

Reykjavik Index for Leadership 2025-2026 - Nigeria

Leadership Readiness Brief

Nine in ten Nigerians say women can lead corporate institutions. Society is ready but systems are yet to catch up

Nigerians overwhelmingly believe women are capable leaders. Comfort levels are high across sectors, according to the 2025-2026 Reykjavik Index for Leadership, Nigeria's overall index score improved to 59, up from 57 in the previous year. The index found:

- 89% of Nigerians were comfortable with women as CEOs of major companies.
- 77% of Nigerians were comfortable with women as political leaders
- 3-point improvement in men’s index from 53 to 56, driven by older men believing in women’s leadership

Institutional Lags Persist

Social acceptance is no longer the constraint. And while public opinion has crossed the threshold of readiness for women’s leadership contributions, institutions are lagging. According to the index, 55% believed gender equality actually exists in the workplace. The 34-point gap between leadership acceptance (nearly nine in ten) and belief in workplace equality (just over half) signals a failure of delivery, not demand. Nigerians are not waiting to be convinced—women are waiting for institutions to catch up.

Sector	Status	Notes
Banking, finance, education, pharmaceuticals	Champions	Demonstrates profitable, scalable examples of women’s leadership
Childcare, fashion, engineering	Laggards	Highlight systemic undervaluation of work traditionally led by women

Aerospace (+9), Automotive (+6)	Breakthroughs	Shows opportunity in male-dominated sectors; shifts in mindset are possible
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Nigeria's index score improved from 57 to 59, yet belief in workplace equality fell by 7 points. This divergence suggests that progress is being captured at the top – policy, visibility, elite leadership – while everyday economic conditions for women are deteriorating.

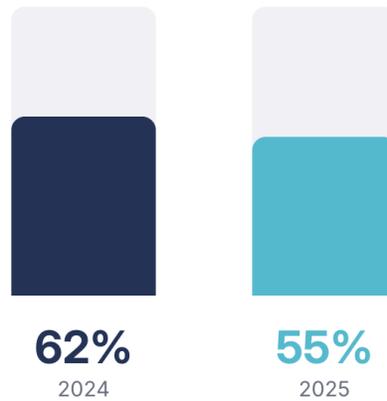
Emerging Insights

Workplace Equality Perception is in Decline

In 2024, 62% of Nigerians believed gender equality had been achieved at work. By 2025, only 55% believed it. This is the largest decline in any measured indicator. Two explanations are possible:

- Conditions worsened - the economic crisis hit women harder, discriminatory layoffs increased, cuts to services women depend on accelerated, or high-profile scandals exposed patterns that were always there.
- Or awareness grew - more women are speaking publicly about workplace barriers, media coverage increased, and previously tolerated behavior became newly recognizable as discrimination.

Workplace Equality Perception in Decline



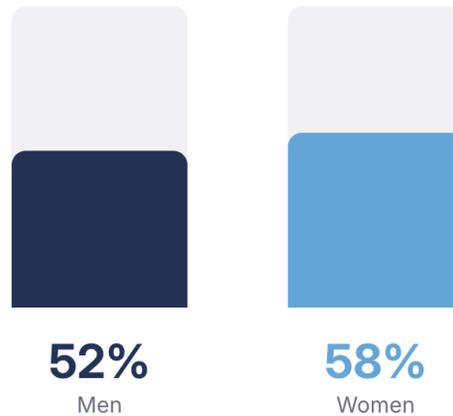
7-point drop

Largest decline in any measured indicator

Men Are More Pessimistic Than Women

In most countries, women report lower levels of workplace equality because they experience discrimination directly. Men, benefiting from structural advantage, tend to report higher equality. Nigeria reverses this pattern entirely: 52% of Nigerian men believe workplace equality has been achieved, compared to 58% of women. Men's pessimism may reflect rising visibility of inequality rather than lived exposure, while women's relatively higher optimism may reflect adaptation to constrained expectations rather than improved conditions.

Who Believes Workplace Equality Exists? (2025)



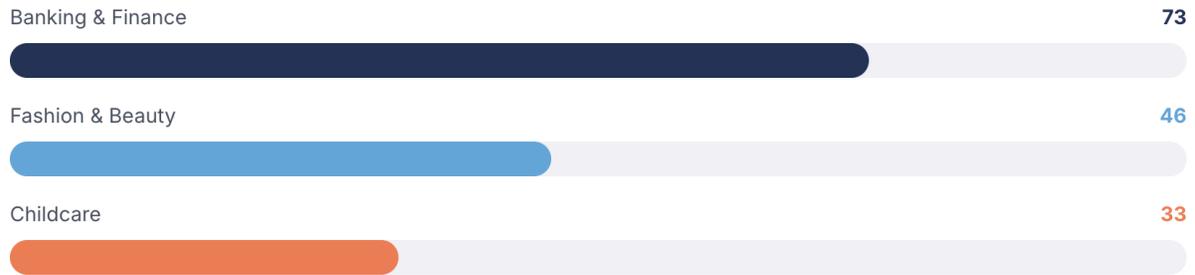
Nigeria reverses the global pattern: men report lower equality than women

Women Dominated Sectors Rank Low on Gender Equity

Leadership pathways favor male-dominated sectors, leaving women's existing leadership under-recognized. Of the 23 sectors measured by the Reykjavik Index:

- Childcare scored lowest at 33 points. This placed it 13 points below the next-lowest sector and a full 40 points below Banking & Finance, which topped the rankings at 73.
- Fashion & Beauty also scores in biased stronghold territory at 46, despite Lagos being Africa's fashion capital, and the sector generating \$6.6 billion annually, and being demonstrably woman-led.
- Most interventions focus on getting women into male dominated sectors - STEM programs, engineering scholarships, aerospace initiatives. Comparable attention to elevating care sectors where women already lead at scale remains limited. Leadership readiness requires both pathways, expanding access to new sectors and revaluing work women already perform.

Sector Rankings: Where Women Can Lead (Reykjavik Index)

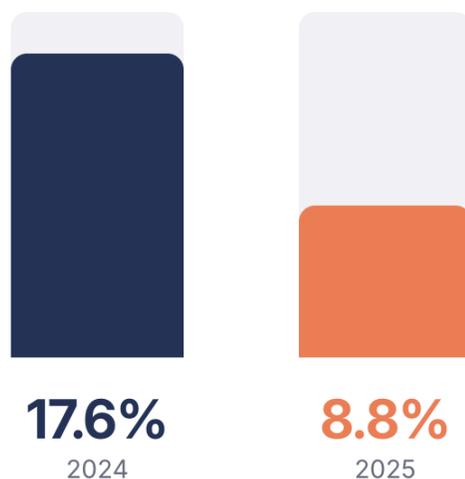


Childcare ranks 40 points below Banking & Finance despite being woman-led

Corporate Progress and Political Regression

Women hold nearly one in three board seats (31.1%) in Nigeria’s largest companies – but fewer than one in twenty seats (4.2%) in parliament. Nigeria is constructing a gender order where women are trusted with profit, but not with power; with markets, but not with the state. The long-term consequence is that women's leadership becomes associated exclusively with profit extraction rather than collective decision-making. Yet, most Nigerians (77%) are comfortable with having a female head of state, a clear vote of confidence on women’s leadership capacity while institutions and systems fail to catch up.

Ministerial Representation Collapse



Cut in half
in just one year

Corporate Progress vs Political Regression



Women can access power in private markets but are excluded from public governance

What Should Happen Next

- **Representation Targets:** 35% female representation across the federal and all subnational executive councils, in line with the gender policy. This should extend to the private sector as well, in executive management and the top 30 companies on Nigeria's stock exchange.

- **Care Economy Integration:** Revalue and formalize care sectors through targeted policy and capital access. Implementing standardized maternity leave (16 weeks minimum) and paternity leave (2 weeks minimum) distributes caregiving responsibility more evenly and signals that care work is not gender-specific.
- **Corporate Transparency:** Require Nigeria's top 100 companies by market capitalization to publish annual gender pay gap reports and promotion data by gender.
- **Media & Advocacy:** Highlight champions, name laggards, and create accountability narratives using Reykjavik Index data.

Bottomline

Nigeria does not lack acceptance of women leaders. It lacks systems capable of converting that acceptance into economic power, institutional authority, and durable leadership pathways. The question is no longer whether Nigerians are ready for women leaders. It's whether Nigerian institutions are fit for a society that already is.