



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON MIGRATION IN NIGERIA

TRADE UNION REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is part of the Global Compact on Migration (GCM) Champion Countries Initiative,¹ a voluntary collective of Member States committed to promoting effective GCM implementation, follow-up and review. Despite this commitment, trade unions have reported that much remains to be done by the government to champion the GCM's objectives. While several national policies, including the National Migration Policy and the National Policy on Labour Migration, have been revised in recent years, this has not been matched by the sufficient level of commitment and resources for implementation. As a result, migration is still largely addressed through development assistance, rather than government leadership and budgeting. There is a general lack of clarity regarding time frames, indicators and monitoring and evaluation benchmarks, and relevant agencies responsible for policy implementation are under-resourced in terms of human, technical and financial resources.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and one of its largest economies.

As of 2024, its estimated population was over 232m with an annual growth rate of more than two per cent.² The migration landscape is complex, with increasing numbers of Nigerians leaving the country, for reasons including political instability and security challenges, economic hardship, family reunification, high unemployment and underemployment rates, poverty, inadequate healthcare, poor-quality education, and social inequality. Foreign migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers predominantly come from neighbouring countries that are affected by conflict and political instability. There is also strong rural-to-urban migration and significant internal displacement due to conflict, climate change, economic and security challenges. The International Organization for Migration has estimated the number of internally displaced persons at 3.4m, and returnees at 2.1m as of 2023,³ many of whom are affected by extreme poverty. While a regularisation drive launched in 2022 enabled 700,000 foreign migrants to register to stay in Nigeria, a similar number remains irregular and at risk of criminalisation, detention and expulsion. In common with their Nigerian counterparts, the majority of migrant workers work informally and lack social protection.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

Since the presidential elections in February 2023, Nigeria's trade unions and their members have experienced repeated interference in their independent functioning from state

authorities and have faced disproportionate force in response to protests. Trade unions seek collaborative engagement with the federal and state governments and have provided expertise on migration-related policies and

¹ Champion countries | United Nations Network on Migration

² <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/nigeria>

³ <https://nigeria.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11856/files/documents/2024-05/2023-iom-nigeria-annual-report.pdf>

practices. Unions work with UN agencies, including the ILO and other international partners to address gaps in the protection of migrant workers through information campaigns and capacity-building initiatives. Nigerian trade

unions, under the umbrella of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), are active participants in the African Trade Union Migration Network (ATUMNET).⁴

GCM IMPLEMENTATION

Nigeria faces serious challenges in addressing the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave the country (Objective 2). Most Nigerians work informally, earning low incomes that leave them with little or no capacity to save. Many lack health insurance or pensions. Poverty affects more than 70 per cent of the population and working poverty is on the rise, due to higher costs of living and stagnant wages. The lack of a decent minimum wage exacerbates these issues for a large proportion of the workforce. Emigration remains significant, with an estimated 17m Nigerians living abroad. In 2023, a Standing Committee on Diaspora Matters was established to implement the 2021 National Diaspora Policy.

The National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), which operates under the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation (FMHAPA), oversees the implementation of the National Migration Policy. Additionally, Nigeria participates in the ECOWAS Migration Dialogue (MIDWA). However, challenges such as insufficient data, security and access issues in some geographical areas, insufficient funding, and a lack of standard operating procedures and bilateral agreements with third countries persist (Objectives 5 & 6).

The government has a long way to go to address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration (Objective 7). Migrant workers in Nigeria face exploitation, low wages, intimidation, lack of accommodation, language barriers, poor access to healthcare, sexual exploitation, and gender-based violence and discrimination – factors that disproportionately affect women domestic workers. Nigeria has yet to ratify the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).

The government has made some progress in supporting pre-departure training for Nigerian migrants through Migrant Resource Centres, involving trade unions and international organisations. It also supported the adoption of a code of conduct for private employment agencies. The Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment collaborates with employers to promote fair recruitment practices and monitoring mechanisms but must ensure trade unions are included in these efforts (Objective 6).

Nigeria has taken steps to suppress trafficking in persons, especially children, and has developed action plans and a protocol for the identification, safe return and rehabilitation of trafficked persons (Objective 10). An emergency call centre for the Nigerian diaspora has been established, and local task forces on human trafficking are active in 21 states. Nigeria has also strengthened its regional cooperation on anti-trafficking with Niger. However, child labour remains a significant concern, with estimates suggesting that between one-third to one-half of Nigerian children are

⁴ Our values are: Respect, Diversity, Solidarity and Partnership | African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ituc-africa.org)

engaged in child labour, and a third are entirely removed from the education system.

In November 2022, Nigeria ratified the ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) and the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190). These are positive developments in line with GCM Objectives 2 & 6.

A major concern for migrant workers is informality and the lack of social protection. Most migrants work informally in sectors such as construction, health, textiles, agriculture, and transport. Unionisation is limited to workplaces with more than 25 employees, excluding most workers, including migrants, from union representation. Migrants also lack access to specific justice mechanisms (Objectives 15 & 16).

Nigeria is part of the General Convention on Social Security of Member States of ECOWAS, which, in principle, allows migrant workers in

regular employment to access social security, retirement pensions, and welfare schemes on equal terms with nationals. However, Nigeria has not made progress in establishing mechanisms for the portability of social security entitlements and earned benefits bilaterally (Objective 22).

Regular migration pathways are not accessible for most Nigerian migrants (Objective 5). A small number of high-wage, younger workers may travel to European destinations, including Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Luxembourg, through opportunity cards and visas based on bilateral memoranda of understanding. Other destination countries, particularly those of the Gulf states remain reluctant to enter into bilateral labour migration agreements with adequate safeguards for migrant workers. Brain drain is increasingly recognised as a concern for Nigerian development.

TRADE UNION ACTIONS FOR RIGHTS-BASED MIGRATION

The Nigeria Labour Congress and its affiliates supports Nigerians by providing information and advice both when they leave the country for work and when they return. The NLC's Trade Union Information Guide on Return and Reintegration of Migrants and Migrant Workers in Nigeria, complements the Standard Operating Procedures on Return and Reintegration developed by the Federal Government of Nigeria.

The NLC helped develop the Nigeria section of the ITUC's **Migrant Recruitment Advisor**, an online tool

conceived to combat exploitative practices by recruitment agencies. The NLC has also advocated for the ratification and domestication of relevant ILO instruments on better migration governance and has trained trade union workers on gender mainstreaming.

The NLC seeks to formalise cooperation agreements with trade unions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to represent Nigerian migrant workers more effectively. An initial agreement with the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU) has been signed.

TRADE UNIONS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

Trade unions call for a New Social Contract for all workers, including migrant workers, with SDG 8 at its core. A New Social Contract should address workers' demands for decent, climate-friendly jobs with a Just Transition; rights for all workers regardless of migration status; minimum living wages and equal pay; universal social protection; equality to end all discrimination; and inclusion of all countries in decision-making processes to build a rights-based development model. These elements are crucial to advancing the GCM objectives.

Trade Unions call on the government of Nigeria to:

- Commit to enhancing the national implementation, follow-up and review of GCM objectives as a GCM Champion Country. Involve non-state actors in these efforts, including trade unions and migrant communities.
- Address the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel Nigerians to leave the country, by taking steps to solidify good governance principles, deepen political stability, respect human rights, achieve universal social protection, eradicate poverty, child and forced labour, and provide decent work opportunities locally through job creation and other means.
- Commit to creating rights-based migration pathways both for Nigerians going abroad and migrants coming to Nigeria, involving trade unions in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of these pathways.
- Enhance access to the regularisation processes in Nigeria for all migrant workers in irregular situations.
- Remove barriers in labour laws to migrants' effective participation in trade unions, which is key to ensuring migrant workers can fully access their labour rights .
- Prevent violence and harassment against migrants and ensure access to state bodies for justice and remedies for victims. Work with trade unions to protect migrants, especially women and girls, from exploitation and gender-based violence in line with ILO Convention No. 190. Ensure safe working conditions and equal wages for migrant workers.
- Strengthen awareness of the human and labour rights of migrant workers, in particular those working informally, so they can increasingly access social protection and public services and seek justice against abuse and exploitation. Address language and skills needs of migrant workers.

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