

Assessment of Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP) 2020

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Abstract

Nations of the world initiate immigration policies for the protection of their national identity and territorial integrity. This is considered essential for economic development and national security. One of the instruments for achieving this is the national immigration visa policy. At the inception of the administration of President Mohamadu Buhari in Nigeria, The Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) 2017-2020) was introduced to remove barriers that impedes investments, innovations and development. Pursuant to this objective, Nigeria Visa Policy was reviewed significantly in 2020 to attract inbound traffic of foreign direct investments (FDIs), innovations, specialized skills, economic development and global competitiveness. Consequently, a new Visa policy came into effect in October, 2020 in Nigeria. The objective of this work is to critically analyze the Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP) 2020 with regards to its implementation, performance and challenges. The paper recommends measures that can be adopted for the improvement and effectiveness of the policy. The Scope of the analysis covers the Nigeria Visa Policy 2020 only and does not extend to the period predating the policy. The method used for gathering data is qualitative with data obtained secondarily through published journals, reports as well as internet sources from academic and relevant organizations' websites.

Keywords: *Visa, Policy, Immigration, Tourism, Investments, Security, Development.*

1.0 Introduction

A Visa is an official document that is issued by the national government of a country that accords the bearer the legal permit to officially enter the issuing country. The US Immigration (2022) defined Visa as a document, or official endorsement, obtained from a US consul abroad, that permits its holder to enter the United States. Visa Policy is an official document that details the conditions and restrictions to the entry and exit of foreign nationals across national boundaries. The administration of such controls is known as a Visa Regime which is reflected in national visa policies.

The Nigerian government, under President Mohammad Buhari, launched the Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP) on the 4th of February 2020. The rationale behind the policy is to enhance the achievement of the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (2017-2020) of the government with particular regards for boosting the ease of doing business in Nigeria, promoting tourism, enhance investment friendliness and creating opportunities through improved bilateral and multilateral relations.

On the 1st of October 2020, the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) commenced the implementation of the NVP 2020. From 2020 to date, the effectiveness of the implementation is in doubt, in spite of the robust objectives of the policy and the positive public reception that greeted it. Olaniyonu and Olanrewaju (2021) observed that despite these laudable announcements, many aspects of the NVP 2020 are yet to be implemented.

The purpose of this publication is to analyze the Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP) 2020 in relation to its implementation status, performance and challenges. The paper also offers recommendations for improved operational effectiveness.

2.0 Major Highlights of Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP) 2020

The Nigeria Visa Policy 2020 offers a comprehensive guide and details of visa services by the Nigeria Immigration Services including categorization, exemptions, privileges, restrictions and mode of obtainment among others. The key highlights of the policy are as presented below.

2.1 Conversion of all classes of visas into two broad categories:

These categories are Visa Free/Exemption and Visa Mandatory. Following the broad categorization, there is a further breakdown of these two categories into 79 new visa classes that are designed to cover different visit purposes and residency in Nigeria. The objective of this all-embracing classification predicates on the need to accommodate an extensive range of travel purposes that were hitherto grouped under transit, tourism, business, and work. (Olaniyonu and Olanrewaju, 2021, Nigeria Immigration Service, 2020)

2.2 Electronic visa (e-Visa) Introduction

The new visa regime created a channel for the issuance of electronic visa (e-visa). The e-visa medium processes the obtaining of Nigerian visas beside the other means; Visa on Arrival and visas at the Nigerian diplomatic missions abroad. The e-Visa is available for Short Visit to travelers that wishes to visit Nigeria for a period that does not exceed three months. Introduction, Eligibility and Requirements for Visa on Arrival

The policy introduced a new visa regime called Visa on Arrival (VoA). Visa on Arrival would be obtainable by holders of passports of African Union (AU) member nations for the purpose of short visits. Other eligible travelers are nationals of all countries that wishes to visit Nigeria for the purpose of tourism, business, or emergency relief work, including Nigerians in diaspora with dual citizenships.

2.3 Introduction of Permanent Residence visa

Another visa class introduced by the national policy 2020 is the Permanent Residence Visa (PRV). PRV allows certain classes of persons to reside in Nigeria. This class of persons include Nigerians' spouses, Nigerians in diaspora with foreign citizenship as well as their spouses, highly skilled persons, investors with minimum investment capital of USD250, 000. Minimum validity period for PRV is 5 years residency, renewable to indefinite.

2.4 Reclassification of the Temporary Work Permit (TWP) and Subject to Regularization (STR) visa

The National Visa Policy 2020 reclassified the Temporary Work Permit (TWP) and Subject to Regularization (STR) visas to accommodate the specifics of short-term and long-term employment and residence of expatriates in Nigeria.

2.5 Visa Application Process

The NVP 2020 reviewed the visa application process to include embassies, application centers, Visa on Arrival at port of arrival, e-Visas, and the automation of Temporary Work Permit (TWP) application.

2.6 Four visa exemption classes

The policy provides for visa exemption. Those exempted are citizens of any Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Visa abolishment agreement countries; International organizations; and Reciprocity visa waiver agreement countries.

3.0 Assessment of Nigeria Visa Policy 2020

The core objective of the Nigeria Visa Policy predicates largely on the need to engender economic development with specific regards for improved tourism receipts, foreign direct investments, market competitiveness and innovations. The performance of the policy since inception to date will therefore be measured against the attainment or progressive drive towards the attainment of the policy objectives. Attainment of the objectives form the anticipated benefits of the policy. A critical view of the policy, especially from the perspective of implementation, performance and challenges show a clear lacuna between theory and effective practice. Specifically, the policy is analyzed below using the indices of implementation, performance and challenges.

3.1 Implementation

Though the NVP 2020 was received with nods as a catalyst for the development of tourism, trade and investments, a closer view suggests that many aspects of the policy are still not implemented. The state of implementation of the policy revealed many visa classes are still far from being a reality. Olayiwonu and Olanrewaju (2021) observed that, though the Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP) 2020 provides for additional visa classes to accommodate a wider travel purposes that were hitherto generalized under transit, tourism, business and work, a review of current visa issuance at the Nigerian Missions abroad shows that most of the new visa options are yet to be accessible.

Olaniyonu and Olanrewaju (2021) further observed that for non-work travel purposes, intending applicants are still left with only the options of Business or Tourist Visas while for work-related purposes, the options are still the traditional classes of 'Subject to Regularization' (STR) and 'Temporary Work Permit' (TWP) that were in place before the new policy.

Reclassifying the Temporary Work Permit (TWP) visa premises on the need to introduce changes to the existing narrow visa with the aim of engendering benefits to organizations that utilizes expatriate resources in their operations. These benefits to organizations range from cost savings, operational stability and expanded visa options that suits peculiar needs. Organizations have the benefit of multiple entry temporary work permit visa which renders the temporary residence permit unnecessary for expatriates whose stay could last up to six months. Specifically, the US\$2,000 cost for TRP is eliminated. Fees for the extension of TWP also becomes avoidable in cases where an expatriate is not staying beyond 6 months. Furthermore, the reclassification of the TWP visa offers

organizations ample flexibility to gauge their human resource requirements in order to ascertain the required visa class between single and multiple-entry.

This was previously not the case as their option was limited to only the Single Entry TWP visa which clearly has many limitations some of which have now been addressed with the multiple entry TWP

In addition, organizational expatriates on TWP visa with a need to urgently exit the country are required to obtain a new TWP pre-approval and subsequently visit the relevant Nigerian mission abroad to obtain another TWP visa for their return to Nigeria in continuation of their project commitment. This long process could have adverse effects on the operations of the concerned business.

The delayed in implementing some of the new visa classifications especially the Multiple-Entry TWP provision prevent organizations with expatriate resources from utilizing these benefits to drive the growth of their businesses. This impact negatively on the Nigeria economy and robs the policy of its core objectives.

A significant landmark of the new visa policy is the Investor's Visa. This visa is categorized under the new Permanent Residence Visa. Specifically, this class of visa was informed by the need to attract Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). The criteria for eligibility ranges from a minimum investment capital of US\$250,000 to US\$10,000,000 US\$100,000,000 and above

Unfortunately, since inception of the policy till date, there is no evidence of implementation of this aspect of the policy, despite the huge potential benefits. The implementation delay of Investor's Visa is a major setback for the drive of the Federal Government of Nigeria to accelerate the attraction of Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) to the country. Investor's Visa is increasingly becoming a popular tool for attracting FDIs by other nations of the world.

The major issues with the new Visa Policy hinge on implementation delays and lack of demonstrable political will to hit the ground running on all aspects of the policy by the Federal Government of Nigeria.

3.2 Performance

Bolashodun (2020) observed that the main reason for the new visa policy is reportedly to enhance business opportunities, promote tourism and achieve African integration. According to PWC (2020), the NVP 2020 seeks to improve the ease of doing business, attract foreign direct investment, tourists, and individuals with specialized skills without compromising national security. PWC (2020) observed further that the new classes of visa would enable effective monitoring of visitors, data analysis by the Government to enhance security, and potentially ease travel ambitions of investors to promote national growth. From the above views, the Key Result Areas (KRAs) of the NVP 2020 can be summarized as follows; Improved tourism receipts, African integration, foreign direct investment, business opportunities, specialized skill development and ease of doing business. Other implied benefits include global competitiveness, employment opportunities, improved immigration service professionalism as well as monitoring of visitors and data analysis by the government to enhance national security. Going by the implementation of the NVP 2020 and the current status of

the policy, it cannot be emphatically stated that these objectives have been achieved. Four critical Areas of the NVP 2020 are discussed as follows.

3.2.1 Nigeria Tourism Receipts

Table 1: Nigeria Tourism Receipt: 2019 – 2021)

Year	2019 (USD)	2020 (USD)	2021 (USD)	% variance
	1,147,000000	321,000, 000	No Data	-78.18%

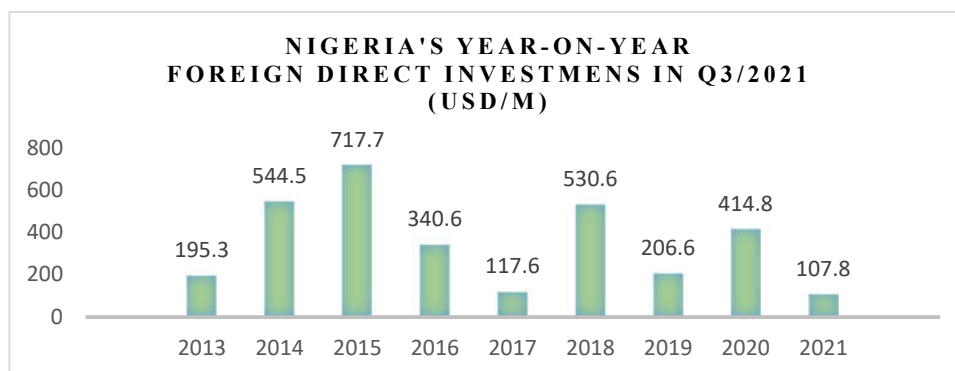
Source: Knoema (2020)

Going by the above data, it is difficult to objectively analyze the performance of the new visa regime as per the delivery of benefits with regards to improved tourism receipts in Nigeria. Whilst tourism earnings dropped by 78.18% between 2019 and 2020, there is no data that adequately captures tourism performance in 2021, after the implementation of the new Visa policy. It must be noted however that the sharp drop in tourism receipt in Nigeria between 2019 and 2020 was occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic due to its devastating effect on global travels. Meanwhile, The UNWTO (2022) observed that Africa saw a 12% increase in arrivals in 2021 compared to 2020, though this is still 74% below 2019. From this observation, one can infer that Nigeria probably witnessed a rise in tourism receipts in 2021.

3.2.2 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

The Nigeria Bureau of Statistics in a Business Day Report (2022) observed that Nigeria’s Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) dropped by 74.01 percent year-on-year in the third quarter of 2021. This was reported to be the lowest performance since the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) started collating the data in 2013.

Figure 1: Nigeria’s FDI Performance 2013 - 2021



Source: Business Day, 2022

Business Day (2022) reports that from \$414.79 million reported in the comparable quarter of 2020, the latest report by the NBS shows that Nigeria only attracted \$107.81 million in the same period of

2021. Nigeria's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) plunged by 74.01 percent year-on-year in the third quarter of 2021. The implementation of the NVP 2020 has not been able to show any tangible correlation with FDI's improvement since inception in 2020. This is due largely to a myriad of challenges facing the economy of Nigeria. Business Day (2022) observed that, a lack of substantial economic reforms has culminated in weak economic growth, foreign exchange volatility and a harsh business environment. It is also worthy of note that the global meltdown occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected global traffic and investment flow in 2020 and 2021. Nations and businesses spent the most part of 2021 battling to recover from the pandemic.

3.2.3 Ease of Doing Business

Evaluating the impact of Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP) 2020 with regards to the objective of improving the ease of doing business Nigeria is a bit difficult due to insufficient data. Prior to the launch of the NVP 2020, Nigeria performance on the global ease of doing business index is dismal and left much to be desired. According to the World Bank Report (2019) on ease of doing business, Nigeria ranks 146 out of 190 national economies studied. The World Bank Report (2020) on ease of doing business positioned Nigeria at 131 out of 190 global economies. Nigeria however, ranked among the top 10 most improving economies with regards to ease of doing business (World Bank, 2020). The launch of the NVP 2020 in February, 2020 must have also positively contributed to the placement of Nigeria amongst the top 10 most improving ease of doing business economies in the world. The policy sent the right signal as per the readiness of Nigeria to improve and become more investment-friendly. This position can only be sustained and improved upon by an effective implementation and sustainability of the NVP 2020.

3.2.4 African Integration

Nigeria realized that Africa cannot achieve integration and economic development without ease of movement within the continent. This informed the introduction of the waived visa requirements for Africans. Ademola (2016) noted that besides **increasing tourism and investment, there would also be elimination of trade and investment barriers that hampers integration, business and job creation on the continent.** Ademola (2016) also noted that countries such as Rwanda, Mauritius, and Seychelles that have already opened up to business are already enjoying the benefits of tourism, investment, and financial services. Consequent upon their open visa policies, Mauritius and Rwanda have recorded an upward curve in business, trade, and leisure travel, all of which impact positively on their economies. Though there is insufficient data with regards to the performance of the NVP 2020 in the area of achieving African integration through improved intra-African movement and economic development, an effective implementation of the policy will certainly stimulate inbound tourism traffic and development as being experienced in Mauritius and Rwanda.

3.3 Challenges

3.3.1 National Security Concerns

Whilst the policy is designed with good intentions, there are public concerns about the intelligence level of the Nigerian Immigration Service, NIS, to track those coming in with wrong intentions. This cast public doubt on the practicability of the Visa on Arrival Policy as there are fears that the policy may compromise national security. The key question here is how prepared is Nigeria in terms of

technology, professionalism and commitment to manage the intricacies and security implications of Visa on Arrival policy.

Inwalomhe Donald in The Guardian News Report (2021) shared the view that the probabilities of criminals beating the system are insignificant. It was observed that biometrics is to be carried out at the port of entry which is a major boost to Nigeria's national security. The report further maintained that the Nigeria Visa Policy 2020 has security identity number which is like the national identification number that helps to boost internal security and which is used by the governments of many countries as a means of tracking their citizens, permanent residents, and temporary residents for the purposes of work, taxation, government benefits, health care, and other governmentally-related functions.

The report paints a robust theoretical picture of an efficient system, however, it still does not address the question of practicability, especially against the background of government ineptitude and lack of will for optimal performance and results.

3.3.2 Implementation Delays

Another major challenge is the delay in implementation of several aspects of the policy. The issue with the new visa policy hinges on implementation delays and lack of demonstrable political will to hit the ground running by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Since inception of the policy till date, there is no evidence of implementation of the Investor's Visa class, despite its huge potentials. The implementation delay of Investor's Visa is a major setback for the drive of the Federal Government of Nigeria to accelerate the attraction of Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) to the country. Olayiwonu and Olanrewaju (2021) observed that, though the NVP 2020 provides for additional visa classes to accommodate a wider travel purpose that were hitherto generalized under transit, tourism, business and work, a review of current visa issuance at the Nigerian Missions abroad shows that most of the new visa options are yet to be accessible.

Technical Expertise

Whilst the Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP) 2020 is a significant milestone in the country's drive to promote tourism receipts and Foreign Direct Investment (FDIs), there is no significant evidence to show that the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), the agency of government responsible for the implementation of the policy has the right technical expertise to successfully implement the reforms embodied in the policy. This is evident in the delays in effectively rolling out all aspects of the policy. There is also poor evidence of internal sensitization by NIS on the workability of the new visa regime.

3.3.3 National Border Porosity

The Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP), seems to focus more on airport point of entry only. This made it handicapped in addressing national security as many Nigerian land borders are serving as seamless gateways for criminals and bandits. Examples are the north-west borders covering Sokoto, Kebbi, and Kano) These borders have created unfettered access to inbound bandits and criminals including foreign nomadic herdsmen.

3.3.4 Corruption in the Nigeria Immigration Service

Another major concern is the escalating corrupt practices by officials of the Nigeria Immigration Services. Given the service antecedents of NIS, it may not take long before the officials of NIS hijack the Visa on Arrival policy as an avenue for frustrating and extorting foreigners, even after meeting all the statutory requirements. According to Temitayo Ayetoto-Oladehinde, in a Business Day Report

(2021), the Nigerian Immigration Service sacked 60 of its officials for collecting bribes in their line of duty. The report noted that Comptroller General of the Nigeria Immigration Service, Muhammad Babandede said this while speaking with BBC Hausa. The Controller-General noted that the 60 officials were sacked following complaints “with evidence” before the Immigration Service and subsequently through the Ministry of Interior. Business Day (2021) also reported how corrupt immigration officials evidently collected peanut bribes from illegal migrants at different points of entry.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

The Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP) 2020 is a landmark policy that was designed to positively alter Nigeria immigration landscape and usher in accelerated tourism development, foreign direct investment, specialized skills transference, African integration, employment, enhanced national security, innovations, global competitiveness and economic development. The policy created 79 classes of visas under two broad categories; Visa free/exemption and visa mandatory. These classes among others include Electronic Visa (e-Visa), Visa on Arrival, Temporary Work Permit (TWP), Permanent Residence Visa (PRV) and Visa Exemption by agreement, reciprocity and organizational membership.

The implementation of the new visa regime as enunciated in the policy is still sketchy. Vital classes like the investor’s visa have not taken effect across Nigeria’s foreign missions and NIS offices in Nigeria. Similarly, the temporary work permits as expanded in the policy has not been fully implemented. The performance of the NVP 2020 in relation to its objectives of promoting tourism receipts, Foreign Direct Investment (FDIs), Ease of Doing Business and African Integration shows that the policy is yet to root firmly. Reports by the World Bank and other credible organisations suggest that Nigeria is still experiencing a downward curve on the global competitiveness index especially in the area of tourism receipts and FDIs. The policy is marred by implementation delay and ineptitude, lack of expertise, systemic corruption, border porosity and national security concerns. Employable measures to address these barriers include full and effective implementation, expertise development, investment in technology, decisive action against corrupt practices and effective border security coverage.

4.2 Recommendations

The Nigeria Visa Policy 2020 is no doubt a laudable initiative that promises ample benefits in the areas of tourism development, national security, specialised skill development, foreign direct investment and African integration. However, these benefits are only feasible if the well-articulated policy is fully implemented and evaluated for improvement or modifications where necessary. To ensure that the objectives of the policy are met effectively, this paper recommends the following measures to assist the Federal Government of Nigeria and relevant agencies, especially the Nigeria Immigration Services in achieving the goals of the policy.

4.2.1 Full Implementation

The Nigeria Immigration Services (NIS) should urgently roll-out effective implementation of all categories of visas in order to engender the achievement of the target benefits of the scheme. Specifically, NIS should promptly identify the barriers militating against full and effective implementation and carefully address them.

4.2.2 Training

With 79 classes of Visa, against the previous 6 categories, NIS is no doubt faced with an up-hill task. This necessitates expertise development in the handling of the various aspects of visa services. The Nigeria Immigration Services should urgently step-up efforts to train its personnel on the specific areas of technical services needed for effective visa administration.

4.2.3 Investment in Technology

The agency should also invest in relevant advanced technology for its visa operation and get its officials skilfully equipped for the smooth operations of such facilities. Expectedly, the operations of the various visa classes require diverse equipment for effective services. This equipment should be identified by experts, procured, installed and operated by trained hands across all Nigeria's foreign missions

4.2.4 Combat Corruption Decisively

As noted earlier in this paper, one of the barriers threatening the successful implementation of NIV Policy (2020) is the systemic corruption within the NIS agency. This practice will create serious setback for the policy and rob Nigeria of its benefit if not decisively nipped in the bud. The agency should consciously put measures in place to fight internal corruption.

4.2.5 Effective Border Coverage

The NIS should embark on a thorough research on all illegal entry points into Nigeria, especially the northern part of the country. Such identification will enable effective security coverage, otherwise the whole essence of promoting national security will be illusive.

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