

Cross-Border Migration in West Africa: Analysing the Socioeconomic Profiles of ECOWAS Migrants in Nigeria

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14050339>

Published Date: 07-November-2024

Abstract: This research examines the socioeconomic characteristics of ECOWAS migrants in Nigeria. Based on a survey of 462 migrants across four locations, the study provides insights into origins, demographics, employment, income, remittance patterns, and integration challenges faced by this population. The analysis reveals that many migrants come from neighboring countries of Benin, Niger and Togo, benefiting from geographic proximity and shared cultural ties. The majority are young, with 89.83% arriving at or below age 30. The unemployment rate among migrants is 7.1%, lower than the national average; however, many work in the informal sector. While many earn above the minimum wage, educational attainment remains low, with a notable predominance of males reflecting societal pressures. The study explores family dynamics, noting that many migrants are married but live apart from their children, often returning home after achieving stability. Despite their economic contributions, migrants encounter challenges related to legal status, housing, and social integration. Many maintain strong transnational ties, with 80.30% sending remittances to support families back home. The findings highlight the importance of social networks in supporting migrants but also point to integration challenges exacerbated by economic pressures. While many migrants express a willingness to return home, barriers such as high travel costs and ongoing instability in their countries hinder this desire. The study underscores the need for policies that address the legal and social integration of ECOWAS migrants, facilitating access to information and services, and promoting broader socioeconomic inclusion, contributing to the understanding of migration dynamics in the region.

Keywords: Cross-border migration, ECOWAS, Integration, Nigeria, West Africa.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, as the largest economy and market within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), is a significant destination for migrants across the region. It attracts a diverse population seeking better opportunities, stability, and a chance to improve their livelihoods (Adetula, 2009). This is made possible by the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocols which remove all obstacles to the free flow of the migrants (ECOWAS, 1979) into Nigeria. This influx is not merely a matter of numbers; it represents a complex interplay of socioeconomic factors that shape the lives of migrants and the communities they join. Many of these migrants are unskilled and primarily find employment in the primary sectors of the economy, including roles as domestic workers, food vendors, and in agriculture (Usama, 2017). The presence of ECOWAS migrants contributes significantly to Nigeria's economic landscape, affecting various sectors and influencing local economies.

Despite that, migration is a selective process in which people respond differently to sets of push and pull factors at origin and destination places, have diverse capabilities to overcome the intervening sets of obstacles, and differ from each other in terms of personal factors (Lee, 1966). According to Ravenstein (1885) whose theory is used in this research, there are differentials in the socioeconomic characteristics of migrants which play a huge role in their migration pattern and impact. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2016a) stated that ECOWAS migrants in Nigeria actively invest in multiple areas of the economy. They engage in Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI), which includes stocks, shares, bonds,

and cash equivalents, as well as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in sectors like telecommunications, real estate, oil and gas, and manufacturing. This investment not only indicates their economic engagement but also underscores the potential for migrants to enhance the economic fabric of Nigeria. For instance, the Nigeria Manpower Board (NMB, 2004) reports that approximately 42.84% of migrants working in clerical positions are from ECOWAS member countries, and about 4,652 companies in Nigeria's private sector predominantly employ these migrants.

The socioeconomic contributions of ECOWAS citizens extend beyond clerical work. Many migrants from countries such as Niger, Mali, Guinea, and Senegal are involved in mining operations in states like Nasarawa, Plateau, and Taraba, as well as in Oyo and Osun (Adetula, 2009). Additionally, in key urban centers such as Lagos, Abuja, and Ibadan, ECOWAS migrants participate in various industries, including manufacturing, transportation, and construction (IOM, 2016). Their involvement in the construction sector is particularly noteworthy, as they are often recognised for their superior craftsmanship, producing higher-quality materials such as tiles and roofing products compared to their Nigerian counterparts. This not only enhances the quality of construction but also reflects the migrants' skills and contributions to the industry.

In the agricultural sector, ECOWAS migrants play a vital role. Many of them work on yam and cassava farms in regions like Saki, while others engage in cultivating sugar cane, cereals, and cotton in northern Nigeria. The northern city of Kano, bolstered by the Kano-Katsina-Mardi Corridor, serves as a central trade hub for cereals and livestock, attracting a significant number of migrants due to its economic opportunities (SWAC & OECD, 2006). The labor provided by these migrants is crucial for sustaining food production and trade, highlighting their importance in the agricultural landscape of Nigeria.

Despite the evident socioeconomic impact of ECOWAS migrants, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding their socioeconomic characteristics in Nigeria. While migration studies often focus on security concerns, specific ethnic groups, or the operationalisation of migration protocols, comprehensive analyses of the socioeconomic profiles of ECOWAS citizens in Nigeria are scarce. This lack of focused research limits understanding of the diverse experiences and contributions of these migrants. Migration is inherently selective, influenced by a variety of push and pull factors (Lee, 1966) that differ across locations, and this variability is essential for understanding the dynamics of migrant populations.

The demographic and socioeconomic traits of migrants can vary significantly based on their origins and destinations. Research by De Haas (2007) emphasises that migration experiences can differ across socio-ethnic and gender lines, illustrating the heterogeneous nature of migration within specific contexts. For instance, studies show that Ghanaian migrants in OECD countries tend to be older, more educated, and predominantly male (Shimeles, 2010). Similarly, Vietnamese women migrating to China often have low education levels and come from rural backgrounds (Su, 2013). In the United States, Mexican immigrants are reported to be younger and more educated than their cross-border counterparts (Orraca-Romano, 2015), further highlighting the diversity among migrant populations.

In the ECOWAS context, Adepoju et al (2010) found that while the first phase of the Protocol for Free Movement of People has been implemented, subsequent phases addressing residence and business establishment remain inadequately addressed. The challenges posed by slow implementation, legal harmonisation, and political instability continue to hinder the seamless movement of people across borders (Agey & Cottey, 2007; Ike, 2013). Such barriers not only restrict the mobility of individuals but also limit the potential contributions that migrants can make to the host country's economy and society.

Again, while previous research has provided insights into various aspects of cross-border migration in Nigeria, the focus has often been on security concerns or specific ethnic groups. This article seeks to fill the gap by examining the socioeconomic characteristics of ECOWAS citizens in Nigeria. Understanding these characteristics is essential for developing policies that enhance the integration and contributions of migrants, ultimately benefiting both the migrants and the Nigerian economy. By exploring the economic activities, demographic profiles, and social integration of ECOWAS migrants, this study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of their role in Nigeria's socioeconomic landscape.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ravenstein's Laws of Migration is used as the theoretical framework for this research. It was established in the late 19th century and offers a foundational perspective on migration patterns by emphasising demographic characteristics, motivations, and behaviours. These laws propose that migrants tend to travel shorter distances, are predominantly young adults, and are influenced by economic conditions in their destination countries. This theoretical framework serves as a lens through which the socioeconomic characteristics of ECOWAS migrants in Nigeria can be analyzed.

One of Ravenstein's key assertions is that most migrants move short distances, with long-distance migration typically leading to urban centers (Ravenstein, 1885). In the context of ECOWAS migrants in Nigeria, this principle is evident as a significant number originate from neighboring countries. The geographical closeness of these nations facilitates migration (Grigg, 1977), allowing individuals to leverage shared languages, cultural practices, and historical ties. This relational proximity reduces both the logistical and social costs of migration, reinforcing the idea that migrants from nearby regions perceive international borders as less significant (Ikome, 2012a).

Ravenstein's theory also emphasises that migrants are often young adults, typically in their late teens to early thirties. This demographic is particularly relevant in the study of ECOWAS migrants, who frequently arrive in Nigeria during their youthful stages. The youthful nature of these migrants is significant, as it often correlates with higher energy levels and a greater willingness to engage in work, particularly in the informal sector (Adepoju, 2004). The desire for better economic opportunities drives these young individuals to migrate, aligning with Ravenstein's assertion that economic conditions in the destination country play a crucial role in migration decisions (Ravenstein, 1885).

Ravenstein's observations regarding gender dynamics indicate that males are more likely to migrate than females. Societal expectations often compel men to seek economic viability before returning home to fulfill familial responsibilities (Tunon & Rim, 2013). However, the increasing participation of women in migration also highlights a shift in gender roles. Women are increasingly migrating to urban areas in search of employment opportunities, contributing to a broader understanding of migration patterns and necessitating policy adaptations to support these evolving dynamics (Adepoju, 2004).

The dynamics of family structures are integral to understanding migration patterns. Ravenstein's theory suggests that families are less likely to migrate as cohesive units, with younger adults more frequently undertaking the journey (Ravenstein, 1885). After establishing economic stability in origin country, male migrants may return to their home countries to reunite with their spouses (Ikome, 2012a). Conversely, a significant number of migrants may choose to keep their children in their home countries due to the high costs of living and raising children in Nigeria. This decision reflects a complex interplay of economic considerations and cultural values, emphasizing the challenges faced by migrant families in maintaining relationships across borders.

Ravenstein's Laws of Migration provide a valuable framework for understanding the socioeconomic characteristics of ECOWAS migrants in Nigeria. By examining geographical proximity, age, gender dynamics, and family structures, this theoretical framework highlights the motivations and behaviours that drive migration. Understanding these dynamics is essential for policymakers to address the needs of migrants and facilitate their integration into Nigerian society, ultimately fostering inclusive policies that support both migrants and their host communities.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research is part of my master's degree work which was conducted in 2017. Based on chain referral approach, a total of 462 migrants from ECOWAS member countries who live in four different locations in Nigeria vis-à-vis Lagos, Abuja, Badagry and Shaki were selected and administered with questionnaire survey. Interviews were conducted with 28 key informants, migrants, community members and border officers. Data analysis was done with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics involving the use of frequencies and percentages in the form of tables, pie charts and bar charts was used to do the analysis. Secondary source of information from journal articles, conference papers, theses and online materials were also consulted.

4. RESULTS

Origin of migrants

The countries of origin of ECOWAS migrants living in Nigeria are presented in Table I. At the time of this interview, most of the migrants were from nearby ECOWAS member countries. The percentage proportion of migrants from these nearby countries are as follows, Benin (30.7), Togo (29.7), Niger (9.3) etc. The percentage proportion of migrants from more distant member countries are, Liberia (1.5), Sierra Leone (0.9), Guinea Conakry (0.6) etc.

TABLE I: Distribution of migrants according to countries of origin

Origin country	Number (%) of migrants
Benin	140 (30.3)
Burkina Faso	33 (7.1)
Guinea Conakry	3 (0.6)
Ghana	40 (8.7)
Ivory Coast	29 (6.3)

Liberia	7 (1.5)
Mali	26 (5.6)
Niger	43 (9.3)
Sierra Leone	4 (0.9)
Togo	137 (29.7)
Total	462 (100.0)

Source: Authour's computation (2018)

Migrants` year of arrival

The results in Table II show that 3.6% of migrants from Benin move to Nigeria between 1984 and earlier while 11.5% of migrants from Mali and 5.1% from Togo move to Nigeria within the same period. Ghanaians have the lengthiest stay on average in Nigeria. A total of 37.5% of them arrived in Nigeria in 1984 and earlier. Generally, most migrants (64.4%) arrived in Nigeria in 2005 and later.

TABLE II: Migrants` year of arrival according to countries of origin

Origin country	2005 and later	1995 to 2004	1985 to 1994	1984 and earlier
Benin	95 (67.8)	28 (20.0)	12 (8.6)	5 (3.6)
Burkina Faso	24 (72.6)	5 (15.2)	2 (6.1)	2 (6.1)
Guinea Conakry	0 (0.0)	3 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0)
Ghana	19 (47.5)	2 (5.0)	4 (10.0)	15 (37.5)
Ivory Coast	22 (75.9)	7 (24.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Liberia	0 (0.0)	1 (14.3)	6 (85.7)	0 (0.0)
Mali	18 (69.3)	4 (15.4)	1 (3.8)	3 (11.5)
Niger	33 (76.7)	7 (16.3)	2 (4.7)	1 (2.3)
Sierra Leone	297 (64.4)	88 (19.0)	2 (50.0)	0 (0.0)
Togo	86 (62.8)	29 (21.2)	15 (10.9)	7 (5.1)
Total	297 (64.3)	88 (19.0)	44 (9.5)	33 (7.1)

Source: Authour's computation (2018)

Sex of migrants

The results presented in Fig. I show that 66.02% of the migrants were males while 33.98% were females.

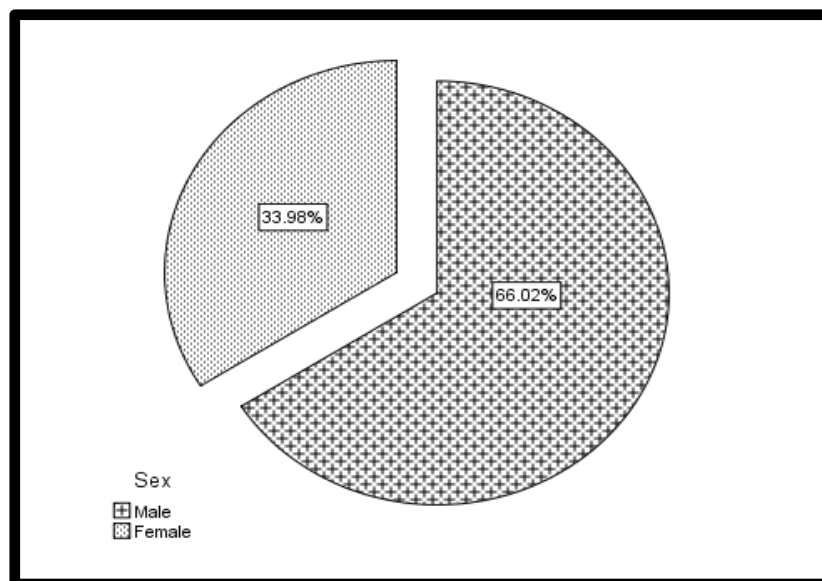


FIG. 1: DISTRIBUTION OF MIGRANTS ACCORDING TO SEX

Source: Authour's computation (2018)

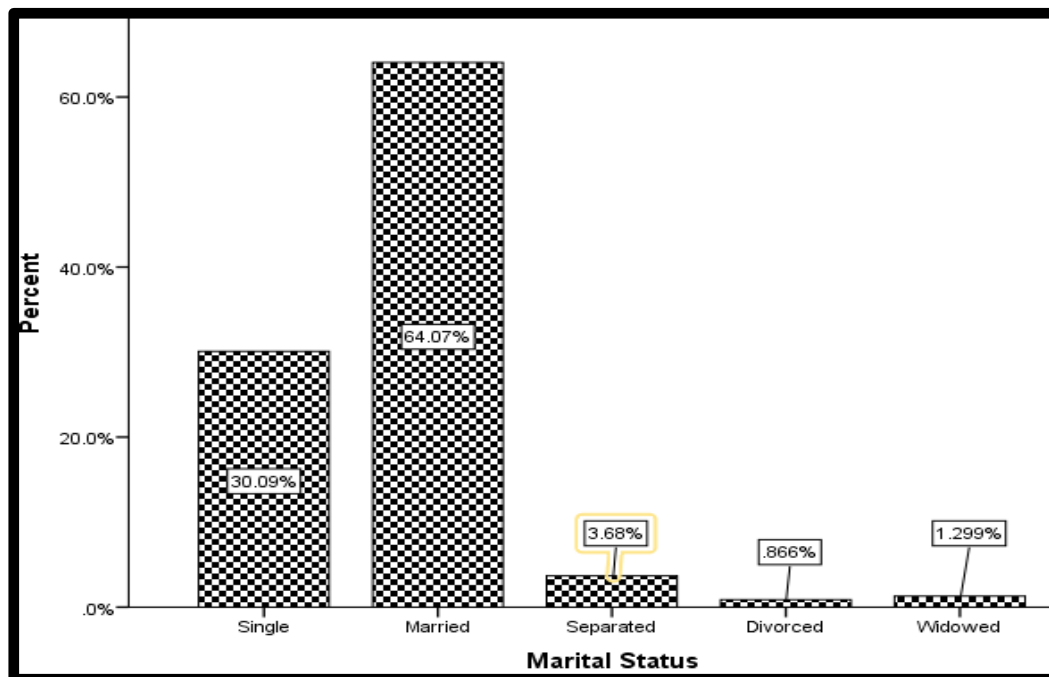
Table III shows the percentage proportion of female migrants across the sampled locations, Abuja (34.0), Badagry, (25.8) Lagos (38.8) and Saki (32.4). This indicates that Abuja and Lagos have more female migrants than Badagry and Saki.

TABLE III: Sex distribution of migrants across the sampled locations

Location	Male	Female	Total
Abuja	68 (66.0)	35 (34.0)	103 (100.0)
Badagry	46 (74.2)	16 (25.8)	62 (100.0)
Lagos	93 (61.2)	59 (38.8)	152 (100.0)
Saki	98 (67.6)	47 (32.4)	145 (100.0)
Total	305 (66.0)	157 (34.0)	462 (100.0)

Marital status of migrants

Results in Fig. II show the responses of migrants about their marital status. A total of 64.1% of them were married. There were less than 6% of the migrants who were either separated, divorced or widowed.

**FIG. 2: MARITAL STATUS OF MIGRANTS**

Source: Authour's computation (2018)

Number of children across marital status

Table IV shows the responses to distribution of children among marital status. Migrants living without their children (55.8%) are more than those living with their children (44.2%) in Nigeria. The migrants live with 1.14 mean number of children. There are 36.8% of married migrants who were living without their children in Nigeria while 99.3% of migrants who are single live without their children in Nigeria.

TABLE IV: Distribution of children across marital status

Marital status	Without children	With children	Total
Single	138 (99.3)	1 (0.7)	139(100.0)
Married	109 (36.8)	187 (63.2)	296 (100.0)
Separated	11 (64.7)	6 (35.3)	17 (100.0)
Divorced	0 (0.0)	4 (100.0)	4 (100.0)
Widowed	0 (0.0)	6 (100.0)	6(100.0)
Total	258 (55.8)	204 (44.2)	462 (100.0)

Mean = 1.14

Source: Authour's computation (2018)

Level of education

Fig. III depicts the results of migrants' responses about their educational level. Most migrants fell into the categories of those with no education and those with primary school education. Those without education make up 26.84%, those with primary education are 41.34% while those with secondary education are 26.62% of the total migrants. Their mean year of schooling is 6.44 years. The expected years of schooling in Nigeria is 10 years (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2016).

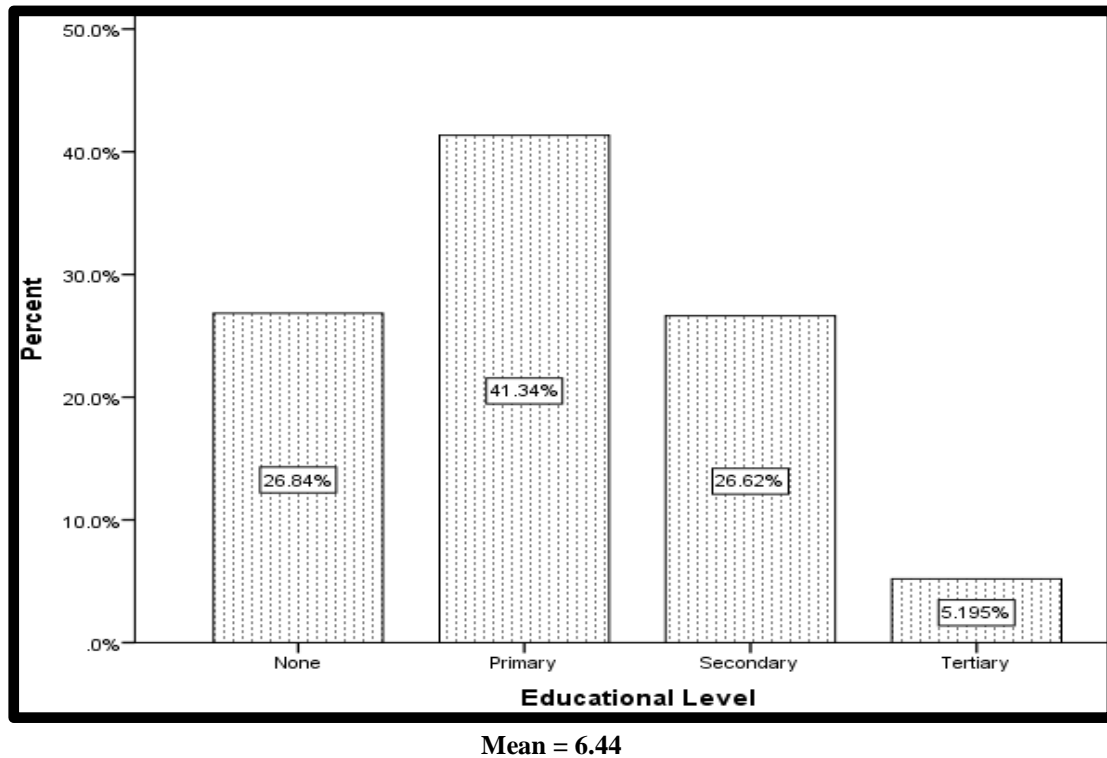


FIG. III: MIGRANTS ACCORDING TO THEIR LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Source: Authour's computation (2018)

Age at first migration

Migrants were asked about their age at the first migration. Table V shows that the age at first migration of the respondents fell mainly between less than 20 and 30 years. Both ranges make up 89.83% of the total respondents. These age ranges fall into youthful stage of life.

TABLE V: Migrants according to their age at first migration

Range of age at first migration	Number (%) of migrants
20 and less	166 (35.93)
21 to 30	249 (53.90)
31 to 40	44 (9.52)
41 to 50	2 (0.43)
51 to 60	1 (0.22)
Total	462 (100)

Source: Authour's computation (2018)

Occupation of migrants

The reported response results in Table VI show that a total of 92.9% of migrants were employed as at the time of this survey. Only 7.1% of them were unemployed. Majority of the migrants are into trade/business (25.1%) and farming (23.6%). The results in Table VII show that the highest number of unemployed migrants were found in Badagry (11.3%) and Saki (10.3%).

TABLE VI: Migrants according to their occupation

Occupation	Number (%) of migrants
Farming	109 (23.6)
Trade/Business	116 (25.1)
Services	67 (14.5)
Civil Servant	9 (1.9)
Industry	7 (1.5)
Craft	28 (6.1)
Medical	7 (1.5)
Teaching	6 (1.3)
Student	7 (1.5)
Artisan	31 (6.7)
Beautification	14 (3.0)
Farming and Trade/Business	2 (0.4)
Service and Trade/Business	4 (0.9)
Farming and Services	3 (0.6)
Fishing	19 (4.1)
Total migrants employed	429 (92.9)
Total migrants unemployed	33 (7.1)
Total number of migrants	462 (100.0)

Source: Authour's computation (2018)

TABLE VII: Employed and unemployed migrants across the sampled locations

Location	Unemployed	Employed
Abuja	5 (4.9)	98 (95.1)
Badagry	7 (11.3)	55 (88.7)
Lagos	6 (3.9)	146 (96.1)
Saki	15 (10.3)	130 (89.7)
Total	33 (7.1)	429 (92.9)

Source: Authour's survey (2017)

Length of stay

The response results to migrants` their length of stay in Table VIII show that 32.9% of the migrants had lived between 1 to 5 years in Nigeria while 7.4 % lived between 21 and 25 years in Nigeria. Their mean length of stay is 10.12 years with a standard deviation of 8.72.

TABLE VIII: Migrants according to their length of stay

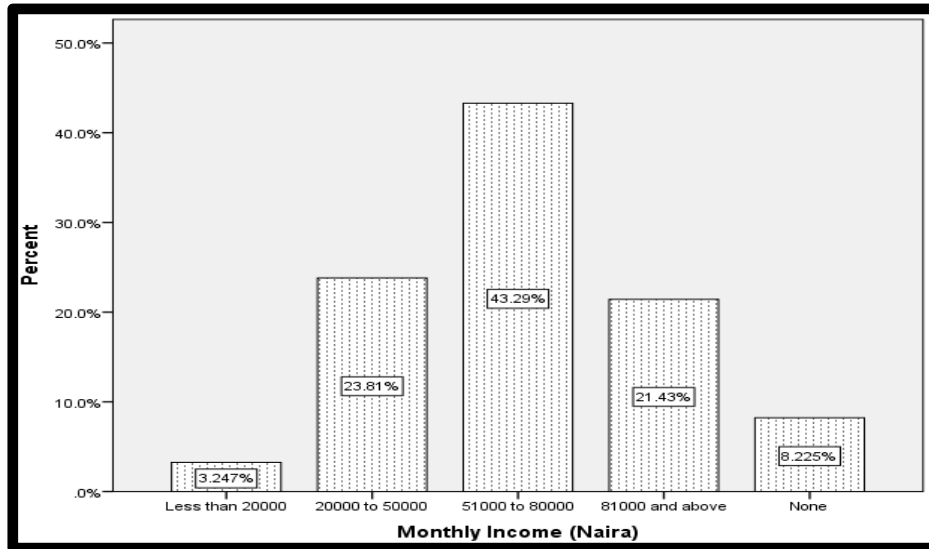
Range of length of stay	Number (%) of migrants
1 to 5	152 (32.9)
6 to 10	147 (31.8)
11 to 15	73 (15.8)
16 to 20	12 (2.6)
21 to 25	34 (7.4)
26 to 30	11 (2.4)
31 to 35	26 (5.6)
36 to 40	5 (1.1)
41 and above	2 (0.4)
Total	462 (100.0)

Mean = 10.12; S. D. = 8.72

Source: Authour's computation (2018)

Monthly income

The respondents were asked about their monthly income. Fig. IV depicts that a total of 3.247% of them earn less than 20000 Nigerian naira per month and 23.81% of them earn between 20000 and 50000 Nigerian naira per month while 43.29% earn between 51000 and 80000 Nigerian naira per month. However, only 8.225% of the migrants do not earn anything. It could be discerned from the results that in total, at least 83.312% of the migrants earn more than the Nigerian minimum wage of 18000 Nigerian naira per month.



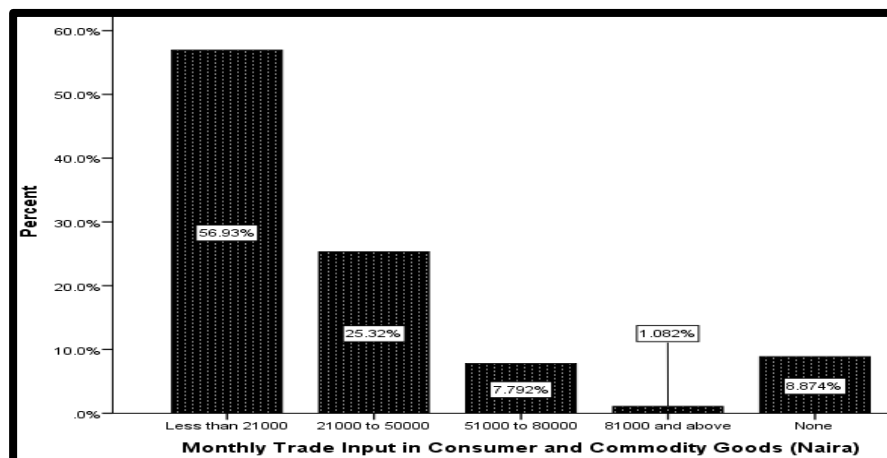
360 Nigerian naira = 1 US dollar by October 2017

FIG. IV: MIGRANTS' MONTHLY INCOME

Source: Authour's computation (2018)

Monthly trade investment in consumer and commodity goods

The response results of migrants on the trade investment they make monthly in consumer and commodity goods in Nigeria are presented in Fig. V. It shows that a total of 56.93% of them make monthly trade investment of less than 20,000 Nigerian naira and 25.32% make monthly trade investment of between 20,000 and 50,000 Nigerian naira while 7.792% make monthly trade investment of between 51,000 and 80,000 in consumer and commodity goods. Those who make monthly investment of 81,000 Nigerian naira and above account for 1.082% of the total respondents. On the other hand, 8.874% of migrants do not make any monthly trade investment in consumer and commodity goods.



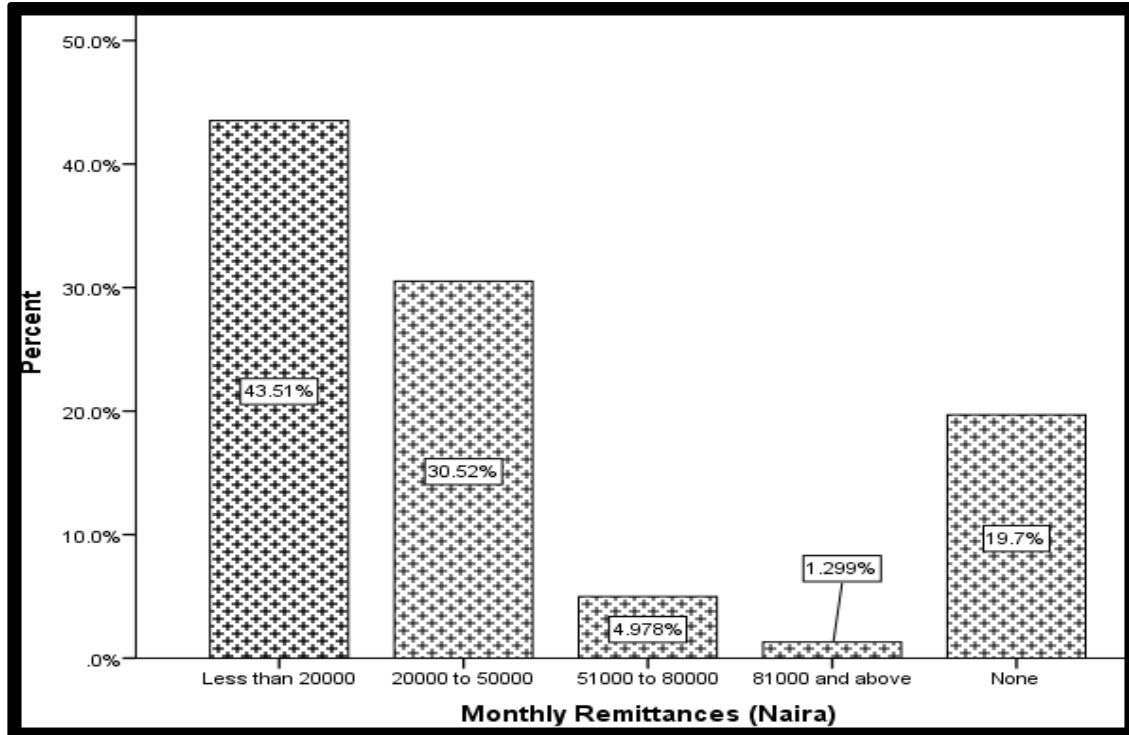
360 Nigerian naira = 1 US dollar by October 2017

FIG. V: MONTHLY TRADE INVESTMENT IN GOODS

Source: Authour's computation (2018)

Monthly remittances

Fig. VI depicts the results of responses of migrants about their monthly remittances. A total of 43.51% indicated that they remit less than 20,000 Nigerian naira per month and 30.52% remit between 20,000 and 50,000 Nigerian naira per month while 4.978% remit between 51,000 and 80,000 Nigerian naira per month. A total of 19.7% of them remit nothing.



360 Nigerian naira = 1 US dollar by October 2017

FIG. VI: MIGRANTS' MONTHLY REMITTANCES

Source: Authour's computation (2018)

Visiting origin countries

The results presented in Table IX depict that a total of 46.8% of migrants visit home only during festive seasons and 15.40% visit home 3 or 4 times yearly while 20.80% visit home either once or twice yearly. Only 14.50% indicated that they do not visit home at all.

TABLE 9: Visits to origin country

Annual visits	Number (%) of migrants
None	67 (14.5)
1 to 2	96 (20.8)
3 to 4	71 (15.4)
5 and above	12 (2.6)
Only during festivals	216 (46.8)
Total	462 (100)

Source: Author's computation (2018)

Migrants' willingness to return home permanently

When migrants were asked about their willingness to go back home permanently, results in Fig. VII show that 85.28% of them were willing to go back permanently while 14.72% were not willing to do the same.

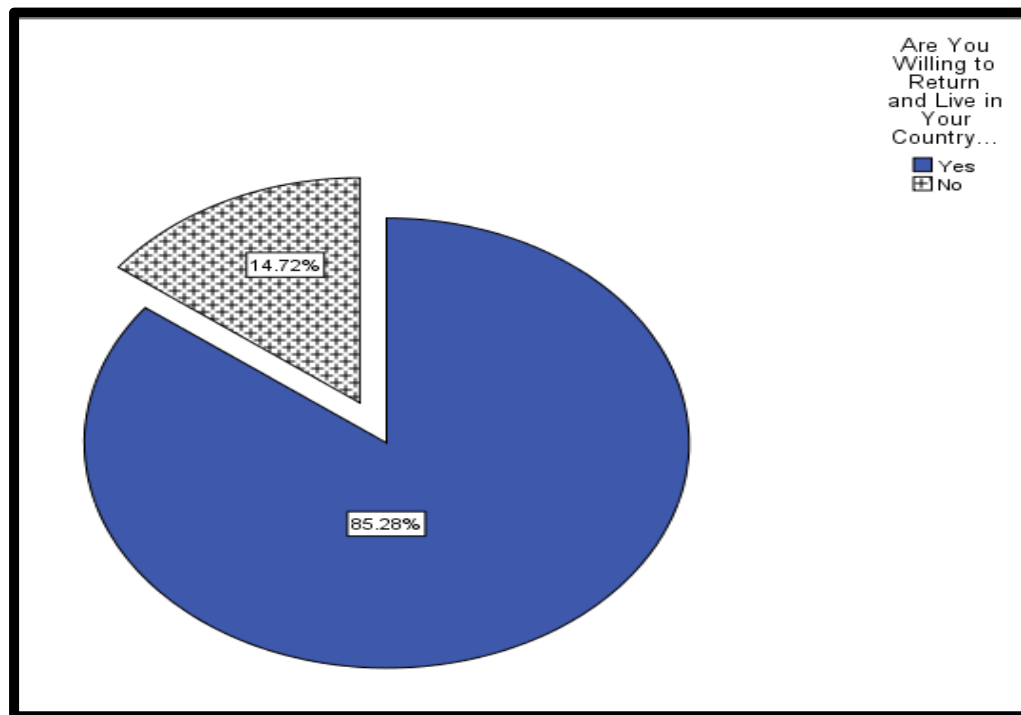


FIG.7: WILLINGNESS TO RETURN HOME PERMANENTLY

Source: Author's computation (2018)

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the socioeconomic characteristics of ECOWAS migrants in Nigeria reveals a rich tapestry of dynamics that reflect broader trends in migration, integration, and economic contribution. This discussion elaborates on these findings, emphasising their implications for migration policy, social integration, and economic development in Nigeria.

Origins of migrants

The descriptive analysis indicates that a substantial proportion of ECOWAS migrants in Nigeria originate from neighboring countries, particularly Benin, Niger, and Togo. This finding aligns with reports from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2009) and the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty (DRC, 2007), which highlight that most migrants in Nigeria come from nearby ECOWAS member states. Geographical proximity facilitates migration, as evidenced by Waldo Tobler's first law of geography, which posits that closer things are more related than those that are farther apart (Sui, 2004).

Migrants from these countries benefit from shared languages, cultural practices, and historical ties with certain ethnic groups in Nigeria. This commonality not only eases communication but also reduces the costs associated with migration, including transportation and the acquisition of social and cultural capital. As noted by Ikome (2012b), individuals from these neighboring countries often perceive the international borders as arbitrary lines, viewing their movement into Nigeria as part of a broader internal migration pattern (Asiwaju, 1984). This perception contrasts sharply with that of migrants from more distant countries, such as Liberia and Guinea, for whom geographical distance imposes significant barriers to migration.

Age and timing of migration

The age distribution of migrants upon arrival in Nigeria reveals that a significant number of Ghanaians, who constitute a large portion of early arrivals, migrated during a period of economic downturn in their home country (Afolayan, 1988). Specifically, 37.5% of Ghanaians arrived in Nigeria before 1984. In contrast, many Liberians migrated during the tumultuous years of conflict between 1985 and 1994 (Liebling-Kalifani et al., 2013). Overall, 64.4% of ECOWAS migrants arrived in Nigeria in 2005 or later, indicating that a majority are relatively new to the country, often seeking better economic opportunities.

The youthful demographic of these migrants is noteworthy, with 89.83% arriving at or below the age of 30. This trend is economically significant, as younger migrants tend to be more energetic and driven to work, aiming to secure their financial futures. The low unemployment rate among migrants (7.1%) contrasts sharply with Nigeria's national unemployment rate of 18% (Obikili, 2018), suggesting that many migrants are effectively contributing to the workforce and the economy. They predominantly engage in the informal sector, which includes various trades, farming, and service provision, thereby supporting local economies.

Gender dynamics in migration

The gender composition of the migrant population reveals a predominance of males, who make up 66.02% of the total. This sex-selective migration pattern supports one of the assumptions of Ravenstein's Laws of Migration, which posits that females migrate less than males internationally (Tunon and Rim, 2013). Ethnographic insights point to societal pressures that compel males to migrate early, as they are often expected to achieve economic viability before returning home to fulfill familial responsibilities, such as marriage and house building.

Interestingly, the geographical distribution of female migrants indicates higher concentrations in urban centers like Lagos and Abuja, which offer greater employment opportunities in sectors such as domestic work, sales, and services. In these urban areas, the feminisation of migration is evident, as women migrate not only to reunite with family but also to pursue independent economic opportunities. This shift signifies changing gender roles in the region and may necessitate adjustments in public policy to accommodate the evolving dynamics of migration (Adepoju, 2004).

Marital status and family dynamics

A substantial proportion of migrants (64.07%) are married, indicating a strong cultural preference for family unity, common in many societies, including those of migrants' home countries. This cultural endorsement of early marriage suggests that migration serves not only as a means of economic advancement but also as a strategy to maintain familial ties. Male migrants often adopt a dual migration strategy, seeking economic stability in Nigeria before returning home to reunite with spouses, reinforcing family stability (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011).

Conversely, 55.8% of migrants live apart from their children, reflecting significant emotional and logistical challenges. This separation aligns with Ravenstein's migration laws, which suggest families are less likely to migrate internationally compared to younger, single adults (Ravenstein, 1885). Leaving children behind often results from high living costs in Nigeria and a desire for children to retain their cultural identity, creating a conflict between economic motives and emotional needs (Friedman, 2015).

A vast majority of single individuals (99.3%) do not have children, indicating a focus on personal and economic development. In contrast, 63.2% of married migrants have children, emphasizing the strong familial ties prevalent in many ECOWAS cultures. A total of 36.8% of married migrants are childless, which may reflect challenges in starting families due to economic pressures or transitional living situations. Among separated migrants, a notable 35.3% have children, suggesting ongoing familial responsibilities despite their status. All divorced and widowed migrants have children, indicating that family remains a central aspect of their lives.

For Nigeria, the presence of families among migrants can enhance cultural diversity and contribute to the economy through labor and consumption. However, it also presents challenges, such as the need for adequate social services, including education and healthcare, to support these families. Overall, understanding the marital status and number of children among ECOWAS migrants is crucial for developing effective policies that facilitate their integration and address their unique needs.

While migrants seeking economic opportunities can positively impact the local economy, they also place pressure on social services and infrastructure, especially in urban areas. Thus, policies addressing challenges faced by migrant families—such as access to education, healthcare, and social integration—are crucial (Ogunyemi, 2020). Additionally, the emotional toll of family separation can affect the mental health of both migrants and their families. Policies supporting family reunification and providing resources for migrant families are vital for enhancing social cohesion and the well-being of both migrants and their children left behind (Nwankwo, 2019).

Employment status

Despite the high unemployment rate in Nigeria, which stands at 18% (Obikili, 2018), only 7.1% of the migrants surveyed were unemployed. This disparity indicates that a majority of the migrants are gainfully employed, contributing positively to Nigeria's socioeconomic development. Most of them find work in the informal sector, engaging in activities such as: Trade/Business: 25.1% of migrants are involved in trading or running small businesses. Farming: 23.6% are engaged in agricultural activities.

Migrants also work in fishing, welding, and various service provisions. Some weave clothing materials or act as middlemen, purchasing farm produce to sell in markets. A few operate as water vendors. The highest unemployment rates among migrants were recorded in Badagry (11.3%) and Saki (10.3%). This trend can be attributed to the proximity of these areas to the migrants' countries of origin, facilitating easier movement for job seeking. The continuous influx of migrants into Badagry and Saki contributes to increased unemployment challenges in larger urban centers like Abuja and Lagos.

The employment data for migrants in different locations—Abuja, Lagos, Badagry, and Saki—highlights several implications related to the size and economic dynamics of these areas. With unemployment rates at 4.9% in Abuja and 3.9% in Lagos, these cities offer more employment opportunities. The high employment percentages (95.1% and 96.1%, respectively) suggest that migrants are more likely to find jobs in larger cities, which can be attributed to more diverse job markets and greater economic activities. Smaller Towns (Badagry and Saki): Higher unemployment rates (11.3% in Badagry and 10.3% in Saki) indicate that migrants in these areas face greater challenges in securing employment. The smaller economies may not support as many jobs or diverse industries, resulting in fewer opportunities.

The higher employment rates in Abuja and Lagos suggest that migrants can achieve more economic stability and contribute positively to their households. This stability is crucial for remittance flows back to families in their home countries, which can improve living standards. In contrast, the lower employment rates in Badagry and Saki may lead to economic insecurity for migrants, potentially resulting in increased reliance on informal work or remittances from family members who have found employment elsewhere.

Educational attainment and employment

The educational background of migrants reveals concerning trends, with 26.84% having no formal education and 41.34% possessing only primary education. The mean years of schooling among migrants is 6.44, significantly lower than Nigeria's expected 10 years (UNESCO, 2016). This lack of educational attainment limits employment opportunities, confining most to non-skilled and semi-skilled jobs. Only 5.195% of migrants possess tertiary education, restricting their ability to contribute at higher skill levels. However, those with tertiary education promote brain circulation within the ECOWAS region, as they are less likely to seek opportunities in Western countries, thereby fostering regional development.

The low educational levels among migrants—26.84% with no formal education and 41.34% with only primary education—highlight critical challenges for employment and economic contributions. The mean of 6.44 years of schooling restricts access to skilled jobs, diminishing earning potential and perpetuating poverty (Adepoju, 2010). The scarcity of tertiary-educated migrants (5.195%) poses a barrier to economic mobility, limiting advancement into better-paying jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities (IOM, 2017). This predominance of low-educated migrants suggests a potential deficit in human capital development in Nigeria, emphasizing the need for educational reforms and vocational training programs (UNESCO, 2016).

For the ECOWAS region, migrants with tertiary education enhance local development by applying their skills regionally rather than migrating to the West, fostering economic growth (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). Policies encouraging the retention of educated individuals can mitigate brain drain and support local development (Nwankwo, 2019). Thus, the educational background of migrants significantly impacts their employment prospects and economic contributions, necessitating urgent policy interventions to improve access to education and vocational training.

Year of arrival

The timing of migration is significant in understanding the experiences of ECOWAS migrants in Nigeria. Data indicates that 64.4% of ECOWAS migrants arrived in Nigeria in 2005 or later, suggesting that a majority are relatively new to the

country, often in search of better economic opportunities. The influx during this period may be linked to Nigeria's economic growth and relative stability compared to other ECOWAS member states.

Age of arrival and length of Stay of ECOWAS migrants in Nigeria

ECOWAS migrants predominantly arrive in Nigeria during their youth, with 89.83% under 30. This trend is significant, as younger migrants tend to be energetic and motivated to secure earnings. Regarding length of stay, 32.9% have lived in Nigeria for 1 to 5 years, 7.4% for 21 to 25 years, and only 0.4% for over 41 years. Overall, 80.5% have stayed for 1 to 15 years. These findings align with research by Adepoju (2004) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2015a, 2016a), indicating that Nigeria has attracted ECOWAS migrants since 2000 due to economic growth. The mean length of stay is 10.12 years, with a standard deviation of 8.72, suggesting that while many migrants stay long-term, some may return home within 1.5 years.

Approximately 80.5% of migrants have resided in Nigeria for 1 to 15 years, contributing to the economy through labor and investments. However, the short stays for some indicate a temporary migration strategy aimed at improving economic circumstances before returning home. This pattern implies limited integration into Nigerian society, as many prefer to live and marry within their communities. Once they achieve economic stability, they often return to their countries of origin. Thus, the age of arrival and length of stay highlight important socioeconomic dynamics, showing how the youthful demographic and high informal sector employment underscore migrants' contributions while presenting challenges related to integration and long-term residency.

Income Levels and economic contributions

The income levels of migrants provide further insights into their economic circumstances. A total of 83.312% of migrants earn above Nigeria's minimum wage of 18,000 naira, which is noteworthy given the impending increase in the minimum wage to 56,000 naira (Oche, 2018). However, if the new minimum wage is implemented without corresponding increases in income for migrants, a significant proportion may find themselves earning below the new threshold. This situation underscores the precarious nature of employment in the informal sector, where many migrants are concentrated.

Moreover, the data indicates that 91.126% of migrants engage in monthly trade investments in consumer goods, with a significant portion (32.9%) investing less than 20,000 naira monthly. This investment behaviour reflects their active participation in Nigeria's economy, contributing to job creation and economic growth. Interestingly, while many migrants engage in trade, a small percentage (19.70%) report that they do not remit any money back home. The majority, however, send remittances, which serve as a crucial lifeline for families and communities in their home countries.

Remittance patterns and family support

Remittance patterns among migrants highlight their economic engagement beyond Nigeria. A large proportion (80.30%) of migrants send remittances back to their home countries, serving as a crucial lifeline for families and communities. This financial support can enhance the socioeconomic conditions of their home regions, thereby fostering development and stability. The remittances often contribute to household consumption, education, and healthcare, underscoring the significant role that migrants play in supporting their families and communities back home. However, many migrants face challenges in sending remittances due to high transaction costs and limited access to formal banking services. This situation can hinder their ability to provide consistent financial support to their families. Policymakers must consider initiatives that facilitate easier and more affordable remittance channels, which would enable migrants to better support their families and drive economic development in their home countries.

Social Networks and Integration

The role of social networks in facilitating migration is evident in the study, with 95% of migrants receiving assistance upon arrival in Nigeria. This assistance is often provided by family members, friends, or return migrants, emphasising the importance of social connections in navigating the challenges of migration. These networks not only provide essential support but also offer valuable information about socioeconomic conditions in Nigeria, further sustaining the migration process.

Despite the substantial support from social networks, the integration of migrants into Nigerian society remains limited. Many migrants maintain strong ties to their countries of origin and prefer to marry within their communities, which can hinder their full integration into Nigerian society. The high proportion of migrants (85.50%) who do not visit their home

countries annually reflects a commitment to kinship ties, yet it also suggests a potential disconnect from the broader Nigerian society.

The limited integration of migrants can lead to social isolation and hinder their ability to fully participate in the economic and social life of Nigeria. This isolation may also contribute to a lack of awareness of their rights and available services, making it difficult for them to advocate for their needs. Policymakers should consider initiatives that promote social inclusion and facilitate stronger connections between migrants and the host community.

Visits to home countries

The data indicates that a significant percentage of migrants (85.50%) do not visit their home countries annually. This statistic reflects both economic constraints and the desire to maintain familial ties while navigating the challenges of life in Nigeria. Many migrants express a longing to return home but often prioritise their financial stability and obligations to families in Nigeria and their countries of origin. The decision to refrain from travel can be attributed to several factors, including the high costs associated with international travel, the need to remit money to families back home, and the fear of instability in their home countries. This reluctance to travel may also contribute to feelings of isolation and disconnection from their cultural roots, further complicating their integration into Nigerian society.

Willingness to return permanently to home countries

The willingness of migrants to return permanently to live in their home countries varies significantly based on economic conditions, family ties, and personal circumstances. Many migrants express a desire to return once they have achieved sufficient financial stability or have secured a better quality of life for their families. However, economic uncertainty and the lack of opportunities in their home countries often deter immediate return plans. Approximately 62% of migrants express a preference to return in the next five years, contingent upon improved conditions in their home countries.

Access to information about home countries

The ability of migrants to access information about their home countries is crucial for maintaining ties and making informed decisions about potential return. Many migrants rely on social networks, community organisations, and media to stay informed about developments in their home countries. However, limited access to reliable information can create challenges, particularly when it comes to understanding political changes, economic opportunities, and social conditions. Migrants often express a desire for more support in accessing this information, as it could help them plan for their futures, whether in Nigeria or back home.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings from this research illustrate the complex interplay of socioeconomic characteristics among ECOWAS migrants in Nigeria. The substantial number of migrants arriving from neighboring countries underscores the importance of geographical proximity and shared cultural ties, which not only facilitate migration but also enhance integration into the local economy. The youthful demographic, with a significant majority arriving under the age of 30, highlights the potential for economic vitality as these individuals seek opportunities to improve their livelihoods.

Despite a low unemployment rate among migrants compared to national figures, challenges persist, particularly in terms of integration and access to services. Many migrants work in the informal sector, contributing positively to Nigeria's economy, yet they face vulnerabilities, including legal status issues and economic pressures that can lead to precarious living conditions. The reliance on social networks for support upon arrival reflects the importance of community in navigating the migration landscape, although it also indicates a tendency towards social isolation.

The dynamics of family relationships, with many migrants maintaining ties to their home countries while seeking stability in Nigeria, reveal the duality of their migration journeys. The willingness of a significant proportion of migrants to return to their home countries, contingent on improved conditions, further emphasises the temporary nature of many migration experiences.

As policymakers consider the implications of these findings, it is essential to address the challenges faced by migrants, including integration barriers, access to legal protections, and support for remittances. By fostering an inclusive environment that recognises the contributions of migrants, Nigeria can enhance the socioeconomic benefits of migration while ensuring that migrants themselves are supported in their pursuit of better lives for themselves and their families and the development of ECOWAs region, particularly Nigeria in which they live.

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