



RESEARCH ARTICLE

IRREGULAR MIGRATION AS VECTOR FOR SECURITY RISK IN NIGERIA: MECHANISMS, MANIFESTATION, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Irregular migration is a vector through which security risk is transmitted across Nigeria porous borders, enabled by diverse mechanisms, and manifest as serious threats to state and citizen security. The study investigates the mechanisms enabling this transmission, how the risks manifests, and policy implications. The research adopted the Transnational Crime theory to analyze how criminal networks exploit border porosity to perpetuate crimes across states. It made use of the qualitative research approach and secondary data analysis to determine the intersection between From the analysis of empirical data, the research revealed that irregular migration is a major vector transmitting insecurity, via activities of transnational criminal networks, mobility of armed actors, and institutional capacity failure. Which manifests as; proliferation of small arms, insurgent infiltration, incessant kidnappings, terrorist attacks, wanton killing, as well as communal clashes due to scarce resource contestations. Also, the research accounts for some of the factors encumbering efforts at controlling irregular migration in Nigeria to include; state failure, inadequate border security, corruption among officials, regional conflict, difficult terrain, poverty and unemployment. To mitigate the crisis of illegal migration in Nigeria, the paper recommends integrating migration-security governance, strengthening regional cooperation, and focusing on root-cause mitigation initiatives such as; unemployment, poverty and regional instability.

Keyword: Irregular migration, vector, Security risk, manifestation, mitigation initiatives.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

International migration is a common feature of global relation which has challenged the migration governance system of many countries (McLeman, 2016). An estimated 272 million people, accounting for 3.5 percent of the world population currently live outside their country of origin (United Nations, 2019). International migration is influenced by geographic, economic and demographic factors, reflected in distinct migration patterns across different states and regions of the world (De Haas, 2008; Ikuteyijo, 2020). Irregular migration on the other hand, refers to the movement of individuals across borders, usually in search of better opportunities or asylum, but without proper authorization or documentation (Thompson, 2014).

The complexity of transnational relations has continued to drive human interactions and resources across national boundaries. This phenomenon has contributed to advancing the activities of diverse transnational actors, including armed groups and criminal networks, who take advantage of poor border control to penetrate sovereign states (Genschel, 2017; Williams, 2022). And having entrenched themselves into the social and political fabrics of such states, they influence governance and policies in ways that undermine the state's sovereign wellbeing (Kalyvas, 2006).

Irregular migration in Nigeria is fueled by factors such as poverty, unemployment, political instability and conflict arising in neighboring countries, which is reinforced by the nation's porous borders. Nigeria international Land borders covering about 4,470 km with Chad, Cameroon, Benin, Niger, and a Coastline of 774 km are largely unmanned. At the 2016 Comptroller General Annual Conference and Stakeholders Interactive Forum, Martin Abeshi, the Comptroller General of NIS stated that, out of the 1,500 identified land border crossing into Nigeria, only 114 approved control posts are manned by immigration officials and other security agencies. And that the National Immigrations' staff strength of approximately 23,000 was grossly inadequate for policing Nigeria's vast borders.

As such, the Nigeria states is bedeviled by the influx of large number of diverse armed groups such as bandits, terrorists and militias, especially from neighboring states (Addoh, 2013). The manifestations of irregular migration are diverse and complex in Nigeria, from the exploitation of migrants by human traffickers and drug smuggling, to the infiltration of terrorist groups through porous borders, to actual terrorism. The presence of irregular migrants has led to social tensions and conflicts within Nigerian communities as resources become scarce and competition for jobs intensifies (Afolayan, Ikwuyatun & Abejide, 2008).

Government effort at mitigating the crisis of irregular migration is however hindered by factors ranging from, failure of state to enforce its regulatory powers, inadequate personnel and equipment, official corruption, poverty and unemployment, as well as conflicts and instability among its neighboring states. This study therefore seeks to examine the transmission mechanisms, manifestations, and policy implications of irregular migration in Nigeria, to provide a deeper understanding of its complexity, and how it affects the Nigerian state. This paper will also explore the various policy implications of irregular migration, especially in relations to border security, improved cooperation with neighboring countries, and sustainable mitigation initiatives.



Irregular migration is a major factor in the insecurity crisis ravaging most developing states, especially in the African sub regions. The Nigerian state lacks capacity to secure its borders, facilitating irregular migration, which has contributed to the crisis of kidnapping, banditry, terrorism, unwarranted killings, as well as systemic erosion of its social and political conditions. This situation is more acute in the Northeast and Northwest, characterized by weak border controls, fragmented governance, and ungoverned spaces along its migration corridors with Chad, Cameroon, Benin, and Niger. Measures aimed at combating irregular migration remain challenged, uncoordinated and ineffectual, due to state capacity failure, poverty, illiteracy, corruption, inadequate personnel and funding issues.

The situation is further complicated by government politicization of the country's security crisis, and unwillingness, especially in treating migration concerns as solely humanitarian issue, neglecting its influence on insecurity. Thus, without effectively addressing how irregular migration intersect with extreme religious/ideological goals, criminal economies and armed actor mobility, Nigeria risks creating a situation where insecurity breeds more irregular movement, which in turn fuels further insecurity. This study therefore seeks to examine the mechanisms, manifestations, and policy implications of irregular migration as a vector of security risk, providing framework to controlling the situation.

1.1. Research Questions

The major research questions that guided this are presented thus:

1. What are the mechanisms through which irregular migration transmits security risks across key Northeast and Northwest Border States in Nigeria?
2. What are the social manifestations of insecurity linked to irregular migration in these key northern states?
3. What are the factors encumbering efforts at controlling irregular migration in Nigeria?
4. What are the policy implications and measures to control the migration-security risk in Nigeria?

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The research objectives are to;

1. Identify and analyze the mechanisms through which irregular migration transmits security risks across key Northeast and Northwest borders states in Nigerian.
2. Account for the social manifestations of insecurity linked to irregular migration in these key northern regions.
3. Examine the factors encumbering efforts at controlling irregular migration in Nigeria.
4. Determine the policy implications and recommendations aimed at controlling the migration-security risk in Nigeria.



2.0. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptual Framework

This section conceptualizes the variables relevant to the research, to provide a logical structure that explains the relationship among concepts and variables of the study.

Irregular Migration

Migration is a global expression generally used to describe the movement of persons and animals from one geographical domain to another. It is also referred to as a term used to describe “the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence either across an international border or within a state” (10M, 2019). Though there are well established means of migration, which is considered the regular migration channels, many immigrants have also utilized the irregular channels to illegally enter into other countries without due authorization. Irregular migration refers to movement across borders without evidence of necessary legal compliance, and official documentation.

Dimensionally, their perceived classification as unauthorized immigrants stem from the fact that such movement violates the immigration laws of both countries of origin and destination (European Commission, 2017; Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants & UNODC Research, 2021). Irregular migrants often patronize the services of human traffickers and smugglers to travel to their chosen country of destination. In this case, the legal instruments of cross border movement such as visas and permits are jettisoned. Irregular migrants may take the form of asylum seekers, refugees or internationally displaced individuals seeking safe environment to lead a decent life which includes opportunities to better work and pay (The Migrant Project, 2021a).

The key transit routes for illegal migration in Nigeria are mostly through the bordering state of Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin. According to studies, this group of individuals migrates based on reasons considered as push-factors namely; bad governance, unemployment, poverty, conflict and violence, lack of basic public goods, human rights abuse, and climate stress, and are facilitated by smugglers and traffickers who exploit migrants' vulnerabilities etc. (Europe Commission, 2017; Adhikari, et al., 2021, The Migrant Project, 2021).

Security and Insecurity

Security is defined as threats to stability which include a wide range of interconnected issues such as nuclear and chemical weapons use, genocide, gross human right abuse, climate change, famine and terrorism etc. (Romaniuk & Marton, 2022). Security is also viewed as a comprehensive condition that recommends the safety of a territory via the network of armed forces, law enforcement agency, and the people themselves (Amitav, 2020). Security can further be described as a social condition involving the comparative ability of a state to counter threats to its fundamental values and interests to the extent of engaging in war.

This view aligns with the traditional notion of security which borders on national defense and protection from external aggression, using military capability and deterrence strategies. In this regard, state survival and defense is supreme (Eriksson, & Rhinard, 2009; Hirsch, Huub, Dijstelbloem, de



Goede, 2020; Morgenthau, 1948). The United Nation General Assembly (2012) definition captures the human security perspective as; freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from indignity (Weller, 2014). This perspective involves a broad spectrum bothering on existential conditions of human beings wherever they live, especially in conflict zones (Hirsch et al., 2020).

Insecurity pertains to overall sense of uncertainty, fear or anxiety due to absence of protection conveying the message of risk, threat or danger impacting individual or group (Eric and Benjamin, 2021). Insecurity bothers on potential or actual threat to the physical and psychological wellbeing of individual or group, within a social environment. It is a situation that signifies the lack of safety or the existence of danger; hazard; uncertainty; lack of trust; inadequately guarded or protected, and being unsafe. Brennan (2020) views insecurity from two perspectives firstly; insecurity is the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury.

On the second, insecurity is the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in expectation of misfortune. As Richard A. Mathew stated, environmental change could stimulate migration, exacerbate intra state and inter-state tensions and create conditions for conflict (Akers, 2009). The Nigerian government has failed to address the issue of Insecurity in Nigeria, especially in relations to the critical issues such as border control, demographic, economic and environmental degradation. As noted by Aliome, (2019), most of the internal violent conflicts in Nigeria are facilitated by its porous border which allows for proliferation of small and light weapons.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Transnational Crime Theory

Transnational crime theory is a complex and multifaceted framework that seeks to understand and explain the phenomenon of crime, and its complex nature that exist across national borders. The theory offers a valuable lens through which to analyze irregular migration as a security risk. Peter A. Lupsha is most widely associated with the theory. He worked on transnational organized crime theory in 1996, when he published the article “Transnational Organized Crime Versus the Nation-State”. The theory posits that criminal activities transcend national borders, involving networks of actors who operate across multiple jurisdictions. The theory highlights the role of organized criminal groups in facilitating and profiting from the movement of migrants across borders. These criminal networks engage in a range of illicit activities; including human trafficking, drug trafficking, smuggling, cybercrime, document forgery and terrorism among others, which pose security risks on states (Lupsha, 1996). In his work, Lupsha explained how organized crime evolves through three stages:

1. Predatory stage – criminal groups compete violently and have little influence over the state.
2. Parasitic state – criminal groups begin infiltrating and business institutions.
3. Symbiotic stage – criminal organizations and state actors become mutually dependent, making corruption deeply entrenched.

Louise Shelley’s contribution to transnational crime theory is captured in her 2014 work, titled “Dirty Entanglement: Corruption, Crime and Terrorism. She argue that transnational crime network do not



operate in isolation; that corruption and terrorism are increasingly interconnected and mutual reinforcing across borders, and that corruption enables organized crime and terrorism to flourish. And that globalization, technology, weak governance, and illicit market strengthen these transnational networks. Shelley also linked transnational crime to social, economic, and political factors. In this case, transnational crime theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the social, economic, and political factors that contribute to the proliferation of transnational criminal activities. It highlights the issues of poverty, political instability, corruption, and lack of effective law enforcement as underlying causes of transnational crime (Shelley (2014).

The Nigerian state is bedeviled by extreme cases of transnational crimes ranging from banditry, illicit arms trade, kidnapping and terrorism, linked to irregular migration and weak border system. This has resulted in the prevalence of insecurity in the country, especially in the Northeast and Northwest. The situation is characterized by attacks and kidnappings, exacerbated by festering Islamist insurgency in the northeast and violent sectarian and herder-farmer clashes in the central region. The Boko Haram insurgency, the Islamic States of West Africa Province (ISWAP), IPOB, and other armed groups penetrate Nigeria's porous borders to engage in terrorist attacks, banditry, and militancy. They control vast swaths of land, impose rules, and partake in illegal activities to fund operations, worsening the deteriorating security situation in the country. Since 2009, 35000 people have been killed arising from the activities of armed groups (Higazi, 2022); O'Connor et al., 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2025).

3.0. Methods and Materials

The research adopted the case study research design in carry out the study, and the secondary mode of data collection. The secondary sources of data involve the use of documented materials such as textbooks, journal articles, magazines, media reports, official publications etc. The research employed the qualitative method of data analysis. The qualitative method involves content analysis of secondary data to provide evidence on the issues regarding the mechanisms and manifestations of security risk arising from irregular migration in Nigeria.

3.1. Area of the Study

The area of the study comprises the Northern Eastern and North Western borderlands. The Northwestern Nigeria includes Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara and shares border with Niger Republic. While the Northeastern states of Nigerian includes Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe sharing borders with Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The mode of economic activities in the North West and East include trade and Agriculture with common products such as millet, sorghum, cowpeas, maize, cotton and trade, while Borno's Lake Chad basin actively supports fishing. These states are all also endowed with diverse forms of natural resources. They however face the challenge of insurgency that impacts economic activities and as such, humanitarian needs are high (NPC, 2025).

3.2. Population of the Study

The total population of Northwest Nigeria is approximately 62 million people, making it the most populous region in Nigeria, accounting for around 23% of the country's total population. While the



total population of Northeastern states is approximately 26 million people, accounting for around 12% of Nigeria's total population (NPC, 2025; United Nations. (2022).

4.0. CONTENT ANALYSES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1. Content Analyses

Mechanisms through which Irregular Migration Transmits Security Risks in Nigeria

Irregular migration into Nigeria often involves arrival of large numbers of migrants especially from different socio-cultural background without legal approval of the country's authority. One of the mechanisms through which irregular migration transmits security risks in Nigeria is evident in the activities of smugglers and human traffickers. Smugglers and human traffickers exploit the poor socioeconomic situation and porous borders of most underdeveloped African states. These states suffering from economic lack, poverty, illiteracy, political instability, and conflict, seek safety and opportunities, and in this quest, fall prey to gangs of criminal networks who later subject them to sex slavery, labour exploitation, and recruitment into armed networks.

This situation is compounded by chronic corruption among government officials, further exacerbating the challenge of illegal migration. Human smuggling and trafficking syndicates operate with impunity in collusion with government officials who compromise the effectiveness of border governance along migration routes. These networks recruit migrants for forced labour or sex work, as well as conduits for illicit goods and information (Dabiri-Erewa, 2026; Diatta, Woldemichael, Handy & Hoinathy, 2021). It is noted that SALW recovered from migrant camps and border zones indicate weapon smuggling via irregular migration corridors (Addoh, 2013).

Also the porous nature of Nigeria's borders is a major factor in the infiltration by violent armed groups. Porous borders enable violent armed groups to move unnoticed into Nigeria's borderline communities from where they spread their criminal networks, including the transportation of small and light weapons (SALW) (Benjamin & Chike 2025; Afolayan, 2000). The Northeastern Nigeria has the highest concentration of border communities with very complicated terrain, lowest literacy, and highest poverty rate. The combinations of these factors explain why the region record highest number of border related crimes (Ajakaiye, 2002). Nigeria northern states are bedeviled by chronic insecurity crisis orchestrated by bandits and killer herdsmen who the authorities alleged are mainly foreigners.

Based on intelligence reports and the confessions of captured and repentant insurgents, Tukur Buratai revealed that sixty percent of the Boko Haram members terrorizing the North-East are foreigners (This Day Newspaper, 2021). The violent activities of armed groups are more noticeable in areas within the North-East states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, which share borders with Cameroon, Chad and Niger. These locations are on the fringes of Sambisa forest and the Lake Chad basin, which constitutes the hotspot of the Boko Haram insurgency (Afolayan, 2018; Adejumo, Ogundele & Adebayo, 2025).

It is argued that the killer herdsmen who wreak havoc on many communities across Nigeria are aliens who came from Libya, and found their way through Nigeria's unrestricted borders. As indicated, during the 43 years regime of the former president of Libya, Colonel Muamma Gaddafi, gave military



training to many people from Sahel, at his death, these groups became dispersed across Africa's sub region. And now became part of various terrorist organizations in the continent, including killer bands parading as herdsmen, Maaeda and Boko Haram (Bilesanmi, 2021). The Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar III, corroborated this fact of external influx of criminal elements through Nigeria porous borders, in stating that "armed herdsmen moving with guns, causing violence, fighting with farmers, perpetuating violence in the country are foreign terrorist...not Nigerians" (NDIC, 2023).

Furthermore, mining business in Nigeria has provided cover for irregular migration. The proliferation of irregular migrants from neighboring countries mainly from Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Togo, Benin etc., who engage in illegal mining in Nigeria, has constituted a serious security threat. The arrests of some Chinese citizens and citizens of neighboring countries exposes the fact of irregular migration which constitutes powerful network of organized criminal activity, involving the local population and foreign nationals engaging in illegal resources exploitation in Nigeria (Bilesanmi, 2021). Between the borders of Zamfara state and the Republic of Niger, illegally mined gold is exchanged for arms and ammunitions using young girls and women (Sahara Reporters, 2019). They have been persistent proliferation of illegal migration into Nigeria from across West Africa to the goldmines, providing cover for armed groups who engage in conflict, violence and deaths (Amosu and Adeosun, 2021).

Manifestations of Security Risks Arising from Irregular Migration in Northeast and Northwest

Irregular migration creates conditions for insecurity in Nigeria which poses serious challenges to social cohesion and development. The influx of irregular migrants in Nigeria has significantly impacted on local resources, constrain social services, and exacerbate unemployment. This situation has contributed to social tensions within local communities, fuel competition over jobs and land, and trigger communal clashes over adaptation and terrorist attacks. Also, the activities of criminal networks in human trafficking and smuggling have shown to lead to increased levels of violence, exploitation, and abuse. And with access to funds derived from illicit cross-border activities, terrorist groups have expanded their influence and carry out deadly attacks. These security risks not only threaten the well-being of migrants themselves but also have broader implications for national security and stability (Ogbonnaya, 2020).

There is nexus between irregular migration and instability in the northern region, especially in the Northeast and West. Irregular migrants across northern borders constituents network of mining cartel that sponsor armed groups for protection, and engender displacement from mining enclaves. The proceeds from illegal mining operations have for long been connected to the recruitment and financing of terrorist organizations, via logistical networks within and outside the country, making counterterrorism difficult succeed. As observed, mined gold is exchanged for arms for use by bandits and insurgent groups, adopting covert measures such as the use of girls and women trafficked across borders. For instance illegally mined gold is moved from sites to the border, young girls and women are ingeniously used to transport weapons from the border to recipient (Addoh, 2013).

In Kaduna State like others, illegal mining activities is facilitated mostly by foreign non-state actors who continued to rob the state, degrade and deplete natural vegetation, create extreme situations, attract bandits and other criminal elements, and posing serious threat to communities (Soni, 2024). In Zamfara state, bandits operated 105 camps from where deadly attacks were lunched, to kill and steal



properties (Sahara Reporters, 2019). Between the years 2016 – 2020 a total of 6,319 persons were arbitrarily killed resulting from banditry and communal conflicts; 3,672 kidnapped; N2, 805,049,748 paid as ransom; 6,483 widows and 25,050 orphans left behind by slain victims. Also, 215,241 cows, 141,404 sheep, 20,600 of other animals were rustled or slain. Furthermore, 3,587 houses, 1,487 vehicles and motorbikes were burnt (Nagarajan, 2020).

Amnesty International (2023) reported that from January to July 2023, there were more than 2,000 abductions relating to mining site disputes in Zamfara State. And it is estimated that 1,615 incidents and 4,201 deaths were recorded from 2010 to 2023 due to banditry in Zamfara and Katsina states. In Nasarawa state the uncanny mode of operations criminal elements involves subjecting females to various forms of abuse including rape and gruesome mass murder (Okolie and Ugwu, 2019). Borno state has over the years suffered from incessant attacks by diverse rival armed groups in the form of terrorist activities, kidnapping and other heinous crimes, including indiscriminate attack on oil exploration facilities in Lake Chad Basin (Ujah et al, 2025).

Challenges in Controlling Irregular Migration in Nigeria Border states

There are several factors encumbering efforts aimed at controlling irregular migration in Nigeria, they are stated as follows;

1. State fragility and inherent contradictions: Nigeria is a fragile state lacking capacity to guarantee effective security and sovereign order. This fact is evident in the influx of irregular or undocumented immigrants where state failure has created opportunities for criminal groups to take over communities. The weak and inefficient state system has made it difficult for government to achieving the task of protecting its territorial sovereignty from external aggression (Aina, 2023).
2. Endemic corruption, connivance and sabotage: resulting from endemic corruption that bedevils Nigeria fragile state system, foreign criminal groups often exploits the vulnerabilities of the regulatory officials and relevant institutions and community members. There are also cases of connivance and sabotage among the strata of the society ranging from traditional institutions to government officials. The situation is further worsened by a compromised visa approval process, driven by incompetence and corruption. The Nigerian immigration authorities which are the primary culprit, intentionally issue tourist visas to Chinese workers who regularly stay beyond the visa expiration date to work in the country (Ojewale and Onuoha, 2024). Systemic corruption is also evident in the fraudulent issuance of work permit, and unwillingness to prosecute regulatory law offenders. And even when offenders are arrested, there are never brought to face the law, while those convicted hardly serve their punishment (Akogun, 2024).
3. The crisis of existential poverty, illiteracy and ignorance before the law, especially in the north: Sponsors of illegal mining exploit these vulnerability among the youths to recruit them as labor forces across national border, which also provides coverage for bandits and insurgent groups. There is also high degree of illiteracy and ignorance regarding awareness of constitutional provisions on mineral resources in Nigeria; as such most people fall short of the law.
4. Geographical complexities of Nigeria borderlines and threats faced by government regulatory officials: the marshals operating along the Nigerian borders have been hampered by logistical



constraints due to vastness of Nigeria's territory, which makes proper monitoring and accessibility difficult to regulatory and law enforcement officers in controlling illegal inflow (Amnesty International, 2018; Alaran, 2025). Sometimes bandits lay mines on the ground against ground forces that wade through the forests to dislodge them (Ajibola, 2024).

4.2. Policy Implications

Irregular migration as a vector of security risk demands a paradigm shift from treating migrants as “humanitarian problems” to seeing migration as a systemic security variable. In this regard, policy must move from reactive enforcement to proactive, integrated governance. The following points should be considered:

1. Security cannot be achieved without addressing migration drivers such as poverty, unemployment, climate stress, and lack of opportunity. Thus to guarantee effective security gains, Nigeria should invests in youth livelihoods, rural development, and climate adaptation initiatives.
2. Strengthening borders alone won't stop irregular migration, it pushes routes underground, making them harder to monitor and more dangerous. Legal pathways should be adopted to reduce incentives for smuggling networks.
3. Migrants are not necessarily threats, but can become vulnerabilities, and without protection, irregular migrants become prey for traffickers, recruiters, or vigilantes.
4. Irregular migration doesn't stop at Nigerian borders; effective response also requires regional cooperation such as harmonized ECOWAS protocols, shared intelligence, and joint border patrols.

5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

Irregular migration poses significant security risks for Nigeria, with implications that extend beyond the well-being of individual migrants to broader issues of national security and stability. Irregular migration functions as a vector of security risk by enabling the mobility of armed actors, facilitating arms smuggling, exacerbating social tensions, and overwhelming weak border institutions (Adamson, 2006; Afolayan, 2018). Irregular migration in Nigeria is not merely a symptom of insecurity, it is a structural vector transmitting risks across borders, embedding them within communities, and amplifying existing vulnerabilities.

The mechanisms identified route exploitation, institutional weakness, and social vulnerability. The transmission of irregular migration is facilitated by a variety of factors which include economic disparities, political instability, and conflict in neighboring countries. Also, porous borders and weak immigration enforcement mechanisms create opportunities for criminal networks to exploit vulnerable migrants and evade detection. The proliferation of corruption within government agencies further exacerbates the problem, enabling criminal groups to operate with impunity (Afolayan, 2018).

Irregular migration manifest security risk in Nigeria in diverse and multifaceted ways. The presence of irregular migrants has shown to strain social services, exacerbate unemployment, and contribute to social tensions within local communities. Moreover, the involvement of criminal networks in human



trafficking and smuggling activities has led to increased levels of violence, exploitation, and abuse. These security risks not only threaten the well-being of migrants themselves but also have broader implications for national security and stability (Benjamin & Chike, 2025). In light of these challenges, policymakers in Nigeria must adopt a comprehensive and coordinated approach to address irregular migration as a security risk. This includes strengthening border controls, enhancing immigration enforcement mechanisms, and cracking down on corruption within government agencies. Additionally, efforts should be made to address the root causes of irregular migration, such as economic disparities and political instability, through targeted development initiatives and diplomatic engagement with neighboring countries.

5.2. Recommendation

Policymakers in Nigeria should adopt a comprehensive and coordinated approach to addressing irregular migration as a security risk; this should include strengthening border controls, and enhancing immigration enforcement mechanisms. In this regard, the government should reform border governance by integrating Migration & Security by combining Nigeria Immigration Services-NIS, Customs, Police, and Military with shared databases, joint training, and real-time tech. Deploy biometric ID systems at key informal crossings in the north. Equip border posts with drones, thermal cameras, and GPS trackers. Create “Migration-Security Liaison Officers” in every state. Provide greater commitment in the development and enforcement of standard immigration guidelines of the country, especially the digitization of the process of visa and permit procurement.

There is the need for greater surveillance and intelligent information sharing among the security officials and effective migration management across the nation’s national border (Shehu, 2009). Also, to mitigate the challenge of illegal migration, there is need to promote effective synergy between the tiers of government. Government should adopt a multi-stakeholder approach at the state, local government and border communities. This should include engaging traditional leaders, community vigilante and neighborhood watch groups. In partnership with private sector, the government should provide a legal pathway to reduce irregular flows by offering safe, documented alternatives especially for seasonal labor, family reunification, and asylum seekers. The country should launch “Nigeria Seasonal Work Visa” for ECOWAS citizens in agriculture/fishing. Expand asylum processing centers in Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja.

The government cannot manage irregular migration alone, especially with shared borders and transnational threats as such; it should strengthen regional & international collaboration. It should liaise with the governments of Niger, Togo, Benin and other neighboring states, to develop a multilateral effort at combating the menace of irregular migration across their border. In this regard, there is need to harmonize ECOWAS protocols with Nigerian security priorities. There is the specific need to push for ECOWAS “Migration-Security Protocol” binding member states to joint surveillance & data sharing. As well as, sign MoUs with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon for cross-border patrols. Leverage EU/Nigeria migration partnership funds for tech upgrades, reduce incentives for irregular routes, and protect migrants from exploitation.

African states should corroborate in managing the root causes of irregular migration within their borders. In this regard, the issues of economic disparities and political instability should be addressed through targeted development initiatives and diplomatic engagement, especially by providing



legitimate means of survival for youths. Governments should launch initiatives such as “Border Zone Development Fund” for infrastructure, schools, and clinics. Policies bothering on climate resilience should be integrated into migration policy, support farmers displaced by drought/floods. Furthermore, the Nigeria government should seek to protect vulnerable migrants by shifting from criminalization to protection as some irregular migrants are victims that are exploited to engage in criminalities. In this regard, the police and immigration officers designated for in migration protocols should be trained, as well as fund NGOs associated with monitoring of migrant camps and transit zones.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exist in this manuscript.

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