

The Nexus of Decent Work and Emigration Trends in Nigeria

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Introduction

Migration can be defined as the movement of people from their usual place of residence to another area at a particular period of time. According to the United Nations, an international migrant is someone who changes his or her usual country of residence. In 2017, the globe witnessed an international migration stock of 258 million which represents 3.5% of the world's population.¹ The share of international migration in the world's total population makes the concept a very significant one for discourse. There are two major types of migration based on geography. They include internal migration (which includes the movement of people within the same country) and international migration (which involves the movement of people from one country to another). The scope of this study will be international emigration trends in Nigeria and its effects on decent work conditions and sustained economic growth in Nigeria.

With a young growing population of over 190 million, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. According to the United Nations' World Population Prospects in 2017, Nigeria is the world's seventh largest country. Annual population growth rate in Nigeria remains steady at over 2%. This is an interesting case study to examine when it comes to mobility of people leaving the country as the net migration rate is -0.2 migrants per 1000 people.² Therefore, more people leave Nigeria than migrate into the country.

Discussion: Emigration Trends in Nigeria

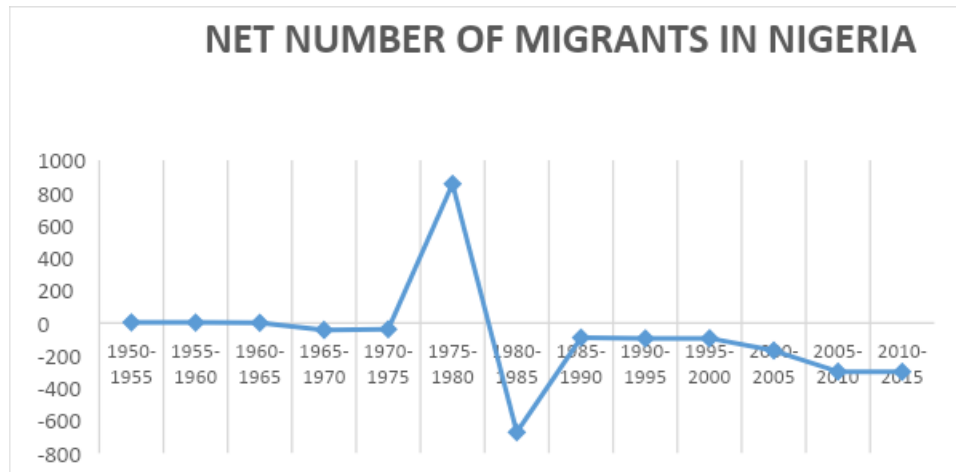
Regarding data on emigration flows in Nigeria, information is recorded in the arrivals and departures records in the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS). However, this source coupled with other sources like the National Population Commission (nPop) and other governmental agencies do not give a rich and accurate description of emigration patterns in Nigeria. This is due to

¹ United Nations 2017. World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision. Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

² United Nations 2017. World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision. Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

undocumented emigration activities which happen frequently in Nigeria, especially within the coastal regions. A visual representation created by the author from the UN World Population Prospects is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Graph of 2017 United Nations World Population Prospects



However, we can still deduce trends in emigration of people from Nigeria to other countries. Using the data from the World Population Prospects 2017, it can be observed from the graph that the net number of migrants has witnessed a negative growth. Between 1970-1975, the number of emigrants in Nigeria was 38,000 more than the number of immigrants. However, a sharp increase in the number of immigrants was witnessed in 1975-1980. This is due to the crude oil boom which allowed many foreign expatriates to come and capitalize on the natural resource. The demand for labor witnessed during this period also encouraged people from neighboring countries especially within West Africa (e.g. Ghana) to migrate into Nigeria.

The trend of an increase of immigrants in the late 1970s was reversed in the early 1980s. The number of migrants leaving the country was 671,000 more than the number of immigrants entering the country. The economy entered a state of recession, food scarcity and debt. This was due to the over reliance on the oil sector, which caused neglect of agricultural production. In addition, the implementation of the structural adjustment policy (SAP) and the “Ghana must go” revolution implemented by the government in power executed as at that time encouraged immigrants to leave. Ever since then, due to economic, educational, and security reasons, the number of emigrants have been more than immigrants in Nigeria, leaving the current net migration rate at -0.2 per 1000 people.

In two decades, the number of Nigerians residing outside the country almost doubled from 0.4% of the Nigerian population (465, 932) in the year 1990 to 0.7% (1,030,322) in 2013.³ A visual representation created by the author from the UN World Population Prospects is shown in Figure 2 below.

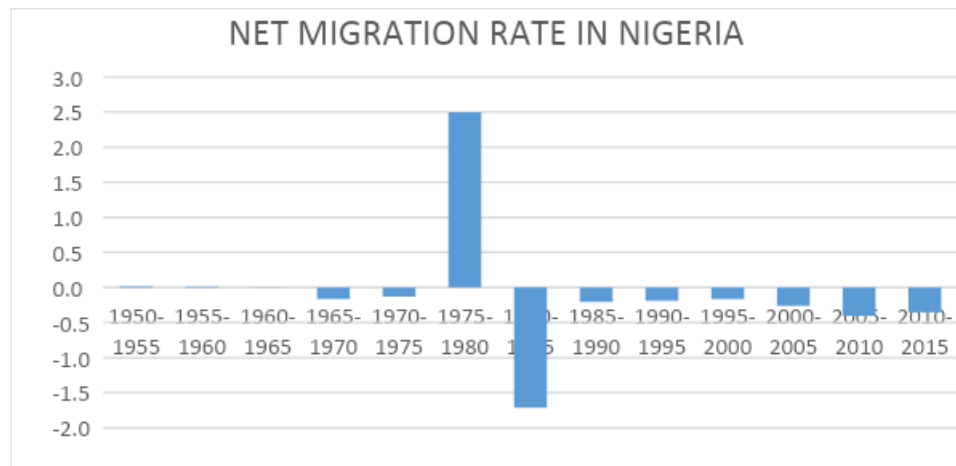


Figure 2: Graph of 2017 United Nations World Population Prospects

28.1 million Africans emigrated from the region in 2010. Nigeria ranks 6th out of the top 10 countries responsible for this emigration flow.⁴ The Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty produced a report in 2007 that the Nigerian immigrants’ most preferred destination countries are Sudan (24% of Nigerian emigrants are found here), United States (14%) and United Kingdom (9%). This shows that the Nigerian immigrants are majorly found within the African region.⁵

Recently, this emigration pattern is changing as two thirds of Nigerian emigrants are now found in developed regions. The 2013 migration profile prepared by UNICEF revealed that the top countries of destination include USA, UK, Cameroon, Italy, and Cote d’Ivoire in that order. The recent trend of emigration to more developed regions signifies that more skilled professionals are leaving the country. The IOM 2014 report states the absence of economic opportunities and decent work conditions in less developed countries as the major reasons why the skilled Nigerians are migrating to developed regions. Looking at involuntary emigration, the number of asylum seekers has increased over time. The number increased from 8,294 in 2006 to 10,148 in 2007 and

³ International Organization for migration (IOM) 2014. Nigeria, Migration Profile. Retrieved from https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mp_nigeria.pdf. 2014. pp.28-35

⁴ World Bank. Migration and Remittances Fact book 2011. World Bank, Washington, D.C. 2012

⁵ Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty (DRC). Global Migrant Origin Database. Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty, March, Version 4. 2007.

further to 15,022 in 2008. The European countries remain the major recipients for asylum seekers from Nigeria. These countries include Italy, Canada, Ireland, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Spain, etc.⁶

Effects of Emigration on Decent Work Conditions in Nigeria

Decent work is a multidimensional concept that consists of job opportunities that are of good quality, provides reasonable income and respects the fundamental human rights of employees in both economic and social spheres. Decent work promotes equality, fairness, and occupational safety. This helps to propel inclusive and sustainable development in society as the ILO reiterates that countries who enforce good practices in decent work developed faster compared to those who do not.⁷ The emigration trends of Nigeria which focus mainly on labor migration explains the fact that decent work conditions are lacking in Nigeria.

The Decent Work Country Programme II (2015-2018) explains that there are several deficits in decent work conditions in Nigeria.⁸ These include limited employability of the workforce due to lack of skills required, obsolete technical and vocational training which do not keep up with modern technological trends, and the slow rate of job creation and growing workforce which increases unemployment rate. This stimulates emigration which in turn has impact on decent work in Nigeria.

As was noted earlier, the number of those emigrating from Nigeria in recent times to developed regions are highly skilled workers. This leads to further worsening of decent work conditions in Nigeria as the human capital left is not sufficient to propel innovation in job creation. The low quality of education in Nigeria limits the employability of graduates. This encourages students to receive education in developed countries.

The number of Nigerian students studying abroad as a percentage of the total tertiary enrolment in the country, has increased over time, from 14.5% in 2003 to 20.7% in 2006.⁹ According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database, the number of Nigerian student migrants (35,131 students) in 2006 almost tripled by the end of 2016(95,731). This increase in the number of student migrants leads to huge brain drain not just in the present, but for future generations. This is because very few immigrants come back to the country of origin to contribute

⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2009 UNHCR Statistical Online Population Database.

⁷ Decent Work. <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>. Accessed 2 July 2019.

⁸ Nigeria Decent Work Country Programme II, 2015-2018. p. 4

⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2008 UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database.

to innovation. Promotion of quality education through the provision of world-class tertiary institutions in Nigeria is required so as to reduce the rate of students going abroad for studies

Furthermore, the conditions and reforms of the labor market can influence one's decision to emigrate. For example, Clemens and Petterson estimated that 12,579 nurses trained in Nigeria left the country as of the year 2000. This accounts for 12% of the total number of trained nurses in Nigeria.¹⁰ In 2009-2012, 2,701 trained Nigerian doctors left to work in other countries.¹¹ (IOM 2014). The working conditions of the health sector characterized by low and irregular pay, high work hours with no incentives has encouraged many medical professionals to immigrate. The emigration of skilled medical experts contributes further to the unavailability of decent work as there is reduced access to health services which threatens the social protection of citizens. Therefore, the Nigerian government should discourage emigration by improving the labor market conditions. This can be done through the increase of minimum wages, job creation, and other labor market incentives. Improving decent work conditions helps to retain the technical know-how needed to stimulate innovation and promote human rights.

A positive effect of emigration on decent work and economic growth is the concept of remittances. Remittances instigate more integrated processes of economic change. Nigeria is one of the top remittance receiving countries over the years. From the World Bank Migration and Remittances Factbook, Nigeria received \$25.1 billion dollars as remittances from her emigrants who are abroad in the year 2018.¹² This money is used to cater to the needs of families, access educational, medical and other social services, facilitate investment and create business opportunities. Improved social welfare access and the formation of human capital are vital preconditions to attain decent work and economic growth. The use of remittances to fund education improves human capital which is an important factor for improved labor market outcomes. Recent analysis by Mallet has revealed that remittances are a shock absorber instrument to ensure continued financing of education and skill acquisition even in the face of economic crisis.¹³

However, remittances are spent basically on urgent and short term needs and not on entrepreneurship or job creation thereby discouraging decent work in Nigeria. From the analysis above, it can be inferred that despite interventions to stimulate job creation in Nigeria, the overall effect of the emigration pattern have adversely impacted decent work environment.

¹⁰ Clemens, M.A and G. Patterson. New Data on African Health Professionals Abroad. Working Paper 95, Centre for Global Development, Washington, D.C. 2007

¹¹ International Organization for migration (IOM) 2014. Nigeria, Migration Profile. Retrieved from https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mp_nigeria.pdf. 2014. Pp.32.

¹² WORLD BANK. Migration and remittances: Recent development and outlook. Migration and Development brief, World Bank Group. 2018

¹³ Mallett, Richard. Decent Work, Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. pp. 1- 20.

Conclusion

Contrary to popular belief, the working conditions of the labor market in the country of origin can influence emigration trends, not just the unemployment rate. These emigration trends further worsen the decent work conditions explaining the vicious cycle (nexus) linking both concepts. The negative effects of emigration trends are further reinforced by low level of return migration due to the scarcity of decent jobs. The adverse effects of a poor decent work climate cannot be overemphasized as it gives rise to social and economic forms of inequality, which breed poverty in the society. To combat this, policy reforms geared towards employment creation, improving labor market conditions, promotion of gender equality, and building the capacity of the labor force are necessary in order to achieve equitable, inclusive and sustainable development in Nigeria. The implementation of these reforms will promote the involvement of foreign companies and Nigerians in diaspora in business and investment environment of the country to provide new opportunities for the teeming populace.

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