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2.7. Human rights activists, bloggers, journalists and other media workers

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: February 2019

*Minor updates added October 2021

This profile refers to human rights activists, individuals affiliated with protests against police brutality, bloggers, journalists and others working in the media.

COI summary

a. Human rights activists

[Main COI reference: [Targeting](#), 3.6, 3.12.5]

Civil society organisations involved in human rights advocacy are free to investigate and express their opinion and findings, although they may be harassed and threatened when they criticise State authorities. In 2018, Amnesty International faced a smear campaign, accusing them of supporting Boko Haram, due to a report concerning sexual violence committed by Nigerian soldiers and militias against women and girls living in satellite camps.

Civil society organisations have also expressed concerns that draft legislation to regulate NGOs is an attempt to crack down and monitor NGOs, by providing the government with an opportunity to use State power without accountability.

Human rights defenders are frequently subjected to threatening phone calls or messages, visits from security agents, surveillance, intimidation and summons to police stations.

Organisations which are perceived as supporting LGBTIQ persons are particularly targeted. Their activity is criminalised, with the registration, operation or participation in gay clubs, societies and organisations being punishable by up to 10 years of imprisonment in accordance with the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act (SSMPA) of 2014. According to Human Rights Watch report from 2016, at least three organisations working on HIV, health and human rights have reported that their offices had been raided by police due to their work with LGBTIQ.

In North-East Nigeria, human rights defenders often face intimidation, arrests, physical harm, risk of being kidnapped or killed by Boko Haram, and women workers are reported to face an additional risk of gender-based violence. In the North-West region, human rights groups and activists have been subjected to intimidation, arrest and torture for speaking out against the attacks by armed groups or demanding that the government help protect the people [[Security](#)]

[situation 2021](#), 1.5.2].

b. Individuals affiliated with protests against police brutality

[[Security situation 2021](#), 1.3.1.7, 1.4.1.1]

In October 2020 peaceful protests erupted across many cities calling for the disbandment of SARS. The protesters were met with intimidation, harassment, and attacks by Nigerian security forces, resulting in casualties. SARS was ultimately disbanded in October 2020. Nigerian authorities have failed to address and bring to justice those suspected to be responsible for the violent response by security forces.

In November 2020, legal actions were launched against individuals and organisations affiliated with these protests, including seizing travel documents and freezing bank accounts.

c. Bloggers, journalists and other media workers

[[Targeting](#), 3.5]

The Nigerian Constitution provides for freedom of expression and press. The country has an active media landscape.

The World Press Freedom Index 2018 ranked Nigeria 119th out of 180 countries with regard to press freedom, based mainly on the 'climate of permanent violence', the threats, physical abuse and denial of access to information faced by journalists.

There are limitations to the freedom of speech in the 12 Sharia-ruled states and in general journalists struggle to cover stories on politics, terrorism and embezzlement.

The 2015 Cybercrimes (Prohibition, prevention, etc.) Act is said to have been used against several bloggers in an arbitrary manner. In August 2017, the Nigerian government announced the monitoring of social media to identify and deal with hate speech, anti-government and anti-security information.

There are reports of threat, harassment and arrests of media workers by governmental officials when they deal with topics such as corruption, human rights, terrorism, separatist movements or communal violence.

During 2017, three journalists were killed by unknown attackers. The impunity of perpetrators of such violence enhances the potential to intimidate journalists.

Journalists have also been harassed and attacked in the context of the elections in 2019 [[Security situation 2021](#), 2.16.3].

Journalists are also particularly targeted by Boko Haram (see [Individuals targeted by Boko Haram](#)).

Risk analysis

Some actions perpetrated against human rights activists, protesters, in particular in the context of #EndSARS protests, bloggers, journalists and other media workers may amount to

persecution (e.g. killing, kidnapping, gender-based violence, (arbitrary) arrests, imprisonment, physical violence). Legitimate actions of law enforcement, in particular in the context of protests, would not amount to persecution.

Not all individuals under this profile would face the level of risk required to establish well-founded fear of persecution. The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances such as: place of work, nature of activities (e.g. those working with LGBTIQ communities may be at a particular risk), visibility of activities and public profile, gender, etc.

Nexus to a reason for persecution

Available information indicates that, depending on the nature of the individual's activities, persecution of this profile may be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion. In case of targeting by Boko Haram, persecution of this profile may also be for reasons of religion.