

Forced Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa: Demographic Determinants and Consequences in Nigeria

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Abstract

Forced migration in sub-Saharan Africa has been a very serious issue of concern, with millions of people displaced due to violence, conflict and climate change. As at 2023, there were about 32.5 million people reported to have been internally displaced in Africa with 16.2 million of them being children. In the same year, about 8.9 million refugees originated from countries in Africa with large numbers of them coming from Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. This paper is aimed at examining migration trends, patterns and determinants in sub-Saharan African countries such as Nigeria. The methodology used for the study was extensive review of scholarly papers on the topic. Findings showed that most sub-Saharan African countries are yet to achieve the mobility transition due to the high rate of rural-urban migration leading to over-congestion and slums, as a result of internal migration, and brain drain, as a result of international migration. It was recommended that migration policies need to be tailored towards promoting even development and reducing urbanisation. Policies also need to be strengthened to reduce the frequency of brain drain in sub-Saharan African countries like Nigeria.

Keywords: determinants, forced migration, consequences, patterns, Nigeria

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Forced migration in sub-Saharan Africa is a very serious issue with millions of people displaced due to violence, conflict and climate change. As at 2023, there were about 32.5 internally displaced people in Africa with children constituting 16.2 million of them. In the same year, about 8.9 million refugees originated from countries in Africa with large numbers of them coming from

Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. The number of forced displaced people in Africa increased by 14 percent from previous years with Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Nigeria being the top countries that are mostly affected. Violence, conflict, and climate change were reported as the primary causes of people being internally displaced in Africa. Floods and storms are some of the harsh environmental factors responsible for internal displacement in Africa. Many displaced persons never return to their original homes. However, as at 2023, about 632,000 former refugees and 3.1 million internally displaced persons returned to their homes in Africa (IOM, 2023).

The number of people that have been forcibly displaced or rendered stateless in Central and West Africa is reported to have reached about 12.7 million, which reflects about 48 percent increase since 2020. Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Nigeria and Somalia are some of the countries having the highest number of people that have been forcibly displaced in Africa. The Mediterranean route has been the deadliest route of these irregular migrants with over 30,000 migrants being lost at sea or in the desert between 2020 and 2024. The most vulnerable population are children with about 16.2 million being internally displaced due to violence and conflict and about 12 million being displaced due to disasters (IOM, 2023).

Some of the countries having the highest number of displaced people in Africa are Democratic Republic of Congo, with 8 million people that are forcibly displaced out of which 6.9 million are internally displaced (IDPs); Sudan, with 12.7 million forcibly displaced out of which about 1.4 million are fleeing their country and 10.5 million internally displaced; and Somalia, with about 3.9 million people that are forcibly displaced out of which 1.2 million are asylum seekers and refugees. Others are Nigeria, with about 2.4 million people that are forcibly displaced out of which 1.2 million of them are internally displaced (IDPs); and Ethiopia, with about 3.5 million people that are forcibly displaced out of which about 2 million of them are internally displaced persons (IDPs).

In Nigeria, forced migration is a pressing issue that has been driven by violence, conflicts and climate change. As at 2022, the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria were about 3,098,404 with about 375,552 people displaced due to conflict and violence and 24,366 of them affected by natural disasters, such as flood, attributed to climate change. In the same year, about 82,773 refugees and 1,529 asylum seekers were registered in Nigeria with majority of them from Niger, Cameroon and Democratic Republic of Congo. In the same year, Nigerian refugees that were living abroad accounted for about 400,633. Most of these Nigerians crossed borders and were recognized

as refugees abroad with their main destinations being Cameroon, Niger and Republic of Chad. Human trafficking is also rampant in Nigeria as the country is often seen as source of transit for human trafficking. Most of the victims are often exploited for forced labour and commercial sex. As at 2022, the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) facilitated the return of about 167 victims with about 81 percent being female (IOM, 2022).

The main drivers of forced migration in Nigeria include violence and conflict such as Boko Haram insurgency, commercial clashes and attacks from Fulani herdsmen. Hazards from climate change such as droughts, floods and other environmental disasters have induced forced migration and internally displaced persons in Nigeria, most especially in the northern part of the country. Economic instability has facilitated forced migration in Nigeria due to unemployment, poverty and lack of access to basic services. These factors have contributed to the high number of internally displacement witnessed in the country and external migration with many Nigerians seeking safety and better economic opportunities and conditions in other countries. Some of the efforts employed in addressing forced migration in Africa, most especially in sub-Saharan Africa countries like Nigeria, include humanitarian response in terms of support and aid for displaced populations. Others are regional cooperation in terms of initiatives such as route-based approach in strengthening asylum systems and providing safe alternatives, addressing root causes through investments in local education, local economies and stability in order to reduce push factors.

1.1 Forced Internal Migrants in Sub-Saharan Africa Countries such as Nigeria

Forced internal migrants in sub-Saharan Africa countries such as Nigeria has been manifested in terms of urbanisation. This is a situation where people migrate from rural areas to urban areas in search of better living conditions. The trend of internal migration in Nigeria is from the rural areas to the urban areas. The trend of international migration in Nigeria is emigration of skilled able workers abroad in search of greener pastures. Worsening socio-economic conditions of the country have remained the main cause of Nigerians emigrating out of the country. Currently, Nigeria is experiencing low physician to population ratio due to rapid emigration of our medical personnel in search of greener pastures abroad (Cosmas *et al.*, 2022). Population growth rate, migrants' remittances and unemployment are the major determinants of emigration from Nigeria to other countries. In a country with high population, this movement will go a long way in reducing pressure on the labour market. Nigerians will continue to migrate out of the country so long as the leading causes of such movements are not addressed, which evolve around socio-

economic and political development (Samuel & Nahanga, 2014).

Movement of people from one place to another for the purpose of merchandise is a common phenomenon in both developing and developed countries. 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. Two generations of internal migrants exist in Nigeria. 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 (Bukola, 2013).

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 in Nigeria. Unresolved problems on issues pertaining to human settlement have hindered government policies and solutions to these problems have remained elusive (Issa, 2012). 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. Due to this effect, there is always a conglomeration and upsurge of population in cities, leading to unemployment and growth of housing problem. The growth of chaotic 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, accelerating urban decay (Aluko, 2012).

1.2 Migration in Nigeria

The United Nations migration agency, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) defined a migrant as someone who is moving or has moved passing through international borders or within the state that is far away from his or her habitual residence. This movement may be voluntary or involuntary, without regarding the person's legal status. Migration is the third component of population dynamics in demography after fertility and mortality. Population dynamics means one of the components that can affect the total level of population either to increase or decrease. Migration can be defined as the movement of people from one locality to another with a motive of changing location, which often involves relocation. Migration can be external or internal. It is external when the movement involves crossing national borders like movement from Nigeria to Benin republic or flying from Nigeria to United States of America (USA). It is internal when the special movement does not involve crossing national boundaries like movement from one state of the federation to another such as travelling from Osun to Lagos state of

Nigeria.

Presently, the net migration rate for Nigeria, which is the deduction of emigration from immigration, is -0.273 per 1000 population. The growth rate as at 2023 is -2.500 percent. The net migration rate for Nigeria as at 2022 was -0.280 per 1000 population, which corresponds to about 2.78 percent decline from that of 2021. That of 2021 was -0.288 per 1000 population, which depicted about 2.37 percent decline from that of 2020 and the decline has been consistent over the years. The negativity in the net migration and growth rate implies people emigrating out of the country have been higher than the immigrants over the years. This steady decline in net migration rate and growth rate may be attributed to some economic factors which this paper will address in subsequent sections.

The type of migration that can affect the dynamicity of the population is the external migration which can either be immigration or emigration. It is immigration when people migrate into the country for some reasons such as seeking asylum or tourism. In this case, the receiving country will experience increase in population size. It is emigration when people migrate out of the country in pursuance of greener pastures, health, education or other purposes. In this case, the giving country will experience decrease in population size. The difference between immigration and emigration will result to net migration. The net migration, which can be either positive or negative, will change the level of the population of a particular country. The internal component of migration deals with local migrants and internally displaced persons.

Statistics have shown that there are currently more than 3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria with about 1.7 million of them accounting for refugees from other countries and unsettled returnees who have formally migrated out of Nigeria and are Nigerians. The remaining more than 74,000 people are asylum seekers and refugees in Nigeria. The major cause of emigration in Nigeria is poor state of the economy; it makes people leave the country in search of greener pastures and out of the fear that the poor economy may get worse and affect their social and economic status. The causes of migration in Nigeria can be classified into environmental migration, political migration, economic migration and social migration and these factors can be grouped into push (factors that make you leave) and pull (factors that entice you entering) a particular country.

The history of migration in Nigeria can be traced to the colonial era where the colonial masters came to Africa for colonies (the scramble for Africa) and for slave trade. Some of the African countries, including Nigeria and Ghana, were

colonised by the British while some others (francophone countries), such as Mali and Burkina Faso, were colonised by the French. After the independence of these colonised countries due to lots of struggle and agitations, the slavery was later modernised to visa lottery and other ways of enticing the black race towards leaving their respective countries in pursuance of greener pastures.

The word visa lottery is used because records have showed that the greatest migration in history was the movements of people into the United States of America where over 6 million black people moved from South America and Africa to North America, Midwestern and Western States. The Nigerian migration to the United States rose in the 1970s and 1980s due to economic and political crises in the country. This was not peculiar to Nigeria alone. The pattern of migration worldwide during this era was movement to the United States because of the perception that the country has always been the hub of economic opportunities.

1.3 Migration Trends in sub-Saharan African Countries such as Nigeria

The trend of international migration globally is from the less developed countries to the developed countries of the world. Globally, the estimate of international migrants was 281 million international migrants as at 2020 which was equivalent to about 3.6 percent of the global population and the estimated number have increased over the years. The trend of internal migration in Nigeria is from the rural areas to the urban areas. This means we are still experiencing urbanisation due to uneven development. We are yet to achieve the urban transition.

Migration trends in Nigeria will be assessed in terms of net migration which is the difference between emigration and immigration. The migration rate, that is net migration for Nigeria presently (as at 2023), is estimated at -0.273 per 1000 population which represents about 2.5 percent decline from that of 2022. That of 2022 was -0.280 per 1000 population which represents about 2.78 percent decline from that of 2021. That of 2021 was -0.288 per 1000 population which in turn represents about 2.37 percent decline from that of 2020 and the decline has been consistent over the years.

The table below shows the trend of decline over the last ten years:

Table 1.3: Net Migration and Growth Rate in Nigeria from 2013-2023

Year	Net Migration	Growth Rate (Percent)
2023	-0.273	-2.500
2022	-0.280	-2.780
2021	-0.288	-2.370
2020	-0.295	-2.640
2019	-0.303	-2.260
2018	-0.310	-2.820
2017	-0.319	-2.450
2016	-0.327	-2.680
2015	-0.336	-2.330
2014	-0.344	-2.550
2013	-0.353	-2.750

Source: IOM, 2024

From the table above, it can be deduced that both net migration rate and growth rate have been declining in the past ten years with -0.273 and -2.500 percent respectively; implying that more people are still migrating out of the country when compared to the immigrants, hence the negative net migration and growth rate. Several factors have been associated with migration trends in Nigeria, both internally and internationally. These factors include education pursuit, unemployment, inadequate social amenities most especially in the rural areas, family ties, health and avoidance of boredom attributed to agriculture most especially in the rural areas. The graphical representation is presented below:

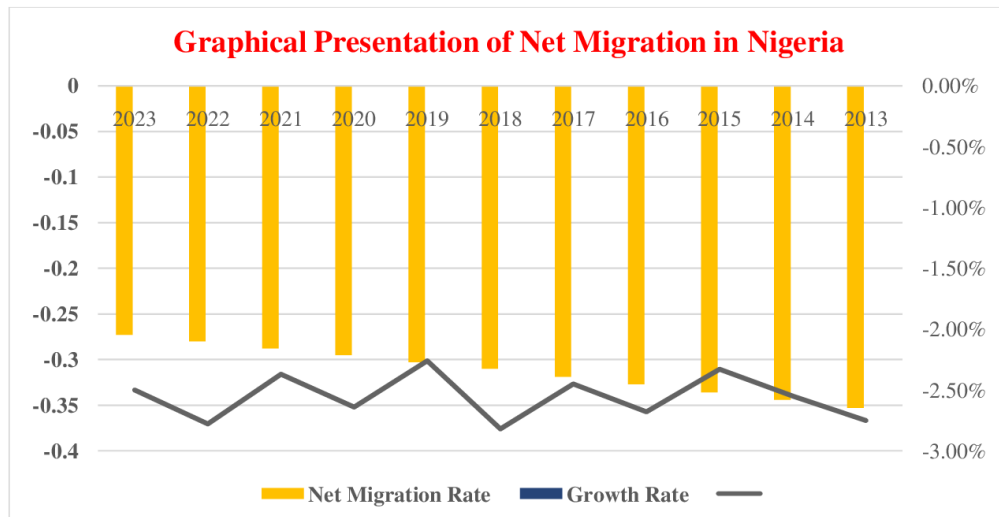


Fig 1.3: Net Migration and Growth Rate in Nigeria between 2013-2023

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Migration patterns in sub-Saharan African countries like Nigeria as well as determinants of migration in Nigeria, both internal and external, are reviewed in this section.

2.1 Migration Patterns in sub-Sahara African Countries Like Nigeria

Migration patterns in Nigeria will be assessed based on internal and international migration. Internal migration in Nigeria is often influenced by marriage, education, civil service; most especially those that are working in the federal civil service that are often been transferred from one state to another, economic factors such as economic recession and economic growth and so forth. The pattern of emigration in Nigeria in most recent years is brain drain, a phenomenon that has led to Nigeria's loss of skilled manpower to emigration, most especially in the health sector. By age selectivity, it is mostly the able-bodied working class which are economically active and have the potential towards contributing their skilled manpower towards the development of the nation. Migration patterns in Nigeria will be assessed based on: pre-colonial era of migration, colonial era of migration, post-colonial era of migration and post-independence era of migration. The four patterns are discussed below.

2.1.1 Pre-Colonial Era of Migration in Nigeria

According to the archaeologists, different human groups had intermingled and habited in several regions of the country thousands of years ago before colonialism. The pre-colonial era has been characterised as an era of empire and kingdom dominations such as Oyo empire in the south west, Igbo Kingdom in the south east and the Borno Empire in the northeast to mention a few. The period of this era span between 16th to 18th centuries. Migration during this period was usually attributed to search of farm land for cultivation of their crops, rearing of animals and settlements. This was because the life style at this period was primitive. Other reasons for migration at this era were social conflicts; usually within a locality where the oppressed will have to relocate to another area for settlement and trade; so that the migration pattern at this period was primarily internal and mostly rural-rural migration.

2.1.2 Colonial Era of Migration in Nigeria

The Colonial era in Nigeria was the time the British were ruling the country. This period was around the 19th century and the pattern of migration during this era was rural-urban migration where the country witnessed massive movement of people from towns and villages to cities in contrast to the pre-colonial era where the pattern was rural-rural. It was reported that between 1970 and 1980, the number of Nigerians living in the urban areas was estimated to have increased to 20 percent which was more than 40 percent of the nation's population. In fact, urbanisation was encouraged by the colonial powers in the south-east through establishment of cities for the export and processing of raw materials in Aba, Owerri, Port Harcourt and Enugu.

During this era, European nations came not only to Nigeria but to America with the aim of exploiting, brooding and increasing their wealth thereby encouraging urbanisation. Colonialism was also characterised by slave trade; hence due to the exploitative motive of the colonial masters, external migration (emigration) with the motive of human trafficking began. However, recently, the causes of urbanisation in Nigeria are chiefly due to increase in population growth rate that has been attributed to high fertility rate and declining mortality. The high rate of rural-urban migration in recent years has also been attributed to increased population density in the rural areas.

2.1.3 Post-Colonial Era of Migration in Nigeria

This is a period after the colonial era. The pattern of migration internally was also rural-urban due to the rapid industrialisation going on in the urban areas and emigration for human trafficking was also dominant only that during this era, slave trade was abolished but was modified to human trafficking through coercion and deception. Human trafficking is the transportation, recruitment, transfer, receipt or harbouring of people through fraud, force or deception with the aim of exploiting them for profit and the victims are children, women and men of all ages. This often involves fraud, force or coercion in order to recruit people as commercial sex workers or forced labourers. Jahnea (2022) posited that in the United States of America, immigrants from Nigeria are the most educated and largest African immigrants. She stressed further that immigrants from Nigeria and other West African migrants in United States came with the motive of economic pursuit and social mobility since early independence. She also attributed the migratory pattern and high rate of immigration receipt from Nigeria to pursuit of individual ambitions of migrants.

2.1.4 Post-Independence Era of Migration in Nigeria

This era was after Nigeria gained independence from its colonial masters. The pattern of migration internally still remains rural-urban migration since we are yet to achieve the urban transition were the internal migration trend will be urban-rural. The pattern of international migration remains a deficit with high emigration taking the form of brain drain of the highly skilled economically active population in pursuance of greener pastures. Studies revealed some of the major factors behind high emigration out of Nigeria; they include wealth prospects, job opportunities, safety and security, unemployment, better conditions of service, higher standards of living and low salaries, to mention a few.

2.2 Determinants of Migration in Nigeria

Nigeria is currently experiencing low physician to population ratio due to rapid emigration of our medical personnel in search of greener pastures abroad. Majority of Nigerian physicians showed intentions towards emigrating abroad due to high insecurity, inadequate diagnostic facilities and poor remuneration. The trend poses a danger to the health sector through foreseeable deficit of physicians in the future. Government should provide a secured working environment for medical personnel, improve on the funding of the health sector through upward review of remuneration of medical personnel, retaining physicians and providing adequate diagnostic infrastructures (Cosmas *et al.*, 2022).

Population growth rate, migrants' remittances and unemployment are major determinants of emigration from Nigeria to other countries. In a country with high population, this movement will go a long way in reducing pressure on the labour market. Migrants' remittances may have a high effect in alleviating poverty within households. Migrants' remittances to Nigeria has surpassed both net official development assistance inflows and foreign direct investment making emigration one of the major sources of foreign earnings to Nigeria. Nigerians will continue to migrate out of the country so long as the leading causes of such movements are not addressed which evolve around socio-economic and political development. Nigerian government should create more jobs and enabling environment for businesses to thrive and encourage skilled labour abroad to return home in order to contribute towards its national development (Samuel & Nahanga 2014).

In recent years, emigration of Nigerian medical doctors have been on increase with no concrete efforts towards mitigating and managing the negative effects on the health sector which is already weak. Out of 244 sampled resident doctors, about 57.4 percent have the intention of migrating out of the country and 34.8 percent have already made attempts towards emigrating. The major factors that have informed their intentions are good salary, better living and working conditions and opportunity for advancing their career in the destination countries (Adebusola & Oluwaseun 2022). The United Kingdom was found to be the topmost preferred destination. Keeping family ties was the main factor deterring them from emigrating at present. Multi-sectoral collaboration and strategic approaches is required in the health sector towards addressing doctors emigration in Nigeria.

It should not be limited to the sector alone, other economic and social aspects affecting the living conditions of medical doctors need to be addressed towards affecting their well-being. This is because the momentum and high

population growth rate in Nigeria can be a panacea for economic growth and development if well harnessed (Akinyemi & Isiugo 2014). Remittances, income differentials and economic size have been main factors behind emigration of high skilled labour in Nigeria. High population and income differentials are factors behind the emigration of low skilled labour in the country. Emigration of high skilled labour have helped in magnifying wages and employment of both low and high skilled workers left in the country. Emigration of low skilled workers has both wage and employment effect with employment being more sensitive. The wage response to emigration of each group is a pointer that emigration of high skilled labour widens income gap.

An employment driven economy needs to be pursued in order to minimise emigration of highly skilled workers and create more jobs for low skilled workers. Remittances should be a source of investment for the country rather funding emigration and that adverse effect of inflation need to be mitigated by ensuring workers are paid wages adjusted to inflation (Ebenezer, 2021). The welfare effect of household migration has the tendency of increasing the probability of future completion of education; both secondary and post-secondary. Education is a very important panacea towards sustainable development both at the micro and macro levels. Emigration can be as a result of desire in improving and increasing one's education attainment as it is evident with most emigration of Nigerian youths in pursuance of higher education abroad. Other demographic factors such as language, sex and marital status are other selectivities that have the tendency of influencing and determining migration trends and patterns. Improving on our living conditions, strengthening our environmental and political conditions will go a long way in reducing emigration rate in Nigeria (Biniam *et al.*, 2022).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed extensive review of scholarly articles as methodology. Meaning and definition of concepts relating to forced migration in Nigeria, causes and consequences were accessed 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 section of the paper.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Most developing countries have not yet achieved the mobility transition due to the high rate of rural-urban migration leading to over-congestion and slums in the urban areas. This has led to urbanisation in most African cities such as Lagos in Nigeria. This is for the internal migration. For the international migration, the country has suffered brain drain due to emigration of skilled

labour personnel as it is witnessed in the health sector. Migration policies need to be tailored towards promoting even development in order to reduce urbanisation. Policies need to be scaled towards reducing brain drain in developing countries such as Nigeria.

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