Country study

Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants

Nigeria country profile

Karen Hargrave
October 2021

ODI

SAMUEL HALL.

Acknowledgements

About this publication

This briefing presents an overview of the key features of migration and asylum policy in Nigeria, recent trends in migration, refugee and asylum patterns, public perceptions and political narratives. This brief is part of a wider project supported by the IKEA Foundation aimed at engaging public and private investors interested in migration and displacement.

About the author

Karen Hargrave is an independent consultant specialising in research and policy engagement relating to migration and displacement. Her research interests include global policy frameworks and public attitudes towards refugees and migrants.

Contents

List of boxes and figures

Boxes

Figures

Acronyms

CSNMD	Civil Society Network for Migration and Development
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
MAN	Manufacturers Association of Nigeria
NCFRMI	National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons
NIS	Nigeria Immigration Service
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OAU	Organization of African Unity
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Executive summary

In mid-2020 Nigeria hosted 1.3 million migrants, including refugees, representing just 0.6% of the country's population (UN DESA, 2020) – far below both the overall global average and the average for West Africa, and the lowest proportion of any Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) country. Significant groups hosted in Nigeria include migrants from other ECOWAS countries – in particular Benin, Ghana, Mali, Togo and Niger – as well as a modest but growing refugee population from Cameroon.

While Nigeria is a country of net emigration, this has not always been the case. In particular, Nigeria has long played host to migrants from across West Africa, whose presence has largely tracked the ebb and flow of Africa's largest economy. These immigration dynamics have roots in long-standing West African patterns of mobility, facilitated by Nigeria's adoption of the 1979 ECOWAS Protocol Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment. While immigration into Nigeria was later more heavily politicised – most notably with the expulsion in 1983 of up to 2.5 million ECOWAS migrants – in the early years of ECOWAS Nigeria took on a role of 'good neighbourliness' towards its regional counterparts, as one of the community's strongest proponents for closer regional integration.

The past decade has seen significant reforms to migration policy in Nigeria, including the development of extensive legal and policy frameworks. While largely focused on emigration patterns and Nigeria's diaspora, these frameworks have reflected a shift from an approach centred around control of immigration to one of easing mobility. In terms of refugees, the overall policy environment in Nigeria is permissive, enabling refugees to reside in the location of their choice, with access to national health and education systems.

Today, migration is not considered a high-stakes political issue in Nigeria, or indeed a political priority compared to other issues. Where migration *is* covered in national public and political debate, this is predominantly in terms of the emigration of Nigeria's own citizens and, particularly in recent years, opportunities to better leverage development gains from Nigeria's significant diaspora. Immigration and refugee-hosting appear to have greater public profile at local levels, for example in states hosting large numbers of Cameroonian refugees.

Where migrants, including refugees, hosted within Nigeria do feature in public discourse, there are two distinct narratives:

- A dominant narrative of **Nigeria as a country of welcome**, rooted in shared history and long-standing socio-economic and cultural ties with specific groups of foreign nationals in the country.
- Narratives, though far from widespread, explicitly portraying specific groups hosted in the country – and irregular migrants in particular – as a **threat** or expressing concerns about the **perceived impacts of their presence**.

The relative absence of immigration from national public, political and media discourse is reflected in data measuring the salience of different issues to the Nigerian public. Recent polling indicates that immigration and refugee-hosting are not considered key issues affecting the country, with Nigerians instead prioritising issues such as infrastructure, electricity, crime and security and unemployment. Survey data has also repeatedly demonstrated high levels of acceptance towards migrants living in the country. Likewise, while available data on attitudes towards migrants in Nigeria largely does not distinguish specific attitudes towards refugees, qualitative and more anecdotal evidence suggests an overall welcoming environment for Cameroonian refugees in their immediate host communities.

However, this climate of tolerance does not necessarily translate into liberal policy preferences. Just under half of Nigerians support either completely prohibiting or putting strict limits on immigration. While the vast majority of Nigerians feel positively about the impacts of immigrants on the country's development, there are also notable concerns, particularly around perceived links between immigration and unemployment. There are also significant differences between different parts of the country, and between demographic groups. In particular, contrary to trends elsewhere in the world, attitudes appear less open among young Nigerians and those with higher levels of education.

Actors seeking to engage with narratives and attitudes towards migrants, including refugees, in Nigeria can do so in several ways, including by:

1. **Ensuring that engagement on migration and development includes a focus on migrants, including refugees, *within* Nigeria**, in particular by prioritising efforts to strengthen data on their skills profiles, labour market participation and broader development contributions.
2. **Further strengthening the evidence base on attitudes towards immigration and refugee-hosting in Nigeria**, including by collecting more targeted data regarding attitudes towards refugees.
3. **Celebrating Nigeria as a country of welcome, while acknowledging complexities and concerns**. In particular, efforts should be made to address concerns related to perceived links between immigration and unemployment. Trusted actors, such as religious and traditional leaders, the private sector and civil society, have a key role to play.

1 Introduction

This country study presents an overview of Nigeria's experience of hosting refugees and other migrants, policy approaches, key features of public narratives surrounding immigration and refugee-hosting and existing evidence on public attitudes. It is part of a wider project, supported by the IKEA Foundation, which aims to engage public and private investors interested in migration and displacement.

The study is based on a review of available literature and polling data. It identifies:

- Historical dynamics surrounding immigration and refugee-hosting, key moments and policy approaches.
- Current population dynamics and policy approaches.
- Public and political narratives advanced by different actors (including central and local government, civil society, the media and the private sector) in relation to immigration and refugee-hosting.
- Evidence on public attitudes towards migrants, including refugees, in Nigeria.

Alongside academic and grey literature, sources reviewed include United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)'s Refugee Population Statistics Database, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)'s 2020 International Migrant Stock data, Afrobarometer Round 1–8 data (with data collected in Nigeria in 1999, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017 and 2020), Waves 2–3, 4 and 6–7 of the World Values Survey (with data collected in Nigeria in 1990, 1995, 2000, 2012 and 2017–2018), Gallup's Migrant Acceptance Index (based on 2016 Gallup World Poll Data), Amnesty International's 2016 Refugees Welcome Index and surveys covering Nigeria by Pew Global (including the 2018 Spring Survey). The review of available literature and data was supplemented by eight key informant interviews with government actors, the United Nations, national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the Nigerian media.

The wider series of which this country study is part uses 'refugees and other migrants' in reference to this broad group of foreign nationals. However, given that, in line with trends in the context of Nigeria, this study focuses less on refugee populations, the author has elected to predominantly use 'migrants, including refugees' here when referring to this wider group of foreign nationals living in Nigeria. Elsewhere, 'refugees' is used when referring only to this more circumscribed group. While the study focuses primarily on the movements of migrants, including refugees, *into* Nigeria, to the extent possible this is situated within the context of broader mobility patterns, including internal displacement, emigration and outbound refugee movements, as well as Nigerians returning to the country. The terms 'immigrants' and 'immigration' are used where considered necessary to distinguish inbound movements (and policy frameworks surrounding them) from emigration patterns, and where this reflects the specific wording used in survey questions. The term 'narratives' is used in reference to the stories told about refugees and migrants by different actors in the public domain.
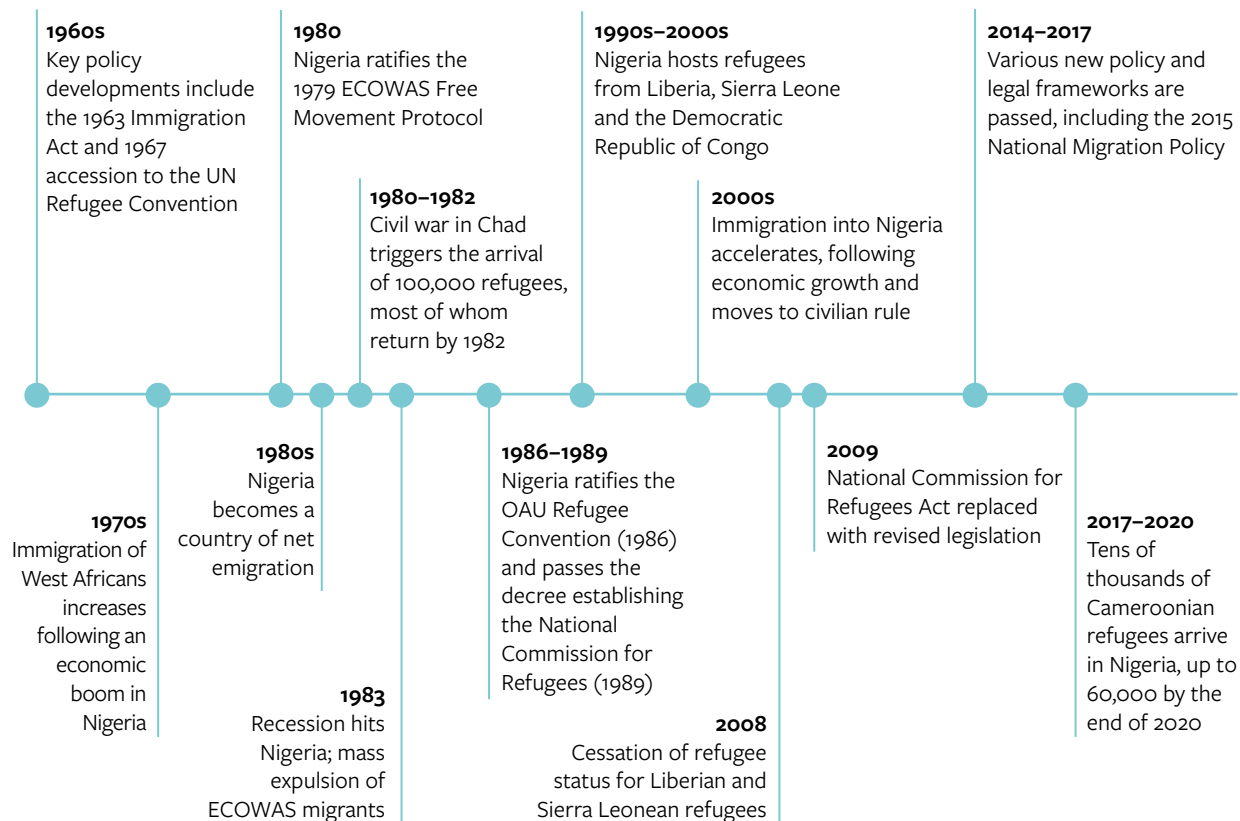
2   Nigeria's immigration and refugee-hosting history

2.1 Immigration in Nigeria

Nigeria has long played host to migrants from across West Africa, whose presence has largely tracked the ebb and flow of Africa's largest economy. West African migration into Nigeria has roots in long-standing regional pre-colonial patterns of mobility, whereby West Africans moved freely as part of mobility patterns oriented towards trade, labour and religion (Adedokun, 2003), particularly between communities sharing social and ethno-cultural characteristics (Fouchard, 2009; Ikwuyatum, 2016). The colonial period – which in Nigeria spanned more than half a century, from 1900 to the country's independence from the United Kingdom in 1960 – heralded the beginning of larger-scale movements, in particular from landlocked countries in the Sahel towards coastal areas (Adetula, 2009; Teye et al., 2015; Idrissa, 2019). In Nigeria this included transfers of workers from and into the country by the colonial administration. Other migrants came of their own accord, seeking work in ports and railways (particularly in coastal centres such as Lagos and Port Harcourt) (Arhin-Sam, 2019; Idrissa, 2019), or to escape more oppressive colonial administrations elsewhere in the region (Mberu and Pongou, 2010).

Immigration first became the subject of state policy in post-independence Nigeria with the introduction of the 1963 Immigration Act and subsequent legislation (see Figure 1). The Act addressed a perceived need for tighter monitoring and documentation to restrict entry to specified groups, and set out requirements for entry and stay in the country (Adedokun, 2003; Adepoju, 2005). During the 1970s, the rapid expansion of Nigeria's economy, driven by burgeoning oil revenues, transformed the country into West Africa's main destination for labour migrants (Adepoju, 2005; De Haas, 2006). While many migrants worked in jobs deemed low skilled – including in oil-related industries, ports, textiles, hotels and domestic services – the country also attracted professionals such as teachers, healthcare workers, engineers and scientists (Adepoju, 2005; Oni and Okunade, 2018). The majority of these migrants entered informally, without official documentation (Adetula, 2009; Gary-Tounkara, 2015).

While many continued to enter informally, regular channels of migration into Nigeria also expanded following Nigeria's ratification of the 1979 ECOWAS Protocol Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment (see Box 1). Nigeria had played a formative role in the creation of ECOWAS and, as one of the community's strongest proponents of closer regional integration (Adepoju, 2005), the government's approach was initially one of 'good neighbourliness' towards its West African neighbours (Adetula, 2009).

Figure 1 Timeline: immigration and refugee-hosting in Nigeria

1960s
Key policy developments include the 1963 Immigration Act and 1967 accession to the UN Refugee Convention

1980
Nigeria ratifies the 1979 ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol

1990s–2000s
Nigeria hosts refugees from Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo

2014–2017
Various new policy and legal frameworks are passed, including the 2015 National Migration Policy

1980–1982
Civil war in Chad triggers the arrival of 100,000 refugees, most of whom return by 1982

2000s
Immigration into Nigeria accelerates, following economic growth and moves to civilian rule

1970s
Immigration of West Africans increases following an economic boom in Nigeria

1980s
Nigeria becomes a country of net emigration

1986–1989
Nigeria ratifies the OAU Refugee Convention (1986) and passes the decree establishing the National Commission for Refugees (1989)

2009
National Commission for Refugees Act replaced with revised legislation

2017–2020
Tens of thousands of Cameroonian refugees arrive in Nigeria, up to 60,000 by the end of 2020

1983
Recession hits Nigeria; mass expulsion of ECOWAS migrants

2008
Cessation of refugee status for Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees

Note: OAU = Organisation of African Unity; UN = United Nations.

Box 1 Free movement in ECOWAS

Free movement has been an integral part of West African countries' shared vision for ECOWAS since its formation, first articulated in the 1975 ECOWAS Treaty and later solidified through the 1979 Protocol. There have been various subsequent efforts to support implementation of the Protocol, including through the introduction of ECOWAS travel certificates and passports (in 1983 and 2000), the 1993 revised ECOWAS Treaty and the 2008 ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration.

While ECOWAS remains the most advanced sub-region within Africa in terms of frameworks around free movement, challenges remain. Over half of the bloc's population are thought to lack identity documents, with the majority of mobility remaining informal. Other challenges include transport infrastructure, the use of checkpoints and differing interpretations of the Protocol between countries. Commitments towards regional freedom of movement have also been challenged by external actors, in particular the European Union and its member states, who have encouraged a more securitised approach to migration as part of efforts to reduce irregular migrant movements towards Europe.

Sources: Adepoju, 2005; Bisong, 2018; Arhin-Sam, 2019; Idrissa, 2019; Schöfberger, 2020

However, this approach soon changed dramatically, when an economic downturn triggered by collapsing oil prices precipitated a rapid deterioration in living and working conditions and rising unemployment (Adepoju, 2005; de Haas, 2006; Gary-Tounkara, 2015). With an election looming, in 1983 President Shehu Shagari ordered the expulsion of all migrants without appropriate documentation. Migrants were given just two weeks to either register with the immigration authorities or leave the country (Adetula, 2009). While estimates vary, anywhere between 900,000 and 2.5 million migrants exited or were forcibly removed, many of whom were Ghanaians (Adepoju, 2005; Government of Nigeria, 2015; Gary-Tounkara, 2015; Oni and Okunade, 2018) (see Box 2). A further 250,000 were expelled in 1985 (Government of Nigeria, 2015).

In the years that followed, the combination of government-mandated expulsions, economic decline and authoritarian military rule led to a 'reverse transformation' of the country's migration profile (Black et al., 2004, cited in de Haas, 2006). Nigeria quickly turned into a country of net *emigration*, first to Ghana, Cameroon, Gabon and Botswana, and from the 1990s to South Africa, Europe and the Gulf (Black et al., 2004, cited in de Haas, 2006; Adepoju, 2005; Afolayan, 2010). This trend persists today, despite migration into Nigeria picking up again from 2000 onwards (see Figure 2).

Box 2 In focus: 'Ghana must go' – impacts of the 1983 expulsion order

The 1983 expulsion order had a considerable impact. In the short term, the sudden and sweeping nature of the decision caused chaos, with many migrants left stranded in transit camps and airport departure halls, and forced to leave long-term employment in Nigeria.

The move also triggered heated public debate. The president and government ministers made numerous public statements in relation to the decision, blaming migrants for the country's economic decline, as well as purported connections to increasing crime rates and religious disturbances. The National Union of Construction and Civil Engineers Workers welcomed the decision, as did sections of Nigeria's media, which stigmatised Ghanaian migrants in particular as 'job stealers' and 'criminals'.

The decision had ramifications for Nigeria's diplomatic relations, and was widely condemned by governments across the region, who saw it as violating the spirit if not the letter of the 1979 ECOWAS Protocol. In the longer term, the episode also left an enduring mark on Nigeria's national consciousness; to this day, the large, coloured bags, at the time used by exiting migrants to carry their belongings, are referred to as 'Ghana must go' bags.

Sources: Adetula, 2009; Afolayan, 2010; Gary-Tounkara, 2015; Oni and Okunade, 2018; Idrissa, 2019

Figure 2 Nigeria and international migration (1990–2020)
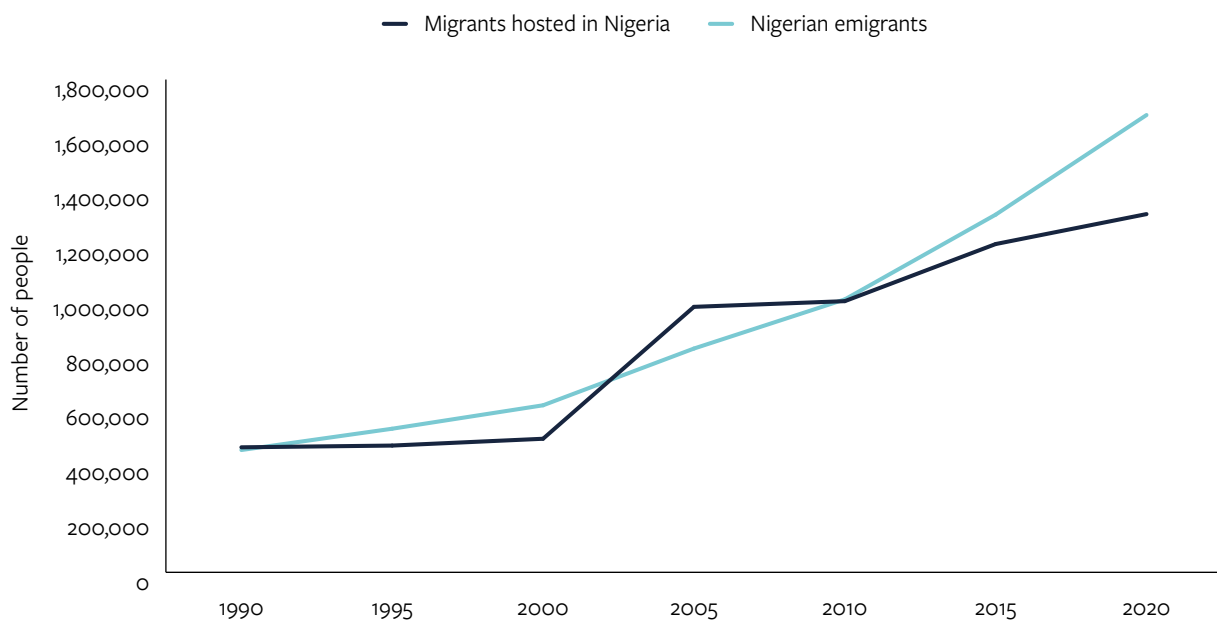
Source: UN DESA, 2020

2.2 Refugee hosting in Nigeria

Nigeria has played an important role as a host country to refugees. However, numbers have historically been low, both in comparison to other African nations, and in relation to the country's population. The largest refugee influx was in 1980, when 100,000 refugees fled an upsurge of violence in neighbouring Chad (most returned in the years that followed (Dash, 1982)). While overall refugee numbers remained relatively low (see Figure 3), other notable populations have included Liberians and Sierra Leoneans in the 1990s (many of whom returned from the late 2000s onwards), refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo from the mid-2000s, and smaller populations from other West African countries.

Since 2017, Nigeria has seen significant new movements of refugees from Cameroon; by February 2018, almost 17,000 Cameroonian refugees had fled to Nigeria, the majority into Cross River State – rising to over 60,000 by the end of 2020 (UNHCR, 2019a; 2021a). The Cameroonian refugee response has faced heavy challenges, including underfunding and chronic food insecurity among refugees (UNHCR, 2018a; 2019b; 2019c). The sharp increase in Cameroonian arrivals has also created significant pressures for local hosting communities, particularly in the context of already weak public health and education services (UNHCR, 2019a).

**Figure 3** Refugees and asylum-seekers in Nigeria by country of origin (1976–2020)
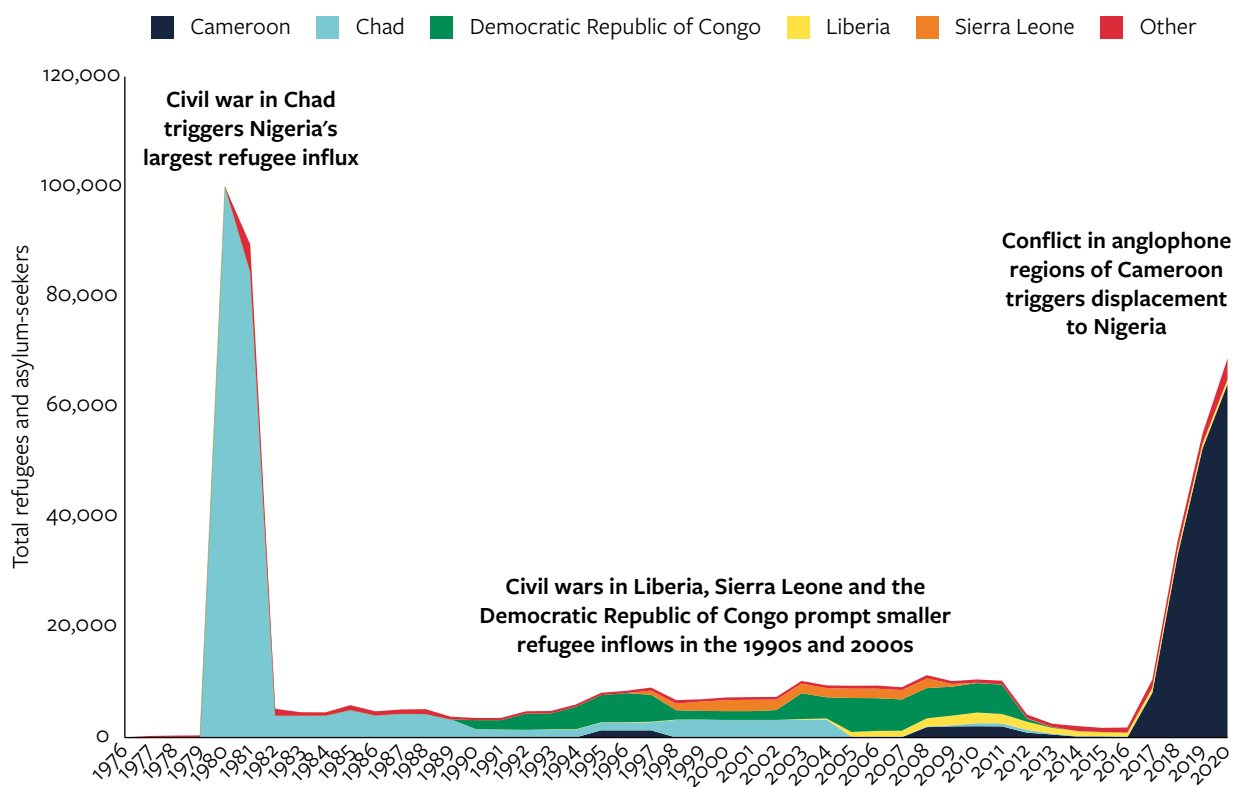
Source: UNHCR, 2021a

3 Current trends and policy approaches

3.1 Current populations

According to UN DESA statistics, in mid-2020 Nigeria hosted 1.3 million migrants, including refugees, representing 0.6% of the country's population (UN DESA, 2020). This proportion is far below both the overall global average (3.6%) and the average for West Africa (1.9%), and the lowest of any ECOWAS country (Figure 4). Benin nationals made up almost three in 10 of all those recorded, alongside significant populations from other ECOWAS countries including Ghana, Mali, Togo and Niger (ibid.). While the proportion of female migrants in Nigeria has risen in recent decades, over half (55.5%) of those recorded were male, and almost a third (30.5%) were aged 19 years or younger (ibid.).

Figure 4 Migrants as a percentage of the population
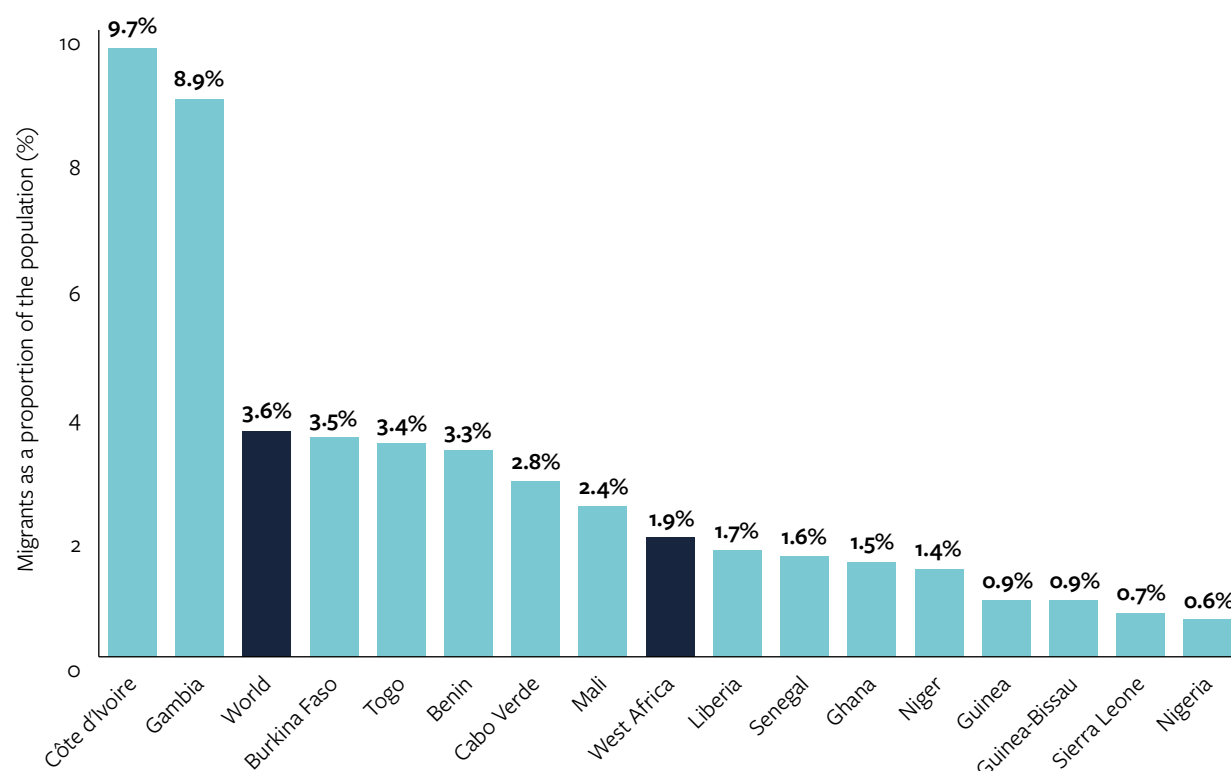
Note: This figure shows migrants, including refugees, as a percentage of the population of ECOWAS countries, as well as the corresponding figures for the world and West Africa.

Source: UN DESA, 2020

Official figures are likely to undercount Nigeria's overall migrant population. Numerous challenges have been noted in terms of systematic gathering of data on migration in Nigeria, including infrequent population censuses and challenges with capacity for data collection and analysis (Fadayomi, 2013; Government of Nigeria, 2015; IOM, 2016). Official statistics do not include undocumented migrants, many originating from West African countries, including those destined for Nigeria and transiting the country as part of wider migration journeys within the region and further afield. Recent data is lacking in terms of the labour market profiles and participation of migrants in the country's workforce (IOM, 2016).

In 2020, refugees and asylum-seekers made up less than 5% of all foreign nationals in Nigeria (UN DESA, 2020). According to UNHCR estimates, as of 31 May 2021 Nigeria was hosting 71,365 refugees, including over 67,000 from Cameroon, as well as smaller populations from countries including the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad and Sudan (UNHCR, 2021b). Most Cameroonian refugees are located in Cross River State, with smaller numbers in Taraba, Benue and Akwa Ibom states (UNHCR, 2021c). Around 30,000 Cameroonians are located across four organised settlements (Adagom, Ikyogen, Ukende and Adagom III), but the majority live dispersed within host communities (ibid.). Refugees of other nationalities are settled predominantly in urban areas, including Lagos, Abuja, Ogun, Oyo and Kano (UNHCR, 2020).

3.2 Immigration policy

The past decade has seen significant reforms of migration policy in Nigeria, including the development of extensive legal and policy frameworks. Nigeria's migration architecture is coordinated by the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), which coordinates between ministerial decision-makers, various government agencies and state-level and non-state actors.[1] Migration into Nigeria is regulated by the 2015 Immigration Act and 2017 Immigration Regulations (see Box 3). In line with the 1979 ECOWAS Protocol, Nigerian legislation retains various exemptions for ECOWAS citizens. Nonetheless, many continue to enter or reside in Nigeria outside official processes, arriving through informal crossings without documentation or failing to register for long-term stay beyond the initial permitted 90-day period (IOM, 2016). The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) has periodically threatened, and at times carried out, arrests and deportations of irregular migrants (Vanguard, 2017a; 2017b; The Nation, 2019a; 2019b). However, the number of people affected has been small in comparison to the likely numbers of ECOWAS citizens in the country without formal documentation, and indeed in comparison to past expulsions of ECOWAS citizens.

---

1   This coordination takes place under a four-level Migration Governance Framework, which defines the respective roles and responsibilities of different actors (for a more detailed overview see Arhin-Sam, 2019).

Box 3 Overview of current immigration, refugee and citizenship policies

Immigration policy

Citizens of ECOWAS countries, if in possession of valid travel documents, are permitted an initial 90-day visa-free period of stay in Nigeria, while those from other countries (aside from Cameroon and Chad) must obtain a visa prior to entry (KPMG, 2020). All individuals wishing to remain for more than 90 days must apply for a residence card, although at a much lower fee for ECOWAS citizens (NIS, n.d.; Deloitte, 2015). These have, however, often proved difficult to obtain, due to corruption, slow bureaucratic processes and limited awareness of rights (Deloitte, 2015). Those wishing to take up short-term employment can apply for a Temporary Work Permit, while for longer-term employment the individual's employer must secure an Expatriate Quota Approval.

Asylum and refugee policy

In 2018 Nigeria granted two-year prima facie temporary protection status to Cameroonians, recently renewed for a further two years (UNHCR, 2018a; 2019a). Refugees of other nationalities must undergo individual refugee status determination, in line with the 2009 NCFRMI Act. Where refugee status is granted, individuals are provided with an identity card and residence permit by the NIS, facilitating their right to work, freedom of movement and access to key services (Mbanugo, 2012; UNHCR, 2019a). However, registration processes remain slow and inconsistent (Arhin-Sam, 2019; UNHCR and Government of Nigeria, 2019; UNHCR, 2019d). Refugees in Nigeria can access national health and education systems free of charge and, with support from UNHCR, are registered in the National Health Insurance scheme (UNHCR, 2019a). However, significant challenges remain in terms of access to education, including due to indirect costs, as well as capacity constraints of overstretched local schools (UNHCR and Government of Nigeria, 2019; UNHCR, 2021f).

Citizenship policy

Acquisition of citizenship in Nigeria is guided by the 1999 Constitution, which specifies that individuals who have lived in Nigeria for 15 years, and who meet a number of set criteria, can become naturalised citizens. This includes that they are of 'good character', are capable of making useful contributions to the country's advancement and have 'assimilated into the way of life of Nigerians' (Government of Nigeria, 1999).

Policy frameworks passed in recent years, including the 2015 National Migration Policy and 2021 National Diaspora Policy, have largely centred on emigration, aiming both to better protect the rights of Nigerians overseas and leverage development gains associated with the country's large diaspora (Samuel Hall, 2018a; Arhin-Sam, 2019; National Diaspora Commission, 2021). However, the 2015 policy contains various references to migrants within the country, including commitments to ensure non-discrimination; take steps to promote integration; strengthen

data collection and dissemination (including relating to border control and migrant labour); and strengthen the capacity of the NIS to manage the country's external borders (Government of Nigeria, 2015). In February 2020 the Nigerian government announced a new visa policy, which took effect in October 2020 (following delays due to Covid-19). The policy aims to attract specialised international skills and knowledge through a series of measures including the expansion of visa classes and the streamlining of processes (PwC, 2020).

Covid-19 has had significant impacts on mobility into Nigeria, including border restrictions enacted in March 2020 as part of the country's pandemic response. At the time of writing most restrictions had been relaxed; as of June 2021, most of the country's official points of entry were fully or partially operational, albeit with stringent conditions on entry (IOM, 2021; UK Government, 2021).

3.3 Refugee policy

Legal frameworks surrounding refugees have developed in line with global and regional norms. In 1967–1968 Nigeria acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol (UNHCR, n.d.), and in 1986 the country ratified the 1976 OAU Convention (UN, n.d.). The Nigerian government subsequently developed national legislation in line with these commitments, passing Decree 52 in 1982, replaced in 2009 by the NCFRMI Act, which set out the country's approach to asylum in line with international obligations (Mbanugo, 2012; Government of Nigeria, 2015; Anyogu and Ozioko, 2019; Arhin-Sam, 2019). Overall, the policy environment for refugees in Nigeria is permissive; refugees can reside in the location of their choice, with access to national health and education systems (see Box 3). In response to increasing numbers of Cameroonian refugees since 2017, the country's borders have remained open to new arrivals, and refugees have been offered the choice to live within organised settlements or alongside host communities.

The 2015 National Migration Policy contains several relevant commitments aimed at improving the country's refugee response, including conflict resolution in areas hosting refugees, steps to facilitate registration, ensuring protection at borders and facilitating local integration through residence permits (Government of Nigeria, 2015). In 2018 Nigeria adopted the Global Compact on Refugees, and at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum it made various commitments, including the allocation of farmland to refugees, supporting refugees' inclusion in national development planning, taking steps to promote access to education and reinforcing national, state and local capacities for local integration (UNHCR, 2021d; 2021e).

4 Public and political narratives

4.1 Migration in national public discourse

In general, while migration – in particular emigration – is considered an emotive topic for many Nigerians, the issue is not such that it can sway federal elections, nor is it a political priority compared to the economy, corruption, infrastructure development and the government's campaign against Boko Haram (Arhin-Sam, 2019). Where migration is covered in public and political debate, this is predominantly in terms of the emigration of Nigeria's own citizens, as well as Nigerian refugee outflows and returns, and internally displaced person (IDP) movements connected to the conflict in the north-east of the country (see Box 4). The relative absence of immigration and refugee-hosting from Nigeria's public discourse is unsurprising given the low proportion of foreign nationals compared to the country's large population size, as well as the normalisation of long-established West Africa mobility.

Where immigration or refugee-hosting are invoked by the federal government, this tends to be limited, relatively sporadic and framed in specific terms, discussed in Sections 4.2 and 4.3. National media coverage is noted only in response to specific events, for example, government announcements regarding irregular migration or during the height of different waves of refugee arrivals from Cameroon (see for example The Nation, 2017; Punch, 2020a). There have been some active discussions convened by civil society actors stressing links between migration and development, for example through the Civil Society Network for Migration and Development (CSNMD). However, these have predominantly focused on connections between migration and development in terms of emigration patterns, with far less focus on immigration into Nigeria (CSNMD, 2016).

While private sector actors in Nigeria benefit from migrant labour, private sector engagement is largely done quietly and is rarely subject to public discussion. Key sectors employing migrant workers include construction, extractive industries, textiles, manufacturing, retail and hospitality (IOM, 2016). Specific locations act as particular hubs for migrant workers, for example in relation to oil production in Rivers and Delta states, industry in Ogun state and hospitality in major cities (Afolayan, 2010). Interviews for this study suggest that reticence on the behalf of the Nigerian private sector to engage publicly with issues surrounding migrant workers may be linked to concerns that this might be perceived negatively by Nigerian nationals, or lead to questions surrounding the use of cheap labour and workers' documentation.

Immigration and refugee-hosting appear to have greater public profile at local levels, in particular in states hosting large numbers of Cameroonian refugees. Local civil society actors focusing on migrant communities have also been vocal on these issues. For example, Senegalese and Beninese communities in Ibadan, Oyo state, have formed migrant associations focusing on the security of their members and their compliance with immigration procedures (Arhin-Sam, 2019).

Box 4 Emigration and internal displacement: trends and public narratives

In 2020, 1.7 million Nigerians were living in other countries (UN DESA, 2020), including in the Middle East, Europe, North America and elsewhere in Africa. Overall, the Nigerian diaspora is notable for its size, comparatively high levels of education and the significant remittances it generates, estimated at $17.2 billion in 2020 (Samuel Hall, 2018a; Echeverria-Estrada and Batalova, 2019; McCarthy, 2021). Economic factors and educational opportunities are key drivers of emigration, alongside deteriorating socio-economic conditions and unemployment (Afrobarometer, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2018; Arhin-Sam, 2019). Conflict and violence have also driven significant forced displacement, including conflict between the Nigerian army and Boko Haram militants in the north-east, conflict between farmers and herders in north-central Nigeria, conflicts in the Niger Delta and recurrent election violence (Arhin-Sam, 2019). While most displacement is internal – with over 2.7 million internally displaced people registered in December 2020 (largely in the north-east) (IDMC, 2020) – in 2020 there were over 400,000 Nigerian refugees and asylum-seekers worldwide, the majority in neighbouring countries (UNHCR, 2021a).

For decades emigration was framed by Nigeria's government in terms of perceived negative impacts, with significant numbers of Nigerians leaving the country seen as a sign of development failure (De Haas, 2006). However, recent years have seen a shift focused on leveraging developmental gains associated with emigration, including by channelling remittances and negotiating regular migration pathways, while promoting sustainable reintegration of returning migrants (Arhin-Sam, 2019). Refugee outflows and internal displacement are often connected to the broader peacebuilding agenda within the country, and viewed as a marker of how far the government is succeeding in this respect, including in its campaign against Boko Haram (ibid.).

Government narratives have also increasingly focused on irregular journeys towards North Africa and Europe, in part prompted by media coverage of violence suffered by Nigerian migrants in Libya, South Africa and elsewhere. Public discourse on the issue has demonstrated empathy with fellow nationals for abuses suffered overseas, although some stigmatisation is noted towards those trafficked for sexual exploitation and returning migrants viewed as 'unsuccessful' (Samuel Hall, 2018b; Arhin-Sam, 2019). On its side, the Nigerian government has publicly articulated commitments to better protect the rights of its citizens overseas (Government of Nigeria, 2015).

4.2 Welcoming Nigeria

On occasions when Nigeria's federal government and other actors invoke immigration or refugee-hosting, reference is often made to a welcoming environment for foreign nationals and peaceful coexistence with local populations. For example, the 2015 National Migration Policy states that 'Nigerians by tradition are very hospitable and welcoming of foreigners in their midst' (Government of Nigeria, 2015: 47). Similarly, the Nigerian government has emphasised its inclusive refugee-hosting model, for example stating at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum that

> Nigeria has included refugees in national services such as education and health, totally avoiding the creation of a parallel unsustainable services and structures [sic][...] These efforts have no doubt contributed to a harmonious co-existence between refugees and local communities (Government of Nigeria, 2019: 5).

Narratives around Nigeria as a country of welcome are often rooted in the idea of shared history and socio-economic and cultural ties with specific groups of foreign nationals in the country. For example, long histories of cross-border mobility, trade, friendship and intermarriage in areas hosting Cameroonian refugees are credited with contributing to local narratives of refugees being brothers, rather than strangers.[2] Similarly, ethnic affinity between groups such as the Yoruba in Nigeria and Benin and the Hausa-Fulani in Nigeria and Niger mean that these groups are largely not portrayed as foreigners, speaking the same language as their counterparts in Nigeria and sharing cultural norms (Government of Nigeria, 2015). More widely, anecdotal evidence suggests that many West African migrants are seen as blending in with, and are often difficult to distinguish from, Nigerians.[3]

4.3 Outsiders, threats and pressures

While shared history and culture are in many cases considered core to a sentiment of 'welcoming Nigeria', narratives concerning migrants can intersect with wider patterns of social exclusion, including towards individuals from specific ethnic and religious groups (Birchall, 2019). More widely, distinctions between 'indigenes' (those with ancestral roots in their local area) and 'non-indigenes' are also associated with patterns of discrimination and marginalisation – including barriers to owning land, standing in elections and accessing employment and education (Birchall, 2019; Adibe and Onwughalu, 2020). Such dynamics have significant implications for broader perceptions of identity, belonging and of those who are considered 'outsiders' (Mberu and Pongou, 2010).

---

2   In addition to literature discussing this topic (see for example Ibrahim et al., 2020), this was a prominent theme in interviews conducted for this study with actors involved with the Cameroonian refugee response.

3   This was mentioned in interviews with various stakeholders, including the national government, civil society and international actors.

While far from widespread, there have been instances where groups of migrants have been portrayed as a threat or where concerns have been expressed about the perceived impacts of their presence. Concerns may be cultural (particularly regarding groups perceived as culturally different and seen as impacting Nigerian cultural norms), or related to perceived security risks (with migrants portrayed as being connected to terrorist activities), purported involvement in criminal behaviour (including prostitution, armed robbery and people trafficking), and perceptions of migrant workers taking jobs from Nigerians.[4] Such narratives often tend to appear at local levels, exacerbated by local media reporting, or sometimes relating to specific groups of foreign nationals. For example, in 2013 rumours reportedly emerged in Lagos alleging a connection between migrants from Chad, Niger and Mali and Boko Haram terrorist activities (Gary-Tounkara, 2015). Elsewhere, the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) has spoken out against Chinese traders, criticising the importation of low-cost Chinese consumer goods (Lampert and Mohan, 2018).

Such narratives appear particularly common in relation to irregular migrants. The federal government has at times sought to portray itself as taking strong action on 'illegal immigration', citing it as a threat to national security (The Nation, 2016a; 2019b; Vanguard, 2017a). For example, in June 2019 NIS Comptroller-General Muhammad Babandede announced that foreign nationals failing to register for residence permits would face deportation, stating that 'in the face of global reality coupled with the insurgency and other serious security threats, Nigeria must take all necessary steps in protecting its sovereignty for the citizens' (The Nation, 2019b).[5] Similar threat narratives are also reflected by those criticising the federal government for not taking strong enough action on the issue. For example, in late 2019 the Nigerian House of Representatives passed a motion stating that 'the uncontrolled immigration of unlawful immigrants into the country poses socioeconomic and political threats to the country', urging the government to strengthen border controls (Vanguard, 2019).

While not directly framed in terms of a 'threat', there are also local narratives pointing to pressures experienced in states hosting Cameroonian refugees, including relating to employment, land disputes, pressures on public services and security. This is often framed by local government and civil society actors in terms of the need for greater support and involvement from the federal government. For example, in January 2020 the chairman of a Cross River House of Assembly special committee on humanitarian crises, Hilary Bisong, spoke to the media, stating that 'Cross River alone cannot handle the refugee burden because of our very low financial resources. We need support and the presence of the Federal Government' (Punch, 2020b).

---

4   Anecdotal evidence of these narratives was noted in interviews and is also documented in the wider
     literature (see for example Adetula, 2009).
5   Similar statements have been made regarding deportations by the NIS at state levels, for example in
     Edo and Cross River states (The Nation, 2016b; Vanguard, 2017b).

5 Public attitudes towards immigration and refugee-hosting

Data on public attitudes towards migrants in Nigeria is relatively strong compared to many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Hargrave et al., 2020a; 2020b; Dempster et al., 2020). Various national polls include questions on immigration, including surveys by Gallup, the World Values Survey, Afrobarometer and Pew Global. These have tended to focus on levels of acceptance towards migrants, including by measuring attitudes towards having migrants as neighbours. However, they have also covered wider questions. In particular, the World Values Survey, last conducted in Nigeria in 2017–2018, includes questions on respondents' immigration policy preferences and assessment of the impacts of migrants' presence.

Perhaps the greatest limitation is that survey questions tend to be framed in terms of 'immigrants' and 'immigration' in a broad sense. Little data is available on attitudes towards migrants of specific nationalities, or distinguishing between attitudes towards refugees and those towards other migrants. Some insights can be drawn from more localised, often qualitative, evidence, particularly concerning Cameroonian refugees. The evidence base is also limited by the fact that survey data largely predates Covid-19 – with the most recent survey by Afrobarometer conducted in January and February 2020, meaning that any shifts in light of the pandemic are not yet discernible.

5.1 Overall trends: low salience and high acceptance

The relative absence of immigration from national public, political and media discourse is reflected in data measuring the salience of different issues to the Nigerian public. According to Afrobarometer's 2020 polling, neither immigration nor refugee hosting appeared to be a common answer when respondents were asked about the most important issues facing the country; rather, respondents prioritised infrastructure, electricity, crime and security and unemployment (see Box 5).[6]

Meanwhile, corresponding with narratives of Nigeria as a welcoming host, survey data has repeatedly demonstrated high levels of acceptance towards migrants. Drawing on data from the 2016 World Poll, Gallup's Migrant Acceptance Index ranked Nigeria the tenth most accepting country globally towards immigrants, achieving a score of 7.76, well above the average globally

---

6   Afrobarometer's questionnaire solicits free responses to this question, which are later coded into different categories. Less than 5% of those surveyed gave answers coded by Afroabarometer as 'other responses' when asked to list the three most important issues facing the country. It is presumed here that immigration and refugee-hosting would be included under 'other responses', falling outside other given categories.

and for sub-Saharan Africa (5.34 and 6.47 respectively) (Esipova et al., 2018).[7] In general, the index showed high levels of tolerance in ECOWAS countries, with Sierra Leone and Mali both ranking higher than Nigeria, among the top six most accepting countries worldwide.

In 2020, Afrobarometer found that only one in 10 Nigerians (10.6%) would dislike having 'immigrants or foreign workers' as neighbours, with over three-quarters (76%) saying that they would like or strongly like it. Attitudes appear to have grown more positive, and less ambivalent, in recent years, with the proportion of those displaying accepting attitudes rising significantly since 2014 (see Figure 5).[8] Available data also suggests that Nigerians are positive about the impact of migrants on the country's development. According to data from the World Values Survey, in 2017–2018 over two-thirds of Nigerians (69.6%) believed that immigrants had had a positive impact on Nigeria's development, with just under 14% citing negative impacts (World Values Survey, 2020).

Polling data reflects qualitative and more anecdotal observations in the literature, which documents high levels of integration of migrants in Nigerian society, including through socio-cultural ties (including intermarriage and friendship), as well as economic and political interactions (Afolayan, 2010; Lampert and Mohan, 2018; Arhin-Sam, 2019). This is particularly evident for migrants from countries neighbouring Nigeria and in Nigeria's border communities (Adedokun, 2003; Arhin-Sam, 2019). However, the literature also suggests a need for caution in assuming this is ubiquitous, with instances of social exclusion experienced by migrant workers (particularly in less regulated sectors such as agriculture, textiles, construction, mining, the food industry and domestic work) (Birchall, 2019), and low levels of integration among some communities (Olayinka, 2016).

---

7   Gallup's Migrant Acceptance Index provides a measure of people's acceptance towards migrants that combines responses to questions asking whether immigrants living in the country, becoming the respondent's neighbour and marrying a close relative would be a good or bad thing. The maximum possible score is 9.0 (if all three are considered good things) and the minimum possible score zero (if all three are considered bad things). The 2018 index ranked 140 countries (Esipova et al., 2018).

8   A similar trend is evident in data from the World Values Survey, although covering a slightly different time period. In 2012 the World Values Survey found that 20% of Nigerians mentioned immigrants and foreign workers as a group they would not like to have as neighbours (solicited from a range of options covering different groups); by the next survey round in 2017–2018 this had fallen to 13% (World Values Survey, 2020).

## Box 5 Broader attitudes in Nigeria: insights from Afrobarometer

Attitudes towards immigration and refugee-hosting should be understood in the context of wider societal attitudes. Afrobarometer polling, last conducted in January/February 2020, provides a useful snapshot in this regard. According to Afrobarometer, in 2020 Nigerians were predominantly negative about the state of the country. More than two-thirds (69%) believed that the country was headed in the wrong direction, while the majority (58%) ranked the country's economic condition as bad.

In 2020 over half of Nigerians (54%) said that they approved or strongly approved of President Muhammadu Buhari's performance. However, Afrobarometer's polling also shows high levels of disapproval with the government's handling of numerous issues, including job creation (with 80% disapproving), addressing the needs of youth (76%), the economy (71%), its handling of crime (66%) and violent conflict (66%), education (64%) and its performance on basic healthcare (62%). When asked to select the three most important problems facing the country that the government should address, the most common responses were infrastructure, electricity, crime and security and unemployment, each mentioned by over a third of respondents.

Polling has consistently shown low levels of trust in Nigerian political actors. In 2020, Afrobarometer found that less than two in 10 Nigerians said that they trusted the president a lot, while this was less than one in 10 when asked about ruling and opposition parties, local government and parliament. According to Afrobarometer's polling, religious and traditional leaders were most highly trusted. Data from the World Values Survey in 2017-18 indicates positive views of the private sector, media and civil society; according to the survey, the majority of Nigerians said they had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the press (54%), major companies (55%), universities (69%) and charitable or humanitarian organisations (65%).

Afrobarometer's data indicates low levels of trust within Nigerian society, with just 7.4% of Nigerians agreeing that most people could be trusted. However, six in 10 Nigerians (62%) felt that there was more that unites Nigerians than divides them. While ethnic identity was considered important, almost two-thirds (62%) said that they felt equally attached to their Nigerian and ethnic identity.

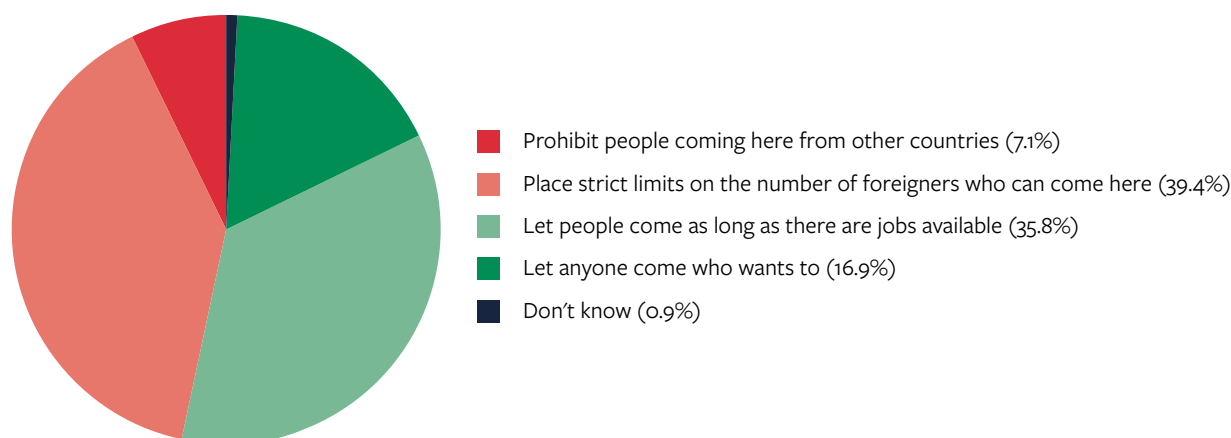Sources: Afrobarometer, 2020; Dempster et al., 2020; World Values Survey, 2020

Figure 5 Attitudes towards immigrants as neighbours (2014–2020)
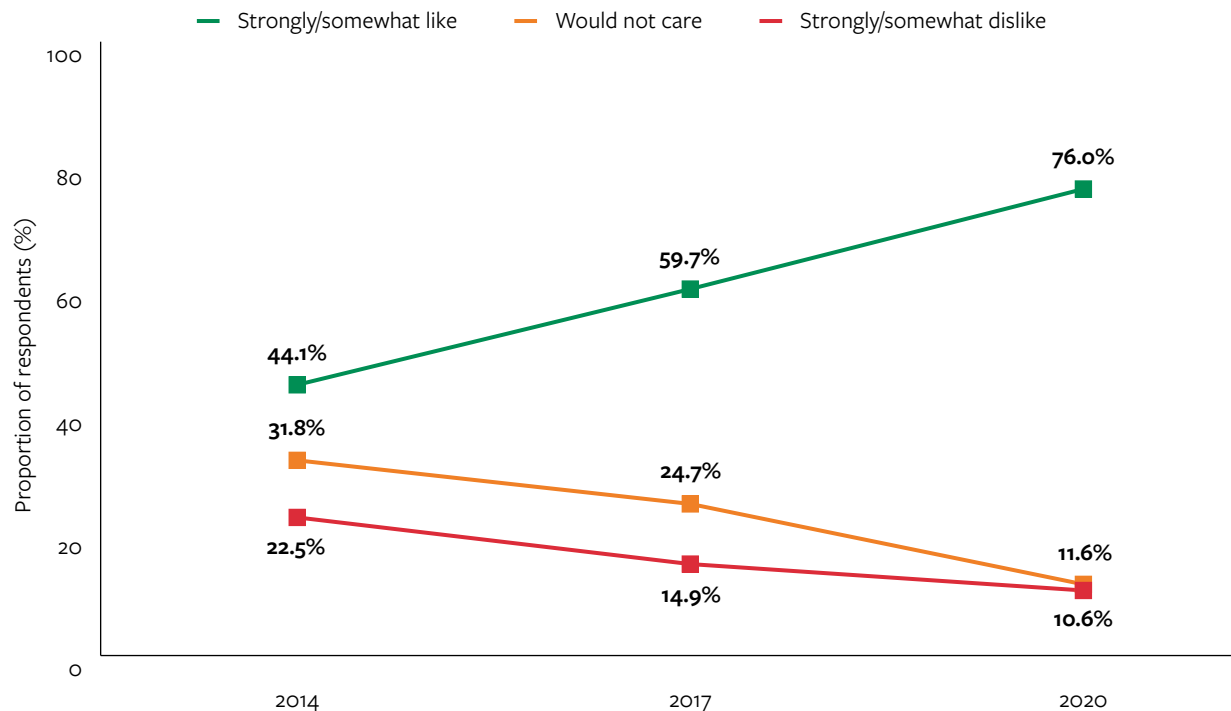
Note: This figure shows the proportion of respondents in Nigeria, from 2014–2020, selecting each response listed to the following question: 'For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care. Immigrants or foreign workers'.
Source: Afrobarometer, 2014; 2017; 2020.

5.2 Complexities behind welcoming attitudes

Generally tolerant attitudes towards migrants among Nigerians do not necessarily translate into liberal policy preferences. Pew Global's 2018 Spring Survey found that 50% of Nigerians supported allowing fewer or no immigrants at all into the country, slightly higher than the median proportion for 27 countries surveyed (45%) (Pew Research Center, 2018). In 2017–2018 the World Values Survey found that, when asked about people coming to the country to work, close to half of Nigerians supported either completely prohibiting or putting strict limits on immigration (see Figure 6). While the majority nonetheless favoured more open policies – although many on the condition that jobs were available – those favouring restrictive policies represented a significant proportion of Nigerian society.

Figure 6 Immigration policy preferences (2018)

Legend:
- Prohibit people coming here from other countries (7.1%)
- Place strict limits on the number of foreigners who can come here (39.4%)
- Let people come as long as there are jobs available (35.8%)
- Let anyone come who wants to (16.9%)
- Don't know (0.9%)

Note: This figure shows the proportion of respondents selecting each response listed to the following question: 'How about people from other countries coming here to work. Which one of the following do you think the government should do?'
Source: World Values Survey, 2020

Support for restrictive immigration policies despite broadly welcoming attitudes is by no means unusual worldwide (Facchini et al., 2008; Berg, 2015). Attitudes to immigration policy are likely to reflect not just perceptions of migrants per se, but also views on a broader range of factors, including attitudes in wider policy areas and perceptions of government competence overall – which in Nigeria have often been negative (see Box 5). It is also important to understand wider nuances within Nigerian attitudes, with data pointing to complexities behind broadly welcoming attitudes. For example, in 2017–2018 the World Values Survey found that, while the majority of Nigerians did not oppose welcoming immigrants or foreign workers as neighbours, two-thirds (67.4%) said that they did not trust people of another nationality much or at all (World Values Survey, 2020) (although this should be understood in the context of low levels of trust in Nigerian society more broadly (see Box 5)).

World Values Survey data from 2017–2018 suggests that Nigerians are relatively evenly split on whether immigrants were seen to increase crime rates or risks of terrorism or lead to social conflict (see Figure 7). More than four in 10, the largest proportion, agreed that immigrants had increased unemployment. While the largest proportion of Nigerians believed that immigration filled useful jobs and strengthened cultural diversity, a still significant proportion – just under a third – did not feel this was the case.

Figure 7 Perspectives on the impact of immigrants on Nigeria's development (2018)
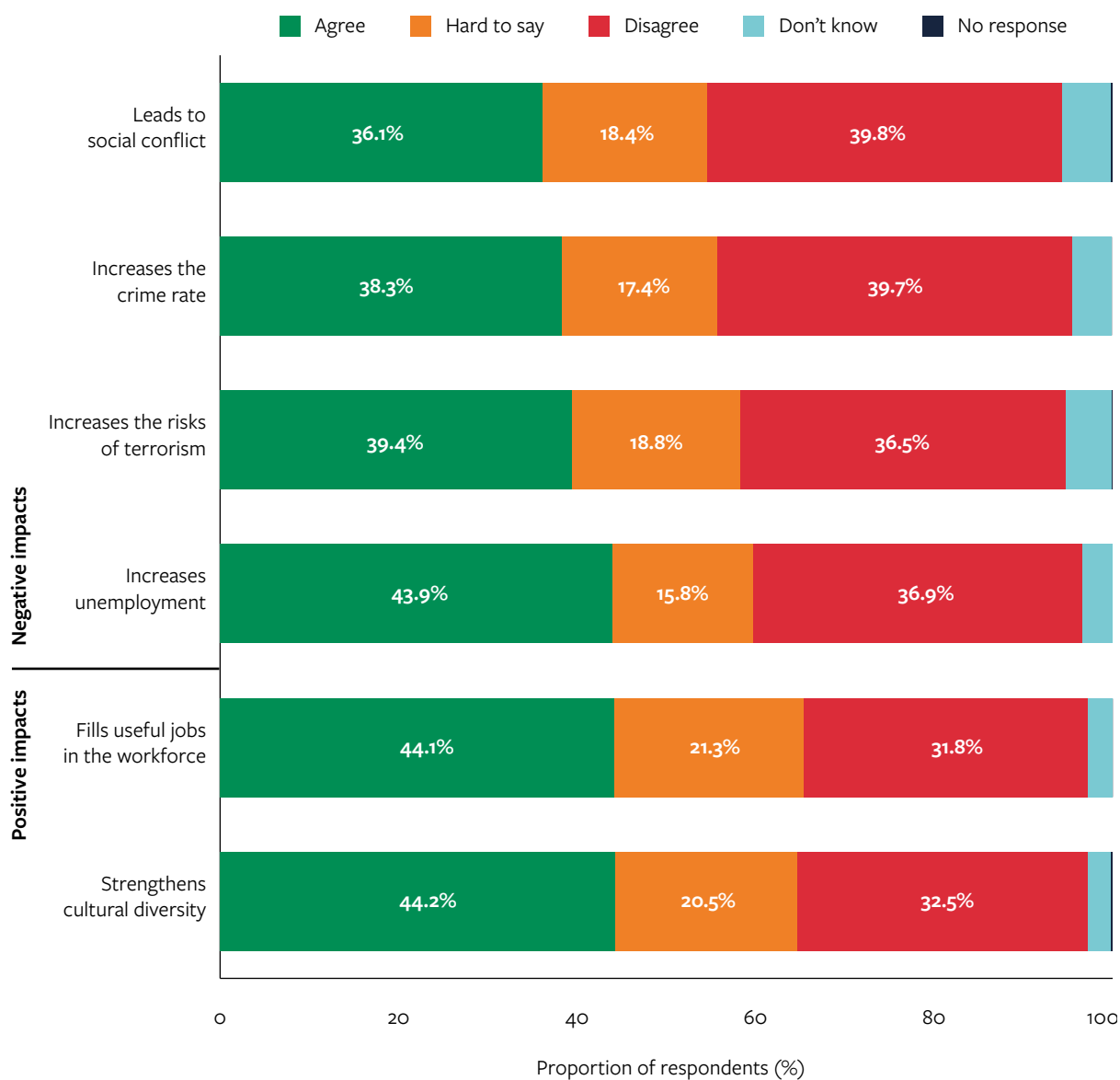
Note: This figure shows the proportion of respondents that agreed with each of the following options when asked: 'From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigrants on the development of Nigeria?' [Leads to social conflict/increases the crime rate/increases the risks of terrorism/increases unemployment/fills useful jobs in the workforce/strengthens cultural diversity]

Source: World Values Survey, 2020

World Values Survey data also suggests diverse views between different demographic groups. Contrary to trends in many other countries (Dempster et al., 2020), attitudes appear less open among young Nigerians and those with higher levels of education (see Figure 8). Almost two-thirds of highly educated respondents favoured prohibiting or putting strict limits on immigration, compared to a lower proportion among those with middling and low levels of education. Those under 50 years of age were more likely than older cohorts to support restrictive immigration policies, though this distinction was less marked.

The same World Values Survey data shows clear distinctions between different parts of the country.[9] For example, support for prohibiting or putting strict limits on immigration ranges from 75% in north-east Nigeria to 36% in the south-west (World Values Survey, 2020).[10] Perceptions of specific impacts also vary significantly between regions (Figure 9). For example, the south-west – home to Ogun and Lagos, both hubs attracting migrant workers – saw the highest proportion across all regions agreeing that immigration increased unemployment. Perceptions that immigrants increased risks of terrorism and led to social conflict were most prevalent in the north-east, likely linked to conflict in the region and the threat from Boko Haram.

----

9   The geographical classification used here is based on Nigeria's six geopolitical zones: North Central (including Niger, Kogi, Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Kwara states and Federal Capital Territory), North East (Bauchi, Borno, Taraba, Adamawa, Gombe and Yobe states), North West (Zamfara, Sokoto, Kaduna, Kebbi, Katsina, Kano and Jigawa states), South East (Enugu, Imo, Ebonyi, Abia and Anambra states), South South (Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Edo, Rivers, Cross River and Delta) and South West (Oyo, Ekiti, Osun, Ondo, Lagos and Ogun states) (European Asylum Support Office, 2019).
10   Support for prohibiting or putting strict limits on immigration was 75% in the North East, 54% in the North West, 41% in the North Central, 58% in the South East, 42% in the South South and 36% in the South West.

Figure 8 Restrictive policy preferences: comparison by age groups and levels of education (2018)
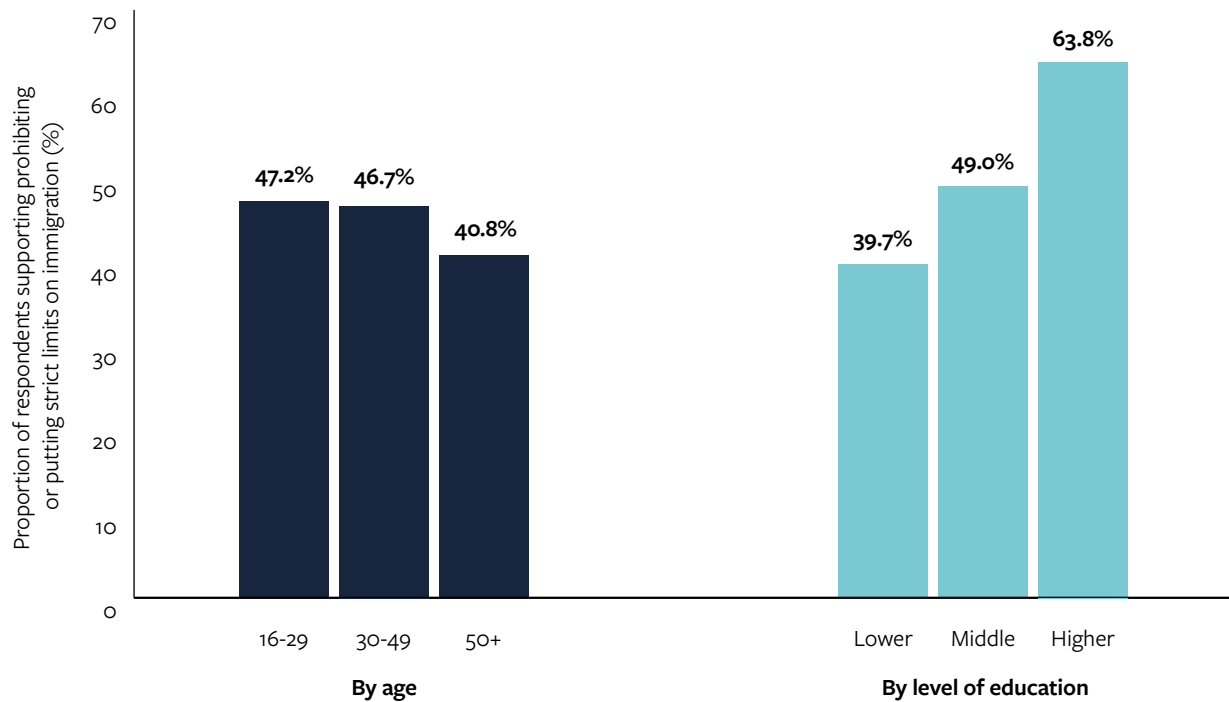
Note: This figure shows the total proportion of respondents in each age group and education level that indicated they would prefer to either prohibit or place strict limits on immigration, in response to the question: 'How about people from other countries coming here to work. Which one of the following do you think the government should do?'
Source: World Values Survey, 2020

Figure 9 Effects of immigrants on Nigeria's development: perspectives on links to unemployment, terrorism and social conflict
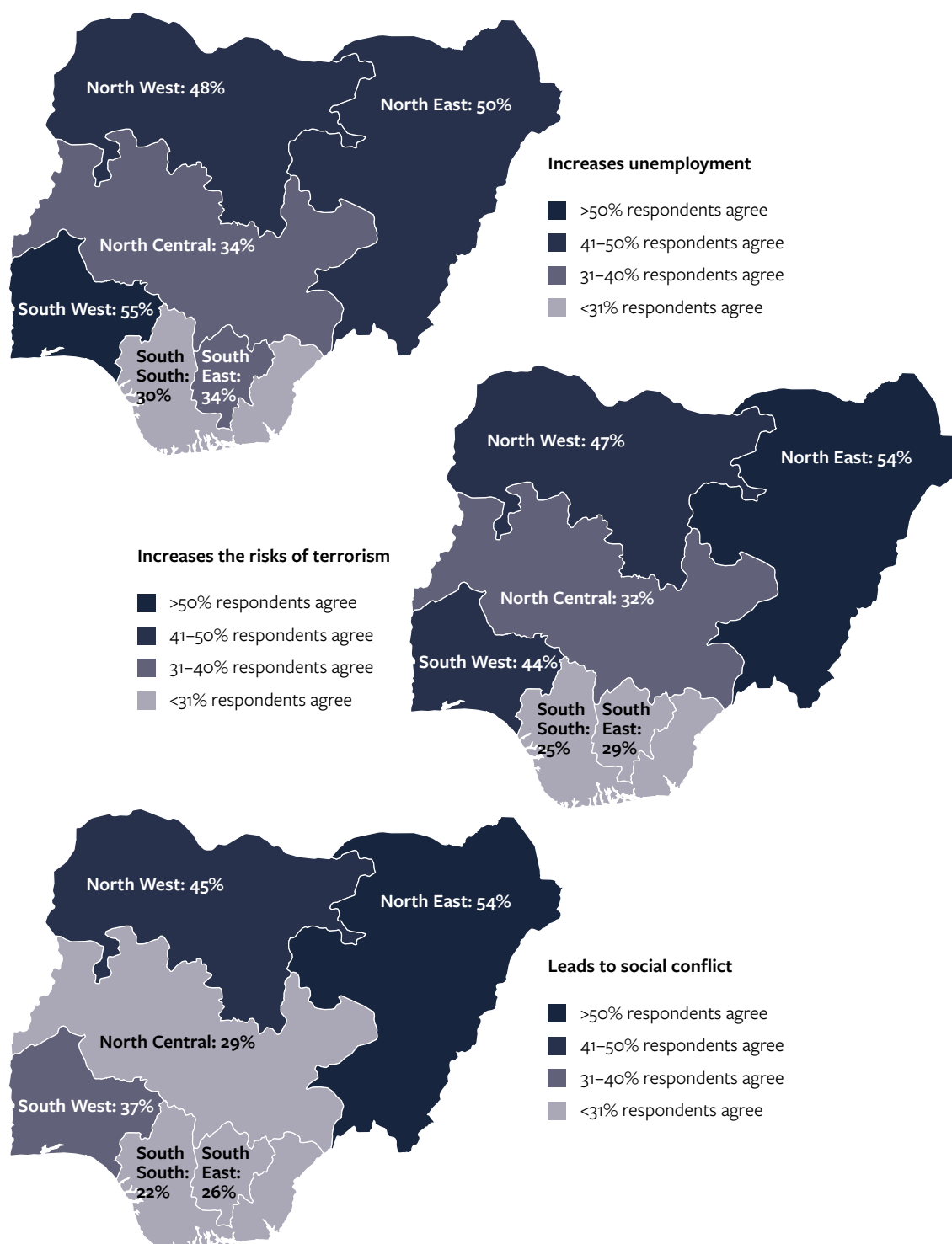
Note: This figure shows the proportion of respondents in different regions of Nigeria that agreed with each of the following options when asked: 'From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigrants on the development of Nigeria?' [Increases unemployment/increases the risks of terrorism/leads to social conflict]
Source: World Values Survey, 2020

5.3 Attitudes towards refugees

Data on attitudes towards migrants in Nigeria does not usually distinguish specific attitudes towards refugees. As a notable exception, Nigeria was included in Amnesty International's Refugees Welcome Index, which in 2016 ranked 27 countries around the world in terms of their populations' willingness to allow refugees to live in their countries, towns, neighbourhoods and homes (Amnesty International, 2016). The index ranked Nigeria the seventh least welcoming of all countries surveyed, with a score of 41, below the 27-country average of 52. While polling conducted as part of the survey found that eight in 10 Nigerians agreed in principle that people should be able to take refuge in other countries, and 84% agreed that their government should do more to help refugees, only around three in 10 of those surveyed (29%) said that they would accept refugees in their household, neighbourhood, city, town or village. However, the Amnesty index was produced at a time when a relatively small number of refugees were hosted in Nigeria, predating the arrival of Cameroonian refugees from 2017 onwards.

Overall, qualitative and more anecdotal evidence suggests a welcoming environment for Cameroonian refugees in their immediate host communities, supported by long-standing social and economic connections.[11] Host communities in Nigeria have been crucial providers of support to Cameroonian refugees, sharing food, water, accommodation and employment opportunities (UNHCR and Government of Nigeria, 2019; UNHCR, 2018b).[12] Interviews for this study suggest that local mosques and churches have played a key role, alongside wealthy community members and those with pre-existing relationships with individual Cameroonians.

Isolated clashes have been reported between Cameroonian refugees and members of host communities, often over land or linked to pressures on natural resources (including food and firewood). These have reportedly usually been settled by community leaders (Arhin-Sam, 2019; UNHCR, 2019d; UNHCR and Government of Nigeria, 2019). Reported incidents include gender-based violence linked to women collecting firewood, exploitation linked to work, tensions over firewood and deforestation and accusations against refugees of stealing food crops (UNHCR and Government of Nigeria, 2019). However, it is testament to the apparent welcome of Nigerian hosting communities that such incidents do not appear more prominent, particularly in the context of steadily rising refugee numbers, significant pressures on already stretched local infrastructure and the impacts of poverty and food insecurity on host communities (Ibrahim et al., 2020).

---

11   This was mentioned in interviews with various actors, including with a government official, national NGO and a national media representative.
12   This was also mentioned in interviews with a government official, civil society organisation and a national NGO.

6 Recommendations

There are various entry points for actors seeking to engage with narratives and attitudes towards migrants, including refugees, in Nigeria, from government at all levels, civil society, the media and the private sector to regional and international organisations. This study offers the following recommendations to actors already engaging, or interested in engaging, in this space.

Recommendation 1: Ensure that broader engagement on migration and development includes a focus on migrants, including refugees, *within* Nigeria

Recent years have seen growing engagement and policy developments focusing on developmental gains associated with migration in Nigeria. However, this has largely been centred on *emigration* patterns and Nigeria's diaspora. Less attention has been paid to the role of migrants within the country, and how their contributions can best be harnessed in support of wider development aspirations. This is despite the fact that the Nigerian public already judges the overall impact of migrants on Nigeria's development to be positive. There appears to be scope to apply existing expertise in terms of links between migration and development, to date focused on emigration and Nigeria's diaspora, to assess and highlight the development contributions of migrants within the country. Areas for future action include:

- **Ensuring that ongoing efforts to strengthen overall migration data collection and management in Nigeria include a focus on migrants, including refugees, within the country.** In particular, efforts to strengthen data on their skills profiles, labour market participation and broader development contributions should be prioritised.
- On the basis of this data, **exploring steps that could be taken at national and local levels to best harness migrants' and refugees' socio-economic contributions within Nigeria**. This should draw on the expertise of actors involved across the spectrum of mobility in Nigeria, as well as those focused on broader development issues, from civil society and the private sector to refugees and other migrants themselves.

Recommendation 2: Further strengthen the evidence base on attitudes towards immigration and refugee-hosting

The evidence base on Nigerian attitudes towards migrants, including refugees, in the country is relatively strong compared to that in other African countries, and indeed low- and middle-income countries more broadly (Leach and Hargrave, 2020). However, there are various areas where this could be further strengthened, in particular by:

- **Seeking to collect more targeted data regarding attitudes towards refugees**, both at the national level and in immediate hosting communities. This evidence could play a key role in informing future national policies, while also facilitating early interventions to address any emerging risks of more direct conflict and tension. This is particularly critical in a context where refugee numbers are likely to continue rising, alongside related pressures, while funding and attention to the response declines.
- **Mixed methods studies** – for example through attitudinal segmentation – seeking to better understand nuances within Nigerian public opinion and factors driving restrictive policy preferences.

Recommendation 3: Celebrate a nuanced picture of Nigeria as a country of welcome, while acknowledging complexities and concerns

The Nigerian government and public at large should be rightly proud that, across several metrics, rhetoric surrounding Nigeria as a country of welcome matches the reality reflected in attitudinal data and wider evidence. Those engaging with narratives and attitudes should seek to celebrate and profile these attitudes, including in regional and global fora, presenting a counterpoint to those elsewhere in Africa and globally. However, it is also critical that this is not at the expense of acknowledging – and taking steps to better understand and address – complexities, in particular among the significant minority of Nigerians for whom immigration is associated with negative impacts. This should include:

- **Addressing concerns relating to perceived links between immigration and unemployment**, as well as other less prominent concerns (for example in relation to crime, security and social conflict). This should be rooted in an understanding of how these concerns play out differently in different geographic areas. Such actions should also be linked with broader efforts – by the government of Nigeria, as well as its humanitarian and development partners – to address the more systemic issues in which these concerns are rooted.
- **Considering the role that more highly trusted actors can play in engaging with concerns**, including religious and traditional leaders, the private sector and civil society. For example, through initiatives aimed at building dialogue within communities where concerns are most prominent, aiming to better understand and where possible alleviate sources of tension.

References

Adedokun, O. (2003) *The rights of migrant workers and members of their families: Nigeria*. UNESCO Series of Country Reports on the Ratification of the UN Convention on Migrants. Geneva: UNESCO (www.cetim.ch/legacy/fr/documents/UNESCO-CMW-Nigeria.pdf).

Adepoju, A. (2005) *Migration in West Africa*. Paper prepared for the Policy Analysis and Research Programme of the Global Commission on International Migration. Geneva: Global Commission on International Migration (www.iom.int/sites/default/files/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/policy_and_research/gcim/rs/RS8.pdf).

Adetula, V.A. (2009) 'West African labour migrants and national security in Nigeria' in M.B. Arrous and L. Ki-Zerbo (eds) *African studies in geography from below*. Dakar: CODESRIA.

Adibe, J. and Onwughalu, V.C. (2020) 'Xenophobia in Nigeria and Ghana: implications for inter-ethnic and international relations' in M.A. Mafukata (ed.) *Impact of immigration and xenophobia on development in Africa*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Afolayan, A.A. (2010) 'Nigeria: experiences of Immigrants in Nigeria' in U.A Segal, D. Elliott and N.S. Mayadas (eds) *Immigration worldwide: policies, practices, and trends*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Afrobarometer (2014) 'Online data tool – Round 6 (2014/15), Nigeria'. Electronic dataset (https://afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/analyse-online).

Afrobarometer (2017) 'Online data tool – Round 7 (2016/18), Nigeria'. Electronic dataset (https://afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/analyse-online).

Afrobarometer (2020) *Summary of results: Afrobarometer Round 8 survey in Nigeria, 2020*. Lagos: NOIPolls (https://afrobarometer.org/publications/summary-results-afrobarometer-round-8-survey-nigeria-2020).

Amnesty International (2016) *Refugees Welcome Survey 2016: views of citizens across 27 countries*. Topline Report from GlobeScan, May. London: Amnesty International (www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/4100/2016/en/).

Anyogu, F. and Ozioko, M. (2019) 'An appraisal of the laws regulating refugee and asylum status in Nigeria' *International Journal of Business & Law Research* 7(3): 42–47.

Arhin-Sam, K. (2019) *The political economy of migration governance in Nigeria*. Freiburg: Arnold-Bergstraesser Institute (ABI) (www.medam-migration.eu/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/MEDAM-Webseite/Publications/Research_Papers/WAMiG_country_reports/WAMiG_Nigeria_country_report/WAMiG_Nigeria_country_report.pdf).

Berg, J.A. (2015) 'Explaining attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policy: a review of the theoretical literature' *Sociology Compass* 9(1): 23–34 (https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12235).

Birchall, J. (2019) *Overview of social exclusion in Nigeria*. K4D Helpdesk report. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies (https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/14809).

Bisong, A. (2018) 'Trans-regional institutional cooperation as multilevel governance: ECOWAS migration policy and the EU' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45(8): 1294–1309 (https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1441607).

Black, R., Ammassari, S., Mouillesseaux, S. and Rajkotia, R. (2004) *Migration and pro-poor policy in West Africa*. Working Paper C8. University of Sussex: DRC on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty.

CSNMD – Network for Migration and Development in Nigeria (2016) 'Outcome of satellite meeting in preparation for the civil society days on Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2016'. Abuja: CSNMD (http://augustinians-un.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CIVIL-SOCIETY-NETWORK-on-MIGRATION-and-DEVELOPMENT-Outcome-document-of-Satellite-meeting-towards-2016-GFMD-civil-society-days.pdf).

Dash, L. (1982) 'Chadian refugees spark questions over approach to problem'. Washington Post, 30 March (www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/03/30/chadian-refugees-spark-questions-over-approach-to-problem/d9a179f6-ae1e-4bca-87c3-9f99cff6c2d9/).

De Haas, H. (2006) *International migration and national development: viewpoints and policy initiatives in countries of origin. The case of Nigeria*. Report prepared for Radboud University, Nijmegen and Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands. Amsterdam: International Migration Institute (www.migrationinstitute.org/publications/nigeria-migration-development).

Deloitte (2015) *The changing face of immigration compliance in Nigeria: improved process, enhanced scrutiny*. Inside Tax report. London: Deloitte Global (www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ng/Documents/tax/inside-tax/ng-the-changing-face-of-immigration-compliance-in-nigeria.pdf).

Dempster, H., Leach, A. and Hargrave, K. (2020) *Public attitudes towards immigration and immigrants: what people think, why, and how to influence them*. London: ODI (https://odi.org/en/publications/public-attitudes-towards-immigration-and-immigrants-what-people-think-why-and-how-to-influence-them/).

Echeverria-Estrada, C. and Batalova, J. (2019) 'Sub-Saharan African immigrants in the United States'. MPI blog, 6 November (www.migrationpolicy.org/article/sub-saharan-african-immigrants-united-states-2018).

Esipova, N., Fleming, J. and Ray, J. (2018) 'Revisiting the most- and least-accepting countries for migrants'. Gallup News, 18 December (https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/245528/revisiting-least-accepting-countries-migrants.aspx).

European Asylum Support Office (2019) 'Country guidance: Nigeria' (www.easo.europa.eu/country-guidance-nigeria/general-remarks-1).

Facchini, G. Mayda, A.M., Guido, L. and Schultz, C. (2008) 'From individual attitudes towards migrants to migration policy outcomes: theory and evidence' *Economic Policy* 23(56): 651–713 (https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0327.2008.00212.x).

Fadayomi, T.O. (2013) *Enhancing migration management in Nigeria: assessment and recommendations*. Brussels: ACP Observatory on Migration (www.migration4development.org/sites/default/files/migration-data-assessment-nigeria.pdf).

Fouchard, L. (2009) 'Dealing with strangers: allocating urban space to migrants in Nigeria and French West Africa, end of the 19th century to 1960' in F. Locatelli and P. Nugent (eds) *African cities: competing claims on urban spaces*. Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies, Volume 3. Leiden: Brill.

Gary-Tounkara, D. (2015) 'A reappraisal of the expulsion of illegal immigrants from Nigeria in 1983' *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 9(1): 25–38 (https://doi.org/10.4119/ijcv-3066).

Government of Nigeria (1999) Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (https://publicofficialsfinancialdisclosure.worldbank.org/sites/fdl/files/assets/law-library-files/Nigeria_Constitution_1999_en.pdf).

Government of Nigeria (2015) National Migration Policy (https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/national_migration_policy_2015.pdf).

Government of Nigeria (2019) 'Statement delivered by the Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management of Social Development, Ms. Anetu-Anne Aliu'. Statement at the Global Refugee Forum, Geneva, 17–18 December (www.unhcr.org/uk/events/conferences/5df9f3db4/statement-from-nigeria.html).

Hargrave, K., Mosel, I. and Leach, A. (2020a) *Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Kenya country profile*. London: ODI (https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/kenya_migration_country_profile_final.pdf).

Hargrave, K., Mosel, I. and Leach, A. (2020b) *Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Uganda country profile*. London: ODI (https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/uganda_migration_country_profile_final.pdf).

Ibrahim, S., Audu, B.J. and Anloho, R.A. (2020) 'Politics and cross-border migrations in Africa: forced migration of Cameroonians and food crisis in Benue state, Nigeria since 2016' *KIU Journal of Humanities* 5(2): 67–74.

IDMC – Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2020) 'Nigeria: country information' (www.internal-displacement.org/countries/nigeria).

Idrissa, R. (2019) *Dialogue in divergence: the impact of EU migration policy on West African integration: the cases of Nigeria, Mali and Niger*. Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/15284.pdf).

Ikwuyatum, G.O. (2016) 'The pattern and characteristics of inter and intra regional migration in Nigeria' *International Journal of Humanities and Science* 6(7): 114–124 (www.researchgate.net/publication/326391270_The_Pattern_and_Characteristics_of_Inter_and_Intra_Regional_Migration_in_Nigeria).

IOM – International Organization for Migration (2016) *Migration in Nigeria: a country profile 2014*. Geneva: IOM (https://publications.iom.int/books/migration-nigeria-country-profile-2014).

IOM (2021) 'COVID-19 mobility impacts: Nigeria'. Geneva: IOM (https://migration.iom.int/countries/nigeria).

KPMG (2020) 'FG launched Nigeria Visa Policy 2020'. Lagos: KPMG Nigeria (https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/ng/pdf/tax/fg-launches-nigeria-visa-policy-2020.pdf).

Lampert, B. and Mohan, G. (2018) 'A transformative presence? Chinese migrants as agents of change in Ghana and Nigeria' in K. Giese and L. Marfaing (eds) *Chinese and African entrepreneurs: social impacts of interpersonal encounters*. Leiden: Brill.

Leach, A. and Hargrave, K. (2020) 'The data gap on public attitudes towards migrants in low- and middle-income countries needs closing – here's how'. ODI blog. London: ODI (https://odi.org/en/insights/the-data-gap-on-public-attitudes-towards-migrants-in-low-and-middle-income-countries-needs-closing-heres-how/).

Mbanugo, O. (2012) 'The state of refugees and internally placed persons in Nigeria: A legal review' *Nnamdi Azikiwe University Journal of International Law and Jurisprudence* 3: 97–106.

Mberu, B.U. and Pongou, R. (2010) 'Nigeria: multiple forms of mobility in Africa's demographic giant'. MPI Profile (www.migrationpolicy.org/article/nigeria-multiple-forms-mobility-africas-demographic-giant).

McCarthy, N. (2021) 'These countries are the world's top remittance recipients'. World Economic Forum blog, 19 May (www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/05/infographic-what-are-the-world-s-top-remittance-recipients/).

National Diaspora Commission (2021) National Diaspora Policy (https://nidcom.gov.ng/national-policy-on-diaspora/#:~:text=The%20National%20Diaspora%20Policy%20aims,Diaspora%20contributions%20to%20Nigeria's%20development).

NIS – Nigeria Immigration Service (n.d.) 'Residence Permits'. Abuja: NIS (https://immigration.gov.ng/residence-permits/).

Olayinka, P.K. (2016) 'Cross-border migrants' integration in rural border communities of South-West Nigeria' *Journal of Sustainable Development Studies* 9(2): 138–152.

Oni, E.O. and Okunade, S.K. (2018) 'The context of xenopohobia in Africa: Nigeria and South Africa in comparison' in A.O. Akinola (ed.) *The political economy of xenophobia in Africa*. New York: Springer International Publishing.

Pew Research Center (2018) 'Topline questionnaire: Pew Research Center spring 2018 survey, December 10, 2018 release' (www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/FT_18.12.10_MigrationViews_Topline2.pdf).

Punch (2020a) 'Cross River prepared for Cameroonian refugees, says SEMA'. Punch, 18 February (https://punchng.com/cross-river-prepared-for-cameroonian-refugees-says-sema/).

Punch (2020b) 'Cross River donates N800m, land to Cameroonian refugees'. Punch, 31 January (https://punchng.com/criver-donates-n800m-land-to-cameroonian-refugees/).

PwC (2020) 'Nigeria: New Visa Policy 2020 takes effect from October 2020'. Insights from Global Mobility Services, 26 October (www.pwc.com/gx/en/services/people-organisation/publications/assets/nigeria-new-visa-policy-2020-takes-effect-from-october-2020.pdf).

Samuel Hall (2018a) *Creating opportunities to work with diaspora in humanitarian settings*. Copenhagen: DEMAC (https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cfe2c8927234e0001688343/t/5d1f18358df1e6000150719c/1562318910648/report-final-12052018.pdf).

Samuel Hall (2018b) *Mapping and socio-economic profiling of communities of return in Nigeria: synthesis report*. Nairobi: Samuel Hall (www.alnap.org/help-library/community-mapping-and-socio-economic-profiling-of-communities-of-return-in-west-0).

Schöfberger, I. (2020) 'Free movement policies and border controls: regional migration governance systems in West and North Africa and Europe, and their interactions' in *Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean*. Geneva: IOM (https://publications.iom.int/books/migration-west-and-north-africa-and-across-mediterranean).

Teye, J.K., Awumbila, M. and Benneh, Y. (2015) 'Intraregional migration in the ECOWAS region: trends and emerging challenges' in A.B. Akoutou, R. Sohn, M. Vogl and D. Yeboah (eds) *Migration and civil society as development drivers – a regional perspective*. WAI-ZEI Paper 23. Praia and Bonn: WAI-ZAI (www.zei.uni-bonn.de/dateien/wai-zei-paper/wai-zei_paper_no_23_en).

The Nation (2016a) 'Insecurity: NIS vows to flush out illegal immigrants' The Nation, 25 March (https://thenationonlineng.net/insecurity-nis-vows-flush-illegal-immigrants/).

The Nation (2016b) '730 illegal immigrants repatriated in Cross River' The Nation, 27 June (https://thenationonlineng.net/730-illegal-immigrants-repatriated-cross-river/).

The Nation (2017) 'Crisis as Cameroonian refugees swell Cross River communities' The Nation, 3 December.

The Nation (2019a) 'Fed Govt to clamp down on illegal immigrants' The Nation, 22 February (https://thenationonlineng.net/fed-govt-to-clamp-down-on-illegal-immigrants/).

The Nation (2019b) 'Illegal immigrants risk deportation over residence permits' The Nation, 17 June (https://thenationonlineng.net/illegal-immigrants-risk-deportation-over-residence-permits/).

UK Government (2021) 'Foreign travel advice: Nigeria'. UK Government (www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/nigeria/entry-requirements).

UN – United Nations (n.d.) 'OAU Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa'. New York: UN (https://treaties.un.org/pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=080000028010432f).

UN DESA – United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2020) 'International Migration Stock 2020'. Dataset. UN DESA (www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock).

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (n.d.) *State Parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol*. Geneva: UNHCR (www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b73b0d63.pdf).

UNHCR (2018a) *Protection strategy for Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria 2018–2019*. Geneva: UNHCR (https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/protection-strategy-cameroonian-refugees-nigeria-2018-2019).

UNHCR (2018b) 'Cameroonian refugees flee clashes and find safety in Nigeria'. UNHCR, 11 October (www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2018/10/5bbb5f714/cameroonian-refugees-flee-clashes-find-safety-nigeria.html).

UNHCR (2019a) *Cameroon situation responding to the needs of IDPs and Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria: supplementary appeal January–December 2019*. Geneva: UNHCR (https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR%20Cameroon%202019%20Supplementary%20Appeal%20%28March%202019%29.pdf).

UNHCR (2019b) *Interagency GBV and chid protection strategic directions: based on a comprehensive assessment in local government areas hosting Cameroonian refugees in Benue, Cross-River and Taraba States, Nigeria*. Abuja: UNHCR (https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/interagency-gbv-and-child-protection-strategic-directions-based-comprehensive).

UNHCR (2019c) *2018 year-end report – operation: Nigeria*. Geneva: UNHCR (https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/pdfsummaries/GR2018-Nigeria-eng.pdf).

UNHCR (2019d) *Cameroon situation update December 2019*. Ogoja: UNHCR (https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Nigeria%20-%20Cameroon%20Situation%20Update%20-%20December%202019_1.pdf).

UNHCR (2020) *2019 year-end report – operation: Nigeria*. Geneva: UNHCR (https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/pdfsummaries/GR2019-Nigeria-eng.pdf).

UNHCR (2021a) 'Refugee population statistics database'. Electronic dataset. UNHCR (www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/).

UNHCR (2021b) 'Operational data portal: refugee situations. Nigeria'. UNHCR (https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/nga).

UNHCR (2021c) 'UNHCR Nigeria: Cameroon refugees overview dashboard – May 2021'. Ogoja: UNHCR (https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/87165).

UNHCR (2021d) 'Nigeria: 2021'. UNHCR (https://reporting.unhcr.org/node/13640?y=2021#year).

UNHCR (2021e) 'Pledges & contributions dashboard'. UNHCR (https://globalcompactrefugees.org/channel/pledges-contributions).

UNHCR (2021f) 'Operational update: Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria'. Ogoja: UNHCR (https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Nigeria-Cameroonian%20Refugees%20Operational%20Update%20April%202021_0.pdf).

UNHCR and Government of Nigeria (2019) *The 2019 Cross River and Benue States refugees and host communities Participatory Assessment (PA) report*. Abuja: UNHCR (https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/2019-crossriver-and-benue-states-refugees-and-host-communities-participatory).

Vanguard (2017a) 'NIS deploys armed personnel to prevent illegal migrants to Niger'. Vanguard, 15 September (www.vanguardngr.com/2017/09/nis-deploys-armed-personnel-prevent-illegal-migrants-niger/).

Vanguard (2017b) 'NIS repatriates 450 illegal immigrants from Edo'. Vanguard, 4 July (www.vanguardngr.com/2017/07/nis-repatriates-450-illegal-immigrants-edo/).

Vanguard (2019) 'Reps urge FG to review immigration procedure to checkmate influx of illegal immigrants'. Vanguard, 10 December (www.vanguardngr.com/2019/12/reps-urge-fg-to-review-immigration-procedure-to-checkmate-influx-of-illegal-immigrants/).

World Values Survey (2020) 'Survey wave 7: 2017–2020'. Vienna: World Values Survey (www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp).