



IRREGULAR MIGRATION OF NIGERIANS TO EUROPE

Oluwanifemi Adeyemo

Graduate Student, Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies,
University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Email: nifeadeyemo@gmail.com

Benjamin Adeniran Aluko (PhD)

Senior Lecturer/Research Fellow, Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies,
University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Email: niranaluko2@yahoo.com

Temitope Francis Abiodun (Ph.D.)

Lecturer/Research Fellow, Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies,
University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Email: tf.abiodun@ui.edu.ng

Abstract

The Mediterranean Sea has accounted for an estimate of 36,000 people who have been recorded missing or dead between 1999 and 2018 respectively. Despite these devastating situations, migrants from sub-Saharan Africa engage in this hazardous journey. This study examined the causes and trends of Nigerians migrating to Europe. The study adopted the use of migration systems theory, the descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Snowballing sampling technique was utilized and secondary data were derived from the report, published articles, and journals.

Keywords: Migration, Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Mediterranean Sea.

Introduction

Nigeria is often referred to as the giant of Africa with a rich population of over 206 million people and exploration of crude oil, natural and mineral resources such as bitumen, gold, iron ore, coal, and fertile land for agricultural produce and cash crops exportation such as cocoa, groundnut, rubber as well as huge human resources even though this has not translated to the increase in the standard of living. This has made most Nigerians embark on adventurous journeys in search of greener pastures, plying illegal routes several factors. Account for the informal movement of migrants towards the Mediterranean route, and this includes armed conflicts, violence, fear of political or religious persecution, political instability, human rights violations, chronic poverty, lack of economic opportunity, and natural or human-made disasters.

It has been discovered that Nigerians moving towards the Mediterranean route are not seeking asylum or refugee status but are rather migrating to better their socio-economic conditions. Nigerians have been engaging in irregular migration, crossing the Mediterranean to Europe not minding the grievous implications. It has also been established that Nigeria stands and is identified as the largest single producer of irregular migrants, with well over 78,000 migrants from January 2015 to 2017 respectively. This study, therefore, intends to investigate the causes and trends, of Nigerians' irregular migration to Europe along the Mediterranean Sea route.

The study adopted the *system theory of migration* to vividly describe and analyze a synergy between illegal migrations of Nigerians and other Africans to Europe. The theory was proposed by Akin Mabogunje who first attempted to argue the implications of feedback mechanisms on migration in 1970 while also pointing to the fact that the migration of people from one location to another re-engineers and re-jigs the socio-economic and institutional settings at both the origin and the destinations. Mabogunje (1970) as cited by De Haas, H. (2009) submitted that the spread of information enables other migrants to link individuals with their loved ones over time. Moreover, the migration systems theory as applied to the global stage includes: change in people's residence, movement of goods, capital, and ideas. Based on the assumptions of the migration systems theory, the effects of irregular migration on border security in the country are greatly influenced by the new ideas of the undocumented immigrants whose interaction with the locals influences the latter's cultural, economic, and institutional condition (Ramutsindela 2014). Considering the views of the theory that undocumented migrants connect with their family members and later encourage others to follow suit, it implies that new lifestyles are transmitted back to migrants' place of origin which, therefore, contributes more to a propensity to migrate by those that were left behind in a state.

Methodology

The study was carried out in one of the three existing migrant resources centers in Benin City Edo State, Nigeria. The resource center is where stranded Nigeria migrant returnees receive counseling, and entrepreneurship skills training to reintegrate them back into the society. The study consisted of one hundred and fifty administered questionnaires with only one hundred and thirteen retrieved back. All the questionnaires were answered by the migrant for they were able to read and write. 5 in-depth interviews were conducted with 18 migrant returnees and 15 interviews with security and migration experts. Purposive snowballing sampling technique was used to select and identify the respondents.

The study employed the use of both primary and secondary data while a descriptive research design was adopted. The researcher employed snowballing sampling technique to distribute

113 questionnaires to migrants while a purposive sampling technique was also utilized to conduct interviews with immigration officers and experts in the field of migration. Secondary data were derived from the reports of the International Organisation for Migration, the Italian Ministry of Interior, and other published articles, and journals while the collected data were thematically analyzed.

Research Findings and Data Analysis

Demographic Data Analysis

Gender of Respondents

Table 1: Gender Distribution of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	97	85.8
Female	16	14.2
Total	113	100

The table shows that there are 85.8% male and 14.2% female out of the total sampled population of 113 respondents.

Age Category of Migrants

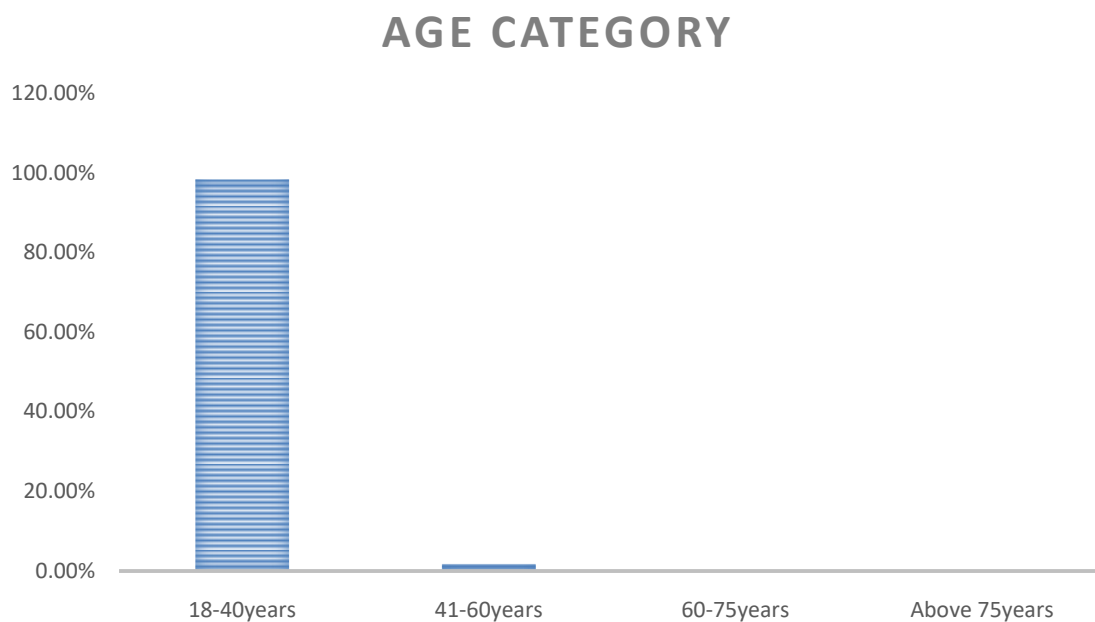


Table 2 shows that 111 or 98.2% are within the age category of 18-40 years old while 1.8% are within the age categories of 41-60 years old. This data shows that most of the irregular migrants are within the age range of 18 to 40 years old. In addition to this fact, the qualitative data gathered reveals;

State of Residence of Migrants

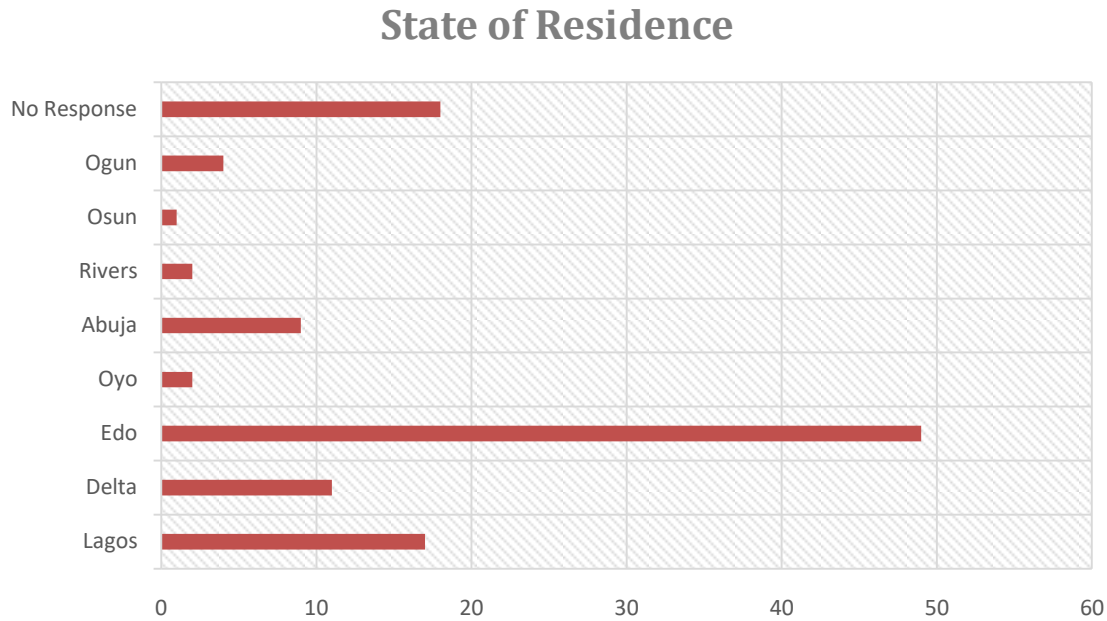


Figure 1: Bar Chart showing the state of residence of Migrants

In terms of the state of residence of the migrants, the figure 2 below reveals that about 15.9% reside in Lagos, 9.7% reside in Delta, 43.4% reside in Edo, 1.8% reside in Oyo, 8% reside in Abuja, 1.8% reside in Rivers, 9% reside in Osun, 3.5% reside in Ogun state and 15.9% did not specify their state of residence. However, it can be deduced that most of the migrants are from Edo state, which represents one of the important states in the south-south region of the country. These demographic findings confirm the assertion of one of the respondents who was interviewed being an immigration expert that the three red-flag states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa produce fewer irregular migrants than Edo states; which is a flagship of irregular migration in Nigeria (KII: January 2020). This implies that there are more irregular migrants from Edo states than elsewhere of which the majority are often men.

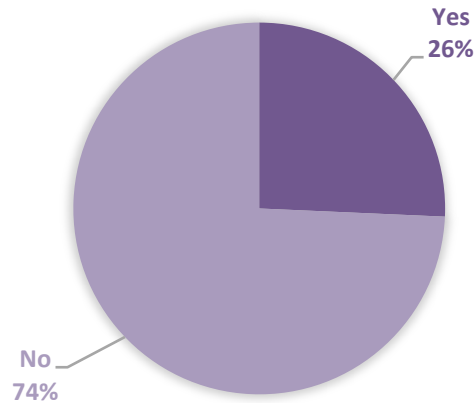
Level of Education of Migrants

Table 2: Level of Education of Migrants

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	1	0.9
Secondary	7	6.2
Tertiary	99	87.6
No education	6	5.3
Total	113	100

The table revealed that 0.9% of the migrants have a primary level of education, 6.2% of the migrants have a secondary level of education, and 87.6% of the migrants have a tertiary level of education, while 6 migrants have no formal education which represents 5.3% of the sampled population. This implies that most of the migrants are those with a tertiary level of education. They constitute the majority of the population.

Before leaving the country do you have a travel document



Employment Status of Migrants before leaving the country

In respect to the data gathered, most of the migrants claimed that they don't have a legal travel document before leaving the country, this represents 74% of the sampled population, but only 26% of the migrants identified that they have a passport.

Causes of Irregular Migration

MAJOR PULL AND PUSH FACTORS OF MIGRATION

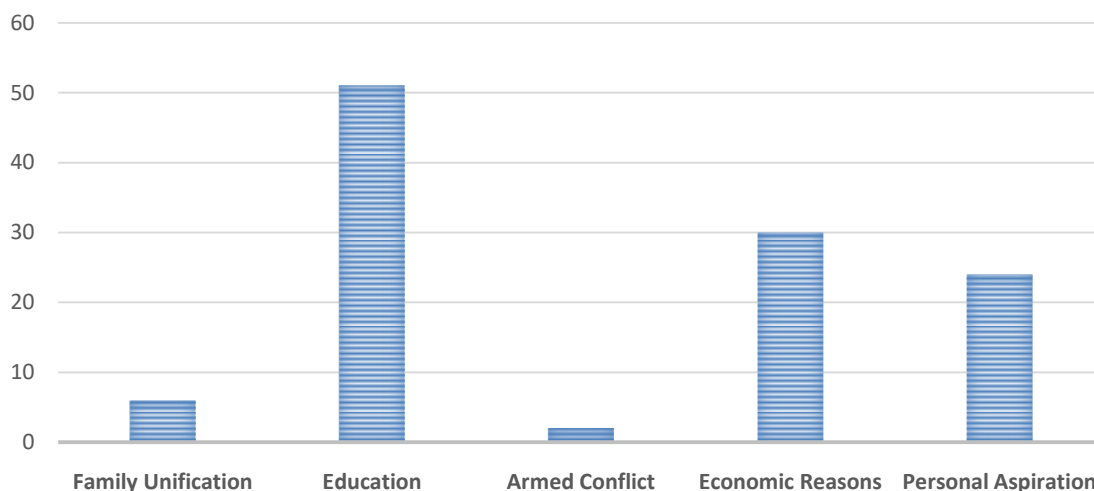


Figure 2: The collected empirical data show that the major push and pull factors identified by the migrants is education (45.1%), followed by economic reasons (26.5%), Personal aspiration (21.2%), family unification (5.3%), and armed conflict.

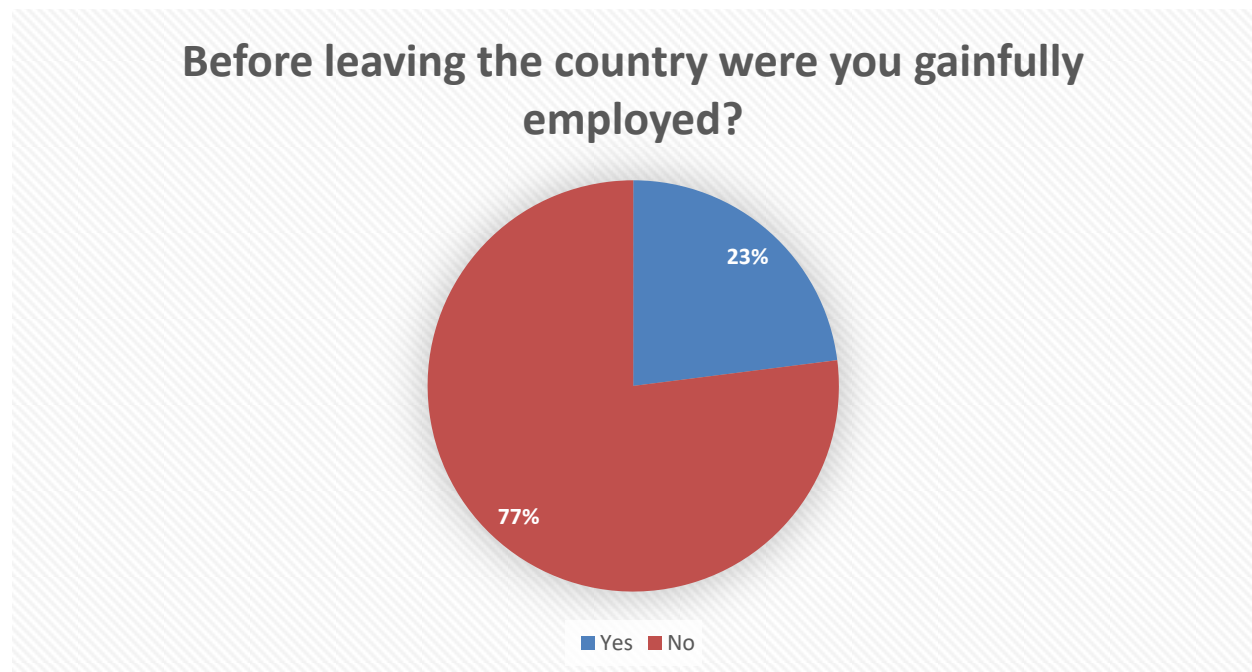
Education

The major reason most irregular migrants leave the country is identified to be education. However, this seems to be an interesting fact for two reasons; most of the irregular migrants are youth between the age of 18-40 years and most of them already have degrees in different fields of study. If coupled with the fact that most of the respondents did not have a valid travel document, it may be deduced that most believe that they cannot get jobs even with their education, so many start afresh.

During an interview with an immigration expert, it was noted that most of the irregular migrants do hard jobs. Jobs that are done at night, washing of dead bodies, washing of toilets, they are cleaners. Even those that are legal and have their papers are drivers. Since many of them are not gainfully employed or under-employed. They have certificates they cannot work with and as a result, they go into other training to be able to fit into the society such as nursing, internet connection, and things like that.

Economic Reasons

Economic reason is the second pull factor next to education identified to cause irregular migration. This might be because most Nigerians live below one dollar per day and coupled with the fact that the rate of unemployment among the youths towers above 40%, therefore as a result, most migrants would naturally want to leave the country, especially through an illegal way since most of them claimed that they had not been gainfully employed before leaving the country.



It can be deduced that since most of the migrants were not gainfully employed before leaving the country, they may not be able to afford the cost of processing a legal route.

One of the respondents when interviewed on the major push and pull factors of irregular migration identified the economy as a major reason and in his word said:

Well, it (irregular migration) will continue to exist as long as there is economic hardship in Nigeria. There is unemployment. It is tied to the economy. Nigeria is the poverty capital of the world, so it is going to remain.

Another respondent also identified that more and more Nigerians are migrating because of economic hardship in Nigeria. The political system does not assure anybody of a regular future and so young ones are running away because they have lost confidence in the social environment, economic environment, and political environment and are now trying to find succor for themselves in the developed world.

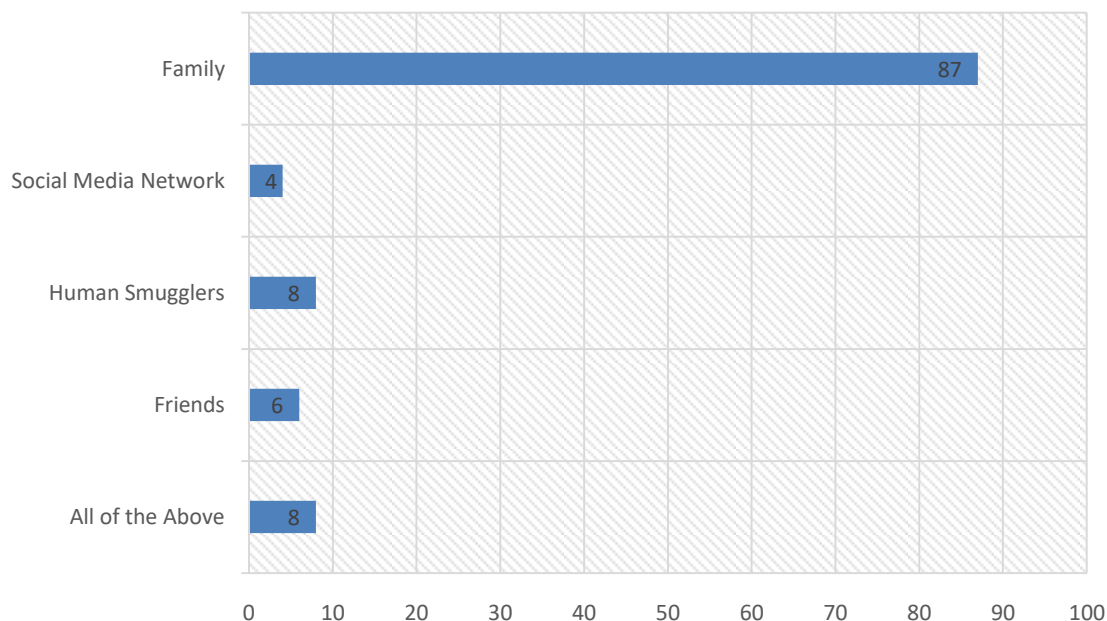
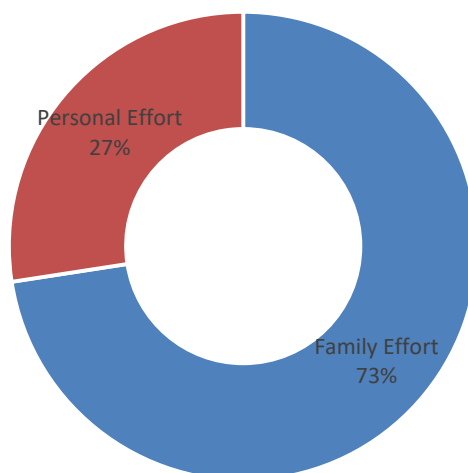


Figure 3: Who did you count on to assist you on the move outside the country?

77% of the sampled population count on their family to help them move outside the country. This considers how most of the migrants finance their move outside the country since most of them claim that they were not gainfully employed. Many even claimed they spend over a million naira and above for travel expenses, which they could not finance themselves except they have help from somewhere else.

How did you finance your trip?



73% of the migrants confessed that their trips were financed by family efforts.

The major reason most irregular migrants leave the country is identified to be education. However, this is because most of them already have degrees in different fields of study. It may be deduced that most believe that they cannot get jobs even with their education, so many start afresh or apply for a higher degree.

However, this is reflected in a statement of a respondent that

How many Nigerian finishes his or her degree here in Nigeria and travels abroad to get jobs over there based on the certificate they got here. This statement is consistent with the claim by a respondent that noted that most of the irregular migrants, do hard jobs. Jobs that are done at night, washing of dead bodies, washing of toilets, they are cleaners. Even those that are legal, and who have their papers are drivers. Since many of them are not gainfully employed or under-employed. They have certificates they cannot work with (Interview Ibadan, 15 January 2020).

The finding suggests that admission into higher institutions has been seen as an easy channel to migrate into Europe. University admission is the process that facilitates the procurement of visas, and residence permits to live and study in destination countries. Education also increases the financial status of migrants because some get a work permit while studying while some are fortunate enough to get a decent job after studying. It can therefore be deduced that the motive behind education is because of economic reasons.

poverty is one of the major causes of Nigerians migrating irregularly to Europe, an average Nigerian youth does not care much about good roads, electricity and other social amenities as much as he cares is where his next meal is going to come from. This is caused by a lack of gainful employment, a lot of Nigerian youths finish their degrees from the university, and at the age of 30-35 years, they are still in their father's houses eating their parents'

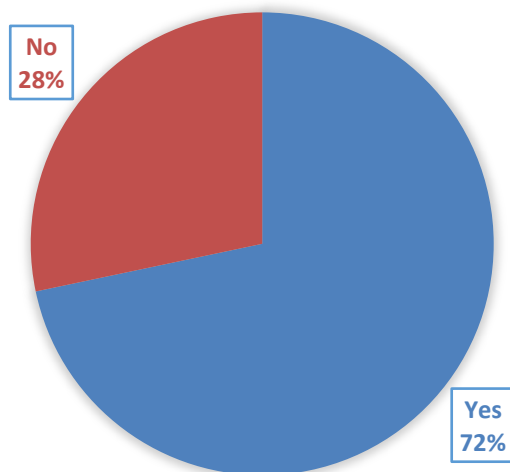
food and looking unto their parents and families for survival because there is no job (Interview Ibadan, 15 January 2020).

According to a statistical report, Nigeria's unemployment rate has risen from 6.01 % percent in 2013 to 6.11% percent in 2019. How it has been stated that nearly a quarter of the population of Nigeria is out of work and 20 percent are underemployed with 54.4 percent of young people aged from 15-53 years without a job (Aljazeera news, 16 February 2019, 12:20 GMT).

Moreover, unemployment and underemployment are also factors that influence irregular migration, especially from developing countries. Concerning the data gathered, most of the migrants claimed that they were not gainfully employed before leaving the country, this represents 77% of the sampled population, but only 23% of the migrants identified that they were gainfully employed.

Research findings have shown that the majority 72% of migrant returnees were aware of the dangers of migrating irregularly to Europe.

Are you aware of the risk of migrating illegally?



Pie Chart Showing the Awareness of Migrants of the Risk of Migrating Illegally

In this study, 77% of the migrants relied on family decisions and assistance in Nigeria and abroad. However, household decision-making is becoming a cultural and societal practice in Nigeria. Furthermore, the investment of Nigerian nations in Europe and the global north, in general, has proven to be beneficial to homes in the country. This is proven by the inflow of remittances which grew up rapidly from 5.66 billion dollars in the year 2010 to \$ 17.57 billion as of November 2019 (NairaMetrics.com). The growth in the flow of remittances can be attributed to the high emigration rate of Nigerians abroad.

The surge of violent conflict led by the Islamist group Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria and the increasing capacity of the gorilla insurgent group in the Lake Chad basin increased the humanitarian emergency in the region. The intensified attack on military formations and civilian population forcibly displaced an estimate of over 3.4 million people in the region.

However, an estimate of over 2.7 million Nigerians is internally displaced within her borders with an estimate of over 294,230 Nigerians refugees in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger (UNHCR, 2020). The number of armed conflicts and situations of political instability influence migration, Conflicts in Syria, Somalia, and Eritrea, have contributed significantly to the unprecedented number of migrants moving toward Europe. However, armed conflict stands as a driver of migration toward a short geographical location, especially neighboring state borders. It was also discovered that very few Nigerians flee violent conflict toward the Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, the demographic findings of migrant returnees confirm that the three red-flag states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa produce fewer irregular migrants than Edo states; which is the source of irregular migration in Nigeria. This is proven by the fact that 43.4% of the respondents are indigenes of Edo state. People from the southern part of Nigeria proceed on long distances migration especially on permanent terms while the northern are less migratory than those in the other parts of the country, they are predominantly short journey migrants.

Nigerians Arrivals in Italy 2011- 2019

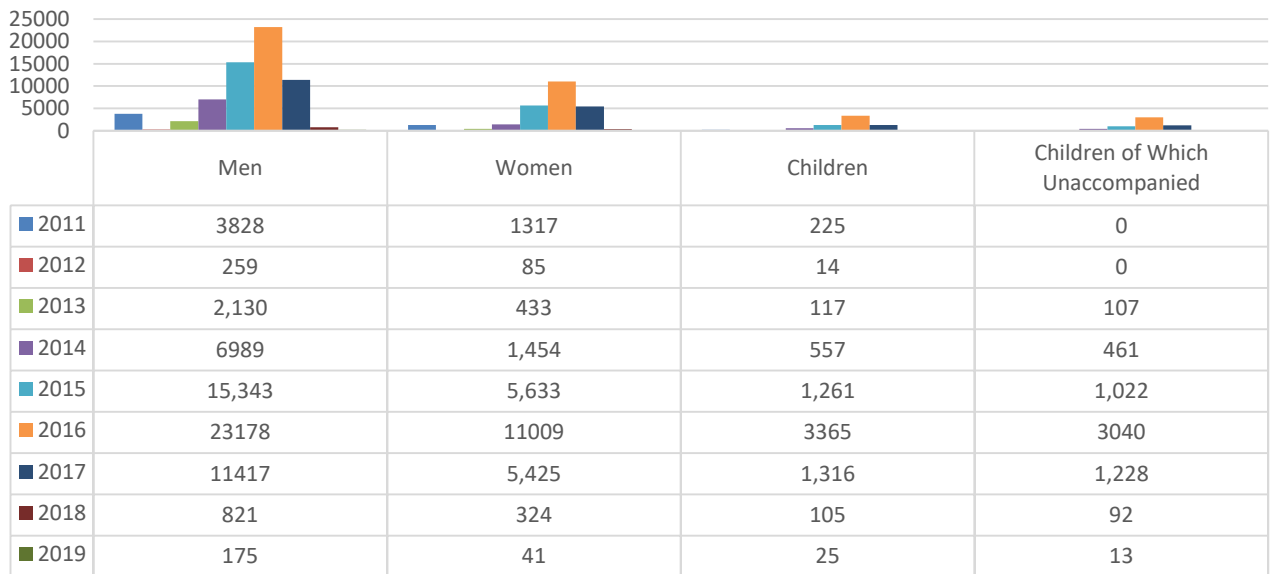
The data below shows the trends of Nigerians taking the Central Mediterranean Sea route to Italy by category in terms of Men, Women, and children Migrants.

Table 3: Nigerians Sea Arrivals in Italy 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: IOM and Italian Ministry of Interior Italy, 2020

Nigerians Sea Arrival to Italy 2011-2019



Nigerians Sea Arrival to Italy 2011- 2019

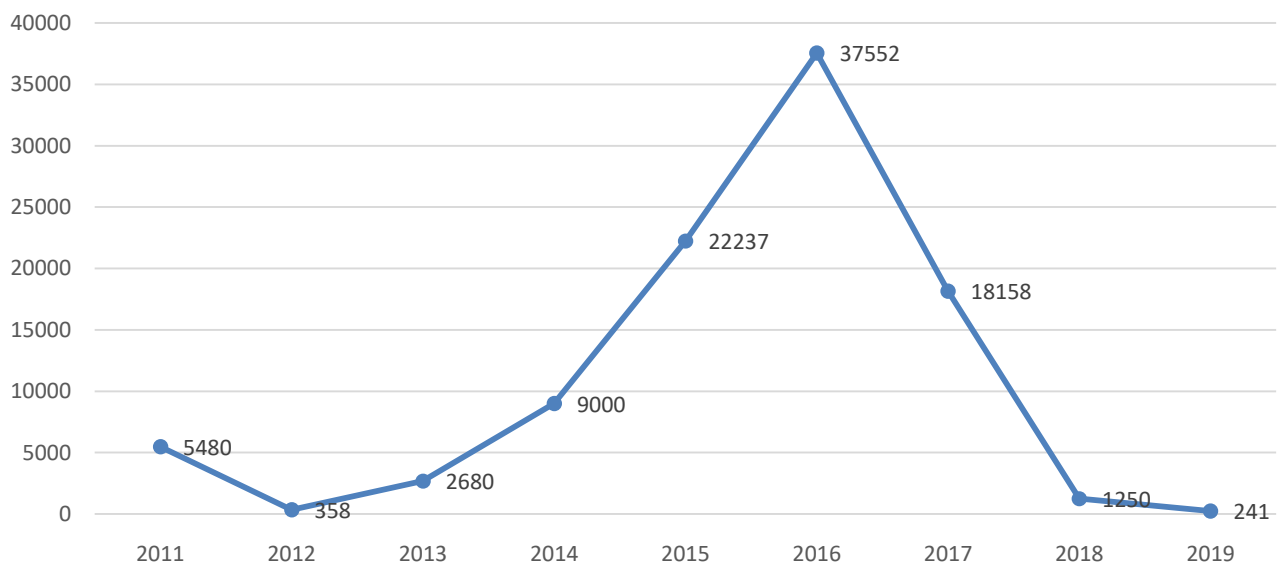


Figure: Line Graph showing the Trends of Nigerians Sea Arrival to Italy from 2011-2019

The trends of irregular migration among Nigerians to Europe

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.

Migrants from Cameroon, Benin Republic, and other African countries come to Nigeria and claim their nationality. Moreover, even people from Asia come to Nigeria. And take off from Benin City to Kano, and from Kano straight to Borno State, because it is easier to move from Kano to Niger because of the ECOWAS free movement protocol (Interview Ibadan 15 January 2020).

However, some migrants also pass through the southwest borders of Nigeria, Saki border in Oyo State, Idiroko in Ogun State, and Seme border in Lagos state to Benin republic and move to the Northern part of Benin republic to GAO in Mali, a desert gate to Algeria and Niger to Libya.

According to Africa Frontex (2016), Niger serves as the main transit hub reporting a weekly flow through Agadez of between 5000 and 17000 migrants per week en route towards Libya. Mali continues to serve as an alternative transit hub, that migrants use to get to the North African coast. As regards Mali, smuggling operations mostly take place once migrants reach Gao. Before reaching this point, many migrants travel using legitimate means, whereas those traveling out of Gao usually travel via well-established smuggling routes to Algeria or Libya. Albert (2009) asserts that West Africa has both overland and sea routes. Ghanaians and Nigerians prefer to join their brothers from Senegal, Mauritania, and Cape Verde in fishing boats traveling irregularly to Canary Islands in Spain. This is supported by Professor Albert's interview; he stated that irregular migrants use transit countries to get to their destination countries. Nigerians who try crossing the Mediterranean to Europe go through Niger to Morocco or Libya and from these African countries hit the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. Also, there is another group of Nigerians who move from Mali to Burkina Faso and end up in Senegal and from Senegal, they cross to southern Europe (Interview Ibadan, 19 January 2020).

Adejumoke (2009) assert that Nigeria is an important destination country for migrants, especially from neighboring Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) countries. Research findings have shown that the Mediterranean route was the most used route by irregular migrants from Africa to Europe with migrants taking both the central Mediterranean to Italy and the western Mediterranean to Spain. The central Mediterranean has been the most preferable route for migrants, the fall of Gadhafi's government in Libya in the year 2011 facilitated entry into Libya by land. This provides greater opportunities for migrants from different parts of the sub-Sahara route and turned Libya into a departure point for illegal migration into Europe (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee Report, 2016). This corroborates with Africa Frontex Intelligence (2016) report that the Libyan route is far more common than through Algeria, due to increased security and frequent arrests that occur at the Algerian border. Inadequate Libyan border security, unpatrolled desert expanses, and the comparatively shorter trip across the desert from Agadez to Sabha make the crossing easier (AFIC, 2016). Moreover, the International Organisation for Migration (2015) reported that Niger to Algeria is an important but less-frequented route for economic migrant. Migration along the West Africa route via Mauritania towards Algeria and Morocco and eventually Spain, continue to take place but have significantly decreased since the year 2006 (IOM, 2015).

Furthermore, the commitment of Algeria towards border security has in turn disrupted migrant smuggling activities, deterring illegal border crossing. The migration route through Arlit into Algeria tends to be used by poorer migrants and is more dangerous than that leading through Libya. Due to the danger involved and the likelihood that migrants choosing to travel through Algeria for financial reasons are more vulnerable, these migrants are more likely to be taken advantage of or to become victims of trafficking (AFIC, 2016). This Algerian border security has made smugglers change their routes toward Libya.

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.

Conclusion

This study has offered a reflection on the dynamics of the irregular migration of Nigerians to Europe. It particularly explores the factors that influence Nigerians migrating irregularly. A critical examination of the leading issue is that irregular migration is not caused by economic reasons only but by another leading factor such as family unification and support, it has been observed that the Nigerian state which produces the highest number of irregular migrants appears not to be the poorest in Nigeria. Moreover, this does not contradict the economic undertone of their departure to their selected destination countries. However, personal aspiration is another antithetic reason for Nigerians suicide movement to Europe, seeing it as the only alternative place for them to survive. It has also been discovered during this research that the majority of Nigerian migrating to Europe are between the age 18 to 40 not just that they are adults but 99% of them are educated having degrees in various fields of study. There is in particular a need to address this problematic character of Nigerian youth.

References

- Albert. I.O (2009). Rethinking the challenges of irregular transnational mobility in USO Africa, Institute of African studies university of Ibadan: Nigeria.
- Bloch, A & Chimienti, M. (2011). Irregular migration in a globalizing world, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Published online: 04 Apr 2011.
- Carling, J. (2007). Unauthorized Migration from Africa to Spain. International Organization for Migration (IOM), 45 (4). Blackwell Publishing Limited: UK.
- Castles, S., Cubas, M., Kim, C. & Ozkul, D., (2016). Irregular Migration: Causes, Patterns, and Strategies.
- Cummings, C., Pacitto, J., Lauro, and D. & Foresti, M. (2015). Why people come: Understanding the Drivers and Trends of Migration to Europe. Overseas Development Institute: London.
- De Haas, H. (2007). The Myth of Invasion the inconvenient realities of African migration to Europe International Migration Institute University of Oxford
- Duvell. F (2011) Irregular Immigration Economics and Politics Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford. Research Report 3/2011
- Fargues, P. (2009). Work, Refuge, Transit: An emerging Pattern of Irregular Migration South and East of the Mediterranean. International Migration Review. 43(3).
- Flahaux, M. & De Haas, H. (2016). African migration: trends, patterns, drivers Comparative Migration Studies. 4:1 DOI 10.1186/s40878-015-00156
- Hamood. S, (2006) African transit migration through Libya to Europe: the human cost, FMRS. AUC, 2006
- House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee. (2016). Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options. www.parliament.uk
- International Organisation for Migration. (2015). Report on Protection of the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Migrants and the Specific Needs of Migrants in Vulnerable Situations.
- International organization for migration. (2017). Enabling a Better Understanding of Migration Flow and Its Root Causes from Nigeria towards Europe, Desk-Review Report Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)
- International Organization for Migration (IOM), (2015). Response plan for the Mediterranean and beyond addressing complex migration flows in the countries of origin, transit, and destination.
- International Organization for Migration (IOM), January 2019. Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)". www.globaldtm.info/niger.
- Karagueuzian, C. & Chouchane, A. (2014). Taking Africa's Irregular Migrants into Account: Trends, Challenges, and Policy Options Chief Economist Complex | AEB African Economic Brief 5(1), 1-14.
- Kuschminder, K., Bresser, J. & Siegel, M. (2015). Irregular Migration Routes to Europe and Factors Influencing Migrants' Destination Choices.
- Koser, K. (2010). Dimensions and Dynamics of Irregular Migration. Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Geneva, Switzerland 16, 181–193 (2010) Published online 29 September 2009 in Wiley InterScience (www.interscience.wiley.com).
- Mabogunje, A.L. (1970), Systems Approach to a theory of rural-urban migration. Geographical Analysis 2(1-8) Massey, D.S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A.,
- Molenaar, F. (2017) Irregular Migration and human smuggling networks in Niger, Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.
- Padilla, B. & Miguel, J. (2008). Challenges for health in the age of migration. 1, 15- 21
- Health and Migration in the European Union: Building a Shared Vision for Action

- Pia, M. & Zavodny, M. (2018). Irregular Immigration in the European Union. Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas: U.S.A.
- Ramutsindela, M. (2014). Instead of Re-Drawing the Map, Let's Transform Our Borders. Available at: <https://psmag.com/news/instead-re-drawing-map-lets-transform-borders-96940>
- Sevastianov, S., Laine, J. & Ratzel, A. (2015). Introduction to Border Studies. University of Eastern Finland.
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). *International Migration Report 2017*, Published by the United Nations.