# Government Initiatives In Mitigating Irregular Migration, Human Trafficking, And Brain Drain: An Assessment Of Effectiveness In Nigeria (2015–2023)

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## Abstract
*Between 2015 and 2023, Nigeria introduced several migration-related initiatives, including the National Migration Policy (2015), the National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons (2022–2026), the establishment of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (2019), and the Central Bank's Naira-4-Dollar scheme (2021). These aimed to curb irregular migration, combat human trafficking, reduce brain drain, and leverage diaspora contributions. Drawing on survey data, official reports, and international sources, this study assesses the effectiveness of these policies. Findings reveal moderate success overall (mean effectiveness = 2.65). Anti-trafficking measures were most effective, while reintegration programs showed modest impact. However, initiatives to address brain drain and public awareness campaigns on irregular migration were largely ineffective. Implementation gaps, underfunding, weak coordination, and structural push factors—such as unemployment, insecurity, and poor working conditions—continue to drive migration challenges. Compared with Ghana and Senegal, Nigeria's approach remains fragmented and reactive. The study recommends stronger legal migration pathways, enhanced investment in anti-trafficking and reintegration, professional retention strategies, and more community-centred awareness campaigns.*

***Keywords:*** *Nigeria; migration governance; irregular migration; human trafficking; brain drain; diaspora engagement; remittances; policy effectiveness*

## I. Introduction

Migration remains central to Nigeria's development trajectory. As Africa's most populous country, Nigeria experiences diverse migration patterns, from regional mobility within ECOWAS to significant emigration to Europe, North America, and the Gulf (Afolayan, 2021). While diaspora remittances—averaging $20–25 billion annually—provide critical foreign exchange and household support (World Bank, 2022), migration also generates serious challenges. These include persistent irregular migration through the Sahel–Mediterranean corridor (IOM, 2023), widespread human trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2023), and a worsening exodus of skilled professionals, especially in healthcare and education (Ojo, 2022).

Since 2015, Nigeria has taken significant policy steps to address these issues, such as adopting the National Migration Policy (2015), strengthening the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), creating the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) in 2019, and introducing the Naira-4-Dollar scheme by the Central Bank in 2021 (CBN, 2021; NIDCOM, 2020). Despite these efforts, outcomes remain mixed.

This article critically assesses the effectiveness of these initiatives. It asks: to what extent have Nigerian government policies reduced irregular migration, curbed human trafficking, mitigated brain drain, and enhanced diaspora engagement between 2015 and 2023?

## II. Literature Review And Theoretical Framework

**Push–Pull Migration Theory**

Migration is shaped by "push" factors in origin countries (unemployment, insecurity, poverty) and "pull" factors in destination countries (higher wages, stability, diaspora networks) (Lee, 1966). Nigeria's initiatives seek to reduce push drivers while promoting safer, legal migration routes. However, persistent irregular outflows suggest structural drivers remain unaddressed (Albert-Makyur, 2022).

**Policy Implementation Theory**

Policy success depends not only on design but also on execution. Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) highlight institutional capacity and coordination, while Lipsky's (1980) concept of "street-level bureaucracy" stresses how frontline discretion shapes outcomes. Nigeria's migration policies illustrate the gap between adoption and effective absorption (Hagen-Zanker, 2023).

**Human Capital and Diaspora Framework**

Brain drain is often viewed as a loss of human capital, but diasporas can contribute through remittances, skills, and networks (Docquier & Rapoport, 2009; Meyer, 2011). Nigeria's approach has largely emphasised financial flows via remittances, with limited mechanisms for structured skills transfer or circular migration compared to peers like Ghana and Senegal (Adebayo, 2021).

**Comparative Lessons**

Ghana has institutionalized diaspora engagement through voting rights and diaspora bonds, while Senegal has established bilateral labour-mobility agreements with Spain (Baizán & González-Ferrer, 2016). Nigeria's more reactive, fragmented strategies highlight the importance of structured, trust-based approaches (Amadi, 2024).

## III. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 360 respondents, including returnees, policymakers, and migration stakeholders. Responses were measured on a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Disagree Strongly). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean scores), chi-square tests, and one-sample t-tests, with a mean of 2.5 as the threshold for effectiveness. Secondary data were drawn from official government documents, international reports (IOM, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2023; World Bank, 2022), and peer-reviewed literature. This triangulation ensured robust analysis of both perceptions and documented outcomes.

## IV. Results

**Table 1. Respondents' Opinions on the Effectiveness of Government Initiatives (2015–2023)**

| Policy Area | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Mean | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Irregular migration reduced | 150 | 90 | 105 | – | 2.58 | Accepted |
| Human trafficking curbed | 210 | 60 | 30 | 60 | 3.17 | Accepted |
| Adequate reintegration support | 180 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 3.00 | Accepted |
| Brain drain reduced | 60 | 45 | 180 | 75 | 2.25 | Rejected |
| Awareness campaigns effective | 60 | 45 | 180 | 75 | 2.25 | Rejected |

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*

Figure 1. Respondents' Mean Ratings of Government Initiatives.

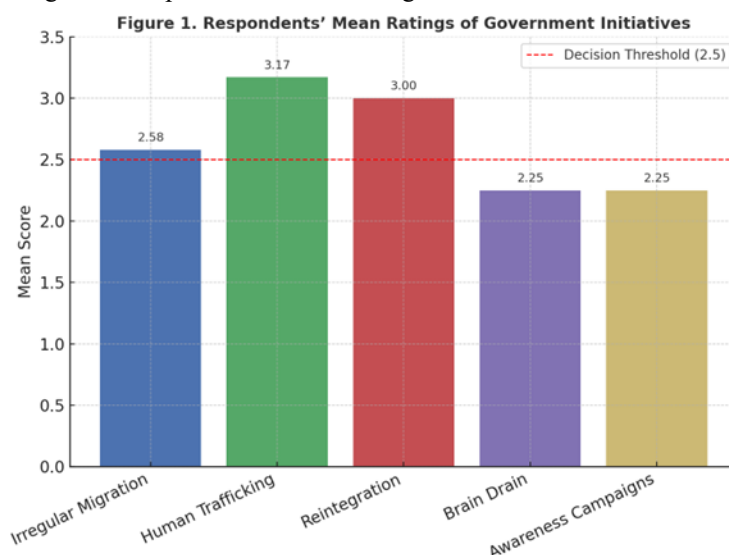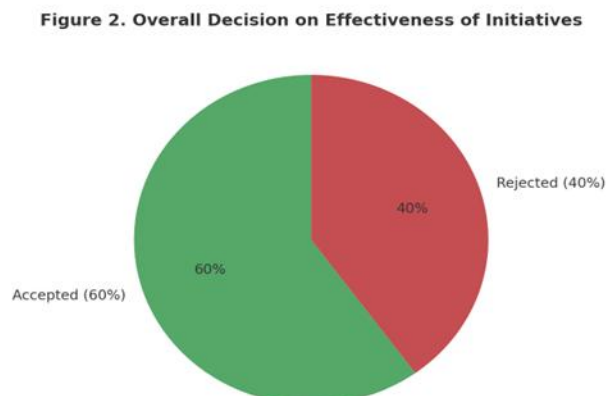Figure 2. Overall Decision on Effectiveness of Initiatives.



Figure 2. Overall Decision on Effectiveness of Initiatives

## V. Discussion

The findings show **moderate effectiveness** overall. Due to persistent structural push factors, irregular migration policies had a limited impact (Afolayan, 2021). Anti-trafficking was the strongest area of progress, supported by NAPTIP reforms and international cooperation (NAPTIP, 2022; U.S. Department of State, 2023). Reintegration programs were moderately effective but constrained by underfunding and donor dependence (IOM, 2023).

Brain drain policies were largely ineffective, as professionals continued to leave Nigeria for better conditions abroad (Ojo, 2022). This confirms the human capital framework: without retention incentives, brain circulation remains elusive (Docquier & Rapoport, 2009). Awareness campaigns failed to resonate due to generic messaging and insufficient grassroots engagement (IOM, 2023). This suggests that policy communication must be paired with tangible socio-economic alternatives.

## VI. Conclusion

Nigeria has established a comprehensive migration policy framework; however, its implementation remains uneven. While anti-trafficking efforts have advanced, irregular migration persists, reintegration is underdeveloped, brain drain is worsening, and awareness campaigns have little impact. Compared with Ghana and Senegal, Nigeria's approach remains fragmented and reactive.

## VII. Policy Recommendations

i. Expand bilateral labour-mobility agreements to provide safe, legal migration options.
ii. Invest in domestic job creation, vocational training, and security reforms to reduce push factors.
iii. Increase NAPTIP funding for victim services and strengthen border cooperation.
iv. Institutionalize reintegration programs with sustainable funding and monitoring.
v. Improve professional retention through better salaries, working conditions, and career pathways.
vi. Create structured diaspora skills-transfer and circular migration schemes.
vii. Reform awareness strategies should be community-driven, culturally relevant, and youth-focused.

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