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

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last updated: February 2019

This profile refers to human rights activists, bloggers, journalists and others working in the media.

COI summary

[*Targeting,* 3.5, 3.6, 3.12.5]

Human rights activists

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 LGBT 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. 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 LGBT communities.

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.

Bloggers, journalists and other media workers

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 are also particularly targeted by Boko Haram (see Individuals targeted by Boko Haram).

Risk analysis

Some actions perpetrated against human rights activists, bloggers, journalists and other media workers may amount to persecution (e.g. killing, kidnapping, gender-based violence, (arbitrary) arrests, imprisonment).

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 or not 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 LGBT 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 and/or religion.

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