



# Voyage of Life or Death

## Policy Recommendations

1. Economic opportunities should be created in Nigeria to make the perilous journey less attractive.
2. Government should be more proactive, empathetic, and nationalistic in tackling the challenge considering that those involved are Nigerians.
3. Illegal migration affects Nigeria's international image, just as it affects the political economy of countries in Europe.
4. Nigeria and other stakeholders should lobby the Libyan government on finding solutions to the maltreatment, enslavement, illegal detention, and xenophobic attacks on stranded migrants.

**Nextier SPD Policy Weekly** provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of **Nextier SPD**.

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The phenomenon of irregular migration has become a major global security threat in the last four years. A [December 2018 report](#) published by the United Nations Human Rights Council, in collaboration with the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, revealed that Nigeria is a key contributor to the scourge of irregular migration in Africa and Europe. A number of Nigerian youth have taken to illegal migration especially through North Africa to Europe in search of a better lot in life. For instance, majority of the [119,310 migrants](#) and refugees who got to Italy from Libya via the Central Mediterranean Sea in 2017 were Nigerians, Chadians, Egyptians, Sudanese, and Ghanaians. [A total of 2,832 of the migrants lost their lives during the dangerous journeys. In 2018, 20,859 migrants and refugees made it to Italy and 234 arrived in Malta. Despite a drop in the number of arrivals in Italy, the journey has become more perilous as over 1,200 migrants perished in the sea as at August 31, 2018.](#) Nigeria now ranks as the 6th provider of irregular migrants in the world. Following the deadly nature of the voyage, this edition of Nextier SPD Weekly examines the risks posed by such migration and makes recommendations on how the challenges can be addressed.

Migration is as old as human society and there is nothing wrong with it if conducted within the stipulations of the rules of entry and exit of the country. For several years, Nigerians have travelled to Europe, Asia and America for trade, tourism and education. However, the late 1990s saw a spike in the number of Nigerian girls and women who travel to [Europe as commercial sex workers](#). Countries such as Italy, Holland, Spain, France, Belgium, and UK amongst others were the popular destinations for this ignoble sex trade organised by a network of traffickers. There has been a spike, in the last four years, of a large number

of migrants and refugees who travelled to Europe by land (through North Africa) and via the Mediterranean Sea. Many of these irregular migrants and refugees have been trafficked or smuggled by criminal cartels. Besides incessant deaths in the Sahara Desert from dehydration, hunger, and illness, many more have [drowned in the Mediterranean Sea](#) while attempting to cross over to Europe on wooden or dingy boats. Most Nigerian survivors have [blamed the](#) high levels of youth unemployment, poverty and violence for their desperation for a better life in Europe.

Following the deaths of migrants in the desert, sea, and [detention camps in Libya](#), the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Government of Edo State have initiated measures to stem the tide of irregular migration. The federal government has collaborated with European governments and some non-governmental organisations (such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and ActionAid) to evacuate several stranded migrants in Libya. As at October 2018, over 11,000 Nigerian migrants have been evacuated and [4,244 of the returnees were indigenes of Edo State](#). The state government, on its part, established the Edo State Taskforce Against Human Trafficking (ETAHT) to tackle the problem of irregular migration and human trafficking in the state. So far, ETAHT has received 42 batches of irregular migrants. [The taskforce also helps to rehabilitate Libyan returnees](#) and other returnees by evaluating their needs and partnering with ActionAid to provide them with vocational training in such skills as cosmetology, agribusiness, fisheries, etc.

A lot more needs to be done to reduce the tide of irregular migration. Below are some ideas for holistic intervention:

1. The government and other stakeholders should create economic opportunities at home to make the perilous journey





less attractive. There is need to provide critical infrastructure to promote small and medium enterprises (SME) in Nigeria. For instance, poor power supply is one of the reasons for the failure of many SMEs. It is instructive that many of the Libyan returnees had some productive economic skills before they left Nigeria; what they require are the opportunities to productively engage here in Nigeria. Even those currently undergoing vocational training will face the same infrastructure challenges.

2. Government should be more proactive, empathetic, and nationalistic in tackling the challenge. Illegal migration should not be seen as a problem of the poor especially in light of the fact that [\\$22 billions was remitted by Nigerians in the Diaspora in 2017](#). This amount includes remittances from people who may have left Nigeria through illegal routes. Various stakeholder organisations (like the media, churches, mosques, civil society organisations, and relevant government agencies) should engage in impactful campaign on the dangers of irregular migration.
3. Government of Nigeria should understand that apart from the political economy of illegal migration, which currently impacts countries in Europe, risks and acts of illegal migration have an international relations dimension, as the country's image continues to dwindle among the comity of nations. The regrettable government

attitude that such [illegal immigrants are “on their own” or doing so at their own risk](#)” impacts Nigeria's image negatively. Therefore, the Nigerian state should continue to work with other donor agencies and international organisations in deepening governance (especially in cutting down on corruption and investments in human capital development) which, in the long run, will help to check the trend.

4. Nigeria should lobby the African Union, the United Nations, and other multilateral organisations to prevail on other national governments (especially the Libyan Coast Guards) to stop the maltreatment, enslavement, illegal detention, and xenophobic attacks on stranded migrants. Such migrants and other current detainees should be released to their governments or to the International Organization for Migration for evacuation to their home countries.

Most cases of illegal migration from Nigeria to Europe are for economic reasons. There is the likelihood that illegal immigration will continue to increase if Nigeria's economy continues to underperform with sustained rise in poverty and unemployment. Furthermore, increasing insecurity in across the country (especially in the North-West and North-East) is likely to breed another type of migration out of Nigeria. However, if these measures are well-implemented, the phenomenon of irregular migration and its concomitant dehumanisation and avoidable deaths should be drastically reduced.