



One in three Nigerians have considered emigration, most to find economic opportunity

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 231 | Thomas Isbell and Oluwale Ojewale

Summary

Migration has become a top-of-mind and highly politicized issue. In a context of high poverty and unemployment in developing countries and demand for skilled young workers in many developed economies, global streams of people are likely to continue (Rapoza, 2017). Migration can have positive as well as negative consequences for both origin and destination countries. In destination countries, emigration may fill gaps in skilled and unskilled labor. In origin countries, family and friends receive remittances, which help the economy through increased spending. On the other hand, "brain drain" hurts emerging economies in the global South as the best young minds seek education and employment abroad (Capuano & Marfouk, 2013; Kekana, 2018; O'Toole, 2018). And populist movements in Europe and the United States have targeted immigration as a supposed threat to domestic employment, security, and national culture (Galston, 2018; Roth, 2017; Ratcliffe, 2017).

In 2016, Nigerians made up the largest migrant populations entering Italy and Greece (Ikeke, 2017). Nigerians have also been identified as the largest cohort of migrants trapped in Libya in the protracted Mediterranean migrant crisis (Eurostat, 2015). The International Organization for Migration (2018) reported that between May 2017 and January 2018, more than 6,700 Nigerian migrants were returned home from Libya through the efforts of Nigerian and international agencies.

How do ordinary Nigerians see emigration and its causes? Findings from a recent Afrobarometer survey show that more than one in three Nigerians have considered emigration, though far fewer are making actual plans to leave. The data support concerns about brain drain: Young and educated Nigerians are most likely to consider going abroad. Finding work and escaping economic hardship are most often given as the main reason to consider emigrating.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer national partners in Nigeria, CLEEN Foundation and Practical Sampling International, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,600 adult Nigerians between 26 April and 10 May 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Nigeria in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2012, and 2014.

Key findings

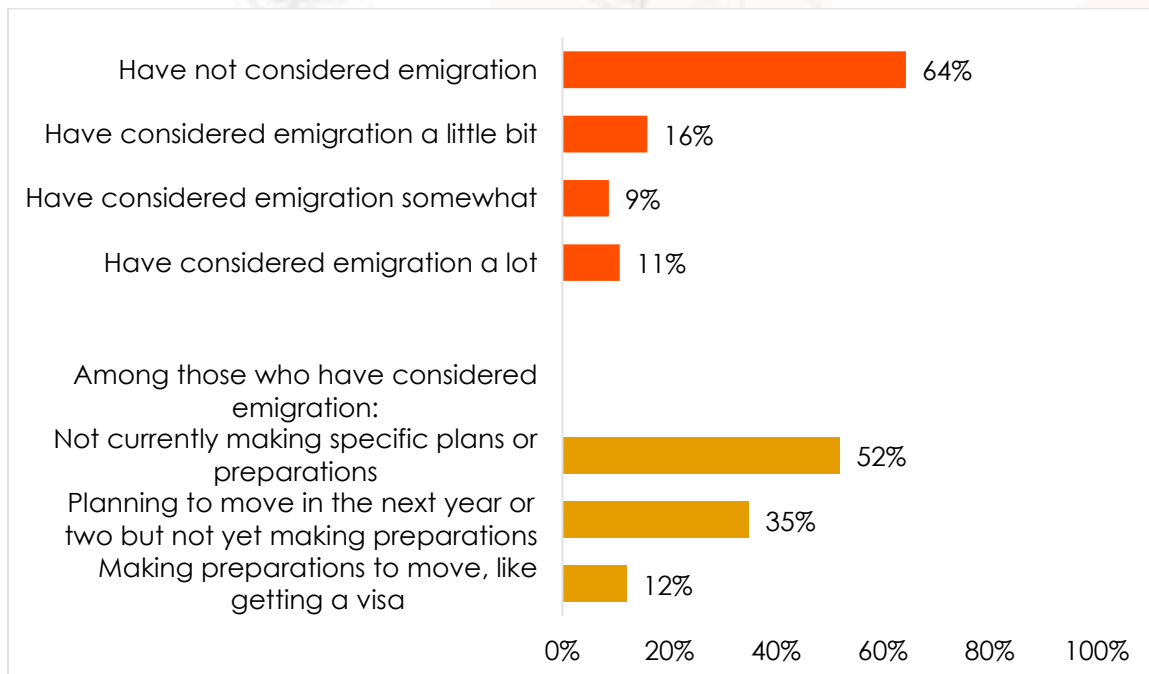
- More than one in three Nigerians (35%) say they have considered emigration, including 11% who say they have given “a lot” of thought to the idea.
- Respondents who have a post-secondary education (44%), who live in cities (42%), and who are younger than 35 (39%) are especially likely to consider going abroad.
- Economic reasons dominate respondents' motivations for emigration. Three-fourths of those who have considered emigration cite as the main reason finding work (35%), escaping economic hardship/poverty (31%), or pursuing better business prospects (10%).
- The most popular destinations for Nigerians who have considered emigration are North America (32%) and Europe (21%). About one in five say they would go to Ghana (9%), another country in West Africa (5%), or somewhere else in Africa (6%).

Considered emigration

More than one in three Nigerians (35%)¹ say they have considered emigration at least “a little bit,” including 11% who have considered it “a lot” (Figure 1).

Of those who have considered emigration, 12% say they are actively preparing to move, while 35% are planning to move in the next year or two but are not yet making concrete preparations. Half (52%) say they are not making any specific plans or preparations.

Figure 1: Have considered emigration | Nigeria | 2017



All respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live?

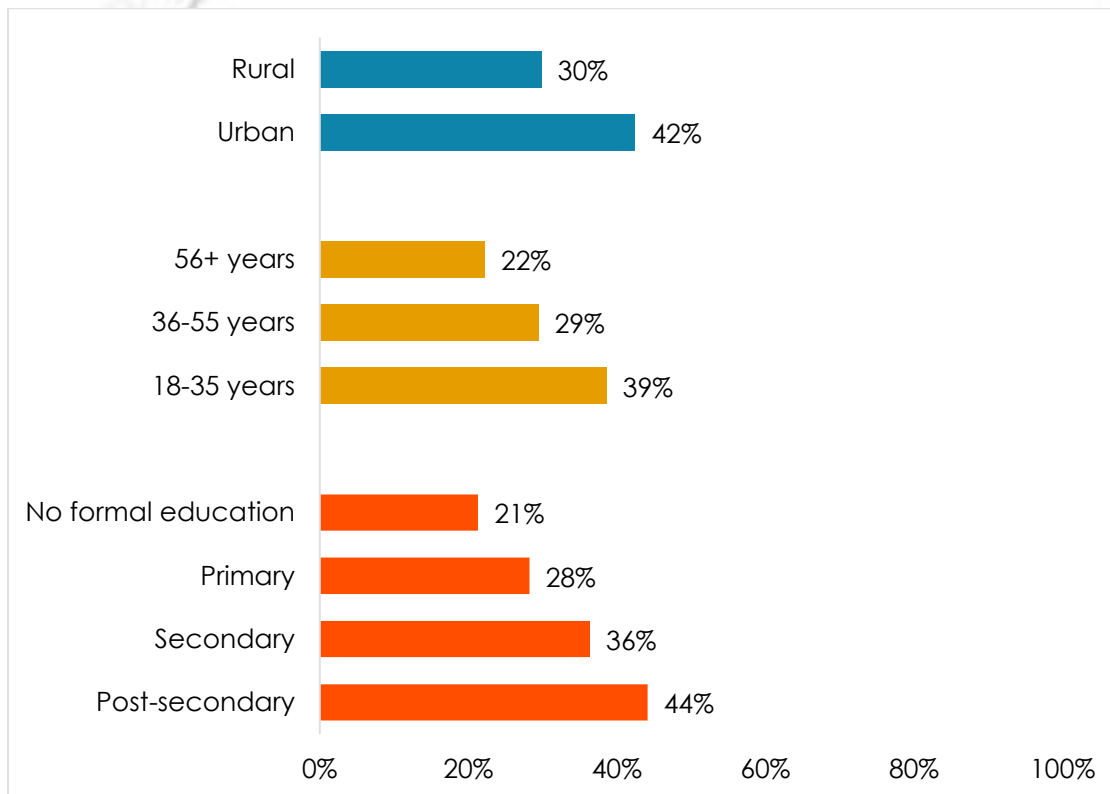
Respondents who said they had considered emigration “a lot,” “somewhat,” or “a little bit” were asked: How much planning or preparation have you done in order to move to another country to live?

¹ Due to rounding, total percentages may differ slightly from the sum of individual sub-categories.

Thoughts of emigration increase steadily with respondents' level of education, ranging from 21% of those with no formal education to 44% among those with post-secondary qualifications (Figure 2). Younger respondents are more likely to consider leaving the country than their elders (39% of 18- to 35-year-olds vs. 22% of those over 55). And city residents tend to think more about emigration than their rural counterparts (42% vs. 30%).

Analysis by respondents' economic status² showed no major difference in their propensity to consider emigration.

Figure 2: Have considered emigration | by socio-demographic group | Nigeria | 2017



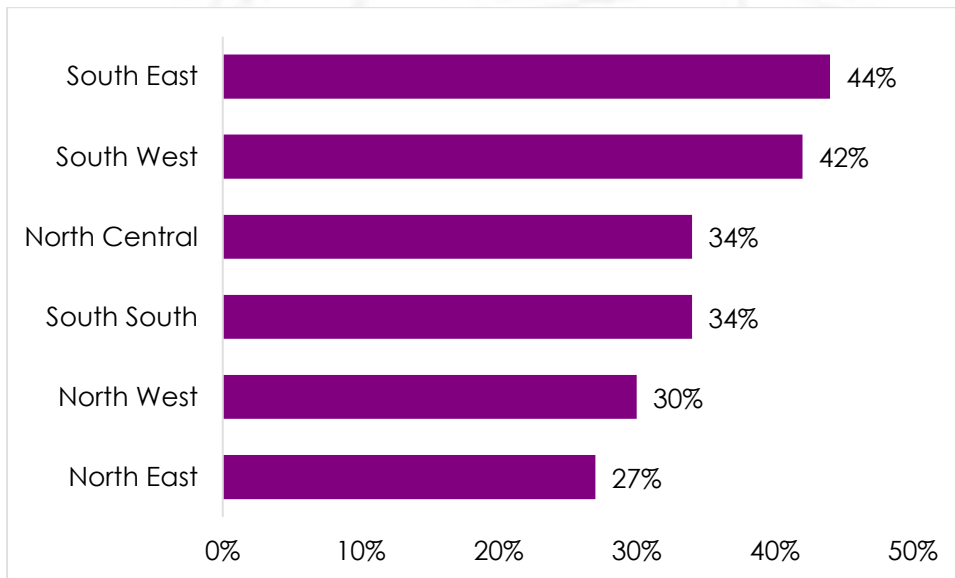
Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live? (% who say "a little bit," "somewhat," or "a lot")

Respondents in southern Nigeria are more likely to have considered emigration than their northern counterparts, ranging from more than four in 10 in South East (44%) and South West (42%) to fewer than one-third in North West (30%) and North East (27%) (Figure 3).

These variations by geographic zone may be related in part to differences in poverty levels and access to information. While nationally we found no major differences across lived poverty levels in the propensity to consider emigration, the poorer and more remote northern zones may also have less access to information, which may influence ideas about emigration (Eguzozie, 2018; Amzat, 2017).

² Afrobarometer assesses respondents' "lived poverty" based on responses to the following questions: *Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?*

Figure 3: Have considered emigration | by geopolitical zone | Nigeria | 2017

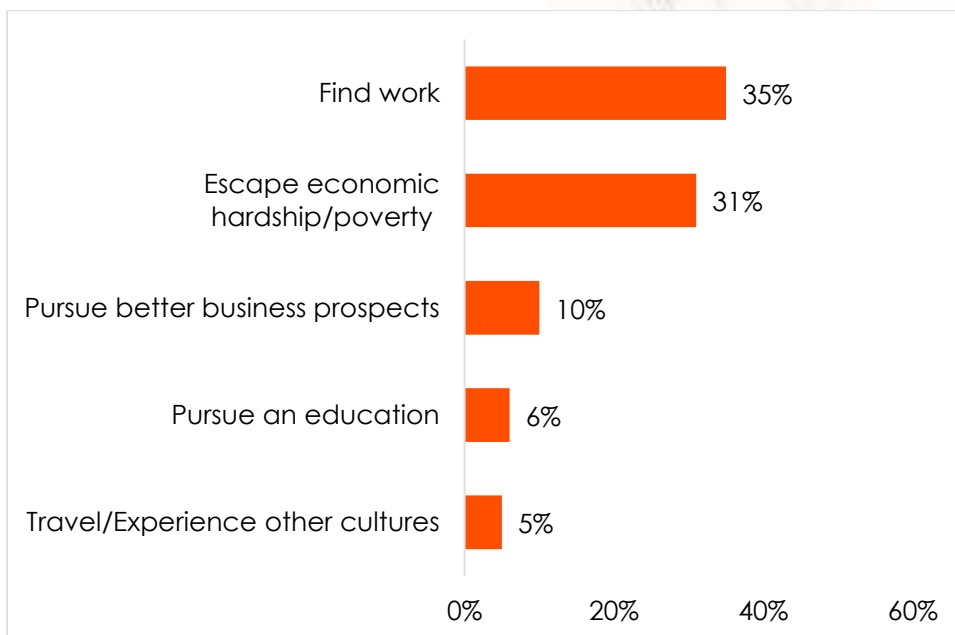


Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live? (% who say “a little bit,” “somewhat,” or “a lot”)

Reasons to consider leaving Nigeria

Among Nigerians who have considered emigration, economic reasons are the main driver (Figure 4). The most common reasons cited for considering moving abroad are to find work (35%), to escape economic hardship/poverty (31%), and to pursue better business prospects (10%). Only a few cite pursuing an education (6%) or tourism (5%) as their main reason to consider emigration.

Figure 4: Reasons to consider emigration | Nigeria | 2017



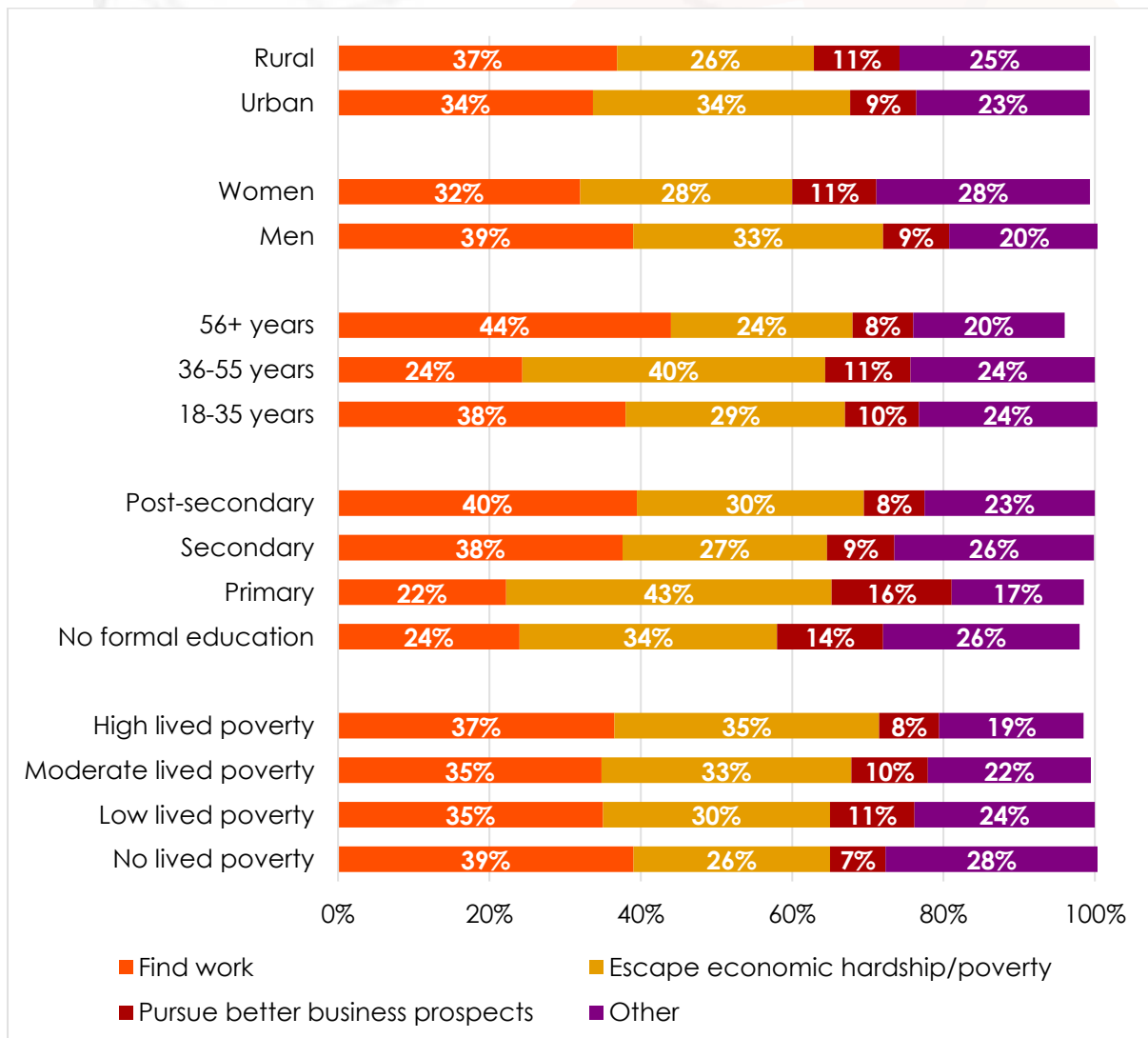
Respondents who said they had considered emigration were asked: There are several reasons why people leave their home to live in another country for an extended period of time. What about you? What is the most important reason why you would consider moving from Nigeria?

A breakdown by socio-demographic group confirms the overwhelming importance of economic factors in motivating considerations of emigration while also highlighting some interesting differences (Figure 5).

Across all groups, majorities cite as their most important reasons unemployment and economic hardship. To some extent, of course, these may be considered two expressions of the same desire for better living conditions. But respondents with secondary or post-secondary education are significantly more likely to express this motivation in terms of finding a job, while those with primary education or no formal schooling are more likely to voice their desire to escape poverty. Respondents in the 36-to-55 age range also tend to emphasize escaping economic hardship (as opposed to finding work) more often than their younger or older counterparts.

The wealthiest respondents tend to emphasize finding work over escaping hardship/poverty, as well as to cite “other” reasons.

Figure 5: Top reasons to consider emigration | by socio-demographic group | Nigeria | 2017



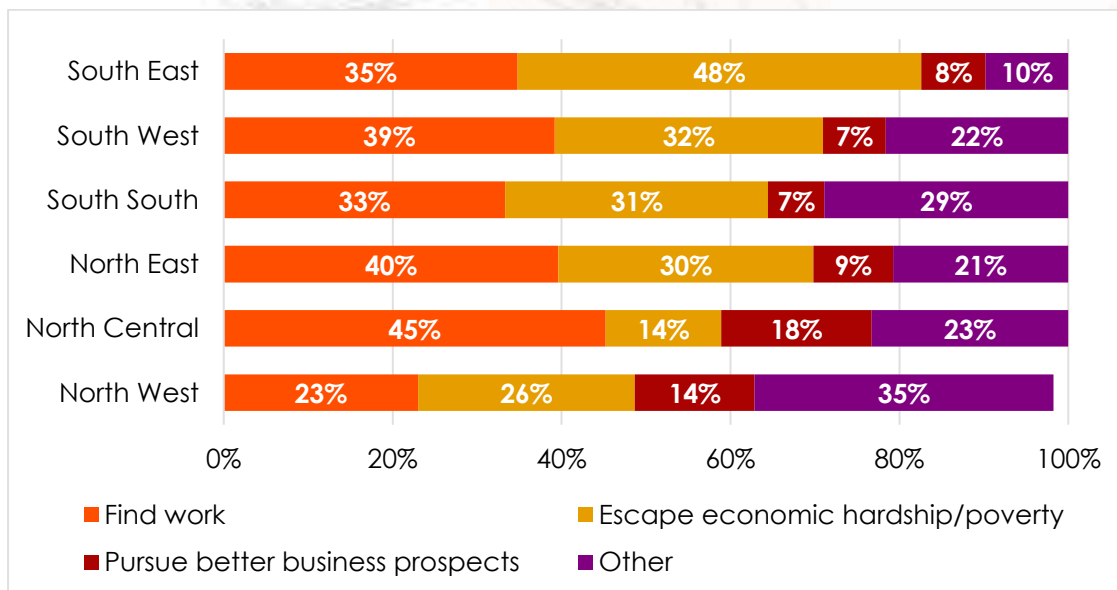
Respondents who said they had considered emigration were asked: There are several reasons why people leave their home to live in another country for an extended period of time. What about you? What is the most important reason why you would consider moving from Nigeria?

Other sources align with these basic observations about emigration drivers, such as high unemployment (18.8% in 2017) and other economic difficulties (Vanguard, 2017a; Oketola et al., 2016) and the drive, especially among professionals, to prospect for work beyond the shores of Nigeria. A recent report by Nigeria Health Watch, for example, showed that about eight out of 10 medical doctors are currently seeking work opportunities abroad (Owoseye, 2018).

They also point beyond unemployment to the government's failure to provide basic public goods such as electricity, security, good roads, and health care services as motivating factors for emigration, especially among the middle class (predominantly educated and living in urban areas) (Oxfam, 2017). While most media reports about migration from Nigeria have focused on the thousands who take the dangerous routes across the Sahara Desert and Mediterranean Sea to try to reach Europe, the preferred route for many of these wealthier emigrants is a formal path to economic immigrant status in the United Kingdom, the United States, and more recently Canada (Kazeem, 2018).

By geopolitical zone, residents in the South East are by far the most likely to cite economic hardship/poverty as the most important reason to consider emigration (48%), while respondents in North Central emphasize finding work (45%) and pursuing better business opportunities (18%) much more frequently than economic hardship (14%) (Figure 6). The South East's emphasis on economic hardship may be related to the area's infrastructure deficit, a critical barrier to economic development; the South East has the worst road infrastructure in Nigeria, and only 9% of nationally generated power is allocated to the zone (Vanguard, 2017b).

Figure 6: Top reasons to consider emigration | by geopolitical zone | Nigeria | 2017

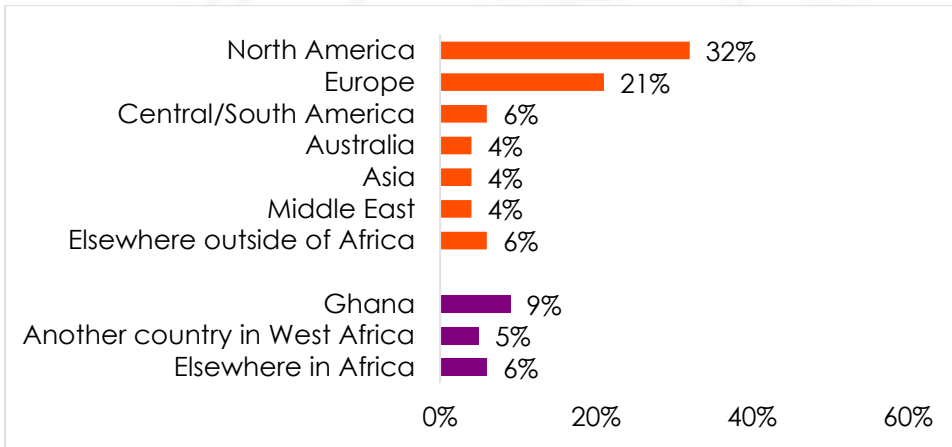


Respondents who said they had considered emigration were asked: *There are several reasons why people leave their home to live in another country for an extended period of time. What about you? What is the most important reason why you would consider moving from Nigeria?*

North America and Europe most popular destinations

When asked what their destination of choice would be, respondents who have considered emigration most commonly cite North America (32%) and Europe (21%). Around one in five prefer an African destination; Ghana (9%) is the favored choice, while 5% cite another country in West Africa and 6% look elsewhere in Africa (6%) (Figure 7).

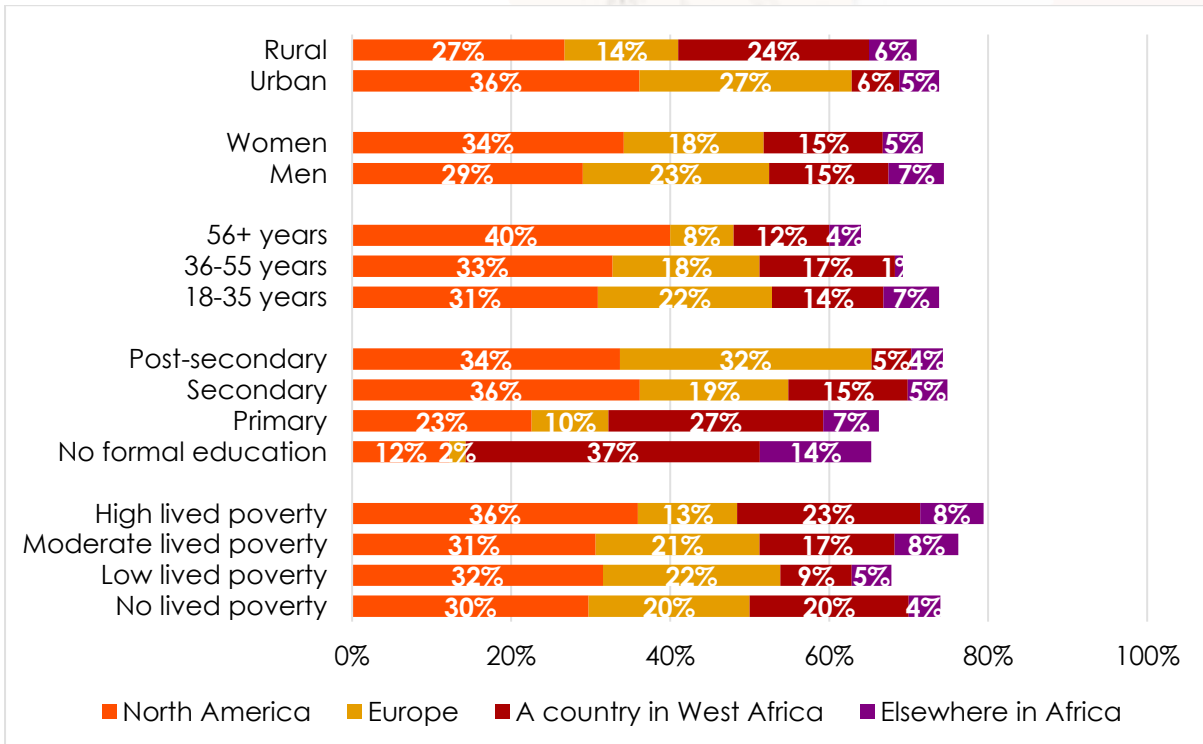
Figure 7: Most likely destination for potential emigration | Nigeria | 2017



Respondents who said they had considered emigration were asked: If you were to move to another country, where would you be most likely to go?

As shown in Figure 8, North America and Europe are considerably more popular destinations among urban residents and respondents with secondary or post-secondary educational qualifications, while West Africa and other African countries play a larger part in the emigration considerations of rural and less-educated respondents. By gender, age group, and level of lived poverty, respondents are quite similar in their thinking as to whether or not to leave the African continent. Female, senior, and poor respondents express a somewhat more pronounced attraction to North America rather than Europe.

Figure 8: Most likely destination for potential emigration | by socio-demographic group | Nigeria | 2017



Respondents who said they had considered emigration were asked: If you were to move to another country, where would you be most likely to go?

Conclusion

Despite economic progress in many African countries, many Africans still choose to start a new life abroad. In Nigeria, more than one in three citizens say they have considered emigration, including 11% who have considered it “a lot.” Younger and more educated Nigerians are especially likely to have considered emigration. Unsurprisingly, finding work and escaping economic hardship are the most frequently cited reasons for considering emigration. The most likely destination for potential emigrants are North America and Europe; only small minorities see another African country as their best option.

These findings clearly point to the need for pro-people and pro-development economic policies that will give young citizens reasons to stay in or return to Nigeria.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It’s easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

References

- Amzat, A. (2017). Despite decades of funding, literacy level in the northern states remains low. *Guardian*. <https://guardian.ng/news/despite-decades-of-funding-literacy-level-in-the-northern-states-remains-low/>.
- Capuano, S., & Marfouk, A. (2013). African brain drain and its impact on source countries: What do we know and what do we need to know? *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 15(4), 297-314.
- Eurostat. (2015). Top 10 origins of people applying for asylum in the EU. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>.
- Eguzozie, B. (2018). Northern states worst in Nigeria sub-national poverty rates. *Business Day Online*. <https://www.businessdayonline.com/business-economy/article/northern-states-worst-nigeria-sub-national-poverty-rates-zamfaras-92/>.
- Galston, W. A. (2018). The rise of European populism and the collapse of the center-left. *Brookings Institution*. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/03/08/the-rise-of-european-populism-and-the-collapse-of-the-center-left/>.
- Ikeke, N. (2017). Nigerians top list of migrants to Europe. *NAIJ*. <https://www.naija.ng/1085015-nigerians-top-list-migrants-europe.html#1085015>.
- International Organization for Migration. (2018). UN migration agency assists 132 Nigerian migrants return from Libya. <https://nigeria.iom.int/media/news/un-migration-agency-assists-132-nigerian-migrants-return-libya>.
- Kazeem Y. (2018). Nigeria's stressed-out middle-class is trying to leave in droves and the destination is Canada. *Quartz Africa*. <https://qz.com/africa/1271591/nigerias-stressed-out-middle-class-is-trying-to-leave-in-droves-and-the-destination-is-canada/>.
- Kekana, M. (2018). Home away from home: The rise of immigration from Africa to Europe and the US. *Mail & Guardian*. <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-03-22-00-home-away-from-home-african-migration-to-europe-and-the-us-on-the-rise>.
- Oketola, D., Adepegba, A., Ben-Nwankwo N., Falodi, F., Adeoye G., & Alagbe, J. (2016). Economic hardship: Nigerians seek greener pastures abroad. <http://punchng.com/economic-hardship-nigerians-seek-greener-pastures-abroad/>.
- O'Toole, G. (2018). Reversing the flow: Tempting emigrants back home. *Global Government Forum*. <https://www.globalgovernmentforum.com/reversing-the-flow-tempting-emigrants-back-home/>.
- Owoseye, A. (2018). Special report: Anxiety as Nigerian doctors leave country in droves. *Premium Times*. 3 April 2018. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/263833-special-report-anxiety-as-nigerian-doctors-leave-country-in-droves.html>.
- Oxfam International. (2017). Inequality in Nigeria: Exploring the drivers. https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/cr-inequality-in-nigeria-170517-en.pdf.
- Rapoza, K. (2017). Here's why Europe really needs more immigrants. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2017/08/15/heres-why-europe-really-needs-more-immigrants/#233c14b74917>.
- Ratcliffe, R. (2017). Populism and immigration pose major threat to global democracy, study says. *Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/nov/15/populism-immigration-major-threat-global-democracy-study-international-idea>.
- Roth, K. (2017). The dangerous rise of populism. *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/dangerous-rise-of-populism>.

Vanguard. (2017a). Nigeria's unemployment rate rises from 14.2% to 18.8%

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/12/nigerias-unemployment-rate-rises-14-2-18-8/>.

Vanguard. (2017b). Economic summit: South-East has the worst road infrastructure – Nwodo.

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/11/economic-summit-south-east-worst-road-infrastructure-nwodo/>.

Thomas Isbell is a PhD student at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. Email: tisbell@afrobarometer.org.

Oluwole Ojewale is assistant program manager at the CLEEN Foundation in Abuja, Nigeria. Email: oluwole.ojewale@cleen.org.

Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

Financial support for Afrobarometer Round 7 has been provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development via the U.S. Institute of Peace, the National Endowment for Democracy, and Transparency International.

Donations help the Afrobarometer Project give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at www.afrobarometer.org) or contact Felix Biga (felixbiga@afrobarometer.org) to discuss institutional funding.

For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.



Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 231 | 27 August 2018