are drawn from surveys, which undercount violence because many women never disclose it. Administrative data on complaints, prosecutions and convictions, which would show how justice systems respond, are rarely published in West Africa. This is one reason the monitoring framework in Chapter 13 asks States to publish annual data on cases and outcomes.

7.3 Dedicated laws on violence against women

A dedicated law on violence against women brings together definitions, protection orders, services, specialised units and data obligations in one text. Guinea, Mali and Niger have no such law and rely on general Penal Code provisions (RFLD, 2026l). Senegal punishes assault on a spouse through a 1999 Penal Code amendment but has no comprehensive law. In Nigeria, the VAPP Act 2015 applies directly only in the Federal Capital Territory and in states that adopt it.

Table 8. Laws on gender-based and domestic violence, by country

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Benin	Loi n° 2011-26 du 9 janvier 2012 portant prévention et répression des violences faites aux femmes	Defines and punishes violence against women, including domestic violence, marital rape, forced marriage and FGM, and set up listening centres in Social Promotion Centres.	A 2022 government study found no Beninese law defines gender-based violence, and only 9.5% of people surveyed believed the laws were applied.
Burkina Faso	Loi n°061-2015/CNT du 6 septembre 2015 portant prévention, répression et réparation des violences à l'égard des femmes et des filles	Dedicated law that defines and punishes violence against women and girls and sets up victim support. It creates offences that were previously unpunished, such as abduction and witchcraft accusations.	The government reported continuing challenges in enforcing the law.
	Loi n°025-2018/AN du 31 mai 2018 portant Code pénal, articles 531-8, 531-9, 533-10 et 533-11	The Penal Code criminalises domestic violence.	There is no specific provision on femicide.
Cabo Verde	Lei n.º 84/VII/2011, de 10 de janeiro de 2011 (Lei Especial sobre a Violência Baseada no Género)	Special law that covers physical, psychological, sexual and patrimonial violence and makes gender-based violence a public crime prosecuted without a complaint. It provides victim support and perpetrator rehabilitation.	None recorded
	Código Penal, artigo 134	Penal Code provision applied to domestic violence, alongside the special GBV law.	None recorded
Côte d'Ivoire	Loi n° 2021-894 du 21 décembre 2021 relative aux mesures de protection des victimes de violences domestiques, de viol et de violences sexuelles autres que domestiques	Sets out protection measures for victims of domestic violence and of sexual violence, including rape.	None recorded
The Gambia	Domestic Violence Act, 2013	Criminalises physical, sexual, economic, emotional and verbal abuse in domestic relationships. It allows police to arrest without a warrant and limits default out-of-court settlements.	Reporting stays low because of a culture of silence, and victim and witness protection is inadequate, according to the CEDAW Committee in 2022.

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
	Women's Act, 2010 (Act No. 12 of 2010)	Prohibits all forms of violence against women and requires state institutions to protect women from it.	None recorded
Ghana	Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (Act 732)	Defines domestic violence to include physical, sexual, psychological, economic and social abuse, and covers informal unions. It provides for investigation and prosecution. It also provides for protection. It set up the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) and a support fund.	None recorded
Guinea	Loi n° 2016/059/AN portant Code pénal, article 248	Assault and wounding between spouses is punished under the general provisions on violence; there is no dedicated law on violence against women.	The victim can end prosecution when incapacity is under 20 days, and the World Bank found no specific domestic violence legislation.
Guinea-Bissau	Lei n.º 6/2014, de 4 de fevereiro (Lei de Violência Doméstica)	Criminalises domestic violence in its physical, sexual, psychological and economic forms, with prison terms of up to 12 years for sexual violence, and sets out victims' status and rights.	Women's organisations reported to the 2025 UPR that the law still lacks implementing regulations for its effective application.
Liberia	Domestic Violence Act, 2019	Criminalises domestic violence and gives survivors legal protection.	A provision criminalising FGM was removed before passage, and the Act does not address the specific risks faced by women with disabilities.
Mali	No specific law on gender-based or domestic violence	Mali has no dedicated statute on gender-based or domestic violence; a draft bill has been under discussion for years.	The CEDAW Committee and the World Bank found no legislation addressing domestic violence.
Mauritania	No specific law; draft law on violence against women and girls (Karama bill, 54 articles)	The bill would set a comprehensive framework for prevention, protection, accountability and support for survivors, including specialised court chambers.	Not adopted as of November 2024 after withdrawals in 2017 and 2018 and renewed opposition in 2023. HRW notes that drafts keep zina and narrow rape definitions.
	Decree No. 2020-140 creating the National Observatory on the Rights of Women and Girls	Creates an advisory body to monitor women's and girls' rights. Its members come from state institutions (government and parliament) and from civil society.	The Observatory sits under the Prime Minister's Office, which limits its independence.
Niger	No specific domestic violence law	The World Bank found no legal provisions specifically addressing domestic violence or femicide in Niger.	Women have no dedicated legal protection against domestic violence; a draft revision of the Penal Code covering sexual violence was still pending in 2024.
Nigeria	Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015	Covers spousal battery, forced eviction from the home, abandonment of dependants, emotional violence, verbal violence and economic violence. It provides for protection orders and victim compensation. It also provides for a sexual offenders register.	The Act applies directly only in the Federal Capital Territory, and each state must adopt it separately.

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Senegal	Loi n° 99-05 du 29 janvier 1999 modifiant certaines dispositions du Code pénal (article 297 bis, violences conjugales)	Makes a deliberate assault on a spouse a specific offence, punished by one to five years' imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 CFA francs where it causes more than 20 days of incapacity. Heavier penalties apply where the violence causes mutilation or death.	None recorded
Sierra Leone	Domestic Violence Act, 2007	Criminalises domestic violence and sets out protection measures for victims. Domestic violence includes physical and sexual abuse. It also includes emotional abuse.	None recorded
	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act, 2022	Establishes the principle of gender equality and sets out measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, with stronger support services for survivors. A National Steering Committee monitors compliance by ministries and agencies.	Limited institutional capacity and staffing constrain enforcement.
Togo	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		

Source: RFLD legal profiles in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. "No provision recorded" means the profile does not yet record a law on this theme; it does not always mean that none exists.

7.4 Rape and marital rape

All sixteen countries criminalise rape, but the definitions, penalties and procedures vary. Senegal only made rape a felony in all cases in 2020. Marital rape is explicitly a crime in only three countries: Benin (Law 2011-26), Cabo Verde (Law 84/VII/2011) and Togo (Penal Code 2015). The Gambia's Sexual Offences Act of 2013 excludes married couples. Guinea does not set marital rape out as a distinct offence, and the CEDAW Committee found in 2015 that Liberia had not criminalised it (RFLD, 2026l).

Table 9. Laws on rape and sexual offences, by country

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Benin	Loi n° 2021-11 du 20 décembre 2021 portant dispositions spéciales de répression des infractions commises à raison du sexe des personnes et de protection de la femme (amending the 2018 Penal Code); Loi n° 2011-26	Law 2021-11 defines rape as sexual penetration against a person's will by violence, constraint, threat or surprise, punished by 5 to 10 years, and life imprisonment where the victim is under 13. Law 2011-26 explicitly covers marital rape.	The CEDAW Committee (2013) raised implementation delays and low awareness of the marital rape provision.
Burkina Faso	Loi n°025-2018/AN du 31 mai 2018 portant Code pénal (sexual offences)	The Penal Code punishes sexual offences, and specifically sanctions sexual relations between educators and the minors in their care.	The government noted the need for stronger application of these provisions.
Cabo Verde	Lei n.º 84/VII/2011, de 10 de janeiro de 2011 (Lei Especial sobre a Violência Baseada no Género)	Recognises sexual violence within intimate relationships, including marital rape, and sets aggravated penalties of up to 30 years' imprisonment for the most serious cases.	Marital rape is addressed in the GBV law, while the Penal Code provisions on sexual offences were not detailed in the government's reply to CEDAW.

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Côte d'Ivoire	Loi n° 2019-574 du 26 juin 2019 portant Code pénal, article 403	The 2019 Penal Code defines rape in article 403.	None recorded
The Gambia	Sexual Offences Act, 2013	Broadens the definition of rape and sexual assault based on coercive circumstances and removed the statutory corroboration requirement.	Section 3(3) excludes married couples from rape, and courts still apply corroboration rules under section 180(2) of the Evidence Act.
Ghana	Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29), section 101 (defilement)	Criminalises sexual intercourse with a child under 16, with penalties of 7 to 25 years' imprisonment.	None recorded
Guinea	Loi n° 2016/059/AN portant Code pénal, articles 267 to 270	Criminalises rape and other sexual violence.	Marital rape is not set out as a distinct offence.
	Loi L/2019/035/AN du 4 juillet 2019 portant Code civil, article 247	Prohibits marriage between ascendants and descendants and between siblings. It also prohibits marriage between uncles or aunts and their nieces or nephews.	None recorded
Guinea-Bissau	Decreto-Lei n.º 4/93, de 13 de outubro (Código Penal), artigos 133.º e 134.º	Article 133 punishes rape with 3 to 12 years of imprisonment and article 134 punishes sexual abuse of girls aged 12 to 16 with 2 to 8 years.	None recorded
Liberia	An Act to Amend the New Penal Code Chapter 14 Sections 14.70 and 14.71 and to Provide for Gang Rape, 2005	Revises the offence of rape in the Penal Code and creates the offence of gang rape.	The CEDAW Committee noted in 2015 that marital rape was not criminalised and that prosecutions remained weak.
Mali	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Mauritania	Penal Code, Ordinance No. 83-162 of 9 July 1983, Articles 307 and 309	Article 309 criminalises rape; Article 307 criminalises zina (sexual relations outside marriage).	Rape is narrowly defined and marital rape is not covered. Survivors risk prosecution for zina, including adolescent girls.
Niger	Draft revision of the Penal Code	At the CEDAW review of January 2024 the delegation said a draft Penal Code revision covers rape, FGM, sexual harassment and the wahaya practice, and that abortion after rape or incest would be decriminalised.	None recorded
Nigeria	Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015	Broadens the definition of rape to cover oral and anal penetration. It also covers penetration with other body parts and recognises male victims.	None recorded
	Criminal Code Act and Penal Code (Northern States) Federal Provisions Act, 1960	These codes contain the general rape offences applied in the states.	Neither code criminalises marital rape, and the CEDAW Committee urged Nigeria in 2025 to criminalise it across all 36 states.

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Senegal	Loi n° 2020-05 du 10 janvier 2020 criminalisant le viol et la pédophilie (modifiant le Code pénal)	Turns rape and paedophilia into crimes tried as felonies. Under the 1999 law, rape was classified as a crime only when it caused the victim's death.	None recorded
Sierra Leone	Sexual Offences Act, 2012, as amended by the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019	Provides the framework for rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation and offences against children, and the 2019 amendment updated the definitions of offences. Sexual Offences Model Courts were set up to speed up trials.	Survivors still face implementation challenges in gaining access to justice.
Togo	Loi n° 2015-010 du 24 novembre 2015 portant nouveau Code pénal	Criminalises rape, and since 2015 marital rape has been an offence carrying the same penalties as rape.	None recorded

Source: RFLD legal profiles in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. "No provision recorded" means the profile does not yet record a law on this theme; it does not always mean that none exists.

7.5 Sexual harassment and online violence

Sexual harassment at work and in education is recognised in a growing number of codes, but remedies are often limited. Guinea has no specific offence of sexual harassment, and the World Bank found no legislation on harassment at work (RFLD, 2026m). Online violence against women, including the non-consensual sharing of images and harassment of women defenders and journalists, is addressed mostly through general cybercrime laws, which are themselves sometimes used against activists. RFLD is pressing for an African regional framework against technology-facilitated gender-based violence, which was under discussion at the African Union in 2026 (RFLD, 2026g).

Table 10. Laws on sexual harassment, by country

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Benin	Loi n° 2006-19 du 5 septembre 2006 portant répression du harcèlement sexuel et protection des victimes; Loi n° 2021-11 (Penal Code arts. 548 to 552)	Criminalises sexual harassment, with higher penalties when committed by educators or against minors; failure to report known harassment is an offence and dismissal after harassment is deemed abusive.	No specific provisions on online sexual harassment were identified in the 2022 government GBV study.
	Code du travail (sexual harassment provisions)	Prohibits discrimination at work and punishes sexual harassment in the workplace.	None recorded
Burkina Faso	Loi n°025-2018/AN du 31 mai 2018 portant Code pénal, articles 533-9 et 722-1	Criminalises sexual harassment, which is also covered by articles 11 and 36 of Loi n°061-2015/CNT and by articles 37 and 422 of the Labour Code for the workplace.	None recorded
Cabo Verde	Lei n.º 84/VII/2011, de 10 de janeiro de 2011 (Lei Especial sobre a Violência Baseada no Género)	Lists sexual harassment as one of the forms of gender-based violence punished under the law.	None recorded

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Côte d'Ivoire	No comprehensive sexual harassment law recorded	The World Bank found no comprehensive legislation on sexual harassment in employment meeting its criteria.	None recorded
The Gambia	Sexual Offences Act, 2013	Expands the criminal law on sexual assault and covers sexual harassment.	There is no comprehensive law on sexual harassment in the workplace, according to the CEDAW Committee in 2022.
Ghana	No dedicated sexual harassment law identified	Ghana has not ratified ILO C190 on violence and harassment at work; trade unions argue national ratification is needed because collective agreements cannot cover all its provisions.	No comprehensive workplace violence and harassment framework (Trades Union Congress, 2026).
Guinea	No specific offence of sexual harassment	Sexual harassment is not specifically criminalised and the World Bank found no legislation on harassment at work.	No civil or criminal remedy exists for workplace sexual harassment.
Guinea-Bissau	No specific sexual harassment law	The World Bank found no legislation on sexual harassment in employment and no criminal penalties or civil remedies for it.	Women have no legal remedy for sexual harassment at work.
Liberia	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Mali	No specific provision on sexual harassment in employment	The World Bank Women, Business and the Law review found no legal provision on sexual harassment at work and no civil or criminal remedy.	Assessment dates from 2020 and predates the 2024 Penal Code.
Mauritania	No specific sexual harassment offence	Mauritanian law has no provision criminalising sexual harassment.	The CEDAW Committee urged criminalisation in February 2023.
Niger	No sexual harassment provision in force: draft revision of the Penal Code	The government told CEDAW in 2024 that the draft Penal Code would criminalise harassment along with other forms of sexual violence.	The World Bank found no provisions in force on sexual harassment, including in employment.
Nigeria	Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2011, section 264	The World Bank records this provision as the legal basis against sexual harassment in its assessment, which covers Lagos.	None recorded
Senegal	Code pénal, article 319 bis (introduced by Loi n° 99-05 du 29 janvier 1999)	Punishes anyone who abuses their authority to harass another person through orders, threats, words or coercion in order to obtain sexual favours, with six months to three years' imprisonment and a fine.	None recorded
Sierra Leone	Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019, sections 3 and 37; Employment Act, 2023	The World Bank records legislation on sexual harassment in employment based on these provisions.	None recorded
Togo	Loi n° 2007-005 du 10 janvier 2007 sur la santé de la reproduction, article 11	Guarantees every person protection against sexual harassment as part of the right to freedom and safety in reproductive health. It also guarantees protection against rape and forced marriage.	None recorded

Source: RFLD legal profiles in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. "No provision recorded" means the profile does not yet record a law on this theme; it does not always mean that none exists.

7.6 Female genital mutilation

UNICEF estimates that about 230 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM (UNICEF, 2024). West Africa includes some of the countries with the highest prevalence in the world. RFLD's profiles record a prevalence of 95 per cent in Guinea, about 90 per cent in Mali, about 73 per cent in The Gambia and 64 per cent in Mauritania (RFLD, 2026m; RFLD, 2026l).

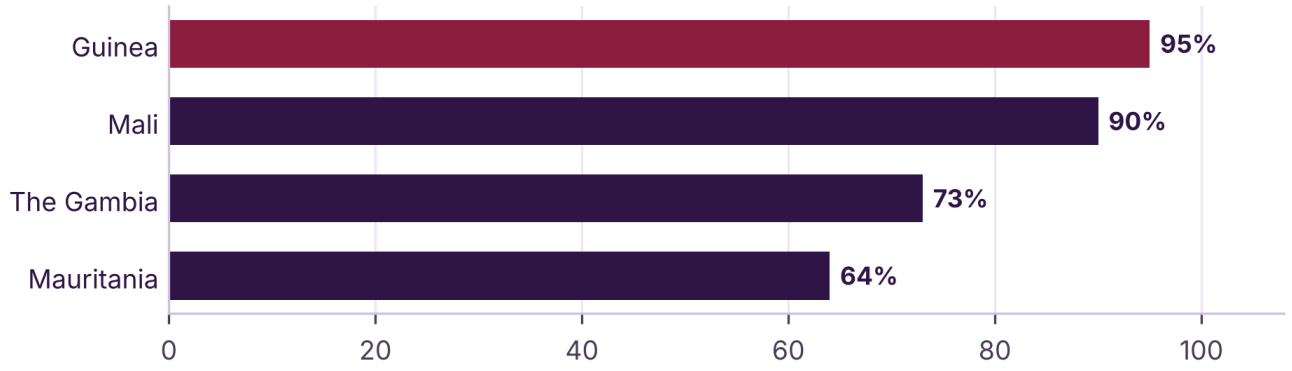


Figure 25. FGM prevalence among women in the four countries where RFLD's profiles and scorecard record a figure. Source: RFLD, based on (RFLD, 2026m; RFLD, 2026l). Mali and The Gambia: approximate values.

Mali, Liberia and Sierra Leone have no statute banning FGM, and Cabo Verde has no specific offence. Liberia's 2018 executive order lapsed after one year. Where laws exist, prosecutions are rare. The Gambia had one prosecution by 2022, and Guinea's ban, in both the Penal Code and the Children's Code, coexists with near-universal prevalence (RFLD, 2026l). FGM is also increasingly performed by health workers, which gives the practice a false appearance of safety. The UNFPA–UNICEF Joint Programme reports that medicalisation is highest in Guinea, at 17 per cent among women and girls aged 15 to 49 and 35 per cent among girls aged 0 to 14 (UNFPA and UNICEF, 2026). In July 2024, The Gambia's National Assembly rejected a bill to repeal the ban, a victory for the women's movement that RFLD supported (RFLD, 2026g).

Table 11. Laws on female genital mutilation, by country

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Benin	Loi n° 2003-03 (2003) prohibiting female genital mutilation; Penal Code art. 524 as amended by Law 2021-11	Prohibits FGM; under Law 2021-11 it carries 6 months to 3 years, 3 to 5 years where the victim is a minor, and life imprisonment if the victim dies.	The CEDAW Committee (2013) noted few investigations, prosecutions or convictions and cross-border practice; in 2024 it again urged action to eliminate FGM.
	Loi n° 2015-08 du 08 décembre 2015 portant Code de l'enfant, articles 185 à 188	Prohibits all forms of sexual mutilation of a child, except surgery prescribed for medical reasons.	None recorded
Burkina Faso	Loi n°025-2018/AN du 31 mai 2018 portant Code pénal, articles 513-7 à 513-9	Criminalises female genital mutilation.	The government noted the need for stronger enforcement.
Cabo Verde	No specific law on female genital mutilation	The 2003 Penal Code has no FGM offence; general bodily harm offences apply. The CEDAW Committee (2019) asked the State to watch for possible cases.	None recorded

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Côte d'Ivoire	Loi n° 98-757 du 23 décembre 1998 portant répression de certaines formes de violences à l'égard des femmes	Punishes FGM with one to five years' imprisonment and a fine of 360,000 to 2,000,000 CFA francs, doubled for health professionals. The penalty is five to 20 years where the victim dies. Parents who order or tolerate the practice are also liable, and article 5 of the 2016 Constitution prohibits FGM.	Prosecutions remain rare: the first trial took place in 2012 and only one prosecution was reported in 2020.
The Gambia	Women's (Amendment) Act, 2015, sections 32A and 32B	Prohibits and criminalises female genital mutilation.	Only one prosecution had taken place by 2022 while prevalence stood at about 73 percent.
Ghana	Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29), section 69A, as amended by the Criminal Offences (Amendment) Act, 2007 (Act 741)	Makes female genital mutilation a second-degree felony with a minimum of three years' imprisonment. The 2007 amendment extends liability to people who take part, including medical practitioners and parents.	None recorded
Guinea	Loi n° 2016/059/AN portant Code pénal, articles 258 to 261	Defines and prohibits all forms of FGM. Penalties are heavier when it causes disability or death. They are also heavier when it is performed in a health facility.	Prosecutions are few and sentences are often suspended or light.
	Loi L/2008/011/AN du 19 août 2008 portant Code de l'enfant guinéen, articles 405 to 410	Prohibits all forms of FGM and punishes parents who authorise it. It obliges heads of health facilities to report cases.	None recorded
Guinea-Bissau	Lei n.º 14/2011, de 6 de julho (prevention and suppression of female genital mutilation)	Prohibits FGM in all its forms, with 2 to 6 years of imprisonment and 3 to 9 years when the victim is a minor. It sets penalties for accomplices and for parents who fail to prevent it. Cross-border FGM is also punished. Health professionals have a duty to report.	Medicalised FGM is not expressly named in the text.
Liberia	Executive Order No. 92 (2018) on the prohibition of FGM	Banned FGM on any person under 18 and on adults without consent.	Executive orders lapse after one year and Liberia has no statute prohibiting FGM.
Mali	No specific law criminalising FGM (Code pénal, article 213 not applied)	FGM is not specifically criminalised even though prevalence is about 90 percent; a bill submitted in 2009 has not been adopted.	No prosecutions of excision practitioners have been registered under the general Criminal Code provision.
Mauritania	General Child Protection Code (Law No. 2018-024 of 21 June 2018), Articles 79 and 80	Criminalises FGM on children without conditions; the delegation told CEDAW in 2023 that perpetrators face prison terms of up to six years.	Rarely enforced; HRW found no recent prosecutions. FGM affects 64% of women and girls aged 15 to 49.
Niger	Loi n°2003-25 du 13 juin 2003 modifiant la loi n°61-27 du 15 juillet 1961 (Code pénal), articles 232.1 à 232.3	Criminalises FGM with 6 months to 3 years of imprisonment and a fine, 10 to 20 years if the victim dies, equal penalties for accomplices and heavier penalties with a possible ban from practice for health professionals.	None recorded
	Loi sur la santé de la reproduction au Niger, adoptée le 24 mai 2006, article 19	Classifies FGM as violence against women that is criminally punished.	None recorded

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Nigeria	Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015	Lists female genital mutilation among the harmful traditional practices it prohibits.	The ban applies in each state only once the state has domesticated the Act.
Senegal	Code pénal, article 299 bis (introduced by Loi n° 99-05 du 29 janvier 1999)	Punishes total or partial excision, or an attempt, with six months to five years' imprisonment. Medical staff receive the maximum penalty and life imprisonment applies where the victim dies.	None recorded
Sierra Leone	No specific law prohibiting female genital mutilation	Sierra Leone has no legal prohibition of FGM. Agreements with Soweis (traditional practitioners) and chiefs have been used instead.	The CEDAW Committee called for an explicit legal prohibition of FGM.
Togo	Loi n° 2015-010 du 24 novembre 2015 portant nouveau Code pénal, articles 217 à 222	Punishes female genital mutilation. The offence was first created by Loi n° 98-016 of 17 November 1998, whose provisions were taken into the 2015 Penal Code.	None recorded

Source: RFLD legal profiles in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. "No provision recorded" means the profile does not yet record a law on this theme; it does not always mean that none exists.



Figure 26. RFLD's 16 Days of Activism 2026 campaign, 25 November to 10 December: ensure justice, protect survivors, end impunity. Source: RFLD.

7.7 Child marriage

About four in ten women in West and Central Africa were married before 18 (UNICEF, 2017). The minimum age of marriage for girls is 16 in Mali and Senegal and 15 in Niger, below the age of 18 set by Article 6 of the Maputo Protocol. Cabo Verde, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Liberia set 18 but keep exceptions (RFLD, 2026l). In 2018, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights found that Mali's age of marriage, among other provisions of its Family Code, violated the Maputo Protocol and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2018; RFLD, 2026c).

Two reforms show the direction of travel. Sierra Leone's Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2024 prohibits marriage under 18 regardless of parental consent. Burkina Faso's Code des personnes et de la famille, adopted on 1 September 2025, sets 18 for girls and boys (RFLD, 2026g).

Table 12. Child marriage and minimum age of marriage, by country

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Benin	Loi n° 2002-07 du 24 août 2004 portant Code des personnes et de la famille; Loi n° 2021-11 (Penal Code arts. 553-2 and 553-3)	The minimum age of marriage is 18 for both sexes. Law 2021-11 punishes organising or contracting forced or early marriage with 10 to 20 years' imprisonment.	None recorded
	Loi n° 2015-08 du 08 décembre 2015 portant Code de l'enfant en République du Bénin, articles 3 et 181	Defines early marriage as the marriage of a child before the age of majority and prohibits practices leading to early or forced marriage of children. These practices include coercion and psychological pressure. Emotional blackmail is also prohibited.	None recorded
	Code pénal (forced and early marriage provisions)	Criminalises forced marriage and early marriage, as reported by Benin to the CEDAW Committee in 2024.	None recorded
Burkina Faso	Loi n°025-2018/AN du 31 mai 2018 portant Code pénal, articles 531-1 et suivants	The Penal Code prohibits and punishes child and forced marriage.	None recorded
	Code des personnes et de la famille, adopted on 1 September 2025	The new code sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both girls and boys and makes consent of both parties the basis of marriage.	None recorded
Cabo Verde	Código Civil (1997), artigos 133 e 1575	Sets the age of majority at 18 and allows a minor to marry with the consent of parents or guardians, with court approval if consent is refused.	Marriage of minors remains possible with parental consent.
Côte d'Ivoire	Loi n° 2019-570 du 26 juin 2019 relative au mariage, articles 2 et 26	The World Bank records these articles as the legal basis protecting girls from child marriage.	None recorded
The Gambia	Children's (Amendment) Act, 2016, sections 24 and 25 (amending the Children's Act, 2005)	Sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both sexes without exception and punishes parents or guardians who marry off a child with up to 20 years of imprisonment.	The CEDAW Committee reported in 2022 that 25.7 percent of women were married before 18 and prosecutions are very rare.
Ghana	Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560), section 14	Sets 18 as the minimum age of marriage with no exceptions and makes forced betrothal, dowry transactions involving a child and child marriage offences.	16 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before 18, rising to 28 per cent in Northern and Upper East regions. The National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage covers 2017 to 2026.

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
	Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29), sections 100 and 109 (forced marriage)	Treats a marriage obtained by duress as void and makes compelling a person to marry a criminal offence.	Forcing someone into marriage is only a misdemeanour.
Guinea	Children's Code (2008)	Sets 18 as the minimum age of marriage.	The President, on request of the Minister of Justice, may authorise marriage before 18 for 'serious reasons' with parental consent. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019) raised concern about prevalence, impunity of perpetrators and weak protection schemes.
	Loi ordinaire L/2019/0059/AN portant Code de l'enfant de la République de Guinée, articles 314 and 829 to 831	Sets 18 as the minimum age of marriage and punishes those who facilitate or celebrate child marriage. Failing to report a child marriage is also punished.	A court may still grant age exemptions for legitimate grounds.
Guinea-Bissau	Lei n.º 11/2010, de 17 de setembro (Saúde Reprodutiva e Planeamento Familiar), artigo 5.º	Raised the minimum age of marriage to 18 for both women and men, from 14 for girls and 16 for boys.	UNDP noted that in practice no sanctions are applied to those who force minors to marry.
Liberia	Domestic Relations Law, 1973	Sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 for girls and 21 for boys; marriage from 16 to 18 is allowed with parental, guardian or judicial consent; marriage under 16 is prohibited under civil and customary law.	The exception from age 16 remains, and there is no national strategy on child marriage.
	Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law of 1998 (An Act to Govern the Devolution of Estates and Establish Rights of Inheritance for Spouses of Both Statutory and Customary Marriages, approved 7 October 2003)	Makes it unlawful to give a girl under 16 in customary marriage and bars parents from choosing a husband for their daughter.	The customary minimum age of 16 is lower than 18.
Mali	Code of Persons and the Family (2011)	Sets the minimum age of marriage at 16 for girls and 18 for boys; persons over 15 may marry with authorisation of the head of the administrative district and parental consent.	Below the age of 18 set by Article 6 of the Maputo Protocol. The national strategy for ending child marriage covered 2020 to 2023.
Mauritania	Personal Status Code (Law No. 2001-052 of 19 July 2001), Articles 6 and 9	Sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both sexes.	Guardians may authorise marriage of minors if they consider it in the child's interest, and a young girl's silence counts as consent.
	General Child Protection Code (Law No. 2018-024), Article 17	Punishes guardians who marry off a child against the child's exclusive interest with 5 to 10 years in prison.	The 'exclusive interest' test is undefined, so the provision does not ban child marriage outright.

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Niger	Civil Code	Minimum age of marriage is 15 for girls and 18 for boys, with exceptions through parental consent and presidential dispensation. A national action plan to end child marriage was adopted in 2018.	76% of women were married before 18 and 28% before 15 (DHS 2012).
	Code pénal, article 258	Punishes marriage of a minor following abduction with 1 to 5 years of imprisonment and a fine.	One in four women aged 25 to 29 was married before 15, and the World Bank found no provisions effectively prohibiting child marriage.
Nigeria	Child's Rights Act, 2003, section 21	Sets 18 as the minimum age of marriage and prohibits child marriage.	Several northern states, including Adamawa and Bauchi, had not domesticated it by 2025, and section 61 of the Constitution keeps Islamic and customary marriages outside federal jurisdiction.
Senegal	Loi n° 72-61 du 12 juin 1972 portant Code de la famille, article 111	Sets the minimum age of marriage at 16 for women and 18 for men. The president of the regional court may grant an age dispensation for serious reasons after an inquiry.	The minimum age for girls remains below 18, the age required by the Maputo Protocol.
Sierra Leone	Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2024	Prohibits marriage of any person under 18, regardless of parental consent, with minimum prison terms of 15 years for violations.	None recorded
	Child Rights Act, 2007	Set the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both sexes.	It conflicted with the Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, which allowed child marriage with parental consent, and a revised Child Rights Bill was pending.
Togo	Loi n° 2007-017 du 6 juillet 2007 portant Code de l'enfant, article 267	Prohibits child marriage and sets the age of marriage at 18.	Civil society reports that other provisions on the marriage of minors are confusing.

Source: RFLD legal profiles in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. "No provision recorded" means the profile does not yet record a law on this theme; it does not always mean that none exists.

7.8 Trafficking

The UNODC's 2024 global report found that the number of people identified as trafficked rose by 25 per cent in 2022 compared with 2019, and that children made up 38 per cent of those identified; girls are mostly trafficked for sexual exploitation (UNODC, 2024; RFLD, 2026i). ECOWAS adopted a regional plan of action against trafficking in persons in 2001, and most States in the region have adopted national laws. Nigeria created a national anti-trafficking agency, NAPTIP, in 2003; Ghana adopted its Human Trafficking Act in 2005; Liberia revised its law in 2021 and Sierra Leone in 2022 (RFLD, 2026i; RFLD, 2026g).

Table 13. Anti-trafficking laws, by country

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Benin	Loi n° 2006-04 du 10 avril 2006 on the movement of minors and the repression of child trafficking; Penal Code (2018)	Criminalises child trafficking and regulates the movement of minors.	None recorded
Burkina Faso	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Cabo Verde	Código Penal, artigo 271-A (tráfico de pessoas)	Criminalises trafficking for sexual or labour exploitation. It also criminalises trafficking for organ removal. Penalties range from four to twelve years' imprisonment depending on the circumstances and the victim's age.	None recorded
Côte d'Ivoire	Loi n° 2016-1111 du 8 décembre 2016 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes	Criminalises trafficking in persons. Decree n° 2017-227 of 13 April 2017 sets up the National Committee against trafficking, and Loi n° 2010-272 of 30 September 2010 separately covers child trafficking and the worst forms of child labour.	None recorded
The Gambia	Trafficking in Persons Act, 2007	Criminalises trafficking in persons and sets up a national response.	Section 49 does not explicitly exempt trafficked persons from detention or prosecution, and the referral mechanism is ineffective.
Ghana	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Guinea	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Guinea-Bissau	Lei n.º 12/2011, de 6 de julho (prevention and combating of human trafficking)	Criminalises trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labour, with 3 to 15 years of imprisonment. Trafficking for servitude is also covered. It provides special protection for pregnant women and victims with disabilities.	None recorded
Liberia	Revised Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons within the Republic of Liberia, 2021 (amending the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons, 2005)	Criminalises trafficking in persons with minimum sentences of 20 years of imprisonment.	Its definition of exploitation is inconsistent with international law and officials lack training to apply it.
Mali	Loi du 12 juillet 2012 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes et les pratiques assimilées	Criminalises trafficking in persons and related practices.	The law does not address gender-specific aspects and lacks an action plan. It is little known to law enforcement.
Mauritania	Law No. 2020-017 of 6 August 2020 on preventing and punishing trafficking in persons and protecting victims	Criminalises trafficking and provides for victim protection. An earlier law, No. 2003-025 of 17 July 2003, also punished trafficking.	A national action plan ended in 2022 and was being updated.
	Law of 2015 criminalising slavery and slavery-like practices	Criminalises slavery; special anti-slavery courts and a victims' support fund have been set up.	Arrests of anti-slavery activists continued in 2026.
Niger	Ordonnance n°2010-86 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes, article 10	Criminalises trafficking for slavery, servitude, sexual exploitation and forced labour with 5 to 10 years of imprisonment and a fine.	None recorded

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
	Loi n°2015-36 du 26 juin 2015 relative au trafic illicite de migrants	Criminalises migrant smuggling, with aggravating circumstances when the migrant is a child or a pregnant woman.	None recorded
Nigeria	Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015	Defines trafficking offences and provides the basis for prosecutions led by the national anti-trafficking agency NAPTIP.	The CEDAW Committee found gaps in protecting abducted women and girls from trafficking.
Senegal	Loi n° 2005-06 du 10 mai 2005 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes et pratiques assimilées et à la protection des victimes	Punishes trafficking with five to ten years' imprisonment and up to 30 years in aggravated cases. Maximum penalties apply where the victim is a child. Victims are protected from prosecution and from removal during proceedings. They may also ask for residence.	None recorded
Sierra Leone	Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act, 2022	Establishes a national task force against trafficking and allocates funding. It also creates a trust fund for victims.	None recorded
Togo	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		

Source: RFLD legal profiles in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. "No provision recorded" means the profile does not yet record a law on this theme; it does not always mean that none exists.

7.9 From law to protection

A good law changes little without implementing decrees, a budget, trained police and judges, specialised units and reliable data (RFLD, 2026l). RFLD members report the same obstacles across the region: survivors who are sent home by police, cases settled by families or chiefs, medical certificates that survivors must pay for, courts far from rural areas and long delays. Legal aid laws adopted in Guinea in 2022 and Benin in 2024 are a step forward, provided they are funded.

WHAT RFLD ASKS ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- Guinea, Mali and Niger: adopt a dedicated law on violence against women that names marital rape.
- Mali, Liberia and Sierra Leone: adopt a statute prohibiting FGM, with funding for enforcement and community-led abandonment.
- Mali, Niger and Senegal: set 18 as the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys without exception.
- Nigeria: complete state-level adoption of the VAPP Act and the Child's Rights Act.
- All States: sign and ratify the AU Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls, and ratify ILO Convention 190.
- All States: fund legal aid, free medical certificates and specialised police and court units, and publish annual data on cases and outcomes.

Sources: (RFLD, 2026l; RFLD, 2026g).



Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

CHAPTER 8

08

Justice, civic space and representation

Rights on paper need courts, legal aid, safe defenders and women in decision-making bodies. Each of these is under strain in parts of the region.

KEY MESSAGES

- Legal aid laws in Guinea (2022) and Benin (2024) open the door to justice if funded.
- Few countries protect human rights defenders by law.
- Women's presence on land bodies depends on law in only a handful of countries.

Justice, civic space and representation

A right that cannot be claimed is a promise. This chapter looks at three conditions that turn the laws in Chapters 4 to 7 into something a woman can use: access to justice, a civic space where women can organise, and women's presence in decision-making.

8.1 Access to justice and legal aid

For most women in rural West Africa, the nearest court is far away, proceedings are in a language they may not speak, and lawyers are unaffordable. Customary and religious authorities are closer and faster, but they apply rules that often disadvantage women in matters of land, marriage and inheritance. Legal aid laws are therefore a precondition for every other right in this report.

Table 14. Legal aid and access to justice, by country

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Benin	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Burkina Faso	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Cabo Verde	Lei n.º 18/VIII/2012, de 13 de setembro de 2012 (Office of Asset Recovery)	Allocates 15 percent of the proceeds of confiscated assets to the fight against gender-based violence.	No dedicated legal aid law for survivors was cited by the government.
Côte d'Ivoire	Décret n° 2016-781 du 12 octobre 2016 (assistance judiciaire)	Decentralises legal assistance by creating local legal aid offices at nine courts.	None recorded
The Gambia	Constitution (scope of free legal assistance)	Free legal assistance for accused persons is constitutionally guaranteed only for capital offences, as stated in The Gambia's ICCPR declaration.	None recorded
	Evidence Act, section 180(2)	Sets rules of evidence applied in criminal trials, including sexual offence cases.	It permits corroboration requirements that the CEDAW Committee found discriminatory and a deterrent to reporting sexual violence.
Ghana	Legal Aid Scheme Act, 1997 (Act 542)	Provides free legal aid to qualifying persons who cannot afford a lawyer.	None recorded
Guinea	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Guinea-Bissau	Lei n.º 12/2011, de 6 de julho, artigo 21.º	Gives trafficking victims the right to medical and psychological assistance. They also have the right to legal assistance.	UNDP noted low numbers of complaints and trials for gender-based violence despite protective laws.
Liberia	An Act to Repeal the Act of 1997 Creating the Liberia Commission on Human Rights and to Create the Independent National Commission on Human Rights of Liberia, 2005	Creates the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, which receives complaints of human rights violations.	The CEDAW Committee found legal aid provision for women insufficient in 2015.

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Mali	Code de justice militaire	Prosecution of members of the defence and security forces requires prior permission from the Minister of Defence.	The CEDAW Committee found this obstructs investigation of conflict-related sexual violence and asked for urgent revision.
Mauritania	Ordinance No. 2006-05 of 26 January 2006 on legal aid	Provides full or partial legal aid before all courts to people with insufficient resources, with dedicated offices for family law and child cases.	Applicants must also show a probable chance of success.
	Law No. 2018-023 of 21 June 2018 on discrimination	Criminalises discrimination.	None recorded
Niger	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Nigeria	Legal Aid Act, 2011	Governs the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria.	None recorded
Senegal	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Sierra Leone	Legal Aid Act, 2012	Provides for free legal aid, including for women who are victims of sexual violence.	The CEDAW Committee noted in 2014 that resources for its implementation were insufficient.
Togo	Loi du 24 mai 2013 relative à l'aide juridictionnelle	Establishes the legal aid scheme (aide juridictionnelle) for people seeking access to the courts.	None recorded

Source: RFLD legal profiles in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. "No provision recorded" means the profile does not yet record a law on this theme; it does not always mean that none exists.

Guinea's Law L/2022/12/CNT on legal aid, promulgated in October 2022, and Benin's Decree 2024-1275 on legal aid both appear in RFLD's register of laws it helped change (RFLD, 2026g). Their value will depend on budgets and on the presence of legal aid offices outside capital cities. Paralegals trained by women's organisations, mobile clinics and community radio programmes on the law fill part of the gap. In Benin, for example, the FAME project tenders published by RFLD include interactive programmes on community radio on the Land Code and the Code of Persons and the Family, and translation of training and radio material into Fongbe and Nago.

Regional and continental remedies

When national remedies fail, women and their organisations can turn to regional bodies. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights receives communications and State reports, and adopts resolutions and general comments. RFLD has held Observer Status N°553 since May 2023, which allows it to speak at sessions and submit alternative reports (RFLD, 2026g). The African Court's judgment against Mali in 2018 shows that continental litigation can establish that a national family code violates the Maputo Protocol (African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2018; RFLD, 2026c). The ECOWAS Court of Justice, which accepts individual applications without requiring exhaustion of local remedies, is another route for women in the region.



Figure 27. The RFLD delegation at the 89th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Dakar, October 2026, where its panel "Defending without being exposed" was on the main agenda. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

8.2 Civic space and women human rights defenders

Women who defend land, bodily autonomy and the environment face specific risks: stigma, sexualised attacks online, threats to their families and the closure of their organisations. In October 2026, RFLD's panel "Defending without being exposed" was placed on the main agenda of the African Commission's 89th Ordinary Session, convened by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders. Its recommendations to the Commission, States and funders are now on record. RFLD joined the Support Group to the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in November 2024 under Resolution 602 (RFLD, 2026g).

Civic space varies widely across the region. RFLD's profiles record the following developments (RFLD, 2026m):

- **Guinea:** International IDEA reports excessive police force against protesters in February 2024, the 90-day suspension of three parties in August 2025, continuing bars on the main opposition parties, a new elections directorate placed under the territorial administration ministry in June 2025 and enforced disappearances of opposition figures before the December 2025 election. The IPU reports that 40 political parties were dissolved in March 2026 (International IDEA, 2025; IPU, 2026).
- **Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger:** constitutions suspended or replaced, elected bodies replaced by appointed transitional councils, and restrictions on parties and media.
- **Mauritania:** CIVICUS upgraded the country from "repressed" to "obstructed" in December 2025; a 2016 cybercrime law has been criticised for its use against bloggers and activists.
- **Côte d'Ivoire:** one of the few countries with a law promoting and protecting human rights defenders (Law 2014-388), alongside Burkina Faso (Law 039-2017) and Mali.

Table 15. Laws on human rights defenders and associations, by country

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Benin	No specific law	No dedicated human rights defenders law was identified.	None recorded

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
Burkina Faso	Loi n°039-2017/AN du 27 juin 2017 portant protection des défenseurs des droits humains au Burkina Faso	Recognises the rights of human rights defenders to associate, seek resources, speak and assemble, and punishes crimes against them.	The law created no protection mechanism; the one set up by the national human rights commission rests on an administrative order with no appeal process and no specific provisions for women defenders.
Cabo Verde	No specific law on human rights defenders	The CEDAW Committee (2019) mentions only a draft law on a National Commission for Human Rights and Citizenship.	Defenders have no specific legal protection.
Côte d'Ivoire	Loi n° 2014-388 du 20 juin 2014 portant promotion et protection des défenseurs des droits de l'homme	Guarantees defenders' freedoms of association and assembly. It also guarantees the inviolability of their premises. Decree n° 2017-121 of 22 February 2017 sets its implementing rules.	None recorded
The Gambia	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Ghana	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Guinea	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Guinea-Bissau	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Liberia	No provision recorded in the RFLD profile		
Mali	Loi n° 2018-003 du 12 janvier 2018 relative aux défenseurs des droits de l'homme, et Décret n° 2020-0087/P-RM du 18 février 2020	Recognises the rights of human rights defenders and gives the National Human Rights Commission a protection role.	The implementing decree limits protection to defenders holding a government-issued professional card and has no specific provisions for women defenders.
Mauritania	Law No. 2021-004 on associations, foundations and networks	Governs how associations are created and run. It applies to foundations and networks as well.	No specific law protecting human rights defenders.
Niger	Law on human rights defenders adopted 15 June 2022	Recognises and protects human rights defenders.	None recorded
Nigeria	Companies and Allied Matters Act, 2020, Part F	Governs the registration of civil society organisations as incorporated trustees and allows the suspension of their trustees.	A Foreign Aid (Regulation, Coordination, Transparency and Disclosure) Bill, 2026 would add disclosure and reporting duties for NGOs receiving foreign funds.
Senegal	No specific law on human rights defenders	Civil society (COSEDDH) submitted a draft law on human rights defenders to the Minister of Justice in May 2024.	Defenders have no specific legal protection.
Sierra Leone	Development Cooperation Framework (NGO Policy), 2018, revised in October 2023	NGOs are regulated by policy, not by an Act. A Human Rights Defenders Bill (2017 draft) was still being prepared for Cabinet in April 2026.	No law protects human rights defenders.
Togo	Loi n° 2011-010 du 16 mai 2011 fixant les conditions d'exercice de la liberté de réunion et de manifestation pacifiques publiques, modifiée en 2019	Regulates public meetings and peaceful demonstrations.	The government acknowledged before the UN Human Rights Committee in 2021 that restrictions added in 2019 were not fully in line with the Covenant.

Country	Law	What it provides	Gaps recorded
	Associations regime based on the French law of 1 July 1901	Associations are registered under a regime based on the French 1901 law and the Constitution, and more than 15,000 associations were registered in 2021.	None recorded

Source: RFLD legal profiles in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. "No provision recorded" means the profile does not yet record a law on this theme; it does not always mean that none exists.

Few countries have a specific law on human rights defenders. In Guinea, a 2017 draft law on their protection was never adopted (RFLD, 2026m). Associations and NGO laws often give the administration broad discretion to refuse registration or to suspend organisations, and online laws are used against those who criticise the authorities.

THE POLICY BRIEF "DEFENDING WITHOUT BEING EXPOSED"

The brief presented at the 89th Ordinary Session asks States to adopt laws protecting human rights defenders that name the specific risks faced by women, to investigate attacks and reprisals, and to stop using cybercrime and associations laws against activists. It asks funders to finance protection, digital security and relocation through flexible grants, and to accept reporting arrangements that do not expose partners. RFLD's West African Feminist Fund has used urgent small grants to help a partner organisation relocate its office and buy digital security equipment after a hostile political shift (RFLD, 2026a).

8.3 Representation: women where decisions are made

Chapter 3 showed that quotas work where they are enforced. The region's best performers, Cabo Verde, Senegal and Guinea, all have parity or allocation rules. Countries without quotas, Nigeria, The Gambia and Liberia, have the lowest shares of women in parliament (RFLD, 2026l). Nigeria's national assembly rejected gender bills in 2022, and Ghana's Affirmative Action Act 2024 has yet to change the composition of parliament.

Representation matters beyond parliament. Land commissions, water committees, local councils, chieftaincy councils and climate committees make the decisions that affect women's land and livelihoods day to day. Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone require women on land bodies. Elsewhere, women's presence depends on goodwill. The second day of the Conakry seminar addresses feminist leadership and land governance, with a panel on parity laws and the presence of women on land commissions (RFLD, 2026f).

Leadership by young women

The leaders who carry the land and climate agenda today will need successors. The Conakry seminar includes a session on passing leadership on to young Indigenous women, with dialogue between generations and mentoring, and the 2027 roadmap provides for a mentoring scheme (RFLD, 2026f). RFLD's Academy and its Francophone online school offer certified courses on the Maputo Protocol, shadow reporting and women's political participation that young leaders can take for free.

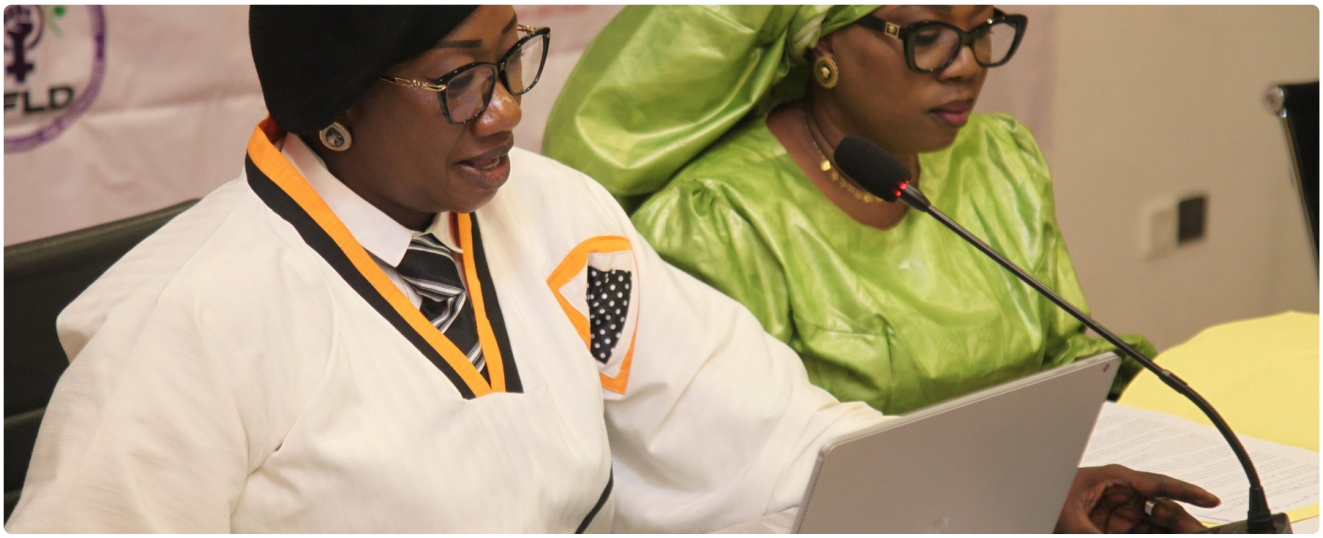


Figure 28. Women leaders follow proceedings during an RFLD training on political participation and the Maputo Protocol, May 2026. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

REGIONAL COURTS AS A ROUTE TO JUSTICE

The ECOWAS Court of Justice accepts applications from individuals and organisations without requiring them to exhaust national remedies first. In *Dorothy Chioma Njemanze and others v Federal Republic of Nigeria* (2017), the Court found that Nigeria had violated the rights of women who were abducted, abused and labelled as sex workers by public officials, and ordered compensation (ECOWAS Court of Justice, 2017). The African Court's 2018 judgment against Mali on its Family Code showed that continental litigation can establish that a national law violates the Maputo Protocol (African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2018). For women whose land or bodily integrity is violated and who find no remedy at home, these courts are slow but real options, and RFLD members can support strategic cases.

Women in local decision-making

Most decisions about land, water and local services are taken below the national level, by communal councils, village development committees and customary authorities. Quotas in electoral law usually apply to national and sometimes municipal elections, but rarely to customary bodies or sectoral committees. RFLD's profiles show that women's presence on land bodies is guaranteed by law only in Burkina Faso, Liberia and Sierra Leone among the sixteen countries (RFLD, 2026m). Extending parity rules to these bodies would bring women into the rooms where the questions raised in Chapters 4 and 5 are decided.

The three conditions examined in this chapter, justice, civic space and representation, are what allow the reforms in Chapters 4 to 7 to happen and to last. They are also the conditions under most pressure in the region today.



Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

CHAPTER 9

09

Guinea in focus

A new Constitution, a parliament that is 40.8 per cent women, and some of the highest rates of FGM and child marriage in the world.

KEY MESSAGES

- Guinea's Assembly is 40.8 per cent women after the 2026 elections.
- There is no dedicated law on violence against women and marital rape is not a distinct offence.
- Widows do not inherit on equal terms and unpaid work is not valued in marital property.

Guinea in focus

Guinea hosts the seminar that gave rise to this report. It combines one of the most advanced parity frameworks in Africa with some of the highest rates of FGM and child marriage in the world, a land code that promises equality and a family law that still treats spouses unequally at death.

9.1 Political context

Guinea adopted a new Constitution by referendum on 21 September 2025, with 89.4 per cent voting yes, a result confirmed by the Supreme Court on 26 September 2025. It replaced the Transitional Charter that followed the 2021 coup, created a Senate and a seven-year presidential term. The transitional leader won the presidential election of 28 December 2025 with 86.7 per cent, with major opposition leaders barred. Legislative elections on 31 May 2026 produced a National Assembly of 147 seats that is 40.8 per cent women, with 60 women elected. The Assembly convened on 17 July 2026, formally ending the transition (RFLD, 2026m).

The same period was marked by restrictions on civic space: the suspension of three parties in August 2025, the dissolution of 40 political parties in March 2026, media bans and enforced disappearances of opposition figures (RFLD, 2026m; International IDEA, 2025; IPU, 2026). The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights urged the authorities to lift bans on political parties and media outlets.

40.8%
women in the National Assembly, 60 of 147 seats (2026)

95%
FGM prevalence among women

47%
of women aged 20 to 24 married before 18; 17% before 15

61.88
World Bank WBL 2026 legal frameworks score

Source: RFLD legal profile of Guinea (RFLD, 2026m), citing IPU, UNICEF, Girls Not Brides and the World Bank.

9.2 Treaty commitments

Guinea ratified CEDAW in 1982 and the Maputo Protocol on 16 April 2012, with no reservation recorded on the AU status list. It is party to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and to the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. It is not party to the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, has not ratified ILO Convention 190, has signed but not ratified the Kampala Convention on internally displaced persons and the Protocol establishing the African Court, and has not signed the 2025 AU Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls (RFLD, 2026m). Eight of the thirteen AU human rights and governance treaties listed in RFLD's profile are ratified.

9.3 Land, property and inheritance

Ordinance 92/019 of 30 March 1992 on the Code foncier et domanial, read with article 652 of the Civil Code, gives women and men equal rights to own and administer property. The Civil Code of 2019 gives sons and daughters equal inheritance rights (articles 666 to 680) (RFLD, 2026m).

Two gaps matter directly for the women in Conakry. First, surviving spouses do not have equal inheritance rights under article 695 of the Civil Code, so a widow can be at a disadvantage compared with a widower, and family councils can discriminate in practice. Second, unpaid domestic contributions are not valued in marital property under article 619, so a wife who has farmed and cared for the household can leave a marriage or widowhood without a share of what she helped build (RFLD, 2026m). Customary allocation of land through the male line remains widespread in rural areas.

The Civil Code of 2019 also brought gains in family law: it requires free consent to marriage, sets 18 as the age of marriage, removes the wife's duty of obedience and gives women equal divorce rights and joint parental authority. It still allows polygamy up to four wives, and divorced women face a waiting period before remarriage (RFLD, 2026m).



Figure 29. Banner of the RFLD advocacy seminar on Indigenous women's land rights and feminist leadership, Conakry, 24 to 26 November 2026. Source: RFLD.

9.4 Violence against women

Guinea has no dedicated law on violence against women (RFLD, 2026l). Assault and wounding between spouses are punished under the general provisions of the 2016 Penal Code (article 248), and the victim can end the prosecution when incapacity lasts less than 20 days. The World Bank found no specific domestic violence legislation. The Penal Code criminalises rape and other sexu-

al violence (articles 267 to 270), but marital rape is not set out as a distinct offence. Sexual harassment is not specifically criminalised and there is no civil or criminal remedy for workplace harassment (RFLD, 2026m).

FGM

FGM is prohibited in all its forms by the 2016 Penal Code (articles 258 to 261), with heavier penalties where it causes disability or death or is performed in a health facility, and by the 2008 Children's Code (articles 405 to 410), which also punishes parents who authorise it and obliges heads of health facilities to report cases. The 2000 law on reproductive health protects women and men against violence affecting the genital organs. Yet prevalence stands at 95 per cent, prosecutions are few and sentences are often suspended or light (RFLD, 2026m). Guinea also has the highest rate of medicalised FGM in West and Central Africa: 17 per cent among women and girls aged 15 to 49 and 35 per cent among girls aged 0 to 14 are cut by health personnel (UNFPA and UNICEF, 2026). UNFPA estimates that, without accelerated action, 714,369 women and girls in Guinea will be at risk of FGM by 2030, although prevalence among girls aged 15 to 19 has declined over the past thirty years and a growing share of people say the practice should stop (UNFPA, 2024).

Child marriage

The Children's Code of 2008 and the Children's Code of 2019 both set 18 as the minimum age of marriage, and the 2019 Code punishes those who facilitate, celebrate or fail to report a child marriage. However, the President, on request of the Minister of Justice, may authorise marriage before 18 for "serious reasons" with parental consent, and a court may grant age exemptions. The Penal Code prohibits forced and early marriage but with short penalties of three months to one year. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child raised concern in 2019 about prevalence, impunity and weak protection (RFLD, 2026m). Forty-seven per cent of women aged 20 to 24 were married before 18.

9.5 Sexual and reproductive health

Law L/2000/010/AN of 10 July 2000 on reproductive health sets the framework for reproductive health services and protection against genital violence (RFLD, 2026m). RFLD's profile does not record the legal grounds for abortion, which the scorecard lists as "not recorded" pending verification against the official text (RFLD, 2026l). Guinea's ratification of the Maputo Protocol obliges it to authorise medical abortion at least in the cases listed in Article 14(2)(c).

9.6 Representation and parity

Guinea is a regional reference on parity. Law L/2019/0011/AN of 2 May 2019 requires 50 per cent women on all candidate lists for national and local elections, with alternation between women and men, although its application depends on its incorporation into the Electoral Code. Article 105 of the 2025 Constitution provides that one third of deputies are elected by nationwide proportional representation, with remaining seats allocated in favour of women candidates and candidates with disabilities (RFLD, 2026m). The result, 40.8 per cent women in the 2026 Assembly, places Guinea third in the region. The question for the seminar is whether that presence translates into land, family and violence laws that women need.

9.7 Access to justice and civic space

Law L/2022/12/CNT of 23 September 2022 organises legal aid for people who cannot pay for justice (RFLD, 2026g). Associations and NGOs are governed by two laws of 4 July 2005, and Guinea has no specific law protecting human rights defenders; a 2017 draft was never adopted (RFLD, 2026m).

9.8 Reforms recommended for Guinea

Table 16. Reforms recommended for Guinea by treaty bodies, national organisations and RFLD

Reform	Recommended by	Theme
Adopt a dedicated law on violence against women that names marital rape	RFLD scorecard	GBV
Remove the presidential exception that allows marriage under 18 in the Children's Code	Girls Not Brides; RFLD	Child marriage
End impunity for child marriage and strengthen protection schemes for children	UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019)	Child marriage
Give surviving spouses equal inheritance rights (Civil Code art. 695) and value unpaid contributions in marital property (art. 619)	RFLD, based on the World Bank WBL assessment	Land and inheritance
Criminalise sexual harassment and provide remedies for workplace harassment	RFLD, based on the World Bank WBL assessment	GBV
Incorporate the 2019 parity law fully into the Electoral Code	RFLD	Participation
Ratify the CEDAW Optional Protocol, ILO C190 and the AU Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls	RFLD	Treaties
Lift bans on political parties and media outlets	UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (September 2025)	Civic space
Restore an independent election management body	International IDEA (June 2025)	Civic space
Investigate enforced disappearances of opposition figures	International IDEA (December 2025)	Civic space
Adopt a law protecting human rights defenders, with provisions for women defenders	RFLD	Civic space

Sources: (RFLD, 2026m; RFLD, 2026l).



Figure 30. Women leaders at an RFLD convening. RFLD member organisations in Guinea use these laws in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

What the Conakry seminar can change in Guinea

Guinea's situation in 2026 combines a high share of women in the new National Assembly with legal gaps that directly affect the themes of the seminar. The Assembly elected in May 2026 is the first since the transition to include 60 women. The seminar's recommendations on inheritance by surviving spouses, the valuing of unpaid work in marital property and a dedicated law on violence against women can be presented to that Assembly and to the ministries in charge of justice, land and the promotion of women. The dialogue with traditional leaders on the last day addresses the custom that, in practice, decides most land questions in rural Guinea.

Table 17. Guinea: key legal texts for the themes of this report

Theme	Text	Main gap
Land and property	Ordonnance 92/019 (Code foncier et domanial, 1992); Civil Code art. 652	Unpaid contributions not valued in marital property (art. 619)
Inheritance	Civil Code 2019, arts. 666 to 680 and 695	Surviving spouses do not inherit equally
Family	Civil Code 2019, arts. 241 to 354	Polygamy up to four wives; waiting period for divorced women
Violence	Penal Code 2016, arts. 248 and 267 to 270	No dedicated law; marital rape not a distinct offence; no harassment offence
FGM	Penal Code 2016, arts. 258 to 261; Children's Code 2008, arts. 405 to 410	Few prosecutions; light or suspended sentences; high medicalisation
Child marriage	Children's Codes 2008 and 2019; Penal Code arts. 319 to 322	Presidential and judicial exceptions; short penalties
SRHR	Law L/2000/010/AN on reproductive health	Legal grounds for abortion not recorded
Participation	Parity law L/2019/0011/AN; Constitution 2025, art. 105	Parity law depends on the Electoral Code
Justice	Law L/2022/12/CNT on legal aid	Funding and presence outside Conakry
Defenders	Laws L/2005/013 and L/2005/014 on associations and NGOs	No law protecting human rights defenders

Source: RFLD legal profile of Guinea (RFLD, 2026m).

The table shows that Guinea's gaps are concentrated in family and violence law rather than in land law itself. The land code already gives women and men equal rights; what keeps Guinean women off the land is the way inheritance, marital property and custom operate around it, and the absence of a legal framework that would let a woman who is threatened or dispossessed obtain protection. These are the links the Conakry seminar sets out to document.



Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

CHAPTER 10

10

The Conakry seminar: design, standards and follow-up

Three days to turn lived experience into a validated map of barriers and a 2027 roadmap owned by women leaders.

KEY MESSAGES

- Thirty-five representatives, three days, one validated map of barriers.
- Recommendations anchored in the Maputo Protocol, UNDRIP and CEDAW general recommendations 34 and 39.
- Outcomes and a 2027 roadmap will be published and followed up.

The Conakry seminar: design, standards and follow-up

The Conakry seminar is built to move in three steps: understand what the law says and what women live, organise women leaders into a network that can act, and influence the institutions and traditional leaders who decide. This chapter describes how.

10.1 Purpose and participants

From Tuesday 24 to Thursday 26 November 2026, RFLD holds an advocacy seminar in Conakry on the land rights of Indigenous women in West Africa and on feminist leadership. RFLD fully funds the participation of 35 representatives: women leaders, women's and Indigenous community organisations, and public institutions (RFLD, 2026f). Their work protects land, soils and water, which makes it part of how the region responds to climate change.

The seminar brings together women who already lead on land issues in their communities, women's organisations and Indigenous community organisations. Public institutions take part in the discussions, and traditional leaders join the dialogue on the last day. Young women have a session of their own, because the network needs new leaders to carry the work over the coming years (RFLD, 2026f).

The mission is led by RFLD's regional programmes team, which facilitates the three days and runs the seminar secretariat. In Conakry, the seminar is organised with RFLD's Country Representative. Each panel brings together an RFLD expert and a woman trainer from West Africa, so that discussions start from the realities of the region (RFLD, 2026f).

10.2 Expected results

The seminar should leave women leaders better equipped to defend women's access to land, and better connected to each other and to the people who decide. By the end of the three days, RFLD expects (RFLD, 2026f):

1. participants to know what land, inheritance and parity laws provide for women, and where custom still overrides them;
2. the link between losing land and gender-based violence to be documented through real cases, along with the places where a dispossessed woman can find help;
3. Indigenous women's knowledge of soils, seeds and water to be recognised as part of land management;
4. a map of legal and customary barriers, validated by participants, showing which ones the network will tackle first in 2027;
5. recommendations grounded in the Maputo Protocol (articles 19 and 21), UNDRIP (articles 22, 26 and 44) and CEDAW general recommendations 34 and 39, presented to institutions and traditional leaders;

6. a solidarity network of Indigenous women leaders with its own coordinators, mentoring for young women and a 2027 roadmap.

An entry test on the first morning and an exit test on the last day will measure what participants have learned.



Figure 31. How the three days fit together: Day 1 Understand, Day 2 Organise, Day 3 Influence. Outcome: an advocacy roadmap for 2027, adopted by the participants. Source: RFLD.

10.3 The agenda

Times are indicative and may change as the work progresses.

Table 18. Day 1, Tuesday 24 November: land rights, laws and lived realities

Time	Session	Content
08:30 to 09:00	**Welcome and registration**	Participant kits, entry test
09:00 to 11:00	**Inheritance, property and land management: what the law says and what women live**	Panel on land law, civil codes and custom; testimonies; discussion
11:30 to 13:00	**Land and gender-based violence: breaking the link**	Case studies on dispossession and its consequences; discussion
14:00 to 15:00	**Indigenous knowledge and women's role in sustainable land management**	Community experiences; reading of UNDRIP articles 22, 26 and 44
15:00 to 16:00	**Group work and summary of the day**	Cases of dispossession and possible responses; plenary feedback; evaluation

Table 19. Day 2, Wednesday 25 November: feminist leadership and solidarity

Time	Session	Content
08:30 to 09:00	**Welcome and recap of Day 1**	Lessons learned and open questions

Time	Session	Content
09:00 to 11:00	**Feminist leadership and land governance: taking up decision-making spaces**	Panel on parity laws and women on land commissions; discussion
11:30 to 13:00	**Building solidarity networks between Indigenous women leaders**	Mapping of actors and alliances; discussion
14:00 to 15:00	**Passing leadership on to young Indigenous women**	Dialogue between generations; mentoring
15:00 to 16:00	**Mapping legal and customary barriers**	Group work bringing together the first two days; validation in plenary; evaluation

Table 20. Day 3, Thursday 26 November: advocacy, dialogue and influence

Time	Session	Content
08:30 to 09:00	**Welcome and recap of Day 2**	Presentation of the validated map of barriers
09:00 to 11:00	**Advocacy strategies based on UNDRIP and the Maputo Protocol**	Articles 19 and 21 of the Maputo Protocol; CEDAW general recommendations 34 and 39; drafting the recommendations
11:30 to 12:30	**Dialogue with institutions and traditional leaders**	Recommendations presented to decision-makers; discussion and commitments
12:30 to 13:00	**Summary and closing ceremony**	Adoption of the 2027 roadmap; exit test; closing remarks; certificates

Source: (RFLD, 2026f). Coffee breaks and lunch omitted.

10.4 The barrier map

The mapping exercise at the end of Day 2 sorts the barriers that participants have identified into four groups. For each barrier, they look at which institution can lift it and how long that would take (RFLD, 2026f). The four groups, with examples drawn from the evidence in Part II and the country profiles, are set out below.

Table 21. The four groups of barriers to women's land rights, with examples from the region

Group	What it covers	Examples from the region	Who can lift it
1. The law itself	Gaps or provisions that still treat women and men differently	Unequal shares for surviving spouses (Guinea, art. 695); half shares for daughters under Muslim succession rules (Senegal, Mauritania); "equitable" rather than equal access (The Gambia); married women's property rights (Niger, Guinea-Bissau)	Parliament, ministries of justice
2. How the law is applied	Where administrations and courts do not enforce women's rights	Unpaid contributions ignored in marital property; titles issued only to heads of household; delays and costs in court	Land administrations, courts, legal aid services
3. Custom and religious practice	Family and village rules that leave women and girls out	Allocation through the male line; property grabbing from widows; family councils overriding statutory shares	Traditional and religious leaders, family councils, communities
4. Lack of information	Women who do not know their rights or how to secure a land document	Laws not translated into local languages; no legal literacy in rural areas; no data by sex	Women's organisations, community radio, local government

Source: groups from (RFLD, 2026f); examples from (RFLD, 2026m).

10.5 The advocacy toolkit

The recommendations will not start from scratch. African and United Nations standards already protect women's right to land and to inherit. Participants work with the Maputo Protocol, which most West African States have ratified, with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and with two general recommendations of the CEDAW Committee, one on rural women and one on Indigenous women and girls. Using texts that governments have already accepted makes it easier to hold them to their commitments (RFLD, 2026f). Annex C summarises the articles used.

WHY THESE TEXTS

- **Maputo Protocol, Article 19:** access to and control over productive resources, including land, and the right to property.
- **Maputo Protocol, Article 21:** a widow's equitable share of her husband's property, her right to continue living in the matrimonial home, and equal inheritance by women and men.
- **UNDRIP, Articles 22, 26 and 44:** particular attention to Indigenous women, rights to lands, territories and resources, and equality between Indigenous women and men.
- **CEDAW GR 34 and GR 39:** the rights of rural women and of Indigenous women and girls to land, natural resources and participation.

Sources: (African Union, 2003; United Nations, 2007; CEDAW Committee, 2016; CEDAW Committee, 2022).

10.6 After Conakry

The seminar is a starting point. RFLD will publish the recommendations and the 2027 roadmap adopted in Conakry once the seminar is over. It will follow up on the commitments made by institutions during the dialogue and support the network as it puts its roadmap into practice. The recommendations will also feed RFLD's advocacy before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (RFLD, 2026f).

Chapter 13 proposes indicators for this follow-up. They track whether the network of Indigenous women leaders is functioning, whether institutions honour the commitments they make in Conakry, and whether the legal barriers identified as priorities begin to move.

10.7 Place in the SEA-T programme

RFLD is one of the civil society partners of the SEA-T programme in West Africa. Since September 2025, under a 30-month grant agreement, it has implemented the Human Rights in Francophone West Africa project. The project supports the advocacy of women human rights defenders at national level and before the African Commission, and passes part of the funding on as sub-grants to women's organisations in the region. In October 2026, the programme supported the panel RFLD facilitated on the main agenda of the Commission's 89th Session in Dakar. The Conakry seminar is the project's next activity in West Africa (RFLD, 2026f). RFLD also serves as Co-Chair of the SEA-T Programme Advisory Council.

Country profiles

The sixteen profiles that follow are drawn from RFLD's database of women's rights laws in the 55 African Union member states, verified as of October 2026 (RFLD, 2026m). They are ordered alphabetically and designed to be read and copied on their own.

How to read a profile

- **Summary:** a short description of the country's legal and political situation.
- **Key indicators:** women in parliament, minimum age of marriage, child marriage and FGM prevalence and the World Bank legal frameworks score where available, with the year.
- **Scorecard position:** the answer to the seven questions of the West Africa legal scorecard 2026 (RFLD, 2026l). Mauritania is outside the scorecard.
- **Treaties:** signature and ratification of the main regional and international instruments, with any reservation recorded.
- **National laws by theme:** each law with its reference, what it provides, the gaps identified and the source cited in RFLD's profile. Themes follow the order of this report: land, property and inheritance; family; violence; harmful practices; SRHR; trafficking; justice and defenders; participation; education, work and social protection; disability.
- **Civic space, recent developments and reforms recommended:** where the profile records them.

> **A NOTE ON COMPLETENESS**
>
> Where a profile records no law on a theme, it does not always mean that no law exists. RFLD lists the topics it is still verifying at the end of each profile. Corrections that cite the official text are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

COUNTRY PROFILE 1 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Benin

Benin has one of the most developed legal frameworks for women's rights in West Africa: Law 2011-26 on violence against women, Law 2021-11 on sex-based offences (sexual harassment, forced and early marriage, FGM), and Law 2021-12, which allows abortion on request up to 12 weeks in cases of material, educational, professional or moral distress. A 2019 constitutional revision reserved 24 National Assembly seats for women, and women won 28 of 109 seats (25.7%) in January 2026. The CEDAW Committee in October 2024 remained concerned about the high prevalence of gender-based violence, FGM and child marriage, and the low share of women in decision-making. A November 2025 constitutional revision created a Senate and extended terms of office to seven years.



Figure 32. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

KEY INDICATORS

25.7% (28 of 109)
Women in National Assembly (2026)

8.0% (2 of 25)
Women in Senate (2026)

18 for girls and boys
Minimum legal age of marriage (2004)

67.60
World Bank WBL 2026 legal frameworks index (2026)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Porto-Novo (official capital); Cotonou is the seat of government
Legal system	Civil law system based on the French model, with customary law in some personal matters; customary rules contrary to the 2004 Persons and Family Code no longer have legal force
Official languages	French
Constitution	Constitution of 11 December 1990, revised in 2019 and again in November 2025 (creation of a Senate and seven-year terms)
Quotas or parity	24 of the 109 National Assembly seats are reserved for women, one in each of the 24 constituencies (introduced by the 2019 revision)

Table 22. Benin: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 11/02/2004 / ratified 30/09/2005 / deposited 13/10/2005	
CEDAW	signed 11 Nov 1981 / ratified 12 Mar 1992	None listed in the UN Treaty Collection status page
CEDAW Optional Protocol	signed 25 May 2000 / ratified 27 Sep 2019	

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	signed 27/02/1992 / ratified 17/04/1997 / deposited 30/05/1997	
ILO C100 Equal Remuneration	ratified 16 May 1968	
ILO C111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)	ratified 22 May 1961	
ICCPR	acceded 12 Mar 1992	
Kampala Convention	signed 25/03/2010 / ratified 28/02/2012 / deposited 28/03/2012	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	signed 28/01/2015 / ratified 14/05/2024 / deposited 12/11/2024	
Budapest Convention on Cybercrime	acceded 20 June 2024 / entered into force for Benin 1 October 2024	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

Loi n° 2002-07 portant Code des personnes et de la famille, arts. 619, 630 and 634

Gives daughters and surviving spouses equal inheritance rights.

Gaps: Customary practice continues to limit women's inheritance of land (CEDAW 2013).

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org, hrlibrary.umn.edu

Loi n° 2013-01 du 14 août 2013 portant Code foncier et domanial (arts. 14 and 316), as amended; Code des personnes et de la famille art. 185

Provides equal access to land and property for women and men.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org, hrlibrary.umn.edu

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Loi n° 2002-07 du 24 août 2004 portant Code des personnes et de la famille

Recognises only monogamous marriage and overrides customs that treated women unequally in marriage and inheritance.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee (2013) noted that de facto polygamous unions persist despite the prohibition.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: hrlibrary.umn.edu

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Loi n° 2011-26 du 9 janvier 2012 portant prévention et répression des violences faites aux femmes

Defines and punishes violence against women, including domestic violence, marital rape, forced marriage and FGM, and set up listening centres in Social Promotion Centres.

Gaps: A 2022 government study found no Beninese law defines gender-based violence, and only 9.5% of people surveyed believed the laws were applied.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org, hrlibrary.umn.edu, social.gouv.bj

Loi n° 2021-11 du 20 décembre 2021 portant dispositions spéciales de répression des infractions commises à raison du sexe des personnes et de protection de la femme (amending the 2018 Penal Code); Loi n° 2011-26

Law 2021-11 defines rape as sexual penetration against a person's will by violence, constraint, threat or surprise, punished by 5 to 10 years, and life imprisonment where the victim is under 13. Law 2011-26 explicitly covers marital rape.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee (2013) raised implementation delays and low awareness of the marital rape provision.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: inf.bj, hrlibrary.umn.edu

Loi n° 2006-19 du 5 septembre 2006 portant répression du harcèlement sexuel et protection des victimes; Loi n° 2021-11 (Penal Code arts. 548 to 552)

Criminalises sexual harassment, with higher penalties when committed by educators or against minors; failure to report known harassment is an offence and dismissal after harassment is deemed abusive.

Gaps: No specific provisions on online sexual harassment were identified in the 2022 government GBV study.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org, inf.bj, social.gouv.bj

Code du numérique (2018)

Covers Budapest Convention offences, including child sexual abuse material and electronic evidence; enforced by the Central Office for the Repression of Cybercrime (OCRC).

Gaps: The 2022 government GBV study found no specific definition of cyber-violence or online harassment against women.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: coe.int, social.gouv.bj

Code du travail (sexual harassment provisions)

Prohibits discrimination at work and punishes sexual harassment in the workplace.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ohchr.org

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Loi n° 2003-03 (2003) prohibiting female genital mutilation; Penal Code art. 524 as amended by Law 2021-11

Prohibits FGM; under Law 2021-11 it carries 6 months to 3 years, 3 to 5 years where the victim is a minor, and life imprisonment if the victim dies.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee (2013) noted few investigations, prosecutions or convictions and cross-border practice; in 2024 it again urged action to eliminate FGM.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: inf.bj, hrlibrary.umn.edu, ohchr.org

Loi n° 2002-07 du 24 août 2004 portant Code des personnes et de la famille; Loi n° 2021-11 (Penal Code arts. 553-2 and 553-3)

The minimum age of marriage is 18 for both sexes. Law 2021-11 punishes organising or contracting forced or early marriage with 10 to 20 years' imprisonment.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: inf.bj, wbl.worldbank.org

Loi n° 2015-08 du 08 décembre 2015 portant Code de l'enfant en République du Bénin, articles 3 et 181

Defines early marriage as the marriage of a child before the age of majority and prohibits practices leading to early or forced marriage of children. These practices include coercion and psychological pressure. Emotional blackmail is also prohibited.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: faolex.fao.org

Code pénal (forced and early marriage provisions)

Criminalises forced marriage and early marriage, as reported by Benin to the CEDAW Committee in 2024.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ohchr.org

Loi n° 2015-08 du 08 décembre 2015 portant Code de l'enfant, articles 185 à 188

Prohibits all forms of sexual mutilation of a child, except surgery prescribed for medical reasons.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: faolex.fao.org

Loi n° 2015-08 du 08 décembre 2015 portant Code de l'enfant, articles 169 et 184

Bans rituals that put children in danger, such as toxic potions and force-feeding. Exposure to extreme temperatures is also banned. It lists children accused of witchcraft among those needing special protection.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: faolex.fao.org

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Loi n° 2003-04 (2003) on sexual and reproductive health, as amended by Loi n° 2021-12

Abortion is allowed on request up to 12 weeks where pregnancy causes material, educational, professional or moral distress, and without a time limit on medical grounds; earlier grounds (rape, incest, fetal impairment, health) remain. A 48-hour reflection period applies and minors need guardian consent.

Gaps: Afyanahaki reports no implementing decree clarifying access conditions, approved facilities and costs.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: abortion-policies.srhr.org, afyanahaki.org

TRAFFICKING

Loi n° 2006-04 du 10 avril 2006 on the movement of minors and the repression of child trafficking; Penal Code (2018)

Criminalises child trafficking and regulates the movement of minors.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: hrlibrary.umn.edu

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

No specific law

No dedicated human rights defenders law was identified.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Constitution as revised in 2019 (24 reserved seats); electoral code as revised in 2024

Reserves one National Assembly seat per constituency for women (24 of 109).

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee in October 2024 recommended legal reform to require 50:50 parity in all decision-making positions. Women held 2 of 25 seats (8%) in the new Senate in July 2026.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: data.ipu.org, ohchr.org, data.ipu.org

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Code du travail (arts. 4, 170, 208); Convention collective générale du travail of 3 December 2005 (art. 54)

Provides at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave, paternity leave under the collective agreement, equal pay for work of equal value and non-discrimination in employment.

Gaps: ILO C190 not ratified.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Loi n° 2015-08 du 08 décembre 2015 portant Code de l'enfant, articles 113 à 116, 170 et 180

Makes schooling compulsory and free from nursery to the end of primary school and guarantees a pregnant pupil the right to continue or resume her studies. The person responsible for an early pregnancy must cover medical costs and support the child. That person must also support the young mother's education or vocational training.

Gaps: Compulsory schooling stops at the end of the primary cycle.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: faolex.fao.org

WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Loi n° 2017-06 du 13 avril 2017 portant protection et promotion des droits des personnes handicapées en République du Bénin

> Provides for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, including women and girls.
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: ilo.org

Civic space

Cybercrime law	Code du numérique (2018); Benin acceded to the Budapest Convention in 2024
Human rights defenders law	No specific law identified

> Loi n° 2015-42 du 17 mars 2016 portant institution du Régime d'Assurance Maladie Universelle (RAMU)
> Establishes universal health insurance.
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: sgg.gouv.bj

> Décret n° 2024-1275 du 23 octobre 2024 portant réglementation de l'aide juridique
> A decree, not a law, organises legal aid.
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: undp.org

> No specific law on older persons
> A draft law on the protection of older persons was still being finalised in October 2024.
> **Gaps:** No law on the rights of older persons.
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: gouv.bj

Recent developments

- 11 January 2026. Legislative elections: 28 women elected to the 109-seat National Assembly (25.7%).
- 12 November 2024. Benin deposited ratification of the AU Malabo Convention.
- 30 October 2024. CEDAW Committee adopted concluding observations on Benin's fifth periodic report, recommending 50:50 parity in decision-making, more shelters and stronger action on FGM.
- 20 June 2024. Benin acceded to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (in force 1 October 2024).

Reforms recommended by treaty bodies and national organisations

- Require 50:50 gender parity in all elected and appointed decision-making positions, including the new Senate (CEDAW Committee, 2024).
- Adopt the implementing decree for Law 2021-12 so that legal abortion services, approved facilities and costs are clearly defined (Afyanahaki).
- Enforce the FGM, child and forced marriage provisions of Law 2021-11 through investigations and prosecutions, and expand shelters and support services for survivors (CEDAW Committee, 2013 and 2024).
- Add legal definitions of gender-based violence and of online violence against women to national law (Government of Benin GBV study, 2022).
- Provide State-funded legal aid for women survivors of violence (CEDAW Committee, 2013).

> Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: vulnerable groups. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Benin in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 2 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso has been ruled by a military government since September 2022, under a transition charter that runs for 60 months from 2 July 2024; the appointed Transitional Legislative Assembly had 11 women among 58 members (19.0%) in March 2026. In 2025 the authorities dissolved political parties and adopted a revised Persons and Family Code. Earlier CEDAW findings (2010) pointed to legal polygamy and unequal marriage ages. UN bodies have documented serious abuses against Fulani communities, and the UN Human Rights Office announced in July 2026 that its country office would be shut down.



Figure 33. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

KEY INDICATORS

19.0%
Women in Transitional Legislative Assembly (2026)

67.40
World Bank WBL 2026 legal frameworks index (2026)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	**Yes**	**Not recorded**	**Yes**	**Not recorded**	**Yes**	**Yes**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Ouagadougou
Legal system	Civil law system based on the French model, with customary law in personal matters; the country has been under military-led transitional rules since the 2022 coups
Constitution	Constitution of 1991, suspended after the 2022 coups; the country is governed under a transition charter (revised in 2024) providing for a 60-month transition from 2 July 2024
Quotas or parity	The electoral quota law requires at least 30% of candidates of each sex on party and independent lists; it has not applied to the appointed Transitional Legislative Assembly

Table 23. Burkina Faso: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 26/02/2004 / ratified 09/06/2006 / deposited 09/08/2006	
CEDAW	acceded 14 Oct 1987	None listed in the UN Treaty Collection status page
CEDAW Optional Protocol	signed 16 Nov 2001 / ratified 10 Oct 2005	
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	signed 27/02/1992 / ratified 08/06/1992 / deposited 10/07/1992	
ILO C100 Equal Remuneration	ratified 30 Jun 1969	
ILO C111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)	ratified 16 Apr 1962	
ICCPR	acceded 4 Jan 1999	
Kampala Convention	signed 25/07/2010 / ratified 05/07/2012 / deposited 09/08/2012	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	Not signed or ratified (AU list of 2 February 2026)	
Budapest Convention on Cybercrime	Invited to accede on 11 December 2019; the invitation lapsed in December 2024 without accession	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

> Code des personnes et de la famille, adopted on 1 September 2025
>
> Contains provisions that eliminate gender discrimination in inheritance, protecting women after divorce or the death of a spouse.
>
> **Gaps:** Customary rules continue to limit women's inheritance of land in practice.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: amnesty.org

> Loi n°034-2009/AN du 16 juin 2009 portant régime foncier rural, article 75
>
> Secures rural land rights for all actors including women and guarantees equal property rights. It requires women's representation on rural land commissions.
>
> **Gaps:** Only 32% of women in unions held land in 2010 and 8.2% held it alone.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

> Loi n°103-2015/CNT du 22 décembre 2015 on private rental housing
>
> Guarantees access to private rental housing without discrimination based on sex; its implementing order was adopted in 2019.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Persons and Family Code (Code des personnes et de la famille), revised in 2025

Governs marriage, divorce and filiation. The earlier code made monogamy the primary regime but allowed polygamy as an option (arts. 257 to 262).

Source cited in the RFLD profile: hrlibrary.umn.edu

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Loi n°061-2015/CNT du 6 septembre 2015 portant prévention, répression et réparation des violences à l'égard des femmes et des filles

Dedicated law that defines and punishes violence against women and girls and sets up victim support. It creates offences that were previously unpunished, such as abduction and witchcraft accusations.

Gaps: The government reported continuing challenges in enforcing the law.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

Loi n°025-2018/AN du 31 mai 2018 portant Code pénal, articles 531-8, 531-9, 533-10 et 533-11

The Penal Code criminalises domestic violence.

Gaps: There is no specific provision on femicide.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: worldbank.org

Loi n°025-2018/AN du 31 mai 2018 portant Code pénal (sexual offences)

The Penal Code punishes sexual offences, and specifically sanctions sexual relations between educators and the minors in their care.

Gaps: The government noted the need for stronger application of these provisions.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

Loi n°025-2018/AN du 31 mai 2018 portant Code pénal, articles 533-9 et 722-1

Criminalises sexual harassment, which is also covered by articles 11 and 36 of Loi n°061-2015/CNT and by articles 37 and 422 of the Labour Code for the workplace.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: worldbank.org

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Loi n°025-2018/AN du 31 mai 2018 portant Code pénal, articles 513-7 à 513-9

Criminalises female genital mutilation.

Gaps: The government noted the need for stronger enforcement.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

Loi n°025-2018/AN du 31 mai 2018 portant Code pénal, articles 531-1 et suivants

The Penal Code prohibits and punishes child and forced marriage.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

Code des personnes et de la famille, adopted on 1 September 2025

The new code sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both girls and boys and makes consent of both parties the basis of marriage.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: amnesty.org

Loi n°061-2015/CNT du 6 septembre 2015 portant prévention, répression et réparation des violences à l'égard des femmes et des filles

Makes accusations of witchcraft against women a criminal offence.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Reproductive Health Act, Act No. 049-2005/AN (2005); Penal Code

Abortion is permitted to save the woman's life or health and for fetal impairment without a time limit, and in cases of rape or incest up to 14 weeks.

Gaps: Abortion on request or on social grounds is not permitted.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: hrlibrary.umn.edu

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

Loi n°039-2017/AN du 27 juin 2017 portant protection des défenseurs des droits humains au Burkina Faso

Recognises the rights of human rights defenders to associate, seek resources, speak and assemble, and punishes crimes against them.

Gaps: The law created no protection mechanism; the one set up by the national human rights commission rests on an administrative order with no appeal process and no specific provisions for women defenders.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ishr.ch

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Electoral quota law (30% of candidates of either sex)

Requires a minimum of 30% of candidates of each sex on every list.

Gaps: Women hold 19.0% of seats in the appointed Transitional Legislative Assembly; elections are suspended during the transition.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: data.ipu.org

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Labour Code, Act No. 28-2008/AN (2008)

Protects pregnant employees and includes the principle of equal pay.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: hrlibrary.umn.edu

Loi n°004-2021/AN du 6 avril 2021, articles 92, 94 et 110

Sets the same retirement age for women and men and credits periods of absence for childcare toward pensions.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: worldbank.org

Code de la sécurité sociale, articles 46 et 47

Provides maternity benefits paid through social security for at least 14 weeks.

Gaps: Coverage of social protection remains limited, especially for women in the informal sector.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: worldbank.org

Civic space

Notes	Military government since the September 2022 coup; political parties were dissolved in 2025. The CERD Committee in May 2026 expressed grave concern about extrajudicial executions, torture and arbitrary detention of members of the Fulani community. The UN Human Rights Office announced in July 2026 that its Burkina Faso country office would be shut down.

Loi n° 012-2010/AN du 1er avril 2010 portant protection et promotion des droits des personnes handicapées

General law on the rights of persons with disabilities.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: social.desa.un.org

No specific legal aid law

A legal aid fund (Fonds d'assistance judiciaire) exists and its decree was under review in November 2025.

Gaps: No law on legal aid.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: fr.allafrica.com

Recent developments

- July 2026. UN Human Rights Office announced the shutdown of its Burkina Faso country office.
- May 2026. CERD Committee published findings on serious violations against Fulani communities and descent-based discrimination.
- March 2026. Renewal of the Transitional Legislative Assembly: 11 women among 58 members.
- December 2024. Burkina Faso's invitation to accede to the Budapest Convention lapsed.
- 2 July 2024. Start of a 60-month transition period under the revised transition charter.

Reforms recommended by treaty bodies and national organisations

- Repeal the polygamy provisions of the Persons and Family Code (CEDAW Committee, 2010).
- Adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination provisions covering direct and indirect discrimination against women (CEDAW Committee, 2010).
- Investigate and prosecute extrajudicial executions, torture and arbitrary detention, and prohibit ethnic profiling in law (CERD Committee, 2026).

> Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: girls' education, trafficking, online violence and cybercrime. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Burkina Faso in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 3 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Cabo Verde

Cabo Verde has one of the strongest legal frameworks for women's political participation in Africa: a parity law adopted in November 2019 requires at least 40% of candidates of each sex, and women won 34 of 72 National Assembly seats (47.2%) in May 2026. It has ratified the Maputo Protocol, the CEDAW Optional Protocol, the Malabo Convention and the Budapest Convention. It scores 75.03 on the World Bank's 2026 legal frameworks index for women.

KEY INDICATORS

47.2% (34 of 72)
Women in National Assembly (2026)

75.03
World Bank WBL 2026 legal frameworks index (2026)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	**Yes**	**Yes**	**No**	**Partly**	**Yes**	**Yes**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Praia
Legal system	Civil law system based on the Portuguese model
Official languages	Portuguese
Quotas or parity	Parity law adopted in November 2019 requiring at least 40% of candidates of each sex



Figure 34. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

Table 24. Cabo Verde: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	ratified 21/06/2005 / deposited 22/07/2005	
CEDAW	acceded 5 Dec 1980	None listed in the UN Treaty Collection status page
CEDAW Optional Protocol	acceded 10 Oct 2011	
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	signed 27/02/1992 / ratified 20/07/1993 / deposited 01/09/1993	
ILO C100 Equal Remuneration	ratified 16 Oct 1979	
ILO C111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)	ratified 3 Apr 1979	
ICCPR	acceded 6 Aug 1993	
Kampala Convention	Not signed or ratified (AU status list)	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	ratified 13/11/2020 / deposited 05/02/2022	
Budapest Convention on Cybercrime	acceded 19 June 2018 / entered into force 1 October 2018; signatory of the Second Additional Protocol on electronic evidence	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

Código Civil, artigos 2064, 2070 e 2072

Gives sons and daughters, and surviving wives and husbands, equal inheritance rights.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Código Civil, artigo 1638, e Decreto-Lei n.º 2/2007, artigos 5 e 8

Grants women equal rights to own and administer property and recognises non-monetary contributions in the division of marital property.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Código Civil, artigos 1564, 1627, 1628 e 1733

Prohibits polygamy and grants equal divorce rights. It gives both spouses equal standing as head of household with no duty of obedience.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Lei n.º 84/VII/2011, de 10 de janeiro de 2011 (Lei Especial sobre a Violência Baseada no Género)

Special law that covers physical, psychological, sexual and patrimonial violence and makes gender-based violence a public crime prosecuted without a complaint. It provides victim support and perpetrator rehabilitation.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

Lei n.º 84/VII/2011, de 10 de janeiro de 2011 (Lei Especial sobre a Violência Baseada no Género)

Recognises sexual violence within intimate relationships, including marital rape, and sets aggravated penalties of up to 30 years' imprisonment for the most serious cases.

Gaps: Marital rape is addressed in the GBV law, while the Penal Code provisions on sexual offences were not detailed in the government's reply to CEDAW.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: cmalex.net

Lei n.º 84/VII/2011, de 10 de janeiro de 2011 (Lei Especial sobre a Violência Baseada no Género)

Lists sexual harassment as one of the forms of gender-based violence punished under the law.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: cmalex.net

Código Penal, artigo 134

Penal Code provision applied to domestic violence, alongside the special GBV law.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Lei n.º 8/IX/2017, Lei do Cibercrime

Cybercrime law, in force since March 2017.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: coe.int

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Código Civil (1997), artigos 133 e 1575

Sets the age of majority at 18 and allows a minor to marry with the consent of parents or guardians, with court approval if consent is refused.

Gaps: Marriage of minors remains possible with parental consent.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: antislaverylaw.ac.uk

No specific law on female genital mutilation

The 2003 Penal Code has no FGM offence; general bodily harm offences apply. The CEDAW Committee (2019) asked the State to watch for possible cases.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

No specific law on harmful practices

The CEDAW Committee (2019) noted that the Civil Code recognises de facto unions from age 19 and linked this to child marriage.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Law of 31 December 1986 on the voluntary termination of pregnancy

Allows abortion on request up to 12 weeks, and later on health and foetal grounds.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: mentalhealthdataprizeafrica.aphrc.org

TRAFFICKING

Código Penal, artigo 271-A (tráfico de pessoas)

Criminalises trafficking for sexual or labour exploitation. It also criminalises trafficking for organ removal. Penalties range from four to twelve years' imprisonment depending on the circumstances and the victim's age.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: antislaverylaw.ac.uk

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

Lei n.º 18/VIII/2012, de 13 de setembro de 2012 (Office of Asset Recovery)

Allocates 15 percent of the proceeds of confiscated assets to the fight against gender-based violence.

Gaps: No dedicated legal aid law for survivors was cited by the government.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

No specific law on human rights defenders

The CEDAW Committee (2019) mentions only a draft law on a National Commission for Human Rights and Citizenship.

Gaps: Defenders have no specific legal protection.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Parity law of November 2019

Requires at least 40% of candidates of each sex on electoral lists.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: data.ipu.org

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Decreto-Legislativo n.º 5/2007, de 16 de outubro de 2007 (Código Laboral), alterado pelo Decreto-Legislativo n.º 5/2010

Prohibits sex discrimination in hiring, conditions, pay and dismissal. It provides maternity and paternity leave and protects pregnant workers.

Gaps: The World Bank found no explicit guarantee of equal pay for work of equal value.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Decreto-Lei n.º 50/2009, artigo 44

Sets how maternity benefits are paid through social security.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Decreto-Lei n.º 5/2004, artigos 15 e 81

Pension rules covering retirement age and pension credits for periods of childcare.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Decreto-Legislativo n.º 2/2010, de 7 de maio, Bases do Sistema Educativo
Makes basic education compulsory, free and universal (articles 13 and 14).
Source cited in the RFLD profile: boe.incv.cv

WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Lei n.º 40/VIII/2013, de 17 de setembro
Framework law on the prevention, rehabilitation and participation of persons with disabilities.
Gaps: No provision specific to women and girls with disabilities.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: boe.incv.cv

Recent developments

- 18 June 2026. Janira Hopffer Almada elected Speaker of the National Assembly.
- May 2026. Legislative elections: women won 34 of 72 seats (47.2%).
- November 2023. Cabo Verde reviewed under the fourth cycle of the UN Universal Periodic Review.

Reforms recommended by treaty bodies and national organisations

- Ratify ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work (not yet ratified as of May 2026).

Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: vulnerable groups. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Cabo Verde in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 4 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire has the highest score among the West African countries profiled here on the World Bank's 2026 legal frameworks index for women (78.25). Its electoral law requires at least 30% women candidates with alternating placement and gives extra public funding to parties that field 50% women, yet women won 38 of 255 National Assembly seats (14.9%) in December 2025, compared with 24.5% in the Senate. The country acceded to the Budapest Convention in 2024 and ratified the Malabo Convention in 2023.



Figure 35. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

KEY INDICATORS

14.9% (38 of 255)
Women in National Assembly (2025)

24.5% (24 of 98)
Women in Senate (2023)

78.25
World Bank WBL 2026 legal frameworks index (2026)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	**Yes**	**Not recorded**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Yamoussoukro (political capital); Abidjan is the economic capital
Legal system	Civil law system based on the French model, with customary law in some personal matters
Official languages	French
Quotas or parity	Electoral law requires at least 30% women candidates under both majority and proportional systems, with alternating placement; parties fielding 50% women receive increased public funding

Table 25. Côte d'Ivoire: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 27/02/2004 / ratified 05/10/2011 / deposited 09/03/2012	
CEDAW	signed 17 Jul 1980 / ratified 18 Dec 1995	None listed in the UN Treaty Collection status page
CEDAW Optional Protocol	acceded 20 Jan 2012	
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	ratified 01/03/2002 / deposited 18/06/2007	
ILO C100 Equal Remuneration	ratified 5 May 1961	

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
ILO C111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)	ratified 5 May 1961	
ICCPR	acceded 26 Mar 1992	
Kampala Convention	signed 12/11/2009 / ratified 20/12/2013 / deposited 22/01/2014	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	ratified 08/03/2023 / deposited 03/04/2023	
Budapest Convention on Cybercrime	acceded 29 July 2024 / entered into force 1 November 2024	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

Loi n° 2019-573 du 26 juin 2019 relative aux successions

Improves the inheritance rights of the surviving spouse.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: achpr.au.int

Loi n° 98-750 du 23 décembre 1998 relative au Domaine foncier rural, modifiée notamment par la loi n° 2019-868 du 14 octobre 2019

Governs rural land, including customary land, and the conversion of land certificates into title. The 2019 amendment revised the deadlines for that conversion, and the rural land agency AFOR was created in 2016.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: achpr.au.int

Loi n° 2015-537 du 20 juillet 2015 d'orientation agricole, article 61

Provides for equitable access to land resources.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Loi n° 2019-570 du 26 juin 2019 relative au mariage

Establishes equality of the spouses and joint management of the household. Companion laws of the same date cover filiation (Loi n° 2019-571), which simplifies recognition of children born outside marriage, and minority (Loi n° 2019-572).

Source cited in the RFLD profile: achpr.au.int

Loi n° 2022-793 du 13 octobre 2022 relative au divorce

Gives women the same rights as men to obtain a divorce.

Gaps: The World Bank finds that article 41 does not give women the same right to remarry as men.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Loi n° 2021-894 du 21 décembre 2021 relative aux mesures de protection des victimes de violences domestiques, de viol et de violences sexuelles autres que domestiques

Sets out protection measures for victims of domestic violence and of sexual violence, including rape.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

Loi n° 2019-574 du 26 juin 2019 portant Code pénal, article 403

The 2019 Penal Code defines rape in article 403.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

No comprehensive sexual harassment law recorded

The World Bank found no comprehensive legislation on sexual harassment in employment meeting its criteria.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Loi n° 98-757 du 23 décembre 1998 portant répression de certaines formes de violences à l'égard des femmes

Punishes FGM with one to five years' imprisonment and a fine of 360,000 to 2,000,000 CFA francs, doubled for health professionals. The penalty is five to 20 years where the victim dies. Parents who order or tolerate the practice are also liable, and article 5 of the 2016 Constitution prohibits FGM.

Gaps: Prosecutions remain rare: the first trial took place in 2012 and only one prosecution was reported in 2020.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ofpra.gouv.fr

Loi n° 2019-570 du 26 juin 2019 relative au mariage, articles 2 et 26

The World Bank records these articles as the legal basis protecting girls from child marriage.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Loi n° 2019-574 du 26 juin 2019 portant Code pénal, article 427

Allows abortion when necessary to save the life of the woman and, at her written request, when the pregnancy results from rape. Two doctors must certify the conditions.

Gaps: Abortion remains a crime in other cases, including incest and fetal impairment, with penalties for the woman of six months to two years.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: reproductiverights.org

TRAFFICKING

Loi n° 2016-1111 du 8 décembre 2016 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes

Criminalises trafficking in persons. Decree n° 2017-227 of 13 April 2017 sets up the National Committee against trafficking, and Loi n° 2010-272 of 30 September 2010 separately covers child trafficking and the worst forms of child labour.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: achpr.au.int

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

Décret n° 2016-781 du 12 octobre 2016 (assistance judiciaire)

Decentralises legal assistance by creating local legal aid offices at nine courts.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: achpr.au.int

Loi n° 2014-388 du 20 juin 2014 portant promotion et protection des défenseurs des droits de l'homme

Guarantees defenders' freedoms of association and assembly. It also guarantees the inviolability of their premises. Decree n° 2017-121 of 22 February 2017 sets its implementing rules.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: achpr.au.int

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Loi n° 2019-870 du 14 octobre 2019 favorisant la représentation de la femme dans les assemblées élues

Requires at least 30 per cent women among candidates in elections to elected assemblies. An implementing decree was adopted on 25 November 2020.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: achpr.au.int

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

> Loi n° 2015-635 du 17 septembre 2015 portant modification de la loi n° 95-696 relative à l'enseignement
>
> Makes school compulsory for all children aged 6 to 16.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: achpr.au.int

> Loi n° 2015-532 du 20 juillet 2015 portant Code du travail, modifiée par l'ordonnance n° 2021-902 du 22 décembre 2021
>
> Prohibits gender discrimination at work (articles 4 and 18.5) and requires equal pay (article 31.2). It provides at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave (article 23.6) and paternity leave. The 2021 ordinance strengthened protection of pregnant workers.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

> Ordonnance n° 2012-03 du 11 janvier 2012, articles 150 et 151
>
> The World Bank records equal retirement ages for women and men under these provisions.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

> Décret n° 2018-456 du 9 mai 2018 relatif à l'emploi des personnes en situation de handicap dans le secteur privé
>
> Implements the Labour Code's employment quota for persons with disabilities (article 12.2) in the private sector.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: achpr.au.int

Recent developments

- 17 January 2026. Patrick Achi elected Speaker of the National Assembly.
- December 2025. Legislative elections: 38 women elected to the 255-seat National Assembly (14.9%).
- November 2024. Visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights.
- 29 July 2024. Côte d'Ivoire acceded to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (in force 1 November 2024).
- 3 April 2023. Côte d'Ivoire deposited its ratification of the AU Malabo Convention.

Reforms recommended by treaty bodies and national organisations

- Strengthen enforcement of the 30% candidate quota, as women won only 14.9% of National Assembly seats in 2025.
- Ratify ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work.

> Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: harmful practices, online violence and cybercrime, vulnerable groups. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Côte d'Ivoire in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 5 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

The Gambia

The Gambia banned FGM and child marriage by law in the 2010s, and in July 2024 its National Assembly kept the FGM ban in place after a bill sought to repeal it. Women hold 5 of 58 National Assembly seats (8.6%) and there are no reserved seats or legal quotas, one of the lowest levels of women's representation in the region. Same-sex relations remain criminalised. The Gambia has not ratified the CEDAW Optional Protocol and has only signed the Malabo Convention, and it scores 57.50 on the World Bank's 2026 legal frameworks index for women.

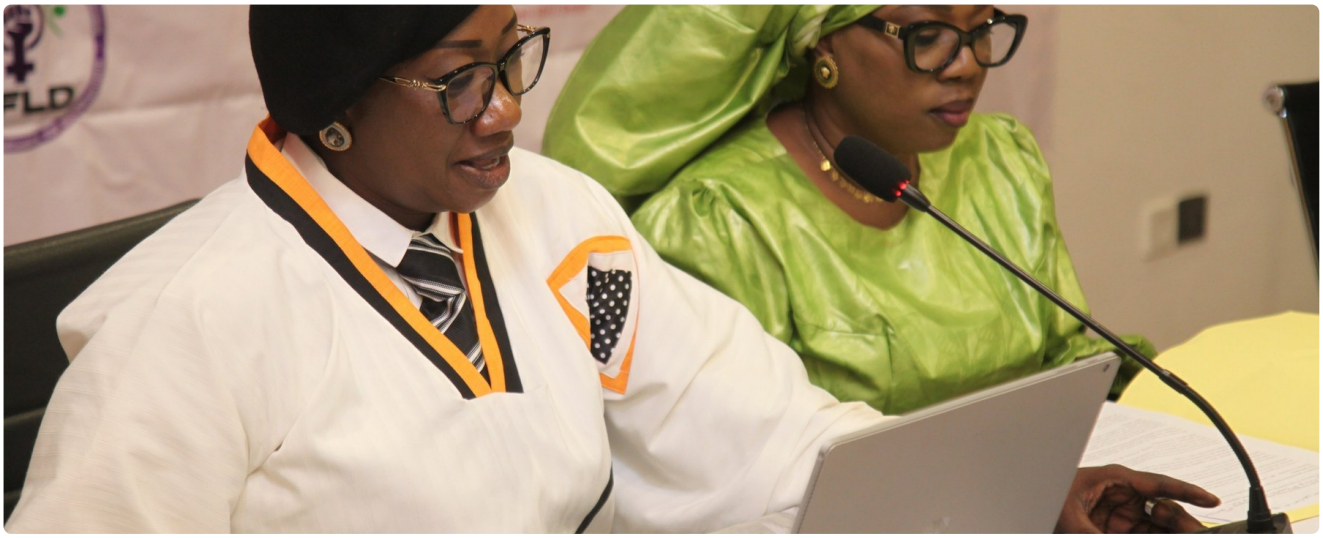


Figure 36. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

KEY INDICATORS

8.6% (5 of 58)
Women in National Assembly (2026)

57.50
World Bank WBL 2026 legal frameworks index (2026)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Not recorded**	**No**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Banjul
Legal system	Mixed system of English common law, statutory law, customary law and Sharia law (the latter applying mainly to personal status matters for Muslims)
Official languages	English
Quotas or parity	No reserved seats or electoral quotas for women; 5 of the 58 members are appointed by the President

Table 26. The Gambia: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 11/09/2003 / ratified 25/05/2005 / deposited 06/09/2005	
CEDAW	signed 29 Jul 1980 / ratified 16 Apr 1993	None listed in the UN Treaty Collection status page
CEDAW Optional Protocol	Not a party	
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	ratified 14/12/2000 / deposited 30/03/2001	
ILO C100 Equal Remuneration	ratified 4 Sep 2000	
ILO C111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)	ratified 4 Sep 2000	
ICCPR	acceded 22 Mar 1979	Declaration on article 14(3)(d): free legal assistance for accused persons is limited under the Constitution to persons charged with capital offences
Kampala Convention	signed 23/10/2009 / ratified 27/04/2011 / deposited 17/08/2011	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	signed 02/12/2022 / not ratified	
Budapest Convention on Cybercrime	Not a party	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

Women's Act, 2010, section 45

Addresses women's inheritance and property rights.

Gaps: The section subjects inheritance to customary and religious law, under which daughters receive half the share of sons.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

Cadi Appeals Panel Rules, 2009

Govern appeals in Sharia matters, including inheritance disputes.

Gaps: Appeals have upheld unequal shares for daughters.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: musawah.org

Women's Act, 2010 (property access provisions)

Grants women equitable access to property.

Gaps: The standard is equitable instead of equal, and customary tenure still excludes many women farmers from ownership.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: musawah.org

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Constitution of the Republic of The Gambia, 1997, sections 7 and 33(5)(c)

Recognises customary law and Sharia as sources of law for marriage and divorce among those they apply to. This also covers related matters.

Gaps: Section 33(5) exempts marriage, divorce, burial and devolution of property from the ban on discriminatory laws, and polygamy is not restricted.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

Cadi Court (Civil Procedure) Rules, 2010

Regulate procedure in the Cadi courts, which hear most marriage and divorce cases for Muslims. These courts also hear most Muslim inheritance cases.

Gaps: Procedural safeguards against discriminatory application of personal law are limited.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: musawah.org

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Domestic Violence Act, 2013

Criminalises physical, sexual, economic, emotional and verbal abuse in domestic relationships. It allows police to arrest without a warrant and limits default out-of-court settlements.

Gaps: Reporting stays low because of a culture of silence, and victim and witness protection is inadequate, according to the CEDAW Committee in 2022.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

Women's Act, 2010 (Act No. 12 of 2010)

Prohibits all forms of violence against women and requires state institutions to protect women from it.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: data.unwomen.org

Sexual Offences Act, 2013

Broadens the definition of rape and sexual assault based on coercive circumstances and removed the statutory corroboration requirement.

Gaps: Section 3(3) excludes married couples from rape, and courts still apply corroboration rules under section 180(2) of the Evidence Act.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: musawah.org

Sexual Offences Act, 2013

Expands the criminal law on sexual assault and covers sexual harassment.

Gaps: There is no comprehensive law on sexual harassment in the workplace, according to the CEDAW Committee in 2022.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: data.unwomen.org

No enacted cybercrime law (Cyber Crime Bill, 2023 pending)

The Cyber Crime Bill, which would criminalise online child exploitation and cyber extortion, was still before a National Assembly select committee in 2025.

Gaps: There is no comprehensive law against online harassment of women, including women candidates.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: paradigmhq.org

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Women's (Amendment) Act, 2015, sections 32A and 32B

Prohibits and criminalises female genital mutilation.

Gaps: Only one prosecution had taken place by 2022 while prevalence stood at about 73 percent.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

Children's (Amendment) Act, 2016, sections 24 and 25 (amending the Children's Act, 2005)

Sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both sexes without exception and punishes parents or guardians who marry off a child with up to 20 years of imprisonment.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee reported in 2022 that 25.7 percent of women were married before 18 and prosecutions are very rare.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

Children's (Amendment) Act, 2016

Prohibits child betrothal, a customary practice of promising girls in marriage.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: musawah.org

TRAFFICKING

Trafficking in Persons Act, 2007
Criminalises trafficking in persons and sets up a national response.
Gaps: Section 49 does not explicitly exempt trafficked persons from detention or prosecution, and the referral mechanism is ineffective.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

Constitution (scope of free legal assistance)
Free legal assistance for accused persons is constitutionally guaranteed only for capital offences, as stated in The Gambia's ICCPR declaration.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: treaties.un.org

Evidence Act, section 180(2)
Sets rules of evidence applied in criminal trials, including sexual offence cases.
Gaps: It permits corroboration requirements that the CEDAW Committee found discriminatory and a deterrent to reporting sexual violence.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

No quota law
There are no reserved seats or electoral quotas for women.
Gaps: Women hold 8.6% of National Assembly seats.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: data.ipu.org

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Basic and Secondary Education Act
Governs basic and secondary schooling.
Gaps: The CEDAW Committee asked in 2022 for its discriminatory provisions to be amended, since pregnant girls can be expelled and lack re-entry support.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Persons with Disabilities Act, 2021
Guarantees persons with disabilities, including women and girls, access to justice, political participation, education, employment and health services.
Gaps: Implementation is under-resourced and accessibility barriers persist.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

Civic space

Notes	The Gambia hosts the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul. The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions announced a country visit in October 2026.

Non-Governmental Organisation Decree, 1996 (Decree No. 81)
Regulates NGOs. The Gambia has no specific law on human rights defenders.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: icnl.org

National Health Insurance Act, 2021

Establishes national health insurance.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: extranet.who.int

No specific law on older persons

The national human rights commission cites only the Constitution and general laws, and notes the lack of basic social protection for older persons.

Gaps: No law on the rights of older persons.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: thepoint.gm

Recent developments

- October 2026. UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions announced a visit to The Gambia.
- June 2026. UN Committee on Migrant Workers published findings on The Gambia and welcomed an immigration bill.
- July 2024. National Assembly upheld the ban on FGM after a repeal bill; UN experts called it a critical win for girls.
- 2 December 2022. The Gambia signed the AU Malabo Convention.

Reforms recommended by treaty bodies and national organisations

- Adopt a legal quota or reserved seats for women in the National Assembly.
- Ratify the CEDAW Optional Protocol and the Malabo Convention.
- Ratify ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work.
- Keep and enforce the FGM ban against future repeal attempts (UN statement, July 2024).

Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: abortion and sexual and reproductive health, labour and maternity, nationality, vulnerable groups. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of The Gambia in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 6 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Ghana

Ghana operates under the 1992 Constitution and has ratified the Maputo Protocol, CEDAW and its Optional Protocol, and the Budapest Convention. In September 2024 the President assented to the Affirmative Action (Gender Equity) Act, 2024 (Act 1121), which sets a minimum of 30 per cent women in decision-making bodies with a progressive move towards parity, yet women held 14.5 per cent of parliamentary seats after the December 2024 elections. On 29 May 2026 Parliament

passed the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, 2025, which expands criminal penalties linked to LGBTQ+ identity, advocacy and funding, and a draft Cybersecurity (Amendment) Bill 2025 has raised press freedom concerns.



Figure 37. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

KEY INDICATORS

14.5% (40 of 276)
Women in Parliament (2026)

18
Minimum legal age of marriage, no exceptions (1998)

16.1%
Women aged 20 to 24 first married before 18 (2022)

66.72
World Bank WBL 2026 legal frameworks score (2026)

234 per 100,000
Maternal mortality ratio, live births (2023)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	**Yes**	**Not recorded**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Not recorded**	**Yes**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Accra
Legal system	Common law system combined with customary law, under the 1992 Constitution
Official languages	English
Constitution	Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992
Quotas or parity	No constitutional or electoral quota for women (IPU). The Affirmative Action (Gender Equity) Act, 2024 (Act 1121) sets statutory targets of at least 30 per cent women in decision-making bodies, rising progressively towards parity.

Table 27. Ghana: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 31/10/2003 / ratified 13/06/2007 / deposited 20/07/2007	None recorded on AU status list
CEDAW	signed 17/07/1980 / ratified 02/01/1986	None recorded
CEDAW Optional Protocol	signed 24/02/2000 / ratified 03/02/2011	None recorded
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	signed 18/08/1997 / ratified 10/06/2005 / deposited 15/07/2005	None recorded on AU status list
ILO C190 Violence and Harassment Convention	Not ratified (the Trades Union Congress was still calling for ratification in September 2026)	
ILO C100 Equal Remuneration Convention	ratified 14/03/1968	
ILO C111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention	ratified 04/04/1961	
ICCPR	signed and ratified 07/09/2000	None recorded
Kampala Convention	signed 02/02/2010 / not ratified	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	signed 04/07/2017 / ratified 13/05/2019 / deposited 03/06/2019	
Budapest Convention on Cybercrime	Party by accession; instrument deposited 03/12/2018. Ghana signed the Second Additional Protocol on 28/06/2023	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

Intestate Succession Law, 1985 (PNDCL 111)

Governs the distribution of property, including shares for the surviving spouse and children, when a person dies without a will.

Gaps: Reform bills to improve the law have been pending for years and the law is applied inconsistently.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: genderapp.statsghana.gov.gh

Constitution of Ghana, 1992, article 22

Entitles a surviving spouse to reasonable provision from the estate of the deceased spouse and calls for laws on spousal property.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: genderapp.statsghana.gov.gh

Land Act, 2020 (Act 1036), sections 38 and 47

Presumes that land acquired for value during marriage belongs to both spouses and treats a spouse holding title alone as a trustee for both. It requires written spousal consent to sell, mortgage, lease or give away such land.

Gaps: The protection does not cover property acquired before the Act took effect in December 2020.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: graphic.com.gh

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Marriages Act, 1884 to 1985, and Customary Marriage and Divorce (Registration) Law, 1985

Recognise ordinance marriages. They also recognise customary and Islamic marriages and provide for registration of customary marriages and divorces.

Gaps: Registration of customary marriage was made optional in 1991, and informal unions are not recognised. Islamic marriages require a male representative's signature for the bride.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: genderapp.statsghana.gov.gh

Matrimonial Causes Act, 1971

Governs divorce for monogamous marriages and lets courts award custody to either parent.

Gaps: Division of property on divorce is left to judicial discretion, and a Property Rights of Spouses Bill has long been pending.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: genderapp.statsghana.gov.gh

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29), section 101 (defilement)

Criminalises sexual intercourse with a child under 16, with penalties of 7 to 25 years' imprisonment.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: girlsnotbrides.org

No dedicated sexual harassment law identified

Ghana has not ratified ILO C190 on violence and harassment at work; trade unions argue national ratification is needed because collective agreements cannot cover all its provisions.

Gaps: No comprehensive workplace violence and harassment framework (Trades Union Congress, 2026).
Source cited in the RFLD profile: ghanabusinessnews.com

Cybersecurity Act, 2020 (Act 1038); draft Cybersecurity (Amendment) Bill, 2025

Act 1038 established the Cyber Security Authority. The 2025 draft amendment would add offences of cyberbullying, cyberstalking and spreading false information, with penalties of up to 10 years, and expand the Authority's powers of arrest, seizure and data access.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: idea.int

Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (Act 732)

Defines domestic violence to include physical, sexual, psychological, economic and social abuse, and covers informal unions. It provides for investigation and prosecution. It also provides for protection. It set up the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) and a support fund.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: genderapp.statsghana.gov.gh

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560), section 14

Sets 18 as the minimum age of marriage with no exceptions and makes forced betrothal, dowry transactions involving a child and child marriage offences.

Gaps: 16 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before 18, rising to 28 per cent in Northern and Upper East regions. The National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage covers 2017 to 2026.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: girlsnotbrides.org

Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29), section 69A, as amended by the Criminal Offences (Amendment) Act, 2007 (Act 741)

Makes female genital mutilation a second-degree felony with a minimum of three years' imprisonment. The 2007 amendment extends liability to people who take part, including medical practitioners and parents.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: genderapp.statsghana.gov.gh

Criminal Code amendment of 1998 banning ritual or customary servitude (trokosi)

Bans all forms of ritualised servitude, including sending girls to shrines, with a minimum penalty of three years.

Gaps: The practice persists in parts of south-eastern Ghana and widowhood rites remain prevalent with little improvement.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: genderapp.statsghana.gov.gh

Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29), sections 100 and 109 (forced marriage)

Treats a marriage obtained by duress as void and makes compelling a person to marry a criminal offence.

Gaps: Forcing someone into marriage is only a misdemeanour.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: genderapp.statsghana.gov.gh

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

Legal Aid Scheme Act, 1997 (Act 542)

Provides free legal aid to qualifying persons who cannot afford a lawyer.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: genderapp.statsghana.gov.gh

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Affirmative Action (Gender Equity) Act, 2024 (Act 1121)

Requires at least 30 per cent women in key decision-making bodies across public, security and business sectors, with a progressive increase towards 50 per cent, gender-responsive budgeting by public bodies, and penalties for gender-based discrimination.

Gaps: Women still held 14.5 per cent of parliamentary seats after the 2024 elections and made up 12.8 per cent of parliamentary candidates.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: mogcsp.gov.gh

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651), sections 55 to 57

Provides maternity protection, including 12 weeks of maternity leave.

Gaps: Ghana has not ratified ILO C183, whose minimum is 14 weeks.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: ghanabusinessnews.com

WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Persons with Disability Act, 2006 (Act 715)

Prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, education, health care and access to public spaces, and created the National Council on Persons with Disability.

Gaps: The ten-year deadline for accessible public buildings expired in 2016 without penalties, and an amendment bill to strengthen enforcement is still pending.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: disabilityworld.org

Civic space

Cybercrime law	Cybersecurity Act, 2020 (Act 1038); Cybersecurity (Amendment) Bill, 2025 opened for public consultation in October 2025.
Human rights defenders law	No specific law identified
Notes	International IDEA reports allegations of heavy-handed police responses to protests in September 2024 and a July 2026 Supreme Court ruling upholding the independence of the Office of the Special Prosecutor. The Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, 2025 contains provisions that would disband organisations, criminalise funding and impose liability on media owners and platform operators.

No NGO Act and no law on human rights defenders

A Non-Profit Organisations Bill was with the Attorney General in December 2023 and had not been passed.

Gaps: Defenders have no specific legal protection.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: gna.org.gh

National Health Insurance Act, 2012 (Act 852); National Pensions Act, 2008 (Act 766)

Set up national health insurance and the pension system.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ghalii.org

No specific law on older persons

The Aged Persons Bill has been pending since about 2010. The National Ageing Policy (2010) is a policy, not a law.

Gaps: No law on the rights of older persons.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: gna.org.gh

Recent developments

- 4 September 2026. Trades Union Congress called for ratification of ILO Conventions 183 and 190.
- 29 May 2026. Parliament passed the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, 2025, which then awaited presidential assent.
- 19 December 2025. Renewed call to pass the Property Rights of Spouses Bill, pending since 2009.
- 1 October 2025. Public consultation opened on the Cybersecurity (Amendment) Bill, 2025, criticised by the Ghana Journalists Association.
- December 2024. General elections; Ghana elected its first woman Vice-President.
- 19 September 2024. Affirmative Action (Gender Equity) Act, 2024 (Act 1121) signed into law.

Reforms recommended by treaty bodies and national organisations

- Pass the Property Rights of Spouses Bill and the Intestate Succession Bill to give effect to Article 22 of the Constitution.
- Ratify ILO Conventions 190 and 183, including extending maternity leave from 12 to 14 weeks (Trades Union Congress, September 2026).
- Narrow the false-information, cyberbullying and cyberstalking offences in the draft Cybersecurity (Amendment) Bill, 2025 to protect legitimate expression (Ghana Journalists Association, via International IDEA).
- Fund and enforce the Affirmative Action (Gender Equity) Act, 2024, including party compliance with its targets.
- Withhold assent from or repeal the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, 2025, which human rights organisations say violates freedoms of expression, association and privacy.

> Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: abortion and sexual and reproductive health, girls' education, trafficking. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Ghana in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 7 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Guinea

Guinea adopted a new Constitution by referendum on 21 September 2025, replacing the Transitional Charter that followed the 2021 coup; it creates a Senate and a seven-year presidential term, and its electoral provisions favour women candidates in the allocation of proportional seats. The transitional leader won the December 2025 presidential election with main opposition leaders barred, and the May 2026 legislative elections produced a National Assembly that is 40.8 per cent women. Child marriage (47 per cent of women married before 18) and FGM (95 per cent prevalence) remain very high, and the Children's Code allows the President to authorise marriage under 18. Civic space has been marked by party suspensions and dissolutions, media bans and enforced disappearances of opposition figures.



Figure 38. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

KEY INDICATORS

40.8% (60 of 147)
Women in National Assembly (2026)

18
Minimum legal age of marriage, with presidential exceptions (2008)

47% (17% before 15)
Women aged 20 to 24 married before 18

95%
FGM prevalence

61.88
World Bank WBL 2026 legal frameworks score (2026)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	No	No	Yes	Partly	Not recorded	Yes

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Conakry
Legal system	Civil law system of French inspiration, alongside customary and Islamic norms in family matters
Constitution	Constitution approved by referendum on 21 September 2025 (89.4 per cent yes, confirmed by the Supreme Court on 26 September 2025), replacing the 2021 Transitional Charter
Quotas or parity	Article 105 of the 2025 Constitution: one third of deputies are elected by nationwide proportional representation, with remaining seats allocated in favour of women candidates and candidates with disabilities. Under the Transitional Charter (article 60) at least 30 per cent of designated members had to be women.

Table 28. Guinea: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 16/12/2003 / ratified 16/04/2012 / deposited 17/09/2012	None recorded on AU status list
CEDAW	signed 17/07/1980 / ratified 09/08/1982	None recorded
CEDAW Optional Protocol	Not a party	
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	signed 22/05/1998 / ratified 27/05/1999 / deposited 21/01/2000	None recorded on AU status list
ILO C190 Violence and Harassment Convention	Not ratified (as of May 2026)	
ILO C100 Equal Remuneration Convention	ratified 11/08/1967	
ILO C111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention	ratified 01/09/1960	
ICCPR	signed 28/02/1967 / ratified 24/01/1978	Declaration objecting to article 48(1)
Kampala Convention	signed 05/01/2012 / not ratified	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	ratified 31/07/2018 / deposited 16/10/2018	
Budapest Convention on Cybercrime	Not a party	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

Loi L/2019/035/AN du 4 juillet 2019 portant Code civil, articles 666 to 680 and 695

Sons and daughters have equal inheritance rights.

Gaps: Surviving spouses do not have equal inheritance rights (article 695), and family councils can discriminate in practice.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Ordonnance n° 92/019 du 30 mars 1992 portant Code foncier et domanial, articles 1 and 2

Together with article 652 of the Civil Code, gives women and men equal rights to own and administer property.

Gaps: Unpaid domestic contributions are not valued in marital property (Civil Code article 619).

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Loi L/2019/035/AN du 4 juillet 2019 portant Code civil, articles 241, 242, 245, 286, 305 to 319, 336 and 354

Requires free consent to marriage, sets 18 as marriage age, removes the duty of obedience and gives women equal divorce rights and joint parental authority.

Gaps: Polygamy is allowed up to four wives, and divorced women face a waiting period before remarriage.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: eeas.europa.eu

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Loi n° 2016/059/AN portant Code pénal, article 248

Assault and wounding between spouses is punished under the general provisions on violence; there is no dedicated law on violence against women.

Gaps: The victim can end prosecution when incapacity is under 20 days, and the World Bank found no specific domestic violence legislation.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: eeas.europa.eu

Loi n° 2016/059/AN portant Code pénal, articles 267 to 270

Criminalises rape and other sexual violence.

Gaps: Marital rape is not set out as a distinct offence.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: eeas.europa.eu

Loi L/2019/035/AN du 4 juillet 2019 portant Code civil, article 247

Prohibits marriage between ascendants and descendants and between siblings. It also prohibits marriage between uncles or aunts and their nieces or nephews.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: coi.euaa.europa.eu

No specific offence of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is not specifically criminalised and the World Bank found no legislation on harassment at work.

Gaps: No civil or criminal remedy exists for workplace sexual harassment.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Loi L/2016/037/AN relative à la cybersécurité et à la protection des données à caractère personnel

Defines rules and mechanisms to combat cybercrime and secure cyberspace.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: extranet.who.int

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Children's Code (2008)

Sets 18 as the minimum age of marriage.

Gaps: The President, on request of the Minister of Justice, may authorise marriage before 18 for 'serious reasons' with parental consent. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019) raised concern about prevalence, impunity of perpetrators and weak protection schemes.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: girlsnotbrides.org

Loi n° 2016/059/AN portant Code pénal, articles 258 to 261

Defines and prohibits all forms of FGM. Penalties are heavier when it causes disability or death. They are also heavier when it is performed in a health facility.

Gaps: Prosecutions are few and sentences are often suspended or light.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ecoi.net

Loi L/2008/011/AN du 19 août 2008 portant Code de l'enfant guinéen, articles 405 to 410

Prohibits all forms of FGM and punishes parents who authorise it. It obliges heads of health facilities to report cases.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ecoi.net

Loi ordinaire L/2019/0059/AN portant Code de l'enfant de la République de Guinée, articles 314 and 829 to 831

Sets 18 as the minimum age of marriage and punishes those who facilitate or celebrate child marriage. Failing to report a child marriage is also punished.

Gaps: A court may still grant age exemptions for legitimate grounds.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: coi.euaa.europa.eu

Loi n° 2016/059/AN portant Code pénal, articles 319 to 322

Prohibits forced and early marriage and punishes sexual acts with children married under customary arrangements.

Gaps: Penalties for forced marriage are short, from three months to one year.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: coi.euaa.europa.eu

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Loi L/2000/010/AN du 10 juillet 2000 relative à la santé de la reproduction, articles 6 and 13

Sets the framework for reproductive health and protects women and men against violence affecting the genital organs, including FGM.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wcaro.unfpa.org

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Constitution of 2025, article 105; Transitional Charter, article 60

Allocates remaining proportional seats in favour of women candidates and candidates with disabilities; the Transitional Charter required at least 30 per cent women among designated members.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: data.ipu.org

Loi L/2019/0011/AN du 2 mai 2019 sur la parité

Requires 50 percent women on all candidate lists for national and local elections, with alternation between women and men.

Gaps: Application depends on its incorporation into the Electoral Code.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Code du travail, articles 4, 136.1, 153.1, 231.5 and 241.2

Prohibits gender discrimination in employment and requires equal pay for work of equal value. It grants at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave.

Gaps: Women are still barred from some industrial and dangerous jobs, and there is no paternity leave. Dismissal of pregnant workers is not prohibited.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Code de la sécurité sociale, articles 49, 53 and 105

Sets equal retirement ages for women and men and credits childcare absences towards pensions.

Gaps: Maternity benefits are shared between employer and the social security fund.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Civic space

Notes	International IDEA reports excessive police force against protesters (February 2024), the 90-day suspension of three parties (August 2025), continuing bars on the main opposition parties, a new elections directorate placed under the territorial administration ministry (June 2025) and enforced disappearances of opposition figures before the December 2025 election. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights urged authorities to lift bans on political parties and media outlets. IPU reports that 40 political parties were dissolved in March 2026.

Loi L/2005/013/AN on associations and Loi L/2005/014/AN on NGOs (4 July 2005)

These laws regulate associations and NGOs. Guinea has no specific law on human rights defenders.

Gaps: A 2017 draft law on the protection of human rights defenders was never adopted.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: guineenews.org

Loi L/2018/021/AN du 15 mai 2018 portant protection et promotion des personnes handicapées

General law on the rights of persons with disabilities.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: journal-officiel.sgg.gov.gn

Loi L/2022/12/CNT du 23 septembre 2022 portant aide juridictionnelle

Organises legal aid. Promulgated in October 2022.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: guineenews.org

No specific law on older persons

Organisations of older persons asked the government in 2022 to adopt a law on ageing.

Gaps: No law on the rights of older persons.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: guineenews.org

Recent developments

- 31 May 2026. Legislative elections: 60 women elected to the 147-seat National Assembly (40.8 per cent); the Assembly convened on 17 July 2026, ending the transition.
- March 2026. 40 political parties dissolved, including the former ruling party.
- 28 December 2025. Presidential election won by the transitional leader with 86.7 per cent; major opposition leaders barred.
- 21 September 2025. New Constitution approved by referendum (89.4 per cent yes), boycotted by the opposition.
- August 2025. Three political parties suspended for 90 days.

Reforms recommended by treaty bodies and national organisations

- Remove the presidential exception that allows marriage under 18 in the Children's Code (Girls Not Brides).
- End impunity for child marriage and strengthen protection schemes for children (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2019).
- Lift bans on political parties and media outlets (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, September 2025).
- Restore an independent election management body (International IDEA, June 2025).
- Investigate enforced disappearances of opposition figures (International IDEA, December 2025).

> Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: girls' education, trafficking. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Guinea in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 8 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau has been under military rule since 26 November 2025, when officers suspended the electoral process three days after presidential and legislative elections and installed a general as transitional president. A 66-member National Transition Council replaced the parliament on 12 December 2025 and approved a new constitution in January 2026, and general elections were announced for 6 December 2026. The Parity Law requires 36 per cent women on candidate lists for elective office, though the appointed transition council reserves only three seats for women. Girls and boys can marry at 16 with parental consent, and 26 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 were married before 18.

KEY INDICATORS

No data (2026)
Women in the appointed transition council

18, or 16 with parental consent
Minimum legal age of marriage

26% (8% before 15)
Women aged 20 to 24 married before 18 (2019)

48.75
World Bank WBL 2026 legal frameworks score (2026)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	**Yes**	**Not recorded**	**Yes**	**Partly**	**Not recorded**	**Yes**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Bissau
Legal system	Civil law system of Portuguese inspiration, alongside customary law
Official languages	Portuguese
Constitution	Constitution of 1984 (as revised) suspended after the 26 November 2025 coup; a transitional charter was published on 8 December 2025 and the National Transition Council approved a new constitution in January 2026
Quotas or parity	The Parity Law requires 36 per cent women on lists of candidates for elective office. The appointed National Transition Council reserves 3 of its seats for women, 2 for youth and 2 for persons with disabilities.



Figure 39. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

Table 29. Guinea-Bissau: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 08/03/2005 / ratified 19/06/2008 / deposited 14/10/2008	None recorded on AU status list
CEDAW	signed 17/07/1980 / ratified 23/08/1985	None recorded
CEDAW Optional Protocol	signed 12/09/2000 / ratified 05/08/2009	None recorded
ILO C190 Violence and Harassment Convention	Not ratified (as of May 2026)	
ILO C100 Equal Remuneration Convention	ratified 21/02/1977	
ILO C111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention	ratified 21/02/1977	
ICCPR	signed 12/09/2000 / ratified 01/11/2010	
Kampala Convention	ratified 23/12/2011 / deposited 04/01/2012	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	signed 31/01/2015 / not ratified	
Budapest Convention on Cybercrime	Not a party	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

Código Civil, artigos 2133.º, 2139.º e 2147.º

Sons and daughters, and surviving wives and husbands, have equal rights to inherit under the Civil Code.

Gaps: UNDP noted that customary law continues to be applied in family matters to the detriment of statutory law.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Código Civil, artigos 1678.º e 1717.º a 1731.º

The Civil Code regulates marital property and recognises non-monetary contributions to the household when property is divided.

Gaps: Married women do not have the same rights as men to own and administer immovable property.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Land Act No. 5/98 (Lei da Terra)

The national land law governing land tenure and use rights in Guinea-Bissau.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: fao.org

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Código Civil, artigos 1672.º, 1674.º e 1605.º

The Civil Code governs marriage and divorce; divorce is open to women on the same terms as men.

Gaps: The World Bank found that a married woman cannot choose her residence or be head of household on the same terms as a man and that remarriage rules differ for women.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Lei n.º 3/76, de 3 de maio (uniões de facto)

Recognises stable de facto unions between a man and a woman and grants marital property and succession rights to partners.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: documents1.worldbank.org

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Lei n.º 6/2014, de 4 de fevereiro (Lei de Violência Doméstica)

Criminalises domestic violence in its physical, sexual, psychological and economic forms, with prison terms of up to 12 years for sexual violence, and sets out victims' status and rights.

Gaps: Women's organisations reported to the 2025 UPR that the law still lacks implementing regulations for its effective application.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: documents1.worldbank.org

Decreto-Lei n.º 4/93, de 13 de outubro (Código Penal), artigos 133.º e 134.º

Article 133 punishes rape with 3 to 12 years of imprisonment and article 134 punishes sexual abuse of girls aged 12 to 16 with 2 to 8 years.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: documents1.worldbank.org

No specific sexual harassment law

The World Bank found no legislation on sexual harassment in employment and no criminal penalties or civil remedies for it.

Gaps: Women have no legal remedy for sexual harassment at work.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Lei n.º 14/2011, de 6 de julho (prevention and suppression of female genital mutilation)

Prohibits FGM in all its forms, with 2 to 6 years of imprisonment and 3 to 9 years when the victim is a minor. It sets penalties for accomplices and for parents who fail to prevent it. Cross-border FGM is also punished. Health professionals have a duty to report.

Gaps: Medicalised FGM is not expressly named in the text.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: fgmcri.org

Lei n.º 11/2010, de 17 de setembro (Saúde Reprodutiva e Planeamento Familiar), artigo 5.º

Raised the minimum age of marriage to 18 for both women and men, from 14 for girls and 16 for boys.

Gaps: UNDP noted that in practice no sanctions are applied to those who force minors to marry.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: undp.org

Lei n.º 12/2011, de 6 de julho (prevention and combating of human trafficking), artigo 3.º

Lists forced marriage as a means of exploitation covered by the trafficking offence.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: antislaverylaw.ac.uk

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Lei n.º 11/2010, de 17 de setembro (Saúde Reprodutiva e Planeamento Familiar)

Recognises the right of couples to decide freely on the number of children and the right to information on contraception. It also prohibits sexual violence.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: documents1.worldbank.org

TRAFFICKING

Lei n.º 12/2011, de 6 de julho (prevention and combating of human trafficking)

Criminalises trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labour, with 3 to 15 years of imprisonment. Trafficking for servitude is also covered. It provides special protection for pregnant women and victims with disabilities.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: documents1.worldbank.org

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

Lei n.º 12/2011, de 6 de julho, artigo 21.º

Gives trafficking victims the right to medical and psychological assistance. They also have the right to legal assistance.

Gaps: UNDP noted low numbers of complaints and trials for gender-based violence despite protective laws.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: documents1.worldbank.org

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Lei n.º 4/2018, de 3 de dezembro (Lei da Paridade)

Requires at least 36% women on electoral candidate lists and sets sanctions for non-compliance.

Gaps: Women's organisations called in 2025 for the parity law to be regulated and effectively implemented.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: upr-info.org

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Law No. 7 of 2022 (Labour Code), artigos 48.º, 359.º e 360.º

Prohibits discrimination in employment based on gender and provides paid maternity and paternity leave.

Gaps: Maternity leave is shorter than 14 weeks, and there is no equal pay provision. There is also no protection against dismissal of pregnant workers.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Decree-Law No. 5/86, artigo 66.º

Sets the same age for men and women to retire with full pension benefits.

Gaps: Periods of absence for childcare are not counted toward pension benefits.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Civic space

Notes	The military suspended the electoral process on 26 November 2025, imposed a curfew and closed borders. On 4 December 2025 it dissolved the Superior Council of the Judiciary and appointed a new public prosecutor with expanded powers. Opposition figures were detained, and six were released on 23 December 2025. In September 2025 the Supreme Court barred three radio stations from covering a press conference.

Recent developments

- January 2026. National Transition Council approved a new constitution; general elections announced for 6 December 2026.
- 14 December 2025. ECOWAS rejected the transition plan and warned of targeted sanctions.
- 12 December 2025. 66-member National Transition Council took office in place of the parliament.
- 4 December 2025. Junta dissolved the Superior Council of the Judiciary; a transitional charter set a one-year transition.
- 26 November 2025. Military High Command seized power and suspended the electoral process.
- 23 November 2025. Presidential and legislative elections held; results never announced.

Reforms recommended by treaty bodies and national organisations

- Set 18 as the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys without parental-consent exceptions, in line with Article 6 of the Maputo Protocol (Girls Not Brides).
- Adopt a national strategy or action plan to end child marriage (Girls Not Brides).
- Restore the Superior Council of the Judiciary and judicial independence (International IDEA, December 2025).
- Hold the general elections announced for 6 December 2026 and apply the 36 per cent Parity Law quota to candidate lists.

Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: girls' education, nationality, online violence and cybercrime, data protection, older persons, women and girls with disabilities, human rights defenders, vulnerable groups. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Guinea-Bissau in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 9 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Liberia

Liberia has ratified the Maputo Protocol, CEDAW and the ICCPR, has signed the CEDAW Optional Protocol without ratifying it, and has not ratified ILO C190; it ratified ILO C100 on equal remuneration in June 2022. Women hold 8 of 73 seats (11 per cent) in the House of Representatives elected in October 2023, and there are no legislated quotas or reserved seats for women. The Domestic Relations Law of 1973 sets the marriage age at 18 for girls and 21 for boys but allows marriage from 16 with parental, guardian or judicial consent, and 25 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before 18. In May 2024 President Boakai issued an executive order to establish a war crimes court for civil war-era crimes.

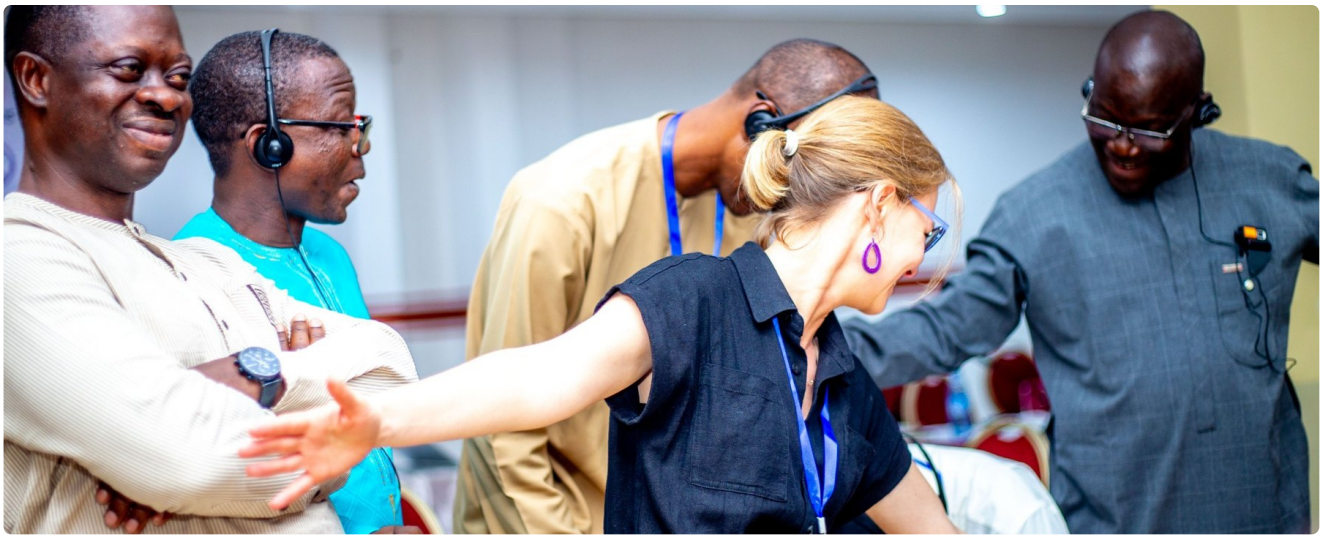


Figure 40. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

KEY INDICATORS

11.0% (8 of 73)
Women in House of Representatives (2026)

18 for girls, 21 for boys
Minimum legal age of marriage (1973)

25%
Women aged 20 to 24 married before 18

58.95
World Bank WBL 2026 legal frameworks score (2026)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	**Yes**	**No**	**No**	**Partly**	**Not recorded**	**No**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Monrovia
Legal system	Common law system of Anglo-American inspiration, alongside a customary law system
Official languages	English
Quotas or parity	No electoral quota and no reserved seats for women in the House of Representatives (IPU).

Table 30. Liberia: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 16/12/2003 / ratified 14/12/2007 / deposited 15/07/2008	None recorded on AU status list
CEDAW	accession 17/07/1984	None recorded
CEDAW Optional Protocol	signed 22/09/2004 / not ratified	
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	signed 14/05/1992 / ratified 01/08/2007 / deposited 15/07/2008	None recorded on AU status list
ILO C190 Violence and Harassment Convention	Not ratified (as of May 2026)	
ILO C100 Equal Remuneration Convention	ratified 13/06/2022	
ILO C111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention	ratified 22/07/1959	
ICCPR	signed 18/04/1967 / ratified 22/09/2004	None recorded
Kampala Convention	signed 23/10/2009 / ratified 23/02/2014 / deposited 07/03/2017	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	Not signed or ratified (AU list of 02/02/2026)	
Budapest Convention on Cybercrime	Not a party	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

An Act to Govern the Devolution of Estates and Establish Rights of Inheritance for Spouses of Both Statutory and Customary Marriages (Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law of 1998), approved 7 October 2003

Gives a widow one third of her late husband's property, with the remainder going to the children or other heirs, for both statutory and customary marriages.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: faolex.fao.org

Land Rights Act, 2018

Guarantees women equal rights to own land. It also guarantees them equal rights to access and use land. It protects the land rights of widows and requires women's representation on community land management committees.

Gaps: Implementation is held back by entrenched customary practice.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law of 1998

Gives every customary woman of legal age the right to marry the man of her choice and prohibits husbands from recovering dowry. Property a customary wife acquires is her own.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: faolex.fao.org

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Domestic Violence Act, 2019

Criminalises domestic violence and gives survivors legal protection.

Gaps: A provision criminalising FGM was removed before passage, and the Act does not address the specific risks faced by women with disabilities.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

Domestic Violence Act, 2019 (harassment through electronic means)

Covers harassment committed through electronic means within domestic relationships.

Gaps: There is no comprehensive law on technology-facilitated violence, and Penal Law provisions on indecency do not address non-consensual sharing of intimate images.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

An Act to Amend the New Penal Code Chapter 14 Sections 14.70 and 14.71 and to Provide for Gang Rape, 2005

Revises the offence of rape in the Penal Code and creates the offence of gang rape.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee noted in 2015 that marital rape was not criminalised and that prosecutions remained weak.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ecoi.net

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Domestic Relations Law, 1973

Sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 for girls and 21 for boys; marriage from 16 to 18 is allowed with parental, guardian or judicial consent; marriage under 16 is prohibited under civil and customary law.

Gaps: The exception from age 16 remains, and there is no national strategy on child marriage.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: girlsnotbrides.org

Executive Order No. 92 (2018) on the prohibition of FGM

Banned FGM on any person under 18 and on adults without consent.

Gaps: Executive orders lapse after one year and Liberia has no statute prohibiting FGM.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: theadvocatesforhumanrights.org

Children's Law, 2011

Prohibits harmful traditional practices against children and addresses school enrolment and re-enrolment.

Gaps: Its protection covers only children, and the CEDAW Committee found enforcement inadequate in 2015.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ohchr.org

Equal Rights of the Customary Marriage Law of 1998 (An Act to Govern the Devolution of Estates and Establish Rights of Inheritance for Spouses of Both Statutory and Customary Marriages, approved 7 October 2003)

Makes it unlawful to give a girl under 16 in customary marriage and bars parents from choosing a husband for their daughter.

Gaps: The customary minimum age of 16 is lower than 18.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: faolex.fao.org

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Public Health Law (revised 2019)

Makes sexuality education mandatory, with a comprehensive curriculum from grades 3 to 9.

Gaps: A reproductive health bill was still under review at the 2015 CEDAW review.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

TRAFFICKING

Revised Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons within the Republic of Liberia, 2021 (amending the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons, 2005)

Criminalises trafficking in persons with minimum sentences of 20 years of imprisonment.

Gaps: Its definition of exploitation is inconsistent with international law and officials lack training to apply it.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: state.gov

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

An Act to Repeal the Act of 1997 Creating the Liberia Commission on Human Rights and to Create the Independent National Commission on Human Rights of Liberia, 2005

Creates the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, which receives complaints of human rights violations.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee found legal aid provision for women insufficient in 2015.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ecoi.net

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

No legislated quota

IPU records no electoral quota and no reserved seats for women in the House of Representatives.

Gaps: Women won 8 of 73 House seats (11 per cent) in October 2023.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: data.ipu.org

Local Government Act, 2018

Requires women's participation in local governance, including representation on county councils, and gender mainstreaming in county and district development plans.

Gaps: Implementation has been slow and uneven across counties.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Education Reform Act, 2011

Supports equal access to education for girls and disadvantaged children; CEDAW experts called it very progressive.

Gaps: Re-entry of girls after pregnancy relies on the National Policy on Girls' Education 2021 to 2026, which is underfunded.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ohchr.org

Decent Work Act, 2015

Prohibits discrimination at work on the basis of sex and guarantees equal protection and rights for workers.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

Civic space

Notes	International IDEA records a six-month leadership deadlock in the House of Representatives from November 2024, ending with the re-election of the Speaker in May 2025. IDEA also notes gender underrepresentation in parliament and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people.

No data protection law

Liberia has no data protection law and no data protection authority. A privacy and data protection bill was under review by the House of Representatives.

Gaps: Personal data, including data on survivors of violence, has no specific legal protection.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: dlapiperdataprotection.com

Associations Law, Title 5, Liberian Codes Revised (1976), and the National NGO Policy

Regulate associations and NGOs. Liberia has no specific law on human rights defenders.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: liblaw.org

Act establishing the National Social Security and Welfare Corporation (approved 27 December 2016, published 13 February 2017)

Sets up the national social security system (NASSCORP).

Source cited in the RFLD profile: liberiahrjobs.com

No specific law on older persons

A bill on a National Commission for the Elderly passed the House in 2021 and was still pending before the Senate in 2026.

Gaps: No law on the rights of older persons.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: frontpageafricaonline.com

Recent developments

- 13 May 2025. Speaker of the House re-elected, ending the leadership deadlock.
- November 2024. A majority bloc suspended three House members and blocked passage of the 2025 budget.
- 2 May 2024. President Boakai signed an executive order to establish a Special War Crimes Court and an anti-corruption court.
- 10 October 2023. Legislative elections: 8 women elected to the 73-seat House of Representatives.

Reforms recommended by treaty bodies and national organisations

- Set 18 as the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys without consent-based exceptions, as recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and Article 6 of the Maputo Protocol (Girls Not Brides).
- Adopt a national strategy on ending child marriage (Girls Not Brides).
- Pass legislation to set up the Special War Crimes Court created by the May 2024 executive order (International IDEA).

Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: sexual harassment, women and girls with disabilities, vulnerable groups. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Liberia in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 10 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Mali

Mali is governed by a military-led transition: the revised Transitional Charter enacted on 10 July 2025 gives the transitional president a five-year mandate renewable until 'pacification', and all political parties were dissolved by decree in May 2025. The legislature is the appointed National Transitional Council, where women hold 40 of 133 seats (30.1 per cent); Law No. 2015-052 bars

electoral lists with more than 70 per cent of either sex. The 2011 Code of Persons and the Family sets the marriage age at 16 for girls and 18 for boys, and 49 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before 18. A new Penal Code adopted in late 2024 criminalises same-sex relations with up to seven years' imprisonment, and critics of the authorities have been prosecuted for social media posts.



Figure 41. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

KEY INDICATORS

30.1%
Women in National Transitional Council (appointed) (2026)

16 for girls, 18 for boys
Minimum legal age of marriage (2011)

49% (14% before 15)
Women aged 20 to 24 married before 18

50.33
World Bank WBL 2026 legal frameworks score (2026)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	**No**	**No**	**No**	**No**	**Not recorded**	**Partly**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Bamako
Legal system	Civil law system of French inspiration, with customary and religious rules applied in personal and family matters
Quotas or parity	Law No. 2015-052 of 18 December 2015: an electoral list of three or more candidates may not include more than 70 per cent of either men or women. Electoral Law No. 2022-019 of 24 June 2022 rejects lists exceeding that threshold.

Table 31. Mali: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 09/12/2003 / ratified 13/01/2005 / deposited 03/02/2005	None recorded on AU status list

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
CEDAW	signed 05/02/1985 / ratified 10/09/1985	None recorded
CEDAW Optional Protocol	accession 05/12/2000	None recorded
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	signed 28/02/1996 / ratified 03/06/1998 / deposited 14/08/1998	None recorded on AU status list
ILO C190 Violence and Harassment Convention	Not ratified (as of May 2026)	
ILO C100 Equal Remuneration Convention	ratified 12/07/1968	
ILO C111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention	ratified 02/03/1964	
ICCPR	accession 16/07/1974	None recorded
Kampala Convention	signed 23/11/2009 / ratified 07/11/2012 / deposited 26/11/2012	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	Not signed or ratified (AU list of 02/02/2026)	
Budapest Convention on Cybercrime	Not a party	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

Loi n° 2011-087 du 30 décembre 2011 portant Code des personnes et de la famille, articles 753, 770, 773, 798 and 800

The Code gives sons and daughters, and surviving spouses of either sex, equal inheritance rights under its statutory rules.

Gaps: Customary rules on succession remain recognised through the 2000 Land Code and limit women's access to inherited land.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Loi n° 06-40/AN-RM du 16 août 2006 portant loi d'orientation agricole

The agricultural orientation law removed legal barriers to women's access to and use of land.

Gaps: The 2000 Land Code still applies customary law to succession and property administration.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

Loi relative au foncier agricole, promulguée le 11 avril 2017

Requires that 15 percent of developed public agricultural land be allocated to women's associations and other vulnerable groups, and recognises customary land rights.

Gaps: The law contains no safeguard against gender discrimination within customary land management.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: iisd.org

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Loi n° 2011-087 du 30 décembre 2011 portant Code des personnes et de la famille, articles 307, 316, 319, 366 and 373

Governs marriage and divorce and permits polygamy. It makes the husband head of household and requires the wife to obey him.

Gaps: Waiting periods before remarriage apply only to divorced women and widows; the Committee described many provisions as discriminatory.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

No specific law on gender-based or domestic violence

Mali has no dedicated statute on gender-based or domestic violence; a draft bill has been under discussion for years.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee and the World Bank found no legislation addressing domestic violence.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

No specific provision on sexual harassment in employment

The World Bank Women, Business and the Law review found no legal provision on sexual harassment at work and no civil or criminal remedy.

Gaps: Assessment dates from 2020 and predates the 2024 Penal Code.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Loi n° 2019-056 du 5 décembre 2019 portant répression de la cybercriminalité

Defines and punishes cybercrime offences, including offences involving personal data.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: dataprotection.africa

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Code of Persons and the Family (2011)

Sets the minimum age of marriage at 16 for girls and 18 for boys; persons over 15 may marry with authorisation of the head of the administrative district and parental consent.

Gaps: Below the age of 18 set by Article 6 of the Maputo Protocol. The national strategy for ending child marriage covered 2020 to 2023.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: girlsnotbrides.org

No specific law criminalising FGM (Code pénal, article 213 not applied)

FGM is not specifically criminalised even though prevalence is about 90 percent; a bill submitted in 2009 has not been adopted.

Gaps: No prosecutions of excision practitioners have been registered under the general Criminal Code provision.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

Loi n° 2011-087 du 30 décembre 2011 portant Code des personnes et de la famille (levirate and bride price)

The Code requires a bride price (article 288) and does not prohibit levirate.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee asked Mali to prohibit levirate and remove the bride price requirement.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Loi n° 02-044 du 24 juin 2002 relative à la santé de la reproduction

Sets the legal framework for reproductive health services and rights in Mali.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

Loi n° 06-028 du 29 juin 2006 fixant les règles relatives à la prévention, la prise en charge et le contrôle du VIH/SIDA

Regulates HIV prevention and treatment.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee asked for a review from a gender perspective, including protection of women in prostitution.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

TRAFFICKING

Loi du 12 juillet 2012 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes et les pratiques assimilées

Criminalises trafficking in persons and related practices.

Gaps: The law does not address gender-specific aspects and lacks an action plan. It is little known to law enforcement.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

Code de justice militaire

Prosecution of members of the defence and security forces requires prior permission from the Minister of Defence.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee found this obstructs investigation of conflict-related sexual violence and asked for urgent revision.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

Loi n° 2018-003 du 12 janvier 2018 relative aux défenseurs des droits de l'homme, et Décret n° 2020-0087/P-RM du 18 février 2020

Recognises the rights of human rights defenders and gives the National Human Rights Commission a protection role.

Gaps: The implementing decree limits protection to defenders holding a government-issued professional card and has no specific provisions for women defenders.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ishr.ch

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Law No. 2015-052 of 18 December 2015; Electoral Law No. 2022-019 of 24 June 2022

Electoral lists with three or more candidates may not include more than 70 per cent of either sex; non-compliant lists are rejected.

Gaps: The current National Transitional Council is appointed by decree, and political parties were dissolved in May 2025, so the quota has no electoral application during the transition.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: data.ipu.org

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Loi n° 2017-021 du 12 juin 2017 portant modification du Code du travail, articles L.4, L.95, 179 and 182

Prohibits gender discrimination in employment and requires equal pay for work of equal value. It provides at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave.

Gaps: Women remain barred from some hazardous jobs and industries under article 185 and Décret n° 96-178/P-RM, and dismissal of pregnant workers is not expressly prohibited.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Loi n° 99-041 portant Code de prévoyance sociale, articles 31 and 151

Maternity benefits are paid in full by social security, and childcare periods count towards pension entitlements.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Loi n° 2018-074 du 31 décembre 2018 instituant le Régime d'assurance maladie universelle

Establishes universal health insurance coverage.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

Loi n° 2019-025 portant modification du Code du travail, articles 60 nouveau and L60 bis

Sets equal retirement ages for women and men, for full and partial pensions.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

> Loi n° 2018-027 du 12 juin 2018 relative aux droits des personnes vivant avec un handicap, et Décret n° 2021-0662/PT-RM du 23 septembre 2021
>
> Sets out the rights of persons with disabilities, with an implementing decree adopted in 2021.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

> Loi électorale n° 06-044 du 4 septembre 2006, article 28
>
> Article 28 denied voting rights to persons on the basis of disability, including women with disabilities.
>
> **Gaps:** The CEDAW Committee called for urgent repeal; the provision predates the 2022 Electoral Law.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: digitallibrary.un.org

Recent developments

- October 2025. A former Prime Minister was sentenced to two years' imprisonment over a social media post.
- September 2025. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger announced withdrawal from the International Criminal Court.
- 10 July 2025. Revised Transitional Charter enacted, giving the transitional president a five-year mandate renewable until 'pacification'.
- May 2025. Military authorities dissolved all political parties and affiliated organisations.
- October 2024. New Penal Code criminalising same-sex relations (up to seven years) adopted.

Reforms recommended by treaty bodies and national organisations

- Raise the minimum age of marriage for girls from 16 to 18 in the Code of Persons and the Family, in line with Article 6 of the Maputo Protocol (Girls Not Brides).
- Renew and fund a national strategy on ending child marriage after the 2020 to 2023 strategy (Girls Not Brides).
- Reverse the dissolution of political parties and release people prosecuted for peaceful expression online (International IDEA).

> Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: rape and sexual offences, girls' education, older persons. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Mali in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 11 OF 16 · NORTH AND WEST AFRICA

Mauritania

Mauritania has no standalone law on violence against women: the Karama bill has been withdrawn or blocked several times since 2017 under pressure from religious leaders. The Penal Code criminalises zina, which exposes survivors of sexual violence to prosecution, and marital rape and sexual

harassment are not criminalised. The 2001 Personal Status Code sets the marriage age at 18 but lets guardians authorise earlier marriage; 37% of girls marry before 18 and FGM prevalence is about 64%. The CIVICUS Monitor upgraded Mauritania from 'repressed' to 'obstructed' in December 2025, while arrests of journalists and anti-slavery activists continue.



Figure 42. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

KEY INDICATORS

23.3%
Women in National Assembly (2026)

18
Minimum legal age of marriage (2001)

37% (16% before 15)
Child marriage rate (% married before 18)

64%
FGM prevalence (women and girls aged 15 to 49)

9.3%
Lifetime physical or sexual intimate partner violence

48.1 / 100
World Bank Women, Business and the Law 1.0 index (2024)

35.0 / 100
World Bank Women, Business and the Law 2.0 legal frameworks (2024)

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Nouakchott
Legal system	Mixed system combining Islamic law and codified civil law; the Personal Status Code applies Islamic rules to family matters
Official languages	Arabic
Constitution	Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, 1991 (as revised, including in 2006 and 2012)

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

Personal Status Code (Law No. 2001-052), Articles 244 to 310

Regulates inheritance according to Islamic rules.

Gaps: Women generally receive half the share of male heirs of the same degree.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: musawah.org

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Personal Status Code (Law No. 2001-052 of 19 July 2001)

Allows men up to four wives (Article 45), though a wife may stipulate monogamy in the contract. The husband is head of the family (Article 56), and divorce must be registered by a court (Article 83).

Gaps: A mother loses custody if she remarries outside close relations, and fathers hold priority guardianship. The Code was under review in 2023.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: musawah.org, hrw.org, refworld.org

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

No specific law; draft law on violence against women and girls (Karama bill, 54 articles)

The bill would set a comprehensive framework for prevention, protection, accountability and support for survivors, including specialised court chambers.

Gaps: Not adopted as of November 2024 after withdrawals in 2017 and 2018 and renewed opposition in 2023. HRW notes that drafts keep zina and narrow rape definitions.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: secdev-foundation.org, data.unwomen.org, hrw.org

Decree No. 2020-140 creating the National Observatory on the Rights of Women and Girls

Creates an advisory body to monitor women's and girls' rights. Its members come from state institutions (government and parliament) and from civil society.

Gaps: The Observatory sits under the Prime Minister's Office, which limits its independence.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: secdev-foundation.org, ungeneva.org

Penal Code, Ordinance No. 83-162 of 9 July 1983, Articles 307 and 309

Article 309 criminalises rape; Article 307 criminalises zina (sexual relations outside marriage).

Gaps: Rape is narrowly defined and marital rape is not covered. Survivors risk prosecution for zina, including adolescent girls.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: hrw.org, secdev-foundation.org

No specific sexual harassment offence

Mauritanian law has no provision criminalising sexual harassment.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee urged criminalisation in February 2023.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: data.unwomen.org

Cybercrime law of 2016

Regulates internet use and criminalises online offences.

Gaps: It has no provisions on gender-based digital violence and has been used against bloggers and activists.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: secdev-foundation.org

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

General Child Protection Code (Law No. 2018-024 of 21 June 2018), Articles 79 and 80

Criminalises FGM on children without conditions; the delegation told CEDAW in 2023 that perpetrators face prison terms of up to six years.

Gaps: Rarely enforced; HRW found no recent prosecutions. FGM affects 64% of women and girls aged 15 to 49.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: hrw.org, ecoi.net, ungeneva.org, upr-info.org

Personal Status Code (Law No. 2001-052 of 19 July 2001), Articles 6 and 9

Sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both sexes.

Gaps: Guardians may authorise marriage of minors if they consider it in the child's interest, and a young girl's silence counts as consent.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: musawah.org, hrw.org, girlsnotbrides.org

General Child Protection Code (Law No. 2018-024), Article 17

Punishes guardians who marry off a child against the child's exclusive interest with 5 to 10 years in prison.

Gaps: The 'exclusive interest' test is undefined, so the provision does not ban child marriage outright.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: hrw.org

Ordinance No. 2005-015 on the criminal protection of the child

Main criminal law protecting children from abuse and exploitation; Article 103 guarantees free legal representation for detained children.

Gaps: No specific law on force-feeding (leblouh), which Girls Not Brides identifies as a harmful practice linked to child marriage.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: archive.crin.org, girlsnotbrides.org

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Law No. 2017-025 of 15 November 2017 on reproductive health; Penal Code Article 293

Declares reproductive health a universal fundamental right (Article 7).

Gaps: Abortion is banned except when the pregnancy threatens the woman's life, with no exception for rape (Article 22 and Penal Code Article 293).
Source cited in the RFLD profile: extranet.who.int, hrw.org

TRAFFICKING

Law No. 2020-017 of 6 August 2020 on preventing and punishing trafficking in persons and protecting victims

Criminalises trafficking and provides for victim protection. An earlier law, No. 2003-025 of 17 July 2003, also punished trafficking.

Gaps: A national action plan ended in 2022 and was being updated.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: ecoi.net, archive.crin.org, ungeneva.org

Law of 2015 criminalising slavery and slavery-like practices

Criminalises slavery; special anti-slavery courts and a victims' support fund have been set up.

Gaps: Arrests of anti-slavery activists continued in 2026.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: clr.africanchildforum.org, ungeneva.org, monitor.civicus.org

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

Ordinance No. 2006-05 of 26 January 2006 on legal aid

Provides full or partial legal aid before all courts to people with insufficient resources, with dedicated offices for family law and child cases.

Gaps: Applicants must also show a probable chance of success.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: archive.crin.org, ungeneva.org

Law No. 2018-023 of 21 June 2018 on discrimination

Criminalises discrimination.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ecoi.net, ungeneva.org

Law No. 2021-004 on associations, foundations and networks

Governs how associations are created and run. It applies to foundations and networks as well.

Gaps: No specific law protecting human rights defenders.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ige.mr

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Electoral provisions on a national women's list

Reserve a national list of 20 parliamentary seats for women and require parties to present lists alternating women and men.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ungeneva.org

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Law No. 2001-054 of 19 July 2001 on compulsory basic education; General Child Protection Code, Article 35

Makes basic education compulsory, and the Child Protection Code protects the right of pregnant girls to continue their education.

Gaps: HRW reports that civil registration barriers keep some children out of school.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: archive.crin.org, hrw.org

Labour Code (Law No. 2004-017 of 6 July 2004)

Provides for equal pay for equal work.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: archive.crin.org, ungeneva.org

Civic space

CIVICUS Monitor rating	Obstructed (score 44), upgraded from repressed in December 2025
NGO and association law	Law No. 2021-004 on associations, foundations and networks
Cybercrime law	of 2016, criticised for use against political bloggers and activists
Human rights defenders law	None identified
Notes	CIVICUS credits the upgrade to Mauritania joining the Partnership for Information and Democracy in January 2025 and regularising public media contracts. Judicial harassment of activists and excessive force against protesters remain concerns, with arrests of journalists and human rights defenders reported in October 2025 and of anti-corruption and anti-slavery activists in February 2026.

Loi n° 2017-020 du 22 juillet 2017 sur la protection des données à caractère personnel

Sets rules for the processing of personal data.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ictpolicyafrica.org

Ordonnance n° 2006-043 du 23 novembre 2006 relative à la promotion et la protection des personnes handicapées

General law on the rights of persons with disabilities.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ungeneva.org

Ordonnance n° 2005-006 instituant un régime d'assurance maladie, modifiée par la Loi n° 2010-018

Establishes the national health insurance fund (CNAM).

Source cited in the RFLD profile: finances.gov.mr

No specific law on older persons

> The State's latest report to the African Commission names no law on older persons.
>
> **Gaps:** No law on the rights of older persons.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: achpr.au.int

Recent developments

- February 2023. The CEDAW Committee reviewed Mauritania and urged criminalisation of domestic violence, marital rape, sexual harassment and child marriage.
- 2023. The Karama bill on violence against women faced renewed opposition from religious scholars and was not adopted.
- January 2025. Mauritania joined the Partnership for Information and Democracy.
- December 2025. CIVICUS upgraded Mauritania's civic space rating from repressed to obstructed.
- February 2026. Authorities arrested anti-corruption and anti-slavery activists.

Reforms recommended by treaty bodies and national organisations

- Adopt the comprehensive law on violence against women and girls, with criminalisation of marital rape and sexual harassment.
- Repeal the zina offence (Penal Code Article 307) and end prosecution of survivors of sexual violence.
- Remove guardians' power to authorise marriage under 18 in the Personal Status Code and criminalise child marriage.
- Enforce the FGM ban in the General Child Protection Code with prosecutions.
- Withdraw the reservations to CEDAW Articles 13 and 16 and allow abortion at least in cases of rape.

> Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: land and property, vulnerable groups. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Mauritania in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 12 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Niger

Niger signed the Maputo Protocol in 2004 but has not ratified it, and it keeps reservations to CEDAW. The 2010 Constitution was suspended after the July 2023 coup and replaced by the Charte de la Refondation of March 2025. The legal minimum age of marriage for girls remains 15. Civic space is rated repressed by CIVICUS.



Figure 43. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

KEY INDICATORS

19.6% (38 of 194)
Women in the transitional council (2026)

76%
Women married before 18 (2012)

28%
Women married before 15 (2012)

15
Minimum legal age of marriage for girls

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
No	**No**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**No**	**Partly**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Niamey
Constitution	2010 Constitution suspended after the July 2023 coup; Charte de la Refondation promulgated on 26 March 2025 by Decree 2025-160/P/CNSP, with a five-year transition, the Conseil consultatif de la Refondation as legislative body and no constitutional court.
Quotas or parity	Law 2000-008 of 7 June 2000, amended by Law 2019-69 of 24 December 2019: at least 25% of elected seats for either sex; 30% for government and senior state appointments.

Table 32. Niger: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 06/07/2004; not ratified	
CEDAW	accession 08/10/1999	Reservations to Articles 2(d) and (f), 5(a), 15(4), 16(1)(c), (e) and (g), and 29(1); declaration on Article 5(b)
CEDAW Optional Protocol	accession 30/09/2004	
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	ratified 11/12/1996; deposited 05/03/1997	
ICCPR	accession 07/03/1986	

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Kampala Convention	ratified 10/05/2012; deposited 13/06/2012	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	ratified 22/02/2022; deposited 16/03/2022	
ILO C190 Violence and Harassment Convention	not ratified	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

Loi n°2018-37 du 1er juin 2018, article 72

The World Bank cites this provision as the basis on which divorce and remarriage are governed for women. It cites the same basis for inheritance.

Gaps: Daughters and surviving wives do not have equal inheritance rights with sons and husbands.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: worldbank.org

Ordonnance n°93-015 (Principes d'orientation du Code rural), articles 8 à 10

Sets the guiding principles of the Code rural on land tenure.

Gaps: Together with articles 1421 and 1428 of the Civil Code it does not give married women equal rights to own and administer property.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: worldbank.org

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Code civil, articles 212, 213 et 215

The Civil Code governs marriage and the rights of spouses and contains no obedience clause.

Gaps: The husband is head of household and chooses the residence, and Niger has no family code.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: worldbank.org

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Cybercrime law of 2019, amended by Ordinance 2024-28 of 7 June 2024

The 2024 ordinance restored prison terms of one to three years for online defamation and insult.

Gaps: Journalists have been arrested under the law.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: hrw.org

Draft revision of the Penal Code

At the CEDAW review of January 2024 the delegation said a draft Penal Code revision covers rape, FGM, sexual harassment and the wahaya practice, and that abortion after rape or incest would be decriminalised.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ohchr.org

No specific domestic violence law

The World Bank found no legal provisions specifically addressing domestic violence or femicide in Niger.

Gaps: Women have no dedicated legal protection against domestic violence; a draft revision of the Penal Code covering sexual violence was still pending in 2024.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: worldbank.org

No sexual harassment provision in force: draft revision of the Penal Code

The government told CEDAW in 2024 that the draft Penal Code would criminalise harassment along with other forms of sexual violence.

Gaps: The World Bank found no provisions in force on sexual harassment, including in employment.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ohchr.org

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Civil Code

Minimum age of marriage is 15 for girls and 18 for boys, with exceptions through parental consent and presidential dispensation. A national action plan to end child marriage was adopted in 2018.

Gaps: 76% of women were married before 18 and 28% before 15 (DHS 2012).

Source cited in the RFLD profile: girlsnotbrides.org

Loi n°2003-25 du 13 juin 2003 modifiant la loi n°61-27 du 15 juillet 1961 (Code pénal), articles 232.1 à 232.3

Criminalises FGM with 6 months to 3 years of imprisonment and a fine, 10 to 20 years if the victim dies, equal penalties for accomplices and heavier penalties with a possible ban from practice for health professionals.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: niger.unfpa.org

Loi sur la santé de la reproduction au Niger, adoptée le 24 mai 2006, article 19

Classifies FGM as violence against women that is criminally punished.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: clr.africanchildforum.org

Code pénal (as amended in 2003 and 2008), articles 270.1 et 270.2

Defines slavery and servile conditions, including forced marriage practices such as wahaya, and punishes reducing a person to slavery with 10 to 30 years of imprisonment and a fine.

Gaps: Wahaya is not yet named as a specific offence; the draft Penal Code would criminalise it with 10 to 30 years of imprisonment.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: antislaverylaw.ac.uk

Code pénal, article 258

Punishes marriage of a minor following abduction with 1 to 5 years of imprisonment and a fine.

Gaps: One in four women aged 25 to 29 was married before 15, and the World Bank found no provisions effectively prohibiting child marriage.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: antislaverylaw.ac.uk

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Loi sur la santé de la reproduction au Niger, adoptée le 24 mai 2006, articles 2, 15 et 16

Recognises equal rights in reproductive health and authorises contraception. It permits abortion when the pregnancy endangers the woman's life or health or in case of serious fetal impairment.

Gaps: Abortion is otherwise prohibited.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: clr.africanchildforum.org

TRAFFICKING

Ordonnance n°2010-86 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes, article 10

Criminalises trafficking for slavery, servitude, sexual exploitation and forced labour with 5 to 10 years of imprisonment and a fine.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: antislaverylaw.ac.uk

Loi n°2015-36 du 26 juin 2015 relative au trafic illicite de migrants

Criminalises migrant smuggling, with aggravating circumstances when the migrant is a child or a pregnant woman.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

Law on human rights defenders adopted 15 June 2022

Recognises and protects human rights defenders.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: civicus.org

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Law 2000-008 of 7 June 2000, amended by Law 2019-69 of 24 December 2019

Sets at least 25% of elected seats for either sex and 30% for government and senior state appointments.

Gaps: Elected bodies were dissolved after the July 2023 coup.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: faolex.fao.org

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Décret n°2017-935/PRN/MEP/A/PLN/EC/MES du 5 décembre 2017

Provides for the protection and support of schoolgirls during their education. Implementing orders were adopted in 2019.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

Code du travail, articles 5, 78, 111, 158 et 159

Prohibits gender discrimination in employment, requires equal pay, gives at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave and prohibits dismissal of pregnant workers.

Gaps: Maternity benefits are paid by the employer instead of social security, and women are barred from some jobs deemed dangerous.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: worldbank.org

Décret n°67-025 du 2 février 1967, articles 13 et 18

Sets the same retirement age for women and men and credits periods of absence for childcare toward pensions.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: worldbank.org

Civic space

CIVICUS Monitor rating	Repressed
NGO and association law	Ordinance 84-06 of 1 March 1984, amended by Law 91-006 of 20 May 1991, implementing decree of 24 February 2022Press and media lawThe Maison de la Presse was suspended on 29 January 2024
Cybercrime law	2019 law amended by Ordinance 2024-28 (7 June 2024)
Human rights defenders law	Adopted 15 June 2022Public order and counter-terrorismDecree of 27 August 2024 creating a terrorism database; Ordinance 2025-06 of 26 March 2025 dissolved all political parties

Loi n° 2022-59 du 16 décembre 2022 relative à la protection des données à caractère personnel, modifiée par la Loi n° 2023-31 du 4 juillet 2023

Replaces Loi n° 2017-28 of 2017 and sets the rules for processing personal data.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: dlapiperdataprotection.com

Ordonnance n° 93-012 du 2 mars 1993 instituant des règles minima relatives à la protection sociale des personnes handicapées

Sets minimum rules on the social protection of persons with disabilities.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: social.desa.un.org

Loi n° 2011-42 du 14 décembre 2011 fixant les règles applicables à l'assistance juridique et judiciaire

Organises legal and judicial aid and creates the ANAJJ.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: extranet.who.int

No specific law on older persons

Loi n° 2018-22 du 27 avril 2018 on social protection lists older persons among vulnerable people, but there is no specific law.

Gaps: No law on the rights of older persons.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: extranet.who.int

Recent developments

- 26 March 2025. Charte de la Refondation promulgated, setting a five-year transition; all political parties dissolved the same day.
- 20 February 2024. CEDAW Committee adopted concluding observations on the fifth periodic report.

Reforms recommended by treaty bodies and national organisations

- Ratify the Maputo Protocol, signed in 2004.
- Raise the minimum age of marriage for girls to 18.

Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: vulnerable groups. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Niger in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 13 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Nigeria



Figure 44. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

KEY INDICATORS

4.2% (15 of 356)
Women in House of Representatives (2026)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	**Partly**	**Not recorded**	**Partly**	**Partly**	**No**	**No**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Abuja

Table 33. Nigeria: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 16/12/2003; ratified 16/12/2004; deposited 18/02/2005	
CEDAW	signed 23/04/1984; ratified 13/06/1985	
CEDAW Optional Protocol	signed 08/09/2000; ratified 22/11/2004	
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	signed 13/07/1999; ratified 23/07/2001; deposited 02/05/2003	
ICCPR	accession 29/07/1993	
Kampala Convention	signed 23/10/2009; ratified 17/04/2012; deposited 22/05/2012	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	signed 23/01/2024; not ratified	
ILO C190 Violence and Harassment Convention	ratified 08/11/2022	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

> Administration of Estates Law of Lagos State, section 50
>
> The World Bank records equal inheritance rights for sons and daughters and for surviving spouses under this law.
>
> **Gaps:** The assessment covers Lagos State only.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

> Land Use Act
>
> Formally gives women and men equal access to land.
>
> **Gaps:** Patrilineal inheritance practices persist, and women own only a small share of land, estimated at 4 to 10 per cent depending on the region.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

> Married Women's Property Act, sections 1, 2 and 5
>
> The World Bank records equal property ownership rights for married women and men under these sections.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Marriage Act

Governs statutory marriage, which does not recognise polygamous unions.

Gaps: Customary and Islamic law permit polygamy, which leaves an inconsistent legal framework for marriage.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: un.org

Matrimonial Causes Act, Cap. 220, section 15

The World Bank records equal rights for women and men to obtain a divorce in statutory marriages.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015

Covers spousal battery, forced eviction from the home, abandonment of dependants, emotional violence, verbal violence and economic violence. It provides for protection orders and victim compensation. It also provides for a sexual offenders register.

Gaps: The Act applies directly only in the Federal Capital Territory, and each state must adopt it separately.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: thebrainbuilders.org

Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015

Broadens the definition of rape to cover oral and anal penetration. It also covers penetration with other body parts and recognises male victims.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: thebrainbuilders.org

Criminal Code Act and Penal Code (Northern States) Federal Provisions Act, 1960

These codes contain the general rape offences applied in the states.

Gaps: Neither code criminalises marital rape, and the CEDAW Committee urged Nigeria in 2025 to criminalise it across all 36 states.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: un.org

Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2011, section 264

The World Bank records this provision as the legal basis against sexual harassment in its assessment, which covers Lagos.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) (Amendment) Act, 2024

Sets the framework for cybercrime offences, including unauthorised interception of electronic communications.

Gaps: Civil society monitors report that the law is increasingly used against critics through defamation and cyberbullying charges.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: icnl.org

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015

Lists female genital mutilation among the harmful traditional practices it prohibits.

Gaps: The ban applies in each state only once the state has domesticated the Act.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: thebrainbuilders.org

Child's Rights Act, 2003, section 21

Sets 18 as the minimum age of marriage and prohibits child marriage.

Gaps: Several northern states, including Adamawa and Bauchi, had not domesticated it by 2025, and section 61 of the Constitution keeps Islamic and customary marriages outside federal jurisdiction.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: un.org

Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015

Prohibits harmful traditional practices, including forced marriage and the denial of succession rights.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: thebrainbuilders.org

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Criminal Code Act, Cap. 77, sections 228 to 230; Penal Code (Northern States) Federal Provisions Act, Cap. 345, sections 232 to 236

Both codes allow abortion only to save the woman's life. Under the Criminal Code a woman who attempts her own abortion faces seven years' imprisonment.

Gaps: In June 2025 the Federal High Court in Abuja recognised that pregnancy resulting from rape or incest harms women's physical and mental health, though the codes were not changed.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: reproductiverights.org

TRAFFICKING

Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015

Defines trafficking offences and provides the basis for prosecutions led by the national anti-trafficking agency NAPTIP.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee found gaps in protecting abducted women and girls from trafficking.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: un.org

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

Companies and Allied Matters Act, 2020, Part F

Governs the registration of civil society organisations as incorporated trustees and allows the suspension of their trustees.

Gaps: A Foreign Aid (Regulation, Coordination, Transparency and Disclosure) Bill, 2026 would add disclosure and reporting duties for NGOs receiving foreign funds.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: icnl.org

Legal Aid Act, 2011

Governs the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: grassrootsjusticenetwork.org

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill (not enacted)

The Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill has not been passed into law.

Gaps: In March 2022 the National Assembly voted against five gender equality bills.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: amnesty.org

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act, 2004

Provides for free and compulsory basic education.

Gaps: The national review reported a primary school dropout rate of about 30 per cent with large regional disparities.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

Labour Act, section 54(1)

Regulates maternity leave for workers covered by the Act.

Gaps: According to the World Bank, it does not guarantee 14 weeks of paid maternity leave and does not prohibit the dismissal of pregnant workers.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

> Pension Reform Act, 2014, section 7
>
> Sets the same retirement age for women and men.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

> Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018
>
> Signed in January 2019, it prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability and punishes violations with fines and prison terms. It also creates a National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and gave five years to make public buildings and vehicles accessible.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: hrw.org

Source: RFLD legal profile of Nigeria in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 14 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Senegal



Figure 45. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

KEY INDICATORS

41.2% (68 of 165)
Women in National Assembly (2026)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	**Partly**	**Not recorded**	**Yes**	**No**	**No**	**Yes**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Dakar

Table 34. Senegal: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 26/12/2003; ratified 27/12/2004; deposited 30/01/2005	
CEDAW	signed 29/07/1980; ratified 05/02/1985	
CEDAW Optional Protocol	signed 10/12/1999; ratified 26/05/2000	
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	signed 18/05/1992; ratified 29/09/1998; deposited 30/10/1998	
ICCPR	signed 06/07/1970; ratified 13/02/1978	
Kampala Convention	signed 12/07/2011; not ratified	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	ratified 03/08/2016; deposited 16/08/2016	
ILO C190 Violence and Harassment Convention	not ratified	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

Loi n° 72-61 du 12 juin 1972 portant Code de la famille (successions de droit musulman)

The Family Code contains a separate regime for Muslim successions alongside the general law of succession.

Gaps: Under the Muslim succession rules a daughter receives half the share of a son.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: droit-et-politique-en-afrique.info

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Loi n° 72-61 du 12 juin 1972 portant Code de la famille

Governs marriage, filiation and parental authority, among other matters of family life.

Gaps: Advocates criticise the code's structure built on the primacy of the father, including unequal parental authority and limits on paternity searches.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: fr.allafrica.com

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Loi n° 99-05 du 29 janvier 1999 modifiant certaines dispositions du Code pénal (article 297 bis, violences conjugales)

Makes a deliberate assault on a spouse a specific offence, punished by one to five years' imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 CFA francs where it causes more than 20 days of incapacity. Heavier penalties apply where the violence causes mutilation or death.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: clr.africanchildforum.org

Loi n° 2020-05 du 10 janvier 2020 criminalisant le viol et la pédophilie (modifiant le Code pénal)

Turns rape and paedophilia into crimes tried as felonies. Under the 1999 law, rape was classified as a crime only when it caused the victim's death.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: justice.sec.gouv.sn

Code pénal, article 319 bis (introduced by Loi n° 99-05 du 29 janvier 1999)

Punishes anyone who abuses their authority to harass another person through orders, threats, words or coercion in order to obtain sexual favours, with six months to three years' imprisonment and a fine.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: clr.africanchildforum.org

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Code pénal, article 299 bis (introduced by Loi n° 99-05 du 29 janvier 1999)

Punishes total or partial excision, or an attempt, with six months to five years' imprisonment. Medical staff receive the maximum penalty and life imprisonment applies where the victim dies.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: clr.africanchildforum.org

Loi n° 72-61 du 12 juin 1972 portant Code de la famille, article 111

Sets the minimum age of marriage at 16 for women and 18 for men. The president of the regional court may grant an age dispensation for serious reasons after an inquiry.

Gaps: The minimum age for girls remains below 18, the age required by the Maputo Protocol.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: droit-et-politique-en-afrique.info

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Loi n° 65-60 du 21 juillet 1965 portant Code pénal, articles 305 et 305 bis

Criminalises abortion for the provider and for the woman, with one to five years' imprisonment for providers and six months to two years for a woman who induces her own abortion. Article 305 bis punishes promoting abortion.

Gaps: The Penal Code contains no exception for rape or incest, which the Maputo Protocol requires.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: reproductiverights.org

Loi n° 2005-18 du 5 août 2005 relative à la santé de la reproduction

Defines reproductive health services, which include action against female genital mutilation and sexual abuse (article 4), and states that all forms of violence and sexual abuse are punishable (article 13).

Gaps: Reports point to weak enforcement and a lack of dedicated budget lines for young people's access to services.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: rutgers.international

TRAFFICKING

Loi n° 2005-06 du 10 mai 2005 relative à la lutte contre la traite des personnes et pratiques assimilées et à la protection des victimes

Punishes trafficking with five to ten years' imprisonment and up to 30 years in aggravated cases. Maximum penalties apply where the victim is a child. Victims are protected from prosecution and from removal during proceedings. They may also ask for residence.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: antislaverylaw.ac.uk

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

No specific law on human rights defenders

Civil society (COSEDDH) submitted a draft law on human rights defenders to the Minister of Justice in May 2024.

Gaps: Defenders have no specific legal protection.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: fr.allafrica.com

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Loi n° 2010-11 du 28 mai 2010 instituant la parité absolue Homme-Femme dans toutes les institutions totalement ou partiellement électives

Requires gender parity on candidate lists for fully or partly elected bodies, and lists that do not respect parity are rejected. Women held 43.3 per cent of seats in the National Assembly at the time of the 2022 CEDAW review.

Gaps: Parity is weaker in local bodies and in appointed posts, which the law does not cover.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ohchr.org

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Education orientation law of 30 January 1991, as amended (compulsory schooling)

Makes education compulsory and free for children aged 6 to 16.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: adry.up.ac.za

Code du travail

Governs employment, including the protection of pregnant workers.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee noted in 2022 that some Labour Code provisions restrict women's access to employment, and the government said a revision was under way.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ungeneva.org

Loi n° 2026-19 du 03 septembre 2026 portant Code de la Sécurité sociale

New Social Security Code, adopted on 18 August 2026 and published in Journal officiel n° 7932 of 18 September 2026.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: vie-publique.sn

WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Loi d'orientation sociale n° 2010-15 du 6 juillet 2010 relative à la promotion et à la protection des droits des personnes handicapées

Prohibits disability discrimination in employment and sets a 15 per cent quota in public sector recruitment. It creates an equal opportunities card giving access to health care and education benefits. The card also gives access to transport benefits.

Gaps: The law has no specific provisions on women and girls with disabilities, and several of its mechanisms were implemented late.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: adry.up.ac.za

Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: harmful practices, land and property, access to justice and legal aid, online violence and cybercrime. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Senegal in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 15 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Sierra Leone

KEY INDICATORS

28.2% (42 of 149)
Women in Parliament (2026)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	**Yes**	**Not recorded**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Freetown



Figure 46. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

Table 35. Sierra Leone: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 09/12/2003; ratified 03/07/2015; deposited 30/10/2015	
CEDAW	signed 21/09/1988; ratified 11/11/1988	
CEDAW Optional Protocol	signed 08/09/2000; not ratified	
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	signed 14/04/1992; ratified 13/05/2002; deposited 18/06/2002	
ICCPR	accession 23/08/1996	
Kampala Convention	signed 23/10/2009; ratified 15/07/2010; deposited 08/10/2010	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	signed 29/01/2016; not ratified	
ILO C190 Violence and Harassment Convention	not ratified	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

> Devolution of Estates Act, 2007
>
> The World Bank records equal inheritance rights for sons and daughters and for surviving spouses under sections 6 to 8.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

> Customary Land Rights Act, 2022
>
> Recognises and protects rights in land held under customary tenure, including the rights of women and other marginalised groups, and sets up mechanisms to resolve land disputes.
>
> **Gaps:** Enforcement of women's equal access to land remains a challenge.
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

National Land Commission Act, 2022

Creates land administration bodies at national and district level and requires a minimum number of women on their committees.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, 2009

Sets the conditions for a valid customary marriage and its registration, including a minimum age of 18 for spouses.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: law.cornell.edu

Constitution of Sierra Leone, section 27(4)(d)

Exempts adoption, marriage, divorce, burial and devolution of property from the constitutional ban on discrimination.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee called for its repeal, since it undermines the 2007 gender laws.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ecoi.net

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Domestic Violence Act, 2007

Criminalises domestic violence and sets out protection measures for victims. Domestic violence includes physical and sexual abuse. It also includes emotional abuse.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act, 2022

Establishes the principle of gender equality and sets out measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, with stronger support services for survivors. A National Steering Committee monitors compliance by ministries and agencies.

Gaps: Limited institutional capacity and staffing constrain enforcement.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

Sexual Offences Act, 2012, as amended by the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019

Provides the framework for rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation and offences against children, and the 2019 amendment updated the definitions of offences. Sexual Offences Model Courts were set up to speed up trials.

Gaps: Survivors still face implementation challenges in gaining access to justice.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019, sections 3 and 37; Employment Act, 2023

The World Bank records legislation on sexual harassment in employment based on these provisions.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

Cyber Security and Crime Act

Sierra Leone's law on cybercrime and cyber security.

Gaps: Amnesty International reported its use in April 2023 to arrest a person who published a video criticising the government.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ecoi.net

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

No specific law prohibiting female genital mutilation

Sierra Leone has no legal prohibition of FGM. Agreements with Soweis (traditional practitioners) and chiefs have been used instead.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee called for an explicit legal prohibition of FGM.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: ecoi.net

Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2024

Prohibits marriage of any person under 18, regardless of parental consent, with minimum prison terms of 15 years for violations.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: law.cornell.edu

Child Rights Act, 2007

Set the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both sexes.

Gaps: It conflicted with the Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, which allowed child marriage with parental consent, and a revised Child Rights Bill was pending.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: hrw.org

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Abortion law dating from 1861 (life-saving exception only); Safe Motherhood bill pending

Abortion is banned unless the woman's life is at risk. In July 2022 the President announced support for a bill allowing abortion after rape or incest and where the pregnancy endangers the woman's health or life.

Gaps: A liberalising bill passed by Parliament in 2015 was not signed into law.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: reproductiverights.org

TRAFFICKING

Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act, 2022

Establishes a national task force against trafficking and allocates funding. It also creates a trust fund for victims.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: law.cornell.edu

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

Legal Aid Act, 2012

Provides for free legal aid, including for women who are victims of sexual violence.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee noted in 2014 that resources for its implementation were insufficient.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: ecoi.net

Development Cooperation Framework (NGO Policy), 2018, revised in October 2023

NGOs are regulated by policy, not by an Act. A Human Rights Defenders Bill (2017 draft) was still being prepared for Cabinet in April 2026.

Gaps: No law protects human rights defenders.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: icnl.org

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act, 2022

Requires that 30 per cent of seats in public office be held by women. By July 2023 the number of women in Parliament had doubled to 41.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ecoi.net

Public Elections Act, 2022, section 58(2)

Requires that one in every three candidates nominated by a party be a woman.

Gaps: The national report recommends clearer placement of women on candidate lists.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

Chieftaincy Act, section 8(1)(b)

Allows women to be excluded as candidates for paramount chieftaincy where tradition bars them.

Gaps: The CEDAW Committee urged its repeal in 2014.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: ecoi.net

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Basic and Senior Secondary Education Act, 2023

Provides 13 years of free schooling, including one compulsory pre-primary year. It states that pregnant girls and parent learners shall be allowed to access school. They shall also be allowed to stay in and complete school.

Gaps: Families still pay unofficial fees and exam costs.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: hrw.org

Employment Act, 2023

Extends maternity leave to 14 weeks on full pay and bans pregnancy testing of job applicants. It requires equal pay for equal work and also addresses violence and harassment at work.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: unwomen.org

National Social Security and Insurance Trust Act

The World Bank records equal retirement ages for women and men under articles 39 and 40.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: wbl.worldbank.org

WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

The Persons with Disability Act, 2011 (Act No. 3 of 2011)

General law on the rights of persons with disabilities.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: refworld.org

Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: harmful practices, vulnerable groups. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Sierra Leone in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

COUNTRY PROFILE 16 OF 16 · WEST AFRICA

Togo

KEY INDICATORS

21.6% (24 of 111)
Women in National Assembly (2026)

SCORECARD POSITION (SEVEN QUESTIONS)

Maputo ratified	Law on violence	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned	Girls: 18, no exception	Abortion after rape	Quota or parity law
Yes	**Not recorded**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Not recorded**

LEGAL SYSTEM AND CONSTITUTION

Capital	Lomé



Figure 47. RFLD network activity. Women leaders from the region use the laws described in this profile in their advocacy. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

Table 36. Togo: status of key regional and international treaties

Treaty	Status	Reservations or notes
Maputo Protocol	signed 30/12/2003; ratified 12/10/2005; deposited 26/10/2005	
CEDAW	accession 26/09/1983	
CEDAW Optional Protocol	not a party	
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	signed 27/02/1992; ratified 05/05/1998; deposited 18/05/1998	
ICCPR	accession 24/05/1984	
Kampala Convention	signed 24/12/2009; ratified 08/07/2011; deposited 09/08/2011	
AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo)	signed 02/04/2019; ratified 30/09/2021; deposited 19/10/2021	
ILO C190 Violence and Harassment Convention	not ratified	

National laws by theme

LAND, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

> Loi n° 2018-005 du 14 juin 2018 portant Code foncier et domanial
>
> Guarantees women equal access to land ownership (articles 8, 13, 14 and 483).
>
> Source cited in the RFLD profile: togoactualite.com

FAMILY AND PERSONAL STATUS

> Loi n° 2012-014 du 6 juillet 2012 portant Code des personnes et de la famille, modifiée par la loi n° 2014-019 du 17 novembre 2014
>
> Makes monogamy the rule and allows polygamy only as an option chosen by the spouses (article 42).

Gaps: The code imposes a 300-day waiting period before a woman can remarry, which the government said in 2021 was under review.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: ohchr.org

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL OFFENCES

Loi n° 2015-010 du 24 novembre 2015 portant nouveau Code pénal
Criminalises rape, and since 2015 marital rape has been an offence carrying the same penalties as rape.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: ohchr.org

Loi n° 2007-005 du 10 janvier 2007 sur la santé de la reproduction, article 11
Guarantees every person protection against sexual harassment as part of the right to freedom and safety in reproductive health. It also guarantees protection against rape and forced marriage.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: scorecard.prb.org

Loi n° 2018-026 du 7 décembre 2018 sur la cybersécurité et la lutte contre la cybercriminalité
Sets the national framework for cybersecurity and defines cybercrime offences, under the authority of the security ministry working with the digital economy ministry.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: labase-lextenso.fr

HARMFUL PRACTICES: FGM AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Loi n° 2015-010 du 24 novembre 2015 portant nouveau Code pénal, articles 217 à 222
Punishes female genital mutilation. The offence was first created by Loi n° 98-016 of 17 November 1998, whose provisions were taken into the 2015 Penal Code.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: upr-info.org

Loi n° 2007-017 du 6 juillet 2007 portant Code de l'enfant, article 267
Prohibits child marriage and sets the age of marriage at 18.
Gaps: Civil society reports that other provisions on the marriage of minors are confusing.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: upr-info.org

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Loi n° 2007-005 du 10 janvier 2007 sur la santé de la reproduction, article 42
Allows termination of pregnancy where continuing it endangers the woman's life and health, or at her request where the pregnancy results from rape or incest. A serious condition of the fetus is a further ground.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: scorecard.prb.org

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DEFENDERS

Loi du 24 mai 2013 relative à l'aide juridictionnelle
Establishes the legal aid scheme (aide juridictionnelle) for people seeking access to the courts.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: togoactualite.com

Loi n° 2011-010 du 16 mai 2011 fixant les conditions d'exercice de la liberté de réunion et de manifestation pacifiques publiques, modifiée en 2019
Regulates public meetings and peaceful demonstrations.
Gaps: The government acknowledged before the UN Human Rights Committee in 2021 that restrictions added in 2019 were not fully in line with the Covenant.
Source cited in the RFLD profile: ohchr.org

Associations regime based on the French law of 1 July 1901
Associations are registered under a regime based on the French 1901 law and the Constitution, and more than 15,000 associations were registered in 2021.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: ohchr.org

GIRLS' EDUCATION, WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Loi n° 2021-012 du 18 juin 2021 portant Code du travail

Togo's current Labour Code, adopted in June 2021, governs employment relations.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: nyulawglobal.org

Loi n° 2011-006 du 21 février 2011 portant Code de sécurité sociale

Sets the social security framework for workers.

Source cited in the RFLD profile: nyulawglobal.org

Loi n° 2021-022 du 18 octobre 2021 instituant l'assurance maladie universelle

Creates universal health insurance (AMU).

Source cited in the RFLD profile: nyulawglobal.org

WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Loi n° 2004-005 relative à la protection sociale des personnes handicapées

Defines persons with disabilities and provides for their social protection, including a right to education (article 8).

Source cited in the RFLD profile: upr-info.org

Being verified. RFLD is checking the laws on the following topics against official texts and will add them to this page: gender-based and domestic violence, harmful practices, inheritance and succession, girls' education, political participation and quotas, trafficking. Corrections and documents are welcome at programs@rflgd.org.

Source: RFLD legal profile of Togo in (RFLD, 2026m), verified as of October 2026. The profile cites the official text or a secondary source for each entry; those sources are listed under each law.

Key indicators across the sixteen countries

Table 37. Key indicators recorded in the sixteen country profiles

Country	Women in parliament or transitional body	Women 20 to 24 married before 18	FGM prevalence	Girls' minimum age of marriage	World Bank WBL legal frameworks score
Benin	25.7% (28 of 109)	n/a	n/a	18	67.60
Burkina Faso	19.0%	n/a	n/a	Child marriage punished (Penal Code)	67.40
Cabo Verde	47.2% (34 of 72)	n/a	n/a	18, minors with parental consent	75.03
Côte d'Ivoire	14.9% (38 of 255)	n/a	n/a	18 (Law 2019-570)	78.25
The Gambia	8.6% (5 of 58)	n/a	n/a	18, no exception	57.50
Ghana	14.5% (40 of 276)	16.1%	n/a	18, no exception	66.72
Guinea	40.8% (60 of 147)	47% (17% before 15)	95%	18, presidential exceptions	61.88
Guinea-Bissau	No data (2026)	26% (8% before 15)	n/a	18 (2010); 16 with consent	48.75

Country	Women in parliament or transitional body	Women 20 to 24 married before 18	FGM prevalence	Girls' minimum age of marriage	World Bank WBL legal frameworks score
Liberia	11.0% (8 of 73)	25%	n/a	18; 16 with consent	58.95
Mali	30.1%	49% (14% before 15)	n/a	16	50.33
Mauritania	23.3%	37% (16% before 15)	64%	18	35.0 / 100
Niger	19.6% (38 of 194)	76%	n/a	15	n/a
Nigeria	4.2% (15 of 356)	n/a	n/a	18 (Child's Rights Act, not adopted in all states)	n/a
Senegal	41.2% (68 of 165)	n/a	n/a	16	n/a
Sierra Leone	28.2% (42 of 149)	n/a	n/a	18, no exception (2024)	n/a
Togo	21.6% (24 of 111)	n/a	n/a	18 (2007)	n/a

Source: RFLD legal profiles (RFLD, 2026m); marriage age from (RFLD, 2026l). n/a: not recorded in the profile.

Reading across the profiles

Three patterns stand out when the sixteen profiles are read together. First, the countries that reformed their family codes in the past fifteen years, such as Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Cabo Verde, score highest on the World Bank legal frameworks index and answer "Yes" to most scorecard questions. Second, the countries with the highest rates of child marriage and FGM, Niger, Mali and Guinea, are also those without a dedicated law on violence against women, which suggests that the absence of law and the persistence of harmful practices reinforce each other. Third, the countries governed by transitional authorities have suspended the elected bodies through which most reforms would pass, so the immediate route to change runs through ministries, courts and regional mechanisms rather than parliaments.

The profiles also show how much is still unknown. Several countries have no recent survey data on child marriage or FGM, few publish data on prosecutions for violence against women, and almost none publish land administration data by sex. Filling these gaps is part of the monitoring framework in Chapter 13.



Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

CHAPTER 12

12

Recommendations

Specific, sequenced and anchored in texts that governments have already accepted.

KEY MESSAGES

- Most recommendations ask States to apply texts they have already ratified.
- Priority reforms are named country by country.
- Funders are asked to reach women-led organisations directly.

Recommendations

Most of what follows asks governments to apply texts they have already ratified. The recommendations are grouped by actor, then by country, and each one names the standard it rests on.

12.1 To West African States

Land, property and inheritance

1. Apply the land equality already written into land codes and civil codes, and instruct land administrations to register land acquired during marriage in the names of both spouses by default, including in customary marriages. *Standard: Maputo Protocol, art. 19; CEDAW GR 34.*
2. Amend civil and family codes so that unpaid domestic and farm work counts in the division of marital property, as in Cabo Verde and Guinea-Bissau. *Standard: Maputo Protocol, art. 7(d).*
3. Give daughters and surviving spouses equal inheritance rights in every statutory regime, and guarantee the right to opt for the statutory regime where several apply. Priority countries: Guinea (Civil Code art. 695), Niger, The Gambia (Women's Act s. 45). *Standard: Maputo Protocol, art. 21.*
4. Require at least one third women, including Indigenous women where relevant, on national, district and customary land commissions, following Burkina Faso's 2009 law and Sierra Leone's 2022 Act. *Standard: Maputo Protocol, art. 9 and 19.*
5. Fund legal aid and mobile land clinics for women contesting dispossession, and make land procedures free or low-cost for women with low incomes.
6. Publish land administration data by sex every year.

Climate and environment

1. Include a measurable target for women's secure tenure in national adaptation plans, nationally determined contributions and food-security strategies. *Standard: Maputo Protocol, art. 18 and 19.*
2. Set and report on the share of adaptation and loss and damage finance that reaches women-led organisations directly.
3. Ensure that environmental and social impact assessments for land acquisitions consult women farmers separately and that compensation reaches the women who farm the land. *Standard: UNDRIP, art. 26 and 32; CEDAW GR 39.*
4. Recognise Indigenous women's knowledge of seeds, soils and water in agricultural and environmental policy, and protect farmer-managed seed systems.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

1. Bring abortion law into line with Article 14(2)(c) of the Maputo Protocol. Priority countries: Senegal, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Publish clinical and administrative guidelines that make the legal grounds usable. *Standard: Maputo Protocol, art. 14; ACHPR General Comment No. 2.*

2. Guarantee post-rape care, including emergency contraception and post-exposure prophylaxis, in every health district.
3. Move towards the Abuja target of 15 per cent of national budgets for health, and protect funding for family planning.

Gender-based violence

1. Adopt a dedicated law on violence against women that names marital rape, with protection orders, specialised units, shelters and a budget. Priority countries: Guinea, Mali, Niger. *Standard: Maputo Protocol, art. 4.*
2. Set 18 as the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys without exception. Priority countries: Mali, Niger and Senegal; Guinea to remove the presidential exception; Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau and Liberia to remove exceptions. *Standard: Maputo Protocol, art. 6.*
3. Adopt a statute prohibiting FGM, with funding for prevention and enforcement. Priority countries: Mali, Liberia, Sierra Leone; Cabo Verde to create a specific offence. *Standard: Maputo Protocol, art. 5.*
4. Criminalise sexual harassment and provide civil remedies, and ratify ILO Convention 190.
5. Sign and ratify the AU Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls.
6. Fund free medical certificates, legal aid and specialised police and court units, and publish annual data on reported cases, prosecutions and convictions.

Justice, civic space and representation

1. Adopt laws protecting human rights defenders that name the risks faced by women defenders, and stop using cybercrime and associations laws against activists.
2. Apply parity and quota laws, including in appointed transitional bodies, and extend them to local councils and land bodies.
3. Ratify the Optional Protocol to CEDAW and accept the competence of the African Court to receive individual petitions.

12.2 To ECOWAS, the Alliance of Sahel States and the African Union

- Make women's secure land tenure a core indicator of regional agricultural, adaptation and food-security plans, and report on it.
- Use the 2015 Supplementary Act on equality of rights to review national land and family laws, and publish a regional report on its application.
- Encourage ratification of the AU Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls, and support its domestication.
- Keep regional cooperation on trafficking, FGM and child marriage working across the ECOWAS and AES boundary, so that the same protection holds on both sides of every border.
- The African Commission: continue to examine land and inheritance in State reporting under Articles 19 and 21 of the Maputo Protocol, and consider a general comment on women's land rights.

12.3 To traditional and religious leaders

- Recognise widows' right to remain on the land they farm and in the matrimonial home, and support daughters' claims to family land.
- Open customary land councils to women, including young women, and record allocations in writing.
- Refer cases of dispossession accompanied by violence to the authorities and to services for survivors, rather than settling them within the family.
- Support community-led abandonment of FGM and child marriage, which works best when leaders speak first.

12.4 To funders and development partners

- Channel a share of climate, land and food-security finance directly to women-led organisations in Francophone West Africa, which receives less than 3 per cent of global funding for women's rights organisations according to AWID tracking cited by RFLD (RFLD, 2026j).
- Prefer flexible, multi-year and core grants; finance protection, digital security and relocation for women defenders.
- Fund legal literacy in local languages, paralegals and land clinics, and the collection of data by sex.
- Accept reporting arrangements that do not expose partners, in line with the recommendations of the policy brief "Defending without being exposed".

12.5 To women's organisations and the RFLD network

- Use the scorecard and country profiles in alternative reports to the African Commission and in CEDAW and UPR submissions.
- Document cases of dispossession linked to violence, with consent and without identifying survivors, to build the evidence base.
- Translate key provisions of land, family and violence laws into local languages and share them through community radio.
- Mentor young women leaders and bring them into land and climate bodies.

12.6 Country-specific priorities

Table 38. Priority legal reforms by country

Country	Land and inheritance	SRHR	Gender-based violence
Benin	Apply equality against customary practice in inheritance	Implement the 2021 law and its guidelines	Fund legal aid under the 2024 decree
Burkina Faso	Apply the 2025 family code and women's seats on rural land commissions	Maintain the rape and incest ground	Name marital rape explicitly
Cabo Verde	Maintain equality	Maintain	Create a specific FGM offence; remove marriage exceptions

Country	Land and inheritance	SRHR	Gender-based violence
Côte d'Ivoire	Speed up conversion of rural land certificates for women	Add incest and health grounds	Name marital rape explicitly
The Gambia	Replace "equitable" with equal access; equal inheritance for daughters	Clarify legal grounds	Remove the spousal exclusion in the Sexual Offences Act; adopt the cybercrime bill with safeguards
Ghana	Adopt the pending intestate succession and spousal property reforms	Clarify legal grounds	Ratify ILO C190; name marital rape explicitly
Guinea	Equal rights for surviving spouses; value unpaid contributions	Clarify legal grounds	Dedicated VAW law naming marital rape; remove marriage exception; criminalise harassment
Guinea-Bissau	Equal property rights for married women	Clarify legal grounds	Remove marriage at 16 with consent
Liberia	Implement the Land Rights Act 2018 in customary areas	Clarify legal grounds	Statute banning FGM; criminalise marital rape; remove marriage at 16
Mali	Remove customary succession rules from the Land Code; non-discrimination in the 2017 law	Clarify legal grounds	Dedicated VAW law; FGM statute; marriage age 18
Mauritania	Equal inheritance shares	See profile	See profile
Niger	Equal property and inheritance rights for married women and daughters	Ratify the Maputo Protocol; add rape and incest grounds	Dedicated VAW law; adopt the Penal Code revision; marriage age 18
Nigeria	Address patrilineal practice under the Land Use Act	Bring the law into line with Article 14	VAPP Act and Child's Rights Act in every state; quota law
Senegal	Equal shares in Muslim successions where the parties choose	Allow abortion after rape, incest and for health	Comprehensive VAW law; marriage age 18
Sierra Leone	Enforce the 2022 Customary Land Rights Act	Replace the 1861 law in line with Article 14	Statute banning FGM
Togo	Apply the 2018 land code equality provisions	Maintain	Publish data on enforcement



Figure 48. Participants at the Dakar consultation on the protection of women human rights defenders, June 2026. Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

Sources: (RFLD, 2026l; RFLD, 2026m), with RFLD analysis.



Photo: RFLD, taken with the consent of participants.

CHAPTER 13

13

Roadmap 2027 and monitoring framework

How RFLD and its members will track progress from Conakry to the next Maputo Barometer.

KEY MESSAGES

- Milestones run from the 16 Days of Activism to the Maputo Barometer on 11 July 2027.
- Indicators track legal change, institutional practice and network strength.
- Baselines come from this report.

Roadmap 2027 and monitoring framework

Recommendations only matter if someone checks whether they are applied. This chapter sets out how RFLD and its members will follow the Conakry commitments and the wider agenda of this report through 2027.

13.1 Milestones

Table 39. Key dates for advocacy, November 2026 to July 2027

Date	Moment	Use of this report
24 to 26 November 2026	Conakry seminar on Indigenous women's land rights and feminist leadership	Background document; barrier map; recommendations
25 November to 10 December 2026	16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence	Country asks on violence laws, FGM and child marriage
1 December 2026	GivingTuesday	Support for women-led organisations
Early 2027	Publication of the Conakry recommendations and 2027 roadmap	Commitments by institutions recorded
January 2027	Update of RFLD's register of laws and policies	New laws recorded
March 2027	71st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW71), New York	Regional findings on land, climate and violence
2027 sessions	Ordinary sessions of the African Commission	Alternative reports; statements on Articles 19 and 21
All year	CEDAW and UPR reviews of West African States	Country profiles in shadow reports
11 July 2027	Anniversary of the Maputo Protocol; update of the Maputo Barometer and scorecard	Progress against the indicators below

Source: (RFLD, 2026l; RFLD, 2026f).

13.2 Monitoring framework

The indicators below combine legal change, institutional practice and the strength of the network. Baselines come from this report. RFLD will report against them in the 2027 Maputo Barometer.

Table 40. Monitoring framework, 2027

Indicator	Baseline (October 2026)	Target (July 2027)	Source of verification
Legal change			
Countries with a dedicated law on violence against women	9 of 15 yes, 2 partly (Nigeria, Senegal), Togo not recorded; Guinea, Mali and Niger have none	At least one of the three has a bill tabled	Official journals; RFLD profiles
Countries where marital rape is explicitly a crime	3 of 15	A bill tabled in at least one more country	RFLD scorecard
Countries with girls' marriage age of 18 without exception	6 of 15 (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Togo); Mali, Niger and Senegal below 18	Reform tabled in one of the three	RFLD scorecard

Indicator	Baseline (October 2026)	Target (July 2027)	Source of verification
Countries with a statute banning FGM	10 of 15, plus Nigeria partly	Advocacy plan in Mali, Liberia, Sierra Leone	RFLD scorecard
Maputo Protocol ratification	14 of 15 (Niger signed only)	Ratification process restarted in Niger	AU status list
Signatures of the AU Convention on Ending VAWG	3 of 16 signed, none ratified	At least three more signatures	AU status list
Land and climate practice			
Institutions that make a public commitment in Conakry	0	Commitments recorded and published	Seminar report
Commitments with a follow-up action documented	0	At least half	RFLD follow-up notes
Countries with sex-disaggregated land data published	Not systematically available	Request filed in each seminar country	Land administrations
National climate plans with a women's tenure target	None recorded	Submission made to ministries in two countries	RFLD advocacy records
Network strength			
Solidarity network of Indigenous women leaders with coordinators	Not yet formed	Formed, with coordinators named and a work plan	Conakry roadmap
Young women in mentoring pairs	0	Mentoring pairs active in each participating country	Network records
Participants' knowledge of land, inheritance and parity law	Entry test	Measurable gain at exit test	Seminar tests
Alternative reports citing this report	0	At least two	ACHPR, CEDAW, UPR submissions

Baselines from (RFLD, 2026l; RFLD, 2026m; RFLD, 2026f). The FGM baseline counts countries the scorecard marks "Yes"; Nigeria is marked "Partly" because the VAPP Act applies only where domesticated, and Cabo Verde, Liberia, Mali and Sierra Leone have no specific statute.

13.3 Roles

- **RFLD regional programmes team:** publishes the Conakry outcomes, follows institutional commitments and updates the scorecard.
- **RFLD country representatives and focal points:** track legislation and meet ministries and parliamentarians.
- **Network coordinators elected in Conakry:** run the solidarity network and the mentoring scheme.
- **Member organisations:** document cases, send texts and corrections, and use the evidence in national advocacy.

Annexes

Annex A. The West Africa legal scorecard 2026 in full

The scorecard asks the same seven questions of the fifteen countries. A country scores only where an adopted and published legal text exists. Texts were checked against official journals and national legal portals, documents shared by RFLD members and RFLD's 2023 report on the region's legislative framework (RFLD, 2026l; RFLD, 2023).

Table 41. Country detail behind the scorecard: laws, ages, grounds and representation

Country	Maputo ratified	Law on violence against women	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned by law	Minimum marriage age, girls	Legal grounds for abortion	Quota or parity law	Women in parliament
Benin	2005	Yes (Law 2011-26)	Yes	Yes (2003)	18	On request to 12 weeks (2021)	24 reserved seats (2019)	25.7%
Burkina Faso	2006	Yes (Law 061-2015)	Not specified	Yes (Penal Code 2018)	Child marriage punished (Penal Code)	Life, health, fetal; rape or incest to 14 weeks	30% of candidates	19.0% (appointed)
Cabo Verde	2005	Yes (Law 84/VII/2011)	Yes	No specific law	18, minors with parental consent	On request to 12 weeks (1986)	40% of candidates (2019)	47.2%
Côte d'Ivoire	2011	Yes (Law 2021-894)	Not explicit	Yes (1998)	18 (Law 2019-570)	Life; rape	30% of candidates (2019)	14.9%
The Gambia	2005	Yes (2013)	No (spouses excluded)	Yes (2015)	18, no exception	Not recorded	None	8.6%
Ghana	2007	Yes (2007)	Not specified	Yes (2007)	18, no exception	Not recorded	Affirmative Action Act 2024 (30% towards 50%)	14.5%
Guinea	2012	No dedicated law	No	Yes (Penal Code 2016)	18, presidential exceptions	Not recorded	Seat allocation (Constitution 2025)	40.8%
Guinea-Bissau	2008	Yes (Law 6/2014)	Not specified	Yes (Law 14/2011)	18 (2010); 16 with consent	Not recorded	36% of candidates (2018)	No data (transition)
Liberia	2007	Yes (2019)	No	No statute (2018 order lapsed)	18; 16 with consent	Not recorded	None	11.0%
Mali	2005	No dedicated law	No specific law	No specific law	16	Not recorded	30% (Law 2015-052), suspended in transition	30.1% (appointed)

Country	Maputo ratified	Law on violence against women	Marital rape a crime	FGM banned by law	Minimum marriage age, girls	Legal grounds for abortion	Quota or parity law	Women in parliament
Niger	Not ratified	No dedicated law	No (draft Penal Code pending)	Yes (2003)	15	Life, health, fetal	25% of elected seats; bodies dissolved	19.6% (appointed)
Nigeria	2004	VAPP Act 2015 (FCT and adopting states)	Not specified	VAPP Act, where domesticated	18 (Child's Rights Act, not adopted in all states)	Life only	None (bills rejected 2022)	4.2%
Senegal	2004	Penal Code offence only (1999)	Not specified	Yes (1999)	16	No exception	Parity on lists (2010)	41.2%
Sierra Leone	2015	Yes (2007)	Not specified	No law	18, no exception (2024)	Life only (1861 law)	30% (2022 Act)	28.2%
Togo	2005	See profile	Yes (2015)	Yes (1998, 2015)	18 (2007)	Life, health, rape, incest, fetal	See profile	21.6%

Source: (RFLD, 2026l). Situation as of October 2026. Mauritania is outside the scorecard; see its profile in Part IV.

Definitions of the seven questions

Table 42. Definitions used for the seven scorecard questions

Question	"Yes" means
Maputo ratified	The State has deposited its instrument of ratification of the Maputo Protocol with the African Union Commission.
Law on violence	A dedicated law on violence against women or domestic violence is in force nationally. A Penal Code offence alone counts as "Partly".
Marital rape a crime	The law explicitly names rape within marriage as an offence, or explicitly defines rape without a spousal exception.
FGM banned	A statute prohibits FGM. An executive order or a law applying in only part of the country counts as "No" or "Partly".
Girls: 18, no exception	The minimum age of marriage for girls is 18 and no judicial, administrative or parental exception applies.
Abortion after rape	The law allows abortion when the pregnancy results from rape.
Quota or parity law	A law or constitutional provision sets a minimum share of women among candidates or seats.

Annex B. Reforms pending and in progress

Table 43. Reforms pending in the region and reforms RFLD is pursuing

Country or body	Reform	Status (October 2026)
Mali	Draft law on gender-based violence; no specific FGM law	Under discussion for years

Country or body	Reform	Status (October 2026)
Niger	Revision of the Penal Code on rape, FGM, sexual harassment and wahaya	Pending since 2024
Niger	Ratification of the Maputo Protocol (advocacy missions in May 2022 and March 2024; Protocol translated into Hausa and Zarma)	Signed 2004, not ratified
Nigeria	Adoption of the VAPP Act 2015 and the Child's Rights Act by every state	Partial
The Gambia	Cyber Crime Bill, 2023	Before the National Assembly in 2025
Ghana	Reform of intestate succession and spousal property	Bills pending for years
Benin	Second-generation National Action Plan on Resolution 1325	Under discussion
African Union	Regional framework against technology-facilitated gender-based violence	Under discussion
Togo, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Cabo Verde	New law on sexual violence	None recorded since 2020; advocacy continues

Source: (RFLD, 2026g; RFLD, 2026m).

Annex C. Key provisions of the instruments used in Conakry

The summaries below paraphrase the provisions. Readers should consult the official texts (African Union, 2003; United Nations, 2007; CEDAW Committee, 2016; CEDAW Committee, 2022).

Maputo Protocol (2003)

Article 2	States combat all forms of discrimination against women through legislative, institutional and other measures, and modify harmful social and cultural patterns.
Article 4	Right to life, integrity and security of the person; States enact and enforce laws prohibiting all forms of violence against women, including unwanted or forced sex in private or public.
Article 5	Elimination of harmful practices, including the prohibition of all forms of FGM, with support for survivors.
Article 6	Marriage requires free and full consent; the minimum age of marriage for women is 18.
Article 7	Equal rights in separation, divorce and annulment, including equitable sharing of joint property deriving from the marriage.
Article 9	Right to participate in political and decision-making processes, through affirmative action and equal representation.
Article 14	Right to health, including sexual and reproductive health; authorisation of medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest and where the pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health or life of the mother or the life of the foetus.
Article 18	Right to a healthy and sustainable environment; greater participation of women in environmental planning and management.
Article 19	Right to sustainable development; women's access to and control over productive resources such as land, and guarantee of their right to property.
Article 21	A widow's right to an equitable share of her husband's property and to continue to live in the matrimonial house; women and men inherit their parents' properties in equitable shares.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)

Article 22	Particular attention to the rights and special needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities; protection of Indigenous women and children against all forms of violence and discrimination.
Article 26	Right to the lands, territories and resources traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired, and legal recognition and protection of those lands.
Article 29	Right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of lands and resources.
Article 32	Free and informed consent before the approval of projects affecting Indigenous lands and resources.
Article 44	All rights in the Declaration are equally guaranteed to Indigenous women and men.

CEDAW Committee general recommendations

GR 34 (2016)	On the rights of rural women: equal rights to land and natural resources regardless of marital status, protection against discriminatory customary systems, participation in rural development and climate and disaster policies.
GR 39 (2022)	On the rights of Indigenous women and girls: individual and collective rights to lands, territories and resources, protection against gender-based violence, participation in decisions and recognition of traditional knowledge.

Annex D. Glossary

Customary tenure	Rights to land held and transferred according to the rules of a community rather than statute.
Dedicated law on violence	A law specifically on violence against women or domestic violence, as distinct from general Penal Code offences.
Domestication	Adoption of a treaty or federal law into national or state law so that it applies directly.
DSSR / SRHR	Droits en santé sexuelle et reproductive; sexual and reproductive health and rights.
FGM	Female genital mutilation: all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs, for non-medical reasons.
Joint titling	Registration of land in the names of both spouses.
Legal pluralism	The coexistence of statutory, customary and religious legal systems in the same territory.
Marital rape	Non-consensual sex within marriage.
Property grabbing	The taking of a widow's or daughter's land, house or goods by relatives, often after a death.
Tenure security	The certainty that a person's rights to land will be recognised and protected against eviction.
Transition	A period of government by authorities that took power outside constitutional rules, pending a return to elected institutions.
Wahaya	A practice in parts of Niger in which a girl or woman is acquired as a so-called fifth wife, amounting to slavery and sexual exploitation.

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RFLD data tools used in this report

All tools are free and bilingual, part of the DƆNÙESÈ Data Center at rflgd.org/rfld-countries-data-center/.

Women's rights laws in Africa (55 countries)	Legal profiles of every AU member state; the basis of Part IV	rflgd.org/womens-rights-laws/
West Africa Legal Scorecard 2026	Seven questions, fifteen countries	rflgd.org/west-africa-legal-scorecard-2026/
West Africa Legislative Platform	Legislation and bills across the region	rflgd.org/west-africa-legislative-platform/
Laws and policies we helped change	Register of reforms since 2020	rflgd.org/laws-and-policies-we-helped-change/
Country fact sheets	One printable page per country	rflgd.org/country-fact-sheets/
Maputo Protocol Hub	Ratification, reservations and eight African languages	rflgd.org/maputo-protocol/
Climate Action Platform	Women, land and climate finance	rflgd.org/rfld-climate-action/
Maternal Health Data	West and Central Africa maternal and child mortality	rflgd.org/maternal/
Decisions and enforcement	African court rulings and compliance	rflgd.org/decisions-and-enforcement/

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