

Socio-economic deprivation and intended migration abroad among Abuja residents in North Central, Nigeria.

Ejukonemu Joyce A.M., Asala Bayo T., Ubana Agnes Enang

ABSTRACT

Out-migration of Nigerians has become a persistent global issue, contributing to brain drain and shortages of skilled professionals in different sectors such as healthcare, information technology, engineering, and education. Despite growing concerns about this situation, little has been done to address the root causes of migration in Nigeria adequately. Unfortunately, many Nigerians are of the view that migration is the only viable solution to socio-economic challenges such as limited employment opportunities, poor infrastructure, inadequate social support, and systemic inequality. This study, therefore, investigates migration in Nigeria, with a focus on socio-economic deprivation. N-100 structured questionnaires were distributed in Abuja. The following research questions were addressed: What form of socio-economic deprivation do Nigerians experience? How do these deprivations influence their decisions to migrate? What are the most effective ways to mitigate these deprivations? To address these questions, primary data were collected through key informant interviews and qualitative analysis of social media discussions on migration, while secondary data were drawn from relevant literature. The study is framed within the confines of the Relative Deprivation and Push-Pull Theories of Migration as expanded by contemporary scholars. The study examines the relationship between socio-economic deprivation and the intention to migrate abroad among residents of Abuja, Nigeria. Focusing on Socio-economic deprivation indices, the study employed an explanatory concurrent mixed-methods design (QUAN-qual) using purposive sampling. Data were collected from 100 intended migrants in Abuja through questionnaires and from 6 key informants via interviews. Quantitative data were analysed with SPSS using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analysed with Atlas. The thrust of the paper is that socio-economic deprivation indices are the driving force for intended emigration among Abuja residents in North-central Nigeria. The study therefore recommends viable citizen-driven policies to address the underlying challenges of emigration in Nigeria.

Keywords: Socio-economic deprivation, citizen, deprivation, Nigerian, migration intention.

Ejukonemu J.A.M., jejukonemu@noun.edu.ng, Centre of Excellence in Migration and Global Studies, National Open University of Nigeria, University Village, Jabi- Abuja, Asala B.T., Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, National Open University of Nigeria, University Village, Jabi- Abuja, Ubana A.E., Department of Political Science, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

Introduction

Human migration is a universal and enduring phenomenon that has shaped societies and civilisations throughout history. Since the earliest periods of human existence, people have moved from one place to another in search of safety, better living conditions, and opportunities for advancement. Migration is often motivated by a variety of factors, including economic hardship, unemployment, environmental degradation, political instability, insecurity, and the pursuit of education or family reunification (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014). People around the world continue to migrate for a variety of reasons. Some move in search of employment or better economic opportunities, while others relocate to reunite with family or pursue education. Many also migrate to escape conflict, persecution, terrorism, human rights abuses, natural disasters, or other environmental challenges.

This movement, known as migration, is a global phenomenon that has shaped the human experience for centuries. People move across borders and continents for a variety of reasons, including economic opportunity, political instability, environmental factors, and the pursuit of a better life. Its patterns and flows have evolved significantly over time, influenced by factors such as globalisation, technological advancements, and geopolitical shifts. According to the World Migration Report (2020), the number of international migrants worldwide reached 272 million in 2019, representing 3.5 per cent of the global population (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2020). In terms of gender distribution, 52 per cent of international migrants were male, while 48 per cent were female. Moreover, 74 per cent of migrants were in the working-age group of 20 to 64 years. Regarding countries of origin, India had the most significant number of international migrants, with 17.5 million people living abroad, followed by Mexico with 11.8 million and China with 10.7 million (Asue, Ijirshar & Ikyaaator, 2022).

In Nigeria, migration can be traced back to the era of the transatlantic slave trade, when many non-disabled men and women were forcibly taken abroad to work on plantations in the Caribbean and the United States. After the abolition of the slave trade, migration increased significantly as Nigerians began travelling overseas to pursue education and acquire skills needed to replace departing expatriates. In contemporary times, key drivers of Nigerian migration include the decline of the educational system at all levels, high unemployment and poverty rates, and widespread disillusionment with the nation's political leadership. These factors have collectively fuelled the growing movement of Nigerians to Europe, America, and other parts of the world. This is especially pertinent in a highly unequal society like Nigeria, where visible disparities in wealth, access to opportunities, and quality of life foster a heightened sense of relative deprivation, particularly among youth and marginalised populations. Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, conceived initially as a symbol of national unity and progress, has increasingly become a site of socio-economic inequality, where many residents face limited access to decent jobs, housing, and social amenities. This situation fuels aspirations to emigrate, especially among young and educated individuals who perceive it as a viable pathway to personal and economic security. Despite the popular adage "no place like home," harsh living conditions have led many Nigerians to feel at home in other countries, prompting them to flee. Aremu (2014) noted that, with more than 50 per cent of citizens unemployed in Nigeria, the country is sitting on a time bomb. It has become increasingly complex for the government to keep people out of avoidable trouble; hence, governance is critical for providing a conducive environment for citizens to live their everyday lives. However, historical evidence shows that Nigeria is characterised by poor governance across

all six indicators of good governance (Asue, Ijirshar & Ikyaator, 2022). The following objectives were sought: 1) to determine how factors such as unemployment, poor infrastructure, poverty, and limited access to social services influence residents' desire to migrate. 2) understanding how individuals' perceptions of inequality and the contrast between local deprivation and perceived opportunities abroad contribute to emigration decisions. Against this background, this study investigates the relationship between socio-economic deprivation and the intention to migrate abroad among residents of Abuja. It explores how socio-economic deprivations influence migration aspirations, situating the analysis within the Relative Deprivation and the Pull and Push Theories.

Migration Trend in Nigeria

The rapid increase in migration from Nigeria in recent years is a concerning trend linked to deprivation, manifesting as a lack of opportunities within the country. Aremu (2020) posited that many Nigerians feel that they are being left behind economically and socially, leading them to seek better prospects abroad. This is a key driver of migration worldwide, as people often feel marginalised from economic, political, and social opportunities in their home countries. This sense of deprivation can manifest in various ways, leading many people to seek better prospects abroad.

Political deprivation is another significant driver, as citizens may feel their voices and interests are not adequately represented in government decision-making. A lack of political power and influence can lead to a perception that the system is rigged against them, fueling disillusionment and a desire to start anew in another country. A large percentage of Nigerians are not directly or indirectly involved in politics. Their leaders are not representing Nigerians; the evidence of good governance is more on paper than in practice. The elected political representative lives and works in the capital, while those who elected them suffer in the grassroots.

Social deprivation encompasses discrimination, marginalisation, and limited access to essential services. Individuals who feel that their identities, cultures, or communities are undervalued or unsupported in their home environments may view migration as an escape from prejudice and an opportunity to build a better life elsewhere. In contemporary Nigerian society, social deprivation has also manifested in governance, contributing to widespread unrest across the country. This troubling situation has become a daily reality, leading to significant loss of lives, destruction of businesses, and damage to properties worth millions of naira. Despite efforts by security agencies to address the problem, their interventions have produced limited results, as they continue to face persistent violent attacks and acts of arson (Ogu, Eti, & Olukoya, 2020). Economic deprivation is a significant factor, as citizens struggle to secure stable employment, access credit, or start businesses amid high unemployment and limited economic mobility. Feelings of being left behind and unable to achieve financial independence in their home countries push many Nigerians to migrate in search of better economic opportunities. Sadly, this unpleasant situation has also become multifaceted and has triggered the emergence of criminal gangs who are viable tools and instruments for all kinds of criminal violence, such as insurgency, armed banditry, hostage taking, and genocide, which has also facilitated the reign of national turmoil and insecurity (Ejinkeonye, 2019)

Globally, the nexus between migration and development has remained a subject of vigorous academic debate. In Nigeria, the issue of migration is compounded by a widespread social, political, economic, educational, technological, and gender-based deprivation being experienced by Nigerians. This awareness of being left out has led many Nigerian citizens to seek better prospects elsewhere, most often through irregular and dangerous migration routes. In most

cases, many Nigerians receive very low salaries that are not enough to pay for their basic needs. There are no systems to ensure that skilled workers receive salaries commensurate with their qualifications. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), the Youth unemployment rate was 42.5% in 2020, while general underemployment was 22.8%. This accounts for why many talented citizens migrate to other countries. The loss of talented citizens poses a significant challenge to Nigeria's development, as the country struggles to retain the human capital needed to drive its growth and progress. Addressing the root causes of this deprivation, such as high unemployment, limited access to education and skills training, and a lack of meaningful political representation for Nigerians, is essential to curbing migration and building a more inclusive, prosperous future for Nigeria's population. Also, the country is equally yoked with high levels of unemployment and inflation (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020; Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN, 2023). Thus, the combined effects of poor governance, high unemployment, and rising living costs in the presence of low wages may have led many to flee the country. Moreover, there has been a surge in the number of citizens who desperately want to leave Nigeria by "all means and at any cost" through irregular migration routes (Ezeador, 2022). These factors have far-reaching implications for emigrants' safety and quality of life. Approximately 27.2 migrants from Africa have been reported to have entered Europe irregularly through the sea, with more than 2,275 reported as dead or missing, and they were mainly from Nigeria, Morocco, Guinea, Mali, and Algeria (UNHCR, 2023).

Despite numerous efforts by Federal, State, and Local governments, as well as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders, the ongoing wave of migration among Nigerian citizens remains unabated. For many Nigerians, migration has become a survival strategy, a means of seeking better living conditions and opportunities abroad. Therefore, examining the underlying causes of migration in Nigeria is crucial for informing sound policy decisions and guiding the formulation of effective development strategies for the nation's economy. It is against this background that this study seeks to interrogate socio-economic deprivation and migration in Nigeria, as well as how to mitigate them to make Nigeria a better country. Against these backdrops, the study addressed the following questions: What forms of deprivation do Nigerians experience? How do these deprivations influence their decisions to migrate? Moreover, what are the most effective ways to mitigate these deprivations?

Theoretical Framework: Relative Deprivation and Push and Pull Theories

Relative Deprivation Theory

This study draws on the Relative Deprivation Theory and the Push–Pull Theory, both of which offer complementary explanations for factors influencing the intention to emigrate among Abuja residents in North-Central Nigeria. Relative Deprivation Theory was first articulated by Stouffer (1949). The theory suggests that individuals' decisions to migrate are often driven more by perceived inequality than by absolute poverty. People compare their socio-economic status with that of others within their community or with perceived standards of living elsewhere. Runciman (1966). Merton (1968), Abrams and Grant (2012), and Gurr (2015) expanded the theory by integrating the concept of reference groups, emphasising that people's evaluations of their well-being are shaped by those they see as relevant comparators. Pettigrew (2015) adopted the theory as its primary theoretical lens to examine the relationship between socio-economic deprivation and migration in Nigeria. When these comparisons reveal a sense of disadvantage or exclusion, what Runciman calls "relative deprivation," individuals experience frustration and a desire for change. In Nigeria, socio-economic deprivation shows up through high unemployment, low income, poor infrastructure, insecurity, limited access to quality education and healthcare, and perceived

exclusion from political processes. Among Abuja residents, the contrast between the visible wealth of elites and the hardships faced by the majority fuels the perception that opportunities for upward mobility are limited. This perception, in turn, encourages strong migration intentions as people seek to escape perceived inequality and pursue better lives abroad.

Push and Pull Theory of Migration

The Push and Pull Theory, first conceptualised by Everett Lee (1966), provides a foundational lens for understanding migration as the result of interacting "push" and "pull" factors. Push factors are unfavourable conditions in the place of origin, such as poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and political instability, that prompt people to leave. Pull factors are the attractive conditions in destination countries, including better job opportunities, higher wages, quality education, safety, and improved living standards, that draw migrants (Ajoseh, Langer, Amoniyani, Uyah, 2024). In the context of Abuja, socio-economic deprivation acts as a significant push factor, while the perceived availability of opportunities abroad serves as a key pull factor (Fiveable, 2024). The combination of these forces creates a strong incentive for individuals to emigrate.

Together, these two theories offer a comprehensive understanding of migration intentions. Relative Deprivation Theory explains the psychological and social roots of migration aspirations based on perceived inequality. At the same time, push-pull theory clarifies the structural forces that turn those aspirations into actual intentions to move. Therefore, this study employs both frameworks to analyse how socio-economic deprivation among Abuja residents influences their decision-making process and sustains the growing desire to seek better lives abroad.

Proposition

1. Higher levels of socio-economic deprivation increase feelings of relative deprivation among Abuja residents.
2. Relative deprivation heightens exposure to push factors while strengthening sensitivity to pull factors abroad.
3. Consequently, the greater the level of perceived deprivation, the stronger the intention to emigrate.

Methodology

The study adopted an explanatory concurrent mixed-methods design (QUAN-qual). The study employed both primary and secondary data sources. First-hand information was obtained through a structured questionnaire. On the other hand, information already existing on international migration in books, the internet, reports, journal articles, and other relevant sources constituted the secondary data. Judgmental or purposive sampling was used in this study. One hundred respondents (100) intended migrants in Abuja, Nigeria, were purposively selected for this study. Abuja was selected as a microcosm of Nigeria, being the Federal Capital Territory. The respondents were selected based on the researcher's judgment that they were not only knowledgeable about external migration but also understood the issue of socio-economic deprivation, and six were purposively selected for key informant interviews (KIIs). The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilised for data analysis. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Atlas. Ti was used to analyse the qualitative data.

Results

Demographic Distribution

Gender distribution among respondents was 42 (42%) male and 58 (58%) female. The largest age group is 26–35 years, with 35 respondents (35%), followed by 36–45 years, with 25 respondents (25%), and 18–25 years, with 20 respondents (20%). Together, respondents between 18 and 45 years old make up 80 (80%) of the sample, indicating that the study primarily reflects the views and experiences of youths and middle-aged adults. The older population (aged 56 and above) is underrepresented, with only five respondents (5%). Married individuals, comprising 52 respondents (52%), are the largest group, suggesting that family and household responsibilities may influence their decision to migrate. Singles form a significant portion of 40 respondents (40%), reflecting younger age groups. A small portion of the sample is either divorced/separated (6 respondents, 6%) or widowed (2 respondents, 2%), indicating limited representation of these individuals intending to migrate. The vast majority of respondents are educated, with 77 (77%) respondents having attained secondary or higher education. Tertiary graduates form the largest group, with 47 respondents (47%), reflecting a population likely to be engaged in skilled or semi-skilled employment or pursuing white-collar opportunities. The low proportion of respondents with no formal education, three respondents (3%), suggests the sample is not fully representative of the illiterate or rural-poor. The number of self-employed individuals is 28 respondents (28%), and the number of unemployed is 12 respondents (12%). A combined 40% of respondents are unable to secure government employment, which may indicate potential frustration, economic hardship, or susceptibility to migration pressures. Civil servants (25%) dominate the occupational landscape. A notable 45 respondents 45% of respondents are in formal employment (civil and private sectors), while students and retirees make up the smaller end of the scale. Religious affiliation among 68 (68%) respondents was predominantly Christian, followed by 30 (30%) Muslim respondents, and 2 (2%) practising traditional or other religions.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N:100)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	42	42%
	Female	58	58%
Total		100	100%
Age Group	18–25 years	20	20%
	26–35 years	35	35%
	36–45 years	25	25%
	46–55 years	15	15%
	56 years and above	5	5%
Total		100	100%
Marital Status	Single	40	40%
	Married	52	52%
	Divorced/Separated	6	6%
	Widowed	2	2%
Total		100	100%
Educational Qualification	No Formal Education	3	3%
	Primary Education	8	8%
	Secondary Education	30	30%
	Tertiary (Diploma/BSc)	47	47%
	Postgraduate Degree	2	2%
Total		100	100%
Occupation	Unemployed	12	12%
	Self-employed	28	28%
	Civil servant	25	25%
	Private sector employee	20	20%
	Student	10	10%
	Retired	5	5%
Total		100	100%
Religion	Christianity	68	68%
	Islam	30	30%
	Other/Traditional	2	2%
Total		100	100%

Source: Authors' analysis (2025)

Table 2 below shows the various forms of socio-economic deprivation. The table reveals that item 1 has a mean score of 3.21, indicating that most Nigerians experience political deprivation. Item 2 also has a mean score of 3.14, indicating that most Nigerians agreed they have been deprived of certain economic benefits. Item 3 has a mean score of 3.21, indicating that most Nigerians have suffered some form of educational deprivation. Additionally, item 4 has a mean score of 3.10,

indicating that most Nigerians agreed they have suffered social deprivation. Item 5 also has a mean score of 3.04, indicating that most Nigerians feel deprived technologically. Item 6 also has a mean score of 2.99, which indicates that most Nigerians have been denied their civic rights. Lastly, item 7 has a mean score of 3.27, indicating that most Nigerians have experienced some gender-based deprivation. The cluster mean is also 3.14, indicating that Nigerians have suffered several forms of socio-economic deprivation in their own country. This finding aligns with Aremu (2020), who posited that many Nigerians feel neglected, abandoned, and deprived, leading them to seek better prospects abroad.

Table 2: Forms of Deprivation Experienced by Nigerians

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD
Nigerians Experience deprivation in the following areas.							
1	Political	41	48	2	9	3.21	0.868
2	Economic	31	58	5	6	3.14	0.766
3	Educational	40	47	7	6	3.21	0.820
4	Social Deprivation	34	49	10	7	3.10	0.847
5	Technological	27	56	11	6	3.04	0.790
6	Civic	33	43	14	10	2.99	0.937
7	Gender-Based	35	58	6	1	3.27	0.617
Cluster mean						3.14	

Source: Authors' analysis (2025)

Table 3 below shows how socio-economic deprivation influences Nigerian citizens' decision to migrate. The table revealed that most Nigerians have agreed they always consider migrating due to economic deprivation in the country, with a mean score of 2.96. The table also revealed that most Nigerians have always considered migrating due to a lack of educational opportunities, with a mean score of 3.20. The table also revealed that most Nigerians have always considered migrating due to bad governance, with a mean score of 2.90. Additionally, the table revealed that most have always considered migrating due to rejections from multiple job applications, despite their qualifications, with a mean score of 3.13. Also, most agreed they will stay in Nigeria if the issue of socio-economic deprivation is addressed, with a mean score of 2.95. Lastly, most agreed they have considered migrating due to limited access to digital/technological advancement, with a mean score of 3.07. The cluster mean is also above the cutoff of 2.5, indicating that, in most cases, socio-economic deprivation influences Nigerians' decision to migrate. This finding is consistent with those of Asue, Ijirshar & Ikyaator (2022), who stated that it has become increasingly complex for the government to keep Nigerians out of avoidable trouble; hence, governance is critical for providing a conducive environment for citizens to live their everyday lives, leading to migration.

Table 3: Influence of Socio-economic deprivation on decision to migrate?

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD
1	I have always considered migrating due to economic exclusion in Nigeria.	31	46	11	12	2.96	0.953
2	I have always considered migrating due to a lack of quality education.	39	47	9	5	3.20	0.804
3	I have always considered migrating due to bad governance.	28	46	14	12	2.90	0.948
4	I have always considered migrating due to rejection from multiple job applications despite my qualifications.	35	45	18	2	3.13	0.774
5	I choose to stay in Nigeria if specific socio-economic deprivation issues are addressed.	26	53	11	10	2.95	0.880
6	I have always considered migrating due to limited access to digital/technological advancement.	30	50	17	3	3.07	0.769
	Cluster mean					3.04	

Source: Authors' analysis (2025)

Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the study's findings on how socio-economic deprivation influences migration intentions among residents of Abuja. The analysis is guided by the Relative Deprivation Theory (Gurr, 1970; Stark & Taylor, 1991) and the Push–Pull Theory (Lee, 1966), which together provide the interpretive framework for understanding the motivations behind migration decisions. The study employed an explanatory concurrent mixed-methods design (QUAN–qual), combining quantitative data from structured questionnaires with qualitative insights analysed using *Atlas. Ti*. A total of 100 respondents participated in the study. Their demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, marital status, educational attainment, occupation, and religious affiliation, offer essential context for interpreting the results. These variables illuminate the socio-economic foundations of migration behaviour in Nigeria and provide deeper insight into the study's objectives, research questions, and propositions. The discussion that follows connects these findings to the theoretical frameworks and explores their implications for understanding migration dynamics within the Nigerian context.

Demographic Data

The gender distribution depicted in Table 1 indicates a female-majority sample, reflecting greater availability or willingness among women to participate in the study. Given the significant role women play in household dynamics and their increasing visibility in both informal and formal economic sectors, their perspectives are crucial for understanding the socio-economic conditions that influence migration choices. The slightly skewed gender ratio is also an indicator of potential gender-specific experiences of deprivation and access to opportunities. The age distribution is skewed toward younger participants, typical in research involving migration or socio-economic dynamics, which are often most pronounced in people within the 18–45 age bracket, who are

usually more mobile and economically active. The education profile may affect attitudes toward migration, job aspirations, and civic engagement, and the occupational distribution provides insight into economic engagement, financial autonomy, and potential reasons for discontent or mobility. Religious distribution, as seen above, reflects the broader national religious makeup and underscores the sample's cultural diversity. While religion may not directly drive migration, it can influence social networks, access to information, and community support systems, all of which play important roles in shaping migration patterns and decisions.

Socio-economic Deprivations Experienced by Abuja Residents

Table 2 presents respondents' perceptions of the various forms of deprivation experienced by Nigerians. Political deprivation recorded a mean score of 3.21 (SD = 0.868), suggesting that respondents strongly perceive limited political inclusion, unequal access to political power, and marginalisation in decision-making processes. This sense of exclusion reflects the persistence of governance deficits and elite domination in Nigeria's political structure, confirming the finding of Adeniyi & Omotayo (2020). Economic deprivation (Mean = 3.14, SD = 0.766) further highlights widespread poverty, unemployment, and unequal distribution of resources. These conditions reinforce relative disadvantage and economic frustration among the populace. Studies such as those by Ajaero and Onokala (2019) have similarly noted that deteriorating economic conditions and weak livelihood opportunities push Nigerians to seek better prospects abroad.

Educational deprivation also scored high (M = 3.21, SD = 0.820), underscoring the limited access to quality education and unequal learning opportunities between urban and rural areas. This finding aligns with evidence that educational inequality remains a major contributor to perceived social injustice and poor upward mobility (Okolie & Igwe, 2021). Social deprivation (Mean = 3.10, SD = 0.847) reflects the perceived exclusion from community participation, weak social safety nets, and limited access to social amenities. Similarly, technological deprivation (M = 3.04, SD = 0.790) indicates that many Nigerians lack access to digital infrastructure and information technology, thereby deepening socio-economic disparities and limiting participation in global opportunities. Civic deprivation had the lowest mean (M = 2.99, SD = 0.937), though still within the agreement range, suggesting moderate concerns about restricted civic engagement and weak institutional responsiveness. Significantly, gender-based deprivation recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.27, SD = 0.617), pointing to persistent gender inequalities in access to resources, employment, and political participation. This aligns with the arguments of Ogu and Edewor (2022), who found that women in Nigeria continue to face socio-economic exclusion and discriminatory cultural norms that limit empowerment opportunities.

Findings from Table 2 revealed that Nigerians experience multiple forms of deprivation, political, economic, educational, social, civic, technological, and gender-based, with a cluster mean of 3.14, indicating widespread agreement among respondents. The high mean scores for political deprivation (3.21), educational deprivation (3.21), and gender-based deprivation (3.27) show that exclusion from governance, limited access to quality education, and gender inequality are significant sources of frustration and discontent. In line with Objective 1: To determine how factors such as unemployment, poor infrastructure, poverty, and limited access to social services influence residents' desire to migrate. Related Research Question: What forms of deprivation do Nigerians experience? Related Proposition: Higher levels of socio-economic deprivation increase

feelings of relative deprivation among Abuja residents. This suggests that socio-economic inequalities and structural exclusion remain pervasive challenges shaping everyday life in Nigeria.

This pattern supports the Relative Deprivation Theory, which asserts that perceived inequality and exclusion, rather than absolute poverty, generate dissatisfaction and motivate behavioural responses, including migration (Gurr, 1970). Educated and economically active Nigerians, especially the youth, feel deprived when they perceive gaps between their educational investment and actual socio-economic outcomes. As Ajaero and Onokala (2019) and Okolie and Igwe (2021) similarly found, unfulfilled expectations in education and employment deepen individuals' sense of disadvantage. These findings thus confirm Proposition 1, as the data demonstrate that higher levels of socio-economic deprivation heighten feelings of relative deprivation. Respondents' experiences of inequality across social and economic structures directly correlate with their perceived exclusion, validating the assumption that deprivation is a key precursor to migration motivation.

Migration Intentions

Table 3 presents data on how various forms of socio-economic deprivation influence Nigerians' decisions to migrate. The results show that economic deprivation is a significant factor influencing migration, with a mean score of 2.96. This reflects the pervasive impact of unemployment, inflation, and declining living standards on individuals' migration decisions. Economic hardship pushes many Nigerians, especially the youth, to seek better livelihoods abroad. This aligns with Ajaero and Onokala (2019), who noted that deteriorating economic conditions and lack of decent work opportunities in Nigeria have intensified outward migration, particularly among educated young adults. Similarly, lack of educational opportunities recorded a high mean score of 3.20, indicating that many respondents view migration as an escape from Nigeria's underperforming educational system. Poor infrastructure, strikes in tertiary institutions, and limited opportunities for advanced study have led to the popular trend of "academic migration." This supports the findings of Okolie and Igwe (2021), who emphasised that educational deprivation in Nigeria contributes to youth disillusionment and the desire to study or work abroad for better prospects.

Bad governance also emerged as a strong motivator for migration, with a mean score of 2.90. Respondents perceive corruption, mismanagement, insecurity, and weak public institutions as major push factors. Asue, Ijirshar, and Ikyator (2022) observed that ineffective governance and poor public accountability have eroded citizens' confidence in the Nigerian state, compelling many to seek safety, stability, and fairness in other countries. This also aligns with the Relative Deprivation Theory, which posits that perceived political and social injustices create frustration and a sense of exclusion that can drive migration (Gurr, 1970). Another critical factor influencing migration intention is job rejection despite qualifications, with a mean of 3.13. This highlights the mismatch between education and labour market opportunities in Nigeria. Many qualified individuals feel underemployed or excluded from economic participation due to nepotism and corruption in recruitment processes. Studies such as Oyeleke and Adedeji (2020) confirm that perceived unfairness and the lack of meritocracy in Nigeria's labour system drive skilled professionals to pursue opportunities abroad, a trend often described as "brain drain."

The finding that respondents would remain in Nigeria if socio-economic deprivation is addressed (Mean = 2.95) reveals that migration intentions are conditional rather than absolute. This underscores that migration is essentially a response to structural deprivation rather than an

inherent preference for relocation. If governance improves and economic and social opportunities expand, many Nigerians would prefer to stay and contribute to national development. This observation is consistent with the Push–Pull Theory (Lee, 1966), which argues that migration results from the interplay between negative "push" factors at home and attractive "pull" factors abroad. Furthermore, lack of access to digital and technological advancement (Mean = 3.07) reflects Nigeria's digital divide and the limited technological opportunities available to its citizens. In a globalised economy where technology drives innovation and employment, technological deprivation fuels migration intentions, especially among young professionals seeking competitive skills and better access to digital industries. This finding is consistent with Adedeji and Oluwatobi (2021), who noted that inadequate technological infrastructure and innovation systems in Nigeria push skilled individuals toward technologically advanced destinations.

Findings in Table 3 show that socio-economic deprivation significantly influences migration intentions, with all variables recording mean scores above the 2.5 cut-off point. Respondents indicated a strong desire to migrate due to economic deprivation (M = 2.96), limited educational opportunities (M = 3.20), bad governance (M = 2.90), job rejection despite qualifications (M = 3.13), and lack of technological advancement (M = 3.07). In line with Objective 2: To understand how individuals' perceptions of inequality and the contrast between local deprivation and perceived opportunities abroad contribute to migration decisions. Related Research Question: How do these deprivations influence Nigerians' decisions to migrate? Related Propositions. Relative deprivation heightens exposure to push factors while strengthening sensitivity to pull factors abroad.3) Consequently, the greater the level of perceived deprivation, the stronger the intention to emigrate. This finding supports the assumption that migration intention is not merely a product of individual aspirations but a response to enduring socio-economic challenges.

The cluster mean above 2.5 indicates that experiences of deprivation play a critical role in shaping migration decisions. Qualitative evidence further revealed that many respondents perceive migration as an escape from systemic inefficiencies, corruption, and lack of career progression. This finding aligns with the Push–Pull Theory, where unemployment, insecurity, and inequality act as push factors, while perceived opportunities, stability, and prosperity abroad function as pull factors (Lee, 1966). Moreover, the data validate Propositions 2 and 3. Respondents experiencing higher levels of deprivation were more aware of external opportunities and more likely to express migration intentions. This demonstrates that relative deprivation not only increases frustration but also strengthens sensitivity to external comparisons and opportunities. As Stark and Taylor (1991) explain, individuals are driven to migrate when they perceive that others, whether within their community or abroad, enjoy better living standards or fairer socio-economic conditions. In essence, the findings confirm that migration among Abuja residents is not merely an economic act but a psychological and social response to perceived inequality. The interplay between deprivation and aspiration fuels migration intentions: the greater the deprivation, the stronger the pull toward destinations perceived as equitable and prosperous.

Effective ways to mitigate socio-economic deprivation

The migration of Nigerians from their home communities is a complex issue driven by a variety of factors, including deprivation and limited opportunities. To identify effective ways of mitigating socio-economic deprivation that influence migration intentions. Related Research Question: What are the most effective ways to mitigate these deprivations? Analysis: The respondents' agreement that they would remain in Nigeria if socio-economic challenges were addressed (M = 2.95) provides valuable insight into policy relevance. This indicates that migration intentions are

conditional and can be moderated by improving local conditions. If unemployment is reduced, governance strengthened, and opportunities for social mobility expanded, the incentive to migrate will decline significantly. This aligns with Asue, Ijirshar, and Ikyaator (2022), who found that good governance and improved living standards are central to reducing migration pressure in Nigeria. Therefore, addressing deprivation through policies that promote inclusive economic growth, transparent governance, and technological innovation would mitigate the push factors identified in this study. The findings thus provide empirical justification for a holistic migration and development policy that integrates social justice, economic empowerment, and institutional accountability. By tackling deprivation at its roots, Nigeria can transform migration from a symptom of distress into a potential driver of national development.

To address this challenge, policymakers and community leaders must take a multifaceted approach that empowers people and provides them with the resources and support needed to thrive in their country. Below is a graphical representation of the interviewees' diverse opinions.



Figure 1.1: Effective ways to mitigate Socio-economic deprivation in Nigeria.

Source: Authors' analysis (2025)

- i) **More Access to Loans:** One of the Respondents was of the view that,
"Private partners with government should join hands to create citizen-friendly business policies,
Interviewee 4: Nanvang Simon, 28
years, Lugbe, Abuja.

This is because providing greater access to affordable loans and financing options can empower entrepreneurs to start their businesses and create economic opportunities in their local communities. Another Respondent added that,

"There should be more access to zero-interest business loans and grants"

Interviewee 1: Lious

Charles, 44 years, Jabi, Abuja.

This could include initiatives such as microloan programs, partnerships with local banks, and access to seed funding and venture capital. As such, removing barriers to capital can catalyse citizen-led innovation and help motivate people to invest in their hometown.

- ii) **Employment Programs:** Investing in robust youth employment and job training initiatives is crucial for equipping young people with the skills and experience they need to find fulfilling work in their local areas. This could involve expanding vocational education, apprenticeship programs, and public-private partnerships that connect youth to in-demand jobs. One of the Respondents, with a smile on his face, suggested that,

"There should be more empowerment programs (e.g., N-Power, YouWin) to address unemployment."

Interviewee 3: Hauwa Dauda, 32years, Lugbe, Abuja.

By ensuring both males and females have clear pathways to meaningful careers, communities can give all indigenes a more substantial stake in their future and incentivise them to stay.

- iii) **Leadership:** another Respondent suggested that,

"Leaders should be more accountable to their citizens."

Interviewee 5: Meshach Lazarus,

26 years, Gwarinpe, Abuja.

Another respondent supported him

"The Nigerian government should be more responsive to the citizenry."

Interviewee 1: Ruth Phillips,

47 years, Gwagwalada, Abuja.

Empowering citizens' voice and agency helps build their sense of belonging and investment in the long-term success of their hometowns.

- iv) **Government Policies:** Effective government policies and programs can play a vital role in supporting and mitigating the drivers of migration. A respondent was of the view that,

"The government should implement stronger anti-discrimination laws."

Interviewee 6: Lucy

Owolabi, 25 years, Kuje, Abuja.

Other policies could include targeted funding for citizens' services and initiatives, tax incentives for businesses that hire and retain staff, and legislation that protects the rights and well-being of Nigerians. Strategic policymaking can help create the systemic conditions for Nigerians to thrive in their home communities.

- v) **Good Learning Environment:** Ensuring access to high-quality education and learning opportunities is fundamental to empowering citizens and expanding their horizons. This means investing in well-resourced, affordable schools, enrichment programs, and lifelong learning initiatives that equip students with the knowledge and skills to achieve their goals. A respondent viewed that,

"The government should improve school infrastructure and learning facilities"

Interviewee 2: Hadiza

Awandeng, 38 years, Jabi, Abuja.

This is because fostering a dynamic, engaging learning environment enables communities to cultivate the next generation of leaders, innovators, and engaged citizens.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, the analysis establishes that socio-economic deprivation in Nigeria, manifested through unemployment, poor governance, limited educational opportunities, and technological stagnation, significantly shapes migration intentions among Abuja residents. The findings reveal that migration is both a structural and a perceptual response to inequality, consistent with the Relative Deprivation Theory, which explains how perceived injustice drives discontent, and the Push–Pull Theory, which accounts for the forces that propel individuals outward and attract them elsewhere. The study confirms that higher levels of deprivation intensify feelings of relative disadvantage, amplify exposure to push factors, and strengthen sensitivity to perceived opportunities abroad. However, respondents' willingness to remain in Nigeria if socio-economic challenges were addressed underscores that migration intentions are not irreversible but contingent on improved governance, inclusive growth, and equitable access to opportunities, offering valuable policy insights to mitigate brain drain and foster sustainable national development.

A large percentage of Nigerians wish and work towards leaving the country by all means. The migration of Nigerians from their home communities is a complex challenge driven by a range of interconnected factors. At the heart of this issue lies a deep-seated perception among citizens that they are deprived of certain benefits and from active engagement in running the affairs of their own country - shut out of civic participation, underrepresented in positions of leadership, and lacking access to economic and social opportunities that would allow them to thrive. Socio-economic deprivation has, in no small way, affected the opportunities available to citizens, especially those aged 18 to 45, who are also the most active age group. The working group stipulated above is being frustrated out of the system and shown the way out to other countries as migrants.

The quest for a more robust life is the engine driving the intention to migrate as orchestrated by socio-economic deprivation. Based on the findings, several actionable recommendations are proposed to address the multidimensional nature of deprivation influencing migration intentions among Nigerians:

1. Establishment of a National Development Fund (NDF):

The Nigerian government should establish a dedicated *National Development Fund* as a sustainable financing mechanism to tackle socio-economic deprivation. This fund would serve as a strategic pool of resources directed toward employment generation, infrastructure development, education, and innovation. The NDF should be transparently managed, with independent oversight to ensure accountability and equitable distribution of resources across states and sectors. By targeting critical areas such as youth empowerment, skills acquisition, and regional development, the fund would strengthen citizens' sense of inclusion and investment in the nation's future, thereby reducing the desire to emigrate in search of better opportunities.

2. Accessible Financing for Vibrant Entrepreneurs:

To reduce economic deprivation and promote self-reliance, the National Development Fund should incorporate schemes that provide *accessible and affordable financing* for entrepreneurs, especially young people and women. Low-interest loans, business grants, and startup incubators should be made available to support innovation and enterprise creation. Such initiatives will not only create jobs but also stimulate local economies and reduce dependence on foreign labour markets. In line with studies by Okolie and Igwe (2021), entrepreneurship remains a viable pathway to inclusive economic growth and a strong deterrent to the "push" factors driving migration.

3.Promotion of Gender-Based Empowerment Initiatives:

The government should prioritise and fund programs that promote gender equity in education, employment, and political participation. Women face distinct forms of deprivation that limit their socio-economic potential, and addressing these barriers is essential for inclusive national development. Initiatives such as women's business cooperatives, leadership training programs, and equal access to credit facilities can enhance women's economic independence. Empowered women contribute meaningfully to household stability and community development, thereby reducing vulnerabilities that lead to migration.

4.Deepening Civic Engagement and Grassroots Leadership:

The government, in collaboration with civil society organisations, should develop *clusters of civic engagement platforms* that bring governance closer to the people. These forums would provide citizens with direct channels to participate in local decision-making, express grievances, and hold leaders accountable. Grassroots leadership development can bridge the trust gap between the government and citizens, promoting inclusion and national belonging. When people feel politically represented and socially valued, the psychological drivers of relative deprivation are mitigated, lowering the incentive to seek better governance abroad.

5. Strengthening Social Support Networks and Welfare Systems:

There is an urgent need for robust *social protection mechanisms* to cushion the effects of economic shocks and structural deprivation. The government should invest in social safety nets, including unemployment benefits, affordable healthcare, and educational subsidies, to protect vulnerable groups. Community-based support programs, mental health counselling, and job placement centres can also help individuals cope with the pressures that drive migration aspirations. By addressing these underlying social and economic challenges, the government can improve citizens' quality of life, enhance national stability, and foster a more substantial commitment to nation-building.

References.

- Abrams D, Grant P.R (2012). Testing the Social Identity-Relative Deprivation SIRD Model of Social Change: The Political Rise of Scottish Nationalism. *British Journal of Social Psychology* 51:674-689.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0190272514566793>
- Adeniyi, O., & Omotayo, B. (2020). *Governance, inequality and political participation in Nigeria*. *Journal of African Political Studies*, 15(2), 87–102.
- Adediji, A. A., & Oluwatobi, S. O. (2021). *Technological capability and youth migration intentions in sub-Saharan Africa: Evidence from Nigeria*. *Journal of Development Studies*, 57(8), 1432–1448.
- Ajaero, C. K., & Onokala, P. C. (2019). *The influence of economic hardship on migration decisions in Nigeria*. *African Population Studies*, 33(1), 4101–4115.
- Ajoseh, S., Langer, A., Amoniyar, O., Uyah, U (2024). Navigating brain drain: understanding public discourse on legislation to retain medical professionals in Nigeria. *Global Health* 20 (80). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-024-01077-1>
- Aremu A.Y., Shahzad A., Hassan S. (2018). Determinants of Enterprise Resource Planning Adoption on Organisations' Performance Among Medium Enterprises. *LogForum* 14 (2), 245-255
- Aremu A.Y., Shahzad A., Hassan S. (2018). Determinants of Enterprise Resource Planning Adoption on Organisations' Performance Among Medium Enterprises. *LogForum* 14 (2), 245-255
- Aremu A.Y., Shahzad A., Hassan S. (2018). Determinants of Enterprise Resource Planning Adoption on Organisations' Performance Among Medium Enterprises. *LogForum* 14 (2), 245-255
- Aremu A.Y., Shahzad A., Hassan S. (2020). Determinants of Enterprise Resource Planning Adoption on Organisations' Performance Among Medium Enterprises. *LogForum* 14 (2), 245–255.
- Asue, M. D., Ijirshar, V. U., & Ikyator, P. S. (2022). *Governance, insecurity, and migration nexus in Nigeria: Emerging realities and policy implications*. *International Journal of African Development*, 9(2), 71–84.
- Asue, I. & Ikyator, (2022). Assessment of Good Governance Indicators on the Pervasiveness of Shadow Economy: Empirical insights from Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law* V 26 NO 1. Pp 15–30.
<https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1301401>
- Castles, S., de Haas, H., & Miller, M. J. (2014). *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world* (5th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ejinkeonye, U. (2019). Nigeria: Why looting may not stop. Benin: Oasis of Greatness National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria. 2023. Unemployment Statistics, <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng>
- Ezeador, C. (2022). "The Question of Insecurity and Sustained Socio-economic Development in Nigeria" in *Nigerian Journal of Philosophical Studies*. Vol.1 No.1

- Fiveable (2024, August 1). Push Factors – International Economics.
<https://library.fiveable.me/key-terms/international-economics/push-factors>
- Gurr T.R. (1970). *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gurr T.R. (2015). *Why Men Rebel*. eBook, Published 17 November 2015, New York. Routledge. DOI <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315631073>
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781315631073/men-rebel-ted-Robert-Gurr>
- Lee, E. S. (1966). A theory of migration. *Demography*, 3(1), 47–57.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2060063>
- McAuliffe, M. & Khadria, B. (2020). 1 Report overview: Providing perspective on migration and mobility in increasingly uncertain times.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340380457_1_Report_overview_Providing_perspective_on_migration_and_mobility_in_increasingly_uncertain_times
- Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social Theory and Social Structure*.
https://archive.org/stream/robert_k_merton_social_theory_and_social_structure/Robert%20K.%20Merton-Social%20Theory%20and%20Social%20Structure-The%20Free%20Press%20%20Collier%20MacMillan%20%281968%29_djvu.txt
- Merton, C.C. (2004) as a General Theorist: Structures, Choices, Mechanisms, and Consequences. *Am Soc* 35, 23–36 (2004). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-004-1015-4>
- Ogu, M, Eti, C., & Olukoya, P. (2020). Environmental security and infrastructural development In Nigeria. *Fuwukari Journal of Politics and Development* 4 (2):2636-5081
- Ogu, R. N., & Edewor, P. A. (2022). *Gender inequality and social exclusion in contemporary Nigeria*. *Gender and Behaviour*, 20(1), 11949–11962.
- Okolie, U. C., & Igwe, P. A. (2021). *Educational inequality and youth unemployment in Nigeria: Implications for sustainable development*. *Education and Development Review*, 6(4), 55–69.
- Oyeleke, O., & Adedeji, D. (2020). *Labour market distortions and skilled migration in Nigeria: An exploratory analysis*. *African Journal of Economic Policy*, 27(1), 23–41.
- Pettigrew, T. F. (2015). Samuel Stouffer and Relative Deprivation. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 78(1), 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272514566793>
- Runciman, W. G. (1966). *Relative deprivation and social justice: A study of attitudes to social inequality in twentieth-century England*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- Stark, O., & Taylor, J. E. (1991). *Migration incentives, migration types: The role of relative deprivation*. The Economic Journal, 101(408), 1163–1178. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023*. 2023, Yaga Africa (2023). Youth Candidacy in Nigeria's 2023 Elections. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/Documents/Youth%20Candidacy%20in%20the%202023%20Elections%20in%20Nigeria.pdf