

Female Migration in Nigeria: Trajectories, Trends, and Implications (1970–2025)

OLALEYE, OLUWASEUN MERCY PhD

Department of Geography, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo.

*Corresponding Author: OLALEYE, OLUWASEUN MERCY PhD

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>Over the past fifty years, Nigerian female migration has undergone significant change, reflecting changes in global mobility trends, cultural norms, and socioeconomic institutions. In the 1970s and 1980s, marriage-related rural-urban migration predominated, but in the 1990s, women's mobility increased due to cross-border commerce and economic restructuring pressures. Nigerian women began migrating for work around the 2000s, especially in the fields of education and healthcare. In the 2010s and 2020s, autonomous professional migration, diaspora growth, and digital enabled mobility all increased. This study traces the historical development of female migration, examines current drivers, and identifies gendered vulnerabilities like trafficking, exploitation, and limited access to formal employment. It does this by utilizing secondary data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), and Nigerian scholarship. The results show that Nigerian women are now key players in both domestic and foreign migration, making substantial contributions to social change, education, and remittances while also overcoming institutional obstacles. The need for better sex-disaggregated data collection, gender-sensitive migration frameworks, and empowerment via education and career training are all highlighted by policy implications. For policymakers, scholars, and practitioners interested in African migration governance, this study places Nigerian female migration within international discussions on gender, agency, and development.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>female migration, associational, autonomous, globalization, brain drain.</i></p>
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Introduction

Migration has always been a distinguishing characteristic of Nigeria's socioeconomic environment. Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, with a population of over 220 million people and is one of the continent's main sources of migration. While male migration has traditionally dominated scholarly and policy debate, female migration has emerged as an important aspect of Nigerian mobility patterns, reflecting changing gender roles, economic prospects, and societal expectations (IOM, 2022; Olaley, 2023).

In the 1970s, Marriage and family reunion were major factors in female migration, with women relocating from rural to urban regions to live with their spouses or other relatives. However, women now have more options in informal commerce and services because to the oil boom

and the ensuing urban growth. Female migration in Nigeria has changed dramatically since the 1970s, mirroring larger political and socioeconomic shifts. Early research focused on rural-urban mobility associated with marriage, when women relocated mostly to live with their spouses or other family members in cities (Makinwa 1994). Rapid urbanization during the 1970s oil boom opened up new avenues for informal commerce and services, and women in Lagos, Ibadan, and Kano were increasingly involved in market operations.

An important turning point occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. SAPs and economic downturns weakened rural livelihoods and decreased employment in the public sector. In response, women migrated as entrepreneurs, especially in West African cross-border commerce (Afolayan, 1999).

By the 1990s, Nigeria's economy had changed due to the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) enforced by foreign financial institutions, which reduced employment in the public sector and encouraged women to migrate abroad and start their own businesses (Adewumi, 2024).

As more women sought opportunities in metropolitan areas and overseas, skilled female migration increased in the 2000s, especially in the fields of education and healthcare. There were more opportunities for skilled migration due to the growth of the healthcare and education sectors, which further diversified female migration. Globalization, the development of ICT, and the increase of the diaspora throughout the 2010s and 2020s made it possible for women to travel independently to Europe, North America, and the Middle East (Adedigba, 2024; Adewumi, 2024).

Aim and Objectives

This study aims to provide a comprehensive review of female migration in Nigeria over the past fifty years, addressing three key objectives:

1. To trace the historical evolution of female migration patterns.
2. To analyze contemporary drivers and challenges.
3. To identify policy implications for gender-sensitive migration governance.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design that integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to capture the complex trajectories of female migration in Nigeria between 1970 and 2025. The choice of design is informed by the multidimensional nature of migration, which encompasses historical, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. By combining statistical trend analysis with thematic interpretation, the study is able to provide a holistic account of how Nigerian women have navigated shifting migration landscapes over the past five decades.

The research relies primarily on secondary data drawn from internationally recognized institutions such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). These sources are complemented by national datasets from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), as well as peer-reviewed Nigerian scholarship. This triangulation of data ensures robustness and mitigates bias by cross-validating findings across diverse sources. In addition, policy papers, migration reports, and academic publications were systematically

reviewed to identify recurring themes, gaps, and emerging trends.

The temporal scope of the study spans 1970 to 2025, divided into five analytical phases: the 1970s–1980s, 1990s, 2000s, 2010s, and 2020s. Within each phase, migration patterns were examined in relation to Nigeria's political economy, including the oil boom, the Structural Adjustment Programs of the 1980s and 1990s, and the globalization and digital transformations of the 21st century. Sex-disaggregated data were prioritized, and where such data were unavailable, proxy indicators such as occupational distribution, remittance flows, and diaspora participation were employed to capture gendered dimensions of migration.

Analytically, the study draws on three complementary frameworks. First, a historical analysis traces the evolution of female migration trajectories, situating them within broader socioeconomic shifts. Second, the Push–Pull model is applied to categorize migration drivers into push factors such as poverty, unemployment, patriarchal norms, and insecurity, and pull factors such as urban opportunities, education, healthcare demand, and diaspora networks. Third, gendered migration theory is employed to interrogate how gender roles, norms, and vulnerabilities shape women's migration experiences, highlighting the duality of empowerment and exploitation.

Quantitative analysis was conducted through descriptive statistics and trend analysis of migration flows, remittance contributions, and diaspora growth. Qualitative analysis involved thematic coding of literature and policy documents to extract narratives on vulnerabilities such as trafficking, exploitation, and reintegration challenges, as well as empowerment through education, healthcare, and entrepreneurship. Findings from both strands of analysis were integrated through triangulation, thereby enhancing validity and reliability.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. As the study is based entirely on secondary data, formal ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, all sources were cited appropriately, and sensitive issues such as trafficking and exploitation were treated with scholarly rigor and respect for human dignity.

The Historical Evolution of Female Migration Patterns in Nigeria

Female migration is becoming more and more recognized as a crucial aspect of mobility, even if male migration has previously dominated academic debate. Women have become autonomous agents in labor, education, and professional migration during the past 50 years, having previously been mostly marriage-driven migrants

(Afolayan, Ikwuyatum & Abejide, 2011; Olaleye, 2023; 2026).

Nigeria rapidly urbanized during the 1970s oil boom. The majority of women moved to cities like Lagos, Ibadan, and Kano to live with spouses or other family members. There was little acknowledgement of women as autonomous travelers, and female mobility was framed within patriarchal frameworks (Afolayan 1999; Awumbila 2015). Women were drawn into market activities by economic opportunities in informal commerce and services, which supported family economies but provided limited opportunity for upward mobility. During this time, migration was frequently circular, with women engaging in urban economies while retaining links to rural communities.

The migration of women experienced a major change in the 1990s. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) implemented Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) that weakened rural livelihoods and decreased employment in the public sector. In response, women migrated for business, especially to engage in cross-border trade within West Africa. Traditional perceptions of women as passive travelers were challenged by the rise of female traders in Ghana, Benin, and Côte d'Ivoire (Afolayan, 1999; Makinwa 1994). Due to institutional limitations, women were able to carve out economic niches in local marketplaces throughout this time, demonstrating their adaptability and tenacity.

The diversity of female migration increased by the 2000s. Skilled migration was made possible by the growth of the healthcare and education industries. Teachers, nurses, and other professionals from Nigeria are progressively relocating to cities and beyond (Adedigba, 2024). During this time, migration became more feminine, with women moving for education and job success in addition to family. Even as worries about brain drain increased, skilled female migration helped Nigeria strengthen its human capital.

By the 2010s and 2020s, independent female migration to Europe, North America, and the Middle East was made possible by globalization, the expansion of ICT, and diaspora networks. Remittances and household resilience were greatly enhanced by women who relocated for job, education, and entrepreneurship (UN DESA, 2022). Vulnerabilities continued, nevertheless. Nigerian women were overrepresented among victims of human trafficking in Europe, and many of them were exploited for domestic labor overseas (IOM, 2022). Female returnees frequently faced difficulties with reintegration, stigma, and restricted access to resources as a result of return migration (Adewumi, 2024).

The Dynamics of Female Migration

There is a growing trend of female migration worldwide, according to Kingston (2016), but up until recently, the experiences of female migrants were mostly ignored in the literature (Kharel, 2016). In the past, female migrants were seen as the dependents and supporters of male migrants, and migration was seen to be a masculine phenomenon. For more than a century until the 1980s, migration literature mostly disregarded the experiences of female travelers, notwithstanding Ravenstein's (1885) movement rules, which suggest that females are more ephemeral than males (Lutz, 2010).

Women have been migrating more often in recent years, and they are now doing so on their own for economic reasons rather than joining male migrants or reuniting with relatives (Afolayan, Ikwuyatum & Abejide; 2011, Olaleye 2026). As a result, in certain areas, the proportion of female migrants is either equal to or higher than that of male migrants (UN Women, 2020). Migration is frequently a deliberate livelihood strategy based on societal norms and structures to improve one's economic status, even though it is occasionally involuntary, such as during conflict, security threats, discrimination, famine, or environmental hazards (Olaleye, Ogunboye & Olanusi; 2014).

Female migration may be caused by a number of non-economic variables in addition to economic ones (Afolayan, Ikwuyatum, and Abejide (2011), patriarchal customs and community surveillance that restrict opportunities and freedom, and a desire for equitable possibilities are some of these. Better living circumstances, however, are the main reason why most women migrate (Awumbila 2015; Masanja 2012). Additionally, educated women may travel in quest of higher-paying professions that make use of their abilities due to social and economic instability (UNFPA, 2016).

The origin and destination of women migrants may be viewed as a single economic region where they engage in livelihood activities to support themselves. One of the main factors influencing women's recent relocations is their desire for better livelihoods. Female migrant workers are defined as women who move from their home areas to work and receive income in the destination region, whether permanently, temporarily, or seasonally (Ofuoku, 2012; Oyeniyi, 2013).

The growing number of independent female migrant workers seeking transnational opportunities primarily for economic reasons in the late 20th century (Afolayan, Ikwuyatum, and Abejide 2011; Makinwa, 1994) has piqued the interest of scholars in understanding the motivations of female migration, despite earlier beliefs that women were passive and subservient to their male partners (Kharel, 2016). According to the United Nations Population Fund (2006), women now account nearly half of all migrants, and

many of them are found in Asian nations. Instead of only moving to be with their wives or other family members, an increasing proportion of women are traveling for economic reasons.

The global trend of female labor migration, sometimes referred to as the "feminization of migration," is associated with the problem of female migration, as an increasing number of workers from poor countries are moving to wealthy countries in search of economic opportunities. This "feminization of migration" tendency was seen by academics like Manors and Miller (1993) as a defining feature of the "migration era." The need for female workers in the reproductive and service sectors in both wealthy Northern and Southern countries has led to a rise in the number of female migrants (Yinger, 2006).

The majority of female migrants find employment in traditional gender roles, such as domestic and reproductive labour (such as cleaning, cooking, and childcare) or low-wage, part-time professions like waitressing, demonstrating the widespread gender-based gaps in the global labor market for women. The influx of highly qualified migrant workers is equal across genders, despite the fact that women make up around half of all foreign migrants (Dumont et al., 2007). Women were frequently overlooked in conversations on skilled migration, labour supply, and employment integration and were generally seen from a domestic viewpoint.

According to the International Organization for Migration (2018), the problem of female migration spans a wide spectrum of origins and circumstances. The lives of women in the nations of origin and destination have greatly improved as a result of this procedure, creating possibilities for people all over the world. People or families with particular economic, social, and welfare features are impacted by the complicated process of migration (Olaleye, 2023). By giving them access to employment-related income, status, autonomy, independence, and self-esteem, female migration can advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Female migration is significantly influenced by poverty and gender inequality, with restricted access to information for decision-making serving as a potent driver.

Understanding the Push–Pull Model

According to the Push-Pull model, "pull" variables like urban opportunities, education, and diaspora networks interact dynamically with "push" factors like poverty, unemployment, and patriarchal restraints to explain female migration in Nigeria. Nigerian women are increasingly relocating on their own, but they are vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking, according to current trends. Conditions known as push factors cause people to leave

their home country. These include cultural norms that are constrictive, unemployment, poverty, and insecurity. Women are forced to relocate to cities or overseas due to rural poverty and a lack of work prospects (Ogbanga, 2020). Women were disproportionately affected by SAPs' reduction of public sector jobs in the 1990s, which forced them into informal commerce and cross-border migration (Afolayan, 1999). Restrictive gender norms in northern Nigeria force women to go through marriage, which frequently restricts their independence (Adewumi, 2024). Women move in search of safety and survival in areas like the Northeast due to conflict and instability.

Pull factors are attractive conditions in destination areas, such as improved social freedoms, diaspora networks, employment, education, healthcare, and skilled labour. Although researchers contend that gendered factors must be included to properly explain female migration patterns, Lee's (1966) original formulation of the Push-Pull model continues to be prominent (Adepoju, 2005). Women are drawn to urban areas with possibilities in commerce, services, and professional employment, such as Lagos and Abuja. While scholarships overseas encourage international female migration, universities and vocational institutions draw women from rural regions (Adedigba, 2024). Nigerian women are drawn to skilled migration by the need for nurses and educators in Europe, North America, and the Middle East (UN DESA, 2022). Migration is encouraged by social contacts overseas, which offer knowledge, assistance, and remittance flows (Sheriadekola, 2010).

Although the Push-Pull paradigm offers a helpful framework, it has to be modified to take gendered realities into consideration. Migration decisions for Nigerian women are influenced by social networks, cultural norms, and vulnerabilities in addition to economic considerations. Complex migratory paths result from the intersection of pull factors like urban opportunity and education with push factors like poverty and patriarchal norms. The necessity for gender-sensitive migration governance is highlighted by the failure of gender-neutral policies to account for these dynamics.

Female migration in Nigeria serves as an example of the Push-Pull model's applicability as well as its shortcomings in the absence of gendered analysis. In addition to being drawn by possibilities in healthcare, education, and diaspora networks, women travel because of cultural restrictions, economic difficulties, and insecurity. Gender-sensitive strategies are crucial for maximizing the advantages of female migration while reducing dangers because current patterns reflect both empowerment and susceptibility.

Female Migration in Nigeria Through a Gendered Lens

In the past, women were viewed as dependent rather than autonomous migrants due to gendered norms. Marriage continues to be a major factor in female mobility today, especially in northern Nigeria where cultural norms restrict women's independence (Adewumi, 2024). In cities like Lagos and Ibadan, women predominate in informal trade and services. Women are frequently forced into low-status, unstable jobs due to gendered norms, whereas males are able to get more formal employment. However, despite institutional limitations, women's resilience in informal economies shows agency.

Since the 2000s, Nigerian women are moving abroad more often to pursue professional careers and education, especially in teaching and healthcare. This is explained by gendered migration theory as both empowerment and continuity: although women become more independent, they are frequently concentrated in "care" occupations that conform to conventional gender norms (Adedigba, 2024; UN DESA, 2022). Domestic work overseas and human trafficking both exhibit gendered vulnerabilities. Nigerian women are overrepresented among victims of human trafficking in Europe, and many of them are exploited as domestic workers in the Middle East (IOM, 2022). These incidents highlight how risk exposure during migration procedures is influenced by gender. Female returns frequently experience stigma and reintegration difficulties, as well as difficulties regaining their social standing and gaining access to resources. Even after migrating overseas, women's reintegration is hampered by patriarchal standards, according to gendered migration theory (Adewumi, 2024).

Applying the Gendered Migration Theory to Nigeria shows that female migration is a socially rooted process rather than just an economic occurrence. Gendered expectations affect the experiences of women who move in search of opportunity, education, and survival. The idea highlights the dual nature of female migration: it exposes women to vulnerabilities stemming from patriarchal norms while also empowering them via autonomy and independence. Additionally, this viewpoint questions gender-neutral policy frameworks (IOM, 2022).

Policies run risk of undervaluing women's contributions and failing to address their vulnerabilities if they fail to acknowledge the gendered aspects of migration. Therefore, gendered migration theory offers a crucial perspective for creating inclusive migration governance in Nigeria. Gendered Migration Theory, which emphasizes how gender roles, norms, and power relations impact mobility, provides insightful information about female migration in Nigeria. Nigerian women move for professional employment, marriage, trade, and education, yet their experiences show both empowerment and limitation.

Understanding these relationships is crucial to creating gender-sensitive immigration laws that shield women from exploitation while maximizing their contributions to the advancement of the country.

Contemporary Trends in Female Migration

In Nigeria, female migration has changed from dependence (associational) to autonomy during the last 50 years. These days, women play a key role in migratory processes, overcoming institutional obstacles to promote social change and economic growth. The necessity for gender-sensitive immigration laws, better sex-specific statistics, and empowerment via education and skill development are highlighted by the historical development. Our comprehension of how women manage opportunity and risk in intricate migratory environments is enhanced by placing Nigerian female migration within international discussions on gender and mobility.

The reasons why women move and the characteristics of their migratory experiences have changed throughout time due to shifting economic realities and social situations. Women have historically moved for a variety of reasons, such as work migration, marriage, and family reunion. Transnational families were frequently formed as a result of women migrating for marriage in numerous countries. However, labour migration became a major factor in female migration in the 20th century, especially in emerging nations. Opportunities for women to migrate for work-related reasons were made possible by the growth of export-oriented sectors and the rising need for low-wage labor in industrialized nations.

Over time, the characteristics of female migration have also evolved. Women migrated mostly from rural to urban regions in the early 20th century to work in factories and other urban industries. But increasingly varied migration patterns, such as urban-to-urban, rural-to-rural, and international migration, have emerged in recent decades. UN DESA (2013) reported that there were around 232 million foreign migrants in the globe. Of this total, half were female migrant workers, with 59% of the population living in developed countries and 41% in developing regions.

Since the late 1990s, the migration pattern has shifted in favour of female migrants. An analysis of migration statistics spanning six decades suggests an increasing trend in the flow of female migrant workers, with an annual rise of around 0.2% since 1960. The share of female migrant workers has consistently increased, from 47.2 percent in 1970 to over 49 percent in 2010.

Another significant trend in female migration is the growth of irregular migration. While irregular migration has historically been associated with male movement, an

increasing number of women have begun to migrate irregularly in recent years, typically for economic reasons. This has created a number of issues for female migrants, including an increased risk of exploitation and abuse.

Irregular female migration is a complicated issue that has persisted throughout Africa for decades. This sort of migration is distinguished by a lack of adequate documents and the use of illicit means to go from one region to another. Women account for a sizable share of irregular migrants in Africa, and their motivations for pursuing such a perilous voyage range from economic to political and social. Poverty is one of the driving forces for irregular female migration in Africa. In many African nations, women are disproportionately affected by poverty, and they frequently lack access to jobs and social services. As a result, many women migrate irregularly to other African nations and Europe in search of better economic possibilities. According to research, women who move irregularly are more likely to originate from poorer homes and have lower levels of education than males (Adepoju, 2006).

Another issue contributing to irregular female migration in Africa is a lack of legal pathways for immigration. Many African nations have tight migration regulations, making it difficult for people to travel lawfully. As a result, irregular migration has become the sole practical alternative for many women who want to go to other countries for job or other reasons. Furthermore, the expense of acquiring legal migration documentation, such as visas and work permits, can be too expensive for many women, driving up demand for irregular migration (Mangala, 2016). Gender-based violence and discrimination are also key contributors to irregular female migration in Africa.

Women who experience violence and prejudice in their own countries may attempt to flee to other nations through illegitimate means. Furthermore, women who travel irregularly are frequently victims of violence and exploitation, such as sexual assault, forced labor, and human trafficking (Adepoju 2006).

Finally, violence and political instability in many African nations have contributed significantly to irregular female migration. Women who have been forced from their homes due to conflict may attempt to travel to other nations, notably neighboring African countries and Europe, via informal channels. They are frequently subjected to different sorts of violence and exploitation along the road (Mangala, 2016). Recent research identifies numerous rising trends, about 60% of Nigerian women have relocated at least once, frequently in stages from rural to urban regions.

- Nigerian nurses have established significant diasporas in the UK, US, and Middle East,

highlighting skilled female migration in healthcare.

- Women involved in trafficking or informal labor face considerable reintegration issues upon returning to their home countries.
- ICT and social media are shaping migration decisions, allowing women to access information and diaspora networks.
- Women in rural regions are disproportionately affected by environmental deterioration, leading to climate-induced migration for survival.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study provides a comprehensive account of female migration in Nigeria over the past five decades, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the reliance on secondary data, while valuable for historical and comparative analysis, restricts the ability to capture the lived experiences of migrant women in real time. Many of the datasets employed, particularly those from international organizations, are not consistently sex-disaggregated, which limits the precision of gender-specific insights. Where proxy indicators were used to approximate female migration trends, there is a risk of oversimplification or misrepresentation of women's diverse experiences.

Second, the study's temporal scope, spanning 1970 to 2025, inevitably encounters gaps in data availability and consistency. Migration statistics in Nigeria, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, were often incomplete or unreliable, making it difficult to construct a fully accurate picture of female mobility during those decades. Furthermore, irregular migration—an increasingly significant phenomenon—remains under-documented, and the clandestine nature of such movements makes them difficult to quantify with confidence.

Third, while the study applies theoretical frameworks such as the Push-Pull model and gendered migration theory, these frameworks may not fully account for the intersectional realities of female migrants. Factors such as ethnicity, religion, class, and regional disparities intersect with gender in ways that require more nuanced analysis. The absence of primary qualitative data, such as interviews or ethnographic accounts, limits the depth of understanding of how these intersectional identities shape migration decisions and outcomes.

Future research should therefore prioritize the collection of primary data through interviews, surveys, and participatory methods that foreground the voices of Nigerian women migrants. Such approaches would enrich the analysis by capturing subjective experiences of empowerment, vulnerability, and resilience. Additionally, longitudinal

studies that track female migrants across different stages of their mobility (departure, settlement, and return) would provide valuable insights into the long-term impacts of migration on women's lives and communities.

There is also a need for more systematic documentation of irregular migration, trafficking, and reintegration challenges, particularly through collaborations between academic institutions, civil society organizations, and migration agencies. Finally, future scholarship should explore the implications of emerging trends such as climate-induced migration, digital-enabled mobility, and diaspora engagement, all of which are reshaping the landscape of female migration in Nigeria. By addressing these gaps, subsequent research can build on the foundations laid here and contribute to more inclusive, gender-sensitive migration governance

Policy Implications for Gender-Sensitive Migration Governance in Nigeria

Economic opportunity, education, and globalization have all contributed to a major increase in female migration in Nigeria during the last 50 years. Nonetheless, women continue to confront structural vulnerabilities such as trafficking, exploitation, and inadequate reintegration services. Current migration policies are primarily gender-neutral, failing to reflect women's unique experiences. This paper critically investigates the policy implications of gender-sensitive migration governance in Nigeria, based on current literature and institutional reports. The findings emphasize the need for sex disaggregated data, trafficking prevention frameworks, empowerment via education and skills, regional collaboration within ECOWAS, and diaspora participation. The study adds to migration studies by placing Nigerian female mobility within worldwide debates on gender and governance.

Migration operations in Nigeria have traditionally ignored gendered elements, regarding migrants as a homogeneous entity. However, female migration patterns show unique motivations and obstacles that necessitate customized policy responses. Nigerian women are overrepresented in the informal economy, cross-border commerce, and vulnerable labor sectors overseas (IOM, 2022). Addressing these realities needs gender-sensitive governance systems that acknowledge women's autonomy while reducing vulnerabilities.

- i. Nigeria's migration policy must progress beyond gender-neutral methods. Establishing gender focal points inside migration agencies and integrating gender into governance frameworks would guarantee that women's opinions are heard in policymaking (Nneli, Hagen Zanker & Hennessey, 2022).

- ii. Accurate sex disaggregated migration statistics are critical for successful policy planning. The National Bureau of Statistics and the Nigerian Immigration Service should emphasize gathering and releasing gender-specific statistics on internal and international flows (UNDESA, 2024).
- iii. Nigerian women are disproportionately impacted by trafficking to Europe and domestic labor in the Middle East. Policies should enhance bilateral agreements with destination countries, improve border control, and increase victim support services (IOM, 2022).
- iv. Female migrants frequently face barriers to formal employment owing to a lack of education and skills. Expanding scholarships, vocational centers, and diaspora mentorship programs will boost women's agency. Female returnees should be provided with psychosocial assistance and access to finance as part of reintegration activities.
- v. Despite ECOWAS's free movement norms, female traders experience border harassment and limited credit availability. Harmonizing labor standards and enacting gender-sensitive border management policies would increase women's engagement in regional economies (Adepoju 2005).
- vi. Female diaspora contributions are underused. Supporting women's diaspora groups via lobbying, mentorship, and financing would increase their influence in migration governance. Policies must also incorporate gender views into climate adaption and digital migration plans (Fasinu, Ogunboye, Olaleye & Adeyemi, 2024).

Gender sensitive migration governance in Nigeria necessitates a multifaceted approach that includes incorporating gender into policy frameworks, strengthening sex disaggregated data, protecting women from trafficking, empowering them through education and skills, improving regional cooperation, and engaging diaspora networks. By implementing these steps, Nigeria may capitalize on the transformational potential of female migration while protecting women's rights and well-being. This is consistent with global calls for inclusive migration governance and positions Nigerian women as key actors in national and regional development.

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