NO ROAD HOME

Christian IDPs displaced by extremist violence in Nigeria

FULL REPORT

1 September 2024

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Pastor Barnabas's story (Image from front cover)

This story from Benue state illustrates the situation faced by many internally displaced Christians across parts of Nigeria.

Pastor Barnabas was attacked in 2019 by Fulani militants. He explains: "I was on the farm with my brother, Everen, and his wife, Friday. We were walking when we heard rapid shooting of guns and other sounds … We didn't know that the militants had surrounded us. [They] came with guns, machetes, [and] sticks." Everen and Friday weren't able to escape their attackers. It has been almost five years, but Pastor Barnabas is still impacted by the trauma of the attack. "I kept running […and] one of [the militants] followed me … He hit me on my hand with a stick and my hand was badly broken." Years later, his hand remains damaged and he cannot afford the medical fees for the necessary operation. "Now, I have lost everything that I had. Everything in my home and village was burnt; I was left with nothing."

He has been living in an informal internally displaced persons (IDP) camp for five years, made up of makeshift tents. His tent is too small to house all of his family and informal camps have limited access to essential support. Most of the Christians in the camp fled because of violence that has targeted their communities. He says: "We are displaced because of violence. The news doesn't care about it, politicians don't talk about it, we are remaining in darkness … being forgotten, being disregarded."

Today, Pastor Barnabas is a minister for thousands of Christian IDPs in the camp. He speaks of the appalling living conditions and the risk of violence. "We don't have good hygiene, water, toilets [or] sanitation. Many people are dying … People only live here because it's worse outside the camps – because of the horrendous persecution that has displaced them."

Pastor Barnabas remains committed to caring for his church members, with the support of local Open Doors partners.

Name changed for security reasons.

1. Key findings

Extremist violence across parts of Nigeria over the last decade has resulted in mass displacement of Christian communities, amongst others. In the northern state of Borno where Islamic militants thrive and target Christians, and in Plateau state, where Fulani militant violence results in uprooted Christian communities, the problem is unrelenting. While the root causes of the violence are complex and Christians and non-Christians alike are impacted, this research illustrates the specific vulnerabilities of displaced Christians. They have been singled out for violence, face harsh living conditions and experience faith-based challenges throughout their displacement journey.

Drivers of displacement: *Targeted violence and a failure to protect Christian communities has resulted in mass internal displacement.*

Though violence has affected both Christians and non-Christians, recorded testimonies indicate that Boko Haram, Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) and militant Fulani groups have deliberately targeted Christians or Christian communities, their livelihood, faith leaders and places of worship.

Nigerian state security personnel regularly failed to respond in a timely or effective manner to violent attacks against Christians. This failure created distrust in the security forces among Christians. Furthermore, widespread impunity by the state for the perpetrators of violence encouraged an environment where more violence and greater displacement can and does take place.

Experiences in displacement: *Inadequate and poorly distributed resources, faith-based discrimination and insufficient understanding of specific displacement experiences increased the vulnerabilities of Christians during displacement.*

The limited resources available to IDPs through the United Nations, national and international actors are concentrated in North-East Nigeria; those displaced in the North-Central region have been largely ignored. Need far outpaces current funding commitments by international governments.

In Borno state, religious identity was a factor in whether Christian IDPs received support during their displacement. Christian IDPs there held the local government and members of the public accountable for unfair treatment and faith-based discrimination, particularly in terms of access to shelter, humanitarian aid, education and employment. Additionally, some efforts to pressure, coerce or force conversion to Islam by the local government and members of public were described.

In Christian-majority Plateau state, religious identity was not identified as a determining factor for support. Rather, the Nigerian government's reductive narrative describing the

crisis as "clashes" and the failure of international agencies to recognize the scale of displacement appears to have greatly inhibited national and international support for thousands of displaced people. The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) official numbers of IDPs in Plateau are nearly 80% lower than those reported by local communities.[1]

Risk of return: *Faith increases the level of risk for displaced Christians who try to return home.*

Christians, particularly in Borno state, reported it is relatively safer for Muslims to return to their homes as they have not been further targeted for their faith by Boko Haram or ISWAP. Christians in Borno also recounted that state officials pushed them to return involuntarily and left them to fend for themselves without adequate preparation, materials or security protection.

Muslims and Christians both faced the threat of abduction, including upon return to their homes. However, militants targeted Christians and demanded a higher ransom for a Christian than a Muslim, with the highest ransom demanded for Christian faith leaders. Where Boko Haram was present, Christians reported an even higher threat level when trying to return home, as the militants often ignored Muslims or had their Muslim neighbors actively inform the militants about Christians in the area. Consequent risks included extra fines, forced conversion or even death.

IDPs from Christian communities in both Borno and Plateau states also reported land grabbing, which included attackers remaining on the land belonging to the displaced. Their attackers, whether Boko Haram, ISWAP or Fulani militants, are still an active threat for displaced Christians and their lands remain destroyed, occupied or unprotected by security forces.

> **For recommendations to address these findings, see .**

This research was initiated as part of a larger Open Doors campaign, Arise Africa, in order to more thoroughly investigate the faith-related violence facing Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa.[2] A summary report of research findings is also available.[3]

See for a list acronyms used throughout the document.

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[1] See for details.
[2] For more on the campaign, see here.
[3] For the summary report, see here.

2. Introduction

"Our churches are shut down. We are still in the situation. Nobody can tell our story better than us. We want the world to know we are still not far from these problems."

IDP FROM GWOZA LGA, BORNO STATE.

Nigeria is among the top 10 of IDP hosting countries across the world.[4] It is also currently sixth on the World Watch List (WWL 2024), a ranking that indicates the presence of acute levels of religious persecution and discrimination for Christians.[5] Recognizing the overlapping nature of these two phenomena, Open Doors, in conjunction with the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), carried out in depth research to explore how religious affiliation shaped the experiences of internally displaced Christians in some of the most affected regions of Nigeria.

Defining Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs): "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State."[6]

A girl in a Christian IDP camp, Benue state

While Nigeria is religiously diverse, this research has concentrated on Christian communities, as Open Doors focuses on Christians facing profound levels of persecution and discrimination across the globe. Christian IDPs in Nigeria are often invisible – and facing a humanitarian crisis that has been underacknowledged and downplayed. Open Doors acknowledges the multifaceted challenges facing all IDPs in Nigeria and encourages further research with other religiously affiliated groups.

Existing evidence paints a complex picture of the causes of the displacement; factors such as poverty, environmental issues, ethnicity and food scarcity also interconnect with ongoing violence and religious extremism. All IDPs in Nigeria face considerable challenges by the very nature of forced displacement. Research is lacking, however, as to whether some challenges are specific to or exacerbated for Christian IDPs because of their faith, particularly for the North-Central region.

This research in Borno and Plateau states makes a fresh contribution by examining displacement through a faith-based lens. It indicates mass displacement driven by deliberate attacks on Christian communities, and State failure to protect them. Christian IDPs have reported faith-based discrimination and neglect in displacement settings, and an increased threat level for Christians who try to return home.

Borno and Plateau states were chosen as two regions with considerable IDP populations, yet distinct dynamics of violence. 292 people were interviewed from January to April 2024, as identified by local partners. Interviewees were primarily IDPs, with some workers from humanitarian agencies also interviewed. Research focused on Gwoza and Ngala Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Borno state, and Bassa and Mangu LGAs in Plateau.

From October 2019 to September 2023, 2.7 times as many Christians were killed as Muslims in violent attacks in Nigeria. The total number of Christians killed in the reporting period was 16,769, while the total number of Muslims killed was 6,235. The total number of African Traditional Religionists (ATR) killed was 154. The religious identity of 7,722 civilians killed remained unknown. Most civilians were killed during community attacks: 25,312 civilians killed during 4,666 incidents, highlighting the disruptive nature of the attacks.[7]

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[4] Norwegian Refugee Council, Global Displacement Overview. 14 June 2023.
[5] Open Doors, WWL 2024 Table of Scores and Ranks, 2024.
[6] OCHA, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. ADM 1.1, PRL 12.1, PR00/98/109, 22 July 1998.
[7] Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA). June 2024.

3. Review of existing literature

The following review of existing literature reveals that analyses of the religious dynamics of forced displacement in Nigeria is limited. Analysis of the role and impact of violent Islamist militancy is more extensive, illustrating how the Sahel region has become a hotspot for such groups.[8] This is significant as it has contributed to considerable forced displacement in the region. It is also intertwined with religious dynamics; the region is religiously heterogeneous and there has been some analysis on how this has affected religious communities. This review focuses on Christian communities as one such example, with existing literature illustrating how Christian communities have experienced targeted violence, either wholly or in part due to religious reasons. Economic, political, ethnic and anti-colonial factors have also been highlighted.

Literature relating to forced displacement in Nigeria identifies general risks for displaced persons such as trauma, physical danger, overcrowding, malnutrition, poor sanitary conditions and tension with host communities. However, most Nigerian data is focused on the North-East and government-run IDP camps; research that addresses the increased violence in the North-Central region and informal IDP settings is still limited.

Religion matters in displacement settings. Some research has begun to illustrate how, in countries where religious freedom is particularly limited, Christians are likely to be forcibly displaced and to experience psychological and physical violence within displacement settings because of their religious identity and activity. Accordingly, they may have additional protection needs on the basis of their religious identity and can face ongoing threats within displacement settings. This correlates with research from other authors such as Eghdamian[9] and Avis.[10]

While there is limited research specifically on how religion interacts with the experiences of IDPs in Nigeria, there are indications of the importance of religion from individual testimonies gathered in the country. Further research is urgently required to develop a clearer understanding of the exact role that religion plays. This will enable deeper understanding and more effective and tailored support for those vulnerable communities. The primary research carried out among Christian IDPs in Borno and Plateau states (see page 19) begins to meet this need.

In outlining existing research, this review first looks at violence, in particular the wider picture of the Islamist militancy across Sub-Saharan Africa before considering the history and dynamics of Islamist militancy in Nigeria and other dynamics of violence. The review then looks at the wider picture of forced displacement, focusing on displacement in Sub-Saharan Africa before exploring the existing body of research on the dynamics of displacement in Nigeria. Finally, this review looks at what research has been conducted as to how one's religion impacts displacement.

3.a. Literature related to violence

3.a.i. Islamist militancy in Sub-Saharan Africa

The roots of Islamist militancy are complex and contested.[11] Weak states, corruption, proliferation of arms, and economic inequality have provided fertile ground for the growth of extremism based on religion and political ideology. As a result, numerous militant Islamist groups have arisen across Africa.

Poverty and political instability delay traditional markers of manhood such as marriage, starting a family and finding employment, making young men vulnerable to recruitment.[12] In joining Islamist militia, they gain the promise of mutual protection and crucial economic resources.[13] Reflecting a lack of academic or religious education, many young men are influenced by the rhetoric of radical Islamist teachers.[14]

Violence perpetrated by militant Islamist groups has risen to alarming levels across Sub-Saharan Africa. It is essential to remember that Islamism marks a shift away from Islam as a faith to Islam as a radical political ideology and movement.[15] Militant Islamist groups in the region also target traditional Sufi Muslims, forcing them to more radical interpretations of Islam. Under this extreme interpretation of Sharia (Islamic law),[16] violence is accepted as a justifiable means to create a pure Islamic state.

The three terrorist groups responsible for the most terrorist-related deaths in 2022 have Islamist extremist roots – Islamic State (IS), Al-Shabaab and Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM).[17] In 2022, 60% of the world's terrorism

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[8] Islamism is defined as "a set of political ideologies drawing on Islamic tradition and teaching to pursue socio-political objectives", moving away from Islam as a faith and towards a radical political ideology and movement. Britannica, Islamism. Accessed 5 August 2024.; Islamist militancy (or violent Islamist extremism) includes a commitment to violence aimed at eradicating or converting non-Muslims (viewed as unclean, infidels and apostates) and ushering in an Islamic state. Manchester Arena Inquiry Volume 3: Radicalisation and Preventability, Report of the Public Inquiry into the Attack on Manchester Arena on 22nd May 2017. Crown copyright 2023. March 2023.

[9] Eghdamian, K., Religious Identity and Experiences of Displacement: An Examination into the Discursive Representations of Syrian Refugees and Their Effects on Religious Minorities Living in Jordan. Journal of Refugee Studies, 30(3), September 2017, pp.447–467.

[10] Avis, W., Challenges religious minorities face in accessing humanitarian assistance. K4D Helpdesk Report 666. Institute of Development Studies, 2019.

[11] Adelaja, A.O. et al., Public Opinion on the Root Causes of Terrorism and Objectives of Terrorists: A Boko Haram Case Study. Perspectives on Terrorism, 2018, 12(3), pp. 24-34.

[12] USAID, Sahel Youth Analysis, 2017.

[13] Africa Youth Population, The New York Times, October 2023.

[14] Onuoha, F.C., Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?. United States Institute of Peace, June 2014.

[15] Hamid, S. & Dar, R., Islamism, Salafism, and jihadism: A Primer. Brookings, July 2016.

[16] Jain, K., What is Sharia? Islamic law shows Muslims how to live, and can be a force for progress as well as tool of fundamentalists. The Conversation, 30 August, 2021.

[17] This translates to "Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims." Institute for Economics & Peace, Global Terrorism Index 2023. March 2023. While there is no single, universal definition of "terrorism", the Global Terrorism Index uses the following definition: "the systematic threat of use of violence, by non-state actors, whether for or in opposition to established authority, with the intention of communicating a political, religious or ideological message to a group larger than the victim group, by generating fear and so altering (or attempting to alter) the behavior of the larger group." p.6.

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deaths occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa – an increase of 8% from the previous year.[18] Africa's Sahel region alone accounted for 47% of global terrorism deaths in 2023, compared to just 1% in 2007.[19]

Historic ethno-religious distrust,[20] the proliferation of arms in the Sahel region, the backing of proxies[21] and the presence of foreign fighters[22] all exacerbate ongoing violence.

3.a.ii. Islamist militancy in Nigeria

Islam arrived in the region known today as Nigeria in the 11th and 12th centuries through trade and migration. By the early 14th century all the ruling elites in Hausaland (comprising much of modern-day Northern Nigeria) were Muslim.[23] Islamism accelerated in the early 19th century when a radical Islamist scholar, Usman dan Fodio started a reformist jihad campaign to establish a new world dedicated to Islamic purity.[24] Great Britain implemented "indirect rule" from the late 19th century and into the 20th, leaving governance to local leaders under colonial guidance and pursued a policy of "divide and rule."[25] These policies effectively froze the northern states as Muslim and the southern states as Christian, ending jihadist expansion from the North but entrenching ethno-religious divides across Nigeria. There were numerous campaigns in the years following colonialism to expand the reach of Islam, with debates over political representation and governance across the various regions, ending in the official implementation of Sharia in twelve northern states.[26] Commentators have proposed that this undermined the Constitution and the civil liberties of non-Muslims.[27]

During the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari (2015-2023), militant violence and unrest spread across the northern and North-Central states and increasingly into the South.[28]

Boko Haram, an Islamist organization that developed from non-violent to violent in just a few years, launched its militant activities in 2009, seeking to create an Islamic State in northern Nigeria.[29] The Nigerian government has acknowledged that Boko Haram intentionally targets Christians.[30] As of 2018, Letswa and Isyaku, in their article on the causes of internal displacement in Nigeria, state: "Of all the social menace in Nigeria that caused internal population displacement, Boko Haram insurgency was the most single social epidemic that caused contemporary national challenges of internally displaced persons."[31]

Splinter groups have broken off from Boko Haram. Ansaru, an al-Qaeda affiliate split off from Boko Haram, remains active in the North-West.[32] The North-East has long been the center of activities for Boko Haram, who pledged allegiance to Islamic State (IS) in 2015, taking up the name Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP).[33] However, in 2016, the group split in two, into ISWAP and Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda-awati wal-Jihad (JAS) (Boko Haram's original name; most current media distinguishes solely between ISWAP and Boko Haram).[34]

3.a.iii. Fulani militant violence

In the last decade, the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and sedentary farmers in the North-Central region and surrounding areas has escalated into "daily occurrences of mass violence," according to Ezenwa.[35] Commentators note that the significant overlap of religion, ethnicity and profession makes it challenging to assess the underlying causes of the crisis in this region.[36] Many commentators identify this as relating to a conflict over scarce resources.[37] Government policies, including restrictions on grazing and land rights, and conflicts between the national government and state governments play a role.[38]

Fulani are predominantly Muslim and most farmers are predominantly Christian, necessitating examination of religious dynamics.[39] Ethno-religious violence is viewed by some commentators not as a by-product of militancy for economic gain but as a parallel or even greater motive, including to control large swathes of presently Christian occupied land.[40] The Christian Association of Nigeria is campaigning for the return of over 100 villages permanently occupied by the Fulani in Plateau state alone.[41] The tactic of occupying land has reportedly increasingly been seen in southern states.[42]

[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Benkirane, R., Radicalization, Violence and (In)security. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2016.
[21] Vellturo, M. & Dick, S., How Arms Proliferation Is Driving Herder-Farmer Conflict in the Sahel. World Politics Review, March 2020.
[22] Open Doors International, Nigeria: Full Country Dossier. January 2023.
[23] Harvard Divinity School, Islam in Nigeria. Religion and Public Life, accessed 1 July 2024.; Hill,M The Spread of Islam in West Africa: Containment, Mixing, and Reform from the Eighth to the Twentieth Century. SPICE Digest, Stanford University, January 2009.
[24] Ibid.
[25] The "divide and rule" policy kept Nigerian ethnic groups (and often therefore religious groups, as ethnicity and religion are intricately intertwined) as separate from each other as possible, fostering suspicion rather than collaboration between different communities in order to reduce the risk of organized opposition to colonial rule. Britannica, Nigeria as a colony. Accessed 1 July 2024.
[26] Nwankpa, M., The North-South Divide: Nigerian Discourses on Boko Haram, the Fulani, and Islamization. Hudson Institute, October 2021.
[27] Hoffmann L.K. & Wallace, J., Democracy in Nigeria, Chatham House, June 2022.
[28] CSW-UK and CSW Nigeria, Submission to the 45th session of the Universal Periodic Review. July 2023.
[29] Ibid., p. 15. See also Iyekekpolo, W.O., Boko Haram: understanding the context. Third World Quarterly, 37(12),2016, pp. 2211-2228.; Onapajo H. & Uzodike, U.O., Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria: Man, the state, and the international system. African Security Review, 21(13), 2012, pp. 24-39.
[30] Casper, J., Government Agrees: Islamist Terrorists Target Christians. Christianity Today, 2 March 2020.
[31] p.37, Letswa, A.M. & Isyaku, S.S., Insurgency and Internally Displaced Persons IDPs in Nigeria: A Reflection on the Causes, Implication and Way forward. International Journal of Innovative Studies in Sociology and Humanities, 20(5), 2018.
[32] Iyorah, F., Rivalry among Boko Haram factions compounds violence in northern Nigeria. Al Jazeera, 8 September 2023.
[33] International Crisis Group, Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province. 16 May 2019.
[34] Ibid.
[35] p.180, Ezenwa E.O., The Politics of Eco-Violence: Why Is Conflict Escalating in Nigeria's Middle Belt?. Terrorism and Political Violence, 36(2), 2024, pp.180-197.
[36] Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Terrorism Index 2015: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism. 2015.; UK APPG FoRB Report, Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide? Three years on. 2023.
[37] For example, see: Ikezue, C.E. & Ezeah, P., Recurrent conflicts among migrant Fulani herdsmen and indigenous communities of southern Nigeria: A review of literature. International Journal of Health and Social Inquiry, 3(1), 2017.
[38] Ibid.
[39] International Crisis Group, Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence. 26 July 2018.
[40] UK APPG FoRB Report, Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide? Three years on. 2023.
[41] Nanlong, M., 'These Fulani men are no bandits but land grabbers'. Vanguard News, 1 January 2022.
[42] Open Doors International, Nigeria: Full Country Dossier. January 2023.

A villiage destroyed by Fulani militant violence near Jos, 2024

Some commentators propose that militant Fulani herdsmen attack farming communities with impunity.[43] This violence is spilling into the South, leading many Nigerians to no longer distinguish between Boko Haram and the militant Fulani, instead fearing a wider, violent conspiracy to Islamize all Nigeria, according to Nwankpa.[44] Many of the bandit groups in the North-West, who engage in abductions, cattle rustling and other acts of violence are similarly ethnic Fulani.[45]

There are multiple ways that the conflict has been framed, including around "sedentarization" and "fulanization".[46] Many argue that Fulani militants turn to arms due to feeling marginalized,[47] and to defend their pastoralist livelihoods and access to land,[48] as evidenced by the ongoing conflict between Muslim Fulani pastoralists and fellow Muslim, Hausa farmers in the North-West.[49] In the context of deepening hostility from farming communities who often feel besieged by multiple pressures, communal defenses have been organized; however this, along with the execution of reprisal attacks which can create cycles of reprisal killings, risks exacerbating communal tensions further according to the International Crisis Group.[50]

While the majority of Fulani are not militants, militant groups among them are rising in prominence (along with debate about their various leaders' motivations). In an escalation of hostilities, a new Fulani vigilante group was launched in January 2024 following large-scale, fatal attacks by suspected Fulani militants on Christian communities in Plateau state.[51] Fulani militants have reportedly partnered with Islamist militant groups.[52] Some commentators view these partnerships as opportunistic or strategic on the side of Fulani participants.[53] However, it appears some Fulani militants have been radicalized.[54]

[43] USCIRF, Issue Update: Ethnonationalism and Religious Freedom in Nigeria. June 2023.
[44] Nwankpa, M., The North-South Divide: Nigerian Discourses on Boko Haram, the Fulani, and Islamization. Hudson Institute, October 2021.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Chukwuma, K.H., Constructing the herder-farmer conflict as (in)security in Nigeria. African Security, 13(1), 2020, pp.54-76.
[47] Ejiofor, P.F., 'We don't have anything': Understanding the interaction between pastoralism and terrorism in Nigeria. Conflict, Security & Development, 22(4), 2022, pp. 345-385.
[48] Brottem L., & McDonnell, A., Pastoralism and Conflict in the Sudano-Sahel: A Review of the Literature. Search for Common Ground, 2020.
[49] Ejiofor, P.F., 'We don't have anything': Understanding the interaction between pastoralism and terrorism in Nigeria. Conflict, Security & Development, 22(4), 2022, pp. 345-385.
[50] International Crisis Group, Managing Vigilantism in Nigeria: A Near-term Necessity. 21 April 2022.; International Crisis Group, Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence. 26 July 2018.
[51] Truth Nigeria, Claiming Victim Status, Nigeria' s Cattle Cartel Launches Militia Group to Fight Banditry. 20 January 2024.; Open Doors Australia, Update: Christians lead peace march in Plateau State, Nigeria. 22 January 2024.
[52] Ejiofor, P.F., 'We don't have anything': Understanding the interaction between pastoralism and terrorism in Nigeria. Conflict, Security & Development, 22(4), pp. 345-385.
[53] Ibid.; Iocchi, A., Nigeria's "Wild West": Insecurity, Pastoralism and Banditry in the Muslim North, Italian Institute for International Political Studies, February 2023.
[54] Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Terrorism Index 2019: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism. November 2019.

A Christian IDP camp, Benue state

In addition, armed bandits operate in vast swathes of Nigeria. Largely driven by criminality, their actions have an impact across various religious communities. There are some reports of exacerbated religious tensions, as many bandits are ethnic Fulani and attack majority Christian farming communities.[55] However, the motivations of Fulani militant groups, the armed bandits and their leaders are complex – as reflected in the various terms used to describe the conflict in the central regions of Nigeria.[56] Furthermore, the term "bandits" is frequently used to describe different groups, further confused by armed gangs camping alongside Fulani herders, the two often being "indistinguishable."[57]

In summary, the picture is complex. While some Fulani militant groups will be actively pursuing an extremist jihadist agenda, others will not. Yet, despite contested motivations, often the result is the attack and expulsion of Christian communities.

3.b. Literature related to forced displacement

3.b.i. Forced displacement overview

The scale of forced displacement is vast and growing. By the close of 2023, a record 117.3 million people were reported to be displaced worldwide.[58] 68.3 million were IDPs, 37.6 million refugees and 6.9 million asylum-seekers.[59] Despite IDPs forming the majority of forced migrants, there is greater global awareness of refugees. However, efforts have been made since 1998 to better monitor IDPs and respond to their needs.[60]

While IDPs share many similar characteristics to refugees – primarily that they are fleeing their homes due to a fear of persecution and are unable/unwilling to return – there are several differences, the most visible of which is that IDPs have not crossed an internationally recognized state border. Refugees enjoy greater legal protection under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, while IDPs primarily depend on the non-binding 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.[61] These Guiding Principles, introduced by the Commission on Human Rights as the first international standards for IDPs, guide states on how to prevent, respond to and resolve internal displacement. They impress the notion of sovereign responsibility, urging national authorities to provide an appropriate framework of protection for IDPs in accordance with international standards.

As such, while refugees have an international protection system to appeal to and are afforded specific rights under the 1951 Convention, such as the right to housing and education, IDPs rely on the policies and protection of their national governments, including in instances where the State has itself been an agent of persecution.

3.b.ii. Religion and forced displacement

It is evident that religion can play an important role in displacement, both as a driver of displacement and as a factor that might make a displaced person more vulnerable to persecution. For example, in the Syrian context, Eghdamian illustrates how Christian and Druze refugees have experienced "isolation, insecurity and discrimination because of their religious identity."[62] It is important to stress that religion can be a marker of cultural or ethnic identity rather than personally held convictions. For example, in the Sahelian context, Christians and other religious minorities can be targeted by militant Islamists for their perceived religious identity, irrelevant of how they would self-identify.[63]

A growing body of scholarly work has served to increase understanding in the role faith-based actors can play in meeting the spiritual, physical and psychological needs of those displaced.[64] For example, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager examine how local faith communities (LFCs) can strengthen community resilience.[65] Despite these contributions, the broader relationship between religion and forced displacement remains largely unexplored, in part due to a lack of relevant statistics; there is no comprehensive data on the religious affiliation of forcibly displaced persons globally or for any country.

3.b.iii. An uneasy relationship between religion and humanitarianism

UNHCR and similar agencies understate and typically omit the religious affiliations of refugees, despite collecting comprehensive data about each person.[66] These agencies do not make readily available whether religion is a factor in their journey of displacement, or in how or where people are displaced e.g. in formal or informal camps, in urban or rural areas. Analyzing and understanding the religious affiliation may, however, help humanitarian agencies determine and address specific protection needs that differ between those displaced of different faiths.

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[55] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Nigeria. August 2023.
[56] "Farmer-herder conflict", "eco-violence", "armed violence and criminality", "population-induced warfare", "ethno-religious conflict" and "ethnonationalist", to name a few.
[57] International Crisis Group, Managing Vigilantism in Nigeria: A Near-term Necessity. 21 April 2022.; See also, International Crisis Group, Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem. 18 May 2020.
[58] UNHCR, Refugee Data Finder. Accessed 5 August 2024.
[59] Ibid. Note that asylum-seekers are people whose asylum case is not yet processed, and therefore not yet legally recognized as refugees.
[60] The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) was established in 1998. For an overview of the impact of the 1998 Guiding Principles, see Joint IDP Profiling Service, Twenty Years of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Forced Migration Review, 59, October 2018.
[61] UNHCR, 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. September 2011; OCHA, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 22 July 1998, ADM 1.1,PRL 12.1, PR00/98/109.
[62] p.447 Eghdamian, K., Religious Identity and Experiences of Displacement: An Examination into the Discursive Representations of Syrian Refugees and Their Effects on Religious Minorities Living in Jordan. Journal of Refugee Studies, 30(3), September 2017, pp.447–467.
[63] In Nigeria for example, Christians are easily detected by their names. One's ID can mean life or death at roadblocks set up by violent Islamist groups. Open Doors International, Nigeria: Full Country Dossier, 2023. January 2023.
[64] Major journals have dedicated special issues to this theme: Special Issue: Faith-Based Humanitarianism in Contexts of Forced Displacement Journal of Refugee Studies, 24(3), 2011; Faith and Responses to Displacement, Forced Migration Review, 48, 2014. Furthermore, in 2012, UNHCR held a dialogue on Faith and Protection in Geneva (December 12-13, 2012).
[65] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. & Ager, A., Local faith communities and the promotion of resilience in humanitarian situations. Refugee Studies Centre, February 2013.
[66] Allouche, J. et al. Humanitarianism and Religious Inequalities: Addressing a Blind Spot. CREID Working Paper, October 2020.

The Sphere Handbook recognizes that understanding religious identity and whether it could play a factor into the level or equality of aid can help ensure application of the principle of impartiality:

> [G]roups may be under-served and discriminated against because of nationality, ethnicity, language, or religious or political affiliation, which requires special attention to reflect the principle of impartiality.[67]

Initial studies have noted that understanding the needs of the displaced based on their religion by providing access to religious leaders and practices represents a tool of resilience, or the "ability to anticipate, withstand and bounce back from external pressures and shocks."[68] These studies have demonstrated that for displaced people religious practices represent a source of continuity and comfort.[69] Many IDPs view religion as playing a positive role in aiding recovery from trauma and helping build an environment of tolerance and acceptance between different communities.[70]

Some scholars have raised concerns about religious bias among individuals acting under the auspices of UN bodies.[71] One Nigerian scholar argues, that it is for these reasons that faith-based organizations (FBOs) have stepped in to meet the needs of Christians in informal IDP camps in Nigeria.[72]

3.b.iv. The role of Faith-Based Organizations

The significant role that Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) can play in supporting forced migrants has been more widely acknowledged in literature.[73] FBOs can be first responders in emergencies due to their local knowledge and ability to access remote areas. Their social capital enables them to mobilize human and financial resources quickly, they understand their community's psychosocial needs (and often have a track record of providing pastoral care), they tend to be well-trusted (even by members of different religious groups) and have a longer-term commitment to an area than other humanitarian organizations.[74]

Christian FBOs in Nigeria are typically located in the central and southern states, and can find it more difficult to work in predominately Muslim states, where Christian IDPs are typically more vulnerable to discrimination.[75] They remain nonetheless better positioned to provide support than many other actors due to their local knowledge and resources. Iweze states:

> Historically, Faith-Based Organizations have a long history of offering humanitarian assistance in providing food, clothing, and shelter to the needy and have been important players in the international community's response to emergencies. FBOs have been prominent in providing support and welfare packages to many IDPs in Nigeria.[76]

FBOs have a role to play pre, during and post displacement. The Shalom Trauma Center in Nigeria, for example, offers holistic support to trauma victims, as well as training to church leaders in how to provide trauma care.[77]

3.b.v. An overview of forced displacement in Nigeria

Internal displacement in Nigeria has remained consistently high, driven by multiple factors including insurgency, conflict, criminality and environmental disasters.[78] As of 2023, Nigeria was home to 3.4 million IDPs.[79] While the North-East of Nigeria has been most affected, the distribution of violence means the North-Central region has seen a rapid rise in internal displacement.[80]

Research indicates that Nigerian IDPs are mostly hosted in the community, with some forming informal IDP camps and even fewer living in government-run IDP camps.[81] While those accommodated in government-run camps are more likely to receive government support or humanitarian aid, those living in informal settings in parts of Nigeria are ineligible for government support and receive little humanitarian assistance.[82] Most IDPs try to earn a small living and/or rely on assistance from religious, community or special interest groups or members of the public.[83]

[67] p.12, Sphere Project, Sphere Association Handbook. 6 November, 2018.
[68] p. 2, UNICEF, Building Resilience. March 2011.
[69] Ní Raghallaigh, M., Religion in the Lives of Unaccompanied Minors: An Available and Compelling Coping Resource. British Journal of Social Work, 41, 2011, pp. 539-556.
[70] Pertek, S.I., "God Helped Us": Resilience, Religion and Experiences of Gender-Based Violence and Trafficking among African Forced Migrant Women. Social Sciences, 11(5), May 2022.
[71] UNHCR's approach to religious minorities has been critiqued by several authors, including: Eghdamian, K., Religious Plurality and the Politics of Representation in Refugee Camps: accounting for the Lived Experiences of Syrian Refugees Living in Zaatari. Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration, 4(1), 2014, pp.37-40.; Allouche, J. et al, Humanitarianism and Religious Inequalities: Addressing a Blind Spot. CREID Working Paper, October 2020.
[72] Iweze, D.O., Faith-based organizations' intervention for the internally displaced persons from the northeast Nigeria's region at Uhogua camp in Edo State. African Identities, 2022.
[73] Kraft, K., The Faith Factor. Open Doors, 2022.; Sulewski, D., Religious Actors and the Global Compact on Refugees Charting a Way Forward. September 2020.; Holdcroft, D., The contribution of FBOs working with the displaced. Forced Migration Review, 48, November 2014.
[74] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. & Ager, A., Local faith communities and the promotion of resilience in humanitarian situations. Refugee Studies Centre, February 2013.
[75] Davis, C. et al., Comparing Religious and Secular NGOs in Nigeria: are faith based organizations distinctive?. Religions and Development Research Programme, Working Paper 56, 2011; Odumosu, O. et al., Faith Based Organization in development in Nigeria: a preliminary mapping. Religions and Development Research Programme, Research Summary WP38, 2009.
[76] p.3, Iweze, D.O., Faith-based organizations' intervention for the internally displaced persons from the northeast Nigeria's region at Uhogua camp in Edo State. African Identities, 2022.
[77] Kraft, K., The Faith Factor. Open Doors, 2022.
[78] Most new displacements in 2022 were caused by flooding. See: IDMC, Internal Displacement and Food Security, GRID 2023. April 2023.
[79] IDMC, Nigeria, Global Internal Displacement Database. Accessed 21 May 2024.
[80] Ibid.; In 2022, 50% more IDPs were displaced in the Middle Belt (North-Central) than in 2021. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Record 36 Million Africans Forcibly Displaced, 19 July 2022.
[81] 57% of Nigerian IDPs are in host-communities, compared to 43% in camp settings. International Organization for Migration, Displacement Tracking Matrix - Nigeria North East Zone 44. March 2023.; A 2020 study of IDPs in Benue State, Nigeria, found that only 15% of IDPs were in official, government-run IDP camps, with the remaining 85% in unofficial camps or living in the community. Ukase P.I. & Jato, T. P. J., From Home to Homelessness: The Dilemma of Internally Displaced Persons in Benue State. Complete Research Report on the Condition of IDPs in Benue State. Catholic Diocese of Makurdi Foundation for Justice, Development and Peace, 2020.
[82] Ukase, P.I & Jato, T.P.J., ibid.
[83] Onifade, V. & Osinowo R., Living Conditions of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Northern Nigeria. Urbanism and Crisis Management in Nigeria, Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies, 2019, pp.369-389.

worsened for those suffering displacement. Child and maternal mortality rates are extremely high.[89]

While Nigeria is party to the Kampala Convention, the world's only legally binding regional instrument on internal displacement, it has come under criticism for not adequately domesticating and implementing adequate protection measures as set out in the Guiding Principles.[90] In 2021, the federal government launched a National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons, drawing on the Guiding Principles and the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.[91]

Criticisms of the Nigerian government have included the fragmented legal framework for IDP protection, insufficient mechanisms and provisions to address the needs and rights of IDPs, and poor accountability and transparency of state and non-state actors.[92] In Nigeria's Borno state, for example, the authorities began a campaign to close IDP camps, resulting in many people being relocated to unsafe areas. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the shutdowns "compelled displaced people to leave the camps without consultation, adequate information, or sustainable alternatives to ensure their safety and livelihoods."[93] These actions were in violation of Article 9 of the Kampala Convention, in particular Article 9, 2e which states that IDPs should be safeguarded from forcible return to any area that their life, safety, liberty and/or health would be at risk.

The Shalom Trauma Center, Nigeria

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs warned that the burden on host communities and poverty of IDPs in Nigeria increases the risk of IDPs suffering multiple displacements.[84] Serial relocation in the country hampers effective humanitarian response and can contribute to host communities viewing IDPs with suspicion due to increased economic burdens, perceived risk of external attack or suspicion of IDPs colluding with extremist groups.[85]

An estimated 55% of Nigerian IDPs are female, and 59% are below 18.[86] Gender-based violence is reportedly pervasive[87] and girls are less likely to attend school once in displacement settings than boys. [88]Access to acceptable levels of healthcare is poor in many regions, a situation

3.b.vi. Experiences of displaced Christians in Nigeria

There has been some literature written on the specific experiences of Christian IDPs in Nigeria. However, a paper based on interviews with IDPs by researchers from the American University of Nigeria in 2016 specifically notes that the personal stories of IDPs are rarely told, "usually lost in statistics and media reports of humanitarian responses."[94] A few studies present testimonies from interviewees that indicate

[84] End of Mission Statement by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Mr. Chaloka Beyani, on his visit to Nigeria, 23 to 26 August 2016, OHCHR.

[85] Demuynck, M., Mass Displacement and Violent Extremism in the Sahel: A Vicious Circle? International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, August 2022.

[86] These figures are taken from the North East region, but provide an indication of the gender and age breakdown in Nigeria. International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — North-east — Displacement Tracking Matrix. March 2022.

[87] Ojengbede, O. et al., Sexual and gender-based violence in camps for internally displaced people and host communities in northeast Nigeria: a mixed methods study. The Lancet, 7(1), March 2019.; Obiageli, M., Gender-based violence in situations of internal displacement: Realities faced by women within the IDP camps in Nigeria. International Review of Law and Jurisprudence, 3(1), 2021, pp.132-138.

[88] Lasukawa, L., Gender dynamics in internal displacement. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, November 2023.

[89] UNICEF, Levels and Trends of Child Mortality in West and Central Africa. September 2023.

[90] Fayehun O. & Akanle, O., Humanitarian Crises and Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria. The University of Warwick, 2022.

[91] Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons. September 2021.

[92] T. Magaji, The Implications of Non-Domestication of Kampala Convention to the Protection of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria. Wukari International Studies Journal, 7(3), 2023.

[93] Human Rights Watch, "Those who returned are suffering" Impact of Camp Shutdowns on People Displaced by Boko Haram Conflict in Nigeria. 2 November 2022.

[94] Jacob, J.U. et al., Narratives of Displacement: Conversations with Boko Haram Displaced Persons in Northeast Nigeria. Contemporary French and Francophone Studies, 20(2), 2016, pp.176-190.

the strong likelihood that religion plays a significant role in the experience of Nigeria's IDPs, which are detailed below.

Christians displaced from the North
Islamic extremist groups such as Boko Haram and its splinter groups have been primarily active in the North, resulting in the displacement of Christians.[95] The Nigerian government has struggled to meet the needs of those who have been forcibly displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency in the north of Nigeria. In an article on the role of FBOs in IDP camps in the North-East of Nigeria, Iweze states that church organizations have established informal IDP camps, separate from government IDP camps, to meet the needs of Christians displaced by Boko Haram.[96]

A paper on IDPs in Nigeria details the types of abuse women can face in IDP camps. The paper notes that both women and girls are raped, sexually abused and battered on a daily basis.[97] This correlates with reports that Christian women have been abducted and singled out for their faith. HRW interviewed abductees from Borno state and found:

> The victims appear to have been targeted either because of their presumed religious affiliation or for attending western-styled schools…One young woman held in a [militant] camp near Gwoza described how combatants placed a noose around her neck and threatened her with death until she renounced her religion.[98]

There have been reports of Christians facing discrimination in aid distribution in IDP camps in the North-East.[99] One church leader from Maiduguri, Borno state said: "Christians are not being taken care of like the Muslims … when the Christians discovered that they were not given food or clothing like the Muslims, they left the camps."[100]

Christian IDPs fleeing Boko Haram/ISWAP violence report intense fear of Muslim IDPs. One Christian IDP residing in Port Harcourt shared:

> They [Muslims] have already caused us enough anguish; we are fleeing because of them [Boko Haram]. They have slain many of our people, and no one has been prosecuted. They are constantly [invading] land all around the Middle Belt, including Kaduna. Are we going to pretend that since we are Christians, this isn't happening? They believe they are superior to us in the North.[101]

A Christian IDP community leader in Port Harcourt agrees:

> There are ill feelings between Christians and Muslims; first, the Christians have unresolved anger due to the Boko Haram crisis being primarily religiously motivated; you cannot blame us. Boko Haram raided my community and killed Christians, while Muslims were forced to recite the Qur'an to show their religion, and many were forced to flee.[102]

The fear experienced by Christian IDPs is also shared by some host communities. This fear was noted by two IDPs living in different cities – one Christian in Port Harcourt and one Muslim in Onitsha. The Port Harcourt Christian IDP community leader reflected: "the locals see IDPs as terrorists, and the Muslims even worse, so not living with Muslims gives us a softer landing with the locals."[103] While one Muslim IDP in Onitsha explained: "Anambra state, where we are, is a Catholic state, and since people often equate IDPs with Islamic terrorism, communities that welcome us do not provide Muslims with the exact same freedom as Christian IDPs."[104]

Christian IDPs from central and southern Nigeria
The security of IDPs in their host communities varies significantly depending on where they are hosted. In a study focusing on IDP experiences in Jos, Plateau state, the majority of IDPs were displaced from their farmlands by militant Fulanis – 59% reported feeling safer in Jos than at home, and 13% felt less safe with some fearing their attackers would find them.[105] Most of those interviewed from their host community felt safe, but 17% felt less safe due to a rise in crime and because they "feared that the presence of IDPs in their community would increase their risk of external attacks."[106]

A report focused on IDP experiences in the South indicates that religion impacts where IDPs go for help and with whom they will live. The report interviewed 107 IDPs and refugees, all living in displacement settings in southern Nigeria, but originally from the North-East and North-Central regions.[107] They had a 48%/51% Muslim/Christian split.[108] When first seeking help during displacement, 27% went to a church, 29% went to their friends, 18% had no help, 17% went to the local community, 7% went to the mosque and the remaining 2% went to their families.[109] When asked if it would be possible for IDPs to stay with other IDPs from different ethno-religious groups, only 8% said yes.[110] The IDPs' responses indicate that one's religion can be both a source of practical aid and support, and a continued source of tension in displacement settings.

95 USCIRF, Factsheet: Violent Islamist Groups in Northern Nigeria. February 2021.
96 Iweze, D.O., Faith-based organizations' intervention for the internally displaced persons from the northeast Nigeria`s region at Uhogua camp in Edo State. African Identities, 2022.
97 John, E.O., The Problem of Refugees, Gender and Religious Differences in Nigeria's IDP Camps. Pinisi Journal of Art, Humanity and Social Science, 1(6), 2021, pp.14-24.
98 p.2, Human Rights Watch, "Those Terrible Weeks in their Camp" Boko Haram Violence against Women and Girls in Northeast Nigeria. October 2014.
99 Open Doors International, Nigeria: Full Country Dossier. January 2023.
100 Bivan, N., Borno's Christian IDPs (1): Struggling For Survival Almost Without Support. HumAngle, 31 August 2021.
101 p.403, Roberts, R.E. & Lawanson, T., Understanding IDPs in Nigerian Cities Working Paper No. 36. Researching Internal Displacement, May 2023, pp. 43-44.
102 p. 44, Ibid.
103 p. 44, Ibid.
104 p. 44, Ibid.
105 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Impacts of Displacement: Displaced by violence, Jos, Nigeria. 2021.
106 p.5, Ibid.
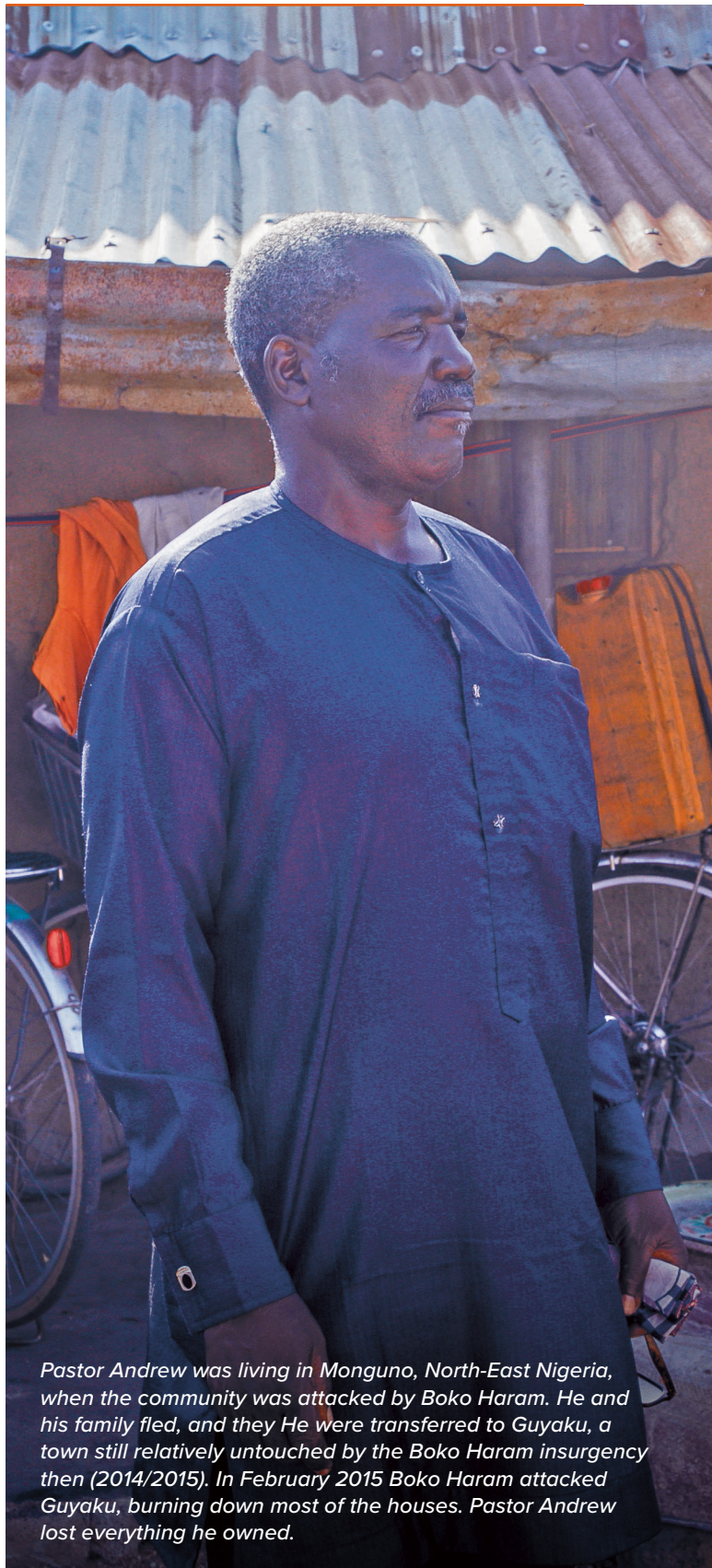107 The IDPs and refugees currently residing in Lagos (37%), Ibadan (28%), Onitsha (23%), and Port Harcourt (12%). The IDPs hailed from Yobe State (7%), Borno State (25%), Taraba State (10%), Adamawa State (10%), Bauchi State (12%), Gombe State (16%), Benue State (8%), Katsina State (1%) and Niger State (1%), and the refugees hailed from Cameroon (7%), Mali (2%), and Togo (1%). Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.

The experience of returnee Christians in Nigeria

Commentators report that the safe return of Christians to their homes is severely hindered in both the North-Central and the North-East regions by ongoing instability and the strategies and motivations of militant groups targeting Christians and occupying their land.

Some IDPs in northern Nigeria have been forcibly returned, despite ongoing instability. Borno state has closed numerous IDP camps and forcibly returned their inhabitants. One female IDP testifies: "The conflict that made us flee our homes out of fear, is what the government is forcing us to go back and face."[111] International Crisis Group notes that Islamist militants operate near the sites to which some of the IDPs are being involuntarily returned, causing a significant security risk. There are reports of attacks on returned IDP settlements by ISWAP, such as at Mallam Fatori.[112]

Forcible return to areas where Islamist militants operate is especially problematic for Christians. Boko Haram, ISWAP and Ansaru are clear about their desire to establish an Islamic State in the North, which in essence requires acquiring land and removing or subjugating non-Muslims.[113]

In the central regions of Nigeria, Fulani militants have also been clear about forcibly taking and occupying land.[114] IDPs support these allegations. Saleh Bayana, from Shonwan, Bakki district, reported: "Since 2014 when we were attacked and displaced, no one has been able to go back [to our homes]...The Fulani now live there with their cattle. They've built normal houses and are living there, we dare not go near there."[115]

The Para-Mallam Peace Foundation reports that "about 60 villages have been occupied by Fulani militants in Riyom and neighboring LGAs of Plateau state."[116] They additionally highlight allegations from IDPs in 2020 that Fulani militants attacked their communities in Kajuru, Kaduna, and then occupied their land.[117]

Reports indicate that such ongoing violence and insecurity make it additionally challenging for IDPs to safely return to their lands in the North-Central region. The testimony of Amina, a Christian IDP from Plateau state, supports this: "The Fulanis came to our community and killed 18 people. My husband, Yakubu and son Emmanuel were killed during the attack and since then we were forced to leave the community because the attackers never stopped coming."[118]

Pastor Andrew was living in Monguno, North-East Nigeria, when the community was attacked by Boko Haram. He and his family fled, and they He were transferred to Guyaku, a town still relatively untouched by the Boko Haram insurgency then (2014/2015). In February 2015 Boko Haram attacked Guyaku, burning down most of the houses. Pastor Andrew lost everything he owned.

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111 Amnesty International, Nigeria: Plans to close IDP camps in Maiduguri could endanger lives. 15 December 2021.
112 International Crisis Group, Rethinking Resettlement and Return in Nigeria's North East. 16 January 2023.
113 UK APPG FoRB Report, Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide? 2023.
114 Ibid.
115 Para-Mallam Peace Foundation, After Killing and Displacing us, Fulani now Occupy our Ancestral Communities: Riyom IDPs Cry Out. 12 August 2023.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.

4. Violent incidents

Numerous organizations have highlighted the risk faced by Christians in Nigeria. Violence targeting the Christian community has become more common since 2020 amid a wider trend of insecurity across the country.[119] Violence is a key driver of displacement in Nigeria, with the vast majority of IDPs being displaced by conflict and violence rather than disasters (the two categories of displacement driver used by the IDMC).[120] To understand forced displacement in Nigeria, an insight into the violence precipitating much of the displacement is essential.

The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project reported a 21% rise in violence "targeting Christians in relation to their religious identity" in Nigeria in 2021 compared with 2020.[121] The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect identified "patterns of violence against civilians, or members of an identifiable group based on their ethnicity or religion, as well as their property, livelihoods and cultural or religious symbols"[122] as a significant risk in Nigeria. Fulani militants have intentionally attacked Christian communities and churches with congregants killed or kidnapped[123] and many displaced.[124]

4.a. Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa findings

The Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA) has released the following data analyzing violent incidents in Nigeria over four years (2019-2023). It reveals high levels of violence, where Christians were disproportionately affected and primarily subject to violence by Fulani militants. Violence is particularly concentrated in the North-West and North-Central regions, with some violence also in the North-East. However, the Nigerian security forces are primarily present in the North-West and North-East regions. Civilians are the most vulnerable in their homes, where community attacks can have a significant impact, including forcing people to flee.

This data gives a picture of the most recent violence and the relevance of religious dynamics. However, in the context of forced displacement generally in Nigeria, it does not cover the deadliest years of Boko Haram and ISWAP; many people are still experiencing protracted displacement as a result of this earlier violence.

ORFA reports on religious background to explore the data behind contrasting analyses of violence in Nigeria, aiming to maintain a neutral stance and to present data without bias.

The following sections on violent incidents are taken from ORFA data, reproduced with their permission, available at orfa.africa, August 2024. Please note ORFA uses the term "Terror Groups" to refer to an assortment of groups including

Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani militants, bandits and other smaller groups. "Armed Fulani Herdsmen" is used for Fulani militants, as a subcategory of "Terror Groups".

4.a.i. Overall insecurity

In the four-year period between 2019 and 2023, ORFA registered 55,910 deaths and 21,621 abductions in Nigeria, across 11,610 attacks. This indicates a high level of violence and insecurity.

Many civilians across parts of Nigeria faced insecurity and fear of the unexpected. For example, eyewitnesses talked about children sleeping in trees at night as a form of protection. In total, 30,880 civilians were killed in 6,942 attacks. For context, there were 9,970 attacks with killings in total. 21,532 civilians were abducted in 2,670 attacks. The remaining 25,030 people killed were members of the Security Forces or Terror Groups. The remaining 89 people abducted were members of the Security Forces or Terror Groups. This gives a sense of the scale of the violence, and the considerable risk to Nigerian civilians.

A woman who fled Fulani violence living in a Christian IDP camp, Benue state

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[119] ACLED, Fact Sheet: Attacks on Christians Spike in Nigeria Alongside Overall Rise in Violence Targeting Civilians. 21 July 2022.
[120] As of the end of 2023, IDMC records 3.4 million IDPs displaced by conflict and violence in Nigeria, compared to 81,000 by disaster. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Displacement data: Nigeria. Accessed 1 August 2024.
[121] Ladd Serwat, Fact Sheet: Attacks on Christians Spike in Nigeria Alongside Overall Rise in Violence Targeting Civilians. ACLED, July 2022.
[122] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Nigeria. 29 February 2024.
[123] World Evangelical Alliance and Open Doors, Nigeria: Violence, Insecurity and Protection of the Population – Report to the UPR 45th session, 18 July 2023.
[124] Iweze, D.O., Faith-based organizations' intervention for the internally displaced persons from the northeast Nigeria's region at Uhogua camp in Edo State. African Identities, 2022.

Table 1: All incidents with killings and abductions in the geographical zones, Oct 2019 – Sept 2023, with special emphasis on civilians killed

Geopolitical zone	# of all incidents with killings	Total killed	# of incidents with civilians killed	Total civilians killed	# of abduction incidents	Total people abducted	# of civilian abduction incidents	Total civilians abducted
North West	2,900	18,635	2,128	11,626	1,054	12,062	1,047	12,042
North Central	2,307	11,974	1,978	8,789	999	6,351	993	6,325
North East	2,058	18,508	823	5,521	269	1,599	261	1,579
South East	954	3,251	636	2,273	124	476	115	465
South South	921	1,978	671	1,369	135	708	132	701
South West	830	1,564	706	1,302	124	425	122	420
Total	**9,970**	**55,910**	**6,942**	**30,880**	**2,705**	**21,621**	**2,670**	**21,532**

4.a.ii. Religious affiliation & perpetrators

The data shows how Christians were disproportionately affected by killings and abductions. The simple ratio of Christians to Muslims killed was 2.7:1; Christians to Muslims abducted was 1.4:1. However, when adjusted to reflect the size of the Christian and Muslim populations in the individual states, the ratio of Christians to Muslims killed was 6.5:1 and Christians to Muslims abducted was 5.1:1.

Table 2: Geopolitical Zones, a comparison of the ratio of the number of Christians killed to the number of Muslims killed from Oct 2019 until Sept 2023 taking into account the Christian/Muslim population levels

Geopolitical zone	Total Christians and Muslims killed	Christians killed	Muslims killed	Ratio of Christians to Muslims killed	Ratio of Christians to Muslims killed, based on their population size in the different states
North West	8,928	5,250	3678	1.4	7.5
North Central	7,187	6,081	1,106	5.5	4.6
North East	3,857	2,595	1,262	2.1	5.3
South East	1,755	1,677	78	21.5	5.3
South South	645	622	23	27.0	6.3
South West	632	544	88	6.2	3.1
Grand Total	**23,004**	**16,769**	**6,235**	**2.7**	**6.5**

The ratio of Christians to Muslims killed was by far the highest in the South-South (27.0:1) and the South-East (21.5:1). The ratio in the North-West (1.4:1) and the ratio in the North-East (2.1:1) were the lowest. However, adjusted to reflect of the population sizes of Christians and Muslims in the different states, the highest ratio was in the North-West (7.5:1), followed by the South-South (6.3:1), and then the North-East (5.3:1) and South-East (5.3:1) on par.

Although affected at different rates, Muslims were generally killed by the same groups that killed Christians, with different percentages. 55% of the Christians killed were killed by *Armed Fulani Herdsmen* (9,153); 29% by *Other Terrorist Groups* (4,895). *Boko Haram* and *ISWAP* combined stood for 8% of the Christians killed (1,268). For Muslims it was the opposite: 24% of the Muslims killed were killed by *Armed Fulani Herdsmen* (1,473); 53% by *Other Terrorist Groups* (3,334). *Boko Haram* and *ISWAP* combined stood for 12% of the Muslims killed (770).

Table 3: All killings, distinguishing attacks by different aggressor categories from Oct 2019 – Sept 2023 with percentages for civilians, Christians and Muslims killed by the different categories of perpetrator

Perpetrators	# of all incidents with killings	Total killings	Total civilians killed	% total civilians killed	Christians killed	% Christians killed	Muslims killed	% Muslims killed	ATR killed	Unknown religious identity killed	Security Forces killed	Terror Groups killed
Other Terrorist Groups	3,588	15,954	12,039	**39%**	4,895	**29%**	3,334	**53%**	57	3,753	1,675	2,240
Armed Fulani Herdsmen	2,175	13,109	11,948	**39%**	9,153	**55%**	1,473	**24%**	31	1,291	627	534
Boko Haram	400	4,359	2,200	**7%**	971	**6%**	548	**9%**	-	681	590	1,569
Security Forces	1,934	15,094	1,342	**4%**	506	**3%**	317	**5%**	12	507	272	13,480
Locals	543	1,060	917	**3%**	273	**2%**	123	**2%**	5	516	30	113
Cultists	473	1,116	912	**3%**	306	**2%**	53	**1%**	36	517	6	198
ISWAP	549	4,130	879	**3%**	297	**2%**	222	**4%**	2	358	1,683	1,568
Assailants	139	282	263	**1%**	141	**1%**	68	**1%**	3	51	10	9
Communal clash	44	221	197	**1%**	138	**1%**	36	**1%**	7	16	-	24
IPOB (Indigenous People of Baifra	80	207	117	**0%**	69	**0%**	16	**0%**	-	32	57	33
Vigilantes	45	378	66	**0%**	20	**0%**	45	**1%**	1	-	3	309
Total	**9,970**	**55,910**	**30,880**		**16,769**		**6,235**		**154**	**7,722**	**4,953**	**20,077**

The numbers of Muslims killed by Christian local vigilantes are included in ORFA data, as are Muslims killed by retaliatory attacks by Christians on Muslims. However, the data shows that by far the majority of Muslims were killed by the same aggressors who killed Christians and ATRs. This means that most of the Muslims killed as reported by ORFA are typically not victims of Christian violence but victims of extremist violence. The main victims of the Christian local vigilantes were members of groups such as Boko Haram, ISWAP and Fulani militants.

4.a.iii. Targeting homes and communities
People's homes became the places where they were most vulnerable. Most civilians were killed (25,312) or abducted (16,761) during attacks on their communities. Attacks on communities were especially devastating for the victims. They often involved a whole spectrum of violence, suffering and destruction, leading to high numbers of forcibly displaced people. This spectrum of violence and suffering included people killed or abducted; people wounded or maimed; women and girls raped; houses, shops and other businesses destroyed or occupied; fields destroyed or occupied; houses of worship abandoned, closed or destroyed; people driven from their homelands into dire situations of internal displacement.
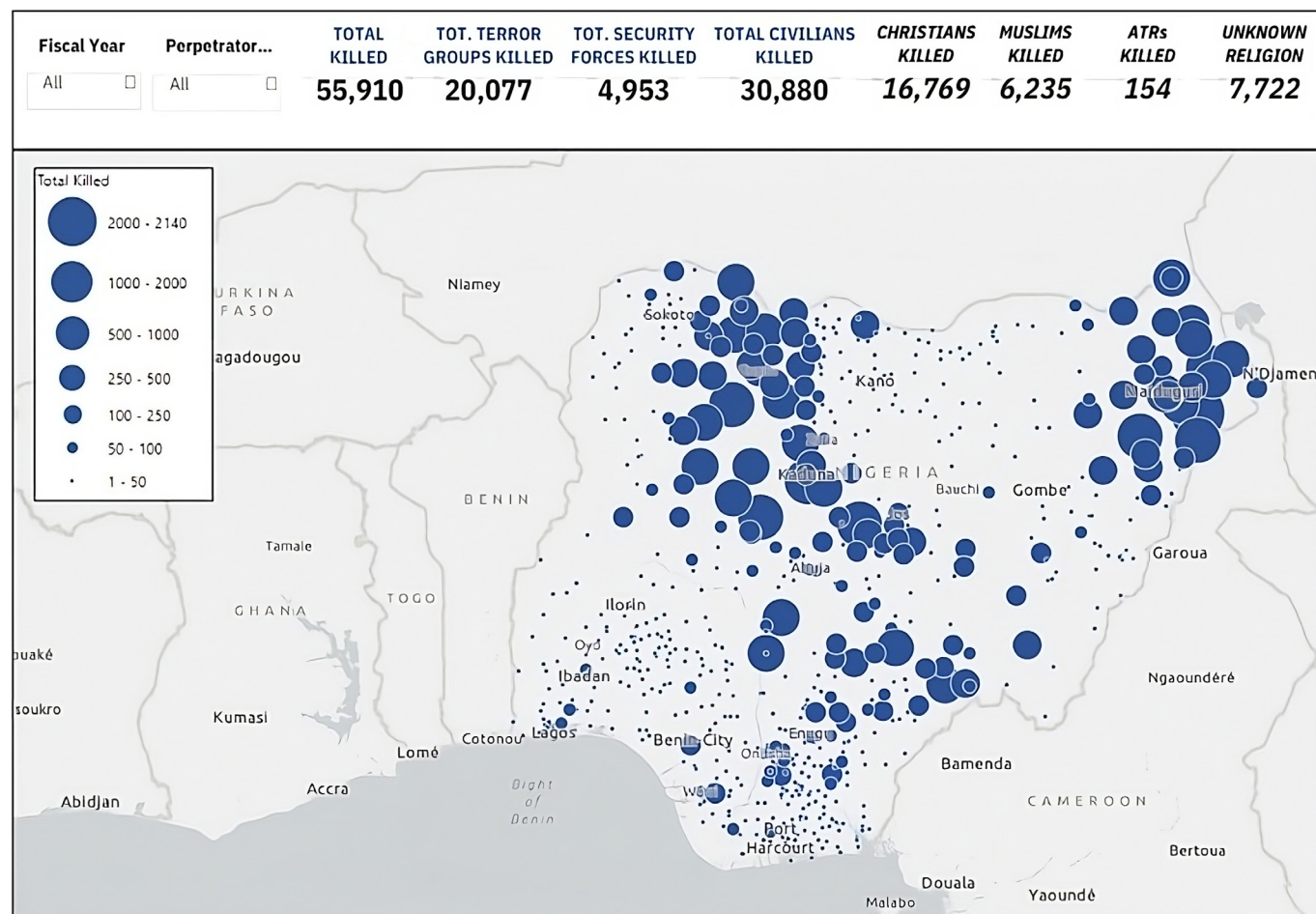
Most civilians were killed during attacks on their communities. Attacks on communities were apparently meant to disrupt the lives of the inhabitants and terrorize them or drive them away from their livelihoods.

- The number of civilians killed during 4,666 attacks on communities was 25,312.

- The number of civilians killed during 2,276 attacks elsewhere was 5,568.

- The ratio "Civilians killed during community attacks" to "Civilians killed during other attacks" was 4.5.

- The average number of civilian killings per community attack was 5.4; for attacks outside of a community setting it was 2.4.

4.a.iv. Most affected regions

The North-West and the North-Central regions hosted the majority of civilian killings and abductions. Most civilian killings took place in the North-West (11,626) and North-Central (8,789), followed by the North-East (5,521). Of these numbers, Christian abductions totaled 5,250, 6,081 and 2,595 respectively; for Muslims they were 3,678, 1,106 and 1,262 respectively. Most civilian abductions were in the North-West (12,042) and North-Central (6,325). For Christians these numbers were 5,931 and 3,277 respectively; for Muslims they were 4,976 and 2,469 respectively.
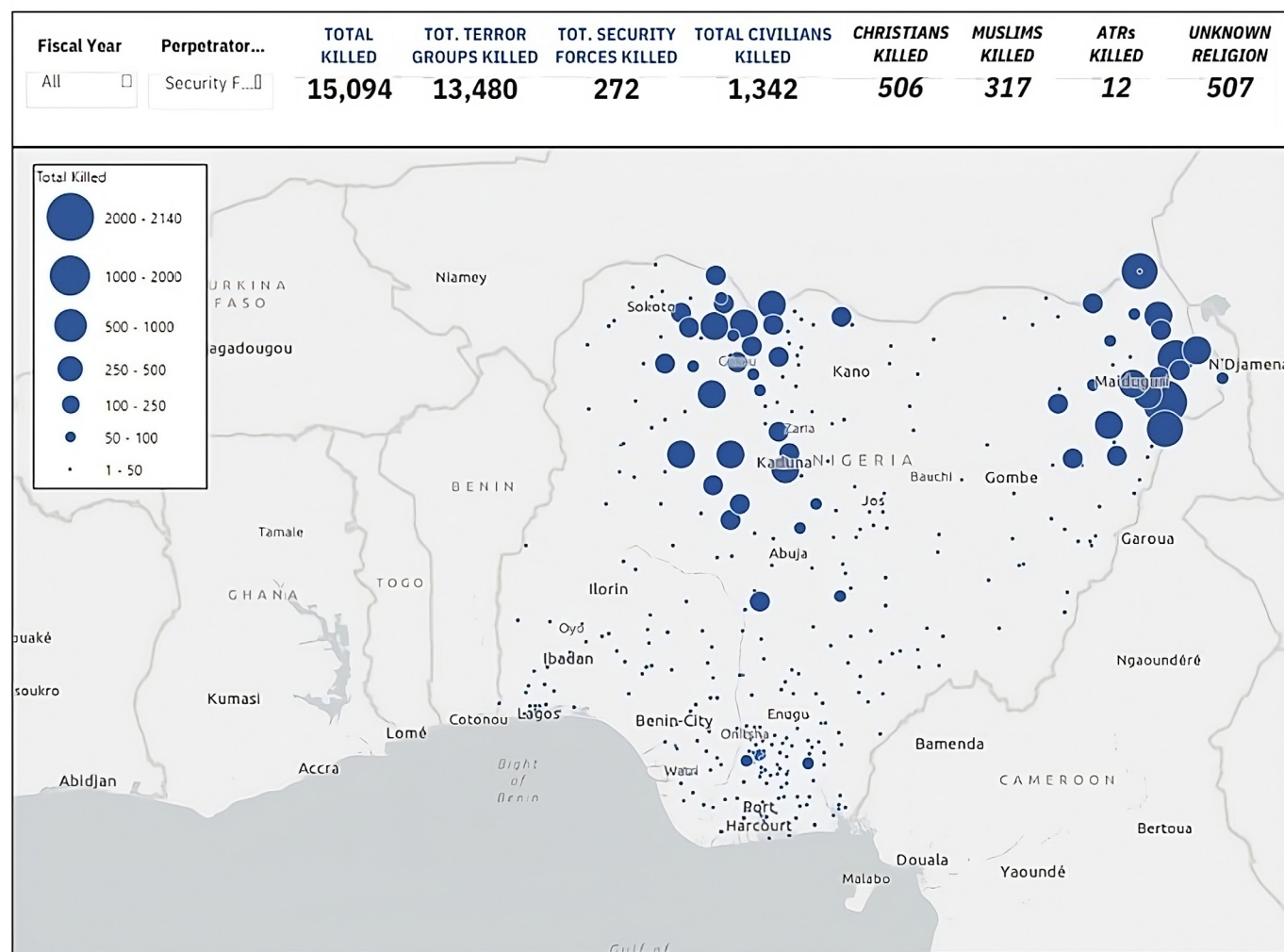
Map 1: Killings by location (Oct 2019 – Sept 2023) - shows the spread of the killings over the country

When looking specifically at community attacks, violent incidents followed the same regional pattern. Most civilians were killed during community attacks in the North-West (10,305), North-Central (7,515) and North-East (4,632). By comparison, the total in the three southern geopolitical zones is 2,860 civilians killed.

The areas of operation of the Nigerian Security Forces were mainly in the North-West and the North-East. This means that, despite the high levels of activity by *Armed Fulani Herdsmen*, the population of the North-Central region was relatively under-protected, when compared to the other regions with high levels of killings and abductions.

Map 2: 2019-2023 Cumulative killings by Security Forces

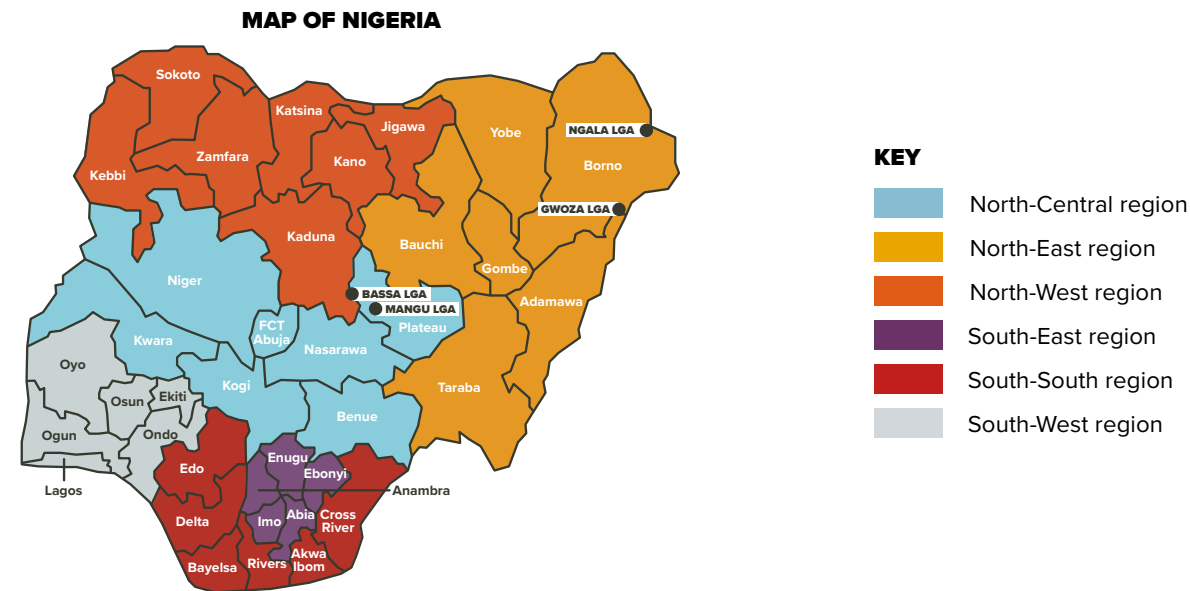| Fiscal Year	Perpetrator...	TOTAL KILLED	TOT. TERROR GROUPS KILLED	TOT. SECURITY FORCES KILLED	TOTAL CIVILIANS KILLED	CHRISTIANS KILLED	MUSLIMS KILLED	ATRs KILLED	UNKNOWN RELIGION
All	Security F...	15,094	13,480	272	1,342	506	317	12	507

The map above shows the killings by Security Forces (15,094). Most people killed by the Security Forces were members of the *Terror Groups* (13,480). The map shows that the Security Forces were most active in the North-West and North-East.

A school class taking place in a Christian IDP camp, Benue state

5. Findings

The following three sections are conclusions from field-based primary research, conducted in 2024.[125] Researchers facilitated in-person interviews and focus groups with Christian IDPs and humanitarian workers from Ngala and Gwoza LGAs, Borno state, and Bassa and Mangu LGAs, Plateau state, totaling 292 people. This qualitative research provides valuable, in-depth insight into the experiences of Christian IDPs in Borno and Plateau states. Open Doors recommends further research be conducted into the experiences of IDPs in other states and adherents of other religions.

MAP OF NIGERIA

KEY

■ North-Central region
■ North-East region
■ North-West region
■ South-East region
■ South-South region
■ South-West region

BORNO STATE
- Region: North-East
- LGAs researched: Gwoza & Ngala
- Threat of violence primarily from Islamic militants, such as Boko Haram and ISWAP
- Threat of violence primarily from Islamic militants, such as Boko Haram and ISWAP
- Generally, longer term, protracted displacement (due to the long-running violence in the region)
- Distinction between official, registered camps run by the government and informal, unregistered camps that are not government-recognized and are supported by other actors, including churches

PLATEAU STATE
- Region: North-Central (also known as the Middle Belt)
- LGAs researched: Bassa & Mangu
- Threats of violence primarily from Fulani militants
- Currently, displacement has been short term due to recent violence.
- The few camps that have emerged were created in an ad-hoc way and remain informal, but some do receive limited support from the government, local actors including churches and some humanitarian agencies.[126] However, 98% of IDPs live in host communities.[127]

Distinguishing formal and informal camps
Organizations such as IOM group together camps and camp-like settings. This category includes both formal and informal camps. Formal camps are in government-approved locations and have more established channels of support. Informal camps are generally not recognized by national authorities and have "limited access to essential support."[128]

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[125] For more information, see Methodology.
[126] For example, see World Health Organization, Restoring hope to displaced Plateau State communities through coordinated humanitarian response. 27 January 2024.
[127] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — North-Central and North-West Displacement Report 12 (December 2023). 4 January 2024.
[128] p.4, Ekezie, W., Resilience actions of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living in camp-like settings: a Northern Nigeria case study. Journal of Migration and Health, 6, 2022.

5.a. Drivers of displacement

Targeted violence and a failure to protect Christian communities has resulted in mass internal displacement.

Violence by Islamic extremists and Fulani militants has been the primary driver of the displacement of Christians in Borno and Plateau states. In both states this violence has deliberately targeted Christian communities, although others have also been affected. The failure of security forces to protect Christian communities and resulting impunity for attackers is also observed in both Borno and Plateau.

5.a.i. Borno state

Protracted violence by militant Islamist groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP was overwhelmingly cited by interviewees as the primary driver of displacement in Borno state. They stated that the violence they experienced was driven by religious objectives.

This is supported by literature that details the explicit targeting of Christians in Boko Haram ideology.[129]

> In one of its early statements, the group declared that: "Boko Haram is an Islamic revolution which impact is not limited to Northern Nigeria, in fact, we are spread across all the 36 states in Nigeria...We have started a Jihad in Nigeria which no force on earth can stop. The aim is to Islamise Nigeria, and ensure the rule of the majority Muslims in the country." In their conception, Christianity is synonymous with Western civilisation, which they see as the source of the multi-dimensional societal crises

which the group aims to address. Thus, Christians—seen as infidels—were declared as one of their primary targets. For example, in one of the releases of the group it was stated that: "The Nigerian state and Christians are our enemies and we will be launching attacks on the Nigerian state and its security apparatus as well as churches until we achieve our goal of establishing an Islamic state in place of the secular state."[130]

This has led to attacks on churches in Borno state. An interviewee summarizes this impact on churches in Gwoza LGA: "Now, all the churches in Gwoza have been destroyed by Boko Haram, and many of the Christians have fled and are living as IDPs in different locations. Since the attacks and the destruction of churches in Gwoza, I have not returned, and the churches are still in their deplorable state since their destruction."[131]

According to local Nigerian researchers, LGAs such as Gwoza and Ngala have historically had significant Christian populations. As violence has resulted in Christians being forcibly displaced, their lands were unprotected and the demographics of the LGAs has reportedly shifted. A Christian IDP from Ngala LGA summarized, "I think for Goshe even during the time of displacement most of the community members were Christians. But now the resettled members are almost ninety percent Muslims in the place I went to. It used to be a Christian community, but now it is a Muslim community."[132]

While non-Christians have also been forcibly displaced because of violence across the state, Christian IDPs spoke of religiously targeted violence. This included attacks and abductions that particularly focused on Christian leaders and places of worship. One interviewee from Gwoza LGA spoke of

An internally displaced woman fleeing Fulani militant violence in northern Nigeria

[129] Onapajo, H. & Usman, A.A., Fuelling the Flames: Boko Haram and Deteriorating Christian–Muslim Relations in Nigeria. Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 35, 2015.
[130] p.111, Ibid.
[131] Interview notes, Individual Interview 7-16-P.
[132] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17HA.

the violence that forced their family to flee several years ago: "Boko Haram target people that are working with the church, maybe you have a position like Secretary or you have any position in church, you are a target. In every community they have a list of people they are looking for."[133]

Intense insecurity has been a fluctuating risk for over a decade. Demonstrating the persistence of the challenges facing these communities, CSW observed in 2014 that Boko Haram was targeting indigenous communities of Christians in Gwoza LGA, clearly violating "their right to freedom of religion of belief."[134] A 2015 VOA news report quoted the military spokesman at the time, Colonel Sani Kukasheka Usman, speaking of Ngala LGA:

> Since the advent of the Boko Haram insurgency, they captured the town and killed most of the inhabitants of the town and some of them have either gone as refugees or become internally displaced persons within the country. Unfortunately, the level of destruction in Gamboru-Ngala, by Boko Haram terrorists is unprecedented. Almost all the structures have been destroyed and you can't even get a single soul. Remember this is a very big town that is very strategic and economically [viable] too.[135]

Violence has life-changing consequences for the individuals involved, such as subsequent trauma.

But a key consequence for the Christian communities in Borno state was the fear instilled by such attacks, pushing them to flee their homes. Many also took with them an increased distrust of the Muslims they used to live alongside. A Christian IDP in Gwoza LGA explained such fears, saying:

> The Christians after they were displaced by Boko Haram from their communities were asked by the government to go to the National Youth Service Camps (NYSC) to stay there, but they refused because the camp was dominated by Muslims whom the Christian IDPs believed were the sole cause of their misfortune. Their refusal to go was also because the Muslims in the camp shared the same faith with their killers, therefore, they were suspicious of what the Muslims could do to them.[136]

Some Christian interviewees related instances where their Muslim neighbors, in order to gain a degree of protection, reported them to Islamist militant groups. An interviewee from Ngala LGA, speaking of the risk of being informed upon, said that many of the displaced persons who returned home lived as "endangered species." However, one interviewee shared that he and his family were saved by a warning of an attack from a Muslim stranger – they were able to flee in advance of the violence.

Violence targeting the Christian community has become more common since 2020 amid a wider trend of insecurity across the country targeting civilians.[137] Total civilian targeting

increased by 28% from 2020 to 2021, and this trend has continued.[138] Outside the North-West and North-Central regions, Borno state has registered the second-highest number of violent events targeting Christians.[139] Additionally, from 2019-2023, Borno state has recorded the highest number of registered killings, at 15,302.[140]

CASE STUDY: GWOZA LGA, BORNO STATE
Between February and May 2014, Boko Haram attacked Isaac's village six times, each time killing seven to ten people.[141] He and his family fled to Adamawa state, where they encountered violence again. Their church was attacked. He describes, "the Sunday school children were out … we suddenly heard gunshots everywhere." Having initially fled the violence, he and his wife came to search for their children once the attack ceased, but could only find four of the five, with one child missing.

Forced to sleep in hilly terrain, with no food, the family ate from the plants they saw. They trekked to multiple places, trying to locate their son. Isaac was given an opportunity to share about his son on the radio and they were also given information and money by people in Maiduguri. After 29 days they were reunited as a family.

"We passed through places that were under attack, we saw dead bodies, we could not eat, I was so weak … [and] said the government should just come and kill me." Both Isaac and his wife became very sick. "Some people took my wife to a hospital and she was diagnosed with kidney problems. I know it was as a result of the kind of food we had been forced to eat."

The continued presence of Boko Haram in their ancestral lands prevents Isaac and his family from returning. Currently living in a camp in Maiduguri, they have been living as IDPs for a decade.

Maiduguri, Borno state

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[133] Transcription, Individual Interview, 7-16-J.
[134] CSW, Christians in Borno State targeted by Boko Haram. 4 June 2014.
[135] Clottey, P., Nigeria Military Recaptures Border Town from Boko Haram. VOA, 9 September 2015.
[136] Meeting Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-CHD.
[137] ACLED, Fact Sheet: Attacks on Christians Spike in Nigeria Alongside Overall Rise in Violence Targeting Civilians. 21 July 2022.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA).
[141] Name changed for security reasons. Case study from: Interview Notes, Individual Interview, 7/16/J.

An informal Christian IDP camp in the North-Central region, hosting Christians who have fled Fulani militant violence

5.a.ii. Plateau state

Displacement in Plateau, a majority Christian state, was triggered by attacks on communities by Fulani militant groups.

There are ongoing debates as to the extent of the radicalization of various Fulani militant groups and the precise religious dynamics at play (see Fulani militant violence on page 6). However, interviewees indicated the presence of religious dynamics. One interviewee from Bassa LGA observed that, "when the Fulani gunmen come to attack, they would be heard shouting 'Allahu Akbar, we will destroy all Christians ...'"[142] Some indigenous Muslims live in Plateau state, and a few interviewees reported Muslims would get advance notice prior to attacks by Fulani militant groups, while Christians would not. This illustrates some of the specific risks of violence for Christians.

The level of violence can be extreme. One attack that demonstrates this occurred on 16th May 2023. According to Solomon Maren, member of the House of Representatives, National Assembly, the death toll hit 100 within 48 hours, including women and children. Many others were left wounded with varying degrees of injuries. Houses and property were razed to the ground, farm and food products destroyed and livestock carted away.[143]

A resident from Mangu LGA shows the destruction to his house

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[142] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 2-24-YO3.
[143] Majeed, B., Over 100 killed in Plateau in 48 hours – Lawmaker raises alarm. Premium Times, 17 May 2023.

An important theme raised by Christian IDPs across both LGAs in Plateau state was the lack of protection by the security forces. Interviewees reported that safety was not guaranteed in their communities, that the security forces either delayed their responses to attacks or didn't respond at all. An interviewee from Mangu LGA shared:

> We don't have what it takes to defend ourselves. Some of our brothers who are hunters only come out with their hunter's guns that have nothing to do with their defense compared to the sophisticated weapons the attackers came with that was why there was massive destruction and massive loss, and most of the time before the security agents will also come to the scene the worst has been done.[144]

This also highlights a disproportionality in weapons used by Fulani militants and those that the Christian farmers defend themselves with. The proliferation of small arms across Nigeria has been highlighted as an issue exacerbating violence by multiple studies, including by International Crisis Group and SBM Intelligence.[145]

In extreme cases of lack of protection, some believed the security forces were complicit with the Fulani militants in their attacks on Christians. A Christian IDP from Bassa LGA commented, "The security was supporting them, rather than protecting us, this was the people coming to us killing us, and destroying our properties, and farms, and the security, could not even protect us nor our farms, or barracks is near us, but I was so angry that nobody could come to our aid, we were helpless. That is why we felt they were there for them; no single house of the Fulani was burnt."[146] Regarding the barracks, the IDP is explaining that one of the largest military compounds is located nearby where they were attacked, yet no military protection was provided. This is not the first time concerns regarding security forces failing to protect civilians have been raised; in 2018 Amnesty International has also commented on the Nigerian government's failure to protect civilians in the north of the country.[147]

In Bassa LGA, during a particular Fulani attack, a respondent shared that "soldiers who were stationed in that village withdrew shortly before the attack happened, we still don't understand why the soldiers acted that way."[148] Many of them concluded that the Army must be collaborating with the attackers, increasing distrust. According to another: "When we report to the security [forces], they remain mute on the matter. The district head's house was burnt in front of the security agents and even the General Officer Commanding (GOC) was standing there. The whole community was burned down in 2021."[149]

Violence in Plateau state has not just created IDPs but has resulted in IDPs being displaced multiple times. For example, some IDPs fled to what they thought was safety in Bokkos,

only to flee back to Mangu after brutal attacks by Fulani militants on Christmas Eve 2023 killed 335 people across Bokkos and Mangu.[150] This creates additional challenges in accessing support, as well as exacerbating feelings of insecurity and uncertainty.

An interviewee from Bassa LGA gave an example:

> They were burning houses and killing people, so I ran with my children to Miango and eventually relocated to Jos to our relatives' house but our house was burnt completely and we did not escape with a single thing, we stayed there for one year and some months while rebuilding our house and then we returned. We thought all had calmed down until in March 2022, they returned and started killing and burning houses some were even burnt inside their houses. As for me we did not lose anyone but the only thing we lost was our house and personal belongings.[151]

Multiple displacements are a recurring pattern across the region. While there have been some doubts raised regarding IOM's data for Plateau state (see The scale of displacement: Plateau), they do report 66% of IDPs in the North-West and North-Central regions being displaced 2 or more times.[152]

CASE STUDY MANGU LGA, PLATEAU STATE

A pastor spoke about the attack on Jebbu Miango on 3 August 2021. Fulani militia numbering up to 300 attacked the entire community during the burial of a local community member. The pastor stated that the military moved to support the Fulani militia, leaving the youths to attempt to defend the community. Farmland was destroyed and the church in Tafi Gana was burnt down.

Two weeks later, the attackers returned, destroying buildings they missed in the first attack and killing people including five members of the church. The attackers also ambushed people on their farms, launched attacks on roads and abducted people. They burnt down houses, destroyed crops, stole property and killed animals, forcing people to flee. Most fled first to nearby communities where they could find friends or relatives. Others settled in the nearest school building or church that they felt safe in. They remained displaced because their security could not be guaranteed despite the presence of soldiers. This was partly due to reports of possible complicity.[153]

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[144] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 13-22-CHD.
[145] International Crisis Group, Violence in Nigeria's North-West: Rolling Back the Mayhem. 18 May 2020.; SBM Intelligence, Report on Small Arms, Mass Atrocities & Migration in Nigeria. April 2020. See also, Gyong, J.E. & Ogbadoyi, C., Public Perception of the Proliferation of Illegal Small Arms and Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Kaduna Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria. American Journal of Contemporary Research, 3(1), January 2013.
[146] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 2-24-CHD.
[147] Amnesty International, Nigeria: The Harvest of Death - Three Years of Bloody Clashes Between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria. December 17, 2018.
[148] Meeting notes, Focus Group Discussion, 2-24-CE.
[149] Interview Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 2-24-YO.
[150] See more about the attacks here: World Health Organization, Restoring hope to displaced Plateau State communities through coordinated humanitarian response. 27 January 2024.; 25 December, 2024.; Open Doors Australia, Update: Christians lead peace march in Plateau State, Nigeria. 22 January 2024.
[151] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 2_24_wc.
[152] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — North-Central and North-West Displacement Report 12 (December 2023). 4 January 2024.
[153] Meeting notes, Focus Group Discussion, 2-24-CHD.

5.b. Experiences in displacement

Inadequate and poorly distributed resources, faith-based discrimination and insufficient understanding of specific displacement experiences increased the vulnerabilities of Christians during displacement.

Need currently far outpaces international support in Nigeria. The UN humanitarian response lists a funding gap of $868.5 million, with funding coverage only at 6.26%.[154] Furthermore, funding commitments and beneficiaries are concentrated in just three states in the North-East: Borno, Adamawa and Yobe.[155]

Living conditions for IDPs generally across Nigeria are hugely concerning. In Borno and Plateau states, interviewees cited issues including inadequate shelter, overcrowding, lack of food and water, and challenges accessing medical care, education, skills training and WASH facilities. The ongoing risk of violence was also a common concern.

An interviewee from Mangu LGA, Plateau state, explained the situation they are facing.

> Our people here in camp do not have enough places to sleep. [In] most of the schools the children look for blankets and spread them on the ground or they sleep on sacks. In most of the camps, you can't find access to drinking water. At the time of the attacks when it was over some of the men were able to go back to their communities. As at the time of the attack boreholes were vandalized by the Fulanis. They destroyed all social amenities; schools, hospitals. No conducive place to sleep or water to drink it's a problem that's why right now a lot of young children are down with malaria, and typhoid because no good water. [156]

Further complicating a challenging situation, Christian IDPs in Borno state reported faith-based discrimination in aid distribution and access to accommodation and livelihoods. In Plateau state, where the majority of IDPs are from Christian communities, there was a notable lack of significant international agency support.

Local church organizations try to care for displaced Christians but are insufficiently resourced to meet the considerable level of need. Where Christians report discrimination in relief provision, particularly in Borno, Christian IDPs are looking to Christian leaders and organizations for support as places of trust.

5.b.i. Borno state
According to Christian IDPs, faith-based discrimination by the state government and community members in Borno has increased their vulnerability by pushing them into more precarious living situations.

For example, to gain access to critical support, some have felt compelled to convert to Islam or deliberately hide their faith.

Two Christian IDPs from Gwoza LGA explained, "there are a lot of different camps..., once you enter any camp and they discover you are a Christian, if you will not convert and be a Muslim, for this, you must leave the camp. So, when they came to Maiduguri and began to enter camps, they would have to convert if they were not Muslim, you had to convert first before you were accepted into the camp."[157] And, "due to the biting hardship and severe living conditions, Christian IDPs are lured and cajoled by Muslims to convert to Islam for temporary benefits or they are forcefully converted."[158]

Accordingly, informal camps run by Christian organizations have emerged to meet the needs of Christian IDPs. However, these informal camps are poorly resourced by the government, resulting in humanitarian need that is outpacing support. An interviewee from Gwoza LGA comments, "there is no food or support from the government in the camp, except for Christians who bring the little that they have to us. People fight for it because it's not sufficient for everyone in the camp."[159]

Discrimination by Borno state government
Christian IDPs reported that official IDP camps run by the state government in Borno are mostly hosting Muslim IDPs; the few Christians there experienced discrimination and persecution by the camp officials and camp leaders because of their faith. Christian IDPs from Gwoza and Ngala LGAs observed that the so-called "white paper cards" – distributed as a license to receive humanitarian assistance by the state government – were deliberately withheld from Christian IDPs. Sometimes cards were given to community leaders to distribute, but usually to Muslim community leaders, who would then bypass Christians.

A Christian IDP from Ngala LGA explained, "The problem with distribution in these areas; if a token card is given to community leaders, they will not give it to Christians. They only give their brother Muslims. So that is the problem. When the government comes with the token cards, they hand them over to the community leaders, [but] the community leaders are Muslims, and they only share with the Muslims [and] don't share with the Christians."[160]

A humanitarian worker from Ngala LGA reported that on the lists of vulnerable persons needing assistance, Christian names on vulnerability assessments carried out by the government or government partners would be replaced with Muslim names once it came to the distribution of aid on the basis of those assessments. For those few Christian IDPs who might have been able to access a white paper card, the humanitarian worker reported that distribution of relief items would be deliberately done on Sundays when Christians would be in church, and so be unable to access aid. In their own words, "In Borno state, we are still suffering persecution from the government, from partners ... Palliatives are being shared on Sunday so that no Christian can benefit from them."[161]

Some of the Gwoza LGA interviewees reported that they used to be well looked after by some organizations, but they alleged these organizations were then instructed by the

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[154] OCHA, Nigeria. Accessed 3 May 2024.
[155] Humanitarian Action, Nigeria. 8 December 2023.
[156] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 13-22-CE.
[157] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 7-18-LA.
[158] Meeting Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-CHD.
[159] Transcription, Individual Interview, 7-16-CA 1.
[160] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-CHDX.
[161] Meeting Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-HA.

government to focus on the Muslims including the Kanuri ethnic group who share that faith. This discrimination has led the majority of Christian IDPs to leave official camps. A Ngala IDP said, "There has been a lot of bias in the way relief materials are distributed within Gamburu Ngala and the situation became very unbearable that we had to leave the camps to fend for ourselves."[162] Another IDP commented, "While we were still in the camp, we were not given cards because we were Christians."[163]

However, leaving a formal camp is not a straightforward choice for Christian IDPs. Both the national and state emergency management agencies focus their attentions on the official, recognized camps; leaving an official camp means leaving a primary provider of essential humanitarian support, even if there are significant challenges in accessing that support.

Other studies have also highlighted general issues for the Nigerian government related to IDP camp mismanagement, including criticisms of policy, corruption and lack of supervision.[164]

Discrimination in host communities in Borno state
Some of the IDPs were accommodated in host communities, which presented challenges for both Christian IDPs and the host communities. Faith-based hostility and greater pressure on amenities and resources were both reported dynamics.

When trying to access accommodation, interviewees said that some Muslims refused to rent to Christians. An interview from Ngala LGA explained this, as well as challenges in accessing aid:

> Recently money was shared to Muslims in the community where we stay by some NGOs but we the Christians did not receive any, not even food was given to us. There is no government targeted intervention to Christians here. Aid is segregated and Christians don't get this aid, it is a systematic segregation of Christians when aid is given. The way it is here, even to rent houses as a Christian is difficult, …[unless] it is a Christian brother who owns the house, [who] will want to rent it to Christians.[165]

Christian IDPs also reported cases when accessing schools and jobs was harder because of their faith. They observed that in some places of education they could not gain admission with Christian names, or that the best and most lucrative course places would be given to those with Muslim names. An IDP youth shared that, "if you decide to go back to school, you will not be offered admission because if they see your name, like I have told you Philip or Philibus, John or Markus and the course you applied for will not be given to you and the courses that seems very irrelevant…will be offered to you and you are left with the decision to study it or not and because of that we are having problems."[166]

In Ngala LGA there were reports of Christians being required or pressured to convert to Islam in order to access jobs. One IDP from Ngala LGA reported: "They intentionally require Christians to convert to Islam, by giving you options to choose from. I knew a teacher who was a Secretary of [a] church and he was due to be a Headmaster and they told him if he wants the position, then he must convert to Islam and he did. I also knew someone who was previously idle but because she converted to Islam, she was given a job as a cleaner in the secretariat. They both got converted because of pressure and hunger."[167]

When reflecting on what this means for Christian IDPs, it is also important to consider the broader context of IDPs located in host communities as opposed to designated IDP camps. For humanitarian agencies, providing support to IDPs in host communities is more time-consuming and complex; however, it is important for agencies to respect the choice of the IDPs in how they choose to manage their displacement.[168] It is also good to recognize that IDPs can place an indirect "heavy economic and social burden on local communities" which can "produce resentment among local host populations."[169] This means that when accounting for faith-based vulnerabilities within host community settings, there are multiple complex factors to incorporate.

THE SCALE OF DISPLACEMENT: BORNO
The scale and length of displacement has been considerable. As of December 2023, IOM reported 1,711,481 IDPs hosted in Borno state alone – Borno hosts 74% of IDPs in the North-East region of Nigeria.[170] Of that 1.7 million in Borno, 74% were displaced before 2021,[171] illustrating how many IDPs have been dealing with the harsh realities of displacement settings for many years. 68% of IDPs have been displaced two or more times.[172] No data exists on the religious affiliation of forcibly displaced persons.

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[162] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-CE 2.
[163] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-DF.
[164] Onuh, E.M., Assessment of the role of government in addressing the challenges of internally displaced persons in Abuja, Nigeria camps. African Journal of Social Issues, 5(1), 2022.; Shimawua, D., Appraisal of the Management of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria. Network for Research and Development in Africa, International Journal of Knowledge and Dynamics Systems, 13(2), December 2020, pp.63-75.
[165] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-LA.
[166] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-16-YO2.
[167] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-Yo 3.
[168] Davies, A., IDPs in Host Families and Host Communities: Assistance for hosting arrangements. UNHCR, April 2012.
[169] p.3, Haider, H., Refugee, IDP and host community radicalisation. GSDRC: Helpdesk Research Report, 31 October 2014.
[170] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — North-east — Mobility Tracking Round 46 IDP and Returnee Atlas (December 2023). 14 February 2024.
[171] Ibid.
[172] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — Borno - Intention Survey (April 2024). 15 April 2024.

5.b.ii. Plateau state

In Plateau state, the experiences of IDPs in displacement settings was not primarily affected by their religious affiliation, a key difference to the findings from Borno. Instead, it was shaped by the distinct lack of attention to the area by humanitarian agencies. International humanitarian funding for Nigeria is focused on three states in the North-East: Borno, Adamawa and Yobe.[173] This neglect has created a humanitarian crisis among the displaced communities in the state, whose population is Christian majority.[174]

Of those displaced within the state, the vast majority are hosted in local communities. IOM reports 98% of the IDPs that they were aware of in the state in September 2023 being dispersed among host communities.[175] People often initially fled in chaos, heading for the bush, neighboring towns and random buildings, some of which evolved into informal IDP camps. This is reinforced by a report from a UNICEF field visit in Plateau state, who observed "temporary IDP camps set up both in public buildings and in host communities."[176] Often interviewees said they fled to what they thought was simply the nearest place of safety. Such informal camps then slowly closed as people moved on; staying with friends and family was often the preferred option.

But the need for humanitarian aid and support is severe. Interviewees cited problems including shelter, access to food and water, education, WASH facilities and access to medical care. According to one IDP:

> Many of our women deliver at home without medical care, no vaccine for newborn babies, and no proper clothing for the mothers and children because the mothers ran without anything. Children run for more than four kilometers without shoes on their legs, many of them had no proper clothing for this weather, and some of the children were presently sick because of the weather. Food in the camps is not always enough, pregnant women have no proper diet, and our women and children are in a very bad situation.[177]

Displaced Christians in Plateau commonly come from farming communities — expulsion from and an inability to return to their home also means a fundamental disconnect with their livelihood. One interviewee from Mangu LGA summarized: "Mangu people do not depend on government work, they depend on their farms."[178] Not only were they forced to flee, but frequently their farms were also destroyed by Fulani militants. In Mangu LGA, 51,131,69 hectares of farmland and crops were destroyed between April 2023 and January 2024; in Bassa LGA over 448 farms were recorded as destroyed between 2018 and 2023, with one youth sharing with a local organization that between 2021 and 2023, "farm destruction became so rampant that a lot of households did not bother to officially report the incidents."[179]

This need for practical support correlates with needs assessments by IOM, who report that among IDPs living in

Destruction following attacks carried out in Plateau state by militant Fulani militants on Christmas 2023

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[173] OCHA, Nigeria: Humanitarian Funding Overview (As of 31 July 2023). 31 July 2023.
[174] For state by state religious affiliation, see Stonawski, M. et al, The changing religious composition of Nigeria: causes and implications of demographic divergence. The Journal of Modern African Studies, 54(3), pp.361-387, September 2016.
[175] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — North-Central and North-West Displacement Report 12 (December 2023). 4 January 2024.
[176] p.1, UNICEF, Nigeria Response Report. June 2024.
[177] Meeting Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 13-22-WC.
[178] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 13-22-CHD.
[179] Mwaghavul Development Association (MDA), January 2024. Received 16 February 2024.

A resident from Mangu LGA shows Open Doors partners the destruction to her house

THE SCALE OF DISPLACEMENT: PLATEAU

IOM reported 54,457 IDPs hosted in Plateau state as of December 2023.[186] However, when our researchers contacted local agencies such as the Mwaghavul Development Association (MDA), they reported significantly higher numbers of IDPs; IOM's figures were nearly 80% lower. For example, MDA documented 103,000 IDPs in Mangu LGA alone as of January 2024. IOM figures also did not correlate with the observations of researchers working among IDPs in the state, who observed much higher numbers of displaced persons. This presents challenges in confidently presenting a figure for the number of IDPs in Plateau state and indicates an urgent need for further quantitative research to verify the number of IDPs, in order to provide adequate levels of support.

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host communities in Plateau, 75% have no access to livelihood support.[180] In a 2021 study conducted with IDPs by IDMC in Jos, Plateau state, the impact of displacement on livelihoods was one of the most severe, with nearly a third of IDPs becoming unemployed once they arrived in Jos.[181] Interviewees also raised the importance of access to education as a key barrier to the long-term prospects for supporting themselves in the future. While primary education is "officially mandatory and free in Nigeria," IDMC reports that IDPs still encounter a key barrier of school fees, as well as costs related to uniforms and materials and other necessities.[182]

IDMC has highlighted the lack of humanitarian attention and research on the North-Central region of Nigeria, "making it difficult to effectively tailor support for IDPs...and assess IDPs' progress towards durable solutions."[183] Out of the ten possible activities that IOM carries out state by state in Nigeria, only three are carried out in Plateau: Rapid Incident/Flash Assessment, Mobility Tracking/Master List Assessment and Mobility Tracking/Needs Monitoring. While this is not the least state by state activity (Kogi and Anambra each only host one), by contrast, IOM carries out seven activities in Borno state and five in the nearby Benue.[184]

Research from another state in the North-Central region, Nasarawa state, demonstrates how displaced persons were reliant on family and friends for shelter and food, and struggled make a living. Relocation to a place of greater safety was one of the cited coping strategies.[185]

CASE STUDY: MANGU LGA, PLATEAU STATE

On 16 May 2023, "we went out in the [small] hours of the morning and saw some Fulani [militants]. We then inquired from one of our Fulani neighbors what was going on. Before we knew what was happening, we heard sporadic gunshots all over the neighboring villages. Before long they had invaded our whole street. We did not have any weapons, so we had to [run], every one of us only wearing our clothes and those were all we had with us. We were all displaced around different local government areas. People from same families could not locate one another, because they were forced to run away to different places. This displacement has separated families; no food and nothing to do. Women have been separated from their men. Our families have been shared among relatives. While that incident was happening, we looked for the Nigeria security [forces] to come to our aid, but for five days no one came to help us." – A Christian IDP interviewee.[187]

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[180] Ibid.
[181] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Impacts of displacement: Displaced by violence, Jos, Nigeria. 2021.
[182] School fees repeatedly cited by Christian interviewees as a challenge. See also, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Impacts of displacement: Displaced by violence, Jos, Nigeria. 2021.
[183] p.7, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Impacts of displacement: Displaced by violence, Jos, Nigeria. 2021.
[184] International Organization for Migration, DTM Nigeria Compendium II. May 2024.
[185] Yikwab, Y.P. & Tade, O., How Farming Communities Cope With Displacement Arising from Farmer-Herder Conflict in North Central Nigeria. Journal of Asia and African Studies, 57(4), 23 July 2021.
[186] International Organization of Migration, Nigeria — North-Central and North-West — Round 13 IDP Atlas (March 2024). 11 March 2024.
[187] Meeting Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 13/22/CE 1.

5.b.iii. Psychological impact

The psychological impact was a recurring theme across both Borno and Plateau states. There is an urgent need for intervention and support for those displaced and considering return.

There were reports of many Christian IDPs experiencing trauma from the severe violence and terror that precipitated their displacement as well as the continued insecurity they now face. For example, in Mangu LGA, Plateau state, many of the Christian IDPs had witnessed family members being killed, and their homes being looted and burned down. A parent from Gwoza LGA, Borno state explained: "The situation is traumatic and scary each time I remember. Due to the volume of trauma, we have experienced, my children, each time they hear anything, they panic or go into hiding because it triggers the trauma. The terror of the attacks has not stopped, rather it has increased."[188]

But the psychological impact also has been exacerbated by living in displacement settings. The trauma of the initial violence that forced someone to flee can be compounded by displacement settings; other research has highlighted the need to specifically address the mental health needs of forcibly displaced persons, given the impact of "post-migration traumatic events, discrimination, lack of access to quality and affordable healthcare and housing, and acculturation."[189] A systematic review of existing research suggests that approximately 30% of populations forcibly displaced by conflict experience depression or PTSD.[190] Research on Borno state highlights the challenge of delivering psychosocial interventions for displaced persons who have experienced violence, it being crucial that psychosocial services are strengthened and sustainable.[191]

The abject living conditions and lack of support has led to a common theme of hopelessness across both Borno and Plateau states. An interviewee from Gwoza LGA, Borno state, commented: "The situation in the camp is a time bomb if not addressed immediately because the psychological state of the IDPs has grossly degenerated."[192]

While Christian religious leaders have been committed to supporting their communities, they are often under-resourced and dealing with their own experiences of trauma. Church leaders interviewed expressed frustration as they are unable to meet the needs of their congregants. Churches of different denominations in Ngala LGA, Borno state, have brought relief materials, water pumps and other resources to support IDPs, but IDPs are still facing considerable humanitarian challenges. Research has documented how local faith communities contribute to the protection and resilience of displaced persons, which often builds on existing coping mechanisms within communities.[193]

Regarding psychological resilience, faith can be a positive factor during displacement; this has also been highlighted by other research.[194] Christian leaders interviewed were concerned about the spiritual lives of the Christian IDPs and held a sense of responsibility towards the faith of IDPs. This prompts recognition of the ways in which Christian leaders can play a role in supporting the psychological wellbeing of displaced Christians. In research from Nasarawa state interviewees also cited their trust in God as a source of resilience.[195]

5.b.iv. Vulnerabilities of specific groups

Through interviews with different groups, such as women with children, youth and older generations, some specific vulnerabilities associated with age and sex emerged. Some were specific to Christian IDPs, and some appeared to be a risk for all IDPs including Christians.

Women and girls

- Pregnant women have faced inadequate food supplies and a lack of medical help. As a result, some babies have been lost both during delivery and as newborns. One IDP from Mangu LGA, Plateau state, explained, "Our women delivered in the rain during attacks and some of the children died. No food for the women, some don't know where their husbands are."[196]

- Some young girls have reportedly been forced into "survival sex", exchanging sex for basic necessities such as food. From Ngala LGA, Borno state, an interviewee comments that "some people got to have sex with small girls in ISS camp so they can get food to eat. I have witnessed this."[197] A displaced church leader from Gwoza LGA, Borno state, additionally says "there are also cases where a mother and her daughter are involved in prostitution to earn a living."[198] HRW have also documented cases in Borno state where displaced women and girls have been coerced into sex in exchange for essential assistance.[199]

- Heightened risk of sexual violence. A female Christian IDP from Ngala LGA, Borno state, comments, "Truly our lives as Christian ladies here in the camp requires prayers, because sometimes we will be kidnapped or raped."[200] Multiple authors have documented the prevalence of sexual violence in IDP camps in Nigeria,

[188] Interview Notes, Individual interview, 7-16-P.r.
[189] p.909, Grasser, L.R., Addressing mental health concerns in refugees and displaced populations: is enough being done?. Risk management and healthcare policy, 2022, pp.909-922.
[190] Steel, Z. et al., Association of Torture and Other Potentially Traumatic Events With Mental Health Outcomes Among Populations Exposed to Mass Conflict and Displacement: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. JAMA, 302(5), 2009.
[191] Umesi, E.J., Interventions for Persons Affected by Conflicts & Insurgency: An Assessment of Psychosocial Support in IDP camps in Nigeria. Psychology and Mental Health Case, 6(3), 22 January 2022.
[192] Meeting Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-CHD 1.
[193] Ager, J. et al., Local Faith Communities and the Promotion of Resilience in Contexts of Humanitarian Crisis. Journal of Refugee Studies, 28(2), 2015, pp.202-221.
[194] Such as, Ibid.; Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. Refugees in Kenya: Roles of Faith. November 2015.
[195] Yikwab, Y.P. & Tade, O., How Farming Communities Cope With Displacement Arising from Farmer-Herder Conflict in North Central Nigeria. Journal of Asia and African Studies, 57(4), 23 July 2021.
[196] Meeting Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 3-22-WC.
[197] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-YO.
[198] Meeting Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-CHD 1.
[199] Human Rights Watch, Nigeria: Officials Abusing Displaced Women, Girls. 31 October, 2016.
[200] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-YO1.

including HRW collecting cases of officials abusing displaced women and girls in Borno state.[201]

- Female-headed households are prevalent. Women face the grief of losing their husbands, alongside the challenge of being the sole provider for their families. A female IDP from Ngala LGA, Borno state, explains the challenges she faces: "My husband was killed, we are struggling with the children, and paying our rent is an issue. We don't have money for food. Our children disturb us when there is no food to eat, they are crying mummy no food. We don't even know what to do with our lives… When we had everything, they loved us but now that we have lost our husbands, [the children] are running away from us because we don't have anything. We are struggling, no house, no food, no school."[202]

- Hygiene challenges, such as sharing one toilet with multiple households and lack of access to sanitary supplies. A female IDP from Bassa LGA, Plateau state, explains, "Where we live, the place was jam-packed, and there was no safety because the women and the men were using one toilet… we are jam-packed in a room, and there was no safe place for us to sleep properly, there was no privacy, and we were just packed men and women all of us in the same place."[203]

- In some places, such as Ngala LGA, to gain acceptance in the community female Christians have sometimes had to wear a hijab. A female IDP comments on the religious dynamic that can be at play, saying "Before we go to the market, we have to disguise ourselves with Hijab still they will recognize us even still they prefer us wearing Hijab because they believe we will later become Muslims."[204]

Children and youth
- Children and youth lack education and training opportunities. Sometimes there were no schools, sometimes the schools were closed, and in other situations the fees were too high. This increased the risk of exploitation for children and youth. Some faith-related discrimination in education settings was also reported, such as denying access to some courses to those with Christian names. An IDP youth from Gwoza LGA, Borno state, speaks of the school fees, "going outside to further your education either secondary level or diploma is the problem when it comes to paying school fees."[205] The IDMC comments on the invisibility of child IDPs, who "face many barriers" in accessing education and "tend to need dedicated support."[206]

- There are few employment options, particularly for the youth. For example, in Gwoza LGA, few can afford education and many only have farming skills. A female IDP from Gwoza LGA, Borno state, explains some of the gendered dynamics at play in employment and challenges with education, "anytime we step out to look for something to do we always have problem with the men who employ us. As for school we cannot afford it because it's hard to afford one like me who have finished my secondary school with two years now and its three years now that I have been out of school because we cannot be able to afford it, we don't have food to eat therefore, we don't think of university because it's very expensive."[207]

A mother and child in a Christian IDP camp, Benue state

[201] Including, Durojaye, E. & Adebanjo, T., Addressing the Epidemic of Sexual Harassment in IDP Camps in Nigeria. Sexual Harassment, Law and Human Rights in Africa, Palgrave Macmillan, 18 July 2023, pp.169-197.; Human Rights Watch, Nigeria: Officials Abusing Displaced Women, Girls. 31 October, 2016.; Ugwa, J., Sexual Abuse Thrives in Nigeria's IDP Camps with No Recourse for Victims. Women's Media Center, 30 May 2021.
[202] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17 WC.
[203] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 2-24-WC.
[204] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-YO 28.
[205] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-16-YO2.
[206] p.10, Cazabat, C. & Yasukawa, L., Informing better access to education for IDPs. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022.
[207] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-16-YO2.

- Child trafficking was reported in Mangu LGA, with orphans particularly at risk. A Christian IDP from Mangu LGA, Plateau state, commented, "there are children we find without both parents, they are orphans, that nobody identified with because of the crises, after the first attack in particular, and then you find out that some people that are into child trafficking, took advantage of what is happening, came in promising the children a better life … we were able to bring back 100 children from Port Harcourt and Lagos, and last week I brought about three children from Jos."[208] Research on modern slavery has highlighted forcibly displaced persons as "one of the most at-risk populations for human trafficking," due to multiple compounding factors such as overcrowding, underfunding, poverty, lack of resources and insecurity.[209]

Older generations

- Older generations find it physically challenging to queue for food and aid distribution. An IDP from Ngala LGA, Borno state, observes, "you can be in line till 5:00pm before you can get the water, so it's easier to go 1am in the night to get and because she only has her grandchildren, she has to do it herself in the night and that is not easy."[210] Interviewees from Ngala LGA also explained that sometimes IDPs will have to get a spot in a queue three days before an aid distribution and stay there for the three days just to receive some food, a considerable physical challenge. An IDP from Mangu LGA, Plateau state, observed, "They still struggle to find support to cater for their family; she was trampled upon during one of the distributions, so she decided to go there again because the aged are not taken into consideration in terms of aid of distribution. They often put their lives at risk just to get these aids."[211]

- Lack of accessible medical care. An IDP from Mangu LGA, Plateau state, explained, "there's no medical care, we use our money for our medical bill." Both she and her husband who are older have not been properly looked after. When they are sick, they have to rely on their children who are not based here, or relatives to get money and go to the hospital. There is no medical support coming from anywhere. Since she was displaced no aid has gotten to her. Even when assistance is brought, she is afraid to go because she will be trampled upon. The only way they survive is via "good-spirited individuals" from host communities who identify them and give them a little food support.[212] Another IDP agreed, saying health care is a big problem for older generations because there is no support for them.[213]

- Reported significant psychological impact from being disconnected from their ancestral lands. A Christian IDP spoke of the significance of the events forcing people to flee, "Before the crisis these were people who depended on themselves they had a means of survival they farmed and they were able to support themselves they had their properties and overnight everything was destroyed."[214]

An internally displaced woman preparing food

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208 Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 13-22-YO.
209 p.1, Lumley-Sapanski, A. et al., Trafficking in persons and protection of refugees, stateless persons and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Submission by the Rights Lab, University of Nottingham, February 2023.
210 Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-CE1.
211 Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 13-22-CE.
212 Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 13-22-CE.
213 Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 13-22-CE.
214 Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 13-22-CE.

5.c. Risk of return

Faith increases the level of risk for displaced Christians who try to return home.

Across both Borno and Plateau states, despite a strong desire among Christians to return home, the lack of security and illegal land occupation continues to be a significant obstacle. A Christian IDP from Mangu LGA, Plateau state, summarized, "Our fear is that the Fulani [militants] are still in our villages presently, we are afraid to return back to our communities. As it is now those Fulani [militants] are well armed even presently now with their cattle in our farmlands we can't even return."[215] There was also a high level of distrust of the security forces among interviewees.

5.c.i. Borno state

The Borno state government has pushed for IDPs to return home, a move widely criticized by humanitarian actors.[216] HRW records an IDP in Borno state saying, "We already suffered at the hands of Boko Haram before now and we are still suffering at the hands of the government."[217] While they initially provided some relevant support for IDPs, with time the Borno state government began to resettle IDPs and close down camps in a manner inconsistent with local and international laws. This closure has reportedly pushed IDPs into further destitution. According to HRW, the Borno state government wrote to all humanitarian organizations in December 2021 banning them from distributing food and other aid to resettled communities like Bama in Borno state.[218]

As to the progress of camp closure, "according to the Global Protection Cluster (GPC), a network of NGOs, international organizations, and UN agencies, the move targets the closure of 220 official and unofficial camps housing nearly 900,000 people, or about half of Borno's IDP population (the rest are accommodated within host community settings). It is unclear how many across the state have so far been relocated, with the state government offering conflicting figures, but by November 2023 at least 13 camps had reportedly been closed."[219]

The state government have offered incentives to returnees, such as food parcels or one-off payments. A Christian IDP from Ngala LGA gave an example:

> The promise the Governor made to us was that if we relocated back to Baga he would be providing us with palliatives since at that time one could not go to the bush; farming or fishing, you could not go. But the promise he made to us was that if we relocated back to Baga he was going to be assisting us with palliative measures. From then – truly once, we were given palliative by the Governor, but what was given to us was not much to write home about, because what he brought to us – rice – was not more than five measures. Beans – was not more than five measures. That was all he gave to us. From then on, we didn't have any work to do. We now decided that we would brave the odds and go into the bush to fish. We then crossed the back of the fish dam. Between the fish dam and Baga the distance is not more than one and a half kilometers. While at the fishing place, one day Boko Haram came and attacked us.[220]

Mother Hannatu holding a photo of her daughter who was kidnapped by Boko Haram alongside 230 other girls in Chibok, Borno state, 2014. Boko Haram released 21 girls in Oct 2016 and another 82 in May 2017. The chairman of the Chibok Parents' Association, Yakubu Nkeki Maina, says 112 Christian girls have yet to be freed. No one knows how many of them are still alive.

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[215] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 13-22-CE 2.
[216] For example, see International Crisis Group, Rethinking Resettlement and Return in Nigeria's North East. 16 January 2023.; Amnesty International, Nigeria: Plans to close IDP camps in Maiduguri could endanger lives. 15 December 2021.
[217] Human Rights Watch, "Those Who Returned Are Suffering": Impact of Camp Shutdowns on People Displaced By Boko Haram Conflict in Nigeria. 2 November 2022.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Baba-Ibrahim, Z., In northeast Nigeria, those who fled conflict and being returned to conflict. The New Humanitarian, 23 April 2024.
[220] Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17-CHD 2.

Bethany's* daughter Mary* was abducted during a Fulani militant attack on her village in North-West Nigeria. She and three other women were held for 54 days, during which she repeatedly suffered sexual violence. After Bethany paid a ransom that impoverished her family, Mary was released. Mary died suddenly almost a year after her release, only for Bethany herself to be kidnapped and released. *Names changed for security reasons

As reported by The New Humanitarian, resettlement packages from the state government were only received by a few IDPs and were distributed evenly without taking into account the size of the household; for some family units the packages were used within a few days and prompted a new cycle of displacement.[221]

Interviewees reported reluctance to return because of ongoing insecurity and the presence of explosive ordinances in their places of origin. Some returnees were attacked by militants and fled again. An interviewee from Gwoza LGA commented, "Boko Haram is still there, they have made camps there and they are living, unless the government evacuates the area and makes it safe because if you go you will be killed, so they are the ones still in possession of the lands."[222]

Christian IDPs regularly commented that they longed to return to their homes and ancestral lands. That desire seemed to be especially strong in those over 50 years of age. This correlates with IOM assessments; as of April 2024, 67% of IDPs in Borno stated an intention to return, but 59% of those who wanted to return explained that their houses were completely destroyed.[223] Absence of housing and insecurity of area of return were the two most frequently mentioned reasons for not yet returning home.[224] 20% remained undecided about where their future lay, and for the 11% who decided to integrate locally, security was the main factor in deciding not to return.[225]

Abductions were cited by interviewees as a key security risk across Borno state. While this was also a risk for Muslim returnees, interviewees explained how ISWAP would ask for higher ransoms for Christian abductees than for Muslims, sometimes twice as much, with ransoms even higher for clergy. The threat from Boko Haram varied. Abductions were less likely for purposes of ransom, with reports of

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221 Baba-Ibrahim, Z., In northeast Nigeria, those who fled conflict and being returned to conflict. The New Humanitarian, 23 April 2024.
222 Transcription, Individual interview, 7-16-CA 1.
223 International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — Borno - Intention Survey (April 2024). 15 April 2024.
224 Ibid.
225 Ibid.

Boko Haram attempting to convert abductees to become foot soldiers and killing those who refused. However, Boko Haram also appeared to have financial motivations, with reports of requirements to pay a jizya tax. For example, farmers who returned needed to pay dues to both farm and to harvest.

An interviewee in Ngala LGA explained how these pressures would combine: "In Doro [located in Kukawa LGA], the Christians have been reduced to a handful. Christians there are struggling to survive because they cannot farm or fish which are their sources of livelihood. If we attempt to farm or fish, Boko Haram will invade the fishing location and your fellow fisherman who is a Muslim will sell you out to them. Concerning farming, we cannot access our farmlands due to the high level of insecurity, and even when we finally farm, we cannot harvest because Boko Haram will harvest it."[226]

As a result of this combination of factors, protracted displacement is common, with one interviewee saying "it has been twelve years of displacement for me and the Christians in Gwoza."[227] The discrimination experienced in host communities, combined with the threat to life associated with returning home, leaves little prospect for a durable solution to the internal displacement Christians face in Borno.

5.c.ii. Plateau state
Ongoing violence in Plateau presents a continual threat for returnees, prompting repeated cycles of displacement and concerns that Christian communities will become more permanently displaced.

A Christian IDP from Bassa LGA spoke about the impact that this has on education:

> So, some of the children, if you just ask them now, they will say, there's no need to go to school again because even though we go, this crisis is not over yet. They will still come back, and they will still be destroyed if we gather enough money to go to school it will be seen as a waste of money to pay school fees again, and they will come and stop you from going to school. You, see? So, most of the children are at home, they are not going to school again. They're just doing mining and other things.[228]

Return appeared to be a more frequent occurrence among those interviewed in Plateau state than in Borno state, but those interviewed emphasized that security challenges persisted. Christian IDPs reported that Fulani militants would often stay in the places they attacked, and so remain a threat for those who return. They feared that without greater government commitment to security and with ongoing impunity for perpetrators, Christian communities are being dislodged across the state and losing their ancestral lands.

Demonstrating how security issues play out in practice, an interviewee in Bassa LGA reported that many families are

separated as the men stay in the village to protect their land and the women and children try to find somewhere safer. He shared, "Fulani brought another attack in Jebbu, and burn a lot of places, but my station was attacked and burn places on the 3rd of August, every day, day and night we don't sleep we take women and children to go and sleep in Jebbu and we stay in the town to protect it."[229] This largely correlates with IOM figures, who record that across the North-Central and North-West regions, 45% of IDPs are girls and 21% are boys.[230] However, IOM's figures do not record religious affiliation.

As well as concerns about safety, the need for shelter and food is acute. Many buildings have been destroyed and many farms are still unsafe. According to a displaced Christian community leader: "In most of the communities mentioned, you can't see any house standing … Our people are now concentrated within the townships. Our people can no longer go to their farms."[231] In Mangu LGA alone between April 2023 and January 2024, there have been 98 separate attacks on predominately Christian villages, 661 people killed, and 7,363 houses destroyed.[232] MDA further reported that 43 schools were destroyed and 27 health clinics.[233] In Bassa and Mangu LGAs this means that many have become dependent on aid; one interviewee from Mangu LGA commented that "the greatest need of our people is to return. If the government can return our people, it will help a lot. Our communities have to be rebuilt, but there has to be security."[234]

This correlates with findings from a UNICEF field visit in Plateau state, where "displaced adults and displaced children respectively emphasized that they were keen to return home and to their schools as soon as the security situations allowed."[235]

CASE STUDY: MANGU LGA, PLATEAU STATE

"In Kantoma, the Fulani attacked us. We didn't know that anything was going on. Our men were alerted that the Fulanis are coming. We were warned by men to move out quickly. Before we knew what was happening the village was surrounded by the Fulanis. There were many of them. Many of our men were killed, about 39 of them were killed. We couldn't farm even in the past year. There is no food or shelter. Everything was destroyed. Even this week, there were attacks. Our people are also into tin mining which has been supporting us economically, but this has been affected by this crisis. Some of our people who were bold to go back to tin mining, were attacked. Our schools have been destroyed. Many of our people have been killed. Fulani [militants] have been destroying what is left, even the houses that are standing. There is no food in the camp. We are seriously in need."
– A Christian IDP interviewee[236]

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226 Meeting Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 14-17 CHD.
227 Transcription, Individual interview 7-16-P.
228 Transcription, Focus Group Discussion, 2_24_wc.
229 Transcription, Individual Interview, 2-24-CHD.
230 International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — North-Central and North-West Displacement Report 12 (December 2023). 4 January 2024.
231 Meeting Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 13-22-HA.
232 Mwaghavul Development Association (MDA), January 2024. Received 16 February 2024.
233 Ibid.
234 Transcription, Individual interview, 13-22-HA2.
235 p.1, UNICEF, Nigeria Response Report. June 2024
236 Meeting Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 13-22-HA.

6. Beyond Nigeria

These indications of overlapping vulnerabilities on the basis of religion and forced displacement necessitates further research and attention beyond Nigeria. With Islamist militancy spreading more widely in the region, evolving and emerging conflicts such as in Sudan and targeted violence against Christians already being reported,[237] Nigeria is not alone in the displacement-related challenges it faces.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, forced displacement is a considerable challenge in multiple countries where there are vulnerable Christian communities. For example, Cameroon hosts over 1 million IDPs and Burkina Faso over 2 million. Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) hosts over 6 million IDPs and Sudan over 9 million.[238] Each of these countries can be found in the top 50 countries of the World Watch List 2024, indicating the presence of Christian communities who experience very high or extreme levels of discrimination and persecution on the basis of their faith.

To take one example, Burkina Faso is home to one of the fastest-growing displacement and protection crises globally; as of March 2023, seven in ten of the Sahel region's IDPs are found here (although the definition of Sahelian countries used in this data does not include Nigeria).[239] Furthermore, thousands flee to neighboring countries such as Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger and Benin. UNHCR reported Burkinabe refugees arriving in Ivory Coast without personal belongings or food and being housed by Ivorian families with up to 30 other refugees.[240]

Internal displacement has risen tenfold since 2013, impacting over 2 million Burkinabes.[241] In addition to militant Islamist violence, driving this surge in displacement is inter-ethnic violence, insecurity, poverty and environmental changes. Burkina Faso has risen from a score of 48/100 points (at rank 61) in WWL 2019 to a score of 75/100 points (at rank 20) in WWL 2024.[242] Its population is 56% Muslim, 23%

"When the terrorists find Christians, they tell them the time of Christianity is over," says Pastor Soré from Burkina Faso. "We had to flee to save our lives."

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[237] Open Doors International, WWL 2024 Summary of Trends. February 2024.
[238] Burkina Faso: 2,063,000; Cameroon: 1,075,000; DRC: 6,881,000; Sudan: 9,053,000. IDMC, IDMC Data Portal. Accessed 21 May 2024.
[239] Countries included: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. UNHCR, R4Sahel coordination platform. Accessed 8 April 2024.
[240] Cheshirkov, B., Insecurity drives more Burkinabe into exile, further straining fragile Sahel region. UNHCR press briefing at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, 4 February 2022.
[241] UNHCR, R4Sahel coordination platform. Accessed 8 April 2024.
[242] Open Doors International, World Watch List 2024. Accessed 1 July 2024.

Pastor Soré and his family outside of his makeshift house, Burkina Faso

Christian and 20% ethno-religionist. In 2023, Burkina Faso was the country most impacted by terrorism.[243]

If Christians, particularly converts from a Muslim background in the Muslim-majority border regions (northern and eastern areas of Burkina Faso), are discovered by militant Islamist groups, they are highly vulnerable to attack. Homes and livelihoods can also be destroyed, forcing Christians to flee.[244] Christians are not the only ones who suffer. Mosques and madrassas in militant-controlled areas teach radical versions of Sunni Islam, causing Sufi Muslims to be under threat. Residents also reported that "terrorist groups" were responsible for killing imams whom the groups accused of collaborating with government security forces.[245]

Since the displacement crisis in Burkina Faso began relatively recently (violence escalated rapidly in 2019),[246] reports on the experiences of displaced Christians are lacking. Commentators have noted that reporting on Burkina Faso's human rights situation is not helped by a 2019 law that hampered media freedom by criminalizing some aspects of reporting on security force operations.[247] Reportedly, the government implemented a de facto ban on visits by journalists to IDP camps through requests for visits being denied by the government ministry on

humanitarian action.[248] Furthermore, there are reports that the government pressured journalists and victims who reported on allegations of sex in exchange for humanitarian relief.[249] It should be noted that while journalists are not granted access, UNCHR operate throughout Burkina Faso to support refugees and IDPs,[250] coordinating a protection cluster with the Danish Refugee Council.[251] Key protection risks identified include child recruitment into armed groups, gender-based violence and attacks on infrastructure.[252] These organizations have not reported directly on the experience of Christians in Burkina Faso.

With journalists prohibited from entering displacement settings, and residents unable to leave and often fighting for survival, it is no surprise that experiences of Christian IDPs have been infrequently recorded. Christian leaders paint a picture of communities shattered by Islamic militants attacking villages and forcing inhabitants to leave without money or possessions and relocate to family members in urban areas.[253]

More research is needed to fully understand the relationship between religious vulnerability and forced displacement in Burkina Faso, exemplifying the need for similar research in multiple countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

[243] Institute for Economics & Peace, Global Terrorism Index 2024. February 2024.
[244] Open Doors International, Burkina Faso Full Country Dossier 2024. January 2024. [password: freedom]
[245] USCIRF, Report on International Religious Freedom. 2021.
[246] Norwegian Refugee Council, Once Again, Burkina Faso is the world's most neglected crisis. 3 June 2024.
[247] US Department of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Burkina Faso. 2019.
[248] Wilkins, H., With media blocked, Burkina Faso's displaced denied a voice, journalists say. VOA News, 17 June 2021.
[249] Wilkins, H., Burkina Faso's Sex for Food Aid Scandal Draws Government Denial, Lawsuit. VOA News, 16 September 2021.
[250] UNHCR, Burkina Faso Fact Sheet. 1 March – 30 April 2023.
[251] The Protection Cluster in Burkina Faso was activated in 2019 to ensure the coordination of protection interventions in emergencies and to respond to the protection needs of persons affected by conflict and disasters. Global Protection Cluster, Burkina Faso. Accessed 1 July 2024.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Open Doors, "They attack to uproot" - New report reveals the wider strategy behind displacement of Christians. 3 July 2022.

7. Conclusion

The scale of suffering caused by forced displacement and violence in Nigeria is vast and concerning. This includes the significant role of religious affiliation in the causes and experiences of displacement. Despair was a common sentiment expressed by Christian IDPs and it is clear that more needs to be done, by both state and non-state actors, to address the material, emotional, spiritual and psychosocial needs of displaced persons in Nigeria.

Yet signs of hope can be seen. While the psychological impacts have been considerable for those interviewed, there was also evidence of remarkable resilience. For example, in Mangu LGA, Plateau state, schools have been closed in most of the rural areas but in April 2023 groups of youth came together to provide educational services. They recruited volunteers to go around different camps to offer teaching to the children, using the syllabus for primary and junior secondary schools which includes literacy, math and science. There are also reports of churches committing to supporting the displaced by a range of means, including paying school fees for orphans and providing soft loans to enable people to restart earning a living.

Forcibly displaced Nigerians are taking action to address some of the issues they are facing. They are asking for support from policymakers and the global church to aid them in their efforts.

For those in positions of influence, they ask for increased commitments to humanitarian support, security and criminal prosecution for perpetrators. Restoration to their ancestral lands is a key step forward. An interviewee from Gwoza LGA, Borno state, says: "If the international community will help us go back and help us rebuild our lives, that is all we want."

For the global church, Christian IDPs in Nigeria are asking for awareness and spiritual support. Mass displacement and the destruction of church buildings has had a significant impact on the life of the church in the region; primarily as places of worship, but also as sources of mutual encouragement and community. An interviewee in Mangu LGA, Plateau state says: "The global church needs to know that many people are displaced. The global church needs to pray for the people to be able to return."

From targeted violence to relief distribution, religious dynamics cannot be excluded from understanding and responding to the experiences of forced displacement of Christian IDPs in Nigeria. For example, religious targeting can drive displacement, religious affiliation can shape the experience of an IDP in a displacement setting, and religious structures and leaders can be a key source of support for displaced persons. Religion has to be included as one of the relevant factors in analysis and action related to forced displacement in Nigeria and beyond.

CASE STUDY: MANGU LGA, PLATEAU STATE

"On the 16th of May, 2023, the Fulani [militants] came at us at 6:30am and started to shoot at us. Our youth were able to stand and chase them off. However, the Fulani [militants] reinforced and returned around 11p.m [They] started to shoot again, burning houses. They burnt our animals and our maize plants.

The next day, we went to report at the security post. The man in charge made a few calls and assured us that there was no problem. After he left, they returned on motorbikes again that day and started killing. That day, six [people] were killed ... were it not for God, we would not [be] alive now.

Recently, we have been given a space to live in Pushit and we are grateful to the people for that. The clothes I am putting on now were given to me from someone. We did not come with even a grain of maize. Even if we are to return to our village, they might attack us. We plead that something be done. May God bring this evil to an end and restore normalcy to us." – A Christian IDP interviewee[254]

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[254] Meeting Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 13/22/CE 1.

In May 2023, the Christian communities of Mangu, Plateau state, Nigeria, experienced brutal attacks by Fulani militants that left hundreds of villagers dead (mostly Christians) and tens of thousands displaced. The event irreversibly changed Pastor Zachariah's life.

NO ROAD HOME: CHRISTIAN IDPS DISPLACED BY EXTREMIST VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

8. Recommendations

URGENTLY INCREASE HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT

Current programming and funding levels are insufficient to meet the needs caused by the escalating crises in Nigeria. We call on

» The **international community** to:
- increase their funding to address the basic, urgent humanitarian needs —and long-term practical and psychosocial needs – of IDPs;

- ensure the needs of IDPs in North-Central Nigeria are accurately understood and met.

» **Humanitarian actors** to:
- recognize how IDPs' faith can increase their vulnerability;

- promote religious literacy among staff to prevent discriminatory treatment that violates fundamental humanitarian principles and ensure equal treatment regardless of age, gender, religion or belief.

» **The International Organization for Migration** to review its evaluations of the numbers and needs of IDPs in Plateau state, working with Local Government Area (LGA) authorities and adjusting its methodology to account for the highly mobile nature of Plateau's IDPs.

IMPLEMENT & ENFORCE THE NATIONAL POLICY FOR DISPLACED PERSONS

With reference to the 2021 National Policy for Displaced Persons,[255] we call on

» **The Nigerian government** to provide adequate security, food and shelter, and education to all children of school-age IDPs. Further, we ask the Nigerian government to call on Borno state government to ensure that all IDPs receive the necessary support regardless of age, gender, religion or belief.

» **The Nigerian government** and **international community** to ensure voluntary returns in safety and with dignity. This includes (i) safety and security prior to, during and after return; (ii) recovery and restoration of land, houses and other property; (iii) provision of humanitarian assistance, basic services, and sustainable livelihood opportunities. For Borno state, safe and voluntary returns must include demining activities.

ESTABLISH AN INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

The protracted crises in Nigeria and across Sub-Saharan Africa are exacerbated by transnational religious, historic, socio-economic, and political factors. We call on

» **The international community** to establish an international commission of inquiry under the auspices of the United Nations to:
- investigate the nature and scale of violence in Nigeria and other seriously affected countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, with particular sensitivity to the identity dimensions of such violence;

- investigate the links between and ramifications of the spread of violence across Sub-Saharan Africa, its connection with global terrorism and consequent threats to international peace and security;

- advise the governments of Nigeria and other Sub-Saharan countries, national and international civil society, the United Nations Security Council, the African Union, the International Criminal Court and other stakeholders, on dealing with extremist ideologies and transnational violence, faith-based discrimination and impunity, and how to resolve conflicts and promote peace and reconciliation.

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[255] Nigeria, National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons. 2021.

ADOPT & IMPLEMENT A NATIONAL POLICY FOR ADDRESSING IMPUNITY

For years, militant groups have committed violence with impunity in Nigeria and across Sub-Saharan Africa. We call on

» **The international community** to work with the **Nigerian government** to:
  - develop a national policy to end impunity, paying specific attention to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Killings;[256]

  - provide training and technical support to members of the police, security forces and judiciary to counter militants and prosecute extremists.

ACTIVELY & COLLABORATIVELY FIND & REMOVE ILLEGAL SMALL ARMS

Reports document that out of 10 million illicit small arms in West Africa, an estimated 1-3 million are in circulation in Nigeria.[257] We call on

» The **Nigerian government** to domesticate the Economic Community of West African States' Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons into national law and ensure its full and effective implementation.[258]

» The **international community** to support the Nigerian government to track, collect and destroy illegal weapons and do everything in its power to disarm members of violent militant groups.

LEVERAGE THE PUBLIC TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE CHURCH & CHRISTIAN LEADERS

The majority of West Africans trust their religious leaders more than any other form of authority.[259] We call on

» **Humanitarian actors** to include the local Christian faith leaders and organizations in the decision making and coordination of the humanitarian response.

» The **international community**, in partnership with the **Nigerian government** and **NGOs**, to integrate flexible funding opportunities into their programming, building capacity in local faith leaders and Christian-based organizations to deliver humanitarian response, psychosocial care, reconciliation, community- and peace-building initiatives, and to document atrocities.

[256] Visit Nigeria: Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnès Callamard, 11 June 2021.
[257] Adeyemi T. T. and Adeyemi M. M., The proliferation of arms and its effect on the development of democracy in Nigeria, Am. Int. J. Res. Hum. Arts Soc. Sci. 5, 233–238, 2003.
[258] Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Convention on Small Arms, Light Weapons, their ammunition and other associated material. Art. 13, 2006.
[259] Bratton M. and Gyimah-Boadi E., Do Trustworthy Institutions Matter for Development? Corruption, Trust and Government Performance in Africa. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 112, 2016.

9. Methodology

Aim and Scope

The aim of the primary research presented in the findings of this report was to understand and convey the realities facing forcibly displaced Christians in the identified Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Nigeria: Ngala and Gwoza in Borno state, and Bassa and Mangu LGAs in Plateau state.

Selection of LGAs

As mentioned, many aspects of displacement and migration in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, are disputed. However, in Open Doors' many years of monitoring the situation in Nigeria, the most common forms of forced displacement of civilians have been the following:

1. Displacement caused by or facilitated by the actions of religiously motivated non-State actors (Boko Haram, ISWAP etc.)

2. Displacement caused by or facilitated by the actions of criminal groups involved in kidnapping for ransom ("bandits")

3. Displacement caused by or facilitated by the actions of Fulani militants who mostly attack Christian-majority villages

4. Displacement caused by or facilitated by armed conflict involving the Nigerian Security Forces (NSF) and non-State actors notably the extremist Islamist groups known as Boko Haram and ISWAP

5. Displacement caused by or facilitated by climatic events (e.g. floods and drought).

Open Doors' monitoring of Nigeria evidences religious dimensions in two of the five categories listed above: displacement caused by or facilitated by the actions of religiously motivated non-state actors (Boko Haram, ISWAP etc.) and displacement caused by or facilitated by the actions of Fulani militants who mostly attack Christian-majority villages. These forced displacement categories were therefore selected for closer examination.

Additionally, there were indirect religious dimensions surrounding the displacement during the non-international armed conflict between the NSF and the extremist Islamist groups Boko Haram and ISWAP.

A single LGA was selected as a representative case study from each of these three categories. The following factors were considered:

1. Issues of temporality: examples of "fresh" displacement as well as "historic" displacement over the last five years

2. Issues of geography: case studies from different states in order to develop an understanding of localized responses to the needs of the displaced

3. The varied experiences of persons in their displacement journey. For example, some people are in refugee camps in neighboring countries, others are internally displaced in a range of contexts such as formal and informal camps, neighboring villages, cities etc. Some people have been able to return to their homes, others have not. A range of these contexts and experiences was desirable.

4. Logistical issues, notably physical accessibility and availability of reliable information including satellite imagery

5. Practical limitations, notably the time and resources that available to invest in this study

6. Ensuring the security and well-being of interviewees as well as research team members.

Considering these factors, the following was agreed:

- As a case study of displacement caused by or facilitated by the actions of religiously motivated non-State actors (Boko Haram, ISWAP etc.): Ngala LGA, Borno state, where there are camps in Maiduguri town housing IDPs from around the state.

- As a case study of displacement caused by or facilitated by the actions of Fulani militants who mostly attack Christian majority villages: Mangu LGA, Plateau state, supplemented by Bassa LGA also in Plateau state.

- As a case study of displacement during the non-international armed conflict between the NSF and the extremist Islamist groups Boko Haram or ISWAP: Gwoza LGA, Borno state.

Method

An approach was employed that allowed for flexibility and was guided by the International Protocol on Documenting Violation of International Religious Freedom.[260] Primary field research was qualitative, with a mixture of focus group interviews as well as in-depth one-to-one interviews. Background research was also commissioned, which helped to create tailored, semi-structured questionnaires.

Some interviews were conducted completely in Hausa, some used interpreters and some were conducted completely in English. Interviews were anonymized and transcripts of audio recordings were translated into English where required. Data is stored securely on internal IT systems. All participants were informed about the purposes of the research and use and storage of their data, with a mix of verbal and written consent.

Selection of Interviewees

For all four LGAs, intermediaries were provided with broad categories of IDPs with whom interviews were preferable, stressing that they should be from all Christian denominations and that there should be a mix of men and women. Persons

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[260] Bajali, N. et al, International Protocol on Documenting Violations of Religious Freedom. Open Doors International & Religious Freedom Institute, 2021.

from different camps and communities were sought. The team did not interview anyone under the age of sixteen due to safeguarding and consent issues.

Based on these requirements, the intermediaries arranged for 292 individuals to come to meet with the research team in safe locations. These intermediaries did not have the details of the information that the team was seeking to gather through the focus groups and interviews.

Focus groups were held with seven categories of people from each of the four LGAs:

a. Camp authorities

b. CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) and denomination heads

c. Community leaders and persons over the age of fifty

d. Humanitarian agencies

e. Local authorities

f. Women with children

g. Youths

In all the LGAs, the team invited several individuals to have one-to-one interviews based on on-site information and the likelihood that there was information worth exploring in greater detail or exploring privately.

For the focus groups and interviews that were held in Maiduguri, the subjects mainly originated from Gwoza and Ngala LGAs, and surrounding areas. Most of them lived in "informal" camps run by Christian bodies, some lived in rented apartments within Maiduguri while some had returned to the communities from which they were displaced.

For the focus groups and interviews that were held in Mangu and Bassa LGAs, the subjects came from IDP camps and various other forms of settlement while others, particularly from Bassa LGA had returned home as all the IDP camps in that LGA had been closed. Most of these individuals were farmers and fishermen. The majority of people interviewed were IDPs, but interviews were also supplemented with three interviews from local authorities and humanitarian agencies.

The initial information gathering took place from 12 January to 26 January 2024. In the course of the review of the material, it became apparent that there were some gaps and follow-up interviews would be necessary in all four LGAs. A slightly differently composed team returned carried out interviews from 24 March to 3 April 2024. Overall, 292 people were interviewed.

Given the level of trust required to carry out these interviews, interviewees were exclusively from Christian communities as interviewers were from a mix of Christian organizations; however, it is also acknowledged that this will shape the perspective and analysis. Interviewees were primarily from Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations, although there was some representation from Catholic and other denominations.

Limitations

The research team were advised that in both states, intermediaries were needed to help identify the people to interview. In addition, travel was highly restricted in Borno state; interviewees were transported to safe locations in Maiduguri to meet with the research team. Travel to volatile areas in Plateau state was not possible.

Some selection in those to be interviewed was inevitable due to wider security concerns. A truly random sample therefore was not possible. In addition, while efforts were made to ascertain the estimated number of IDPs in each LGA, and the proportion of this group which was Christian, there was no reliable data available with such a degree of specificity.

292 displaced persons from four LGAs in two geographically distant states were interviewed. Few of these people knew each other. It is reasonable to consider them as representative of the wider Christian community because despite the natural differences in each person's experience of displacement, there was broad consistency. However, it cannot be said definitively how significant that is as a sample of the wider IDP populations, particularly in the state or geopolitical zone. As no-one under the age of 16 was interviewed, the experience of this demographic was primarily shared as second-hand information from those connected with under-16s. However, some of the youths over the age of 16 were able to share about their previous experiences as part of this demographic where relevant.

To further develop and strengthen the research, interviews could be conducted across a greater range of Christian denominations and widened to include multiple faiths. While it would have been very helpful to interview displaced Muslims and those accused of forcibly displacing Christians, this was not the focus of the research, and it would have put the research team and interlocutors at unnecessary risk. There could also be a greater gender balance across interviewees. Additionally, quantitative research could prove beneficial in gaining more accurate numbers around the scale of displacement and the religious affiliation of IDPs.

List of Acronyms

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project
FBO	Faith-Based Organization
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISWAP	Islamic State of West Africa Province
LFC	Local Faith Community
LGA	Local Government Area
NSF	Nigerian Security Forces
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
ORFA	Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WWL	World Watch List