

TRAFFICKING AND SMUGGLING OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS FROM NIGERIA TO EUROPE: STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

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Abstract. *The objective of this study is to ascertain the causes of trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe, and examine European Union strategies and challenges to migration governance in curbing trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe. The study made use of qualitative data through individual in-depth interviews conducted on European External Action Service, EU delegation to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Frontex, International Organisation for Migration, Nigeria Immigration Service, Idia Renaissance and the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons. Findings showed that the causes of trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe are not limited to border porosity with other Africa countries, cultural perspective that remittance flow improves economic standard of families, and demand of bribe by the security officials from smugglers and traffickers. Moreover, findings revealed migration governance put in place by the EU to curb trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe such as the adoption of revised 2000 Cotonou agreement, establishment of European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling, Europol Information Clearing House, Visa Information System, and European Union Trust Fund for Africa. However, the migration governance further attached strict conditionality to legal migration and encourage stricter border policing which undermines respect for human rights and constitutes crime against humanity. The study concluded that these challenges enable traffickers and smugglers to divert migrant's journey to more precarious routes to Europe.*

Keywords: *Trafficking and Smuggling, Nigeria Irregular Migrants, European Union, Migration Governance.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Edo people of the 1980s were responsible for the history of trafficking and smuggling from Nigeria to Europe. The first Edo women who traveled to Italy and Spain during this time did so for commercial reasons, such as buying and selling apparel, jewelry, and shoes (Cole & Booth, 2007; Damon et al., 2011). They were hired as low-skilled laborers in Italy and Spain to work in fruit and tomato farms during the planting and harvesting seasons due to a labor shortage (Plambech, 2014; Odorige, 2016). However, because farm labor was a meager source of income compared to prostitution, many migrants compromised and supplemented their income through prostitution while working on farms. Essentially, the rising demand for sex workers in Europe and the comparatively high wages associated with prostitution led many female migrants to

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supplement their farm labor with prostitution, which in turn helped attract more female migrants to Europe for the same reason (Braimah, 2013).

The decision to embark on complex journey to Europe is based on the information that Nigerian migrants receive from trafficking and smuggling networks, the generosity of the EU member states like Italy and Malta to rescue migrants from sinking ship and receive them into reception centres, as well as the likelihood of granting migrant's subsidiary or permanent asylum. Nigerian citizens constituted more than a quarter of all migrants travelling by traffickers and smugglers along the central Mediterranean *en route* to Europe (International Organisation for Migration, 2017). Traffickers and smugglers capitalised on the assumption that the ordeal and vulnerabilities of migrants in the course of their journey to Europe especially along the Sahara desert and Libya are enough reason for EU immigration personnel to grant migrants asylum (Oberti, 2021). In most cases, trafficking and smuggling agents deliberately inflict pain on migrants so that when they are recounting their experience, EU immigration personnel shows compassion to grant asylum. However, as EU continued to grant asylum to irregular migrants, trafficking and smuggling networks take this advantage to encourage potential migrants who want to embark on irregular migration to Europe.

Nigerian citizens constituted one the highest West African irregular migrants with asylum application in Europe. For example, earlier available data showed that in the year 2015, 2016 and 2017, Nigerian asylum application in European countries increased to 4 430, 5 680 and 9 100 respectively, whereby Italy asylum applicants constituted about 63.8%, Germany 20.0% and France 5.2% (European Union, 2019a). This position was also corroborated by the International Organisation for Migration (2017a) that Nigerian nationals with about 21% and 16% constituted that highest number of migrants who arrived in Italy by boat in 2016 and 2017 respectively. All these indices pointed to the availability of trafficking and smuggling network that provide different available routes of destination to Europe. Trafficking and smuggling networks capitalised on the assumption that few irregular migrants are eventually return to Nigeria while others who are not granted asylum find their way out of the reception centres through the assistance of trafficking and smuggling agents who engage them in prostitution and drug peddling activities (Frontex, 2021).

Benin City the Edo state capital is regarded as one of the major areas of recruitment among traffickers who gain from economies of scale because of the higher number of potential migrants. Larger percentage of Nigerian irregular migrants in Europe are native of Edo, where in some towns like Uromi and Ekpoma, it is likely to find households who have relatives, mostly women who have migrated to Europe (Kastner, 2010; Agbakwuru 2018). For example, data collected from the International Organisation for Migration (2017b) showed that 62% of Nigerian irregular returnees from Libya en route to Europe from 2015 to 2016 were from Edo state. Trafficking agents in Edo state often recruit victims from rural areas to a larger extent and in urban areas to a lesser extent where the females are commonly force to sex trafficking and the male force into drug peddling, trafficking and smuggling operations (Plambech 2016; Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, 2017).

Existing literature on trafficking and smuggling from Nigeria to Europe linked poverty and weak legal migration from Nigeria has some of the causes of irregular migration to Europe (Obi-Ani et al., 2020; Castillejo, 2017; Plambech, 2016; Odorige, 2016). However, this study focuses on the factors that propel traffickers and smugglers to gain more access in transporting irregular migrants to Europe. Hence, the objectives of this study is to ascertain that causes of trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants

from Nigeria to Europe and examine migration governance put in place to curb trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe. The study is divided into 7 sections. After the introduction, the next section conceptualized trafficking and smuggling; followed by literature review on the trends and patterns of trafficking and smuggling network from Nigeria to Europe; area of study and methodology; results and analysis; discussion of findings and conclusion.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION: TRAFFICKING AND SMUGGLING

Trafficking and smuggling are central terms in international migration discourse and largely used interchangeably, but differs in degree and mode of operations. Smuggling is the voluntary purchase of smugglers' services by migrants to circumvent migration law without necessarily being the victim of deception or exploitation, whereas trafficking is the act of deceiving, threatening, or coercing people in situations of exploitation (Carling, 2006; de Haas, 2007). According to Kari et al. (2018), smuggling differs from human trafficking in three ways: consent, exploitation, and duration. This means that migrants negotiate with smugglers in a consensual manner with no intention of exploiting the migrants, and the negotiation ends when the migrants arrive in the country of destination. Migrants voluntarily seek the services of smugglers and without necessarily exploiting the migrants, smugglers engage in a relationship of general cooperation with the migrants which terminate once migrants arrives destination country (Chaikin, 2009). Meanwhile, traffickers deceived migrants to consent against their will and coerce them into form of exploitations. In view of this, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2017) claim that trafficking is the trade of humans for forced labour, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation by traffickers. In some cases, migrants under the control of smugglers are also victims of human trafficking, in which smugglers exploit their vulnerable state through sex trade or debt bondage (Reitano, Adal & Shaw 2014).

The United Nations (2000) defined smuggling as the procurement of a financial or other material benefit for the illegal entry of migrants into a state of which they are not nationals. According to Pinna and Schuler (2013), human smuggling is the illegal transfer of a person from one country to another in exchange for payment. It is the facilitation and transportation of a person across international border in violation of border laws, either clandestinely or the use of fraudulent documents (Shaw & Mangan, 2013). Smugglers are locals who live and work along border regions, have specialised skills and knowledge about irregular migration, and are linked to larger smuggling networks that provide contract services. Reitano et al. (2014) identified three types of smuggling network:

- Ad hoc smuggling services: These are migrants who travel on their own and occasionally use smuggling services to cross a border;
- migrants smuggling through document misuse or abuse: These are migrants who have sufficient financial resources to purchase visas and other necessary papers from smugglers in order to expedite their migration; and
- pre-planned stage-to-stage smuggling: In this case, the smugglers organise the entire journey and migrants are accompanied for the majority of the journey.

The connection between smugglers and migrants is mainly a business relationship. The smugglers arrange and facilitate passage for migrants at a certain

negotiated price and also responsible for handling migrant's awaiting departure (Shaw & Mangano, 2013; Doomernik, 2013). Smugglers supply information about law enforcement checks points and act as guards by protecting the business using threats or violence (Doomernik, 2013; Chibba, 2013). Similarly, smugglers act as guards and escorts for migrants embarking on a journey and also responsible for the settlement of bribes to law enforcement agents at the border check points (Collyer, 2006). Smugglers are typically former nomads, fishermen, and immigrants who work in small and loose networks, and frequently collaborate with local police, border officials, and other intermediaries to facilitate the movement of migrants (Pastore, et al., 2006).

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2010: 2) human trafficking is defined as the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons through the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse or vulnerability, or the giving and receiving of payments or benefits in order to obtain the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation". Reitano et al. (2014) claimed that human trafficking revolves around the concepts of supply and demand as determined by price, profit, and benefit, with vulnerable migrants providing labour for traffickers. One of the factors that make human trafficking appealing is that the benefits outweigh the costs, resulting in massive amounts of money in black market activity. Human trafficking, like other illegal business activities across the border such as the proliferation of small and light weapons, money laundering, and drug trafficking, has a high profit potential and a low risk, owing in part to a high labour supply (Charriere & Fresia, 2008). The price of victims of human trafficking is based on the availability of labour and the type of job they are recruited to do which may include agricultural and factory work or sexual services. Collyer (2006) opined that if the supply of a particular work category is low, the price rises, and if the demand is high, employers are willing to pay a high price for the service provided by a victim of trafficking, knowing that the profit potential outweighs the costs.

In human trafficking, migrants are force into exploitative situation by the traffickers. Marie (2004) described trafficking as a form of sexual exploitation, forced labour and debt bondage using coercion, fraud and force to compel the victim. Trafficking of migrant is the work of criminal organisations that are capable of adapting to changes in measures taken by states to review law on borders (Doomernik, 2013). As argued by Fronex (2018) traffickers set up a complete system of division of labour and made use of communication technologies in order to keep inform on new initiatives use by the border police. The aim of traffickers is to coerce the victims into working and keeping the victims under infinite control. Even when the victim has paid off debt, traffickers use threats and force to compel the victims to continue working as slaves until they are unable to work or have died (Reitano et al., 2014; Chibba, 2013). In this sense, human trafficking is differentiated from smuggling in that, trafficking victims are transported against their wish and exploitation continues when they arrive at the country of destination, whereas victims of smuggling voluntarily sort the services of smuggling agents and negotiation ends when they arrive at the country of destination.

Pastore et al. (2006) maintained that human trafficking consists of three major components: recruitment and movement, control and coercion, and exploitation. Bales (2005); Abia and Ekong (2013) posited that human trafficking is the process of bringing people into the country through deception, intimidation, or coercion by those who exploit them, which may take the form of sexual exploitation, forced labour, or slavery-like practices. In other words, trafficking involves treating victims as commodities to be

traded for monetary gain, and it is frequently accompanied by violence or threats of violence against the victims. Victim of traffickers are bought and sold within and across borders by traffickers who exercise control over the victims and also subject them into force, physical or psychological exploitation and abuse (Czaika & Hobolth, 2016).

While smuggling is synonymous with illegal entry of a state border in violation of migration laws by smugglers through exchange of money from migrants, human trafficking is a situation where victims are deceived, threatened or forced into exploitation of any kind in order to make a shady profit for the traffickers. In essence, smuggling is a breach of national sovereignty while human trafficking is a crime against international law because of the exploitative nature of the migrants. Meanwhile, the relationship between trafficking and smuggling are sometimes similar. Although smuggling generally occurs with the consent of the person being smuggled, migrants may become victims of trafficking because of the vulnerability and nature of migration (Kara, 2010; Chibba, 2013). Also, like smuggling, victims of traffickers are smuggled across national borders depending on the methods used by the traffickers to bring the migrants into a country.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE TRENDS AND PATTERNS OF TRAFFICKING AND SMUGGLING NETWORK FROM NIGERIA TO EUROPE

According to studies, a significant portion of irregular migrants from central Mediterranean routes through Niger, the Sahara Desert, Libya, and the Mediterranean Sea are from Nigeria (Malakooti, 2015; International Organisation for Migration, 2017). Due to the insecurity in Yobe, Maiduguri, and Chad, traffickers and smugglers of migrants uses routes from Zamfara, Jigawa, Kastina, Kano, or Sokoto states to connect with Niger, where they join other migrants along the central Mediterranean route to Libya. The enormous distance makes the Lagos to Benin Republic route unappealing to migrants, even though it is also devoid of insecurity. When compared to the lengthy journeys via the western Mediterranean routes from Morocco, the Niger route is frequently used as the shortest way to Europe. The central Mediterranean is the most common and highest-ranking route used by traffickers to trafficked irregular migrants to reach Europe.

The journey is broken up with numerous stops and there is a significant chance of death, as well as physical and psychological abuse both before and after reaching Europe. According to Berber and Scacco (2018), the top causes of mortality for migrants include illness (39%) and car accidents (20%), violence (13%), drowning (13%), and famine or dehydration (7%). The first arrangements for the journey from Nigeria to Europe are made by trafficking or smuggling agents (middlemen) who live in Benin City or Lagos. In the majority of cases, migrants are tricked by agents, particularly when they don't give the smugglers the full sum. According to Kazeem (2018) traffickers conduct routine roll calls at every stage of the trip to make sure migrants have paid in full for the subsequent trip. Fraudulent migrants are imprisoned, flogged, and chained. Calling their loved ones to pay the ransom is the only way to get their freedom back. In order to compensate for their loss and receive a minimal advantage, the smugglers in Libya sell the migrants as slaves in parking lots, garages, and public squares if the ransom is not paid (Winter, 2018).

The least dangerous portion of the trip to Europe is the first leg, which involves leaving Nigeria for Niger. According to the International Organisation for Migration (2017), migrants who travel the Niger route do so in the context of their covert circumstances because of its geographic location, which links North Africa with west and

central Africa. They typically fabricate or manipulate their identities in order to continue their journey. As a result of this, the gendarmes at the Niger border get bribes from many migrants, which may be greater than anticipated (Malakooti, 2015; Frontex, 2017). Smugglers and traffickers are primarily in charge of enabling migration to Europe by offering services including transportation, forged documents, bribery of officials at the border, and other settlement services (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017).

With numerous smuggling networks (*Passeur*) operating there, Agadez, Niger, is one of the most well-liked transit points for irregular migrants. According to data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2016), over 4,000 undocumented migrants travel via Agadez each week. Smuggling networks are hierarchically structured, with a ghetto boss at the top who owns a sizable ghetto compound where irregular migrants are temporarily housed and a variety of vehicles, such as cargo trucks and white Toyota Hilux automobiles that are used to carry irregular migrants to different migration hubs. In addition to providing infrastructure and facilitating services for migrants in transit, the ghetto boss is in charge of logistics and financial arrangements to maintain the network's overall functionality (Frontex, 2017). Smuggling agents that assist the ghetto leader in the relocation process include drivers, fixers, and chasseurs, among others. As it was stated:

“Chaseurs are intermediaries that bring incoming migrants to the ghetto boss's compound from the bus stop, particularly if the migrants lack the contact details of a specific smuggling organisation. Fixers are the people that ride motorcycles behind the smuggling caravan and are in charge of bribing and extorting security guards at different checkpoints on the boss's behalf. Former tour operators who had built a relationship with the ghetto ruler and had a car for smuggling are among the drivers. Additionally, they manage transportation from the city to a cross-border location” (Frontex, 2017, p: 10).

One of the most dangerous aspects of the trip is traveling through the Sahara desert for weeks or months at a time. Kazeem (2018) claim that the desert, which is 3.6 million square miles in size and consists of a great deal of sand and dirt, makes up around 31% of Africa. Because there are insufficient supplies for the voyage, migrants in the Sahara desert suffer from persistent malnutrition and dehydration, which can result in physical deformities, an unhealthy lifestyle, and even death. According to the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (2016) migrants are more likely to die crossing the Sahara desert than the Mediterranean Sea. Not every migrant makes it through the Sahara desert; some are abducted or treated like commodities. Armed Tuareg and Berber organisations frequently use the desert routes for kidnapping, ransom, and militia recruiting, particularly for male victims, while women are either sold to brothels as prostitutes or are regarded as warlords' wives (Bodunde, 2016).

Migrants who survive their stay in the Sahara desert are linked to another trafficking agent (*buger*) in Libya that continue the journey from there to Sabha, Tripoli, and Sabratha, a coastal town in Libya, where they are temporarily housed in a ghetto compound, waiting for the rainy season in July and August to subside in order to allow the vessel to balance on the sea (Kazeem, 2018). Libya's geographic border makes it an essential transit country in North Africa, particularly when traveling across the Mediterranean Sea to reach Italy or Malta in Southern Europe. Nigerian nationals make

up the majority of migrants traveling from Libya to Italy, despite the Morocco routes (see table 1) becoming more popular in the early 2000s (Kastner, 2010; Kuschminder, de Bresser & Siegel, 2015; Kirwin & Anderson, 2018). In order to earn enough money to cover the remaining portion of their voyage to Europe, Nigerian migrants live and work in parts of Libya, especially around the coast (Teppert & Rossi, 2020).

One of the migrants who had been trained to handle the motor is handed a compass to help them cross the sea with the help of smugglers who subsequently turn back halfway before they reach the Italian shores. The migrants are provided with a Thuraya satellite phone with a strong signal, which they use to call an emergency number as soon as they enter Italian waters (Kazeem, 2018). Migrants drown before European Union or foreign humanitarian rescue mission personnel reach them because of the risky circumstance of being smuggled on rubber, toy, or small fishing boats that frequently capsize, along with inadequate life-saving and rescue equipment (Toaldo, 2015; Frontex, 2018). According to the table below, there were 3,139 Nigerian migrant deaths in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015, and that figure significantly increased to 5,143 in 2016. The number of migrant deaths decreased to 3,139 in 2017 and then to 606 in 2018. Under cruel conditions, migrants detained by the Libyan coast guards are either deported or imprisoned. In light of evidence of the cruel treatment of migrants in detention facilities, Human Rights Watch (2018) contended that Italy is permitting the Libyan coast guard to assume command of operations in the Mediterranean Sea.

Table 1. Estimated Number of Arrival and Death of Nigerian Migrants in the Mediterranean Sea

Year	Arrival to EU Via Mediterranean	Recorded Deaths in Mediterranean	Ration Deaths
2015	1,012,179	3,785	1:267 (0.37%)
2016	363,401	5,143	1:71 (1.42%)
2017	172,152	3,139	1:55 (1.82%)
2018 (1 Jan-30 April)	34,133	606	1:56 (1.78%)

Source: Adapted from Akkerman (2018)

The traffickers and smugglers prefer to sponsor female migrants through loans with high interest rates that they pledge to pay with a pact sealed through religious rituals that are regarded as binding (International Organisation for Migration, 2017a). The voodoo or Juju practice, as it is known in Nigeria, psychologically subdues and binds the fate of the women to the pledge made, the debt incurred, and the traffickers' wishes. Frontex's report (2018b) revealed that:

“...The Juju practice involves clippings of the victims' nails and pubic hair or cleaning the menstrual blood with a white cloth and putting it in a packet that the Juju priest will keep. This is done to make the victims and their families fear death, make sure they pay the traffickers when they arrive in Europe, and prevent them from reporting to the authorities. The massive debt bondage encourages migrants to become prostitutes in Europe, even while trafficking agents trick them into taking better-paying jobs” (Frontex, 2018b, p: 13).

According to the European Asylum Support Office (2015), it is not unusual for former prostitutes to join trafficking networks in order to recruit new migrants after they

have paid off their debt. Often referred to as "madams," these women pimps are in charge of funding the journey of new female migrants from Nigeria, some of whom are oblivious to the upcoming employment. They may be local or foreign, depending on the locality. Further explanation from Kazeem (2018) showed that the local madams who operate in Libya brothels only fund the trip to Libya after which the female migrants would have to pay off the debt owe and also source for money to pay for the last trip to Europe. International madams who operate in brothels in Europe such as Italy, France and Spain pay for the full sponsorship of female migrants to Europe with the expectation that they will recover the money as soon as the female migrants join prostitution ring.

Italy is fiercely opposing irregular migrants who travel to Libya via the central Mediterranean route as a result of a change of administration that placed a strong emphasis on stricter migration laws. Winter (2018) demonstrated that the new right-wing government in Italy had refused to allow rescued ships carrying migrants to dock at Italian ports. Rescued migrants can disembark in any nearby European port, including Italy, Spain, Malta, and Greece, in compliance with the EU naval rescue mission. Due to their closeness to African transit nations, these EU members are particularly impacted by the pressure and issue surrounding migration. However, in order for other EU nations to open their ports to receive rescued ships carrying migrants, the Italian government had asked for a review of the EU naval mission (Riegert, 2018; Winter, 2018). Trafficking and smuggling agencies now reroute migrants' journeys via the routes that connect Mauritania to Algeria and Morocco before crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Spain, mostly because Spain now permits rescue missions bringing migrants to dock on its shore.

4. AREA OF STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja, as well as the states of Lagos and Edo. These states and FCT were chosen because of their proximity to national, international, and non-governmental organisations that are involved in migration, as well as the prevalence of trafficking and smuggling networks that facilitate irregular migration to Europe. The study made use of qualitative research approach such that data was collected through In-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted in 2021 on seven (7) respondents including the European Union representative to Nigeria and ECOWAS; Frontex; the European External Action Service; and Idia Renaissance, a local non-governmental organisation that focuses on migration. Other respondents include the Nigeria Immigration Service; the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons; and the International Organisation for Migration. Table 3 presented the distribution of the respondents.

The selection of respondents was based on having sufficient expertise and understanding of the migration-related issues in the EU and Nigeria. Content analysis was used to analyse the acquired data. In analysing the results of the study, the two objectives were used. The first objective examine the factors that influence trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe while the second objective examine migration governance put in place to curb trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe.

5. FACTORS THAT CAUSES TRAFFICKING AND SMUGGLING OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS FROM NIGERIA TO EUROPE

There are many factors that cause trafficking and smuggling network of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe. First is the issue of border porosity with other Africa

countries which have not only exposed Nigeria to trafficking and smuggling activities, but also crime and terrorism related activities. One of the key functions of the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) is to promote legal migration and prevent irregular migration, trafficking and smuggling activities across Nigerian border. To this extent, border posts are established in every border crossing point between Nigeria and other neighbouring countries including Niger, Chad, Benin Republic and Cameroon, and various mechanisms such as routine border check, random and individual search are carried out to ensure compliance. Among other many ungoverned land borders, the NIS supervise border control and manage over 114 recognised land border posts (Arhin-Sam & Zanker, 2019). Most of these borders are shared with ECOWAS countries where free movement of persons and goods are guaranteed in the legal framework on migration. The ECOWAS Protocol of 1979 guaranteed right of residence which promote entry and abolition of visa requirements for a 90 day (3 months) stay in ECOWAS member states, provided such national is with necessary travelling requirement. However, trafficking and smuggling agents capitalise on ECOWAS Protocol to facilitate border crossing from Nigeria to Niger Republic, and that the activities of bus companies that transport migrants from Nigeria to Niger Republic also aid irregular migration. It was stated that:

Travelling from Kano in Nigeria to Agadez in Niger is relatively cheap, fast and simple because of the shared boundaries between the two countries and the increasing presence of many bus companies that compete for passengers by providing relatively cheap and affordable transport due to their vast knowledge of different routes. Migrants enter the territory of Niger Republic either through legal or illegal means under the ECOWAS free movement Protocol and further breach the Protocol by staying more than 90 days and for the most part, they are able to finance their journey from Niger to Libya *en route* to Europe (RI, 2021).

Nigeria share borders with Niger, Chad and Benin Republic who are members of ECOWAS and transit countries to other African countries that share frontiers with EU countries like Italy, Malta and Spain. For this reason, it was observed that since the 1979 ECOWAS protocol promote the right of entry and the abolition of visa requirements for a 90-day stay, accessibility to other African countries like Libya that share border with Niger and Chad, or Benin Republic that share border with Burkina Faso and onward to Algeria and Morocco has been relatively easy for traffickers and smugglers of migrants who embark on complex journey to Europe (R1, 2021).

The cultural perspective on migration in Nigeria which is based on the belief that remittance flow from migrants improve economic standard of families and relatives in home country also caused trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe. Average Nigerians view migration to Europe as household strategy to escape poverty and increase remittance flow (R2, 2021). This has further increased the chances of trafficking and smuggling agents who devise different illegal means of migration to Europe for irregular migrants either by flight through counterfeit passport visa or creation of riskier overland routes. With the difficulty of securing visa and restrictive measure imposed on immigration in EU, trafficking and smuggling agents could buy passport with valid EU visa belonging to another person for would-be migrant or another person's passport could be bought, information page which show passport photograph torn-off and replaced with a new information page and photograph of would-be migrant who

bought the passport (R3, 2021). For example, larger percentage of Nigerian irregular migrants in Europe are native of Edo, a state that is often described as the passage to Europe where in some towns like Uromi and Ekpoma, it is likely to find households who have relatives, mostly women who have migrated to Europe (Kastner, 2010; Agbakwuru 2018).

In some cases, travelling by flight from Lagos to Turkey is relatively easy for irregular migrants who gain access to external borders of the EU. The fact that Turkey is not a member of EU and the ease of securing Turkish visa enable trafficking and smuggling agents to provide valid passport visa for migrants who travel by flight to Turkey from where they cross EU external border by sea to Greece, Cyprus or Bulgaria and onward by land to their preferred destination countries (R3, 2021). As it is often called, this route is referred to as the Eastern Mediterranean which majorly comprised of irregular migrants from Syria, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. This was corroborated that:

Because of the risk involved in embarking on journey in Sahara desert and the vulnerabilities encountered, would-be migrants preferred the arrangement of travelling by flight to Turkey from where they join their counterparts along the Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey by boat to Greece through the Aeagan and Ionian Sea. It is the most travelled route since 2009-2018 with about 1.2 million arrivals of irregular migrants. And for the record, the 2015 Frontex reports showed that Nigerians, Ghanaians and Algerians are among migrants detected *en route* from Greece to Hungary. Also, some migrants make use of counterfeit documents to travel by flight from Turkey to EU countries (R4, 2021).

Another factor that cause trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe is the lack of effective monitoring and control by the security officials as a result of bribes they demand from smugglers and traffickers that convey irregular migrants on complex journey to Europe. The issue of corruption is exacerbated by the fact that immigration officials who are sent to remote areas close to border consider this as a form of punishment and are therefore unmotivated. This alone propels border officials to demand bribe from traffickers and smugglers of migrants who embark on risky journey to Europe. Corroborating this view, it was maintained that:

Migrants with fake and counterfeit documents or those without any travelling documents could cross the Niger border with the assistance of Nigeria Immigration Service officials who charge individual migrants as much as 7\$ at border crossing point. The route from Niger to Libya is the longest, complicated and risky part of the journey and this makes the bribe paid to be higher than expected. Payment of bribe to security forces between Agadez and Sabha could be 450\$ per vehicle and 30\$ per migrant (R1, 2021).

In support of the foregoing, Frontex (2015) maintained that bribe paid by migrants are crucial to sustain the functioning of security forces as money earmarked in the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) budget to buy diesel for vehicles, spare parts and food are simply inadequate. Even when apprehended and charge to court, traffickers are able to buy their way out or jump bail which resulted in the decrease of traffickers convicted and sentenced to prison.

Table 2. Reported Cases of Trafficking, Cases Won and Traffickers Convicted in Nigeria between 2015 and 2020

Year	Trafficking Reported	Trafficking Cases Won	Traffickers Convicted
2015	570	18	23
2016	721	25	31
2017	876	21	26
2018	1076	31	50
2019	203	18	25
2020	1032	38	51
Total	4478	151	206

Source: Adapted from NAPTIP

The table above corroborated the view regarding bribery and corruption of security officials by traffickers which reflected in the decrease in the number of trafficking cases won (151) and traffickers convicted (206) when compare with the increase in the number of trafficking cases reported (4478). While the year 2018 and 2020 witnessed the highest number of reported cases of trafficking (1076 and 1032), there was a decrease in the number of trafficking cases won in court (31 and 38) including traffickers convicted (50 and 51). This table revealed the continuous effort of the trafficking networks to sustain trafficking business through bribery and corruption of security officials including the Nigeria Police, Nigeria Immigration Service and NAPTIP who are responsible for rescuing victims of trafficking and prosecuting the traffickers.

The week performance and lack of appropriate technology for NIS to detect migrants with fake passport visa at the Nigerian airport has also been considered factors that cause trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe. And for the most part, NIS officials have been accused of collaborating with smugglers and traffickers who provide passage for migrants with counterfeit documents to travel by flight to the EU countries or Turkey to link the EU through the Eastern Mediterranean route (R5, 2021). More so, traffickers and smugglers capitalised on poverty and lack of unemployment of the youth to facilitate irregular migration to Europe. This position was explicitly stated:

Nigeria population is above 200 million which account for 20% and half of the total population of Africa and West Africa respectively. Meanwhile, half of the populations are youths who are less than 19 years old while only 3% are 65 years and above. In this sense, migration to Europe is regarded as being selective particularly in favour of the active and young Nigerian population. This factor couple with poverty, unemployment and lack of economic opportunities consequently create large potential irregular migrants who have high propensity for international migration (R6, 2021).

Also corroborating this viewpoint, the National Bureau of Statistics (2020) showed that unemployment rate rose from 23.1% in the third quarter of 2018 to 27.1% in the second quarter of 2020, whereby the youth unemployment rate increased from 29.7% in the third quarter of 2018 to 34.9% in the second quarter of 2020. Given this analysis, migration from Nigeria to Europe appears to be primarily motivated by economic factors, as well as increase in unemployment rate among the youth, and not threat to security or natural disasters as claimed by migrants applying for asylum in Europe.

6. MIGRATION GOVERNANCE PUT IN PLACE IN CURBING TRAFFICKING AND SMUGGLING OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS FROM NIGERIA TO EUROPE

One pertinent migration governance that was put in place to curb trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe is the adoption of 2000 Cotonou agreement (ACP-EU Migration Dialogue) revised in 2005 and 2010. The Cotonou agreement which was based on EU cooperation with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries emphasised on migration and development with a major focus on three pillars; migration and development, legal migration and illegal migration. The Cotonou agreement was adopted as a framework to provide available route for legal migration that will help promote development in the concerned ACP countries. The framework for cooperation with ACP-EU was stated in article 13 of the Cotonou agreement which focused on improving conditions in ACP countries, promoting legal migration, and return of irregular migrants. It is on this basis that on November 2015, EU and some African countries agreed on action plan which gave rise to the establishment of EUTF for Africa for the purpose of addressing root causes of irregular migration and displace persons in Africa.

The three pillars of the Cotonou agreement (migration and development, legal migration and illegal migration) was sub-divided to cover seven specific migration issue which are mobility of skilled persons; legal migration; readmission; visa; smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings; migrants' rights and remittances. Adequate information was extracted from mobility of skilled persons, legal migration and smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings from the seven specific migration issues:

The mobility of skilled persons was aimed to ensure circular migration to avoid concentration of skilled migrants in EU and tackle the issue of brain drain in migration policies of the ACP countries. It is also based on the recognition of skills and professional qualifications that will promote national development. Legal migration focused on availability of labour migration, social rights of migrant workers in EU and pre-departure training for ACP nationals leaving for Europe to work. The Cotonou agreement also emphasised on prevention and prosecution of traffickers and smugglers, as well as the protection of victims of smuggling and trafficking. Furthermore, it echoed the need to improve access to migrant's rights through exchange of good practices by the ACP-EU (R7, 2021).

More so, in an effort to combat trafficking and smuggling of migrants from Nigeria to Europe, Frontex and Nigeria formed a joint and coordination patrol network across Nigerian borders, support capacity building through border surveillance, research and information sharing and also launched cooperation platform on migrants smuggling. More so, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the EU established joint maritime crime information cell in Mediterranean called European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) also known as operation Sophia (named after a child born by a Somali woman in a rescued ship heading to Europe and the German frigate name the child Sophia). The task of operation Sophia was to rescue migrants, identify, capture and destroy vessels used by smugglers in the Mediterranean Sea (R4, 2021). Moreover, Frontex and Europol developed profile of vessels used by smugglers to identify potential vessels and monitor their movement. Also, it was stated that:

Europol launched European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling (ECAMS) to support EU member states in destroying smuggling networks involved in irregular migration. In the same vein, Europol established Information Clearing House (ICH) to identify illegal internet content use by smugglers to attract migrants and request for its removal. There are other EU member states like Italy and Spain joint operations with Libya coast guards to combat the activities of traffickers and smuggler from preventing migrants' ship to cross the international waters (R3, 2021).

Furthermore, through the use of information technology, EU developed specific border control system such as the Visa Information System (VIS) to detect fraudulent visa applicants through thorough background checks and better information exchange between member states, as well as the introduction of Schengen Information System (SIS) for sharing information on migrants which make it difficult to enter Schengen area with false documents and also help to identify migrants with over-stay visa or those who enter the EU or associated member states clandestinely (R7, 2021). More so, EU naval and other foreign ships like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) have taking the responsibility to embark on search and rescue mission in the Mediterranean Sea and transfer migrants to the nearest EU members states port in Italy, Malta and Spain where they will be lodged temporarily at the reception centres and given necessary hospitality (R4, 2021).

Another migration governance put in place to curbing trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe is the establishment of European Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) in Nigeria which emphasis on legal migration and sustainable development. The major reason why the fund was established by the EU is to control and prevent irregular migration to Europe. It is part of a larger EU policy for Africa which emphasised on economic development in Africa to dissuade irregular migration to Europe (Zanker, 2019; Marin, 2020). The basic assumption here is that socioeconomic and political conditions in Africa, as well as economic growth and labour supply in EU are among indices that drive trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants to Europe. To this ends, EU established EUTF for Africa to promote economic development, improve security and migration governance in order to deter irregular migration to Europe (Juncker, 2017; Tardis, 2018).

7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

It is essential to state that some of the migration governance put in place by the EU to curb trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants to Europe further attached strict conditionality to legal migration. For example, the major part of the pillars of 2000 Cotonou agreement; migration and development as well as legal migration attached strict conditionality and policy to legal migration through EU Return Directive and Readmission Agreements (RDRAs) which emphasised on common procedures for returning irregular migrants and strengthening migration cooperation by ensuring speedy and sustainable return of irregular migrants for the promotion of legal migration. Findings showed that the conditionality attached to Readmission Agreements (RAs) including visa liberalisation and more relaxed travel conditions to Europe are only applicable for highly-skilled migrants and businessmen, a situation that has been described as brain drain for Nigeria and brain gain for the EU (Castillejo, 2017; Kervyn & Shilhav, 2017). The Return Directive (RD) policy have negative impact on the decision of irregular migrants to return to Nigeria because they are less likely to leave Europe when they know it will be difficult to go back

due to the entry ban that accompany the RD, and that most of the returns are not done in compliance with the laid down regulation as some Nigerian irregular migrants are return to countries of transit (R3, 2021). The EU RDRAs conditionality and policy continued to propel traffickers and smugglers to seek for divert routes for irregular migrants.

The introduction of EUTF for Africa was based on the assumption that migration development cooperation from EU will deter irregular migration from origin and transit countries to Europe. In other words, the EUTF for Africa is used to address four main goals; economic and employment opportunities; strengthening the resilience of vulnerable communities; improved migration management in countries of origin, transit and destination; and improved governance, conflict prevention and reduction of forced displacement and irregular migration (Zanker, 2019; EUTF, 2021). However, findings from the study showed that considerable amount of EUTF for Africa is use to enforce stricter border policing which undermines respect for human rights and constitutes crimes against humanity from the enforcement agencies like the Police and the NIS who are accused of violence and abuse against migrants. (R4, 2021) As EUTF for Africa is used to supports the enforcement agencies on border security, it serves as a form of reward system to reduce human mobility and weaken respect for democracy and human rights (R6, 2021). More so, findings revealed that increase in border securitisation through the EUTF for Africa enables traffickers and smugglers to navigate migrant's journey to another riskier routes (R2, 2021).

Findings revealed that the joint and coordination patrol network across Nigerian borders between Frontex and Nigeria is against the free movement of persons and goods as enshrined in Nigeria constitution and ECOWAS Protocol which emphasized on the free movement of persons and goods within ECOWAS States (for the period of 90 days) and also view as Eurocentric agenda that contradict local needs, especially those that make use of border between Nigeria and neighbouring countries like Niger and Chad for transporting goods and services. This form of securitisation of border is a threat to people's privacy and it can be used to stifle human and democratic rights (R5, 2023). Again, Frontex joint operation with Nigeria across its borders is regarded as a way of Nigeria handing over border control and territory to the EU, a situation that is antithetical to the principle of sovereignty and state autonomy (R4, 2023). Finding also showed that stricter border policy by the EU has condition Nigeria to readjust some of its migration policies in favour of the EU in order to access some form of financial and humanitarian aid as well as other diplomatic support. Explaining further, it was asserted that the readjustment in migration policy is detrimental to the rights of migrants where in some cases, they are denied the rights of movement and those apprehended are victimised and also experience prolong detention (R7, 2023).

8. CONCLUSION

This study examined the factors that cause trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe and examined migration governance put in place to curb trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe. Findings from the study identified key factors that causes trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe which include border porosity with other Africa countries, the cultural perspective of migration which is based on the belief that remittance flow improve economic standard of families, travelling by flight from Lagos to Turkey which is relatively easy for irregular migrants who gain access to external borders of the EU and demand of bribes by the Nigeria Immigration Service officials

from smugglers and traffickers that convey irregular migrants on complex journey to Europe.

Moreover, findings from the study revealed some of the migration governance that are put in place by the EU to curb trafficking and smuggling of irregular migrants from Nigeria to Europe which include the adoption of revised 2000 Cotonou agreement which focus on three pillars migration and development; legal migration; and illegal migration, joint and coordination patrol network by Frontex and Nigeria across Nigerian borders, Europol establishment of ECAMS and Information Clearing House to identify illegal internet content use by smugglers, establishment of Visa Information System to detect fraudulent visa as well as the establishment of EUTF for Africa in Nigeria which emphasis on legal migration and sustainable development.

The study concluded that the EU migration governance put in place to curb the activities of traffickers and smugglers of Nigerian irregular migrants to Europe is very strict and stringent in nature, so it has not really translated into an increase in return of irregular migrants, prosecution of traffickers and smugglers or destruction of trafficking and smuggling networks. Rather, it has caused traffickers and smugglers to divert migrants' journey through navigation and detection of riskier and precarious routes.

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