

Peace and Security Dimensions of Inter-State Movement of Persons Amid COVID-19 In Nigeria

BACKGROUND

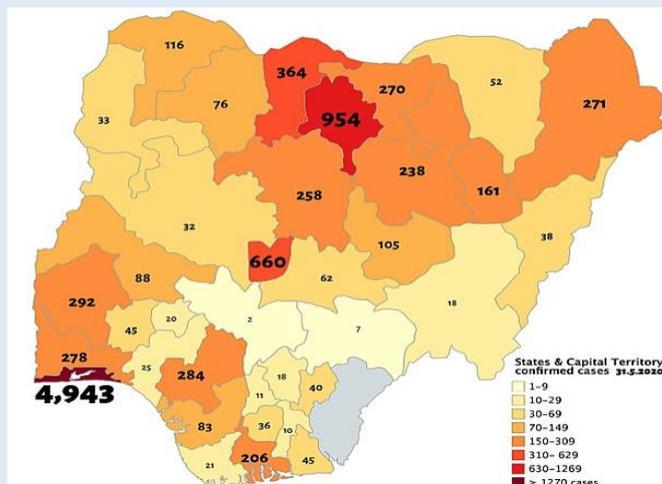


Fig. 1 : COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria³⁸

- Nigeria is currently recording cases of the global pandemic-coronavirus disease (COVID-19) since its first detection in Wuhan, China, on December 8, 2019¹. Following the first confirmed case of COVID-19 on February 27, 2020² in Nigeria, cases of infection and fatalities continue to increase in the country.
- As of May 31, 2020, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) recorded a total of 10,162 confirmed COVID-19 cases across 36 States including the Federal Capital City (FCT). Also, out of the 10,162 confirmed cases, 3007 infected persons have recovered and discharged with 287 fatalities³. However, authorities in Kogi State have rejected the discovery of two (2) infected cases on May 27, 2020 by the NCDC. As of May 28, Cross River remains the only State with zero case in Nigeria⁴.
- To mitigate the spread of COVID-19 from State to State, Governors of the 36 States on April 22, 2020 agreed to the implementation of an inter-state lockdown, exempting persons and trucks on essential services⁵. Prior to this, several States had implemented an inter-state movement restriction to curb the spread of coronavirus into their States. This is in addition to the numerous internal restrictions imposed by State Governments as preventive measures.
- Also, at the onset of the outbreak, President Muhammadu Buhari announced lockdown in States (Abuja-FCT, Lagos and Ogun) with high statistics of the virus on March 29 and April 13, 2020 respectively. On April 27, 2020, the President in his national broadcast, placed a ban on all inter-state movement of vehicles and humans⁶.

INCIDENT PROFILE

Despite the inter-state border closure put in place by Federal and State Governments as part of precautionary measures to curb the transmission of COVID-19 across States, there have been reports of violations in defiance to these directives.

Between May 21- 23, 2020, over 145 vehicles and trucks on non-essential duties were intercepted at border areas of Enugu and Kano States for violating the inter-state travel ban⁷. Other States including Katsina, Kaduna, Ekiti, Rivers, Sokoto, Cross River, Lagos, Ogun, Nassarawa, Kwara, Edo, Oyo, Enugu, Abia, Benue, Plateau, Delta, Kogi, Kano, Ondo, Osun, Abuja-FCT and Akwa-Ibom also intercepted vehicles and trucks with several persons disguised and trafficked in these trucks arrested.

The WANEP's National Early Warning System (NEWS) recorded 38 incidents of violations of the inter-state travel ban from April 23 to May 23, 2020⁸. The continuous movement of people across States amid COVID-19 has further heightened tension in States following the influx of persons from the northern region.



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RISK ANALYSIS

The influx of people across States continues to provoke reactions following the ineffective implementation of the inter-state ban by security agencies. Reports of exploitation by security operatives⁹ and poor security surveillance at border posts and forest areas have hampered the successful implementation of the ban. From April 23 to May 23, 2020, several vehicles and trucks congested with people were intercepted in Katsina, Kano, Kaduna, Rivers, Cross River, Lagos, Ogun, Nassarawa, Kwara, Edo, Oyo, Osun, Abuja-FCT, Enugu and Akwa Ibom States, amongst others, as recorded in WANEP NEWS¹⁰. This generated concerns among the populace given the increasing rate of infected COVID-19 cases and security threats.

Although, internal migration of people across States is not new in Nigeria, the current wave of movement hinders containment of COVID-19 and increases the risk of inter-state transmission of the disease. Prior to the national inter-state lockdown, several states had reported increase of COVID-19 cases in their States following the influx of people from States with high risk of the virus¹¹. For instance, as of May 20, 2020, Kwara State reported 11 index cases from Lagos and other north-west States¹². The repatriation of children across the 19 northern States from the Qur'anic (Almajiri) educational system has also contributed to this increase as evident in Kaduna, Bauchi and Kano States, amongst others¹³. This could put a strain on States' health infrastructure and response capacity of receiving States. Moreover, the repatriation of Almajiri's generated reactions of violations of their fundamental human rights to reside in any part of the country. To ease religious tensions, the northern State Governors have agreed to a coordinated procedure in the repatriation process from profiling through testing to handover to their respective families in the States.¹⁴

Suspected smugglers and human traffickers have exploited these security loopholes to perpetuate crime¹⁵. As recorded in WANEP's NEWS, States in the southern part of the country (Edo, Kwara, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Lagos, Ogun and Cross River) intercepted truckloads of youths and teenagers suspected to be Almajiri's hidden within the truck chambers. This illegal movement heightens the issue of human trafficking and kidnapping in the affected areas. These security threat increases the fragility of the affected States and human security in the country. Also, the internal displacement of community residents in Niger, Katsina and Sokoto States affected by armed banditry increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission. These security challenges further hinder social distancing guidelines put in place by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the country.

Again, as States continue to grapple with combating coronavirus and its attendant effect on socio-economic activities, essential micro businesses and small-scale farmers continue to bear the brunt of the border closure. The lockdown restrictions have led to a decrease in inter-state trading due to price increase of transporting goods. The consequence of this manifests in the loss of perishable farm produce and household income. Additionally, with many vehicles stranded along such inter-state borders, movement and delivery of essential commodities such as food, medicals and essential workers are hampered. This also has likely effect on food security and associated impact on livelihoods of the population.

Furthermore, there is a general lack of coordination in the enforcement of inter-state travel restrictions. This has resulted in inter-security squabbles between security agencies in Imo and Rivers States.¹⁶ This could have possible implications on effective collaboration in the enforcement of security duties.



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MECHANISMS FOR INTERVENTIONS

- In response to implementing the inter-state restrictions, State Governments have set up a number of containment measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 in their States. Several violators have been arrested and quarantined at isolation centres, while others have been turned back to their States of departure.
- The Inspector-General of Police has ordered the deployment of police mounted troops (police horses) to patrol identified bush and footpaths and other irregular routes being used by some travellers to evade law enforcement agents¹⁷.
- State Governments have also set up mobile courts to prosecute violators of the restriction directives in the State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Federal and State Governments, in collaboration with security agencies responsible for the enforcement of the ban, should review reports of security breaches submitted by Civil Society Organisations and Community leaders with a view to strengthen security surveillance mechanisms at the borders.
- The Federal and State Governments should strengthen coordination in the implementation of guidelines and procedures for easing the inter-state restrictions to prevent violations and an attendant spike in the rate of community transmission in States.
- The State and Local Governments in partnership with security agencies, traditional, religious leaders and civil society organisations should create avenues for information exchange through town-hall meetings on early warning signs of human security threats in States.

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