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The dreams and the drama: Alternative narratives to illegal migration amongst young people in Nigeria: Gender predisposition, dangers and recommendations

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Abstract

Alternatives to illegal migrations: The need to migrate out of Nigeria has almost been seen as the surest bet to getting a better life. Many Nigerians try to attain this fit by all means possible. Even illegally. In 2015, 23,000 Nigerians crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Europe and in the first 9 months of 2016, 22,500 had crossed. In the 1990s, more men migrated than women, however the reverse is becoming the case in the 21st century. The general prevalence of illegal migration is constantly increasing. Due to the illegality of this act, a lot of people migrating illegally lose their lives and properties in the process. Others never get to where they are going. While the rest are kidnapped and trafficked into prostitution. Especially the women and girls. With reasons ranging from family and friends' pressure, to search for greener pastures or even escaping from the law, More Nigerians die on the seas, illegally migrating than other African nations.

Keywords: alternatives, illegal migration, gender predisposition, Nigeria, mediterranean sea

Introduction

"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to a land I will show you. In that land I will bless you and make you great". [Gen 12:1]. This was the famous call of Abram, as narrated in the Holy Bible. We are made to understand that everything he became and achieved afterwards was linked to the fact that he undertook this famous migration. Although, this was a call to Abraham then; still engraved in the minds of many is that same agonistic feeling that blessings shall come when they finally emigrate. In the Nigerian Youth context, 'Japaa'.

It is a fact that young Nigerians make up the largest population of African Migrants to developed countries [1]. It is seen as a God granted miracle to leave Nigeria, that people do special thanks giving when foreign visas are granted them. Basically, life seems to be better in the western countries, with good education, job opportunities, stable cost of living and the likes. Research has shown that with all these basic and good amenities available there to promote better human development, there is an increase in the average life expectancy (Figure 1). Although, improved life expectancy will be a rather farfetched reason for illegal migration or even legal migration to an extent.

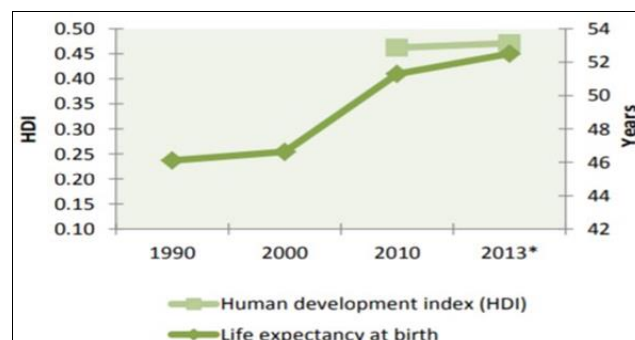


Fig 1: Human development index against life expectancy of fellow Nigerians who had immigrated to more developed countries between 1990 and 2013. Adapted from *the United Nations indication index for migration*.

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Ab initio, Nigerians have always viewed western migration as one of the first indicators for success. With majority youths from low- and middle-income families seeing their promised lands outside the shores. While their families at home waited in magical anticipation of the dollars or pounds they may have had so loftily promised on departure. With aspiring younger ones attaching Gulliver names such as ‘My London Uncle; My American Aunty’. Further fueling their passion to also emigrate. At times, at all cost. In 2015, 23,000 Nigerians crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Europe and in the first 9 months of 2016, 22,500 had crossed [2].

The Oxford learners dictionary defined migration simply as, the movement of people to a new country or area in order to find work or better living conditions. However, it was also defined there as the seasonal movement of large numbers of birds and animals from one place to another for the purpose of survival. Which means, if these animals do not migrate, they will not survive. Well, Nigerian Youth, why do we so desperately crave to migrate?

A point to note though is, illegal migration is migration that violates the immigration laws stipulated in the laws of the destination country [3]. Hence, it is basically criminal entry. Is this better than remaining in Nigeria? Like the migrating animals, is it a case of life and death?

As we legally migrate through the paragraphs of this essay, you should have a grasp as to why. Or rather, the alternate reasons why and their consequences.

Predisposition to migration by sex

It may have come as an eyebrow lifter when this subheading was seen. However, it is most important as it holds the answers to the question; ‘who is most liable to migrate?’

Research by the United Nations noted that; as against the trends in the 1990s where men migrated more, in the 2000s women migrated more (Figure 2). Though there are different reasons why they migrated, there was an accompanying increase in prevalence of Nigerian women and girls in prostitution and sexual trafficking in the western nations according to a report by Human Rights Watch. Studies showed that as high as 80% of women who and girls who emigrated from Nigeria were potential victims [4]. This is in no way insinuating that they travel out solely for prostitution. Rather, it is bringing to light the fact that some youths, especially amongst the females, may have been deceived or not have travelled of their own volition. As popularly depicted in the 2019 movie by Actress Adesua, Muna.

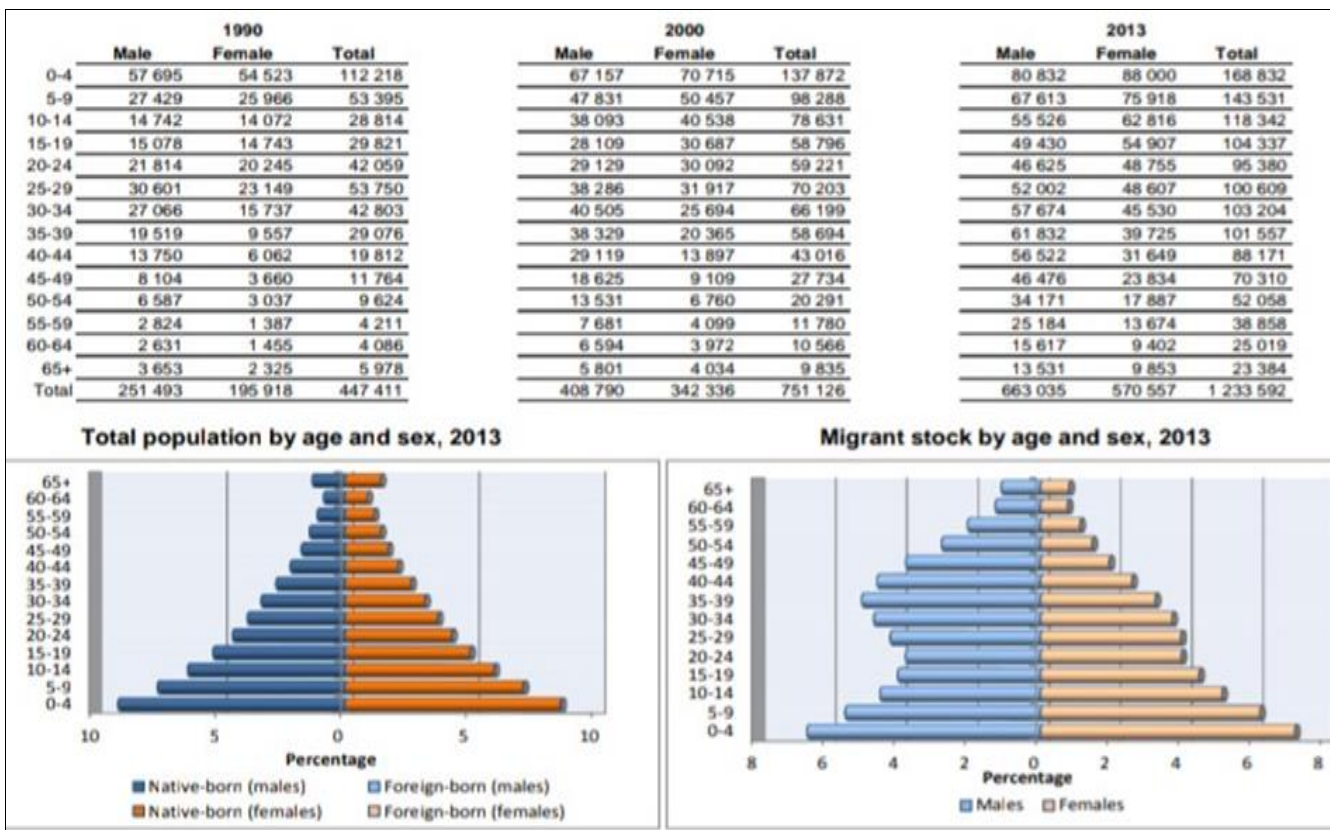


Fig 2: Nigerians international migrant stock, by age and sex. From the United Nations indication index for migration.

Classification of illegal migrants

I will want to classify the illegal migrants into two (2) categories.

1. Absolutely illegal migrants
2. Legally illegal migrants.

Absolutely illegal Migrants

This area those who utilize dangerous means and routes to secure their passage out of the country. Such popular routes are Nigerian borders with other African nations, such as

Ghana, Togo and Cameroon; and those outside Africa such as Italy, the United Kingdom and Ireland [4, 5].

Legally illegal Migrants

These are those who left the country legally like tourists, students visa etc., but over stayed their visa permit and started living there. Such people may be abused over there without any legal backing and most of them are later disgracefully deported [6].

Countries Nigerians commonly migrate to illegally African countries

- a. South Africa
- b. Ghana
- c. Togo
- d. Cameroon
- e. Gambia

Non-African countries

- a. Italy
- b. United Kingdom
- c. Ireland

Alternative reasons for illegal migration

There is a saying that “it is he who wears the show that knows where it hurts”. As a Nigerian Youth of the high and upper middle class income families, we often think of the foreign countries as opportunities to further our educations and get better job opportunities befitting our attained educational status. However, is this the same narrative for the lower middle class and low-income Youths and Families?

We know that “A frog is not seen in the day time, unless it is chasing something or is being chased by something”. Utilizing the wisdom from this saying, I will roughly classify these alternative reasons into two (2) groups; the chased and the chasers (Table 1).

Table 1: classification of reasons why people may leave Nigeria illegally

S/n	Chased	Chasers
1	Running away from the law	False information
2	Escape from violence	High yield crimes
3	Abuse of human rights	Football and other sporting dreams
4	Peer pressure	Ignorance
5	Parental/family pressure	Prostitution

- A. Running away:** it is now common news for criminals to escape from Nigeria when evading the law. This ranges from brown collar criminals like the Boko Haram sect members to White collared criminals. The white collared criminals unlike Maina who escaped to Niger Republic on a motor cycle, often do so in their private or chartered jets. An example was Faisal the fleeing son of the former pension boss Maina [7].
- B. Escape from violence:** A perfect example will be the indigenes of the north eastern regions of the country that share borders with other countries and are plagued under the violent jihadist sect and bandits. They often flee across the borders into their countries for their lives, without proper custom checks. Hoping to be accepted as refugees [8].
- C. Abuse of human right and police brutality:** A simple example here is the anti-LGBTQ laws Nigeria practices amongst other violations of human rights in the nation. With extremist Nigerians always brutalizing and policemen extorting the LGBTQ community, those who are not financially capable will be forced to leave the country illegally to search for a safe nation where they can be free and accepted as they are.
- D. Peer pressure:** One 39-year-old Yakubu who returned from Gambia said that he began to nurse and plan to go after seeing the flashy life styles returnees were living [6].

- E. Family pressure:** At times, the pressure to leave the country comes from even the family members. With those within the country chasing you and those outside encouraging you. As seen in the case of one final year student from Lagos whose uncle had left to Germany through the sea and kept telling him about how he had no regrets and was enjoying [6].
- F. False information:** Many youths are fed false honey and banana tasting information about their destination countries or desires. So was the case of 30-year-old Juliet who went for a better education but ended up being trafficked in Italy [6].
- G. High yield crimes:** Nigerians will leave the country to search for greener pastures in their line of business or interest, even in crime. Of late, a lot of Nigerians have been deported from India due to drug related crimes [10-11]. Another angle are Nigerians committing crimes on the soils of other African nations, like the Kidnap of Philip Walton who was kidnapped in Niger and hidden in Nigeria [9].
- H. Football and other sporting dreams:** There are those who leave due to the fact that they feel they have better chances at making it in their sporting careers over there. So was the case of 20-year-old Francis, a returnee from Libya who wanted to go to Italy [6].
- I. Ignorance:** To he who is blind, they say, a one-eyed man can rule over. The fact that there is really little information about a lot of important concept and facts in circulation in the society to a large extent is also responsible for the illegal migration. Just that, in this case, the people may not fully understand that their actions are wrong and is a crime and may think they are just hustling as the spirit leads. A Corp member once interviewed on his perception of irregular and illegal migrations called the act diplomacy [6].
- J. Prostitution:** this in itself is dynamic. Like young Juliet, some may have gone with better plans then were deceived and forced into prostitution and sex trafficked. While others may in full knowledge have gone to further their already existing commercial sex trade. [12] This was also the sad tale of a Nigerian deceived and trafficked to Libya, in hopes of getting a better paying Job as seen in a report by the Human Rights Watch titled “You Pray for Death”.

Means of illegal migration

- a. The Sahara Desert
- b. The Mediterranean Sea
- c. Forests
- d. Poorly manned country Borders.

Dangers associated with illegal migration

- 1. Sex trafficking
- 2. Death
- 3. Deportation
- 4. Imprisonment
- 5. Exploitation
- 6. STDs (Sexually transmitted diseases)
- 7. Permanent lifelong injuries.
- 8. Low self esteem
- 9. National and family disgrace
- 10. Insanity.

Recommendations

1. An inquiry committee should be set up to evaluate the desires, experience and lessons from returnees of illegal migration
 2. The country should amend its laws to recognize and practice better human right polices
 3. The Nigerian borders should be better manned by well trained and equipped personnel
 4. Desires and plight of illegal migrants should not be swept under the rugs when the return, as this may be the same plight of to-be illegal migrants.
 5. The Government should provide better social amenities to make more comfortable the living conditions of her citizens.
 6. Government scholarships like the BEA Ministry of Education Scholarship should be made more achievable on merit, so as to give those with educational aspirations better chances at attaining their dreams legally.
 7. Migration, emigration, immigration and its legalities should be included in civic education topics taught in schools. This should include and also emphasize the consequences of illegal migration
 8. The Nigerian embassies in various nations should be more welcome to her citizens and not bully and exploit them when they need the help of the embassies.
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Conclusions

Illegal migration is on an increase in Nigeria. The government in her effort to curtail this menace should put more efforts into an emphatic approach rather than a disciplinary approach. That is, find out what it is that they wanted. Until this is done, the trend may keep increasing on the plane of survival of the fittest to the promised lands.

Notwithstanding, a study conducted by Ikuteyijo showed that youths generally had little knowledge and displayed ignorance about official migration laws. This, and the fact that girls being pushed/deceived into sexual trafficking were one of the most dominant reasons for illegal migrations. Although, Nigeria has a signed law prohibiting smuggling and human trafficking.

Hence, there is a large unmet gap in the needs of youths materially and intellectually before we can curtail both the common and alternative reasons for illegal migrations.

Conflict of interest

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Ngozi OKORO = Proof reading and Editing

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