

ECONOMIC MIGRATION: SOCIO-ECONOMIC INVESTIGATION ON WHY PEOPLE MIGRATE FROM THE GAMBIA TO EUROPE

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Abstract

This paper attempts to show how migration is today a global observable fact facing many countries who are trying to understand and find a way to manage it effectively. In Africa, like many other nations of the world, pull and push factors of migration are pertinent and require a concerted and deliberate political will and sensitisation to contain the issue. The paper shows how Africa is weighed down with identity crisis of varying

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degrees. Competition amongst individual families who wish their children travel to Europe, the perennial problems of poverty, hunger, disease, social and cultural affiliations, and opportunities, religious attachment, economic improvement, the quest for better accessible and affordable quality education, and urbanisation leading to possible globalisation characterised the reasons why people move from within the state or country. The paper will provide an introduction to the mainstream and give direction to the thesis; an overview of economic migration by Africans to other nations. The paper also intends to highlight the positive and negative impacts of migration in Africa. The paper used primary and secondary data. Results were analysed and displayed using the triangulation method of data display. The results of the discussion through personal interviews and observation revealed how those who migrated to Europe have improved the economy and living standard of their families despite horrific dangers, cruel treatment, and death which characterized their exodus and stay in foreign lands. The paper provides great insights into the discourse. The paper suggests that globalisation and the quest for better life and opportunities play significant roles in determining the extent of pull factor in economic migration amongst Africans on the lifestyle and dignity of the migrants.

Key Word: *Migration, economy, Africa, push, pull*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Gambia is the smallest country on the African mainland. The total area is 11,300 sq. km, consisting of

10,120 sq. km of land mass and 1,180 sq. km of bodies of water, mainly the River Gambia. The river flows across the middle, dividing the country into the north and south banks. The Gambia is surrounded on three sides by Senegal, and has a western Atlantic coastline of about 80 sq. km. The 2013 national census put the population at over 1.8 million, and the United Nations Population Fund ‘State of the World Population’ puts it at 2.4 million in 2020. The population is young, with 76% aged 24 or younger, and a national median age of 21.8 years. Gambia is amongst the most densely populated countries in Africa at 177 people per sq. km, with a high population growth rate of about 3%. Urban concentration is high at 62%, growing at an annual rate of 4%.

An economic migrant is someone who emigrates from one region to another, including crossing international borders, seeking an improved standard of living, because the conditions or job opportunities in the migrant's region are insufficient. Africa and the of course The Gambia is not exempt from the horror of economic migration. Economic migrants are not necessarily refugees but persons “who travel from one country or area to another to improve their standard of living.” Economic migration of working-age (15-64 years) as defined by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2012) can cause serious

economic strain. Most of these migrants according to the study are highly skilled and looking for specialized jobs not available in their home regions. While economic migration provides the source of cheap labour to the receiving country, one of the advantages of economic migration is an increase of cultural diversity amongst identity thereby leading to loss of identity while embracing global culture. However, the mass migration of working-age people can also release pressure on the region's current job market and resources. Migrants also transfer wealth back to their source regions: The World Bank estimates that remittances totaled US\$ 420 billion in 2009, of which \$317 billion went to developing countries (OECD, 2021).

Migration according to Thet (2014) is a global phenomenon caused not only by economic factors but also by social, political, cultural, environmental, health, education, and transportation factors. It commonly takes place because of the push factor of fewer opportunities in the socio-economic situation and also because of pull factors that exist in more developed areas. In the very words of Thet (2014), various scholars study migration for different purposes. Sociologists have emphasized the social and cultural consequences of migration. While geographers have laid stress on the time and distance significance of migration, economists emphasize the

economic aspect of migration. This study however lays greater emphasis on family competition as a result of economic migration as it is seen in Africa, particularly, in The Gambia.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are to examine the socio-economic implication of migration and to find out the significant pull and push factors of migration that are prevalent in The Gambia.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

To get the required data for the study, stratified cluster random sampling was carried out with the regions. Using a survey questionnaire to collect data, a total of 120 respondents were sampled to represent the Gambia. And then, the socio-economic characteristics of respondents were analyzed in terms of descriptive statistics to provide clarity.

2.1 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was restricted to North Bank Region of The Gambia which provided a representation of the whole state situation about migration as it affects almost every household in the country. Different researchers in this field have developed several factors while looking at reasons for migration amongst nations. This study

however considered economic migration as an important factor that informed the study between 2010 to 2020.

2.2 ECONOMIC FACTORS

Like the case of Gambia where rural-urban drift is prevalent amongst the energetic young people, this study holds that most of the studies indicate that migration is primarily motivated by economic factors and or family competition. Although the researchers do not have statistics revealing these trends, it is, however, obvious that the rural-urban drift from the agricultural eastern regions to the Greater Banjul Area (GBA) in the Gambia was primarily because of lack of social amenities to attract the teeming young population, Altrogge and Zanker (2019) in Gaibazzi (2015) disclosed how many of the Gambians who decide to migrate via land-sea routes are young men in search of better economic opportunities. This is because ‘Men shoulder the financial obligations for their parents and households, and since households are in a chronic need of cash for basic consumption items, men are expected to go and find it’. They are nurtured through the positive impact of personal remittances on household living standards, visible everywhere in the country. The researchers found out that this is akin to ‘family competition’. Though societal ideals to migrate persist, by far not all families give their approval to taking the ‘backway’. Especially

since a growing awareness of the dangers of land travel, Altrogge et al (2019) said that migrants also leave on their own accord, sometimes even stealing from their family or employers to fund their travels. Families often indebt themselves to finance their son's trip, increasing the pressure for them to succeed. Labour force survey carried out by GBOS in 2018 revealed that the cultural obligations are founded in socio-economic political reality. Youth unemployment, for example, currently stands at 41.5%.

Many of those who leave do so 'irregularly' because they do not have access to legal alternatives. A report from Eurostat (2020) states how migrants claim asylum upon their arrival in efforts to obtain a legal status, while often not fully aware of the political and legal implications the status brings with it. Gambian asylum claims to EU countries according to the report grew from 1,395 claims in 2012 to 15,725 claims in 2016, going down again to 4,275 in 2018. Italy and Germany receive by far the highest application numbers. The recognition rate is fairly low, at 4% across the EU in 2017. Since the new Gambian government of President Adama Barrow came into power, many asylum seekers receive negative asylum decisions and risk to be deported if not following invitations to leave voluntarily. The new government has a clear interest in distancing itself from the former

government, which includes addressing the safe situation for Gambian refugees who had fled the country.

In the same manner, UN DESA data in a study conducted by Faal (2020) indicates that in 1995 there were 38,385 Gambian migrants globally, and that the number rose to 90,254 (135%) by 2015. Except for the mixed migration profile in the UK, migration of Gambians to Europe in the past 10 years is characterised by persons seeking asylum and arriving irregularly. In recent years, Italy was the destination for the highest number of irregular African migrants crossing the Mediterranean. At its highest in 2016, of the 181,436 people who arrived by sea in Italy, 11,929 (6.6%) were Gambians. This was a 41% increase from 2015 where the number Gambians arriving by sea was 8,454. Of these arrivals in 2016, 27% were Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC), constituting a 150% increase from 2015. From the top 10 nationalities arriving by sea in Italy in 2016, Gambia was fifth, behind Nigeria, Eritrea, Guinea and Cote D'Ivoire. In the same year, of the 7,490 sea arrivals to Spain, 863 (11.5%) were Gambians, the second largest nationality, behind Cote D'Ivoire and ahead of Guinea. In Spain, 8% of the irregular migrants who arrived in 2016 were young Gambians, 92% of them aged 15 to 17, and the remaining aged 5 to 14 years. Faal maintains that these

statistics are staggering considering that Gambia is a small country with a population of just over 2 million.

Faal (2020) also revealed that between 2014 and 2019, about 40,000 young Gambians, primarily men and boys, entered Europe by travelling through the ‘back-way’, across the Sahara and Mediterranean to Italy and Spain. Gambia entered the list of top 10 countries of irregular migrants to Europe in 2014 and the arrivals peaked in 2016 at 12,792, dropping to 7,600 in 2017 and to 4,500 in 2018. With a new anti-migration government in Italy in 2018, over 90% of the Gambian migrants that year arrived in Spain. By 2019, Gambia was no longer in the top 10 countries of sea arrivals in Europe, but the journeys continue, with the horrendous incidences of destitution and deaths that occur along these perilous routes.

In developing countries, low agricultural income, agricultural unemployment, and underemployment are considered basic factors pushing the migrants towards the developed area with greater job opportunities. Thus, almost all studies concur that most of the migrants have moved in search of better economic opportunities.

2.3 PUSH AND PULL FACTORS FOR MIGRATION

The basic economic factors which motivate migration may be further classified as ‘Push Factors’ and ‘Pull Factors’ (Thet, 2014). The push factors are factors that compel a person, due to different reasons, to leave that place and go to some other place. The common push factors are low productivity, unemployment, and underdevelopment, poor economic conditions, lack of opportunities for advancement, exhaustion of natural resources, and natural calamities. The non-availability of alternative sources of income in a rural area is also an important factor for migration.

The Pull Factors on the other hand are factors that attract the migrants to an area. Opportunities for better employment, higher wages, facilities, better working conditions, and attractive amenities are pulled factors of an area. Generally, reasons for the pull factors in migration are synonymous with upgrading the quality of living. On the whole, this is the factor that informed the choice for the study.

2.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF MIGRANTS

Most of the migrants were aged between 18 and 25 years. The second highest percentage can be seen in the age group 25-40. From the survey questionnaire

collected, a vast majority of 99.9% of the migrants are males while female migrants account for a negligible size of 0.01% of the migrants. The education level of most of the migrants was found to be the primary level of 10.3%. Most of the migrants were dependent and unskilled.

3.0 ANALYSIS OF DATA AND ITS IMPLICATION

A simple table was provided to show the demography, responses, frequency, and percentage of the respondents as described in the questionnaire.

3.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 Gender Distribution of Respondents

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	73	60.8	60.8
Female	47	39.2	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

Source: Survey Research, April 2021

Table 1 above indicated that 73 respondents representing 60.8% were males and 47 respondents representing 39.2% were females. This by implication implies that the male family members are conscious of migration than the female folks.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
25-30	13	10.8	10.8
31-40	37	30.8	41.7
41-50	51	42.5	84.2
51-60	18	15.0	99.2
61 and above	1	.8	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

Source: Survey Research, April 2021

The age bracket of the respondents shown in table 2 manifested that 51 respondents representative of 42.5% of the population is between the ages of 41 to 50, 37 respondents representing 30.8% are 31 to 40 years, 18 respondents constituting 15.0%, are between 51 to 60 years while 13 respondents representative of 10.8% are between the ages of 25 to 30 whereas 1 respondent denoting 0.8% of the population is 61 years and above. By implication, this is indicative of the fact that the youthful group of people in the study area are prone to migration factors than the elderly.

Table 3: Demography, Responses, Frequency, and Percentage of Respondents

S/N	Demography	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age and gender of Migrant	18-25, Male	31	25.8%
2	Occupation of Migrant	Dependent person	44	36.6%
3	Educational Level of Migrant	Primary school level and secondary	10	8.3%
4	Reasons for Migration	To upgrade the quality of living	22	18.3%
5	Support for Migration	Family, mothers and siblings	13	10.8%
Total			120	100%

Source: Survey Research, April 2021.

The current study carried out indicates that male youths ages 18 to 25 are found to be the leading group of people who migrate, mostly to Europe and America with an overwhelming 25.8%. The occupation of these youth before migrating was found to be dependent and private individuals with no major skills with a majority of 36.6%, while the educational level of most of these people was found to be within the primary school or secondary school dropped out with a percentage of 8.3%.

The reasons why many of these people migrate like in many situations in Africa was found to be socio-economic factors in a frequency of 22 with 18.3%. Family and siblings were found to be the major support for migration in The Gambia with a total of 10.8%. The implication of this study, therefore, is that not minding the educational level of the migrants, family members are strongly behind young Gambians leaving their homes to Europe and the western hemisphere to upgrade the living standard of their family members back home.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION OF STUDY

The study observed that the pull and push factors of migration are closely knitted in the fabric of Africans who see themselves to be economically disadvantaged. The quest for better living conditions has made many families support external migration. Although the educational level of many of these migrants is low (many of whom are school dropped-out), and unskilled, the motivation to enhance the family economy keeps the morale to migrate high. Based on personal observations and randomized interviews with family households and individuals, extreme poverty in upper and lower regions of the country have a negative impact on the life of the populace. Lack of social amenities, unemployment, and prestige are other reasons why they migrate to another

place. Sadly, the study found out that self-low esteem, lost identity, political instability, and envy amongst Africans who migrate to either Europe or America result in a negative disposition where many of lost their identity and self-worth while adopting the culture and life of their new country of residence. With poor education before migrating (8.3% of the respondents allude to this), during an interview with some of the returnees, they lamented that they were subjected to all kinds of labour to survive in their host nations. As a result, they earn just a little compare to those who were probably educated before leaving. The study revealed that those who are educated hardly migrate. Unfortunately, most of those who migrate go through the illegal ways known in The Gambia as “the back way” – risking themselves through the Libyan desert or by the Mediterranean Sea. Two years ago, over 40 young Gambians from the study area got drawn and died on the coast of Mauritania in 2019.

However, aside from the ugly face of migration as discussed earlier, economic pull factors for migration in Africa stand out. The family economy improves with remittances from abroad. Most families in The Gambia depend on migrants in Europe or America to send money for the family upkeep. A random sample of 100 households was taken during the study. The study

showed that 99.8% of these houses had a son, a brother, or a sibling abroad who serves as a breadwinner. These migrants turn the storyline of their families around for good. And so, the study also researched that families (parents –mostly fathers, and mothers lately) support or even sponsor their children and wards to migrate so that their lives will be transformed as well. This accounts for 10.8%. The study disclosed that the majority of these young folks who migrate are males of ages between 18 to 25 in corresponding to 25.8%. This does not rule out the fact that female folks also migrate. During an interview with a returnee and, with personal observations, youths of 12 to 15 years were found on a cruise boat en route Europe in 2019. Apart from family support to migrate, unemployment, self, and envy are commons vehicles for migration in the Gambia. The study indicated that many of these youths only wish to migrate without knowing what they would get. Many of these suffer untold identity crises and cultural deviation.

5.0 FINDING AND SUGGESTION

This study aims at examining the socio-economic impact of migration: the migrants, and their family members in The Gambia with the set period of ten years (2010-2020). It was found that 25.8% of the migrants were age between 18 to 25 years old. The majority of migrants during the study were having a low level of education,

dependent persons, overwhelmingly male with family as a source of support to migrate. The main reason for migration was to upgrade the living standard of the family. These findings highlight that average Africans and particularly Gambians are motivated to do whatever it takes to sustain the family by illegally migrating even when the dangers of doing so are obvious. Globalization and the quest for better living standard motivate several youths to desire the adventure into the unknown. With experience, one of the returnees (whose name is concealed) revealed that if he was above 18 years old when he travelled to Italy, he wouldn't migrate. He thought that (like many of them think today), to migrate and make quick money was the ultimate dream of every young Gambian. At the moment, he discourages young people from migrating. He says that, they should stay and build up the economy by going to school and engaging in entrepreneurship. At this point, "their culture and religion are not affected negatively due to migration" he concluded.

The untapped wealth in Africa is enough reason why young Africans should stay and harness the rich potentials therein. Those who migrate with low education and unskilled never think of going back to school. That enough is devastating.

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