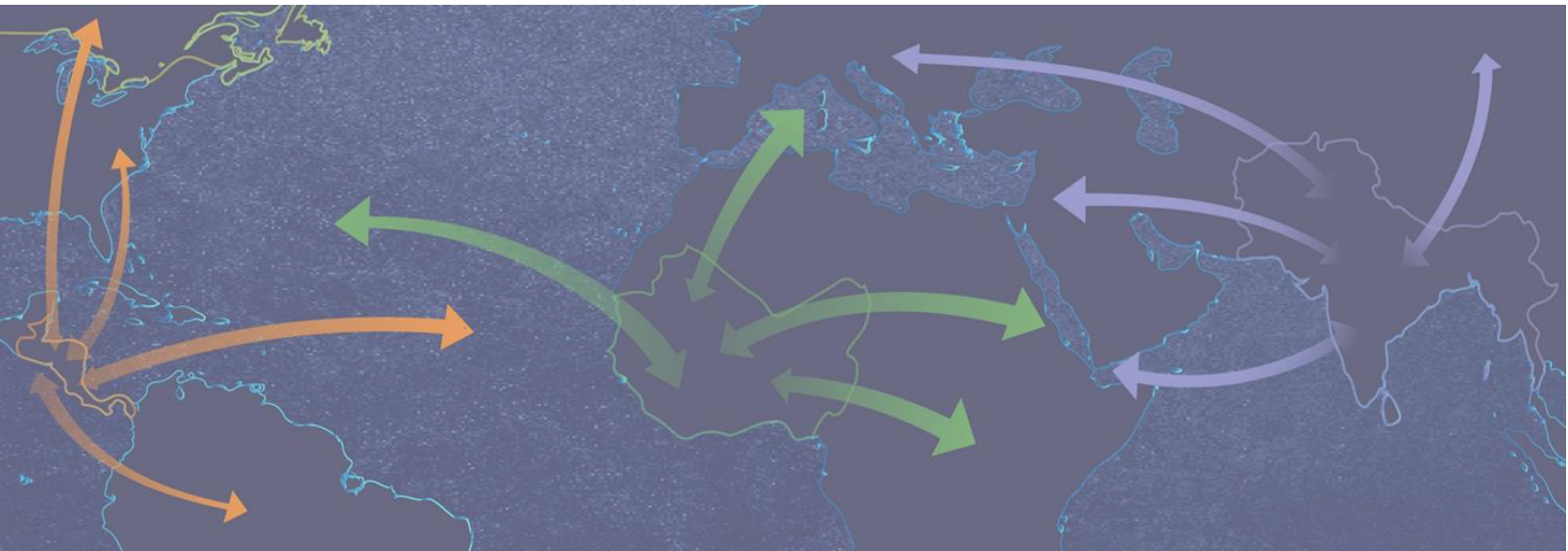


MEMO

Complex Migration Flows and Multiple Drivers in Comparative Perspective



Background country report on Nigeria within the migration system of West Africa

The MEMO research partnership is led by:



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The MEMO Research Project

MEMO is a **multidisciplinary project** to develop a socio-ecological system framework that integrates drivers (main contextual factors) and individual determinants of migration; its primary objectives are:

To map the links between internal, intra-regional and intercontinental migration along complex population dynamics and migration systems;

- To describe and interpret the interplay among migration drivers (environmental conditions, demographic and health factors, economic development dynamics, socio-political issues), accounting for cultural and emotional processes that can shape individual decisions to migrate;
- To provide evidence to inform policy and support an efficient and rights-based governance of international migration.

Differences and analogies of migration drivers and determinants are comparatively established across (and within) the following regional migration systems:

- **The Americas** – focusing on migration flows from the northern countries of Central America (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador) to Mexico and further north to the USA and Canada.
- **West Africa** – focusing on Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Ivory Coast and their inter-related flows to each other to neighbouring countries in West Africa and towards Europe and Canada.
- **South Asia** – focusing on Nepal and Bangladesh, internal and cross border flows within South Asia, as well as to Malaysia and Canada. The migration system and population dynamics are described and modelled to capture the plurality of (multi-directional) population flows.

MEMO will contribute innovative analytical tools to support a rights-based governance of migration and related drivers.

Research partner organizations



Background country report on Nigeria within the migration system of West Africa

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Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction 3

2.0 Migration dynamics 5

 2.1 Causes of international migration of Nigerians..... 6

 2.2 Consequences of international migration of Nigerians..... 9

3.0 Internal migration 13

4.0 Intra-regional migration..... 15

5.0 Inter-regional migration 20

6.0 Migration decision-making 23

7.0 Discussion and setting a research agenda 24

References..... 27

1.0 Introduction

Migration has important historical and contemporary dimensions in the broader context of human relations. Migration is both complex and dynamic, requiring continuous examinations of its *causes*, *currents* and *structures* that generate new processes, patterns, dynamics and consequences in human societies. *Causes* can be unbundled in the drivers; *currents* can be exemplified by the massive increase in migration from poor countries to developed countries, especially Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union (Akanle and Amori, 2024); while *structures* are more deep-seated societal forces serving as the complex background for the rising migration to rich countries (Akanle, 2023a; 2023b; 2023c). Moreover, *causes* are push factors within international migration systems (Akanle, 2023d), including in the context of the MEMO project. *Currents* represent migration flows and directions in the facilitations of migration journeys as migrants move thousands of kilometres along migration corridors. *Structures* play significant roles in shaping migration decision-making processes and actual movements. Within the context of the MEMO project, structures are issues of political systems and political participation, gender inequality, governance (leadership and corruption), rule of law, respect for human rights, economic opportunities, migration governance and management, and culture, norms, and traditions. All are important contextual factors for understanding the migration of Nigerians.

Against this background, Nigeria has definitive migration footprints across West Africa and the world – a phenomenon that predates colonialism. Nigeria is one of the 16 countries that make up West Africa. According to Itumo and colleagues (2018), several factors influence migration in West Africa. Nigeria's population size and growth rates are indicative of a country that is growing *astronomically*. In 1963 (IOM, 2016), there were 56 million people living in the country; in 2022, according to World Bank data, the population of Nigeria stood at 218,541,212.¹ Hence, based on the most recent data from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Nigeria's population is estimated at 224 million in 2023.² Nigeria serves as a significant country of origin for both domestic and international migrations, a key destination in West Africa, and a country of transit (IOM, 2018). The biggest country by population in Africa, it is also a primary West African destination (Akanle and Adesina, 2017a; Popoola, Oladehinde and Fatusin, 2017).

Migrants from Nigeria are primarily youths and young skilled adults at working-age. An increasing number of women are migrating internationally, either accompanied by their spouses or alone, in search of better life-chances abroad (Fayehun et al, 2023; Akanle et al., 2021; Akanle and Adewusi, 2020; Ikwuyatum, 2016, Adeola and Oluyemi, 2012, Akanle, 2011; NPC, 2010). The current gender reality, in the context of international migration of Nigerians, is unprecedented (Akanle and Ogundele, 2024). Before the current waves and flows of Nigerian migrants abroad, migrations were predominantly male-dominated, as women were often left behind in Nigeria while the men moved to provide for the children and other family members. Currently, international migration of Nigerians is not so gender biased as more women are now migrating abroad to improve the quality of life for themselves and their family members, with many even leaving spouses behind or pulling their spouses along to escape poverty and underdevelopment. This is particularly evident among educated and middle-class women who can afford to migrate and have the exposure and skills to move internationally (Liu, 2024; Akanle, 2023a).

While women of different marital statuses move internationally for similar reasons as men, female migrants from Nigeria are key players in households' and the nation's survival (Akanle, 2023a). Their roles at household and societal levels include: sending remittances to left-behind spouses, children, and other social and kinship networks; contributing new skill sets; actively participating in social and economic decision-making processes; and aiding in the transfer of technology and investment back into the country. Some female migrants also become involved in charity work in Nigeria as a way of *giving back to the country* and helping the needy in the poverty-stricken country (Bolaji, 2022).

Return migrants also play significant roles in Nigeria's migration processes. From pre-colonial times to the present, Nigeria's history and migration patterns have been extremely dynamic, shifting with changes in the global and national political economies. These include, among others,

¹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=NG> (Accessed 29/11/2023)

² <https://population.un.org/dataportal/data/indicators/49/locations/566/start/1990/end/2023/table/pivotbylocation> (Accessed 29/11/2023)

growing disparities in resource distribution, socioeconomic potentials, and the distribution of the population between urban and rural areas, and regional and local socioeconomic development. However, Nigeria's migration patterns have been impacted most by the rise of capitalism; increasing adoption of the internet and other technological innovations; globalization; institutionalization of liberal democracy; and governance issues in Nigeria (Akanle, 2023a; Bolaji, 2022; Itumo et al., 2018). Although the country has great socioeconomic potential, this is not effectively managed and optimized, keeping it underdeveloped and thereby leading to massive emigration of Nigerians seeking better life chances abroad.

Regarding spatial patterns, characteristics of the actors, and mechanisms involved, migration in Nigeria is quite dynamic. Flows into and out of Nigeria have changed significantly across space and time, but they are better characterized as complex (Ikwuyatum, 2016). A lot of Nigerians hold strategic migration conversations across settings; they desire to migrate and actually migrate in droves across the West African Region (WAR), within the framework of South–South Migration, and intercontinentally, as well as within the framework of South-North Migration (Liu, 2024). These two frameworks are vital for comprehending Nigerians' spiking migration existentialities. Significant numbers of Nigerians are increasingly mobile internationally for many reasons discussed in the next section. This report provides contextual socio-ecological, economic, and other relevant analyses and narratives of nuances, drivers, and outcomes of regional and intercontinental migrations of Nigerians in ways that contribute to the understanding of global migration drivers and complex determinants.

The current migration flows from Nigeria are related to demographic pressure. For instance, Nigeria is a very populous country. According to Worldometer (2024) data, its population was 227,341,395 as of 28 February 2024. Nigeria has the highest population of youths globally, with a median age of 18.1, and not less than 70 per cent of the population under the age of 30 (World Bank, 2021b). These are young, vibrant, ambitious, creative, innovative, and sometimes, desperate groups of people constantly seeking avenues to achieve their life goals. With rising poverty and unemployment, Nigerian youth (within the context of demographic youth bulge) now believe the only lifeline to exit poverty and unemployment is to emigrate. The recent migration wave is peculiar as Nigerians are becoming more substantially mobile due to the current mismatch among demographic pressures, occasioned by the youth bulge as well as poverty, unemployment, and socioeconomic/resource potentials. These drivers are discussed in more detail in this report.

This report is organised in six sections, including the introduction. The next section looks at migration dynamics and both its causes and consequences. This is followed by sections on internal, intra-regional, and inter-regional migration. The report then turns to migration decision-making and concludes with a discussion and research agenda.

2.0. Migration dynamics

This section provides an overview of migration flows, followed by detailed subsections on the causes of migration. This approach is adopted for clarity and to capture the peculiar migration realities of Nigeria. Data and analysis are provided under the internal, intra-regional, and inter-regional flows analyses below. To enhance the understanding of migration flows and dynamics within the framework of the MEMO project, it is important to identify the contextual causes and consequences of Nigerians' migration.

2.1. Causes of international migration

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa; its population of 200 million represents roughly 50 per cent of the West African population. It is within this sociodemographic characteristic that Nigeria's migrations can be best understood. Despite also being the largest economy in Africa, Nigerians' unmet needs remain substantial. There are existential livelihood challenges in Nigeria that drive international emigration (Akanle, 2023d). Unfortunately, lack of job opportunities and other services have not shown significant signs of improvement (ibid.; EU and IOM, 2009). Hence, international migration is driven by economic, political, social, environmental, and cultural factors. These five categories of causes are discussed below.

Economic factors include unemployment, poverty, and an unfavourable foreign exchange situation. According to World Bank data, while Nigeria's economy experienced broad-based and sustained growth between 2000 and 2014 at over seven per cent annually, growth has since declined while GDP per capita has fallen, economic fundamentals have flattened, and inflation reached 25.8 per cent in August 2023 (World Bank, 2023). The economic outlook is less than encouraging and this can be seen in the high rate of youth unemployment. Nigeria currently has significant youth unemployment. Young people are willing and qualified to search for work but cannot find jobs. Even for those who are willing to engage in informal sector economic practices, the collapsed infrastructure prevalent in the country frustrates them. A share of the young population prefers to be engaged in the informal sector because formal employment is very scarce and poorly paid in most instances. The informal sector thus becomes the only alternative and buffer zone for the youngest people. According to the KPMG Global Economy Outlook Report (2023), unemployment rose from 37.7 per cent in 2022 to 40.6 per cent in 2023 due to mismatch in available job opportunities and youths qualified and willing to work, as a result of poor socioeconomic systems and government ineptitude. The economic growth rate is very slow compared to population growth, with approximately four million youths entering the labour market each year (NBS, 2023b). This imbalance is due to problematic social and economic conditions.

Poverty is a major economic cause of migration from Nigeria. Many Nigerians moving out the country are either escaping poverty or preventing the fall into poverty due to volatile economic conditions. According to the World Poverty Clock, in 2023 there were no less than 71 million people living in extreme poverty in Nigeria (Ubanagu, 2023). In a related fashion, National Bureau of Statistics data indicate 133 million Nigerians as poor when multidimensional measures of poverty are used. These measures include low literacy levels, malnutrition, insufficient access to

safe drinking water, poor sanitation, lack of access to clean energy, lack of basic modern assets (including mobile phones, computers, motorbikes), and underdevelopment-induced hopelessness (Maclean and Peltier, 2023; Okunade and Awosusi, 2023; Ogwo, 2023; Akanle, 2023g). Thus, there is a high propensity to migrate to perceived safer and more hopeful conditions abroad.

There is also the issue of the unfavourable foreign exchange rate and its relationship to migration in Nigeria. The Nigerian naira is very weak compared to many global currencies such as the US dollar, Canadian dollar, pound sterling, and euro. For example, on 28 February 2024, the US dollar was worth 1,630.66 Nairas, the Canadian dollar was 1,201.09 Nairas, the pound sterling was 2,064.18 nairas, and the euro was 1,766.83 nairas. In terms of global competitiveness, the naira is of little or no value and continues to depreciate consistently and lose value against globally competitive currencies. Thus, for Nigerians, there is a propensity for real migration actions towards global economic epicenters abroad to earn competitive currencies. This is particularly important because even after migrating abroad, when the migrants send remittances, even small amounts in foreign currencies become a huge amount when converted to nairas. Thus, the types of jobs migrants do abroad do not matter as once they have earnings in a foreign currency, they can be rich quickly in the Nigerian context. The desire to earn foreign currencies is thus a major cause of migration among Nigerians.

Another major driver of Nigerian migration is the political setting, that is, a sense of insecurity because of such factors as terrorism, banditry, armed robbery, kidnapping and other violent crimes. An objective assessment of the security situation in Nigeria today is that no one and nowhere is safe, as anyone, at any time, can be robbed, killed, or kidnapped without any hope of rescue until ransom is paid. Even among those who have the economic ability to stay in the country fear for their lives and properties. This backdrop of political uncertainties continues to push Nigerians and their loved ones abroad in search of security. Unfortunately, the situation is deteriorating. According to Afolabi (2022), the insecurity and terrorism index in Nigeria rose from 6.95 in 2011 to 8.31 in 2019. Another major element of insecurity in Nigeria is the displacement of farming and pastoral communities, especially in northern Nigeria.

Social issues, misgovernance, corruption, a poor political system, and uncompetitive educational system are also significant issues in spurring migration. Misgovernance is entrenched in Nigeria. The political system is lacking in transparency and accountability. Even though Nigeria is a democratic country, electioneering is heavily monetized and susceptible to rigging (Maclean and Peltier, 2020; Akanle, 2023g; 2023h; 2023i). For example, primary elections and political parties' internal processes are heavily monetized. Vote-buying and electoral violence are common during elections – a situation further exacerbated by widespread poverty and youth unemployment. This continually throws up incompetent rulers, corrupt office-holders, and a compromised political system that lacks the capacity to meet the security and other needs of the citizens, consequently forcing Nigerians abroad (Okunade and Awosusi, 2023; Akanle, 2023g; 2023h; 2023i).

Nigeria's lacking educational system is also a factor as certificates and diplomas from Nigerian

educational institutions are not highly rated in the country or abroad. This is no thanks to incessant strikes by labour unions on campuses, poor funding, demotivated lecturers, uninterested learners, poor infrastructure, and poor learning environments. These have given rise to 'educational tourism' with Nigerians migrating abroad to acquire foreign qualifications to be able to compete in the global economy (Ogwo, 2023; Akanle, 2023h) but also to stay abroad as a route to permanent emigration.

An inadequate healthcare system is another reality and social factor driving migration. Many Nigerians migrate abroad for access to a better health system whenever the need arises. Nigeria's healthcare system suffers from a shortage of sufficiently qualified medical personnel and many health centres are not staffed by doctors. Most of the qualified doctors in the country have migrated abroad in search of good pay and better working conditions, leaving behind a system where the pay is very poor, the government doesn't care about working conditions, and healthcare infrastructures have collapsed. While a substantial number of medical personnel have emigrated from Nigeria – mostly to the EU, US, UK, Australia, Canada, and the Middle East – more are expected to follow (Adejoro and Ajayi, 2024; Opanuga, 2024). For example, according to Onah and colleagues (2022), in 2017, nine out of ten Nigerian doctors and medical personnel were seeking work opportunities abroad; similarly, Adebayo and Akinyemi (2021) found that 57.4 per cent of resident doctors in a tertiary hospital in southwest Nigeria intend to emigrate and 34.8 per cent of them have actually made various attempts to do so.

Concern over the emigration of Nigerian doctors has become so acute that the government is now instituting policies to recruit retired medical officials to fill vacancies created by the exodus of medical personnel (Ojurongbe, 2023; Adejoro, 2023). This massive outflow of medical personnel, and Nigerians in general, is known as *Japa*, popular slang meaning widespread, desperate, and urgent exodus; it can also be translated as "to run away from Nigeria and move abroad quickly." The wave of Nigerians migrating for health purposes has also come to be known as 'health tourism', common among the elite class who can afford to travel abroad to seek healthcare for all manners of ailments.

Climate change is the main environmental cause of Nigerian migration and mostly involves regional migration across West Africa as drought, land conflicts, and increasingly unpredictable weather conditions force pastoralists and farmers to move in search of arable land and pastures (Omobowale et al., 2019). Unfortunately, most farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria still do not engage in climate smart agriculture as they continue to depend on historical and unsustainable farming and agricultural practices that are based on unreliable cultural and traditional climate forecasts within Indigenous knowledge systems. This often makes agricultural practices less profitable and more frustrating and predisposes farming and pastoralist populations to continuous migration, particularly regional migration across western African territories.

The desire for foreign citizenship and emergence of a culture of migration known as 'the bandwagon effect' or copycat syndrome are elements of cultural factors as drivers of Nigerians' international migration. Many Nigerians aspire to, and actually do, migrate abroad to obtain foreign

nationalities for themselves, their families, and future generations so they can relinquish the Nigerian nationality, which they negatively construct as being globally uncompetitive and as an identity burden (Akanle, 2023g; 2023h). Preferred foreign nationalities include Canadian, American, British, Australian, and German or other European nationalities. The desire to acquire a different nationality for future generations is termed ‘intergenerational life-chances security and enhancement (or because of my children’s future phenomenon’ (Akanle, 2023h). Many Nigerians believe the only way to secure their future and the future of their children, including generations yet unborn, is to migrate abroad and acquire foreign citizenship for themselves and their families. Thus, desire to for foreign citizenship and nationality is a major cause of migration among Nigerians.

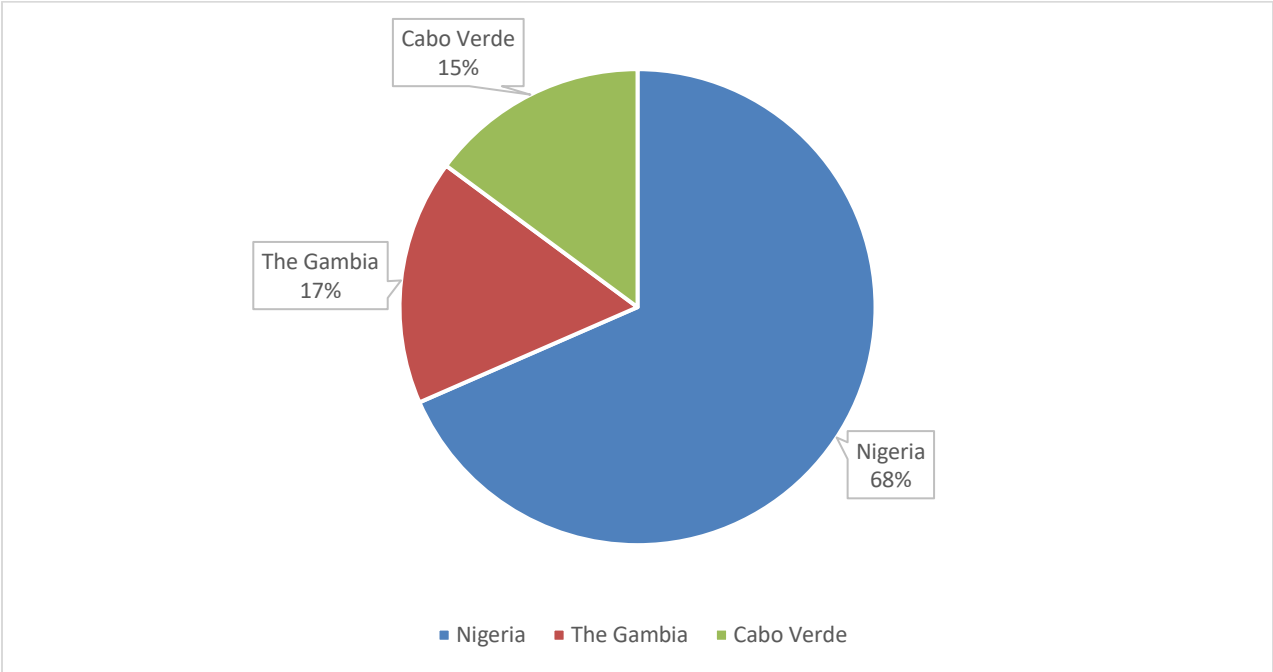
2.2. Consequences of international migration

The consequences of Nigerians’ large-scale emigration are complex and dynamic. From a positive perspective, it is possible to consider Nigerian migration within the framework of *international migration as a transformation agenda* in the face of excruciating poverty, unemployment, and misgovernance – among other factors. Many Nigerians think that migration will at least bring hope for a better future, and this is good for their social well-being and mental health outcomes.

Migration provides opportunities for competent Nigerians to move abroad and contribute to the economies of their host countries and, directly and indirectly, to the development of their country of origin in both the short and long term.

Moreover, remittances are significant lifelines for many households in Nigeria. Even the national economy largely depends on remittances from Nigerians abroad as a major source of foreign exchange. At the macro/state level, as the country confronts the challenge of scarcity of foreign exchange due to dwindling income from crude oil – the major resource on which Nigeria depends for national income – a decline in foreign direct investments (FDIs), a growing deficit, and poor GDP, remittances from Nigerian migrants are increasingly the country’s main sources of foreign exchange earnings. In West Africa, Nigeria receives the highest amount of remittances from international migrants because the country has a substantial diaspora.

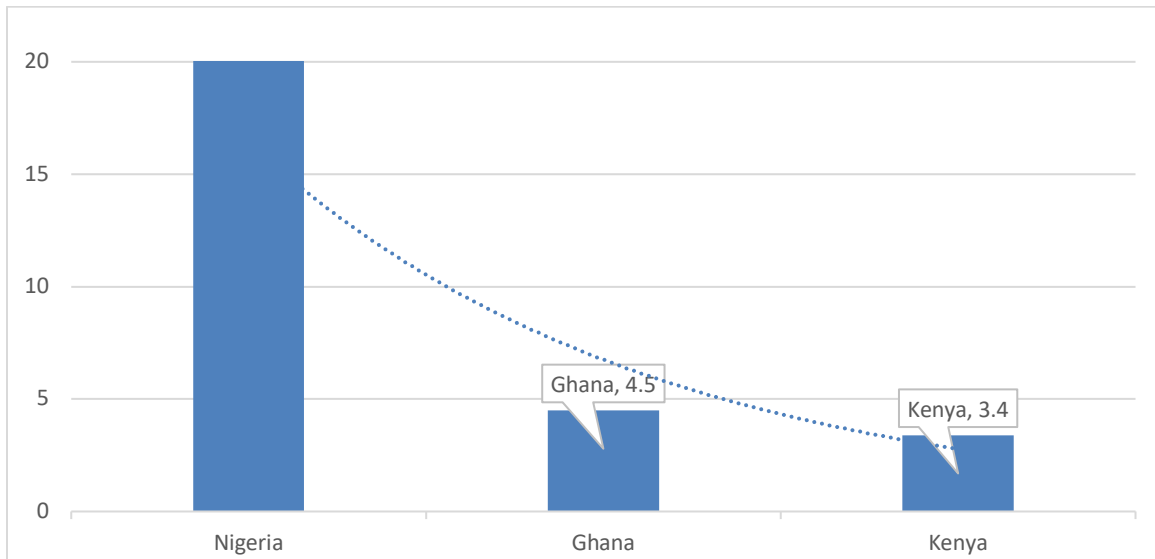
Figure 1: Three highest remittance-receiving countries in Sub-Saharan Africa by percentage



Source: Data from the World Bank, 2024. Chart elaborated by the author.

Based on World Bank (2021a) data, in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria is the highest recipient of remittances, accounting for 68 per cent of remittances in the region. This is followed by The Gambia (17 per cent) and Cabo Verde (15 per cent).

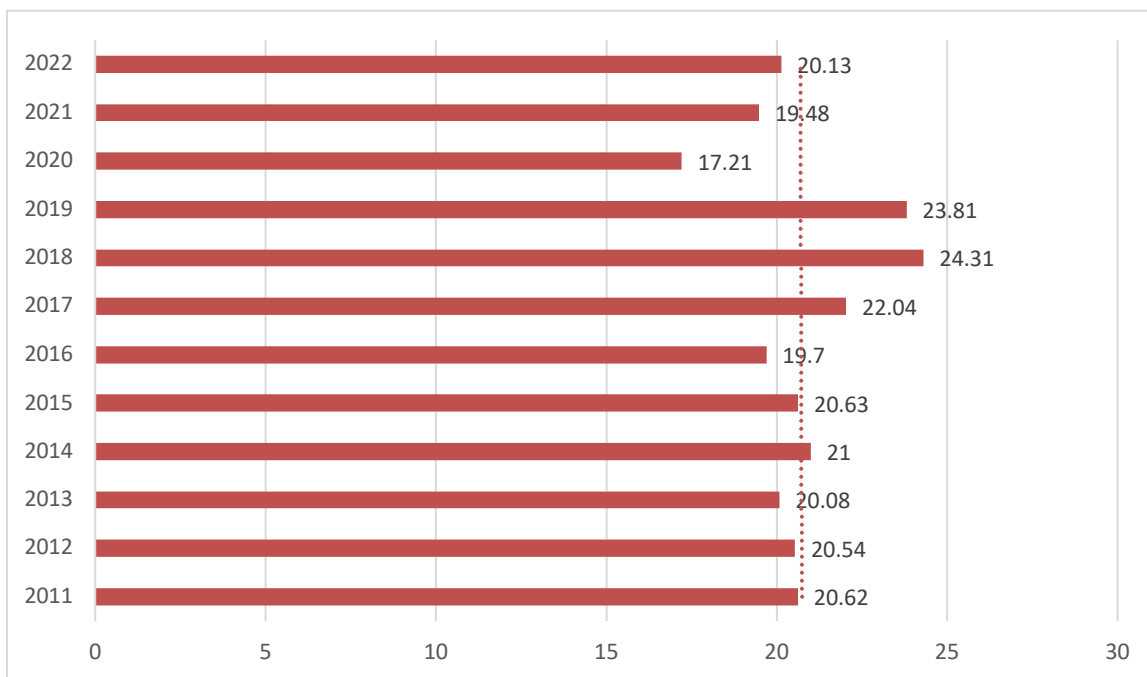
Figure 2: Three highest remittance-receiving countries in Sub-Saharan Africa by amount received (in billions of US\$)



Source: Data from Statistics, 2024, Benson, 2022. Chart elaborated by the author.

Remittances from Nigerians abroad are around \$20.13 billion (Akanle, 2023d; Benson, 2022). Remittances to Nigeria were distantly followed by Ghana (\$4.5 billion) and Kenya (\$3.4 billion).

Figure 3: Value of remittance inflows to Nigeria from 2011 to 2022 (in billion/US dollars)



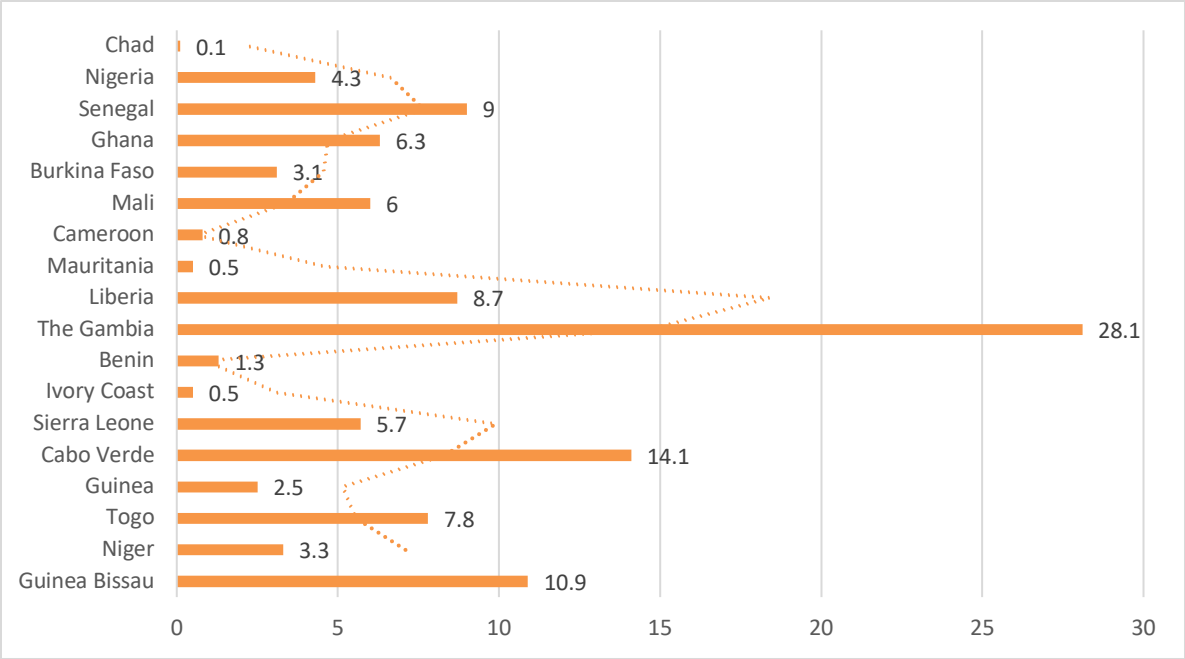
Source: Data from *Statista*, 2024³. Elaborated by the author

Remittance inflows to Nigeria peaked in 2018 at 24.31 billion US dollars followed by 23.81 in

³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1012368/remittance-inflows-to-nigeria/>. Accessed 29/02/2024.

2019. The lowest inflow was in 2020 due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic, which affected economies of destination countries of migrants and remittances inflow to the country (Akanle, Otomi and Nwanagu 2021). Remittance inflows, however, are already recovering and in 2022 rose to 20.13 billion US dollars.

Figure 4: Inflows of Remittances as % of GDP in West Africa by most recent year, 2022



Source: Data from The World Bank, 2024.⁴ Elaborated by the author.

The Gambia has the highest percentage of remittances to GDP (28.1), followed by Cabo Verde (14.1) and Guinea Bissau (10.9). Remittances as a percentage of Nigeria’s GDP are 4.3. Many Nigerians use remittances to supplement their households’ livelihood supports, depending on these monies for food, to start new businesses, finance education, pay for health services, enhance their social image, and improve their life chances (Akanle and Adesina, 2017b). Thus, at both the macro and micro levels, Nigeria benefits from international migration. Knowledge transfer is another consequence of the international migration of Nigerians. There is knowledge transfer from Nigerians abroad as they remit information of international migration and opportunities abroad in manners that they sustain chain migration (Akanle and Olutayo, 2009).

However, while remittances are a substantial contribution to the country’s socio-economic development, they cannot sufficiently compensate for the massive brain drain associated with the exodus of professionals and skilled workers. Brain drain generates capacity shortages in Nigeria due to the huge unmitigated emigration of the youth population who do not serve the country but were trained with national resources through heavily subsidized education. Many Nigerians who are supposed to contribute to the country’s development have been pulled abroad. While there is

⁴ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=ZG>. Accessed 28/02/2024.

the logic of brain gain through remittances and knowledge transfer, brain drain remains a major negative impact of migration from Nigeria. Its repercussions are heavily evident across service and economic sectors, including medicine, technology, engineering, and education. According to Akingbolu (2023), based on data from Phillips Consulting, 52 per cent of professionals in Nigeria intend to migrate abroad; indeed, the Human Capital Flight and Brain Drain index for Nigeria is very high within the period 2007-2023, at the average value of 7.35 index points (on a scale of 10) with a low of 6.5 index points in 2021 (Global Economy, 2023).

An important negative impact of migration that has not been documented in the past is the weak sense of patriotism and nationhood in Nigeria, as many people consider the country a liability and would rather change their nationality to another abroad at the slightest opportunity within the migration ecosystem. Many Nigerians remain poorly committed to the country on account of their migration orientations and intentions driven by economic, social, and other factors.

3.0. Internal migration

Internal migration here is defined as the movements of people within Nigeria, either temporarily or permanently (see also Oyeniya, 2013). Cross-border migration refers to the movement of individuals outside of the country. (Ezeabasili and Nwanolue, 2021; IOM, 2015). Having a population of more than 200 million and a projected growth rate of 2.4 per cent in 2023 (World Population Prospect, 2022), the population of urban areas is expected to bound up without any natalist interventions. World Bank (2021) projections for 2023 see a 3.9 per cent increase in migration, particularly internal movement related to urban expansion.

More than 10 per cent of Nigerians are lifetime migrants or reside in states other than their places of origin according to National Population Commission (2010) data. Hence, two per cent of Nigerians born and living in the country are returnees and 23 per cent of them have a migration experience during the previous decade; 60 per cent of internal migrants live in cities and this has significant impacts on socio-economic infrastructures. Based on statistics on the distribution of households by immigrant status, immigrants make up at least two-fifths of the total population in seven out of 36 states: Abia, 48.7 per cent; Ekiti, 48.1 per cent; Delta, 45.3 per cent; Imo, 45.1 per cent; Anambra, 44.4 per cent; Bayelsa, 43.2 per cent; and Lagos, 40.1 per cent (IOM, 2016).

Rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-urban, and urban-rural are the main patterns of internal migration in Nigeria.

Rural-urban migration represents the highest form of internal migration in the country. According to IOM (2015), approximately 60 per cent of the Nigerian population is categorized as rural, with a substantial percentage of migrants across rural areas.

Rural-rural migration by farmers, seasonal workers, and ranchers from resource-poor to resource-rich rural areas, particularly from the savannah zones to the fertile coastal areas, persists. During periods of low agricultural activity, seasonal migration from the arid savannah zones in the north

to the coast continues to be a significant form of rural-rural movement in Nigeria.

The rapid population expansion, the pressure on arable land, the land tenure system, diminishing productivity leading to poverty in rural areas, pervasive unemployment rates, and inaccessibility to social services, land, and capital are all factors pushing people to move from rural to urban regions (IOM, 2015). Due to the observed and projected rapid accentuation of rural-urban migration in Nigeria, even more people will soon be living in urban areas than in rural regions.

The economic and political activities of the 1960s made Nigeria officially a destination state and a source nation-state (Tabi and Etim, 2020). Internal migratory flows were influenced by economic expansion and recession, displacement, and ethnic conflicts from the time of independence in 1960 through the oil boom of the 1970s (Oyeniyi, 2013). Many traders and migrant workers from the rural areas came to the cities in search of employment or other means of sustenance. People who move from rural to urban areas are typically young literate men and, to a greater extent, women looking for jobs and educational opportunities in towns. Men's literacy in this context shows a young population can stay and attend education in rural areas. However, these towns do not have the capacity to create sufficient jobs or provide adequate social amenities to host the growing population (IOM, 2015). Congestion, subpar housing, and expanding slums are all symptoms of insufficient infrastructure and poor planning of Nigerian cities and towns.

Lagos megacity is a case in point. As the country's former capital – and with a major airport, seaport, educational facility, and economic free zone – Lagos houses an excessive amount of development projects. As a result, it has attracted significant migration flows that persist to this day. Currently, at least 10 per cent of the total Nigerian population lives there. Yet Lagos is among the smallest states in Nigeria in terms of spatial dimension. Lagos's large population and migration influx are leading to a massive infrastructure deficit and the development of (mega) slums (Akanle and Adejare, 2017).

The vast natural resource base (specifically petroleum) and administrative attraction generated by the rapid transformation of Abuja (The Federal Capital Territory, FCT) into a federal capital, are responsible for the increasing significance of the south-south and north-central zones as the centres of migration circulation in Nigeria (IOM, 2016). The southeastern regions are where most internal migrants originate. However, due to Boko Haram's terrorist activities and the implementation of Sharia law, Calisto (2020) revealed that there has recently been an uptick in migration from the north. Internal migrants comprise over 40 per cent of the population in seven states. Nigerians who move from one state to another frequently experience prejudice because locals treat them as outsiders and typically exclude them from political involvement, which raises the possibility of social unrest (ibid.).

4.0. Intra-regional migration

Intra-regional migration is defined here as migration within the West African sub-region and within the broader framework of South-South Migration. A lot of movements happen within the region that are not sufficiently captured in the literature. Intra-regional movements are spurred by a range of causes, including the political, economic, social, and ecological factors cited earlier. According to Adepoju (2001), West Africa has a long history of substantial intra-regional migration (UNDESA 2020), and a lot of migration in Western Africa continues today.

Since pre-colonial times, intra-regional movements affecting Nigeria have been quite dynamic (Ikwuyatum, 2016), and migration across borders has always been on the rise. The primary reason for pre-colonial migration in or to West Africa was to find new livable and productive land. By imposing various economic and political structures, enforcing tax regimes, and setting territorial limits, colonialism hindered the cause and structure of migration in the region. This phenomenon led to massive population shifts, the emergence of patriarchy, and transnational and seasonal migration that eventually gained legitimacy (Ezeabasili and Nwanolue, 2021; 2018; Akanle and Omobowale, 2015). After independence in the late 1960s and early 1970s, cross-border movements took place between Nigeria and other neighbouring countries, including Ghana, Togo, Gambia, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Cote d'Ivoire (Attoh and Ishola, 2021; Ezeabasili and Nwanolue, 2021; Popoola et al., 2017; Adeola and Oluyemi, 2012; Yaro, 2008).

Commodity exchanges between individuals from various regions of West Africa led to the development of well-known Trans-Saharan trade routes. Inter-marriages, trading of slaves, and military ties were all forms of cohesion among West African inhabitants that went beyond commodity trade (Yaro, 2008). Since those involved believed the West African sub-region to be a borderless space where both individuals and goods could move around without restrictions, most movements during the pre-colonial period were not considered as migration across borders (Adepoju, 2005; Teye, 2022).

The emergence of colonialism shattered traditional migration patterns. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, European traders forcefully enslaved and transported about 15 million people from central and west Africa to the Caribbean, Europe, and North America (Teye, 2022; De Haas, 2019). De Haas (2019) notes that in the 19th century, colonial governments imposed borders and restrictions on movement that reduced intra-regional mobilities. The different colonial administrations' economic strategies, as well as the creation of state borders, have dramatically altered migration patterns to and from West Africa. Road and railway construction facilitated massive, male-dominated, cross-border, and seasonal labour movements across the sub-regions, skirting colonial economic and recruitment procedures. These included forced and contract labour legislations and agreements as well as encouraging labour migration from countries in the north savannah region to southern countries in the region, where mining and plantation operations were situated (Teye, 2022). By the early 1960s, most West African nations had attained independence. However, the patterns of migration that were established during

colonialism persisted (Yaro, 2008).

Early in the 1970s, West African leaders realized that intra-regional cooperation would constitute a crucial step in the sub-region's connection to the global economy. As a result, they came collectively to sign a treaty in Lagos on 28 May 1975 establishing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which encompasses a variety of economic activities (Adepoju, 2001). ECOWAS was established to promote regional economic growth, enable labour migration within regions, and promote the integration of the region as a whole to the global economy. A major component of its strategy is the *free movement of people* to allow the ECOWAS region to be seen as borderless in terms of how people should be able to move from one country to another. Hence, ECOWAS comprises Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo and particularly intends to promote intra-regional mobility by significantly reducing travel restrictions (Ikwuyatum, 2013). In 1979, ECOWAS enacted the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence, and Establishment with the assumption that regional partnership around labour mobility may enhance the transfer of assets, knowledge, and skills (Teye et al., 2015). This was an essential step in the establishment of a sub-region without borders.

In the wake of the 1973 oil crisis, Nigeria became the destination for a growing number of West African migrants (Teye et al.,... 2015; Yaro, 2008). Nigeria welcomed immigrants, especially unskilled labourers, from Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Cameroon, Verde, and Cabo Verde, in the construction and service sectors. By the end of the 1970s, one million Ghanaians were thought to have moved to Nigeria (Teye et al., 2015). Hence, economic crises led to mass relocation of previous migrants in Côte d'Ivoire, as well as a large-scale eviction of migrants, especially in Ghana (1969) and Nigeria (1983 and 1985) (Yaro, 2008). According to Adepoju (2006), the main migration typologies in modern West Africa include return migration, transit migration, cross-border movements, seasonal migration, and permanent migration (see also Ikwuyatum, 2013; Adepoju, 2003).

Nigeria's mishandling of the oil boom led to a rapid decline in working and living conditions, as well as a devaluation of the country's currency, with the consequent wage compression and rise in inflation. As the economic crisis worsened in 1985, about 200,000 immigrants from the ECOWAS member countries Ghana, Chad, Togo, and Mali – were expelled (Adepoju, 2001). The second phase of the ECOWAS Protocol on Right of Residence was ratified and entered into force in 1986 at the same time as Nigeria's Structural Adjustment Program, SAP (Adepoju, 2001). In 1983-1985, the Nigerian government repealed Articles 4 and 27 of the Protocol in order to expel between 900,000 and 1.3 million illegal aliens, primarily Ghanaians (Adepoju 2001; 2006). Despite difficulties associated with intra-regional migration, ECOWAS made significant progress in establishing an unrestricted community, allowing people to travel freely within the region without a visa, and now a common international passport.

Beginning in the 2020s, migrant flows are becoming more female-centric even though men still dominate migration processes (Akanle, 2024; 2022b; Teye, 2022). It is, however, noteworthy that

female migrants are increasingly participating in informal and formal paid labour markets as a means of survival to boost inadequate family earnings, and are a significant aspect of current migration trends in West Africa. According to Adepaju (2005), the majority of commercial migrants are women, a trend that supports intra-regional trade. Also, West Africa is currently witnessing the phenomenon of mixed migration (Mixed Migration Centre, 2021). This term describes cross-border migration of people, which includes refugees escaping conflict and oppression, trafficking victims, and those searching for greater stability and opportunities. Extensive poverty and human deprivation, deteriorating social conditions, insecurity, climate change, and the high unemployment rate in West Africa are the main causes of movements. These circumstances encourage skilled and unskilled people, men and women, in legal and illegal circumstances to migrate (Boateng, 2012; Adepaju, 2001).

There is evidence to show that a sizable share of migrants frequently remains within the region, alongside high rates of intra-regional mobility (Teye 2022). According to estimates, 84 per cent of migrant flows in West Africa are in the direction of another nation in the region, with countries in the region currently hosting around 7.5 million migrants from other West African nations. This makes intra-regional migration the dominant pattern (Adaawen 2017; Teye, et al. 2015). This notable feature of contemporary movement within the sub-region implies that many West African states now serve as transit immigration and emigration hubs (IOM, 2009; 2015; 2016; Akanle and Olutayo, 2009, Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity, 2010; Akanle, 2013; Adeola and Oluyemi, 2012; Obi-Ani et al., 2020; Akanle et al., 2022; Akanle, 2023a; 2023b; 2023c).

Intra-regional migration in West Africa is thus definitive and substantial; it must be understood for the many issues facing the migration ecosystems, especially relative to Nigeria. As can be seen in Table 1 below, West Africa is a region of migrants mostly from within the region.

Table 1: Top 10 Destination Countries of Migrants in Western Africa: Absolute Numbers and Share of Migrants in mid-2020.

S/N	Countries	Absolute number of migrants	Migrants as percentage of the population
1	Cote D' Ivoire	2,564,857	9.7
2	Nigeria	1,308,568	0.6
3	Burkina Faso	723,989	3.5
4	Mali	485,829	2.4
5	Ghana	476,412	1.5
6	Benin	394,276	3.3
7	Niger	348,056	1.4
8	Togo	279,936	3.4
9	Senegal	279,929	1.6
10	The Gambia	215,659	8.9

Source: Data from United Nation, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020). *International Migration Stock, 2020*.

MEMO

According to UNDESA (2020) data, there were as many as 7.4 million migrants in West Africa as of mid-2020, of which 90 per cent was from the sub-region. This is significant and noteworthy. This high representation from the sub-region is driven by a shared common history, the prevalent common socioeconomic, political, and existential realities, and the ECOWAS *free movement of people* protocol. As show in Table 1, the 10 most common destination countries in the region are Code D' Ivoire, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Ghana, Benin Republic, Niger Republic, Togo, Senegal, and The Gambia. As a population share, Cote D' Ivoire has the highest number of migrants (9.7 per cent), followed by The Gambia (8.9 per cent), Burkina Faso (3.5 per cent), and Togo (3.4 per cent). It is noteworthy that the sharp drop in migrants' percentage of total population in Nigeria to 0.6 is due to its large and burgeoning population (more than 200 million people). Nonetheless, as can be seen in Table 1, Nigeria still has a significantly large population of migrants from West Africa in absolute terms.

It is also important to note that UNDESA's figure of 7.6 million migrants in West Africa is likely a significant underestimation. This is because Western Africa typically has high rates of seasonal and temporary migration. Hence, a lot of West Africans move across informal routes and without any form of documents like ECOWAS passports so there is no formal record or database.

Table 2: Top 10 Migration Corridors in Western Africa, 2020

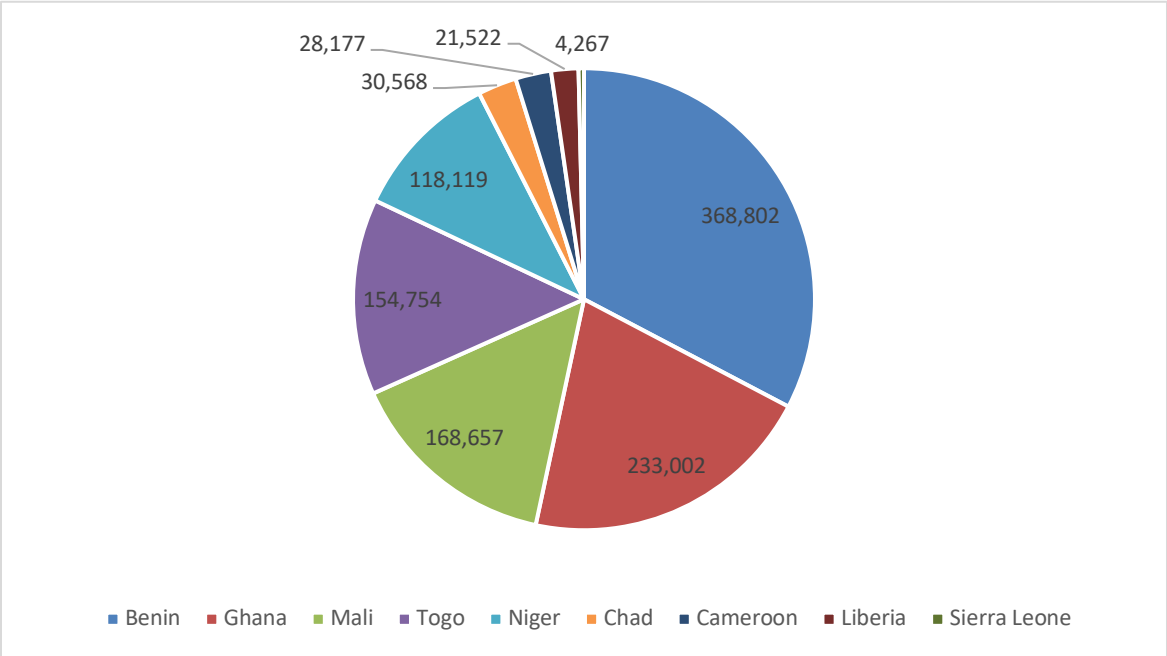
S/N	Countries of origin	Absolute number of migrants	Countries of destination
1	Burkina Faso >	1, 376, 350	>Cote D'Ivoire
2	Cote d'Ivoire >	562, 117	>Burkina Faso
3	Mali >	522, 146	>Cote d'Ivoire
4	Benin >	377, 169	>Nigeria
5	Ghana >	238, 284	>Nigeria
6	Cote d'Ivoire >	195,271	>Mali
7	Mali >	172, 481	>Nigeria
8	Guinea >	167, 516	>Cote d'Ivoire
9	Togo >	158, 262	>Nigeria
10	Senegal >	154, 739	>Gambia

Source: Data from United Nation, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020). *International Migration Stock, 2020*).

As illustrated by the arrows in the Table 2 above, Nigeria is a major migration corridor in West Africa, featuring prominently in four out of 10 major migration corridors in the region. The 10 major migration corridors are: 1. Burkina Faso – Cote D' Ivoire 2. Cote D' Ivoire - Burkina Faso 3. Mali - Burkina Faso 4. Benin Republic – Nigeria 5. Ghana – Nigeria 6. Cote D' Ivoire – Mali 7. Mali – Nigeria 8. Guinea - Cote D' Ivoire 9. Togo – Nigeria 10. Senegal – The Gambia. The drivers of movements across these migration corridors are contiguity; identical cultures and traditions, including

language, colonial, and precolonial histories; economic opportunities; and existing kinship and social networks.

Figure 5: Immigrants according to countries of origin (2019)



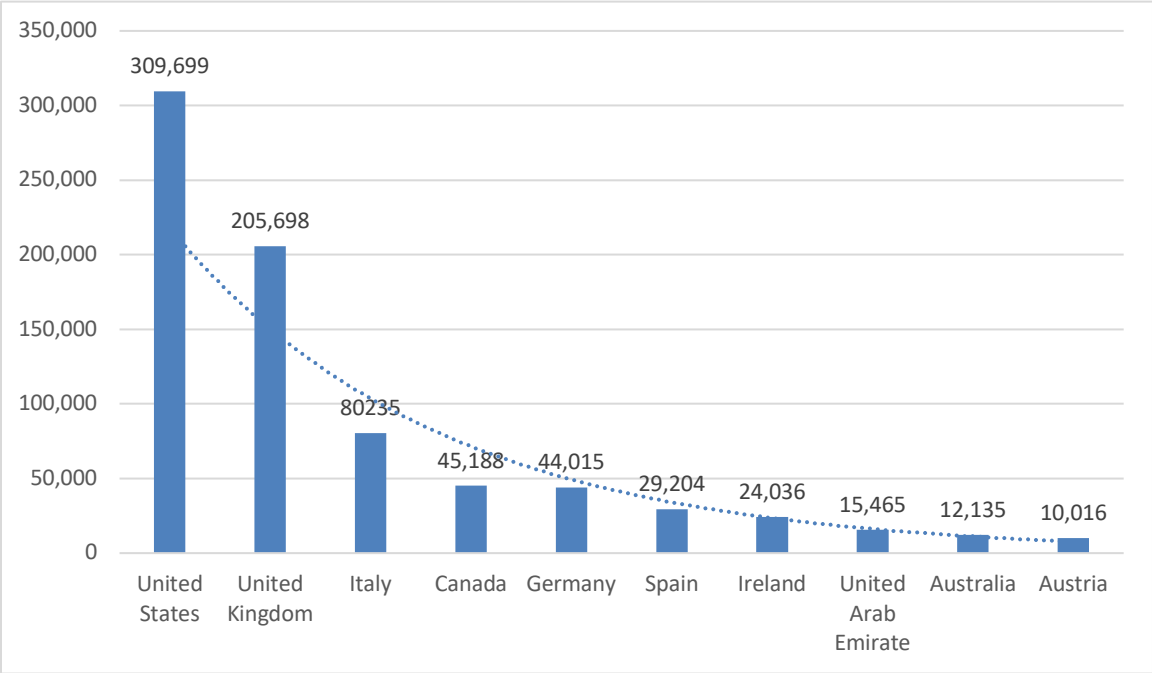
Source: Data from Country Economy (2020). Elaborated by the author.

In order of predominance, Figure 5 above indicates that most of the regional migrants in Nigeria are from Benin Republic, Ghana, Mali, Togo, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. These countries are mostly considered its neighbours and share common borders, histories, cultures, traditions, and strong kinship and social networks as well economic relations with Nigeria. These shared characteristics render Nigeria as their preferred country of destination.

5.0. Inter-regional migration

While more than five out of every eight migrants from West Africa remain in the region, a growing number of people, particularly Nigerians, are also migrating out of West Africa to other parts of the world (Akanle, 2023a; 2023e; UNDESA, 2020; Popoola et al., 2017). Drivers of these inter-regional/inter-continental migrations were provided in the sub-sections on *causes* and *consequences* of migration.

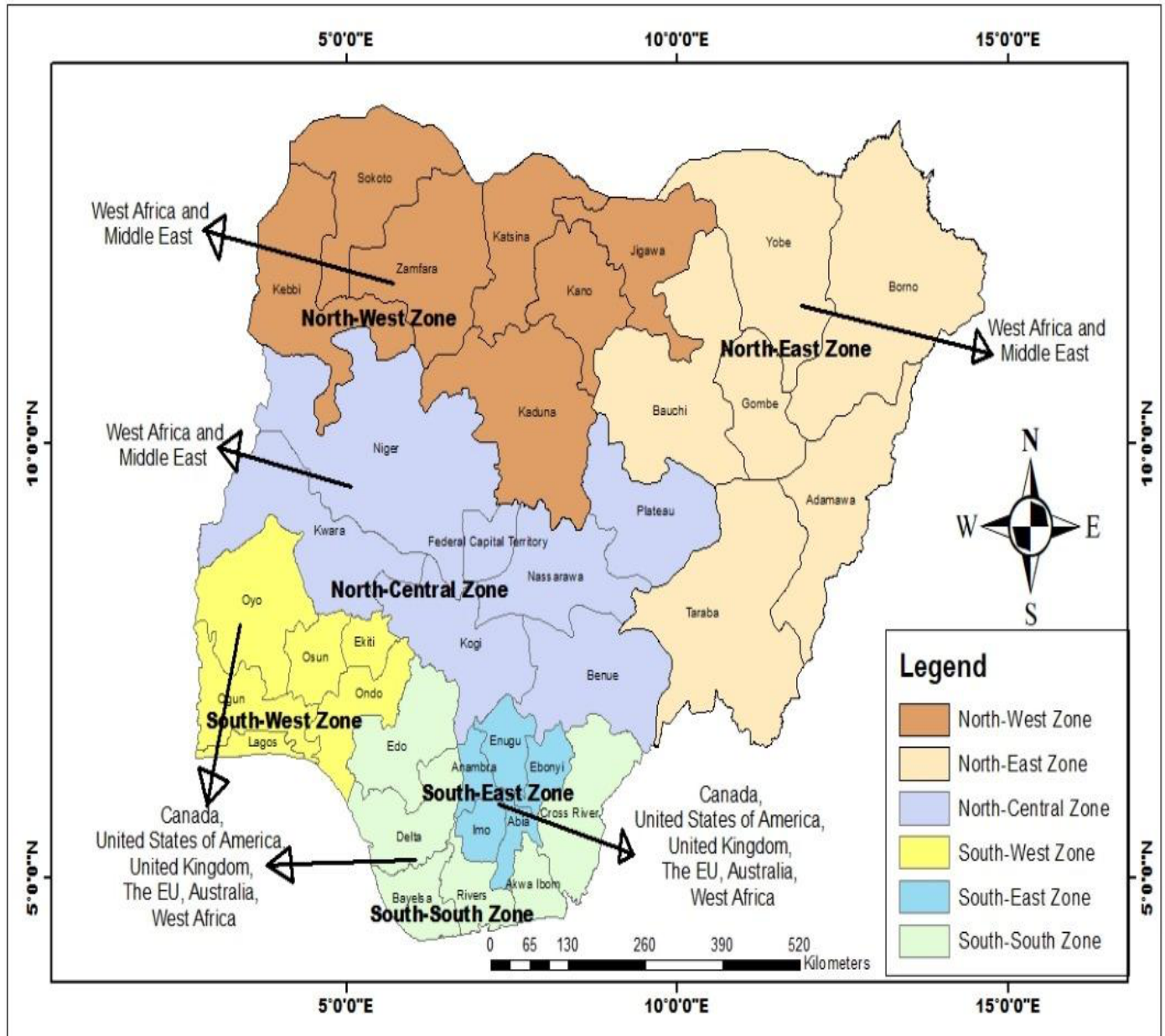
Figure 6: Migrants from Nigeria according to destination country as at 2019



Source: Data from Country Economy, 2020 elaborated by the author.

The most common destination countries among inter-regional migrants from Nigeria are the US, the UK, the EU, Canada, Australia, and United Arab Emirates. Common realities in Nigeria as of 2023 show Canada as an increasingly popular destination among Nigerian migrants because of more welcoming immigration policies, economic opportunities, and increasingly existing social and kinship networks (Akanle, 2023a; 2023b; 2023e). Some Nigerians are also migrating to the Middle East (Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity, 2010). From 2013 onwards, almost two-thirds of emigrants (61.4 per cent) have lived in more developed countries like the US, Canada, the UK, the EU, and Australia.

Figure 7: Map of Nigeria showing the six geopolitical zones, their states and their migration flows



Source: The author.

Figure 7 above shows the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, the states in each geopolitical zone, and their common inter-regional migration destinations abroad. There are identical destinations among the southern regions and states, while there are identical destinations among the northern region and states.

Citing African Development Bank figures, the News Agency of Nigeria reported that Nigeria ranks as fourth among African countries having huge numbers of people in the diaspora (NAN, 2023), with Nigeria's intercontinental diaspora tripling in 20 years from 320,000 people in 2000 to approximately 1,000,000 in 2020. An estimated 58 per cent of Nigerians living abroad are outside Africa (ibid.). According to the International Organization for Migration (2020), as of 2020 about 1.3 million Nigerians have emigrated. This number is, however, considered low because many Nigerian migrants are undocumented and irregular. Moreover, even official statistics on documented migrations are incomplete.

The number of Nigerians leaving the country has significantly increased due to the many causes; indeed, the mass emigration of Nigerians is better described as an *exodus* (Akanle, 2023c; Akanle, et al. 2022). Generally, the patterns, processes, and trajectories of migration among Nigerians suggests that net migration rate has remained largely negative.

Current social, economic, political, security, and climate realities in Nigeria clearly suggest migration from Nigeria to other continents will only increase in both the short and long term. The *Japa syndrome* (a contemporary sociocultural slang/construction commonly used to describe urgent and mass emigration from Nigeria) demonstrates this clearly. Against the backdrops of causes and consequences of intercontinental migrations, the current trend and pattern will continue to rise due to acute survival challenges in Nigeria, globalization, increased internet penetrations, migration normativeness and legitimizations, accentuations of virtual interactions among migrants and their networks across continents, and the many developed countries shifting immigration policies to target skilled workers and young people from poor countries, especially Nigerians.

While intercontinental migration holds huge social and economic prospects for Nigeria, it could become a double-edged sword that must be well understood and managed (Akanle, 2018). More sustainable socioeconomic and other gains from intercontinental migrations will be better realized once the complex migration flows and the multiplicity of migration drivers across different settings and times are well understood through strong comparative analysis, as purposed by the MEMO Project.

6.0. Migration decision-making

In Nigeria, decisions about migration are frequently the result of a complex interaction among migrants, significant others, personal traits, home dynamics, socio-demographics, and socio-economic factors (Akanle, 2018; 2011; Akanle and Adesina, 2017a). For instance, before migration, kinship, social networks, age, gender, finances, and spiritual forces from both Nigeria and destination countries are involved. The degree of income disparities between Nigeria as country of origin and the destination countries is also a consideration, while the level and nature of risk factors at home and abroad, the associated implications, and prospects abroad are important too. One option for Nigerian households is to support the migration project of a household member in order to receive remittances to either lessen risks or shocks to the household but also sustain chain migration (World Bank, 2021; Achenbach, 2017; Akanle and Adesina, 2017a; Baláž et al., 2016; Osawe, 2015). Increasing international migration of Nigerians is also in one sense a coping and survival mechanism for migrants, their families, and their social networks in the face of Nigeria's persistent underdevelopment.

Migration decisions are often assumed to be highly rational and based on the most accurate outcomes of careful cost-benefit analyses (Akanle, 2023b). In reality, decisions about migration are frequently influenced by specific personal needs, stress, urgency, uncertainty, and a lack of knowledge about available employment opportunities. Individuals who make decisions about migration in Nigeria consider their own needs and desires, as well as the potential consequences of their choices on their present, future, families, and social networks. Decisions about migration are made based on the level of knowledge and the length of the decision-making process. To make decisions and take actions regarding international migration, there are five critical and strategic factors involved: awareness of opportunities abroad; frustration with situations at home; availability of financial resources needed to migrate; determination to improve life-chances; and, existing support systems and necessary networks at home countries and countries of destination/receiving countries (Akanle and Adesina, 2017a; Akanle, 2023b).

Making decisions about migration is not easy. Even though Nigerians are now migrating in droves within the context of the *Japa* phenomenon, many are very cautious and do extensive research and consultations before they move. Still there are those who migrate irrationally and take perilous journeys. The cautious approach – including extensive research, and consultations (including on social media) – taken by many Nigerians when planning to migrate or during migration stem from awareness that they must make informed decisions and choices. Migration can be very expensive and fundamentally consequential socially, economically, and psychologically, among other impacts.

Nigerians use a variety of information, support networks, and prospects when deciding on processes, period/time, and likely migration destinations. It is certain that Nigerians consider their knowledge of broader socio-economic, cultural, and political factors when making migration decisions. The outcomes of their cost-benefit analyses against this contextual background

ultimately affects their values, priorities, and eventual decisions concerning migration. This very complex and inclusive decision-making process is continual throughout their migration cycle, beginning from the first migration to the potential return, if it occurs (World Bank, 2021; Achenbach, 2017; Akanle and Adesina, 2017a, Baláž et al., 2016; Osawe, 2015).

7.0. Discussion and setting a research agenda

Based on this analysis, findings suggest there have been shifting patterns, trends, and processes in Nigerians' migration experiences. During pre-colonialism and colonialism, many young women and men were captured and taken away. This emigration pattern was forced, as people were taken involuntarily and transported out of Nigeria. Emigration trends changed from forced to voluntary when Nigeria gained independence in 1960. People began to emigrate voluntarily for education, work, family and related concerns, especially as economic challenges, the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), and political instability of the 1980s pushed people to seek permanent settlement overseas. This continued into the 21st century as emigration increased. Currently, insecurity, unemployment (and general economic woes), infrastructural collapse, and political instability, among other factors, continue to push Nigerians to emigrate significantly to developed countries (Akanle and Adesina, 2017b) and even to some less-developed ones. Thus the associated issues must be continuously interrogated to be sustainably understood.

This analysis deliberately adopts scholarly and practical approaches to addressing the issue of migration in Nigeria. It sets the background and establishes contexts for very strategic, objective, and comparative analyses in the western African regions. Nigeria offers opportunities for research on migration in Africa and poor countries to obtain rich and robust evidence for understanding the multiplicities and complexities of issues driving migration across frontiers. Nigeria has strong migration-propelling forces, factors, and complexities that must be factored into migration studies and narratives. Migration trajectories and elements of Nigeria are large windows to the understanding of migration issues and efficient migration governance. Nigeria continues to experience massive emigration and complexities of social, economic, climate, political, cultural, and environmental factors that continue to drive intra- and inter-regional migrations in the country. The migration of Nigerians is dynamic, complex, and varies across socio-demographics, socioeconomics, and socio-ecologies – and these must be deeply researched and sufficiently understood.

The best way to sufficiently understand important migration trajectories and footprints of Nigerians is through comparative, in-depth studies, and analyses. Interestingly, the migration of Nigerians needed to be better examined and understood as the most populous country in Africa, among the most migratory people on the continent, and the highest remittance-receiving country on the continent. By looking at Nigeria in the context of migration, experts can learn, unlearn, and relearn important migration issues from the experiences and scenarios of Nigerians. There is, thus, a need to better investigate Nigerians' what, why, and how in the migration ecosystem for sustainable understanding of migrations, both current and potential future patterns.

Comprehending the complex flows and dynamics of Nigeria's migration is very important because Nigeria has among the largest stocks of migrants in the world – and the largest in Africa. However, current empirical data in comparative perspectives on Nigeria's migration ecosystem are not available and this is why the current MEMO project is very timely, important, and particularly relevant to Nigeria. This report broadly outlined the deterioration of the social and economic conditions and failure of governance and security apparatuses to address this as the backdrop for the social, economic, political, livelihood, and political factors that continue, to date, impacting Nigerians' decisions to leave their country.

Nigeria offers the scenarios and contexts that are strategic to understanding drivers of migration and how they align with the demographic, economic, political, environmental, social, cultural, institutional, and systemic drivers in other similar and relevant countries. Nigeria provides the opportunities to empirically explore these factors and what influences them to project the migration trends, patterns, and consequences in the short, medium, and long term.

There is, thus, the need to carefully and thoroughly study and understand intra-regional and inter-continental migration realities, nuances, complexities, and narratives as well as the sociocultural and economic worldviews of migration among Nigerians. Methodologically and analytically, migrants and their kin must be studied to understand deep-seated migration orientations, decision-making processes, and eventual migration actions effectively. Migration systems and geopolitics within the context of multi-dimensionality of human movements and migration ecosystems of Nigerians must also be examined and narrated comparatively. This is the only way there can be improved, sustainable, and enhanced governance of international migration to the benefit of Nigeria, Africa, and the world at large.

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