Irregular Migration in Nigeria: An Appraisal of the Causes and Social Consequences on the Source Region

Adedokun, O.A.

Corresponding author-adedokun.olufemi1764@fcesoyo.edu.ng +234 8051695485

**Department of Geography
Federal College of Education (Special)
Oyo, Nigeria.**

Abstract

Irregular migration involves the movement of people across national boundaries have violated the national laws of the destination country. However, the growing scope of irregular migration, particularly, the perilous migration flows of Nigerian citizens into Europe through the Mediterranean Sea and Sahara desert is what has gained popularity. Irregular migration in Nigeria which is not a new phenomenon comes with its attendant consequences on both the origin and destination. This paper, therefore, appraised the social consequences of irregular migration on Nigeria. The paper used secondary data obtained from policy report by International Organization for Migration (IOM), Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS), media reports and relevant publications of scholars in the field of migration. Poverty, apathy, low rating of family without migrants, established social network, social pressure and status labeling are some of the factors identified as drivers of irregular migration. Similarly, the social consequences identified are discrimination, absence of safety and material support upon return, broken family ties and total breakdown of marriages and stigmatization which compromised Nigeria's relationship with those countries and downgraded social and economic status. Based on the findings of this study, the paper suggested among others, the improvement in the nations' economy, support for the returnees must be tailored to connect with their social network, establishment of coordinated action between Nigeria and host nations and between government and society and adoption of Assisted Voluntary Return Scheme in Nigeria.

Keywords: Irregular migration, Social, Consequence, Nigeria.

Introduction

Migration which is the movement of peoples either temporary or permanently from one place to another for various reasons has been in existence for long. It can either be internal or international. Moreover, international migration includes two sets of people, the regular migrants and the irregular migrants. Regular international migration referred to migration that occurs in compliance with the laws of the country of origin, transit and destination. Conversely, Irregular migrants are people who have violated the immigration law of the destination country after crossing national boundaries (International Organization for Migration-IOM, 2011, 2019). That is, the migrants have violated the laws, regulations or international agreement governing the

entry and exit from the state of origin, transit or destinations. However, the increasing trends of Irregular migration, most especially the flow of people into the European continents through the Mediterranean Sea and Sahara desert is most worrisome. Irregular migration (IM) possesses a great challenge because of the undocumented nature of many irregular migrants and the increased risk of survival that these journeys often present (United Nations Organization for Children Emergency Fund-UNICEF, 2017). A report by Social Cohesion Survey (2022) indicates that seven out of 10 Nigerians are willing to relocate to other countries for various reasons. In 2018, United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported an irregular migrants of 144,106 into Europe through the sea, with more than 2275 reported dead or missing and Nigeria is one of the central country of departure (UNHCR, 2018). Statistically, evidence has shown a significant increase in the rate of people dying at sea. For instance, reports for migrants dying at sea in transit from Libya to Italy indicates the occurrence of 1 death for every 38 arrivals in 2017 to an increase of 1 death for every 14 arrivals in 2018 (UNHCR, 2018). Similarly, the number of deaths increased by almost 4 times in 2018 than the previous years for those coming from Morocco to Spain. Further reports by the UNHCR (2018) reveals the perilous experiences and inhuman treatment (such as sexual exploitation, death at sea and on land, financial exploitation) received by migrants in transit. Majority of the international migration from Nigeria still stayed within the continents, however, a significant number of people still migrate to other destination outside the continent (Connor and Gonzalez-Barrera, 2019). The phenomenon called "Irregular Migration" (IM) in Nigeria is on the increase as Nigeria has been classified as one of the top 9 countries with irregular stays in Europe, particularly through the sea (European Migration Networks, 2018). Furthermore, according to the a 2019 data from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2019), the report state that between 2013 and 2016 year period, the number of irregular crossings by Nigerians through the Mediterranean sea route to Italy increased from 2,824 people to 37,554 people. In addition, further figures in the literature on Nigerians especially on the irregular migration route to Europe are quite alarming. For instance, Analu (2008) gave an estimate of 59,000 Nigerians on the irregular migration route to Western Europe. In the same vein, a survey data by IOM in 2016 showed that about 1 million migrants in Libya are from Nigeria. As of 2017, Nigerians are identified as the largest groups entering Italy illegally. Specifically, the records of Nigerian arrivals stood at 36,000 people (Daily Trust Online, Jan 11, 2017). Similarly, Nigerians are recorded to be by far the single largest nationals when compared with West and North Africans in Spain and Italy for the year 2016 and 2017 (Migration Data Portal, 2019).

Also, Nigeria has been ranked as the 5th largest number of migrants irregularly crossing to Europe (National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons NCFRMI, 2017). Furthermore, a recent report indicates that between May 28 to June 10, 2018, 2,225 illegal migrants arrived Italy with Nigerian nationals being one of the top three migrants (IOM, 2018). The gender dimensions of IM shows a mixed result. While majority of the male migrants reportedly paid to be smuggled, most females are victims of human trafficking (Carling, 2006). According to Frontex (2018), and International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2017), majority of the human trafficking and smuggling from Nigeria to Europe are younger girls from Edo, Ogun, Osun, Lagos, Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Cross River, Delta and Akwa Ibom states. A recent report by the Nigeria's National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) through its monitoring programmes reported that over 20,000 Nigerians were trapped in Malian shanties (NAPTIP, 2022).

In Nigeria, several measures such as domestication of national laws on illegal migration, setting up of task force on illegal migration, enhanced border control have been adopted to control this menace. Nevertheless,, the episodes of irregular migration is still on the increase. One of the reasons for this increase is that many migrants have devised more sophisticated means to beat those measures put in place. As a result of the reduction in the rescue ships provided in the Mediterranean Sea by the Italian government, more people have been reported to be moving through Greece and Spain than Italy (UNHCR, 2018). This revelation strongly indicates the desperation of Nigerians to get out of the country by all means even at the detriment of their lives. Furthermore, many organizations and scholars have delved into the risk faced by irregular migrants in their journey to Europe and also at their destination. Some of these risks are physical in form of torture, rape, psychological abuse of women and children while crossing the Mediterranean (IOM, 2019; UNICEF, 2017), exploitation of migrants (De Haas, 2008), risk of communal gangs, bandits, armed nomads who attack and kidnap migrants for their belongings (Asongu & Kodila-Tedika, 2018), sale of migrants (Al Jazeera, You Tube page, Nov 26, 2017) and children at risk of sexual labour exploitation (Menjivar and Perreira, 2019). However, their attempt to look at the social consequences on Nigeria and returnee migrants is receiving passive attention. Hence, it is against this backdrop that this paper appraised the social consequences of irregular migration on Nigeria and returnees with a view to proffer sustainable solution to reduce the trend.

Conceptualizing Irregular Migration

Irregular migrants are people who have violated the immigration law of the destination country after crossing national boundaries (IOM, 2011, 2019). Another study viewed it as a movement occurring on an undocumented fashion and or irregular flows and also include migrants whose status due to expiration of permit may at any point be undocumented (Vaspe, Natale & Pappalardo, 2017). This form of international migration has characteristics of occurring outside the regulatory framework of countries of destination, the migrants having a sole aim of avoiding detection and also being difficult to track. Pennington & Balaram (2013) categorized irregular migration in two broad categories. The first category refers to those entrants who either evade formal migration controls or who present false papers. The second category consists of migrants who were at one time given permission to reside, but have since exceeded the agreed period of residence or breach the terms of their stay. Those under this category include failed asylum seekers, who stayed on in spite of being refused the right to remain; over stayers whose right to reside has expired without renewal; and those who have a restricted right to reside but are violating their conditions, for instance students who have limited opportunity to work falls into this category. In the context of this paper, irregular migration is seen as a desperate emigration of Nigerians into various parts of the world (both the North and South) through unauthorized means following the Nigeria- Niger – Kenya-Morocco- Mediterranean- Europe route.

Causes of Irregular Migration (IM)

A number of intricate causes were identified as the causes of Irregular migration (IM) despite the effort made so far to halt the menace. Few among them are:

Poor Economy: Evidence such as Pennington & Balaram (2013) and Obi (2018) have suggested that Irregular migration (IM) is closely connected to economic conditions, as well as the belief in the power of migration to alleviate poverty and improve social status (Pennington & Balaram,

2013). In the same vein, about 58% of people with lower economic status (in form of employment status and income) show a higher propensity to migrate irregularly in Nigeria (Obi, 2018). Ihue (2022) reported that, 84% of over 3000 respondents surveyed identified the lack of job and poor economic conditions as the most important reason for exploring the options of irregular migration route to Europe.

Perceived Government Apathy and Low Rating of Family Members: Documented evidence such as Olaoluwa (2019) has shown that government apathy, the poor background of people, such as low skilled has also contributed to the menace of IM. Specifically, it was reported that almost 90% of the sampled returnee irregular migrants in a survey in Nigeria had left school before the age of 18 and had pulled out of school before at an early age in order to contribute to upkeep of the home, care for their siblings or for children of their own (Olaoluwa, 2019). This agrees with the trends of rising poverty observed in Nigeria over the years. According to the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 40% of the total population was classified as poor (National Bureau of Statistics-NBS 2020). In addition, there is an ideology associated with some Nigerians that Nigeria is not a suitable place for success with the assumption that you can only prosper in foreign countries. This feeling create an infatuation with other lands, thereby resulting in the attitude of desperation to travel at all cost.

Social Pressure: IM is also fueled by social pressure. Many citizens give up their career, daily activities just because people around them urged them to be more adventurous by migrating to other lands. This urging is due to the perception that those Nigerians living abroad seems to fair better economically. Thus, resulting to IM, the strain impose on a family may predispose some family member to IM. This strains may led to the pressure to move abroad in order to pave the way for the rest of the family members. For instance, parents persistently referring to peers of migrants parents who have moved and made fortune. This repetitive pressure re-enforce IM. Also, the breakdown in an individual social support network as a result of death, breakdown in relationship or abuse and the subsequent lack of alternative support are important drivers of IM (Cherti, Pennington & Grant, 2013).

Inadequate Information on Opportunities at Home and the Hazards Inherent in IM: The inadequate information on the valuable resources available and opportunities for development that is available in Nigeria compound the menace of IM. Similarly, the inadequate understanding about the hazards inherent in IM makes Nigerians vulnerable to and desperate to engage in IM.

Status Labelling: One of the reasons for the increase in IM is associated status. It confers on the left-behind family members. In a bid to enjoy this status, would-be migrants' family and relation usually support them to aid their movement. As a result, there is crave to travel abroad and even dare the risks involve using the IM routes. This social value attached to those who travelled out of the country has also attracted IM (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC, 2011).

Over bloated Information by the Media: Most times, the media painted every person abroad as living happily without any problem. Many Nigerian now dream of being in the land that is portrayed as "Okay in all aspect". This lopsided tail of better life and abundant economic opportunities for all in these countries coupled with the constructed dream of a possibility of life of affluence triggers in Nigerian the desire to travel to these destinations. This facilitated the use of irregular means to travel in order to achieve their long awaited dream. Furthermore,

incomplete information about lifestyles abroad raises expectations and may invariably greatly increase the tendency of migrating, which can sometimes lead to incidences of irregular migration (Obi, 2018).

Global Inequality in Development: The inequality in development between the global North and South (Nigeria) partly explains why people adopt crude/illegal means to move to the global North. It is arguably true that while the global North is technologically advanced and developed, the global South (Nigeria) is still battling with issues of development. Similarly, Nigeria does not have the comparative advantages to adequately compete with these economies. Consequently, these global divisions created as a result of disparities create a desire and envy on the inhabitants of the less developed Nigeria to move to the developed nation.

Perceived Non-functioning of Institutions and Infrastructure: Some Nigerians have relocated from the country due to the perceived factor of non-functioning institutions and outdated infrastructure. Particularly, those without the needed qualification believe that they can combine both work and school in order to acquire certificate that will make them fit into the system over there. Hence, travelers display illegal means to get out their desired destination. The growing hatred with life in Nigeria and what it would offer fuels the apparent increase in IM (Pennington & Balaram, 2013). Similarly, low perceived life satisfaction as reported by irregular migrants from Nigeria in Italy has been found to drive irregular migration (Obi, 2018).

Escape Routes: Some people migrate from Nigeria to escape from some unfavourable practices. Some cultural practices (such as widowhood, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child marriage) have led to migration by all means in order to escape from these unfavourable practices. Cherti., Pennington and Grant, (2013) reported that gender-based violence, including forced marriages and domestic abuse and a lack of alternative support for women fleeing violence –prone areas at home has also been a driver of IM. The above assertion was also supported by Obi (2018) in his research who reveals that those who migrated illegally are motivated by the need to escape from exploitation, domestic violence and police brutality.

Escape from Unfavourable Political Climate: The prevalence of unfavourable political conditions such as poverty, mismanagement, corruption, insecurity, oppression, ethnic rivalry et cetera, is one of the reasons while people engage in irregular migration because of the fear of future, insecurity of their lives and property.

Need to Work to Support Family: working to support both immediate and extended family is an important phenomenon in Nigeria and the expectation that people accept responsibility for their families has led to great pressure. This pressure has compelled people to accept offers to work abroad from strangers or even other family members that connect them with traffickers. The belief of liberating the family from lack and make them smile also encourages irregular migration.

Social Consequences of Irregular Migration

Migrating irregularly to Europe or elsewhere attracts social consequence which has great impacts on the country of origin as well as the returnee migrants. These consequences have been summarised below;

Irregular migration brings about broken family lives and even the total breaking of marriage. This has often led to children left-behind becoming deviant due to the absence of parental care (Ikuomola, 2015, Ikuteyijo, 2020). Irregular migration often leads to returnee migrants living in an irregular situations for years, being inactive and are excluded from the environment (Pennington & Balaram, 2013). Irregular migrants lack safety and material support upon return: As a result of the fact that most migrants had left in order to improve their lifestyle and status in their country, returning without achieving this purpose brings about fear of how to sustain themselves. The probability of emerging tension between stayees and returnees: There might be increase worsening state of socio-economic conditions and or level of violence and persecution on the returnee. This may be caused by unplanned pressure on services and infrastructure upon return (Finch & Cherti, 2011). Furthermore, the irregular migrants faced the threat of being stigmatized upon returning to the country especially those who have been victims of trafficking. Some of them loose friends and face different negative narrations that make them unwanted. Even when they are not trafficked or sexually exploited upon return to the native country, they are still being suspected of being victims of trafficking. Irregular migrants upon return may also face rejection from relatives because of their inability to meet up with expectations from them of changing financial status of the family. Their inability to achieve this expectation makes them to be termed failure. Consequently, irregular migration compromised Nigeria relationship with these countries. The integrity and credibility of Nigeria are damaged overtime.

Conclusion

This paper examined the causes and social consequences of irregular migration on the source region. The causes of irregular migration identified include poor economy, perceived government apathy, low rating of family member, social pressure, status labeling, escape route, need to support family and global inequality in development. Apart from this, destruction of family, stigmatization of returnees, lack of safety and material support upon return are some of the social consequences observed. Therefore, the social consequences of irregular migration are silent but they must be addressed in order to sustainably address the aftermath of irregular migration on the country and the returnee. This can be done by the government providing modernized infrastructure, where people will have access to all the basic necessities of life such as shelter, water, sanitation, energy, public transport and ICT; coupled with an economy that is transformed to create shared growth, descent jobs, and economic opportunities for all.

Recommendations

As a result of the identified causes and social consequences of IM on Nigeria and the returnees, the following recommendations are made:

1. Significant capital should be made available and committed to developing, monitoring and implementing re-integration program for returnee to ensure its success.
2. Government should provide information through various channels such as mass media, school curriculum, community engagement, home visits and informal gathering to deliver safe migration messages to potential irregular migrants on the probability of obtaining a legal residence permit in different host countries.
3. Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) Scheme as being propagated by IOM should be adopted and encouraged in Nigeria. The scheme has with it package upon returning

voluntarily such as bearing the cost of returning, provision of money to commence a business, or access secured accommodation.

References

Asongu, S.A., & Kodila, T. (2018). "This one is 400 Libyan Dinars, This one is 500: Insights from Cognitive Human Capital and Slave Trade, *International Economic Journal*, 32(2).

Carling, J. (2006). Migration, Human Smuglling and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe. *IOM Migration Research Service.* Available at www.iom.int

Connor, P., & Gonzalez-Barrera, A. (2019). Many in Nigeria, Tunisia, Kenya plan to leave the country in the next 5 years. www.peror-ch/20s111z. Accessed April 28, 2019.

Cherti, M., Pennington, J., & Grant, P. (2013). Beyond border: Human trafficking from Nigeria to United Kingdom. www.ippr.org/publications/55/10189/beyondborders-human-trafficking-from-Nigeria-to-the – UK

De Haas, H. (2008). Irregular migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union: An Overview of Recent Trends. IOM Geneva

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2015). National Migration Policy. *International Organization for Migration Mission in Nigeria*

Finch, T., & Cherti, M. (2011). *No Easy Options: Irregular Migrants in the UK, London*:IPPR. www.ippr.org/publication/55/1837/no-easy-options-irregularmigration-in-the –uk

Frontex, (2018). European Border and Coast Guard Agency. *Risk Analysis for 2018* "Illegal migrant in Italy" (2017,August 23). *Daily Trust Online*. Retrieved 23 August, 2017

Ikuomola, A.D. (2015). An explorationof life experiences of left-behind wives in Edo state, Nigeria. *Journal of Conparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology*, 6(1), 289-307

Ikuteyijo, L.O. (2020). Irregular migration as survival strategy: Narratives from Youth in Urban Nigeria; In L. McLean (Ed.) *West African Youth Challenges and Opportunity Pathways* (pp 53-76), Palgrave Macmillan

International Organization for Migration, (IOM, 2011). Glossary on Migration. Geneva. Switzerland: *International Organization for Migration*

International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2017). United Nations Agency Issues

Report on Arrivals of Sexully exploited Migrants; chiefly from Nigeria; www.iom.int/news/un-migration-agency-issues-report-arrivals-sexually-exploited-migrants-chiefly-Nigeria

International Organization for Migration, (IOM, 2018). World Migration Report, IOM Geneva

International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2019). World Migration Report 2018. IOM, Geneva

Italian National Institute of Statistics. (ISTAT, 2019). Population and Households. April, 2019. www.istat.it/en/population-and-households

Menjiver, C., & Perreira, K.M. (2019). Undocumented and unaccompanied:Children of migration in the European Union and the United States. *Journal of Ethics and Migration Studies,* 48(2), 197217

Migration Data Portal. (2019). Irregular migration. www.migrationportal.org. Accessed April 22, 2019.

National Bureau *of Statistics (NBS, 2020). Poverty in Nigeria 2019: Measurement and Estimate.* Executive Summary. 1-27

Obi, C. (2018). Safe Migration, Awareness Campaign in Rural Communities of Nigeria, The Procedure and Impacts. *Ricosmigration Nigeria Project Report*. 1-43

Olaaoluwa, S. (2019). Irregular migration from Nigeria: Causes, Risk and Policy Implications. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 1-62

Pennington, J., & Balaram, B. (2013). Return and Re-integration of Irregular migrants from Nigeria. *Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR)*, 1-64

UNICEF (2017). Harrowing Journeys: Children and Youth on the move across the Mediterranean Sea, at risk of trafficking and exploitation. Available at www.unicef.org/publications/index_100621

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2011). The role of organized crime in the smuggling of migrants from West Africa to the European Union, Venna, UNODC. www.Unodc.org/documents/humantrafficking/migrant-smuggling/report_west_Africa_eu.

United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR, 2018). *Global Report*. UNHCR, Geneva

Vaspe, M., Natale, F & Pappalardo, L. 2017. Data set on the migration and   irregular Migrants in the European Union. *Migration Policy Practice*, 7(2), 26-33