

RESEARCHED AND COMPILED BY THE REFUGEE DOCUMENTATION CENTRE OF IRELAND ON THE 29 JULY 2024

DISCLAIMER

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. All COI Query Responses are compiled in line with the Common EU Guidelines (2008) and the EUAA Methodology (2023). This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. Please refer to all documents cited.

COI QUERY RESPONSE

NIGERIA – BLACK AXE

Prevalence of the Black Axe

The *Associated Press* published a report in July 2024 stating: “One of the targeted groups was Black Axe, one of the most prominent criminal networks in West Africa. Black Axe operates in cyber fraud, human trafficking, drug smuggling, and is responsible for violent crimes both within Africa and globally, the agency added. Black Axe used money mules to open bank accounts worldwide and is now under investigation in over 40 countries for related money laundering activities, the agency said.”¹

The *European Union Agency for Asylum* reporting on the security situation in July 2024 stated: “In the last quarter of 2023, insecurity across the Niger Delta persisted, particularly with kidnappings and robberies, driven by financial gain from ransoms demanded by criminal gangs.”²

In April 2024 a publication issued by *Agence France Presse* points out that: “The Black Axe gang had “strict hierarchical structures under leadership in Nigeria” operating different territorial units, police said. The group had a “significant influence” on politics and public administrations, in particular in Nigeria”³

In March 2024 Nigeria Watch points out that: “In 2023, cultism in Nigeria resulted in 371 deaths, marking an increase from the 301 recorded in 2022.”⁴

In January 2024 the *Federal Office for Migration and Refugees* reporting on July 2023 to December 2023 reported that: “Recently, cult groups are said to have been relatively successful in recruiting new

¹ Associated Press (17 July 2024) Interpol arrests 300 people in a global crackdown on West African crime groups across 5 continents, p.1

² EUAA (11 July 2024) EUAA COI Report - Nigeria: Country Focus (July 2024) [2. Security Situation], p.4

³ Agence France Presse (24 April 2024) German police swoop on Nigerian dating scammers

⁴ Nigeria Watch (March 2024) Thirteenth Report On Violence In Nigeria 2023, p.8

members. The recruits are mostly young adults from different educational backgrounds and professions.”⁵

A report published in September 2023 by the *European Union Agency for Asylum* includes stating that: “...the Black Axe originated at the University of Benin in Edo State in the 1970s...as a student gang...[a]fter its creation, another confraternity, called the Supreme Eiyé Confraternity, also known as the National Association of Air Lords, broke away from Black Axe. During this time, the splintered cult groups introduced a new dimension into confraternity tradition: before carrying out any activities, they would practice voodoo rituals...Cultism in Nigeria is considered as one of the major security issues...”⁶

This document also states that: “...the Black Axe...have a vast network and infiltrated all levels of Nigerian society...”⁷

In October 2022 the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* reported that: “According to sources, the Black Axe confraternity is one of the “most notorious” (Harper’s Magazine Sept. 2019), or “most-feared organised crime syndicates” (BBC 13 Dec. 2021a), or one of the “more prominent confraternities/cults” in Nigeria (Australia 3 Dec. 2020, para. 3.131). The BBC indicates that secret societies, also known as “confraternities and campus cults,” such as the Black Axe, are “banned in Nigeria” (BBC 2 June 2020).”⁸

Initiation ceremonies for membership

In January 2024 the *Africans Unite Against Child Abuse (AFRUCA)* notes that: “First is the excessive use of violence. The confraternities are well known to employ excessive violence and brutality in every aspects of their operations both in Europe and across Nigeria. Violence is a key element in the recruitment and initiation of victims of trafficking as well as cult members, which can include physical abuse, rape, excessive use of force and torture.”⁹

The *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) / National Institute for Security Studies (NISS)* in September 2023 reported that: “Recruitment was not seen as problematic by most of the cultists, as there appeared to be plenty of prospects willing to join. As one respondent put it: “We don’t find members, members come to us.” Targeted recruitment was said to take place, however. In the university confraternities and the street cults alike, talented or connected people are approached. Coopting the most promising young people has the effect of blunting potential rivals. Sometimes this targeting can be quite aggressive, especially for women, who may be raped as part of their initiation: “Before now, we didn’t force people into the cult group...But now, when we see someone that does things in a way that his boldness would be seen, we will call him in and give him our orientation, by

⁵ Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (17 January 2024) Briefing Notes Summary - Nigeria II/2023 (July to December 2023) p.7

⁶ European Union Agency for Asylum (28 September 2023) Nigeria; Black Axe cult in Edo State, including structure and activities (2005-2010); situation and treatment of former members of Black Axe cult by state and non-state actors (January 2021-2023); availability of state protection (January 2021-2023) [Q41-2023],p.1

⁷ Ibid, p.5

⁸ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (28 October 2022) Nigeria: The Black Axe confraternity [Aiye Confraternity; Ayee], also known as the Neo Black Movement of Africa (NBM); whether they use force to recruit individuals; their treatment of anti-cultists, p.1

⁹ Africans Unite Against Child Abuse (AFRUCA) (25 January 2021) Nigerian Confraternities and the Increase in Human Trafficking Across Europe, p.3

explaining to him how things are done. That is it. Because we know that you can fight against us some day, and in order to not let that happen, the person has to come into the group.”¹⁰

The *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* in a response to information request found that: “The group leader indicated being “tortured” with a whip during his initiation into the group and that he “had no choice other than to go through [it] all,” and was not informed of what would happen during the initiation.”¹¹

The position of a “Butcher”

In 2021 the *BBC* in an interview with a former member of the Black Axe reported that: “...he was known as “a butcher”.”¹²

In 2018 the *European Asylum Support Office* (now the *EUAA*) described the structure of cults stated: “...the chief butcher (Minister of Defense) is charged with leading operations. Usually four or five butchers are in place...”¹³

References

Africans Unite Against Child Abuse (AFRUCA) (25 January 2024) Nigerian Confraternities and the Increase in Human Trafficking Across Europe
<https://afruca.org/blog/nigerian-confraternities-and-the-increase-in-human-trafficking-across-europe>
(Accessed on 29 July 2024)

Agence France Presse (24 April 2024) German police swoop on Nigerian dating scammers
<https://advance.lexis.com/r/delivery/content/1609879202/download/227515677/FullDoc/false>
(Accessed on 29 July 2024)
This is a subscription database

Associated Press (17 July 2024) Interpol arrests 300 people in a global crackdown on West African crime groups across 5 continents
<https://apnews.com/article/interpol-financial-crime-west-africa-nigeria-dce992bc9edba0130f4766ab7d76261e>
(Accessed on 29 July 2024)

BBC (13 December 2021) The ultra-violent cult that became a global mafia
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-59614595>
(Accessed on 29 July 2024)

EUAA (11 July 2024) EUAA COI Report - Nigeria: Country Focus (July 2024) [2. Security Situation]
https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2024_07_EUAA_COI_Report_Nigeria_Country_Focus.pdf

¹⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) / National Institute for Security Studies (NISS) (25 September 2023) Organized Crime in Nigeria: A Threat Assessment [Chapter 1. Cultism], p.10

¹¹ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (28 October 2022) Nigeria: The Black Axe confraternity [Aiye Confraternity; Ayee], also known as the Neo Black Movement of Africa (NBM); whether they use force to recruit individuals; their treatment of anti-cultists, p.3

¹² BBC (13 December 2021) The ultra-violent cult that became a global mafia

¹³ European Asylum Support Office (EASO) (25 November 2018) Nigeria: Targeting of individuals [2.3 Student/university cults; 3.11 Persons affected by student/university cults], p.4

(Accessed on 29 July 2024)

European Asylum Support Office (EASO) (25 November 2018) Nigeria: Targeting of individuals [2.3 Student/university cults; 3.11 Persons affected by student/university cults],

<https://www.ein.org.uk/print/pdf/members/country-report/easo-country-origin-information-report-nigeria-targeting-individuals-23>

(Accessed on 29 July 2024)

This is a subscription database

European Union Agency for Asylum (28 September 2023) Nigeria; Black Axe cult in Edo State, including structure and activities (2005-2010); situation and treatment of former members of Black Axe cult by state and non-state actors (January 2021-2023); availability of state protection (January 2021-2023) [Q41-2023]

https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2098003/2023_09_EUAA_COI_Query_Response_Q41_2023_Nigeria_Black_Axe.pdf

(Accessed on 29 July 2024)

This is a subscription database

Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (17 January 2024) Briefing Notes Summary - Nigeria II/2023 (July to December 2023) Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (17 January 2024) Briefing Notes Summary - Nigeria II/2023 (July to December 2023)

<https://www.ein.org.uk/print/pdf/members/country-report/briefing-notes-summary-nigeria-ii2023-july-december-2023>

(Accessed on 29 July 2024)

This is a subscription database

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (28 October 2022) Nigeria: The Black Axe confraternity [Aiye Confraternity; Ayee], also known as the Neo Black Movement of Africa (NBM); whether they use force to recruit individuals; their treatment of anti-cultists,

<https://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/country-information/rir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=458713&pls=1>

(Accessed on 29 July 2024)

Nigeria Watch (March 2024) Thirteenth Report On Violence In Nigeria 2023

[ht](https://www.nigeriawatch.org/media/html/Reports//NGA-Watch-Report23VF.pdf)

[tps://www.nigeriawatch.org/media/html/Reports//NGA-Watch-Report23VF.pdf](https://www.nigeriawatch.org/media/html/Reports//NGA-Watch-Report23VF.pdf)

(Accessed on 29 July 2024)

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) / National Institute for Security Studies (NISS) (25 September 2023) Organized Crime in Nigeria: A Threat Assessment [Chapter 1. Cultism]

<https://www.ein.org.uk/members/country-report/organized-crime-nigeria-threat-assessment-chapter-1-cultism>

(Accessed on 29 July 2024)

This is a subscription database

Sources Consulted:

Amnesty International

BBC News

Electronic Immigration Network

European Country of Origin Information Network

Freedom House



Google
Human Rights Watch
Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
International Crisis Group
Lexis Nexis
Minority Rights Group International
New Humanitarian
Online Newspapers
Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database
Reliefweb
United Kingdom Home Office
United States Department of State
UNHCR
Refworld

Contact Information

Refugee Documentation Centre
Legal Aid Board
48/49 North Brunswick Street
Dublin 7
Ireland

Email: research@legalaidboard.ie