Global Online Journal of Academic Research (*GOJAR*), Vol. 5, No. 2, 2026
ISSN 3043-6729
https://klamidas.com/gojar-v5n2-2026-02/

Internal Migration and Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria: Demographic Determinants and Policy Implications

Rilwan Akintayo Akinokun, Zainab Hamza Yusuf & Nurudeen Ibrahim

Abstract

Nigeria is faced with problem of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Explosion in the development of urban areas due to rural-urban migration in the past two decades has deterred the reality of sustainable human settlement pattern. Unresolved problems emanating from issues pertaining to human settlement have hindered government policies and solutions to these problems have continued to be a mystery in Nigeria. Worsening socio-economic condition of the country has remained the main cause of Nigerians not only migrating to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities but also emigrating out of the country. This paper examined internal migration and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria, determinants and policy implications. The methodology used for the study was extensive review of scholarly papers on the topic. Findings showed that Nigeria is yet to achieve the desirable mobility transition due to the high rate of rural-urban migration leading to over-congestion and slums in the cities. This has deterred sustainable settlement pattern in most cities in Nigeria. It was recommended that migration policies should be tailored towards promoting even development in order to reduce urbanisation. Policies also need to be scaled towards reducing brain drain in sub-Saharan African countries such as Nigeria.

Keywords: internal migration, displaced persons, determinants, patterns, Nigeria

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, the determinants of migration levels and trends can be generally classified into push and pull factors (Heberle, 1938; Lee, 1966). Pull factors are those factors that attract the migrants into the receiving country; pull factors include favourable working environment, better

standard of living, social security, better health conditions, and better education pursuit, among others. Push factors are those factors in their environment that are unfavourable to the migrants and push them away to seek greener pastures elsewhere; push factors include unemployment, poverty, lack of good working conditions, lack of old age security and so forth. This has led to urbanisation in most cities in Nigeria, such as Lagos (Cosmas *et al.*, 2022).

The country is also faced with problem of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Explosion in the development of urban areas due to rural-urban migration in the past two decades has deterred the reality of sustainable human settlement pattern. Unresolved problems on issues pertaining to human settlement have hindered the implementation of government policies, and solutions to these problems have continued to be a mystery in Nigeria (Issa, 2012). The country is also faced with the problem of emigration. Worsening socio-economic conditions of the country have remained the main cause of Nigerians not only migrating to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities but also emigrating out of the country.

Several studies have identified migrants' remittances (in terms of money remitted to relatives at home by Nigerians working abroad), unemployment, and high population growth rate in Nigeria as possible determinants of high emigration of people out of Nigeria. In terms of selectivity of the emigrants by age, it has been the economically active population that emigrates most; in terms of selectivity by education, it has been the highly skilled labour, most especially physicians in the health sector, that emigrate most (Adebusola & Oluwaseun, 2022).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This study reviewed literatures on patterns of internal migration and urbanisation as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria. The details of the review are segmented below.

2.1 Patterns of Internal Migration in Nigeria

There are four patterns of internal migration in Nigeria. These patterns are rural-rural migration, rural-urban migration, urban-urban migration and urban-rural migration. Rural-rural migration is a situation whereby people migrate from one village or town to another which is mostly based on agricultural activities such as shifting cultivation and rearing of animals as is it with the case of the nomads. This pattern of migration is mostly common during the pre-colonial era. Rural-urban migration is a situation

whereby people migrate from the villages or towns to the cities due to lack of adequate social infrastructures or amenities in the villages; they migrate in pursuit of better living conditions in the cities. This pattern of migration was prominent during the colonial era but continued in the post-colonial period. Urban-urban migration is that pattern of migration that involves people migrating from one city to another due to transfers, as it is with the case of federal civil servants in Nigeria, or due to social or personal reasons. Urban-rural migration is that pattern of migration that involves people leaving the cities to settle down in the rural areas. This pattern of migration can only be achieved with countries that have attained urban transition. The attainment of urban transition is a situation whereby there is even development. Social amenities and infrastructures present in the cities will also be present in the rural areas. As with the case of Nigeria, we are yet to attain this stage of transition as we are still experiencing urbanisation in most of our cities.

2.2 Internal Migration and Urbanisation in Nigeria

In a study conducted by Bukola (2013) on internal migration in Nigeria and its attendant positive contributions to human development, she posited that movement of people from one place to another for the purpose of merchandise is a common phenomenon in both developing and developed countries. Her study examined the associating effect of internal migration on human development from three standpoints: life expectancy, education and living standard. She identified four dynamics of internal migration in Nigeria, which are rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-rural, and urban-urban migration. She stressed that the motive behind most local movements in Nigeria and other African countries are economic reasons (such as recession and growth), civil service transfers, change of spouse locations for married couples, and national service. She asserted that two generations of internal migrants exist in Nigeria: the first generation along with their dependants and the second-generation migrants and that this generations are not specific to Nigeria alone. She stressed further that in all the generations of internal migrants, socio-economic, education and political developments had played a vital role in how internal migration has enhanced increased life expectancy, living standards and education. She concluded that internal migration has helped in alleviating poverty, and has led to economic empowerment and community development. She recommended that government should put in place programmes and policies that will harness the benefits of internal migration rather than regarding the phenomenon as a factor deterring economic and environmental development.

Issa (2012) asserted that explosion in the development of urban areas due to rural-urban migration in the past two decades has deterred the reality of sustainable human settlement pattern. He asserted that unresolved problems on issues pertaining to human settlement have hindered the implementation of government policies and that solutions to these problems have continued to be a mystery in Nigeria. His study attempted to examine and analyse the general factors behind development of rural and urban areas in Nigeria as well as the various strategies and policies put in place by government. His study also examined why government policies and programmes were focused on the urban areas at the expense of the rural areas, which has led to artificially created urbanised areas in Nigeria. This, he said, has not changed Nigeria's position of being internationally dependent due to its unbalanced spatial development.

Aluko (2012), on a study examining the impact of urbanization on housing development in Lagos State, posited that the rapid housing development in most urban areas of developing countries is usually associated with the push effect from the rural areas and pull factors from the urban areas. He stressed further that due to this effect, there is always a conglomeration and upsurge of population in cities which has being leading to unemployment and growth of housing problem and that the growth of cities has been attributed to lack of proper planning which has in turn accelerated deficiencies, deterioration and environmental pollution of the urban areas. Modern basic facilities and infrastructures have been over stretched, leading to acceleration of urban decay. He asserted that most cities in Nigeria have lost their dignity, administrative efficiency and social cohesion due to urbanization, poverty and pressure on urban facilities. His study revealed the consequences of urbanization in Nigeria and concluded that the upsurge of urbanisation in the 20th century was attributed to rural-urban migration, which has resulted to unprecedented high cost of rent and insufficient housing delivery system and conurbation.

2.3 Internally Displaced Persons and Wellbeing in Nigeria

According to Roland Schonbauer (UNCHR, 2004), unlike refugees, an internally displaced person (IDP) is someone that has not crossed an international border in order to find safety; such persons were merely forced from their homes but where still within the territory of their home country. Statistics have showed that Nigeria is the third country having the highest number of internally displaced people in Africa with about 2.7 million people that are internally displaced. Studies also revealed that Africa is the continent having the highest number of internally displaced people in the world. The major cause of the high number of internally

displaced people in Nigeria can be attributed to the activities of Boko-Haram and other armed groups that have triggered internal displacement of people in the north-eastern part of Nigeria.

Adebowale (2016), in a study reviewing the challenges of survival facing internally displaced persons in Abuja, asserted that the dispersal of residents in north-eastern part of Nigeria due to Boko-Haram has worsened the accessibility of the victims to food, shelter and safe drinking water, making life increasingly difficult for majority of the internally dispersed victims. His study examined the agitations of the internally displaced persons in the federal capital territory, Abuja, and discovered that there was an agreement reached with the federal government on the need for Nigerian government to change its policy orientations in dealing with internally displaced persons.

His study stated that internally displaced persons have suffered neglect due to the security implications of Nigerian policies regarding the internally displaced coupled with the fact that Nigeria has been facing a lot of interconnected humanitarian and economic crises. Failure to resolve these issues might lead to the disruption of basic life-support systems for IDPs and to the worsening of the already fragmented security structures.

Adeejat (2013) was of the view that the refugee convention of 1951 and 1967 which was aimed at protecting refugees internationally does not guarantee legal protection for category of people who have been forced to migrate out of the boundaries of their respective countries due to famine, bad weather, earthquake, flood and other natural disasters. For a victim to be under the protection of the refugee convention, such individual need to have been forced to leave his home countryas a result of either fear of persecution due to race, nationality, religion, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. She stressed that even though there is no provision in the refugee convention regarding people that leave their respective countries due to natural disasters, people who have been forced to leave their farms, homes, towns, homesteads, cities and other familiar terrain due to incidence of famine, flood, weather, earthquake and other natural disasters, and as such internally displaced, are also in need of help and assistance from the government.

In Nigeria, this category of people are under a government agency called the National Emergency and Monitoring Agency (NEMA), which is often not proactive in taking care of the welfare of this category of people. She posited that the effect of human abuse suffered by this class of people, most especially women and the children, often result to women been

beggars and people of pity in the localities they are forced to migrate to. She stressed further that the recent incident of flooding experienced in Bayelsa, Kogi and Lagos states has forced millions of people to be internally displaced, and occasioned loss of lives and destruction of properties, thereby necessitating an urgent need for an institutional framework towards protecting this category of people by the Nigerian government.

Emmanuel (2018), in a paper reviewing the internally displaced persons in Nigeria, acknowledged that no study has been conducted in Nigeria examining how the arrival of internally displaced persons can affect the provision of public goods to local residents. He said that this unexplored aspect has a large implication on the welfare conditions of the receiving locations, given the large magnitude of the internally displaced people in Nigeria. He stressed further that efforts have not be concerted towards examining how the internally displaced are been affected in terms of welfare losses and employment with the intent of putting in place relevant policies or measures towards improving their standard of living. He concluded that further studies should be conducted with the goal of mitigating the negative effects of the internally displaced in Nigeria.

Oduwole & Fadeyi (2013), in a study evaluating the state of the internally displaced in Nigeria, discovered a gap on the part of the Nigerian government in putting on ground effective and functional policies towards ensuring better living conditions for the internally displaced persons in Nigeria. He stressed further that the magnitude of this neglect has the tendency of endangering national cohesion and increasing the vulnerability of the internally displaced to high risk of social neglect. He asserted that with the current complexity and magnitude of the internally displaced in the country, the achievement of the millennium development goals (MDGs) will be endangered, most especially goal 8 which guarantees rights to safety of lives and properties as it is equally enshrined in other international treaties such as right to creative life, health, right to enjoy a decent standard of living, dignity, freedom, self-respect and respect of others. He concluded that with the current state of insecurity, poverty, bomb blast, inequality and internally displaced in the country, the achievement of the millennium development goals (MDGs) and what development really connotes will be hindered.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed extensive review of scholarly articles as methodology. Meaning and definition of concepts relating to internal

migration in Nigeria, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and wellbeing as well as determinants and policy implications were sourced from the internet and other electronic search devices. Deductions were made from the literatures and discussions made so far. The author's personal conclusion formed the last portion of the paper.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The national migration policy in Nigeria has mandated census offices and ministries to be consistent with definitions of subpopulations and migrants and in capturing circular and seasonal migrants, and in incorporating migrant-specific variables in existing surveys. The goal of migration policies and programmes in Nigeria as implemented by the international organisation for migration is aimed at deterring illegal immigration and promoting a well-managed, legal forms of immigration towards protecting human rights of immigrants, including the protection and identification of potential refugees, reducing human trafficking and smuggling. Section 18 of the 2015 immigration act stipulates that unless the controller general of immigration or minister directs otherwise, an immigration officer has the capacity of admitting into Nigeria a person who has in their possession a valid passport or other travel documents as approved by the chief immigration officer or minister into Nigeria.

The Nigerian government in pursuance of its obligations in establishing and strengthening the local structures, protecting the economic, civic and human rights of its citizens at home and abroad as well as the aliens affirms its commitment to all national and international principles, instruments and standards that are related to migrants. It is with this backdrop that Nigerian policies on migration is committed towards providing a platform for unification of administrations on migration, providing strategic direction on effective and efficient migration both home and abroad, ensuring the security and protection of labour, economic, and civil rights of Nigerians abroad, ensuring regular migration through effective boarder management controls, promoting a regular sensitization of Nigerians on possible hardships and dangers likely to be encountered by irregular migrants, eradicating human trafficking, smuggling and other migratory-related offences and encourage the participation of Nigerians abroad on economic and other activities at home.

To this effect, some of the strategies to be employed by the Nigerian government in facilitating the participation of Nigerians in the diaspora include the establishment of comprehensive data base of all Nigerians in

the diaspora, which will serve as a reliable statistics that will facilitate network collaboration, enacting legislation that will facilitate participation of Nigerians in diaspora in census and elections, encourage participation of Nigerians in diaspora in national events, recognising outstanding achievers in the diaspora through honours and awards, encouraging the return of qualified Nigerians in the diaspora through social concessions such as land acquisition and incentives, facilitating the transfer of technology and scientific knowledge as well as trade and investment, creating enabling policies in the economic sector such as encouraging small and medium scale enterprises, promoting exports and job creation, and integrating migration and development into the national development plan for the achievement of the millennium development goals (MDGs).

Migration strategies by the government in tackling brain drain include the following:

- increasing the retention rate of professionals most especially in the health sector through regular educational and professional development opportunities,
- establishing a good atmospheric condition for private sector participation and providing opportunities for part-time employment or alternative employment for low paid professionals most especially those employees in the public service,
- reviewing and increasing salaries and other remunerations of highly skilled professionals employed in the public sector,
- designing strategies for the replacement of qualified professionals that have left Nigeria through training, scholarships and provision of guarantees from top government officials,
- facilitating increased mobility of professionals within the African continent through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and
- reducing the adverse effect of brain drain by encouraging the transfer of knowledgeable and highly skilled to return home for short or long periods of time in order to contribute to the development of their father land.

Strategies towards addressing and minimising urbanisation and other internal movements include: addressing the root causes of internal migration in Nigeria such as poverty in the rural areas, prompt response to

natural disasters, addressing unemployment in the rural areas and so forth. The Nigerian government is also committed to providing basic social services such as good health services in the rural areas, affordable education, adequate and affordable houses for rural dwellers. Some of the strategies also involve compiling data on trends, factors and characteristics of internal migration for proper actions and decision-making. This will also include having data on geographical distribution of the population as guidance towards formulating effective policies that relates to population distribution. The Nigerian government is also committed towards revitalising basic infrastructures such as portable water and electricity in order to reduce rural-urban migration and assist in the development of the rural areas.

Strategies devised towards addressing the problems of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Nigeria include:

- passing legislation targeted towards reducing discrepancies between the rights of indigenes and those of the settlers,
- using all arms and levels of government in increasing the participation in decision making process across all ethnic groups in Nigeria,
- consolidating the dividends of democracy through equitable distribution of the country's resources across all ethnic groups and citizens,
- prioritising attention on internally displaced people (IDPs) in access to skill acquisition programmes, provision of microloans and aiding their relocation and resettlement,
- avoiding abuse of human rights by all government agencies and authorities,
- establishing early action structures and early warning mechanisms as part of preventive measures,
- providing access and guaranty of safety of all international and national humanitarian support that will serve as succour to all IDPs,
- training of peace monitors and mediators from local to federal levels,
- applying the provisions in the national policy on IDPs in legal

principles of protection, reintegration and displacement among others,

- ensuring adequate funding by the federal government through budgetary provisions for the IDPs,
- facilitating the domestication of the 2009 African Union Convention on assistance and protection of the IDPs, and
- enhancing national capacities in tackling disasters and risk reduction through humanitarian response to vulnerable people.

Good migration policies have the tendency of boosting the population of the working age so that skilled immigrants can contribute to the development of human capital in the receiving country. Skilled immigrants also have the tendency of contributing to technological progress. To this end, the Nigerian government should put in place policies that will be tailored towards promoting economic stability, improving quality of our tertiary institutions, and providing employment opportunities for our teaming youths. This will go a long way in reducing emigration of our skilled economically active population in search of greener pastures abroad. Also, migration policies should be formulated in order to tackle illegal migration and alternative data sources should be put in place in order to capture migration variables, most especially in our national surveys and censuses.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Nigeria is yet to achieve the mobility transition due to the high rate of rural-urban migration leading to over-congestion and slums in the cities. This has deterred sustainable settlement pattern in most cities in Nigeria. Adequate government policies need to be in place towards addressing the various factors affecting emigration and internal migration in Nigeria with the aim of checking the high brain drain and urbanization we are experiencing in the country. Also, migration policies should be formulated in order to tackle illegal migration.

REFERENCES

Adebowale S. (2016). Internally displaced persons and the challenges of survival in Abuja. *African Security Review* 25(2) 176-19

Adebusola A., Oluwaseun O.A. (2022). What are you really doing in this country? Emigration intentions of Nigerian Doctors and their policy implications for human resource for health management.

Journal of international migration and integration 23(3), 1377-1396

Adeejat-K.K. (2013). Towards the evolution of legal and institutional framework for the protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria. *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development.* 6(5), 141-154.

Aluko O.E. (2012). The Impact of Urbanization on Housing Development: The Lagos experience, Nigeria. *Ethiopian journal of environmental studies and management*.

Bukola A.O. (2013). Internal Migration in Nigeria: A positive contribution to human development. *ACP observatory on migration. International organisation for migration*.

Cosmos K.O., Benedict N.A., Casmir N. (2022). Physician emigration from Nigeria and the associated factors: the implications to safeguarding the Nigerian health system. *Human Resource for Health* 20(1), 1-15.

Emmanuel O.O. (2018). Internally displaced persons in Nigeria: Review of empirical studies. *American International Journal of Social Science Research*. 2(1), 28-38

Heberle, R. (1938). The causes of rural-urban migration: A survey of German theories. *American Journal of Sociology*, 43(6), 932-950.

Issah M.A. (2012). Trends of rural-urban migration in Nigeria. European Scientific Journal. 8(3), 97-125.

Lee, E.S. *A theory of migration*. Demography 3, 47–57 (1966). https://doi.org/10.2307/2060063.

Oduwole A.T., Fadeyi O.A. (2013). Issues of refugees and displaced persons in Nigeria. *Journal of Sociological Research* 4(1), 1.

UNCHR. (2004). *The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Author Information

Rilwan Akintayo Akinokun is affiliated with the Department of Demography and Social Statistics, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria.
Email: akinokunridwan@gmail. com

Zainab Hamza Yusuf is of the Department of Demography and Social Statistics, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria.

Nurudeen Ibrahim is of the Department of Demography and Social Statistics, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria.

CITING THIS ARTICLE

APA

Akinokun, R. A., Yusuf, Z. H. & Ibrahin, N. (2026). Internal Migration and Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria: Demographic Determinants and Policy Implications. *GOJAR*, 5(2), 21-32. https://klamidas.com/gojar-v5n2-2026-02/

MLA

Akinokun, Rilwan Akintayo, Yusuf, Zainab Hamza and Ibrahim, Nurudeen. "Internal Migration and Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria: Demographic Determinants and Policy Implications." *GOJAR*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2026, pp. 21-32. https://klamidas.com/gojar-v5n2-2026-02/