



▶ Promoting better media reporting relating to returning Nigerian migrant workers

December 2022

Introduction

This information brief was developed by the FAIRWAY Programme of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and covers key findings and recommendations from a media monitoring study, looking at the coverage of Nigerian returning migrants over the period of May 2020 - February 2021. The FAIRWAY Programme addresses underlying causes of decent work deficits at their source through national-level interventions in selected countries of origin – including Nigeria – and in the Arab States.

An estimated 1.7 million Nigerian migrants¹ live abroad, many of whom are migrant workers. The capacity of journalists to report their experiences is critical in shaping public discourse. In turn, this discourse influences both public perception by society and the design of programmes and initiatives by policymakers.

Understanding whether professional media in Nigeria capture the experiences of migrant workers is important, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This monitoring exercise informs whether Nigerian media outlets give sufficient attention to labour migration issues and how such reporting is being done. It presents quantitative data and qualitative analysis, suggesting concrete recommendations to improve future reporting.

The brief complements other efforts by the FAIRWAY programme to improve media coverage of labour migration and forms part of the broader engagement² of the ILO on labour migration reporting.

Other activities carried out by the programme include the drafting of training resources³, the organization of workshops for media professionals⁴ and the editing of a brief on reporting in Jordan and Kuwait⁵.

This information brief is an abridged presentation of a report from research undertaken by Prof. Ifeoma Vivian Dunu, based on a review of eight Nigerian newspapers, and two online news media, covering a total of 2,687 editions of newspapers. Through the application of content analyses documentation methodology, the monitoring exercise reviewed the contents of news stories from print media to capture, document and analyze how the media in Nigeria covered and reported news of returning migrants during the indicated period.

It aims to inform and facilitate further consultations and evidence-based initiatives relating to reporting labour migration by the media in Nigeria. The brief was validated and edited by Augustine Erameh, Dino Corell, Sophia Kagan, Grace Sebageni and Charles Autheman.

¹ UN DESA 2020

² About the ILO media engagement ([link](#))

³ Reporting on forced labour and fair recruitment: An ILO toolkit for journalists in Nigeria ([link](#))

⁴ https://www.ilo.org/africa/media-centre/news/WCMS_818395/lang-en/index.htm

⁵ Promoting balanced media reporting on migrant workers in the Arab States, ([link](#))

Key findings

The following key findings emerged from the review:

1. Low number of media reports on returning migrant workers

An analysis of the frequency of newspaper coverage of returning migrant workers indicated low coverage. As shown in Table 1, out of the 2687 editions covered during the study period, only 115 stories on migrants returning to Nigeria were published. Over the ten-month period, the newspaper published on average 11.5 stories on this topic.

Table 1

Frequency of newspapers' reporting on migrant workers returning to Nigeria (May 2020 – Feb. 2021)

Newspaper	Frequency of Reports on Migrants	
	Total No. of Editions	Stories on Migrants
Daily Trust	72	7
Leadership	184	11
Punch	304	15
The Guardian	304	6
The Nation	304	23
The Sun	303	10
This Day	304	17
Vanguard	304	5
Premium Times	304	10
Sahara Reporters	304	11
Total	2687	115

2. Returning migrant workers were largely “silent” and “voiceless” in the newspapers' reporting

Analysis of the sources and or subjects of the available reports on returning migrants shows that the returning migrants⁶ who are the subject of the reports were barely quoted or interviewed or used as news sources. They represent only 3.5 per cent of the sources. As such, government officials constituted 92.2 percent of the news sources as shown in Table 2. Voices of other non-state actors such as NGOs or academics were also absent.

Table 2

Source of news reports

	Frequency	per cent
Government Officials	105	92.1
Migrants	4	3.5
NGOs	0	0
Media/Journalist(s)	5	4.4
Security Agencies	0	0
Total	114	100

⁶ The non-inclusion of migrants as sources of information in labour migration reporting has also been documented in other media monitoring research, for example in the Jordan and Kuwait ([link](#))

3. The reasons for returning were not always clear from the newspaper reports

Most of the reports (74.8 per cent) simply reported that the returnees were repatriated or evacuated because they were stranded due to conditions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown in Table 3. It was not clear from the reports why they had to return to Nigeria beyond the report that linked their returns to conditions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3

Reasons for returning as mentioned in newspaper reports

	Frequency	per cent
Repatriation	22	19.1
COVID-19 Pandemic	86	74.8
Economic reasons	1	0.9
Persecution	2	1.7
War/Conflict	0	0
Undisclosed	4	3.5
Total	115	100

4. Limited depth and contextualization of reports on returning migrants

The available newspapers' reports generally lacked adequate profiling of the returnees. The reports mostly did not detail the reasons for migrating in the first place, the demographics and employment history or experience of the returnees. The news reports indicated that the airports were the major entry channel.

It was not clear from the available reports if the returnees were migrant workers, i.e., Nigerians who were previously employed in their former destination countries. They were simply tagged "returnees", "evacuees", "stranded Nigerians abroad", or "illegal migrants".

5. The return of migrants, an issue seen predominantly through a humanitarian lens

The analysis of news frames illustrates that most newspaper frame stories related to returning migrants with a humanitarian angle, as shown in Table 4. Migrants are portrayed as vulnerable or stranded individuals in need of rescue or intervention.

Table 4

News frames

	Frequency	per cent
Criminalization	1	< 1
Humanitarian/Empathy	93	80.9
Economic Consequences	8	7
Morality	1	< 1
Undetermined	12	10.4
Total	115	100

6. Significant level of inconsistencies in the reports

There were inconsistencies in newspapers' reports particularly on figures, circumstances, and conditions of return. Again, the newspapers were not uniform in following up the incidences of migrants' returns which accounted for the differences in the total number of migrants' report found across the different newspapers sampled. This raises a clear challenge to the accuracy and uniformity in media's report in this critical area. There was also a disparity between online and print versions of some of these newspapers' reports.

7. Lack of prominence on issues around returning migrants across the newspapers' reports

There was no prominence attached to issues around the returning migrants as the reports were mostly 'buried' in the inside pages. No editorial on returning migrants was published in any of the newspapers.

8. Limited follow-up on the reintegration of returning migrants

The news reported merely mentioned government plans for reintegrating the "returnees" including facilitating their safe quarantine in compliance with the COVID-19 protocol of safe self-isolation and successful reintegration with family. There were no follow-up reports to show the level of implementation of the plans.

Recommendations

Based on the key findings of the media monitoring and following a stakeholders' workshop, the ILO recommends Nigerian media and communication professionals as well as educators to:

- 1. Build capacity of current and future journalists, editors, and communicators on labour migration reporting.** This can be done through dedicated workshops and the integration of migration within journalism and mass communication higher education curricula.
- 2. Integrate reporting guidelines with regards to labour migration terminology, gender-sensitive reporting, ethical photojournalism, and reporting vulnerable sources of information.** This can be done by using resources developed by the ILO such as the *Reporting on forced labour and fair recruitment: An ILO toolkit for journalists in Nigeria* or the *Media-Friendly Glossary on Migration*⁷.
- 3. Promote quality reporting on labour migration and encourage media organizations to broaden coverage and news content related to migration.** This can be done through the organization of roundtable workshops – with journalists, editors, and media owners – or the organization of a dedicated labour migration reporting prize. An emphasis should be put on key aspects of labour migration reporting: inclusion of migrant voices, gender-responsiveness, and human-rights based approach.
- 4. Sustain media monitoring studies on labour migration to inform future reporting.** Studies like the one conducted over the May 2020 – February 2021 period offer a snapshot on key reporting trends at a given date. Regular analysis can help track the evolution of reporting on labour migration and proved a baseline for changes.

⁷ A list of resources, updated on a regular basis, can be found on the media engagement portal of the ILO ([link](#))

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