Illegal Migration to Europe and Nigeria's Policy Response: Trends and Analysis

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Abstract

Illegal migration poses significant challenges, straining economies, and endangering lives. Nigeria grapples with these issues, with citizens seeking better prospects in Europe. Human trafficking, exploitation, and border control inefficiencies heighten risks. Nigeria's policy response involves diplomatic cooperation, awareness campaigns, and economic reforms to illegal migration, emphasizing regional collaboration for lasting solutions. This paper examines the nature of illegal migration of Nigerians to Europe and Nigeria's policy response. The study adopted qualitative method of data collection. Findings of the study show that over 5.8 million Nigerian men, women, and children are migrants in Europe. Majority of Nigerians who left the country illegally used the Central Mediterranean Sea en route to reach Italy, Spain, and other European nations. Findings also revealed that thousands of Nigerian youths have left the country as a result of these socio-economic issues, including a lack of employment opportunities, low pay or wages, poverty, failing health care system, failing educational system, unfavourable working conditions, and a high cost of living. The study recommends among others, that Nigeria's policy response should prioritize addressing socioeconomic disparities, unemployment, and insecurity within the country to discourage citizens from seeking illegal migration as a solution. Secondly, Nigeria should enhance cooperation with European nations to combat illegal migration through intelligence sharing, joint law enforcement efforts, and support for repatriation programs.

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Introduction

Illegal migration of Nigerians to Europe has been a longstanding and complex issue that has significant social, economic, and political implications for both Nigeria and the European countries involved. Over the years, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of Nigerians attempting to migrate illegally to Europe in search of better opportunities and improved living conditions. This phenomenon has raised concerns among policymakers,

international organizations, and the general public, prompting a need for comprehensive policy responses from the Nigerian government (World Bank, 2021).

The reasons behind the surge in illegal migration from Nigeria to Europe are multifaceted. Economic instability, high unemployment rates, poverty, and lack of access to basic amenities are some of the factors driving individuals, particularly young people, to seek better prospects abroad. Political instability, insecurity, and lack of adequate social infrastructure further contribute to the desire of many Nigerians to leave their homeland in search of a more stable and secure future (IOM, 2019). Nigeria, as one of the most populous countries in Africa, has witnessed a significant outflow of its citizens in recent years. The push factors in Nigeria are deeply rooted in a struggling economy marked by high unemployment rates, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of access to basic amenities. Additionally, the country faces internal conflicts, particularly in regions like the Niger Delta and the northeast, further exacerbating the situation. These challenges create a fertile ground for illegal migration, with many Nigerians choosing to embark on dangerous journeys in pursuit of a better life in Europe (Frontex, 2019).

To gain a deeper understanding of the scale of this problem, it is crucial to examine the statistics related to illegal migration from Nigeria to Europe. Reports shows that between May and September, 2023, no fewer than 170 Nigerians have been deported from Germany, Sweden, Lithuania and others. In May 2023, four siblings aged between 11 and 17 and their mother were deported alongside 35 others from Europe to Nigeria. Between late May and July 4, Germany deported 80 Nigerian migrants, including children battling severe health challenges requiring surgeries. In the following months, 50 others, comprising 48 males and two females, were deported from Switzerland, Sweden, Luxembourg, Austria, Belgium, Spain and Hungary (Angulu, 2023). This reflects a larger picture of the migration trends of Nigerians across European borders as the illegal forms of international migration of Nigerians outside the country end up causing a nuisance to the European world and has severely ridiculed the country's image in the international community.

The statistics reveal a concerning trend, with thousands of Nigerians being intercepted by European authorities while attempting to enter the continent illegally. Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of Nigerians falling victim to human trafficking networks, further highlighting the vulnerability of migrants and the need for stronger international cooperation to combat this issue.

In the face of these challenges, the Nigerian government has implemented various policies and initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of illegal migration and curbing the flow of migrants. One of the fundamental strategies involves economic reforms and investments in job creation. By focusing on sectors with high employment potential, such as agriculture, technology, and manufacturing, the government aims to generate opportunities for the burgeoning youth population. Education and skill development programs have also been introduced to enhance the employability of the workforce, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to the nation's economy (Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2021).

Furthermore, the Nigerian government has intensified its efforts to combat human trafficking and raise awareness about the dangers of illegal migration. Law enforcement agencies have been mobilized to apprehend traffickers and dismantle their networks. Simultaneously, awareness campaigns have been launched to educate vulnerable populations about the risks associated with illegal migration, emphasizing the importance of legal pathways and available support services. Additionally, diplomatic engagements with destination countries in Europe have been strengthened to facilitate the repatriation of Nigerian migrants and provide them with necessary support upon their return. Bilateral agreements and cooperation frameworks have been established to ensure the safe and humane return of migrants, while also addressing the social and economic reintegration challenges they face back home (NIS, 2017).

While these policy responses demonstrate the Nigerian government's commitment to addressing the issue of illegal migration, several challenges persist. The implementation of policies often faces bureaucratic hurdles and resource constraints. Moreover, the effectiveness of awareness campaigns and law enforcement efforts hinges on comprehensive collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, and international

partners. Strengthening these partnerships and enhancing coordination mechanisms is crucial to achieving sustainable outcomes. Another significant aspect that demands attention is the need for regional cooperation and collaboration among African nations (UNHCR, 2020). Addressing the root causes of illegal migration requires a collective effort to promote peace, stability, and economic development across the continent. By fostering regional partnerships and supporting initiatives aimed at enhancing intra-African trade and economic growth, African nations can create an environment conducive to opportunities, thereby reducing the impetus for citizens to seek migration as their only recourse.

Statement of the Problem

This paper seeks interrogate the increasing wave of illegal migration from Nigeria to Europe and the measures put in place to effectively manage it. Illegal migration to Europe places a burden on host countries' social welfare systems, healthcare, and education services, leading to increased strain on resources and potential social tensions. Migrants, especially vulnerable populations, are often exploited and trafficked by criminal networks during their journey to Europe, leading to human rights violations and a rise in organized crime. The challenge is the condition of well-being in Nigeria hasn't improved to discourage further illegal Migrations, neither has the repatriated illegal migrants been able to offset the debt most of them collected to fund their illegal movement to Europe. This leaves them with the option of trying to illegally re-migrate back to Europe (Pennington &Balaram, 2013; Plambech, 2018).

Despite the border controls, the stifling of migration policies and the security approaches that the European Union and Nigeria have used to manage their illegal migration problem, there are no signs progress is being made with the great number of illegal Nigerian emigrants appearing in Europe en route to the Eastern and Central Mediterranean (Olaiya & Chukwuemeka, 2019). Nigerians keep migrating illegally to Europe and the majority of those embarking on these risky migratory journeys passes through Libya and then afloat rickety boats through the Eastern and Central Mediterranean routes to get there. After many harrowing journeys to make it to Europe, in 2016 alone over 20,000 illegal Nigerian migrants were told to return home because they have no legal right to be in Europe (NIS, 2017). Germany on its part was said to be planning to also repatriate 30,000 Nigerian illegal migrants who were denied asylum (Simiona, 2021).

European countries have since been restricting illegal migration by way of stifling migration policies around the EU and embarking on mass deportations because of the economic and terrorism narrative of illegal migration (Reitano, and Shaw, 2014). The area of bilateral migration governance to achieve skilled development, planning, and employment to support livelihood/wellbeing lacks comprehensive literature that could aid better understanding of the complex illegal migration challenge and interventions that are continuously sending a large number of Nigeria's illegal immigrants into the European Union. Against this background, this paper delves into the trends and analysis of illegal migration of Nigerians to Europe, shedding light on the intricate web of causes and consequences. Additionally, it explores Nigeria's policy responses to address this challenge, aiming to understand the effectiveness of existing measures and the potential avenues for improvement.

Conceptualization

Migration

Migration is not a recent phenomenon as involves the movement of people from one place to another in search of a better standard of living. Heckert (2015) viewed migration as the movement of people from one place or country to another to settle there for some time. She noted that youths migrate to Europe seeking better opportunities, drawn by the allure of greener pastures. However, some overlook the challenges, including cultural adjustment, economic uncertainties, and legal complexities. Fuelled by hope, they often ignore these consequences, facing difficulties in their pursuit of a better life in a foreign land. However, according to Baldassar (2014), the term migration refers to the relatively permanent movement of people, to change their place of residence. Like many other developing countries in the world, in Nigeria however, there is a general tendency that youths between the age of 15-25 years migrated t urban areas in search of better opportunities and living conditions in the cities(United Nations, 2013). Oluyemi and Adeola (2012) stressed that the youth are been preoccupied with this movement because it provides them with work opportunities not available in their places of origin. It constitutes an important stage in the transition to adulthood and an opportunity for independent income generation.

Illegal Migration

Vespe, Natale and Pappalardo(2017) argue that illegal migration does not connote the individuals involved in migration but their migratory status at a certain point in time, and this status can as well change during their journey and stay in their destination or transit country. This particular fact makes it difficult to get a comprehensive picture of irregular migrants Changes in national policies and laws can turn regular migration into illegal migration and can as well turn irregular into regular migration as the case may be. Vespe, Natale and Pappalardo (2017) shared a similar opinion of illegal migration but only differed where they asserted that the term connotes both the movement of people in an undocumented fashion and the number of migrants whose status may at any point be undocumented. To Vespe, et al., (2017) an irregular migrant may fall within any of the following categories; through the use of falsified documents at a crossing point or may not even have entered through an official crossing point; reside in the country irregularly by violating the terms of an entry visa/resident permit, or employed in the country irregularly by taking up paid employment when they were supposed to only reside in the country (Vespe, Natale & Pappalardo, 2017).

Transnational Migration

The International Organization for Migration (2019) defined illegal migration as the movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit, and destination countries. Glick (2003) and an earlier study conducted by Udo (1975) conceptualized Transnational Migration to entail a movement involving those persons who have migrated from one nation-state to another to live their lives across borders, participating simultaneously in social relations that embed them in more than one nation-state. Activities and identity claims in the political domain are a particular form of transnational migration that is best understood as long-distance nationalism (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2021).

For Stephen (2005) the term transnational migration suggests more or less permanent states of being between two or more locations, some people may spend a good part of their time engaging in this state of being, and others may live for long periods in one place or another, and still, others may leave their home communities only one time or never. This author further argued that all the people living within a transnational social field are exposed, on different levels but in some shared way to a set of social expectations, cultural values, and

patterns of human interaction shaped by more than one social, economic, and political system (Arhin, 2019)

Nature of Illegal Migration from Nigeria to Europe

Kingsley (2019) studied focused on an article titled: Unregulated Migration and Nigeria-EU Relations: This article presents the social and political nature of Nigeria-EU migration issues concerning unregulated migration that has been affecting the EU. This was done through qualitative and quantitative methodology, which includes interviews, data gathering, and documentary analysis. From the findings and discussion, the article submits that the main problem frustrating the effort of the EU interventions on migration is the political situation of Nigeria. If the political sphere in Nigeria is not addressed properly by eradicating numerous vices that undermine the economy and security through corruption, granting and assisting funds by the EU will be a superficial solution. It also presents the unconventional neo-vectors of migration and concludes that, since migration is a part of the human right through freedom of movement, which is also enshrined in human security, migration issues, therefore, cannot be exterminated through the building of migration centers. However, they can be reduced, if there are effective collaborative efforts by the Nigeria-European relations in conjunction with other African states through strong border controls and enabling development as a precursor to addressing migration problems.

Florence, Olufemi and Jessica (2021) in their study titled: Illegal Transnational Migration: Implication for Human Rights and Dignity of Nigerians: observed that the movement of people across country borders in violation of the migration laws of those countries is not a new phenomenon. The nature of illegal migration is many and no country is exempt from its occurrence within its borders. Both conventional and unconventional routes are used by migrants to cross international borders in search of safety and greener pastures. In the course of being smuggled across borders, many migrants are trafficked and exploited while others are apprehended by security agents of the source, transit, and receiving countries and subjected to human rights abuses. The study objective examined the implication of illegal transnational migration on the human rights and dignity of Nigerians protected by the international bill of rights and other international and national statutes and proffers lasting solutions to the problem

Abegunrin (2013) focused in his study titled: The Political Economy of Transnational Migration: explained that history has taught us that wars, natural disasters, and religion have at different times contributed to the mass movement of Africans into other regions world. However, economics has played the most prominent and important role in the lives of African immigrants. For instance, the Slave trade was an economic phenomenon and was only stopped by economic realities, when Britain used the Royal Navy to prevent the labor force it needed in Africa from being moved to the Americas and needed to maintain the African peripheral states for British economic (interest) survival. The focus of this chapter is to show and emphasize the significance of Nigerian immigrants in the European countries and the United States and how it can be gauged almost everywhere and in most professions. Most of these immigrants are contributing immensely not only to the economy of the United States but also to the American academy and its medical institutions. And Nigerian immigrants' role and importance in religious organizations – especially, the spread of the new Nigerian Pentecostal churches in the United States – are impacting American society and religion. This subject, which has so far been neglected, deserves to be researched.

Nigeria's Policy Response to Illegal Migration to Europe

Otobo and Okoro (2021) studied in the article titled: The Dreams and the Drama: Alternative Narratives to Illegal Migration amongst Young People in Nigeria: explained the Alternatives to illegal migration, the need to migrate out of Nigeria has almost been seen as the surest bet to getting a better life. Many Nigerians try to attain this fit by all means possible. Even illegally. In 2015, 23,000 Nigerians crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Europe and in the first 9 months of 2016, 22,500 had crossed. In the 1990s, more men migrated than women, however, the reverse is becoming the case in the 21st century. The general prevalence of illegal migration is constantly increasing. Due to the illegality of this act, a lot of people migrating illegally lose their lives and properties in the process. Others never get to where they are going. While the rest are kidnapped and trafficked into prostitution especially the women and girls for reasons ranging from family and friends' pressure, to search for greener pastures or even escaping from the law, more Nigerians die on the seas, illegally migrating than in her African nations.

According to Yunusa (2020) focused in an article titled: Irregular Migration and Security Challenges in North-Western Nigeria: Trends, Issues, and the Way Forward Illegal migration is the migration of people across national borders in a way that violates the immigration laws of the destination country. Recently, it has been noted that there are rising trends in irregular migration worldwide, especially from poorer to richer countries. Most migrants within and outside Africa are irregular migrants. However, those found in Nigeria appear to be on the increase in recent times, especially in the North-Western region. The objective of the paper is to examine the issue of irregular migration and its effects on Nigeria's national security with particular reference to the North West region and to provide suggestions on how the security challenges faced in the country could be addressed. Thus, the paper began by presenting a historical and conceptual background of the issue of irregular migration and security challenges in Nigeria. The trends and issues of irregular migration and security challenges in North-Western Nigeria were reasonably discussed. It then reviewed the causes of irregular migration. It specifically dwelt extensively on the impacts and consequences of irregular migration on social, economic, political, and security in north-western Nigeria. In the light of all these, recommendations were proffered as a way forward for reducing insecurity challenges in the North-western part of the country and the nation at large.

Stanislav (2020) studied in the work titled: Criminal Aspects of Illegal Migration: Illegal migration in Europe means that an ever-increasing number of people are leaving their homes to live in better countries. Migration carries risks that affect individuals and groups of people, sometimes society as a whole, and therefore states decide to intervene in migration processes. The causes of current irregular migration are quite diverse, but the common feature is that migrants had to leave their countries of origin because they could not live a normal life there. Illegal migrants are increasingly nationals of economically underdeveloped countries, who do not have financial resources, are socially deprived, and because of all these facts are involved in committing criminal anti-social activities. In countries where the number of migrants has risen sharply, the racial, ethnic, and religious structure of the population composition may change. The escalating tensions between the indigenous peoples and immigrants accelerate racism (bilaterally), radicalism in politics, socio-economic problems, crime, and other risk factors. It is in the European Community's interest to take all possible legal and effective measures to eliminate the risks of irregular migration and to ensure a safe environment for the

population. The paper characterizes migration and analyzes its causes and consequences, including crime associated with illegal migration.

The literature review above on illegal migration of Nigerians to Europe and Nigeria's policy response is marred with several gaps. There is limited research exploring the root causes driving this phenomenon, including economic factors, political instability, and social pressures. Additionally, there is a dearth of studies analyzing the effectiveness of Nigeria's policies in curbing illegal migration and addressing the challenges faced by returnees. Furthermore, there is a lack of in-depth examination of the social and psychological implications experienced by migrants and their families, hindering a comprehensive understanding of this complex issue.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts failed state theory, popularized in the 1990sby Robert Kaplan as its point of departure. The theory posits that some states are unable to perform essential functions, leading to a breakdown of law and order within their borders. It argues that failed states are characterized by the erosion of central authority, widespread corruption, economic instability, and social unrest (Kaplan, 1996). Kaplan contend that these states cannot deliver basic services such as security, education, and healthcare to their citizens, fostering an environment conducive to terrorism, organized crime, and humanitarian crises.

The theory rests on several key assumptions. First, it assumes that states are the primary actors in the international system, and their failure can have profound consequences for regional and global stability. Second, failed states are seen as breeding grounds for transnational threats, including terrorism and refugee crises, which can spill over borders and impact neighbouring countries. Third, failed states are believed to result from a combination of internal and external factors, such as weak governance, ethnic conflicts, and economic decline, exacerbated by external interventions or neglect (Ake, 1981).

Critics argue that the concept of a "failed state" oversimplifies complex political realities, leading to inaccurate categorizations and potentially misguided policy interventions. Despite its limitations, the failed state theory has influenced international discussions on state fragility and the need for targeted interventions to prevent state failure and promote sustainable

development. In the context of this paper, failed state theory is highly relevant in understanding illegal migration of Nigerians to Europe. Nigeria's political instability, weak institutions, and economic challenges contribute to citizens seeking better opportunities abroad. The failure to provide security and economic prospects drives many to migrate illegally. In response, Nigeria must strengthen governance, promote economic growth, and enhance social welfare to curb illegal migration. Addressing the root causes is vital for effective policy responses, fostering stability, and discouraging citizens from risking illegal migration.

Methodology

The study adopts qualitative research design in collecting data. Qualitative research design offers a nuanced approach to comprehending the complex phenomenon of illegal migration of Nigerians to Europe and Nigeria's policy responses. By employing qualitative research, it facilitates a thorough analysis of Nigeria's policy responses. Examining government documents, policy debates, and expert opinions helps researchers grasp the effectiveness and gaps in existing measures. Qualitative data also captures the perspectives of policymakers, NGOs, and law enforcement agencies, shedding light on the challenges faced in implementation. Additionally, employing methods like in-depth interviews, ethnographic studies, the researcher delves into the intricate narratives, motivations, and socio-economic factors driving this migration trend. Understanding the migrants' experiences, aspirations, and challenges provides valuable insights into the push and pull factors at play.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The trends of Nigerians taking the Central Mediterranean Sea route illegally to Italy comprises of Men, Women, and children Migrants (see table below).However, over 2.7 million Nigerians are thought to be internally displaced within her borders, with over 294,230 of them believed to be refugees in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger (UNHCR, 2020). Migration is influenced by the number of armed conflicts and instances of political unrest. The extraordinary influx of migrants heading to Europe has been strongly influenced by conflicts in Syria, Somalia, and Eritrea. However, migration toward a small geographic area, particularly along neighbouring state borders, is driven by armed conflict. It was also found that very few Nigerians travel to the Mediterranean Sea to escape severe strife. Additionally,

the demographic research on migrant returnees supports Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa are the three red-flag states in Nigeria, and they create less illegal migration than the Edo states. This is demonstrated by the fact that Edo state accounts for 43.4% of the majority of them. People from the southern portion of Nigeria migrate vast distances, often on a permanent basis, whereas those from the northern part of the country migrate less frequently and tend to migrate locally.

Data Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Table 1: Nigerians Sea Arrivals in Italy, 2011-2019

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total arrivals in Italy by Sea	62,692	13,267	42,925	170,100	153,842	181,436	119,369	23370	11,471
Nigerians									
Total	5,480	358	2,680	9,000	22,237	37,552	18,158	1,250	241
Men	3,828	259	2,130	6,989	15,343	23,178	11,417	821	175
Women	1,317	85	433	1,454	5,633	11,009	5,425	324	41
Children	225	14	117	557	1,261	3,365	1,316	105	25
of which, unaccompanied	na	Na	107	461	1,022	3,040	1,228	92	13

Source: International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Italian Ministry of Interior Italy, 2020

However, this is reflected in a statement of a Peter Samson in this interview (2023) stated that:

The Nigerian government of failing to create a welcoming climate for Nigerian young, blaming illegal migration on the economic, social, and political problems that Nigerians suffer in their home nation. How many Nigerians complete their degrees in Nigeria before moving abroad to get employment using their credentials from home? Peter stated that the majority of unauthorized immigrants work difficult occupations. Cleaning tasks like washing corpses and cleaning toilets are done at night. Even those who are in the legal system and have their documents are drivers. Considering that many of them are underemployed or unemployed. An average Nigerian kid worries more about his next meal than he does about excellent roads, power, and other social amenities, which is one of the main reasons why Nigerians migrate irregularly to Europe. Many Nigerian adolescents graduate from universities but remain in their fathers' homes, eating their parents' food, at the age of 30 to 35. This is due to a lack of productive jobs. They are unable to work with their certificates (Interview with Mr P., an Assistant Controller of Customs, 5th January 2023).

Factor of illegal migration from Nigeria to Europe

In responding to the predisposing factors for illegal migration of Nigerians to Europe, the respondents attributed to a complex interplay of various social, economic, and political factors. While it is essential to note that not all Nigerians migrating to Europe do so illegally, several common factors contribute to illegal migration as revealed by the respondents, thus:

1. **Economic Opportunities**: Limited economic opportunities and high unemployment rates in Nigeria drive many individuals to seek better job prospects and higher wages in Europe.

2. **Poverty**: Widespread poverty in Nigeria push individuals and families to consider illegal migration as a means to escape their financial struggles and secure a better future.

3. **Political Instability**: Political instability, corruption, and lack of effective governance create an uncertain environment, prompting some Nigerians to migrate illegally in search of stability and security.

4. **Conflict and Insecurity**: Nigeria has faced various internal conflicts and security challenges, such as Boko Haram insurgency and communal clashes. Insecure living conditions drive people to seek refuge in more stable countries, sometimes resorting to illegal means.

5. **Lack of Basic Services**: Limited access to basic services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure lead to dissatisfaction among Nigerians, motivating them to migrate illegally in search of better living conditions.

6. **Human Trafficking**: Criminal networks involved in human trafficking exploit vulnerable individuals, luring them with promises of a better life in Europe. Many victims of human trafficking end up migrating illegally.

7. **Family Reunification**: Some individuals migrate illegally to Europe to reunite with family members who have already migrated, often using illegal means due to the complexity of legal immigration processes.

8. **Desire for Education**: Limited access to quality education in Nigeria prompt young people to migrate illegally in pursuit of educational opportunities in Europe.

9. **Media Influence**: Idealized perceptions of life in Europe, often influenced by media and social media, create unrealistic expectations and push individuals to migrate illegally in hopes of a better lifestyle.

10. **Smuggling Networks**: Well-organized smuggling networks facilitate illegal migration by providing routes, documentation, and transportation, making it easier for Nigerians to enter Europe without proper documentation.

11. **Climate Change**: Environmental factors such as droughts and desertification impact agricultural activities, leading to economic instability and potentially encouraging migration.

It's important to address these underlying issues through comprehensive policies and international cooperation to tackle the root causes of illegal migration and provide better opportunities for individuals within their home country.

According to Mrs. Deborah James in an interview conducted in January 2023. She cited the economic concerns. Due to these socioeconomic issues, such as a lack of employment opportunities, low pay or wages, poverty, a failing health care system, a failing educational system, inadequate working conditions, and a high cost of living, thousands of Nigerian youngsters have left the nation. Despite considerable improvements in some areas of the economy, there are still significant obstacles to be overcome in other areas. Examples of such issues that still provide difficulties for Nigerians include the financial, health, and educational

sectors, which push people to leave the nation. To complement the above response, an interview was conducted with Mr. Umar Musa who clarified that:

> Banditry, terrorism, and the kidnapping of civilians have all been unstable political factors in Nigeria. President Buhari recently told Nigerians that he will battle this terrible attack on our countrymen, yet despite this, murder and kidnapping are on the rise in our nation, instilling dread and leading to issues for locals. This encouraged some people to think about leaving for new places in search of a better life. These kinds of circumstances are a big factor in why some young people have illegally migrated to Europe. Additionally, according to Umar in the same interview, there have been instances where citizens of the nation have had their fundamental human rights, such as freedom of speech and protection from corruption, violated. Security forces have also been accused of violating basic human rights by arbitrarily detaining people, torturing them, and carrying out extrajudicial killings to silence dissent and independent media for political reasons, including those related to those thought to support the opposition, political instability, or illegal migration to Europe. Well, as long as Nigeria's political leaders continue to put its populace through misery, irregular migration will persist. Unemployment exists. It is related to the public's perception of the government's sincerity (Field Survey, 2023).
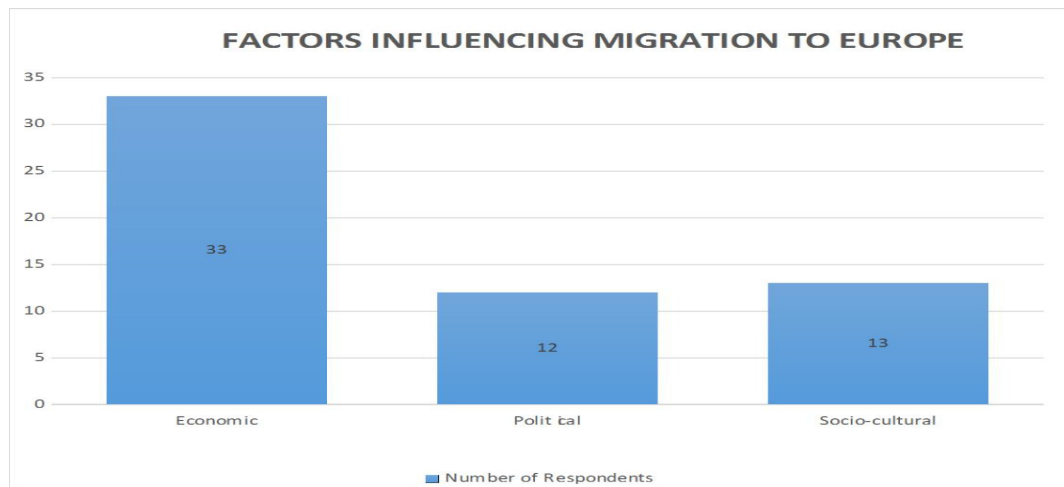
The trends of illegal migration among Nigerians to Europe

During the" migration crisis" in Europe which started in 2015, the central Mediterranean was the most preferred route for migrants to Europe. Confirming this fact between January to December 2015, 153,842 arrived in Italy by sea. Which represented a very stable trend between the years 2016 with the figures of sea arrivals increasing to 181,436 and 119, 369 in 2017 and a sudden decrease happened between 2018 and 2019 reducing the number of sea arrivals to 23,370 in 2018 and 11,471 in 2019. However, 5,312 have been the number of migrants detected to have migrated through the western Mediterranean by sea and arrived in Spain in 2015, there was a substantial increase in 2016 with the number of arrivals increasing to 8,162 and 22,414 in 2017 and a major hit occurred in 2018 with the numbers of sea arrivals getting to Spain increased to 58,523 and declined to 26,168 respectively in 2019. It can be deduced that most of the migrants who travel by sea generally prefer the western Mediterranean Sea to Spain rather than the Central Mediterranean Sea route to Italy. This is due to the increasing number of sea arrivals in Spain from 2018 to 2019 (IOM, 2019). There is shift from the central Mediterranean to the western Mediterranean to Spain following the sea arrivals in both Italy and Spain. This has been supported by an interview with a respondent who stated that after the calamity that happened to migrants in 2015 and 2016
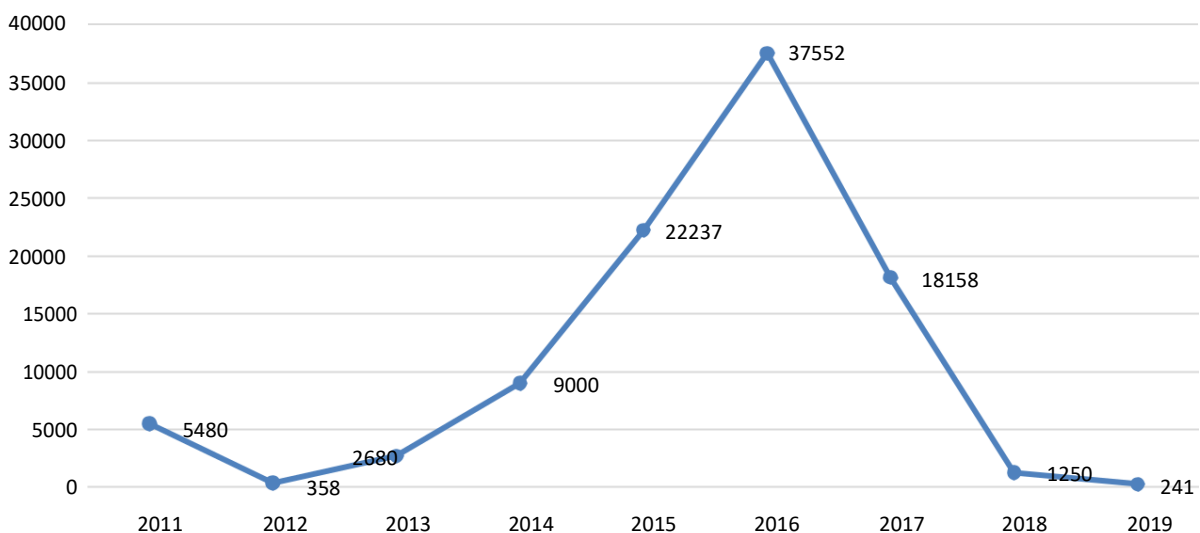
along the central Mediterranean, the Italian authorities maintained their security along the sea, which made it a bit difficult for people to come to their country. This situation made migrants divert again into a more dangerous route to go to Morocco to enter Spain. One of the respondents argued that arbitrary detention of migrants in prisons and camps, with migrants captured and sold in slavery, and all sorts of physical abuses. This has brought about a rapid decline in the number of migrants using Libya as a transit route to Europe and has also shifted the attention of migrants to the route through the Western Mediterranean Sea to Spain

Fig 1: Factors Influencing Migration to Europe

Source: Field Data (2023).

Figure 2: Line Graph showing the Trends of Nigerians Sea Arrival to Italy from 2011-2019

Source: Field Data (2023).

Nigeria stands as a source, transit, and destination country for migrants. Nigeria is a source country of migrants having been identified as the largest single producer of irregular migrants, from the year 2015 to 2017 respectively. Also, as a transit country, there are shreds of evidence that migrants from neighboring countries use Nigeria as a transit country to Niger.

Mr. Miko He stated that they are unable to estimate the departure rate, but that they feel it has decreased over the previous two years compared to five years ago in this interview with the Director of Employment and the Communication Officer for IOM 2023. They thought that this was because European nations had strict border controls and procedures in place on their borders and in other places. If there is a migration policy in Nigeria, it is not made, according to Mr. Miko, the IOM's communication officer. Instead, they provide specialized interventions, such as training programs for migrants who have returned home and those in Libya who wish to go back to Nigeria providing national and local stakeholders along with capacity building to guarantee sustainable reintegration where necessary, raising public awareness of the hazards of and alternatives to illegal migration through information and sensitization efforts, and ultimately gathering and analyzing data on migrant flows. The Director of Employment then stated that although the Nigerian policy on migration is currently lacking, it is still being developed, thus its impact on implementation has not yet been determined. IOM is providing support and help when needed. It is the responsibility of the government institution to create policies for the country.

An interview with Mr. Abdullahi Mailafiya
In this interview from 2023, Mr. Abdullahi Mailafiya talked about how forced marriage was the catalyst for their unauthorized immigration to Europe. Issues like this are not shocking enough in a region of the world where young girls are compelled into marriage. He added that familial pressure was a factor in their move because girls who marry before the age of 18 typically do it before their 15th birthday. In addition, he identified education as the basis for their illegal relocation to Europe. Family pressure can also take the shape of persistent need from the immediate family, as well as the need to get things done among others. Many others

have left Nigeria in search of better education because the country's educational system is a sham suits their choice of study.

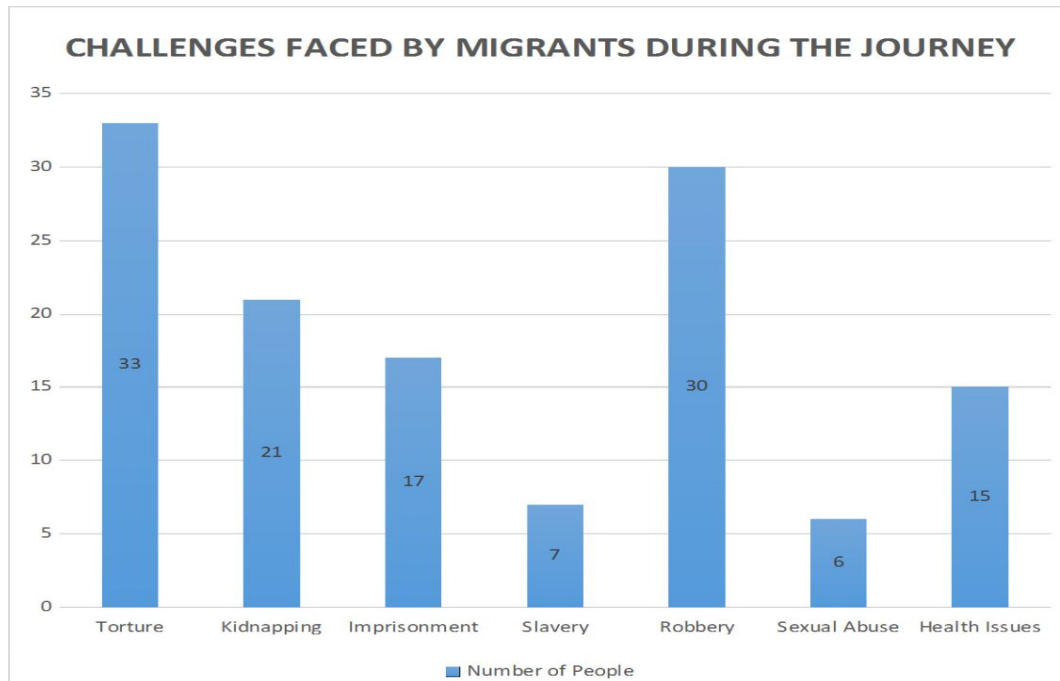**Challenges Faced by Migrants during the Journey**

Figure 4. The number of people, the respective challenges they went through.
Source: Field Data (2019).

In an interview conducted with the respondents, it was revealed that, illegal migration of Nigerians to Europe, like any form of irregular migration, have various impacts on both the immigrants and the host countries. The following are some ways in which it affects immigrants:

1. **Exploitation**: Illegal migrants are often vulnerable to exploitation, including low wages, poor working conditions, and sometimes even human trafficking. Many of them have been forced in the past to work in sectors with little regulation and protection, making them susceptible to abuse.

2. **Legal Consequences**: Illegal migrants are at risk of deportation if caught by immigration authorities. This lead to a cycle of constant fear and uncertainty, affecting their mental health and overall well-being.

3. **Social Isolation**: Illegal immigrants often live in the shadows, fearing detection and deportation. This isolation lead to a lack of social integration, making it difficult for them to access basic services, social support, and community engagement.

4. **Health Risks**: Limited access to healthcare services is a significant concern for illegal immigrants. They avoid seeking medical help due to fear of being reported to immigration authorities, leading to untreated health issues and public health risks.

5. **Education**: Children of illegal immigrants faces barriers in accessing education, which have long-term consequences on their future opportunities and socio-economic status.

6. **Psychological Impact**: Living with the constant fear of deportation and facing social exclusion lead to significant psychological stress and mental health issues among illegal immigrants.

7. **Integration Challenges**: Even if illegal immigrants manage to regularize their status, the initial period of irregularity affect their ability to integrate fully into the host society. Gaps in employment, education, and social connections can pose challenges to long-term integration efforts.

8. **Strain on Host Countries**: Large numbers of illegal immigrants strain the resources of host countries, including social services, healthcare, and law enforcement. This lead to tensions between local communities and immigrants, potentially resulting in social conflicts.

In an interview with Mr. Rose Salami in January 2023, she claimed that crossing the Mediterranean to reach Europe was one of the riskiest trips ever taken by humans. The majority of Nigerians currently travelling by sea to Europe come from the central Mediterranean route, which runs from Sub-Saharan Africa to Italy. This route is one of the busiest and most dangerous in the world. The majority of Nigerian refugees and migrants who are trying to travel to Europe still leave from Libya. These mixed migrations include those seeking better economic and social prospects as well as those escaping conflict, violence, and persecution including means to support family members at home. These migrants face a lot in their pursuit of political and economic freedom. He claims that these migrants encounter problems including rape, which is widespread among female migrants, as well as racism, kidnapping, incarceration, torture, and robbery. Some of the female respondents have occasionally served as sex objects or prostitutes for their captors. To inspire

terror and cooperation, those who refused to be utilized in this way were slain in full view of their peers. Additionally, 20 (40%) of the 50 migrants questioned during the investigation spoke regarding being robbed, followed by being abducted and demanded to pay a ransom. In situations like this, the migrant workers' families at home were contacted and requested to provide the ransom for the release of a family member. One of the replies recalls his unfortunate contact with the Navy; he claims that while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea, he was detained and held for six months.

Mr. Joseph Abraham (2023) discussed the effects of human trafficking in an interview. In recent times, human trafficking has become an issue in Nigeria. Seven (14% of the migrants) spoke up about their experience with human trafficking. They claimed to have been imprisoned in dungeons after being captured by men in Libya. They talk about being sold. They said that they had been forced to labour for extended periods of time while receiving little to no food or drink. They were designed to work in industries, mines, and farms. In a scenario like this, you have two options: either you expend all of your energy paying back your "master" to buy your freedom, or you choose to flee, which can be quite dangerous if you are discovered. The most common typical difficulty encountered by the majority of immigrants. 33 (66%) of the refugees claimed that when they were in Libya, the Libyans tortured them. When asked why they were tortured, their response was either "for no reason" or "because they were black." Illegal immigrants frequently talk to us about the difficulties they encounter when travelling across the Mediterranean Sea. They discussed being cramped inside a boat. They describe incidents where another boat capsized and killed everyone on board. According to a UNHCR report published in 2018, 2873 persons were reported missing or killed in the Central Mediterranean Sea in 2017 as a result of our people's unauthorized movement. Due to the numerous perils encountered along the routes and in Libya to reach Europe, it is thought that many more people have perished on their trek over the desert and before attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

When asked about the main obstacles to unauthorized immigration in Nigeria in this interview (2023), Frank Amadi provided the following responses. Institutional capability is insufficient to deal with unauthorized cross-border migration of persons. In other words, the nation lacks the resources and knowledge. The few that are available lack the capability

required to deal with the situation. Again, in his opinion, national borders are permeable, and as a result, entry and exit are typically not effectively detected by border patrol guards because the country's borders have lax systems, policies, and structures in place, making the job of the border patrol guards challenging, difficult, and time-consuming. Track down and halt those who are beginning an illegal migration. This results in inefficiencies and a rise in illegal immigration from Nigeria. Another factor that is seen as a significant barrier to irregular migration is the impact of peer and family pressure. In a related interview in 2023, Mr. Adekoye Vincent also mentioned that this is seen as a serious issue that promotes illegal immigration in Nigeria. Due to peer pressure, friends who brainwash them, and unrealistic expectations of success in Europe, many young people routinely travel there illegally and in danger. Family members are encouraged to send money back to their families each month by a friend's child who lives in Europe sending their children on this voyage with the hope that they will arrive in Europe more quickly and easily than in Nigeria. They don't realize the risks associated with illegal migration because they aren't informed of the difficulties and risks associated with crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Additionally, the difficulties and torture endured while travelling through Libya.

In this interview from 2023, Mr. Adelabu Olaniyi also discussed the economy as a difficult element. In his opinion, the lack of work possibilities in Nigeria drove away many talented and bright young people, which is why the majority of Nigerians who started this voyage departed the country. Youths, he claimed, believed they had been forgotten about as the world's leaders of the future, and as such, they needed to be empowered at all levels. They also pointed out that there were no secure migration routes, which further encouraged Nigerians to travel illegally. Internationally, it is everyone's right to move freely as long as they do it legally. However, these routes are often convoluted and arduous, and as most young people lack patience, they are left with no choice but to use improper or illegal methods to get where they need to go.

Discussion of Findings

Investigations from the field show that, over 5.8 million Nigerian men, women, and children are migrants in European countries around the world. The majority of Nigerians who left the country illegally use the Central Mediterranean Sea route to reach Italy, Spain, and other

European nations. However, the findings show that Nigerians' illegal migration is driven by economic, social, and political problems they confront in their host countries. Nigeria is a country with leadership problems and an unfavourable climate for young people. Additionally, corruption in the political sector has harmed Nigeria's economy and security.

However, findings revealed that illegal migration of Nigerians to Europe is influenced by a complex interplay of factors. These predisposing factors can be economic, social, political, and environmental. Nigeria has implemented several policies and initiatives to address this issue. From the investigations, below are an itemized list of predisposing factors and Nigeria's policy response:

Economic Factors:

a) **High unemployment rates**: A lack of job opportunities in Nigeria drives individuals to seek better economic prospects in Europe.

b) **Low wages and income inequality**: Economic disparities within the country motivate people particularly the youths to migrate in search of higher-paying jobs abroad.

c) **Limited access to financial resources**: Many Nigerians lack access to credit or savings, making it difficult for them to invest in education or start businesses in Nigeria.

Social Factors:

a) **Family and peer pressure**: Social networks and family expectations play a significant role in encouraging migration.

b) **Perceived social status**: Some Nigerians view migrating to Europe as a way to gain social recognition and status.

c) **Lack of social services**: Limited access to education, healthcare, and other basic services motivate people to seek better living conditions abroad.

Political Factors:

a) **Political instability**: Political unrest, corruption, and insecurity in Nigeria drive individuals to seek safety and stability in other countries.

b) **Human rights abuses**: Violations of human rights make individuals feel unsafe and oppressed, leading them to seek refuge in Europe.

c) **Lack of effective governance**: Poor governance and ineffective public services can encourage illegal migration as people lose confidence in their government.

Environmental Factors:

a) **Climate change and environmental degradation:** Environmental factors, such as droughts or flooding, displace communities and push them to migrate in search of more favorable living conditions.

Nigeria's Policy Response:

1. **Bilateral Agreements and Cooperation**: Nigeria has engaged in bilateral agreements and cooperation with European countries to address the issue of illegal migration. These agreements often focus on issues like repatriation and the protection of migrants' rights.

2. **Awareness and Information Campaigns**: The Nigerian government launched awareness campaigns to educate its citizens about the risks and challenges associated with illegal migration. This includes public information on the dangers of human trafficking and illegal migration.

3. **Economic Empowerment and Job Creation**: The Nigerian government implemented various programs aimed at reducing unemployment and promoting economic opportunities. Initiatives like the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) under the administration of former President Muhammadu Buhari to provide job training and financial support to vulnerable populations.

4. **Strengthening Border Controls**: Nigeria has increased efforts to secure its borders, including measures to prevent human trafficking and illegal migration. This involves the use of technology and cooperation with neighboring countries.

5. **Rehabilitation and Reintegration**: The Nigerian government has established rehabilitation and reintegration programs for returnees. These programs help reintegrate individuals who have returned from Europe into Nigerian society, providing them with skills and opportunities to rebuild their lives.

6. **Anti-Trafficking Initiatives**: Nigeria also launched initiatives to combat human trafficking, which is often linked to illegal migration. These efforts include the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), which focuses on preventing trafficking and supporting survivors.

Conclusion

Nigerian illegal immigration has grown to be a significant problem for the ECOWAS, the EU, and the world community at large. In today's international politics, it has evolved into a significant concern that drives key decisions. This study has provided insight into the dynamics of Nigerians migrating illegally to Europe. It focuses in particular on the variables that affect illegal migration by Nigerians. It has been observed that the Nigerian state that produces the biggest number of illegal migrants does not necessarily appear to be the poorest in Nigeria, suggesting that another important aspect, such as family unification and support, also plays a significant role in the issue. Additionally, this is consistent with the economic undertone of their departure for the countries they have chosen as their destinations. However, personal aspiration is another counterintuitive factor driving Nigerians to Europe, where they believe it to be their only viable option for survival. The majority of Nigerians travelling to Europe are between the ages of 18 and 40, and this research has also revealed that, in addition to being adults, 99% of them are educated and hold degrees in a variety of subject areas. Government, parents, and community leaders must work together in particular to address the harmful behavior of Nigerian youths.

Recommendations

1. **Promote Economic Opportunities**: Nigeria's policy response should prioritize creating sustainable economic opportunities at home, addressing root causes of migration. Investment in job training, education, and infrastructure can discourage citizens from seeking better prospects abroad, reducing illegal migration trends.

2. **Collaborative International Efforts**: Nigeria should strengthen cooperation with European countries and international organizations to combat human trafficking networks. Joint efforts in intelligence sharing, law enforcement, and victim support can disrupt smuggling routes and provide a deterrent, making illegal migration less appealing while promoting legal pathways for migration.

By adopting these recommendations, Nigeria can better address the issue of illegal migration to Europe and develop more effective policy responses to protect its citizens and combat human trafficking and exploitation.

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