

MIGRATION AND YOUTH IN NIGERIA

Racheal INEGBEDION

Special Needs Initiative for Growth (Nigeria)

This policy brief aims to explain the motivation for and impact of migration on Nigerian youth through an analysis of the recent migration experience in the country. It also identifies and explores the main push factors of migration, such as employment, education and other social benefits. It presents the context on the list of countries that Nigerians chiefly migrate to and examines the role that Nigerians in the diaspora play in terms of a remittance flow. The brief also focuses on the role of an NGO, Special Needs Initiative for Growth, in terms of engaging with migration trends in Nigeria. The brief concludes with some policy recommendations regarding the migration of Nigerian youth.

Keywords: *Migration, youth, Nigeria*

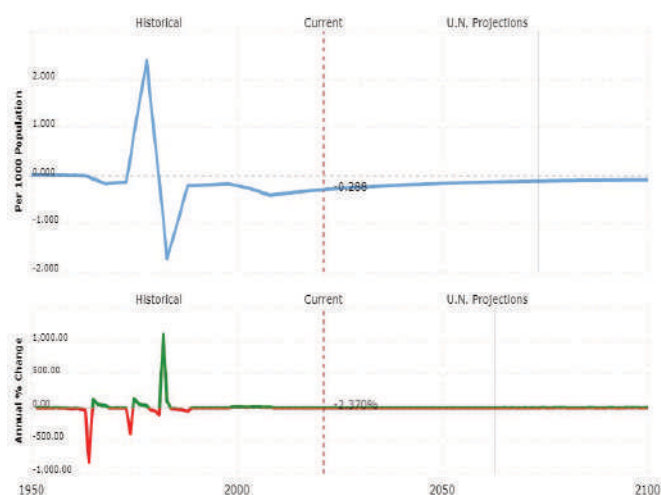
Country Context: Overview

With 211 million people, Nigeria has the largest population in Africa (UNFPA, 2022). The population growth rate stands at 2.62%, faster than many countries of similar size. Nigeria's population is predicted to hit 264 million by 2030 and cross 300 million by 2036 (World Population Review, 2022). Nigeria's population will surpass that of the United States by 2050, at a projected 379 million (Moore, 2022). With those numbers, Nigeria still will become the third most populated country. The major contributors to Nigeria's population growth are early marriages, high birth rates, and lack of access to family planning.

Nigeria has a multi-ethnic and diverse set of culture, language and dialects. It has more than 250 ethnic groups (such as Hausas, the Yorubas, the Igbos, the Fulanis, the Tivs, Kanuri, Beriberi, Ibibio, Ijaw) and over 730 native languages. Nigeria is the third largest Commonwealth country by population and English is the main language. The British Empire formally annexed the country in 1861 and it became a British protectorate in 1901. Colonization lasted until 1960 when an internal political movement succeeded in gaining Nigeria its independence. However, political turmoil and military regimes lasted for nearly 40 more years.

Nigeria is an important destination country for migrants in the West African region and it hosts the second highest number of migrants (including refugees and asylum seekers) with 1.3 million people in the region. (UN DESA, 2020). The majority of migrants are from neighbouring Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries, in particular from Benin, Ghana and Mali. The net migration rate between 2015-2020 is -0.3 (per 1,000 population) (IOM, 2022).

Figure 1. Nigeria Net Migration Rate 1950-2022



Source: Macrotrends/United Nations-World Population Prospects

As of January 2022, there are 79,365 registered asylum seekers and refugees in Nigeria accompanied by a roughly 3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) (UNHCR, 2022a).

The most common countries of origin of asylum seekers in Nigeria are Niger, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic. The highest number of refugees by country of asylum are Cameroon (73,870), Niger (1,439), and Central African Republic (1,132) (UNHCR, 2022a).

Some of the causes of internal displacements in Nigeria are jihadist violence, armed banditry, farmer-herder conflict, inter-communal wars and boundary disputes. Nigeria's displaced population continues to increase as these conflict and violence persist. The violent attacks of the Islamist group Boko Haram started to spill over Nigeria's north-eastern frontier in 2014, drawing Cameroon, Chad and Niger into the devastating regional conflict. The conflict still feeds the refugee crisis in Nigeria. Boko Haram has displaced almost 2.4 million people in the Lake Chad Basin region (UNCHR, 2022b).

Why do Nigerian Youth Migrate?

The Nigerian emigration experience can be divided into four eras: the civil and political unrest stages of the 1960s; the downfall of the petroleum boom in the

1980s; the military regime of the mid-1990s and the past two decades of mass from Nigeria to other countries across the world. The factors that cause Nigerian youth to leave the country can be classified as socio-economic factors, political factors and migrant networks.

Socio-economic factors

A lot of Nigerian youth receive very low salaries that are not enough to cover their livelihood. There are no systems to ensure that young skilled workers receive salaries commensurate with their qualifications. Youth unemployment rate in Nigeria is reported at 42.5% in 2020, with underemployment rate at 22.8 % (National Bureau of Statistics Nigeria, 2022). This is one of the main reasons some Nigerian youth leave the country and seek work opportunities in Europe and Northern America.

In a focus group discussion conducted by Special Needs Initiative for Growth (a youth NGO in Nigeria), young people with disabilities between 18 to 30 years of age said migration promises economic benefits. For instance, Adebayo, a 21-year-old, said that the unfavourable exchange rate between the Nigerian Naira and other foreign currencies was a sufficient reason to leave the country. Migration is also seen as a way of helping and looking after family members. Kosi, a 24-year-old unemployed respondent, offered the example of someone

she knew who left Nigeria for Spain. Kosi said her friend was living a much better life and was able to financially assist her family. Kosi maintained this belief even though her acquaintance was reportedly doing the 3D (dirty, dangerous, and demeaning) jobs.

Second, there has been a marked increase in the number of Nigerians emigrating for educational purposes as well. In the United States, among the 35,364 international students from Sub-Saharan Africa, 11,000 are from Nigeria (Ogundare, 2018).

Political factors

A Presidential Committee on Brain Drain established by former Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida reported that between 1986 and 1990 Nigeria lost over 10,000 academics from tertiary institutions alone (Adesote and Osunkoya, 2018). A combination of political factors, such as poor governance and corruption, were among some of the reasons for this emigration. In Nigeria, political corruption has been cited as often as economic opportunities as a reason for migration.

In addition, “The Special Anti-Robbery Squad”, popularly known as SARS, was created as a special police unit in 1992 to tackle increasing incidents of armed robberies and kidnappings for ransom by criminal elements operating across Nigeria. After 27 years, SARS has been

implicated in widespread human rights violations and has garnered a reputation for arbitrary arrests, torture, rape, extortion, unlawful detention, and extrajudicial killings across Nigeria, but especially towards Nigerian youth (ACLED, 2021). Some of the Nigerian youth also site the activities of SARS as a reason they wish to migrate.

Migrant networks and Nigerian diaspora

Migrant networks play a crucial role in stimulating further migration between a country of origin and a destination. Previously established social networks serve as sources of information as well as support in terms of finances or other logistics. In an online focus group discussion conducted in 2021, 23 young Nigerians with disabilities (aged between 18- 25 years) were asked what role social networks, particularly friends and relatives, play in deciding to migrate. Nineteen mentioned that they support their parents and friends who decide to make the journey. Some parents said they would go as far as selling their property and belonging to help that their children migrate to another country for greener pastures.

The largest Nigerian diaspora community is in the United States, at around 400,000 people and that is followed by the UK, with

more than 200,000 Nigerians (Cuevas-Mohr, 2019). Other countries with significant populations of Nigerians include Benin, Cameroon, Colombia, Italy, Brazil, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, The Netherlands, South Africa, Canada, Spain, Australia and Austria.

Nigeria continues to receive a high amount of remittance given the exceptional size of the Nigerians abroad (an estimated 800,000 persons) concentrated in two key host countries, the United States and the United Kingdom. Nigeria being the largest recipient of remittance flows in the Sub-Saharan African Africa, received over 40% of the entire remittance flows to the region (World Bank 2021). Nigeria's remittance inflow accounts for \$17.2bn in 2020 and it ranks as 10th country that receives the highest amount of remittances, India being the top with \$83.1bn (World Bank 2020). From the United States, about one third of the total volume of remittances are being transferred to Nigeria, followed by the UK with 20%, then Cameroon with 12%, Italy with 5%, Ghana and Spain with 4% each, Germany and Benin with 3% each, Ireland, Canada, Gabon, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Niger with close to 2% each (Hugo Cuevas-Mohr, 2019). It must be stated that it is an estimate of remittances sent through formal channels and does not account for the informal channels.

Special Needs Initiative for Growth (Youth NGO)

A lot of young Nigerians leave the country due to a lack of social and economic programs designed for them. Special Needs Initiative for Growth (SNIG), also known as “Initiative for National Growth Africa,” was established as a Nigerian non-governmental organization to empower and advocate for youth with disabilities to provide them access to equal employment opportunities in Nigeria. Young persons with disabilities are double vulnerable as they have a high rate of poverty as well and are often exposed to discrimination at the local, regional and national levels. Accordingly, SNIG tries to build resilience and implement support strategies focused on ensuring that youth with disabilities gain access to equal employment opportunities.



It is hoped that by eliminating these obstacles, Nigerian youth with disabilities will be motivated to stay in their country and contribute to its development. In this context, SNIG develops initiatives through demand-driven ICT entrepreneurship and employment skills programs for young Nigerians with disabilities. It also holds a series of employment workshops for youth with disabilities, conducts advocacy outreach to Nigerian employers about hiring youth with disabilities, and works to equip youths with disabilities with career strategies. The training programs address how youth with disabilities can access employment and how employers can create an enabling environment for youth with disabilities.



In 2020, the United Nations Secretary-General Envoy on Youth recognized SNIG's staff among the 10 young leaders inspired to change the world during the COVID-19 crisis (United Nations Office of the Secretary-General Envoy on Youth, 2020).



In 2021, SNIG received an award from for best innovative practices for employment and ICT for persons with disabilities from the “Zero Project”. The award commended SNIG’s key practises on demand-driven IT entrepreneurship and career development for employment or self-employment, as well as its mentorship and financial support aimed at securing an internship, job, or to start a business (2021 Zero Project Awardees, 2021). In April 2021, SNIG’s project on Career Development Initiative for Mothers with Cerebral Palsy Children in Nigeria was awarded as 2021 Champion for the World Summit on Information Society - ITU 2021 Prizes in the Enabling Environment Category. (World Summit on the Information and Society, 2021). In September 2021, Google named SNIG as one its Google Leap Takers for its project as one of the “Best Examples of IT’s incredible impact on our world” (Google Leaptakers, 2021).

Policy suggestions

The political system in Nigeria must be reformed to ensure inclusion, participation, adherence to the rule of law, respect for human rights, and establishment of constitutional empowerment of state institutions. This will improve access to education and employment opportunities for Nigerian youth. These improvements might help eliminate the root causes of migration. It is therefore pertinent for the Nigerian government to ensure that good governance and appropriate socio-political and economic conditions are put in place to reduce the mass movement of skilled Nigerians and prevent massive brain drain. The brain drain should be replaced with policies that will encourage brain-gain and brain circulation. For example, Nigerian academics living in the diaspora can advise and guide students in Nigeria by sharing their good practices and advanced knowledge, or they might return for specific periods to transfer their knowledge back to Nigeria.

It is also important to put in place necessary mechanisms to support Nigerians in the diaspora and build connections to boost the development of Nigeria. Political elites in Nigeria should work to ensure that the conditions at home are conducive for the resident citizen and for those in the diaspora who may wish to return home.

There is also a need to increase awareness among young people about the dangers of irregular migration. Some educational programs should be organized at secondary schools and tertiary institutions about the issue. These institutions should also develop curricula that teaches the rights of migrants and international migration procedures. These programmes should be supported with social media campaigns, special programmes and grassroot project activities to eliminate the misinformation about the realities of living in destination countries illegally.

Nigeria's government leaders must cultivate a youth-friendly socioeconomic environment and support them by providing technical know-how, resources, mentorship, financial and practical support they need to thrive in the Nigerian economy. These programs must be designed as inclusive and disability-friendly. Youth with disabilities should be included as advisors in designing these programmes which will affect them directly.

REFERENCES

- Adesote, S. A. and Osunkoya, O.A. 2018. "The Brain Drain, Skilled Labour Migration and Its Impact on Africa's Development, 1990s-2000s." *Journal of Pan African Studies* 12 (1), Sept. 2018.
- Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). (2021). Lessons from the #ENDSARS Movement in Nigeria, <https://acleddata.com/2021/02/09/lessons-from-the-endsars-movement-in-nigeria/>
- Cuevas-Mohr, H. 2019. "Nigerian Diaspora and Remittances: Transparency and Market Development". Premium Times, September 4, <https://opinion.premiumtimesng.com/2019/09/04/nigerian-diaspora-and-remittances-transparency-and-market-development-by-hugo-cuevas-mohr/>
- Google Leaptakers. 2021. Sharing the Knowledge to Build the Future, <https://chromeenterprise.google/leaptakers/special-needs-initiative/>
- International Organization for Migration (IOM) Nigeria. 2022. Facts and Figures, <https://nigeria.iom.int/>
- Macrotrends. 2022. Nigeria Net Migration Rate 1950-2022, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/NGA/nigeria/net-migration>
- Moore, D. 2022. "U.S. Population Estimated at 332,403,650 on January 1, 2022". United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/12/happy-new-year-2022.html>
- National Bureau of Statistics Nigeria. 2022. Unemployment Statistics, <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng>
- Ogundare, T. 2018. "Nigeria has Highest Students' Population in US". Nigerian Tribune, September 25, <https://tribuneonlineng.com/nigeria-has-highest-studentspopulation-in-us-%E2%80%95-embassy>
- United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). 2022a. UNHCR Nigeria:Population Statistics-January 2022, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90828>
- UNHCR. 2022b. Nigeria Emergency, <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html>
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (UN DESA). 2020. International Migrant Stock
- United Nations Office of the Secretary-General Envoy on Youth. (2020). Meet 10 leaders who can inspire you to change the world (10th Edition), <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2020/08/meet-10-leaders-who-can-inspire-you-to-change-the-world-10th-edition-special-edition-dedicated-to-young-people-with-disabilities/>
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2022. World Population Dashboard Nigeria, <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/NG>
- World Bank. 2021. "Defying Predictions, Remittance Flows Remain Strong During COVID-19 Crisis". Press Release 2021/147/SPJ, May 12, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/05/12/defying-predictions-remittance-flows-remain-strong-during-covid-19-crisis>
- World Bank. 2020. Personal Remittances Received, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT>
- World Population Review. 2022. Nigeria Population 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/nigeria-population>
- World Summit on the Information and Society. 2021. WSIS Prizes, <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/stocktaking/Prizes/2022/Champions?jts=XYQOIJ&idx=11&page=6#start>
- Zero Project Awardees. 2021. Providing vocational skills and career development to young adults with disabilities, <https://zeroproject.org/view/project/5dc77d44-8513-eb11-a813-000d3ab9b226>

Acknowledgements

The author presents her appreciation to the editor, Ayselin Yildiz for her constructive comments and the inspiration on this brief. She also exhibits her appreciation to Kimberly Winston for volunteering the proof editing. Being co-network members of the Global Exchange in Religion and Society (GERIS), this brief came as an output of this exceptional collaboration platform. Lastly, she thanks to the Board of Trustees and the team members of the Special Needs Initiative For Growth for their support in providing meaningful contribution towards the advancement of youths with disabilities in Nigeria.

Please cite as: Racheal Inegbedion (2022). “Migration and youth in Nigeria”. *Policy Brief*, 4 (1), Yasar University UNESCO Chair on International Migration. (ISSN: 2619-9440)



Racheal Inegbedion has over eight years of experience in Disability Advocacy, Policy and Youth & Development issues. She is the Founding Executive Director of the Special Needs Initiative For Growth (SNIG), a non-Governmental organisation focused on empowering persons with disabilities through the provision of resources and practical programs for living a meaningful life. Racheal is a Mandela Washington Fellow (2020-21) and also the selected member of Global Exchange on Religion in Society (GERIS). She was announced and recognised by the United Nations Secretary-General Envoy on Youth as one of the 10 young leaders inspired to change the world during the COVID-19 crisis.

The author is responsible for the choice and presentation of views contained in this policy brief and for opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit Yasar University.