

Immigration Reforms in Nigeria: An Overview & Critique.



Introduction

In the past year, Nigeria implemented comprehensive reforms to its immigration framework, aimed at enhancing border security, curbing illegal migration, and modernising migration governance. These measures reflect the Federal Government's commitment to addressing national security concerns while digitising administrative processes to improve efficiency, transparency, and compliance.

The Reforms:

1. E-Visa Roll Out.

The e-Visa Application System was officially rolled out on 1 May 2025 and replaces the erstwhile Visa on Arrival process. The system is now fully operational through an online platform, enabling eligible foreign nationals to apply for and obtain short-term visas electronically before travelling to Nigeria. By digitising the visa application process.

2. Automation of the Temporary Work Permit (TWP) application process.

Automation of the TWP process is designed to accelerate the issuance of short-term work authorisations for expatriates while improving procedural transparency. While the digital workflow promises reduced processing timelines and limited human intervention, its effectiveness will depend on portal stability and intra-agency coordination.

3. Overhaul of CERPAC forms and Introduction of the e-CERPAC (Electronic – Comprehensive Expatriate Residence Permit and Aliens Card).

The e-CERPAC (a fully digital platform for processing the Electronic – Comprehensive Residence Permit and Aliens Card) was launched on 1 August 2025, offering expatriates a more streamlined and efficient way to manage their residency and identification.

4. Digital Landing and Exit Cards.

This is an electronic platform set to enhance migration intelligence, strengthen risk profiling, and improve the accuracy of entry and exit monitoring and border management analytics. This system enables immigration authorities to more effectively monitor compliance with visa conditions, identify instances of overstaying, and detect irregular or unlawful migration. By requiring foreign nationals to complete digital landing and exit cards before entering and upon departing Nigeria.

These measures reflect the Federal Government's commitment to addressing national security concerns while digitising administrative processes to improve efficiency, transparency, and compliance.

Projected Advantages of the Reforms:

- Reduced incidents of corruption through minimal human interaction in immigration processes. By leveraging digital platforms, the framework is expected to enhance transparency, accountability, and procedural integrity.
- Strengthened border security through more accurate documentation and effective monitoring of the entry and exit of individuals into and out of Nigeria. Improved tracking and record-keeping mechanisms should enable the relevant authorities to maintain better oversight of migration flows and safeguard the country's borders.
- A faster and more efficient mechanism for processing visa applications and e-CERPAC approvals. Under the new system, e-Visas are expected to issue within 20 to 48 hours, while CERPAC processing is projected to be completed within 2 – 4 weeks.

Ultimately, these reforms are expected to contribute to economic growth by facilitating easier entry of foreign investors, professionals, and visitors, thereby enhancing Nigeria's attractiveness as a destination for international business and investment.

Consequential Challenges.

It is important to note that Nigeria's new immigration policy direction may also present certain practical and strategic challenges.

- 1. Reciprocity considerations:** Under international law, the principle of reciprocity governs the mutual exchange of privileges and obligations between Sovereign States. While the introduction of an e-Visa system aligns with prevailing international practice, the concurrent discontinuance of the Visa on Arrival option may be perceived by some jurisdictions as a tightening of Nigeria's entry requirements. In such circumstances, other countries may consider adopting reciprocal measures that could affect the ease with which Nigerian nationals access their territories. The likelihood and extent of any such response will largely depend on how efficient, predictable, and accessible Nigeria's new visa processes prove to be in practice.

- 2. Policy Volatility and Immigration Uncertainty:** Frequent reforms may create uncertainty for multinational companies, investors, and expatriates. Rapid policy changes, particularly where implemented with limited transitional guidance, may complicate long-term workforce planning and increase operational and advisory costs. From an investment perspective, regulatory unpredictability may also affect investor confidence, as businesses generally favour stable and transparent immigration regimes when making decisions on market entry, expansion, and the deployment of foreign personnel.
- 3. Operational Inefficiencies of Newly Deployed Digital Portals:** Stakeholders have observed system shortcomings, intermittent disruptions, and frequent interface updates across the newly deployed immigration portals. Such inefficiencies suggest that these portals were deployed ahead of operational maturity, thereby creating procedural uncertainty for users.
- 4. Exit Capture Discrepancies and Travel Disruptions:** While digital Landing and Exit Cards are intended to improve border control, practical challenges persist. Some foreign nationals have experienced difficulties being properly scanned out at departure or have found that their exit records fail to reflect on the portal. Consequently, the system may inaccurately indicate that travellers remain “in-country,” creating complications for subsequent visits. Whether due to human error or systemic inefficiencies, this issue underscores the importance of accurate, real-time synchronisation between exit points and central databases to maintain both border integrity and traveller trust.

Conclusion

Nigeria’s immigration reforms are ambitious and forward-looking, reflecting a clear commitment to modern, digitally enabled border governance. Ambition alone is however insufficient, and operational precision must accompany policy design. If digital portal inefficiencies, compliance burdens, and exit-recording discrepancies remain unaddressed, the reforms risk falling short of their transformative potential.

Moving forward, stakeholder engagement and phased adjustments will be critical in ensuring these reforms achieve their objectives without unduly hindering economic growth or international relations.

Building a future-ready immigration framework will demand iterative refinement, robust stakeholder collaboration and sensitisation, and technological resilience. Striking this balance is essential to positioning Nigeria as a secure, efficiently governed, and globally competitive hub for talent, investment, and mobility.

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