

CIDOB International Yearbook 2008

Keys to facilitate the monitoring of the Spanish Foreign Policy and the International Relations in 2007

Country profile: Nigeria and its regional context
Annex Emigration and immigration*

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Emigration and Immigration in Nigeria

Immigration flows

With increased phenomenon of international migration in which the trend in Africa currently accounts for 10% of the population,¹ very many countries have attempted to engage in regular review of their emigration and immigration policies with a view to capturing emerging challenges. Nigeria is not left out in this regard, given that its account of spatial mobility of people has also assumed more dramatic and higher proportion in the last three decades. The country has “a laissez-faire emigration policy” as it has no enough administrative structures or measures that “hinder and/or facilitate the movement of citizens outside the country beyond the normal immigration requirements for all travelers.”² Although no exact figure exists on the number of Nigerians that have migration from the country in view of the very ‘informal/illegal’ nature of some of the migrations, but an estimate of 15 million was taunted to have so far migrated from the country in 2002.³ These Nigerians in the Diaspora left the country for several reasons. Those who migrated prior to the economic crisis that started in the middle of 1980s left to study abroad with the hope of returning to put the knowledge acquired into use. Majority of these category of migrants were either on student scholarship or grant scheme of their home governments (be it federal or state) or the governments of their host countries.⁴ Even those sponsored with private funds then were able to undertake such adventure because the Nigerian economy was still fairly strong and the currency (the Naira) stable and highly valued.

The latter day emigrants (of mid-1980s upward) left Nigeria at a time of economic depression precipitated by the fall of international oil price and the failure of the accompanied economic stabilization and structural adjustment policies evolved to deal with the problem. As successive authoritarian military regimes in Nigeria increased their hold on the already shrunk political space in the face of a ‘defiant’ pro-democracy and human rights community who continually agitated for a return to civilian rule, emigration and immigration also witnessed a corresponding surge across age, educational background, class and state/ethnic group of origin.⁵ The pattern of emigration among professionals has been argued to have more of medical personnel in the Middle East, while others are dispersed in Europe and America, with yet artisans, laborers and traders also dispersed around the world, but with

¹ Florence Nightingale, *Nigeria: An Assessment of the International Labour Migration Situation: The Case of Female Labour Migrants*, GENPROM Working Paper No. 7, *Series on Women and Migration*, International Labour Organization, Geneva,

² Ibid

³ Bashir Olabode, *Op. Cit.*

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Florence Nightingale, *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

concentration in other African countries⁶. The latter day emigration in Nigeria was induced by different reasons, chiefly among which were: running from the brutality of the military regimes that were not disposed to criticism and from the hardship precipitated by the myriads of sanctions slammed on Nigeria to compound its dwindling economic fortunes. Even though people still left the country in search of the proverbial "golden fleece", the majority of others who emigrated during this latter period (and now), left in search of "greener pastures". To majority of this latter generation of emigrants the financial cost of migration was disproportionately high, given their very low incomes, near zero opportunity for job mobility, escalating inflation and dehumanizing visa application procedures. But the desperation to leave Nigeria, in the face of this clear absence of the means to do so via legal way, has also correspondingly increased intending migrants' "desperation to beat and decouple from a distrusted and dislike system" to do it in the hard (illegal) way. It is in this sense that the country today records high cases of human trafficking and cross-border rights abuses.

Today, the Sahelian and Saharan states of Mali, Burkina Faso, Morocco and Libya are grappling with incidents of young Nigerians, majority of whom are of Edo and Cross River States origin, who continue to attempt this illegal and hard route to Europe in search of greener pastures.⁷ The apparently porous nature of the country's borders has greatly facilitated this 'hard (illegal) way'. The most prominent illegal migrant routes today are: the Lagos Exit Axis which is dominated by men and women traders seeking jobs ranging from menial to skilled jobs; the Calabar Exit Axis through which young girls and women migrate by road and boat; and the Northern Exit Axis where Sokoto, Kebbi, Katsina, Jigawa, Yobe and Borno have served as land routes for almost an entirely male migrant population.

While Nigeria can today boast of a high number of its citizens doing resoundingly well in foreign land, including in the US and Canada where physicians of Nigerian origin are more than the number currently based in the country, there is also the obvious case where many others are trapped to the point of surviving on menial jobs. No sooner than most of these latter categories of migrants left Nigeria than they realized that the so-called greener pastures are not as green as were reported. Women who migrated via trafficking have suffered the most from this experience. Between 1999 and 2000, Nigeria recorded cases of 1,178 persons repatriated for traffic related reasons. All of them, except 12, were reported to be girls.

Over the years, Nigeria has considerably squared up to the challenges of emigration and immigration in the country. The first major attempt to move against a seeming mass emigration by the Nigerian government was during the Buhari-Idiagbon regime (1983 – 1985) when Nigerians were treated to a regular TV show of a popular Nigerian actor, Enebeli Elebrowa, who played the role of an aspiring emigrant that had to drop his ambition to 'check out'

⁶ Ibid

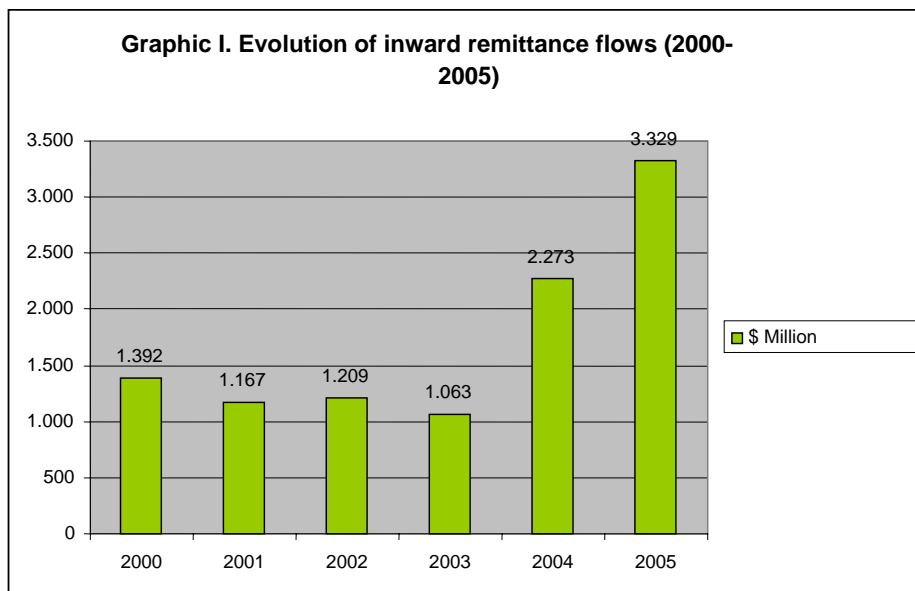
⁷ Dauda S. Garuba, "Survival at the Margins: Economic Crisis and Coping Mechanisms in Rural Nigeria", *Local Environment*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2006, p.28.

of Nigeria, after seeing reasons with his dissuaders. As popular as the comedian TV show was among Nigerians, it did not play the desired result as the unfriendly policies and attitude of the government and its succeeding dictatorial regimes were completely antithetical to the message of the TV show.

With regard to figures on emigration and immigration, according to the World Bank, in 2005 Nigeria had 836.832 emigrants, which represents 0,6 % of the Nigerian population. Ten principal target countries of the Nigerian emigrated citizens are: United States, Chad, United Kingdom, Cameroon, Benin, Niger, Italy, Sudan, Germany and Spain.

On the immigrants coming to Nigeria, according to information of the Division of Population of the United Nations and the World Bank also in 2005, Nigeria had 971.450 proceeding immigrants for the most part of his neighbors of Western Africa: Benin, Ghana, Mali, Togo, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Liberia, Mauritania, and Egypt. The immigrants represent 0,7 % of the Nigerian population. In this context it is important to stress the progressive evolution of the remittances of Nigerian emigrants to their compatriots in Nigeria in the last five years, with figures that go from 1.392 million dollars in 2000 up to 3.329 million dollars in 2005 (see graphic 1).

As for the requests of asylum presented by Nigerian citizens in 2006, Ireland stands out first with almost 2.000 requests, followed by France with 1.256 requests. It is important to underline that the majority of the requests were presented in countries of the EU, with 74 % of the total requests presented (to see Table 1). As for the Nigerian refugees in other countries, according to information of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2006 these were adding a whole of 21.624 persons.



Source: World Bank

Table I. Asylum applications of Nigerian citizens by countries (2006)

	Asylum applications
Austria	421
Canada	685
France	1.256
Germany	584
Greece	391
Hungary	109
Ireland	1.963
Israel	448
Italia	830
Morocco	183
Netherlands	243
Sierra Leone	205
South Africa	712
Spain	632
Sweden	104
Switzerland	209
United Kingdom	991
United States	109
TOTAL	10.075

Source: UNHCR

The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS)

The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) was established as a separate entity with core Immigration duties under the headship of the Chief Federal Immigration Officer within the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) in 1958.⁸

When it was established, the Department of Immigration operated on a very low profile with the only functioning units being the visa and business sections, and with the Federal Minister of Internal Affairs regulating its operations. It was not until August 1, 1963 that (in the run up to Nigeria's attainment of a republican status) the NIS was formally established by an act of the Parliament (Section 5 of Immigration Act L.N. Cap. 171), with the first set of Immigration officers being former NPF officers who were constituted into a department under the control and supervision of the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs (FMIA) as a purely Civil Service outfit.⁹

⁸ Nigeria Immigration Service, 'The Nigeria Immigration Service: A Profile' <http://www.nigeriabusinessinfo.com/nigerian-immigration.htm>

⁹ Ibid

As contained in NIS source, the functions of the NIS include, but not entirely limited to:

1. The issuance and administration of Nigeria travel documents - passports and other documents,
2. Endorsement of all categories of travel documents of persons arriving and departing Nigeria,
3. Visa issuance and interpretation of such visas,
4. Issuance of residence permit to foreign investors and other expatriates who wish to reside in Nigeria. (It must be emphasized that although issuance of visa is a certain function of the Immigration, for now visas in our mission abroad are being issued by the Foreign Affairs Ministry while the NIS CARRIES the re-issuance of the visas in country.)
5. Examination of all persons leaving and entering Nigeria at any designated port and also the right to examine those in Nigeria before the commencement of this act with a view to determining their rights of residence in Nigeria.
6. Acting as the nation's public relation officer in view of the fact that the immigration officers are the first government officials investors come in contact with on arrival in Nigeria.¹⁰

The foregoing informed the basis for setting the NIS requirements for entering Nigeria through all its official entry points. Besides the immigration officers who are to see to the fact that all foreigners visiting the country via air, land and sea ports have genuine and relevant permits (including visas), there is also the possible presence of the State Security Service (SSS) officers whose duty it is to ascertain that the visitors to the country are not security risks, and the custom officers who check with visitors for any durable goods and items to declare.¹¹

The first known expansion of NIS was in 1966 when an upsurge in immigration activities prompted the Nigerian government to open area offices in Ibadan, Ilesha, Akure, Benin-city, Warri, Sapele, Calabar, Enugu, Port-Harcourt, Sokoto, Kaduna, Jos, Mubi and Maiduguri.¹² This was followed with the creation of Immigration out-posts in foreign countries in 1976 by the General Obasanjo military regime with the first Immigration officers' postings to Britain, U.S.A, U.S.S.R., West Germany, Italy and India. Further postings were made to Nigeria's missions in New York, San Francisco and Atlanta in the United States, Hamburg in Germany, the Philippines, Japan, Egypt, Brazil, Switzerland and Hong Kong.¹³ Since then there had been series of reforms in the institutional and structural contingency of the NIS. The first major milestone was the restoration of Immigration back to its former

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ "A Guide to Nigerian Immigration Law". www.bbinigeria.com/pdfs/gtnil.pdf

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

paramilitary status with more autonomy with the establishment of the Customs, Immigration and Prisons Board (CIPB) (L.N. Cap. 89) in 1986.¹⁴ Second was the complete removal of the Nigeria Immigration Service, along with Customs and Prisons in the CIPB, from the Federal Civil Service structure and aligned the ranks of the officers to the structure of the Nigeria Police Force with due parity in salaries and conditions of service in April 1992.

The challenges of contemporary globalization and its increasing implication for emigration and immigration have also forced the restructuring of the NIS. At the apex of the structure is the Comptroller General of the Service who is supported by six Deputy Comptroller Generals that head the six Operational Directorates – i.e. (1) Finance and Administration, (2) Investigation and Aliens Control, (3) Operations, (4) Passport Administration and Control, (5) Border Patrol and Surveillance, and (6) Projects and Logistics. Beneath the position of the six deputy comptrollers are Assistant Comptroller Generals, eight of whom head the following Zonal Commands: (1) Zone 'A' Lagos Headquarters, (2) Zone 'B' Kaduna, (3) Zone 'C' Bauchi, (4) Zone 'D' Minna, (5) Zone 'E' Owerri, (6) Zone 'F' Ibadan, (7) Zone 'G' Benin, and (8) Zone 'H' Makurdi.

There are also 36 State Commands which are headed by Comptrollers. Of these, the Lagos Zone is quite peculiar with 10 Commands headed by Comptrollers. These Commands are: Seme Border, Murtala Mohammed International Airport, Passport Office Ikeja, Passport Office FESTAC, Lagos Sea Ports, Investigation, ECOWAS and African Affairs, Aliens Registration, Lagos State office, and Zonal Office.

The NIS role as the main regulator of emigration and immigration has not been without its problems and challenges. These challenges have manifested in the area of poor infrastructure for operations, especially in the area of aerial surveillance, computerization, communication and centralized network for passports. The level of corruption within the Service has also proved a huge problem to the implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol for Free Movement of Persons and Goods. The recent policy decision by the Nigerian government to introduce the harmonized Nigerian and ECOWAS electronic passport is a step in the direction of redressing some of the challenges of the NIS in the age of globalization. Also, the NIS is at the final stage of fine-tuning its laws currently under review to meet existing international laws on immigration, given that much of the existing laws the product of the Immigration Act of 1963.

¹⁴ This development enabled CIPB to take over the functions of the Federal Civil Service Commission with respect to recruitment, promotion and discipline of officers of the service.