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Experts confirm 28 new CERPAC centers boost business, FDI flow into Nigeria

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The decentralization of the Combined Expatriate Residence Permit and Aliens Card (CERPAC), which is issued by the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) to foreigners with business interests in Nigeria has boosted ease of doing business and increase Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the country, some industry experts said.

Industry analysts confirmed to BusinessDay that the Nigeria Immigration service, (NIS), is also complying to the order once an investor meets the requirement, which is in an accordance to the implementation of Executive Order signed by Yemi Osinbajo the Vice President who was the acting President five months ago when the order was signed.

The step, they said is significant considering the fact that foreign investors largely shunned Nigeria's economy in 2016, making FDI inflow to dip by \$4.52billion to \$5.12 billion, the lowest in nine years.

This is according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), which specifically states that in the year 2016, capital importation into Nigeria fell from \$9.64bn in 2015 to \$5.12bn, showing 46.86 percent decline.

According to economic experts, the bureaucratic and regulatory constraints to doing business in the country was hurting the economy as foreign investors were being scared away.

Nigeria is ranked 169 among 190 economies in the ease of doing business, according to the latest World Bank annual ratings. The rank of Nigeria improved from 169 in 2016 from 170 in 2015. Ease of Doing Business in Nigeria averaged 145.00 from 2008 until 2016, reaching an all time high of 170.00 in 2015 and a record low of 120.00 in 2008.

Concerned about the development, President Muhammadu Buhari in July 2016 established the Presidential Business Environment Council (PEBEC) with a mandate to remove the bureaucratic and regulatory constraints to doing business in Nigeria.

The decentralization of the Combined Expatriate Residence Permit and Aliens Card (CERPAC) is seen as one of the strategy to minimizing the bottlenecks encountered by intending foreign investors.

Before now there were only 8 centers that issued the CERPAC but its decentralization has seen additional 28 centers across Nigeria that now issue the card, making it a total of 36 centers.

At present, only Borno out of the two conflict ridden states of north eastern Nigeria, is without a CERPAC center.

Abdulrahman Dambazau, who is Nigeria's minister of interior, described the development as being "in tandem with the recent executive order by President Muhammadu Buhari on ease of doing business in the country."

The Nigeria Immigration Service requires foreigners living in Nigeria to get the new CERPAC or they will be considered to be illegal residents and subject to repatriation from Nigeria.

Those who qualify for the card are expatriates that are resident or working in Nigeria.

Obi Mbanuzuo is the Accountable Manager and Chief Operating officer, Dana Airlines and Allen Onyema, Chairman and CEO of Air Peace, commended the federal government for the implementation of Visa on Arrival. They say since it was made effective, business has been seamless with regard to bringing in expatriates to conduct checks and maintenance.

Muhammad Babandede, the NIS Controller General said that the new process was designed to eliminate all unnecessary bureaucratic visa processing procedures in Nigeria missions abroad.