

# 2.10. Individuals targeted by Boko Haram

## 2.10. Individuals targeted by Boko Haram

For background information on Boko Haram and its splinter groups, including their capacity, *modus operandi*, areas of operation and violations perpetrated by them see EUAA COI Report – Nigeria Security Situation November 2025.

Boko Haram mainly operates in North-East Nigeria.650 The major point of contention between the two main Boko Haram factions - Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS) and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) - is rooted in a fundamental disagreement over how civilians should be treated. JAS views civilians as legitimate targets, operating through extreme violence and sectarianism, including suicide attacks, massacres, and the enslavement of those it labels 'infidels' or 'apostates'. ISWAP, on the other hand, distinguishes between Muslims and non-Muslims, seeking to build support among Muslim communities by imposing taxes and enforcing its own governance system, rather than relying on indiscriminate plunder. While ISWAP limits violence against Muslim civilians, non-Muslims remain unprotected under its rule. 651

JAS considers unaffiliated Muslim civilians to be apostates and targets them accordingly. Lower-level fighters frequently conduct raids independently, risking punishment if apprehended. JAS raids go beyond merely looting goods or money; they also involve the abduction of girls and women. JAS commanders have reportedly rewarded loyal fighters by permitting forced marriages with these captives, a practice prohibited by ISWAP.652

ISWAP has carried out massacres of civilians accused of breaching its rules. Justifications include refusal to pay taxes, suspected cooperation with government forces, or defiance of its authority. In accordance with Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)653 ideology, ISWAP considers the killing and enslavement of non-Muslims to be permissible.654 Media sources noted that ISWAP have increasingly targeted farmers, fishermen, loggers, herders, and metal scrap collectors, accusing them of spying and relaying information to the military and local militias opposing them.655 In September 2024, ISWAP militants attacked Mafa town in Yobe State, killing dozens and destroying the town. While authorities confirmed 34 deaths, locals report over 100 burials across multiple sites. The attack was reportedly carried out as retaliation for the community's refusal to pay extortion levies.656 In a similar attack in January 2025, ISWAP militants killed some 40 farmers in Borno state, allegedly for trespassing on its territory without permission and failing to pay required levies.657

Schoolchildren have been significantly impacted by Boko Haram's campaign against secular education. Attacks on schools and widespread abductions by Boko Haram and other armed groups have led to the closure or destruction of thousands of educational institutions at all levels. Student kidnappings for ransom remain a major threat, particularly in northern Nigeria. 658 In February 2024, suspected Boko Haram fighters abducted over 200 IDPs, mostly children, in Ngala Local Government Area of Borno State. 659

Boko Haram's attacks on women have been especially severe, with kidnapped victims frequently subjected to forced marriage, sexual violence, and other abuses.660 (for more information see Conflict-related violence under 2.3.3. Violence against women and girls). Members of civil society organisations have faced threats and physical violence for speaking out against Boko Haram.661 Armed groups such as JAS, ISWAP and Bakura have continued to carry out attacks against civilians, including humanitarian workers.662

- 650

  Reuters, ISWAP claims responsibility for deadly attacks in Nigeria, 21 April 2025, url; AP, At least 7 members of Nigerian security force missing after insurgents ambush convoy, 20 November 2024, url; UNIDIR, Boko Haram - Mapping an evolving armed constellation, September 2024, url, pp. 14-19

- 651

  International Crisis Group, JAS vs. ISWAP: The War of the Boko Haram Splinters, 28 March 2024, url; Foucher, V., Boko Haram: Mapping an Evolving Armed Constellation, UNIDIR, 16 September 2024, url, pp. 16-19

- 652

  International Crisis Group, JAS vs. ISWAP: The War of the Boko Haram Splinters, 28 March 2024, url

- 653

  In 2015, Boko Haram's leader Abubakar Shekau pledged allegiance to the ISIS, leading the movement to adopt the name Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). However, internal divisions soon emerged, and in 2016, dissenting members broke away. This splinter group retained the ISWAP name and gained formal recognition from ISIS. Meanwhile, Shekau and his loyalists formed a separate faction, returning to the original designation of Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS). See Crisis Group, JAS vs. ISWAP: The War of the Boko Haram Splinters, 28 March 2024, url

- 654

  International Crisis Group, JAS vs. ISWAP: The War of the Boko Haram Splinters, 28 March 2024, url

- 655

Defense Post, Jihadists Kill at Least 40 Farmers in Northeast Nigeria, 14 January 2025, url; Vanguard, Boko Haram massacre farmers, fishermen in Borno for supporting ISWAP, 17 May 2025 url

- 656

  HumAngle, ISWAP Attack Devastates Mafa in Northeast Nigeria, Leaving A Grim Toll of Death, 4 September 2024, url

- 657

  Defense Post, Jihadists Kill at Least 40 Farmers in Northeast Nigeria,

- 658

  Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Nigeria, 26 February 2025, url; UN, Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and armed conflict in Nigeria, 17 July 2024, url, paras. 3, 5

- 659

  HRW, World Report 2025 (Events of 2024), Nigeria, 16 January 2025, url

- 660

  Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Nigeria, 26 February 2025, url

- 661

  Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Nigeria, 26 February 2025, url

- 662

  UN, Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and armed conflict in Nigeria, 17 July 2024, url, para. 3

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu