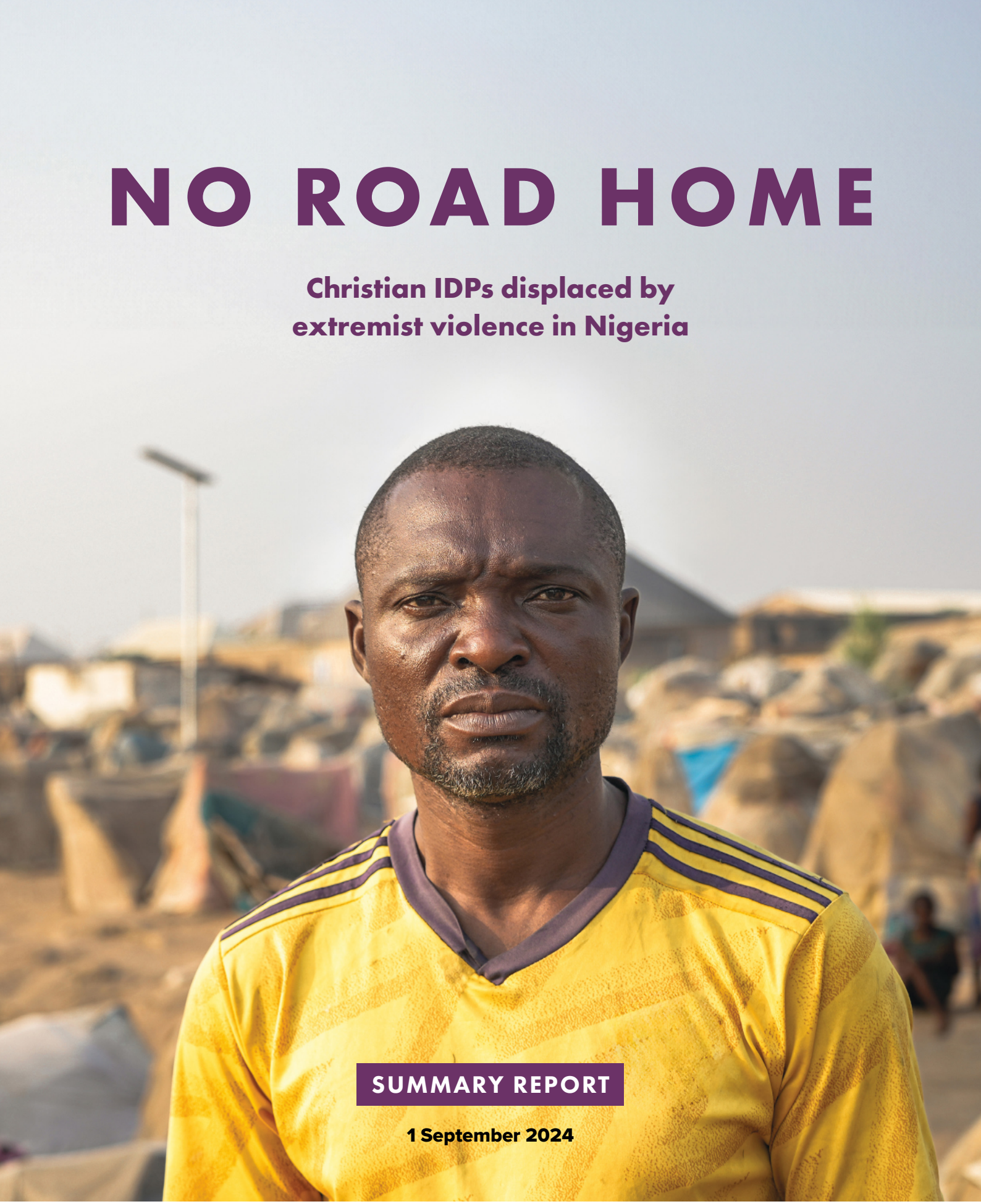
# NO ROAD HOME

## Christian IDPs displaced by extremist violence in Nigeria



**SUMMARY REPORT**

**1 September 2024**

IIRF International Institute for Religious Freedom

Open Doors

WEA EST 1846 WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

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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.*


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# 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 percent 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 page 18.**

*This is a summary of a full report available, which presents a more detailed picture of the findings listed here.[2] 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.[3]*

[1] See page 11 for details.
[2] Full report available here.
[3] For more on the campaign, see here.

# 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, ongoing violence and religious extremism. All IDPs in Nigeria face considerable challenges by the very nature of forced displacement. However, some challenges are specific to or exacerbated for Christian IDPs, an analysis often lacking in existing research, 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]

[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.



*A Christian IDP camp, Benue state*

# Context: Internal displacement in Nigeria

Internal displacement in Nigeria is consistently high, with multiple drivers including insurgency, conflict and environmental disaster.[8] 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.[9]

> **In 2014, there were 1.1 million IDPs in Nigeria. As of 2023, there are 3.4 million.[10]**

Most IDPs live among host communities. For example, in the North-Central and North-West regions, 82% of IDPs are said to live in host communities.[11] Some construct informal IDP camps, and a minority live in government-run camps.[12] This pattern changes slightly in Borno state; as of April 2024, 58% of displaced households are in camps or camp-like settings.[13]

The risk of violence does not disappear with displacement; IDPs can be unwanted in the places where they seek shelter and those 'safe' places can come under attack, including the risk of gender-based violence.[14] When living outside formal camps, IDPs can struggle to receive government support and find it more challenging to access humanitarian assistance, such as in Benue state.[15] Living conditions are also a serious concern, including reported issues of food insecurity, lack of medical care, being unable to earn a living and forced recruitment into extremist groups.[16]

Although Nigeria is party to the Kampala Convention, a binding instrument for states on protecting IDPs, it has been criticized in academic and humanitarian spaces for not meeting the requirements laid out in the convention.[17] Criticisms include a 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.[18]

## Religion driving displacement

Islamic militant violence in northern Nigeria, which has ebbed and flowed for well over a decade, has resulted in considerable displacement, including of Christian communities. People fled because of attacks by Boko Haram and ISWAP, which has targeted Christian communities for killing, abduction and the destruction of churches.[19]

In the North-Central region, where Fulani militant violence has been escalating, there are challenges in assessing the underlying causes due to the significant overlap of religion, ethnicity, profession, socio-economic conditions and access to land.[20] There are indications of some Fulani militant groups actively pursuing a jihadist agenda, however certainly not all.[21] Despite contested motivations, often the result is the attack and expulsion of Christian communities.[22]

## Faith-based vulnerabilities of IDPs

Open Doors has heard from Christian IDPs that there has been discrimination in aid distribution in IDP camps in the North-East along religious lines, in interviews from 2024 and 2021 (for further exploration of this, see Experiences in displacement).[23] One church leader from Maiduguri, Borno state said: "Christians are not being taken care of like the Muslims… they were not given food or clothing like the Muslims."[24] Accordingly, church organizations have established informal IDP camps and aid distribution centers to meet the needs of Christians displaced by Islamic militants.[25] Fears of violence have also been expressed along religious lines between Christian IDPs, Muslim IDPs and host communities.[26]

A report on IDPs who have fled the North-East and North-Central regions to the south of the country indicates that religion impacts where IDPs will go for help, being a source of practical support as well as a potential source of tension.[27]

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[8] The majority are displaced by conflict and violence (3.6 million). IDMC, Internal Displacement and Food Security, GRID 2023. April 2023.
[9] 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, July 19, 2022.
[10] IDMC, Nigeria, Global Internal Displacement Database. Accessed 21 May 2024.
[11] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — North-Central and North-West Displacement Report 12 (December 2023). 4 January 2024.
[12] The International Organization for Migration, Displacement Tracking Matrix - Nigeria North East Zone 44, March 2023, reported that 57% of Nigerian IDPs are in host-communities, compared to 43% in camp settings. A study of IDPs in Benue state, Nigeria, found that only 15% of IDPs were in official, government-run IDP camps, P.I. Ukase & T.P.J. Jato, From Home to Homelessness: The Dilemma of Internally Displaced Persons in Benue state., Catholic Diocese of Makurdi Foundation for Justice, Development and Peace (FJDP), 2020.
[13] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — Borno - Intention Survey (April 2024). 15 April 2024.
[14] O.A. Adejumo et al. "Experience of Gender-based Violence by Internally Displaced Women in Southern Nigeria: A Cross-sectional Study", Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 2021; The Irish Consortium on Gender-Based Violence, "Women, War and Displacement: A review of the impact of conflict and displacement on gender-based violence", 2016.
[15] From Home to Homelessness, ibid., p. 36.
[16] US AID, Resilience and food security amidst conflict and violence. August 2021.
[17] O. Fayehun & O. Akanle, Humanitarian Crises and Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria, The University of Warwick, 2022.
[18] 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, Vol 7 (3), 2023.
[19] USCIRF, Factsheet: Violent Islamist Groups in Northern Nigeria, February 2021.
[20] Institute for Economics and Peace Global Terrorism Index 2015: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism, 2015, p. 44; UK APPG FoRB Report, Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide?, 2023, p. 10.
[21] While the majority of Fulani are not militants, militant groups among them are rising in prominence. A. McGregor, The Fulani Cris: Communal violence and Radicalization in the Sahel, Combating Terrorism Center, 2017.
[22] USCIRF, Issue Update: Ethnonationalism and Religious Freedom in Nigeria, June 2023, p. 1.; Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Nigeria, August 2023.; UK APPG FoRB Report, Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide?, 2023, p. 11.
[23] World Watch Research Nigeria: Full Country Dossier, January 2023, p. 41.
[24] N. Bivan, Borno's Christian IDPs (1): Struggling For Survival Almost Without Support, HumAngle, August 31, 2021.
[25] D.O. Iweze, "Faith-based organizations' intervention for the internally displaced persons from the northeast Nigeria`s region at Uhogua camp in Edo state," *African Identities*, 2022, pp. 1-22.
[26] R.E. Roberts & T. Lawanson, Understanding IDPs in Nigerian Cities Working Paper No. 36, Researching Internal Displacement, May 2023, pp. 57.
[27] Ibid.

Against this brief background, the following primary research among Christian IDPs in Borno and Plateau states begins to fill in more details about their realities.

**BORNO STATE**

- Region: North-East.
- LGAs researched: Gwoza & Ngala.
- 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 part of the Middle Belt).
- LGAs researched: Bassa & Mangu.
- Threat of violence primarily from Fulani militants.
- Currently, displacement has been short term due to the recency of 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 and some humanitarian agencies.[28] However, 98% of IDPs live in host communities.[29]

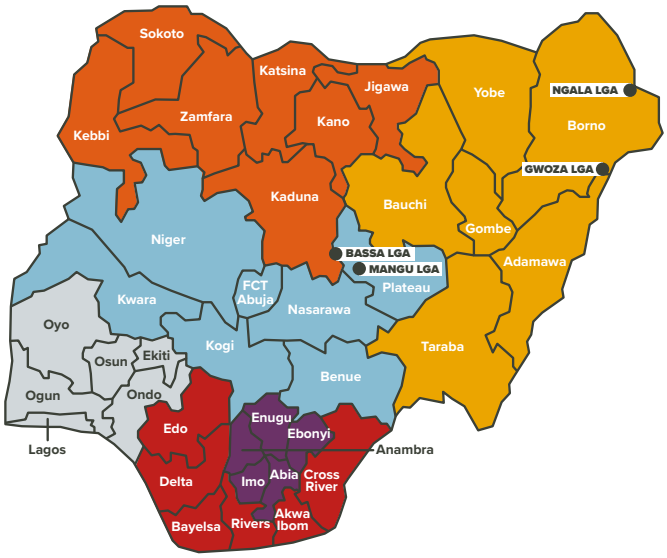
**Distinguishing formal and informal camps**

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."[30]



*Camp leader Abraham talking to children in a Christian IDP camp, Benue state.*

**MAP OF NIGERIA**




**KEY**

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

## Beyond Nigeria

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.[31] Each of these countries can be found in the 2024 WWL top 50 countries, indicating the presence of Christian communities who experience very high or extreme levels of discrimination and persecution on the basis of their faith.

These indications of overlapping vulnerabilities on the basis of religion and forced displacement necessitates further research and attention beyond Nigeria. With Islamic militancy spreading more widely in the region, evolving and emerging conflicts such as in Sudan and targeted violence against Christians already being reported,[32] Nigeria is not alone in the displacement-related challenges it faces.

[28] For example, see World Health Organization, Restoring hope to displaced Plateau state communities through coordinated humanitarian response. 27 January 2024.
[29] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — North-Central and North-West Displacement Report 12 (December 2023). 4 January 2024.
[30] 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.
[31] 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.
[32] Open Doors International, WWL 2024 Summary of Trends. February 2024.

# 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.

These three sections (Drivers of displacement, Experiences in displacement and Risk of return) are conclusions from field-based primary research, conducted in 2024.[33] 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.

## Borno state

Protracted violence by Islamic militants 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.[34]

Historically, LGAs such as Gwoza and Ngala have had significant Christian populations. While Muslims 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 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."

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. Some Christian interviewees related instances where their Muslim neighbors reported them to Islamic militant groups for self-preservation. 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.[35] Total civilian targeting increased by 28% from 2020 to 2021, and this trend has continued.[36] Outside the North-West and North-Central regions, Borno state has registered the second-highest number of violent events targeting Christians.[37] Additionally, from 2019-2023, Borno state has recorded the highest number of registered killings, at 15,302.[38]

**CASE STUDY: GWOZA LGA, BORNO STATE**

Between February and May 2014, Boko Haram attacked Isaac's[39] village six times, each time killing seven to ten people. 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, when the attack ceased, he and his wife came to search for their children, 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 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.

[33] For more information, see Methodology on page 17.
[34] Onapajo, H. & Usman, A.A., Fuelling the Flames: Boko Haram and Deteriorating Christian–Muslim Relations in Nigeria. Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 35, 2015.
[35] ACLED, Fact Sheet: Attacks on Christians Spike in Nigeria Alongside Overall Rise in Violence Targeting Civilians. 21 July 2022.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA), available at orfa.africa.
[39] Name changed for security reasons. Case study from: Interview Notes, Individual Interview, 7/16/J. For references for every interview quote, see full report.

## 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 Context: Internal displacement in Nigeria above on page 6). Interviewees indicated the presence of religious dynamics. One interviewee observed that, "when the Fulani gunmen come to attack, they would be heard shouting 'Allahu Akbar [Allah is the greatest], we will destroy all Christians …'". Some indigenous Muslims live in Plateau state, and a few interviewees reported Muslims would get advance notice prior to attacks by Fulani militant groups. This illustrates some of the specific risks of violence for Christians.

An important theme raised by Christian IDPs 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. At the extreme end of the scale, some believed the security forces were complicit with the Fulani militants in their attacks on Christians. This is not the first time such concerns have been raised; Amnesty International has also commented on the Nigerian government's failure to protect civilians in the north of the country.[40]

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." 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."

Violence in Plateau state has not just created IDPs, but has resulted in IDPs being displaced multiple times. This creates additional challenges in accessing support, as well as exacerbating feelings of insecurity and uncertainty.

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." 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.[41] This is 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 two or more times.[42]

### 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 in 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.[43]



*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.*

[40] Amnesty International, Nigeria: The Harvest of Death - Three Years of Bloody Clashes Between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria. December 17, 2018.
[41] 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.
[42] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — North-Central and North-West Displacement Report 12 (December 2023). 4 January 2024.
[43] Meeting notes, Focus Group Discussion, 2-24-CHD.

# **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%.[44] Furthermore, funding commitments and beneficiaries are concentrated in just three states in the North-East: Borno, Adamawa and Yobe.[45]

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.

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 have experienced discrimination in relief provision, particularly in Borno, Christian IDPs are looking to Christian leaders and organizations for support as places of trust.

## Borno state

Faith-based discrimination by the state government and community members in Borno has increased the vulnerability of Christian IDPs 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. 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 outpacing support.

### 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 government 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 humanitarian worker from Ngala LGA reported that on the lists of vulnerable persons needing assistance, Christian names would be replaced with Muslim names in vulnerability assessments carried out by the government or government partners. 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."

Some of the Gwoza LGA interviewees reported that they used to be well looked after by some organizations, but these organizations were then instructed by the 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 … While we were still in the camp, we were not given cards because we were Christians."

However, this is not a straightforward choice. 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.

**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.[46] Of that 1.7 million in Borno, 74% were displaced before 2021,[47] 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.[48] Still no data exists on the religious affiliation of forcibly displaced persons.

[44] OCHA, Nigeria. Accessed 3 May 2024.
[45] Humanitarian Action, Nigeria. 8 December 2023.
[46] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — North-east — Mobility Tracking Round 46 IDP and Returnee Atlas (December 2023). 14 February 2024.
[47] Ibid.
[48] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — Borno - Intention Survey (April 2024). 15 April 2024.

### Discrimination in host communities

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. Christian IDPs also reported cases where 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. 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."



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**THE SCALE OF DISPLACEMENT: PLATEAU**

IOM reported 54,457 IDPs hosted in Plateau state as of December 2023.[49] 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.

### 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. This neglect has created a humanitarian crisis among the displaced communities in the state, whose population is Christian majority.[50]

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.[51] People often initially fled in chaos, heading for the bush, neighboring towns and random buildings, some of which evolved into informal IDP camps. 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 commonly 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: "There is scarcity of food because our crops were destroyed by Fulani. The food from the ground is not enough. There are also disease and trauma issues. We thank God for some [Christian] NGOs that have come to do trauma healing. There is no protection against diseases in the environment where the people live in the camps. The IDPs need food, clothing and products."

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." 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."[52]

This need for practical support correlates with needs assessments by IOM, who report that among IDPs living in host communities in Plateau, 75% have no access to livelihood support.[53] Interviewees also raised the importance of access to education as a key barrier to the long-term prospects for supporting themselves in the future.

[49] International Organization of Migration, Nigeria — North-Central and North-West — Round 13 IDP Atlas (March 2024). 11 March 2024.
[50] 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.
[51] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — North-Central and North-West Displacement Report 12 (December 2023). 4 January 2024.
[52] Mwaghavul Development Association (MDA), January 2024. Received 16 February 2024.
[53] Ibid.

## 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 violence 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."

But the psychological impact also has been exacerbated by living in displacement settings. 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." While Christian religious leaders have been committed to supporting their communities, they are often under-resourced and dealing with their own experiences of trauma.

**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 enquired 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.[54]

## 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.
- Some young girls have reportedly been forced into "survival sex", exchanging sex for basic necessities such as food.
- Heightened risk of sexual violence.
- Female-headed households are prevalent. Women face the grief of losing their husbands, alongside the challenge of being the sole provider for their families.
- Hygiene challenges, such as sharing one toilet with multiple households and lack of access to sanitary supplies.
- In some places, such as Ngala LGA, to gain acceptance in the community female Christians have sometimes had to wear a hijab.



*An internally displaced woman preparing food*

### CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- Lack of 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.
- Few employment options. For example, in Gwoza LGA, few can afford education and many only have farming skills.
- Child trafficking was reported in Mangu LGA, with orphans particularly at risk.

### OLDER GENERATIONS

- Find it physically challenging to queue for food and aid distribution.
- Lack of accessible medical care.
- Reported significant psychological impact from being disconnected from their ancestral lands.

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



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

# **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 continues to be a significant obstacle. There was a high level of distrust of the security forces among interviewees.

## Borno state

The Borno state government has pushed for IDPs to return home, a move widely criticized by humanitarian actors.[55] They have offered incentives to returnees, such as food parcels or one-off payments. However, Christian IDPs have generally been reluctant 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.

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.[56] Absence of housing and insecurity of area of return were the two most frequently mentioned reasons for not yet returning home.[57] 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.[58]

Abductions were cited 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 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.



*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.*

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."

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". 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.

[55] 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.
[56] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — Borno - Intention Survey (April 2024). 15 April 2024.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

## 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.

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 sometimes 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. 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.[59] 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. 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.[60] 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."

### 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[61]



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

[59] International Organization for Migration, Nigeria — North-Central and North-West Displacement Report 12 (December 2023). 4 January 2024.
[60] Mwaghavul Development Association (MDA), January 2024. Received 16 February 2024.
[61] Meeting Notes, Focus Group Discussion, 13-22-HA.

# 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 psycho-social 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.

**"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."**

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 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 16 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.[62]

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

# Methodology

Qualitative research was selected to provide depth of information and detail around the lived experience of Christian IDPs. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were carried out in two phases between January and April 2024, conducted in Hausa and English. 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 was 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. Overall, 292 people were interviewed in Borno and Plateau states. Men and women were interviewed separately, but overall more men were interviewed than women (approximately two thirds men and one third women). The majority of people interviewed were IDPs, but interviews were also supplemented with 3 interviews from local authorities and humanitarian agencies. 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.

To further develop and strengthen the research, interviews could be conducted across a greater range of Christian denominations and widened to include multiple religious communities. There could also be a greater gender balance across interviewees. Quantitative research could prove additionally beneficial in gaining more accurate numbers around the scale of displacement and the religious affiliation of IDPs.[63]



*A school class taking place in a Christian refugee camp, Benue state.*

[63] For a more detailed methodology, see the full report here.

# 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 psycho-social 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,[64] 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.

[64] 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;[65]
  - 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.[66] 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.[67]

» **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.[68] 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.

[65] Visit to Nigeria: Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnès Callamard, 11 June 2021.
[66] 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.
[67] Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Convention on Small Arms, Light Weapons, their ammunition and other associated material. Art. 13, 2006.
[68] Bratton M. and Gyimah-Boadi E., Do Trustworthy Institutions Matter for Development? Corruption, Trust and Government Performance in Africa. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 112, 2016.