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What are the Social Costs of International Migration? Narratives of Lived Realities from Nigerian Migrants, their Kinship and Social Networks

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Abstract

International migration is a major reality that is changing the composition, structures, relationships, and labour systems of human societies globally. It is nearly impossible to understand the institutions, dynamics, behaviours and functioning of contemporary societies without attention to international migration. Unfortunately, as important as international migration is, works only exist on its economic, development, legal, and governance components, with very little attention paid to its crucial social costs. Against this background, this article draws on secondary and primary data to examine the social costs of international migration through narratives of lived realities from Nigerian migrants, their kinship and social networks. Secondary data were gathered through scholarly journals, reliable online databases, books and unclassified documents. Primary data were generated through In-depth interviews with Nigerian international migrants and their kinship and social networks across multiple countries and regions. This article unpacks the various dimensions of the often-overlooked yet significant social costs embedded in the international migration ecosystem. It effectively locates the social costs within important broader contextual factors and forces moderating international migration. This

article makes new strategic contributions to discussions on the decision-making and consequences of international migration.

Keywords: *Lived realities, social costs, migration, Nigerian migrants*

Competing Interest Declaration:

There are no competing interests

Introduction

Studies on international migration have examined factors that motivate people to migrate, as well as patterns, nature and implications of migration (Ojuri and Akanle, 2025a; Ojuri and Akanle, 2025b; Squire *et al.*, 2024; Oladipupo, 2024; Adger, Fransen, de Campos and Clark, 2024; Ojuronbe, 2024; Akanle, 2024; Akanle and Amori, 2024; Akanle, 2023a; Triandafyllidou, 2022; Akanle, 2018; Sjaastad, 1962). Many existing studies focus on the economics and governance of migration, especially relative to remittances, labour mobility, humanitarianism, displacement, income disparities, and livelihood issues (Squire *et al.*, 2024; Oladipupo, 2024; Ojuronbe, 2024; Akanle, 2018). Not enough attention had been paid to the social costs of international migration, especially in migrant-sending countries of the global south.

Social costs, in the context of this article, refer to the consequences of international migration on social relations within established social institutions, which are often taken for granted in migration studies (Ojuri and Akanle, 2025a; Ojuri and Akanle, 2025b; Akanle and Amori, 2024; Oladipupo, 2024; Ojuronbe, 2024; Chima, 2024; Akanle and Adesina, 2017a; Akanle, 2018 and Akanle and Adesina, 2017b). The guiding research questions of this article are: What social costs exist within the contextual frameworks of international migration as a consequential social reality that must be understood beyond economic terms? What are the forces of decision-making and consequences of international migration that can be learned through the study of Nigeria?

This article draws attention to the different elements of social costs of international migration, within the broader migration ecosystems, through the study of Nigeria, Africa's most populous country. Through the case of Nigeria, it is empirically possible to understand the social costs of international migration from migrant sending countries, especially from Africa, and the global south. The particular interest of

this article is to jump-start and continue conversations on the social costs of international migration. This is to draw attention to the very important associated issues (International Organisation for Migration [IOM] and Save the Children, 2017; KNOMAD, 2016). The issues are key for effective, fair and sustainable migration governance. This is particularly so in the post-pandemic era. In the order of Triandafyllidou and Yeoh (2023), in their article *Sustainability and Resilience in Migration Governance for a Post-pandemic World*, it is important to realise that the social costs of migration are very dangerous issues that must be better understood and effectively integrated into migration studies and governance for sustainable development.

Social Costs of International Migration: Engagement with the Literature

There is no doubt that migration holds very important keys to the economic, livelihood and development enhancements of many countries (Ojurongbe, 2024; Oladipupo, 2024; Akanle and Adesina, 2017a). This is particularly so in the post-pandemic era as the world continues to cope with the complicated consequences of the pandemic (Triandafyllidou and Yeoh, 2023). However, many existing studies on international migration today are within the celebratory socioeconomic development model, and this is not the complete reality (Chima, 2024; Ojurongbe, 2024; Akanle and Adesina, 2017a). Important social costs dimensions of migration need more attention (de Haas, 2012). There remains a need for more robust and nuanced contemporary research on the social costs of migration. Such research is essential to understand the evolving realities of international migration, especially within the context of the post-pandemic global migration order (Akanle and Amori, 2024; Adger, Fransen, de Campos and Clark, 2024; Triandafyllidou & Yeoh, 2023). As more countries and more stakeholders are increasingly interested in migration as a potential engine of growth, research, policy, and scholarly efforts must also be accelerated to empirically examine the social costs of human movements (Sjaastad, 1962) to prevent vacuous knowledge, especially in the context of sustainable development (Akanle, Kayode and Abolade, 2022).

Substantial parts of common international migration narratives and interpretations are around remittances and governance (Akanle, Kayode and Abolade, 2022; Triandafyllidou, 2017). Remittances, particularly, are often used as key measures of the impacts of migration as migrants

continue to send billions of dollars to countries of origin, even in crises like the Covid-19 pandemic (Akanle, Otomi and Nwanagu, 2021). For instance, remittances to Nigeria are about the most stable and most reliable sources of foreign exchange earnings to households and the country (Ojurongbe, 2024; Benson, 2022; Akanle and Adesina, 2017a). At the national level, while foreign direct investments (FDIs) are crumbling and Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) are in comatose, remittances from international migrants to Nigeria are constantly being sent to the country. Currently, the highest number of remittances to West Africa is received by Nigeria. Boosting the country's external reserves and strengthening its financial buffer, Nigerian migrants abroad sent \$20.98 billion to the country in 2024, making it the highest level in half a decade and a 9% increase from the 2023 figure (The World Bank, 2025; Statistica, 2024¹).

Based on available data, going by remittances data from the World Bank (2021), on the totality of Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria received the highest amount of remittances, totalling 64% of all remittances to the sub-region. Nigerians are migrating abroad significantly, and this is having definitive implications for the country (Akanle, 2024). According to Macrotrends (2024), the net migration rate for Nigeria in 2023 was -0.273 per 1000 population, representing a 2.5% decline from 2022. The net migration rate for the country in 2022 was -0.280 per 1000 population, representing a 2.78% decrease from 2021. As of 2021, the net migration rate for Nigeria was -0.288 per 1000 population, translating to a 2.37% decline from 2020 (Migration Trends, 2024). In a related manner, Statistica (2024), giving a summary of emigration from Nigeria, opined that the number of people emigrating from Nigeria is higher than the number of those immigrating into the country. Between 2000 and 2021, for example, net migration in Nigeria stayed negative (Statistica, 2024).

The current wave of Nigerian emigration is driven by both social and economic pressures (Habib, 2024). Increasingly, many Nigerians feel a strong urge to leave the country. This is a phenomenon now culturally framed as *Japa* - a term meaning "to flee urgently" (Habib, 2024; Akanle, 2023a). While the migration of the mid-1980s up to the last 20 years was mostly well thought out and mostly characterised by the quest for higher studies, further training, professional career upliftment and family

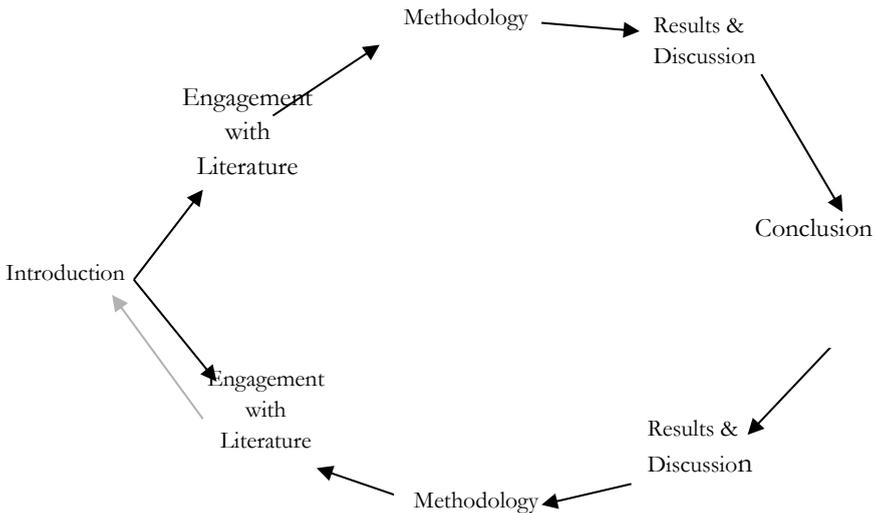
¹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT?locations=NG>

reunion, migration in this recent era is more desperate and driven by escapism (Akanle, 2023a). Many reasons have been attributed to the *Japa Phenomenon*. Top of these reasons are widespread unemployment, insecurity, corruption, mis-governance, copycat syndrome, poverty and fear of poverty, dilapidated infrastructures, uncompetitive education system, poor healthcare facilities, devaluation of currency, hopelessness and quest for acquisition of foreign citizenship, among others (Opanuga, 2024; Ojurongbe, 2024; Adejoro and Ajayi, 2024; Akomolafe, 2024; Jaiyeola, 2024; Akanle, 2024; Habib, 2024; Aina, 2024; Chima, 2024; Ubanagu, 2023; Onwuzoo, 2023; NOIPolls, 2023; Akanle, 2023a; IOM and Save the Children, 2017; KNOMAD, 2016).

Methodology

Exploratory research design was adopted for the study that informed this article. The Iterative Balloon Framework of Analysis (Fig. 1) illustrates the logical flow of the article and serves as a key component of the methodological approach.

Figure 1: The Iterative Balloon Framework of Analysis



Source: The author, 2025

Explaining the Iterative Balloon Framework of Analysis

The Iterative Balloon Framework of Analysis was developed by the author to demonstrate the flow pattern, the structured analytical orientation and the strategic interconnectedness of the different sections of the article. The article is not linear in analysis and engagement, even though the structure may appear linear. The structure and analysis of the article are iterative. The title of the framework is a metaphor of a balloon because the article begins with the Introduction, which provides the air (entry) into the whole article, ending with the Conclusion. Of particular importance in the framework is the interconnectedness of every section with the others for a strengthened and coherent analysis.

The Introduction flows into the Engagement with Literature, which surveys existing works and the gaps. This connects with Methodology. The Methodology connects with the Results and Discussion, which connect with the Conclusion. The Conclusion can inform further studies, which can start another research process from the Introduction. The Iterative Balloon Framework of Analysis approach adopted enabled the article to still benefit from the Conclusion to further connect and deepen the Results and Discussion, the Methodology, the Engagement with Literature and even the Introduction. The article learnt from every section of the analytical process to work forward and backwards in an iterative manner for valid and reliable research on the social costs of migration as a major contribution to knowledge. From this approach, it is possible to see the implications of every section in every other section and the overall article as a coherent whole.

Study Population

The study population were international migrants of Nigerian origin and Nigerians who were still in Nigeria at the time of conducting the research. Hence, the Nigerian migrants abroad and Nigerians who were still in Nigeria and interviewed during the research all had kinship and/or social networks with many other migrants and people in Nigeria and overseas. This broadened their understanding of the issues and their relevance to the research. This approach provided important counterfactuals to strengthen the validity of the article, especially the results and conclusions.

Inclusion Criteria

Major inclusion criteria were adopted for the study. For the international migrants abroad, all must be of Nigerian origin, they must have stayed abroad, continuously, for more than a year, they must have strong social and kinship networks in Nigeria and must have been maintaining the kinship and social networks to be qualified for inclusion (Akanle, 2023a; Akanle and Ola-Lawson, 2022; Akanle, 2018). For the Nigerians still in Nigeria during the study, they must have networks of Nigerian international migrants abroad, they must be Nigerians, and they must have firsthand lived experiences of the research issues.

Sampling

The sampling design was purposive sampling because of the nature of the study. Kinship and social networks of migrants and non-migrants were leveraged to access the research participants because many of them were hard-to-reach, especially the international migrants (Akanle, 2012; Akanle and Olutayo, 2012).

Method of Data Collection

Semi-structured interview guide was developed and used for data collection among a total of 32 interviewees (migrants and non-migrants). Seven of the interviewees were international migrants living in the United Kingdom (UK) (3), Canada (1), Australia (1), the Netherlands (1) and Namibia (1). The remaining 25 interviewees were living in Nigeria as at the time of the fieldwork, but were in regular touch with their kinship and social networks abroad including in; Canada, UK, The United States of America (U.S.A), Australia, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, Poland, France, Ukraine, Ireland, South Africa, Russia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), New Zealand, Norway, Ghana, South Africa, Botswana. Interviews were conducted virtually and in person. The choice of mode of interviews was guided by the schedules and preferences of the interviewees. Interviews were recorded and transcribed in many instances, while some interviewees preferred virtual research interactions and provided comprehensive, relevant information/responses to interview guides after numerous pre-interview contacts and explanations of prompts and probes in the interview guide.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done through content and thematic analyses and presented as ethnographic summaries and interpretative discourse. The research followed global best practices in ethical research throughout the research process. Ethical procedures are adhered to strictly, including principles and practices of informed consent, anonymity, beneficence, non-maleficence, right of withdrawal, non-coercion, non-inducement, justice and full disclosure. As part of ethical compliance, the researcher has international and national certifications in the ethical conduct of research.

Results and Discussion

It is noteworthy that results are presented in ways that respect the original thoughts and lived experiences, and realities of research participants.

Table 1: Socio-demographic and Networks Contexts of Research Participants (Nigerian migrants abroad)

S/N	Name ²	Age	Gender	Level of Education	Country of Residence	Locational nodes of Social/kinship Networks
1	Elabohonyn	29	Female	Masters Degree	Netherlands	Netherlands and <i>all over the world</i> ³ , including Nigeria
2	Oluwaleke	39	Male	PhD	Canada	Canada, UK, Germany, UAE, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Ghana, U.S.A., South Africa, Botswana <i>and many more</i> , ⁴ including Nigeria
3	Olorunnumiwa	32	Male	PhD	Australia	England, Australia, Canada, U.S.A., Nigeria
4	Oluwamolawa	50	Male	PhD	Namibia	South Africa, Canada, Britain, Nigeria
5	Maliluma	26+	Male	Masters degree	UK	UK, U.S.A, South Africa, Canada and every other place there is a Nigerian migrant, including Nigeria.
6	Esinwapa	27	Female	Masters degree	UK	UK, U.S.A. Canada, Nigeria
7	Olaoluwa	46	Male	PhD	UK	UK, Nigeria

The age range of Nigerian migrants abroad who participated in the study is 26 – 50, showing a socioeconomically active population. The study shows that 71.4 per cent of the interviewees are males, 100 per cent of the interviewees have postgraduate degrees. As much as 57.1 per cent of

² All names are not real names. All the names are pseudonyms for ethical reasons.

³ This interviewee insisted she has social and kinship networks all over the world, indicating the tremendous depth of her migrants’ kinship and social networks.

⁴ This interviewee, after listing many countries, maintained his social and kinship networks traverse many countries abroad and could not be listed because they were too numerous.

the interviewees have a PhD, indicating very educated interviewees. As many as 85.7 per cent of the interviewees live in developed countries of Canada, Australia, the UK and the Netherlands, while the remaining live in Africa. All the interviewees have social/kinship networks spread across the world. The widespread presence of migrants’ networks across the world suggests their capacity to relate to important social cost issues.

Table 2: Socio-demographic and Networks Contexts of Research Participants (Left-behind Nigerians)

S/N	Name ⁵	Age	Gender	Level of Education	Country of Residence	Locational nodes of Social/kinship Networks
1	Feran	25	Female	Masters	Nigeria	Canada, U.S.A, UK
2	Bukunmi	46	Female	Masters	Nigeria	UK, Canada, Australia, U.S.A., Ireland
3	Sauna	60	Male	Masters	Nigeria	U.S.A.
4	Adeorimi	26	Female	Masters	Nigeria	UK, U.S.A., Canada
5	Veronica	49	Female	PhD	Nigeria	U.S.A., UK
6	Funmika	27	Female	Masters	Nigeria	UK, Canada, U.S.A., Russia, Germany
7	Yiukalawani	41	Male	PhD	Nigeria	Germany
8	Gbenle	24	Male	Masters	Nigeria	Canada
9	Muharid	-----	Male	Undergraduate	Nigeria	Switzerland
10	Cinedum	29	Male	Masters	Nigeria	UK, Poland, France, U.S.A., Australia
11	Tiamiyu	29	Male	B.Sc	Nigeria	UK
12	Sadiq	45	Male	B.Sc	Nigeria	U.S.A., UK, Canada, Australia
13	Morito	36	Male	Masters	Nigeria	U.S.A., Canada, UK
14	Alhaja	24	Female	B.Sc	Nigeria	Australia, U.S.A., UK
15	Esther	24	Female	B.Sc	Nigeria	Australia, U.S.A., UK
16	Mark	28	Male	Undergraduate	Nigeria	UK
17	Kajorepo	40	Female	PhD	Nigeria	UK, Canada, U.S.A.
18	James	25	Male	B.Sc	Nigeria	Qatar, UAE, Ukraine, UK
19	Kehinde1	24	Male	Masters	Nigeria	Canada
20	Kehinde2	48	Male	PhD	Nigeria	U.S.A.
21	Daniel1	29	Male	PhD	Nigeria	UK, Poland, U.S., France, Australia
22	Daniel2	43	Male	PhD	Nigeria	U.S.A., UK, Australia
23	Agbajaoga	31	Male	Masters	Nigeria	UK, U.S.A., Canada, Ireland, etc
24	Olaobi	54	Female	B.Sc	Nigeria	U.S.A., Canada, UK
25	Ademioson	57	Female	PhD	Nigeria	UK, U.S.A., Canada

⁵ All names are pseudonyms for ethical reasons. Not all names are real names.

According to Table 2, all the interviewees were Nigerian nationals residing in Nigeria at the time of the data collection. Their ages ranged from 24 to 57 years, representing a relatively mature cohort with the capacity to engage meaningfully with the research themes. Women constituted 40% of the sample. In terms of educational background, 40% held Masters degrees, 28% had PhDs, 24% held Bachelor's degrees, and 8% were undergraduates, indicating a highly educated group equipped with the knowledge capacity to contribute to the study. Importantly, all participants maintained active kinship and social networks with Nigerian migrants abroad. These transnational ties were particularly concentrated in developed countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, various EU member states, Ireland, Switzerland, and Australia.

Context, Forces and Influences of International Migration of Nigerians

All the interviewees opine that migration has a significant influence on the country. The influences are, however, considered binary (positive and otherwise), needing careful interrogation. This is within the context of high-rate emigration, especially to Canada, the UK, the EU and the United States, where most Nigerian migrants have existing networks to facilitate the migration and integrate the migrants in the destination countries. According to an interviewee, a very senior medical expert:

By virtue of my profession, I know a lot of professional colleagues who have relocated to the United Kingdom. The rate of migration, especially to the UK, is very, very high. This is almost every day. As a matter of fact, a colleague of mine was telling me, a few weeks ago that in the institution where she works in Nigeria, about 50 people dropped their Letters of Resignation a day just because they were relocating. That is in one health institution. You can imagine. I know there is so much data on the internet talking about the number of people leaving Nigeria every day for overseas. For the sake of this interview, I know so many people, professionals and non-professionals who had relocated.
(Medical practitioner in Nigeria/Female/49 years old/PhD/ Nigeria/2024)

Some elements of class can, however, be seen in the spate of migration from Nigeria. Reasons for moving can, somewhat, be accounted for by class and copycat syndrome. For instance, according to an interviewee:

The not-so-successful (Nigerians) leave – migrate- for economic opportunity (abroad), while the established successful (Nigerians) leave because of insecurity, as they claimed. It has gotten bad to the extent that it has become a wave of conformity that people migrate just because it is what “most” people are doing now, without a clearly defined purpose and reasoned decision. I struggled to understand how a person in the latter part of their career would accumulate 30 million Naira or more (About \$23,000 USD), sell their cars and houses in order to migrate, to at times, uncertainty. Some travelled with their families on a study visa, where there is no guarantee that they would get a work visa. (*International Migrant abroad/Male/50 years old/ PhD/Namibia/2024*)

This is consistent with the findings of Aina (2024), Habib (2024), Ojurongbe (2024) and Onwuzoo (2024). There are class dynamics and pressures as forces motivating many Nigerians to *Japa* (to escape quickly from Nigeria). This relates strategically to the migration reality and consequential impacts on the country. Aside from the contextual forces of migration from Nigeria, the research gathered qualitative primary data on the implications of the migration. As Nigerians migrate, it has indelible positive and negative implications for the country. Negative implications include negative representation of the country as a failing state/frustrating state, very poor, insecure, and perpetually underdeveloped.

One notable consequence of migration is the dissemination of predominantly negative narratives about Nigeria by some migrants living abroad. These individuals often contrast such accounts with idealised portrayals of life in destination countries, which are widely shared online. Through social media and other platforms, they highlight the benefits of living abroad while emphasising the perceived hardships in Nigeria. This, directly and indirectly, encourages emigration from the country. This digital amplification trend of comparative national and international narratives has not been sufficiently documented in existing migration literature (Akanle, 2023b). Such representations shape public perception, normalise desperate migration decisions, and influence the migration aspirations of those still residing in the country.

According to an interviewee, on the issue of negative implications of migration from Nigeria:

Migration is a historical phenomenon. It is an inevitable occurrence that is indicative of multilateral exchange of values between and among interacting humans across borderlines. But it becomes concerning

when this exchange becomes precarious, such as the case in Nigeria. The precarity of the Nigerian immigration trend lies in the fact that the country (being an economically weak country) is on the verge of losing its most productive demographic force to other (supposedly economically more stable) countries of the world. (*International Migrant abroad/Male/39 years old/ PhD/Canada/2024*)

According to another migrant abroad:

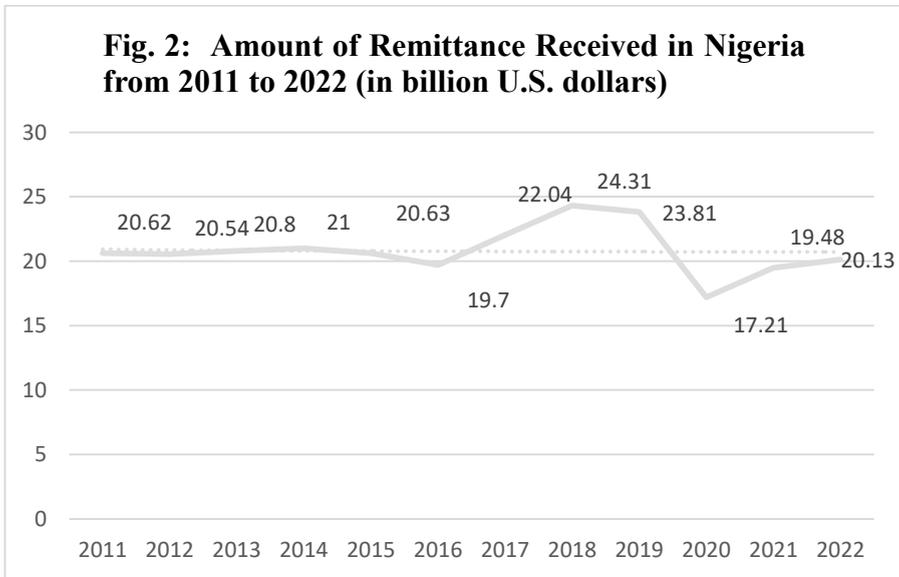
The most prominent negative impact is what we experience when people believe the solution to Nigeria's problems is to leave instead of looking at migration as an avenue to create a working system and strategising on how to adapt to it. Instead of this problem-solving thinking, we continue to see videos and posts on SM (Social Media) on how things are cheaper, like getting chicken breast and a few other groceries for a small amount. (*International Migrant abroad/Female /27 years old/Masters Degree/UK/ 2024*)

For another Nigerian migrant abroad:

The impacts on Nigeria, in my view, are the projection of a negative image to the world. At some stage, it will start to have economic impacts on the country because of the loss of the economically active population to other countries. This is compounded by the fact that the cost of education and training is relatively cheap in Nigeria. Losing university-educated people to other countries means Nigeria cannot reap the benefits of its social investment in education and training. This is especially bad for the health-related profession. (*International Migrant abroad/Male/50 years old/PhD/ Namibia/2024*)

While the positive impacts of migration from the findings include opportunities for migrants to build positive/useful social networks, professional contacts, and functional capacities abroad, results show remittances as the most common and the most profound positive impacts and gains from international migration of Nigerians in consistent with the results of Akanle (2024), Ojurongbe (2024), Akanle, Otomi and Nwanagu (2021), Akanle and Adesina (2017a). All interviewees (100%) affirmed that the prospect of sending remittances to their kinship and social networks in Nigeria is a major motivation for their emigration from Nigeria. Many seek opportunities abroad not only to improve their quality of life through access to foreign exchange earnings but also to support their kinship and social networks and to

invest in their home country, Nigeria. This dual motivation: personal advancement and networks' obligation reflects the deep-rooted role of kinship and social networks in shaping migration decisions. It is, therefore, unsurprising that Nigeria consistently ranks among the top recipients of remittances in Africa, with remittance inflows playing a significant role in household livelihoods, social mobility, and national economic indicators. In agreement with data from the World Bank, data from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) show that personal remittances to Nigeria have reached five years high of \$20.9bn in 2024, and this is very crucial for foreign exchange earnings of the country and very key to the livelihoods of the citizens.

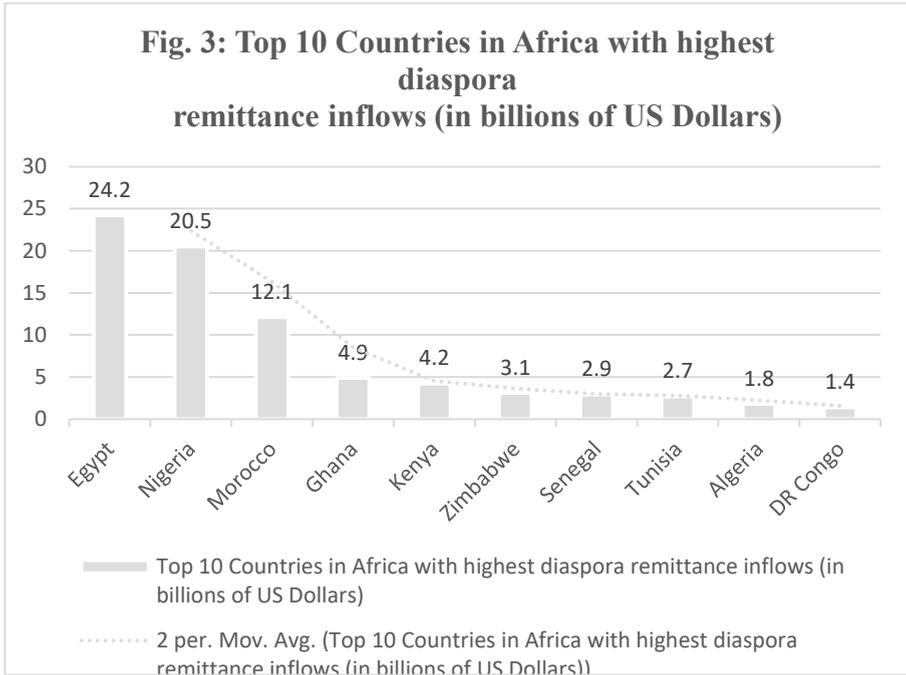


Source: Data from Statistica (2024)⁶

Remittances inflow to Nigeria remains appreciable, with a steady flow into Nigeria from 2011 to 2015 with negligible fluctuations. There was, however, a little appreciable decline in remittances inflow in 2016, but there was a recovery in 2017 from 19.7 billion United States Dollars to 22.04 billion dollars in 2017. The next major decline was in 2020, with a

⁶<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1012368/remittance-inflows-to-nigeria/#:~:text=The%20personal%20remittances%20received%20in,billion%20U.S.%20dollars%20in%202022.>

decline to 17.21 dollars due to the massive impact of COVID-19. Recovery in remittances inflow to Nigeria has, however, been estimated to have increased to 20.13 billion dollars in 2022 (Independent, 2024).



Source: Data from The Independent (2024)

The country with the second-highest remittance inflow on the continent was Nigeria,⁸ with 20.5 billion US dollars, making an increase of 0.37 billion US dollars from 2022. Nigeria was followed in distant third position by Morocco with 12.1 billion US dollars. DR Congo received the least volume of remittances among the 10, with 1.4 billion U.S dollars.

The interview data reveals a consistent theme. The desire to earn and send remittances is a key driver of emigration from Nigeria, particularly in light of the country’s underdevelopment and difficult cost

⁷ The Independent (2024). *Top 10 African countries with high diaspora remittance inflows*. <https://www.independent.co.ug/top-10-african-countries-with-high-diaspora-remittance-inflows/>. Accessed 14/05/2024.

⁸ Egypt received the highest volume of remittances on the continent, with 24.2 billion US dollars in 2023.

of living. As one interviewee, reflecting the predominant worldview among participants, explained:

Apart from remittances back home from migrants, I do not see any other positive impacts for Nigeria because the migration is not coordinated. The remittances will pale compared to the economic contributions the migrants would have made to the country. A good example is India, that packaged its skills into products (e.g., call centres servicing companies globally) that it sells globally without migrating out of its country. (*International Migrant abroad/Male/50 years old/PhD/Namibia/ 2024*)

Another interviewee captured the real contours of positive impacts maintained:

It (international migration) gives a level of networking for Nigerians abroad. People who have moved out (migrated abroad) have increased their networking, which has also in one way or the other affected those in Nigeria (as remittance of networks). For instance, a friend of yours travels out and his/her networks can impact you in Nigeria. Your friend's network can influence yours positively. Nigerians who had travelled abroad mix with people from different countries, and have diverse knowledge from other countries. Those who have been able to travel out (migrate) also bring back to their home country (country of origin) because of funds from abroad (remittances). (*Lecturer in Nigeria/Female/26 years old/Master's/Nigeria/2024*)

Social Costs of International Migration in Nigeria

Social costs are the direct and indirect non-financial or non-economic consequences incurred by a country/people on account of migration. Nigeria bears these social costs in the short and long run, and they are often not accounted for in migration literature. Findings reveal that all the interviewees maintain increasing international migration of Nigerians exerts significant social costs on the country. The major themes that emerge on social costs in results are culture of dependency/entitlement mentality on account of reliance on remittances, separation of family members, training of children at home and abroad (child socialisation), disputes among family members about control of resources (including remittances and properties sent by migrants abroad), negative perception of spouses left-behind in Nigeria, wrongful perception of women returnees as prostitutes.

Remittances and Culture of dependency/Entitlement mentality

While remittances serve positive purposes in ameliorating the burdens of migration, it is a double-edged sword. Remittances can build a culture of dependency/entitlement mentality in the social systems and minds of recipients in developing countries (Gupta, Pattillo, and Wagh, 2007). Hence, governments and state actors tend to abdicate their responsibilities of providing competitive resources and quality of life for their citizens, just because of dependence on remittances. Citizens receiving remittances tend to be indifferent to mis-governance because they have alternative sources of livelihood and income through remittances. Culture of dependency/entitlement mentality thus becomes a major social cost of migration. This is a very important issue for resilient and sustainable migration governance. This is especially so relative to when migrants and their left-behind kin and social networks are considered for inclusion and integration into national safety nets (Triandafyllidou and Yeoh, 2023).

International Migration, Family disorganisation and instability

On the separation of family members on account of migration, interviewees consistently believe a long period of separation leads to family disorganisation, especially among kin with closely knitted relationships. Such separations weaken and ultimately lead to strained relationships in the context of families. This is especially so as long periods of separation tend to lead to loneliness with accompanying emotional disadvantages such as anxiety and depression, especially among spouses. In many cases, the long period of separation has the consequence of estrangement in husband–wife relationships, which has led to many cases of empty-shell marriages and divorces. This is especially so when there are ineffective communications and a lack of shared migration goals. Even in cases where husbands and wives migrate together, migration affects social relations even in destination countries where couples have to work very hard, in different companies and across different shifts/days to make ends meet and to attend to demands from their home countries. There are also many bills to be paid. All these put serious strains on spousal relationships, which often lead to divorce. Hence, according to an interviewee, a migrant in Canada, who captured the modal view on this theme:

Sometimes, the separation can be for a short while. Other times, it could be permanent. I know couples that never got reunited because one of them migrated. The implications of this are many: children in such a marriage suffer the consequences, financial stress sets in, emotional instability becomes an issue, and life itself becomes threatened. Personally, it has not been an easy experience for me to raise a family outside the physical reach of my extended family members. Particularly during childbirth, I felt all by myself! (*International Migrant abroad/Male/39 years old/PhD/ Canada/2024*)

In consistency, another migrant in the UK insisted:

Migration greatly impacts on separation of family members, and as the rate of migration increases, so does the increase in family separations. This affects both nuclear and extended family separations. I had neighbours who were impacted by this. In one case, the husband stayed behind with the children while the woman travelled for work. In another instance, the husband stayed abroad while the wife remained with the children. Recently, the wife has also gone to join the husband while the children are left with their grandmother. I have also had a personal experience of travelling to a different country and my husband to another country, so we were both migrants in two different countries and away from our extended family members. The common explanation given is that one person should be outside, and that at the end of the day, it is more beneficial for the family- this is, however, in economic terms and has no social or familial advantage. (*International Migrant abroad/Female/27 years old/ Master's Degree/UK/2024*)

International Migration and Socialisation of Children

There are cases where children do not have effective socialisation due to parental absence on account of international migration. This is particularly so where couples do not migrate together as families, leading to cases of left-behind spouses and children (Ojuri and Akanle, 2025a; Ojuri and Akanle, 2025b). Children in this situation are usually confronted with poor cultural adaptations and integration, whether in Nigeria or overseas. Young children often face cultural dilemmas and confusion as different and conflicting cultural ethos are transmitted across boundaries. According to an interviewee:

Migration has resulted in lessened cultural norms. Children now see their parents' culture as secondary. Aside from the cultural impact,

migration is also resulting in single parenting due to the absence of one of the parents. (*Graduate in Nigeria/Male/25 years old/B.Sc. holder/Nigeria/2024*)

International Migration, Remittances and Disputes in Families

For disputes among family members for control of resources (including remittances and properties sent by migrants abroad), this is a very serious challenge as kinship/social networks of migrants struggle for recognition from the migrant and develop a sense of entitlement. This is common across interviews conducted and is a major cause of family feuds. This result is consistent with that of Akanle and Adesina (2017). While there are cases where remittances do not cause overt family feuds, cases of covert conflicts exist where some network members continue to feel cheated, isolated and undervalued because they believe they do not receive significant recognition and share of remittances in a manner commensurate with their positions and contributions to the networks.

According to another interviewee:

In cases when remittances are sent from Nigerians in the diaspora, some family members feel more entitled than others. This can fan an ember of division in the extended family. Conversely, when there is no remittance sent, family members become embittered and suspicious – they are agitated or angered about their loved ones in whom they had some vested interests. Some resort to spirituality to address this matter. (*International Migrant abroad/Male/39 years old/PhD/Canada/2024*)

Migration in stages, delayed joint relocation and the implication for families

Many Nigerians migrate in stages, especially among some middle-class families. These are people who are not able to afford the relocation of all family members at once, and those not very sure of the success of their migration plans. Many migrants thus migrate first and leave their spouses behind with a promise to relocate them later once they are more financially stable and socially well integrated in the destination countries. In some cases, this works, but in many other cases, it either does not work or is very delayed. This failure of eventual joint relocation or excessively delayed joint relocation is a major issue. When joint relocation becomes extended or impossible, the separation often leads to mutual suspicion among the migrant spouses and left-behind

spouses/kin. The situation becomes worse if there were trust issues pre-migration and/or if the marriage and the couple are very young:

Mostly because of the things we have seen or heard about marriages where a spouse is left behind, there is a belief that ‘ara o kin se okuta’ (the body is not stone [human nature will naturally demand sex]). Because of these human feelings, it is hard to believe that married partners live apart without any sexual relationship for such extended periods. Based on my own experience, I believe this to be mostly true for those who have limited commitment to their spouse and even less moral standards, which makes this acceptable. Because of the increasing experience of women divorcing their husbands once they have migrated, there might also be doubts about the commitment of the partner left behind and if he/she has been left behind because their partner has doubts about their behaviour or love commitment. (*International Migrant abroad/Female/27 years old/ Masters Degree/UK/2024*)

Perception of Women Returnees as Prostitutes

There are cases of wrongful perception of women returnees as prostitutes. This situation is very common, and it is one of the gender stereotypes against women migrants. While there have been efforts to change the perception, this has been largely unsuccessful, especially among women lone-migrants. Whether the women return with significant or insignificant achievements, they are perceived to have gone abroad for prostitution. The perception is, however, worse if the women returned with significant material and financial fortunes. This perception is very serious. It is often driven by common negative media narratives projecting women as sex objects who are often trafficked for prostitution or who easily resort to prostitution in the face of employment and economic challenges. While interviewees believe this perception is common, they mostly maintained that the perception is due to patriarchy and ignorance:

This notion (perception) might be due to the enlightenment and freedom of dressing which these returnees portray. The hold of patriarchy seems to be less strong in developed countries, such that women can be what they want to be with little communal decisions on what is right or wrong. As such, these women returnees are likely to return more vocal about claiming their rights. In instances where one has spent months wearing layers of clothes during winter, summer

seems like a good time to wear less clothing and fewer layers. Returning to a country like Nigeria, where it is possibly hotter all year round than even just a summer in the UK, there is more possibility to put on less clothing to be comfortable in the heat and thereby be termed a prostitute according to the standards of dressing. This issue of dressing is perhaps a way that I could have judged some people to be morally lacking before experiencing the different seasons in a different country as well. (*International Migrant abroad/Female/27 years old/Master's Degree/UK/2024*)

Human Capital Flight/Brain Drain

Another major social cost explained by interviewees is the issue of human capital flight/brain drain from Nigeria. This is when well-trained Nigerians emigrate to contribute to the skill pool abroad, leaving a huge skill gap in Nigeria. All 100 per cent of interviewees believe this is among the greatest social costs of current emigration from Nigeria. According to interviewees, Nigeria is losing its best brains to foreign countries, and the country is increasingly lacking qualified professionals to drive its growth and development (Akanle, 2024). This is particularly so in the health, Information Technology and education sectors. The health sector is, especially the most affected in Nigeria, with the federal government and every state raising the alarm of labour shortages in the health sector (Nbanagu, 2023; Onwuzoo, 2023). The medical sector in Nigeria has been hard hit in this regard, with almost all states in the country crying loud over reduced manpower in hospitals (Ojurongbe, 2024).

Conclusion

Costs of migration flows for people and countries remain fundamental in understanding human migration. Interests in the costs of migration have engaged the attention of scholars over time, but the understanding of social costs of migration remains insufficient. This article has, therefore, contributed to knowledge by engaging the social costs of international migration through the case study of Nigeria, a country with substantial and profound footprints in international migration. The results in this article emphasise the importance of social costs in understanding international migration flows from Nigeria to developed countries, including Canada, the UK, the U.S.A., the EU and Australia.

While social costs of international migration are the main focus of this article, the author has located the analysis in connection with remittances for comprehensive analytical frameworks and complete scholarly, policy and practice understanding. In this context, it is recommended that Nigeria and other migrant sending countries, in concert with migrant receiving countries, take fundamental steps to better manage and mitigate the social costs. Migration policies need to be better innovated and made more proactive to ensure fair migration systems that make migration a *win-win* for all in the migration ecosystem – the countries of origin, destination countries, migrants themselves and social/kinship networks. The current migration policies in Nigeria are very ineffective and do not strategically address the mismatch among human capital development, substantial emigration and fair migration systems (Akanle, 2024). The Nigerian migration policy ecosystem is too weak, especially relative to implementation, to ensure effective migration management and governance. This is a common migration policy reality of not only Nigeria but, Sub-Saharan Africa. This is unlike what is found in countries like China and India, where strong and determined policies and systems are in place to ensure fair migration with the capacity to mitigate the costs of migration.

While Nigerians migrate more to the few clusters of developed countries, there are no effective Bilateral Skill Partnership Agreements or Labour Migration Agreements between Nigeria and most of the destination countries of choice. This means structured migration governance systems are non-existent to mitigate migration costs and optimise migration gains across levels. Even though Nigeria has the Nigerian National Migration Policy and the National Policy on Labour Migration, 2020, as supported by the EU, the policies are poorly implemented; hence, the policies do not particularly address social costs. There are huge migration policy gaps in Nigeria and across Sub-Saharan Africa, as the current policy ecosystems do not have the capacity to moderate the social costs of migration, and this must change! Even though efforts were made in this article to identify, analyse and interpret the social costs of migration within the broader contexts of the migration realities of Nigeria, the social costs were not quantified within a cost-benefit framework. Further studies are, thus, recommended to attempt some cost-benefit quantitative analyses of the social costs of international migration.

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