International Labour Organization | Fair Recruitment Initiative

Media anthology in Ghana-Nigeria labour migration corridor

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Foreword

This media anthology is the result of a unique collaboration between journalism students from the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) in Ghana and Pan-Atlantic University (PAU) in Nigeria. It is the third such anthology after previous experiences between journalism schools and universities in Uganda and Jordan (2021) and Côte d'Ivoire and Tunisia (2023). Through a joint exploration of reporting on labour migration across the Ghana–Nigeria corridor, the students have produced an insightful body of work that reflects the complexity of labour migration in West Africa, highlighting the many facets of this topic, using different narrative formats and co-produced by teams of students from both institutions.

Supported by the International Labour Organization (ILO), this initiative seeks to foster cross-border collaboration in journalism, enabling future media professionals from both origin and destination countries to portray the full spectrum of the migration experience, beyond the limited perspectives often found in international media. Through such partnerships, including the twinning of journalism schools, the ILO is investing in the resourcefulness of next generation of journalists, as well as media and development communication professionals, equipping them to produce and disseminate quality reportage on labour migration, and further engage on an evidential basis across related themes.

This collaboration forms part of the ILO's global effort to strengthen the capacity of media and communication professionals to promote balanced narratives on labour migration. By supporting balanced and evidence-based reporting, the ILO aims to ensure that migrants can make informed decisions based on reliable information, that their experiences are highlighted in ways that challenge stereotypes and discrimination, and that migration debates are grounded in transparency and evidence-based policy dialogue.

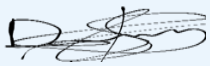
Special recognition is extended to **Dr. Daniel Odoom** of UniMAC and **Dr. Chike Mgbeadichie** of PAU, whose academic guidance and mentorship were instrumental in shaping this initiative, and to **Mr. Charles Autheman**, whose expertise and coordination contributed greatly to its success. Appreciation is also expressed to the students from both institutions whose commitment, creativity, and dedication brought this collaboration to life. Recognition is also given to the contributions of Kamil Abubakari, Grace Orshio, Augustine Erameh, Pauline Delrue and Melanie Belfiore, whose support and expertise were instrumental in shaping this work.

Acknowledgment is extended to the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) Nigeria for their support in the development of this anthology.

This anthology stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, learning, and responsible storytelling in shaping more inclusive, informed public discourse, balanced reporting, as well as helping stimulate reflection and ongoing dialogue on the challenges and opportunities associated with labour migration, while strengthening the lasting ties between the two institutions.

University of Media, Arts and Communication

At the heart of our mission at UniMAC (University of Media, Arts and Communication) lies the conviction that journalism and communication transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, shaping a global and nuanced understanding of contemporary issues. This inter-university collaboration with Pan-Atlantic University, supported by the ILO, symbolizes our shared commitment to academic excellence and the promotion of responsible journalism and evidence-based labour migration communication. The works presented in this anthology illustrate the talent, creativity, and dedication of UniMAC and Pan-Atlantic University students, as well as the wealth of perspectives they have brought to this crucial exploration of labour migration, ultimately reinforcing UniMAC's belief in the amazing power of strategic communication in transforming society. We express our gratitude to the ILO for its invaluable support, which has made this innovative inter-university initiative possible.



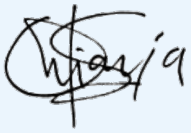
Dr. Daniel Odoom,

Dean, Faculty of Communication and Liberal Studies

University of Media, Arts and Communication, Ghana

Pan-Atlantic University

This collaboration between Pan-Atlantic University in Nigeria and the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) in Ghana represents a meaningful step toward building cross-border understanding through responsible journalism. By engaging our students in reporting on labour migration, we are nurturing a new generation of media professionals equipped to tell stories that are informed, balanced, and human-centred. This anthology reflects our shared commitment to education that bridges practice and impact, and we commend the ILO for its support in fostering ethical journalism and inclusive narratives on migration across our region.



Dr. Ikechukwu Obiaya

Dean, School of Media and Communication

Pan-Atlantic University, Nigeria

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1. Labour demographics and intra-African migration

Nigerian migrants in Ghana's informal economy

John Appiah and Jessica Hanson Idara

Academic and public discourses on migration have long been dominated by narratives of global North-South flows, often overlooking the significant volume and complexity of intra-continental movements. This story addresses this gap by foregrounding the voices of individuals like Mr. Blessing Inoche, Mr. Clinton Nwosu, Mr. Sylvester Nwokedi, Mr. Ola Taiwo, and Mr. Daniel Ekwugha, illuminating the subtle but profound challenges that define this under-researched migratory corridor. By presenting testimonies and identifying patterns, this report shows how these experiences confirm or challenge the elements of the specific project Labour Demographics and Intra-African Migration[1] which centres on Nigerian migrants operating within Ghana's informal economy.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, adopted in 1979, serves as a foundational pillar for regional integration, allowing citizens to move, reside, and establish businesses within member states without a visa. This policy aims to foster economic interdependence and mobility. However, a paradox exists: while the protocol facilitates physical movement, it fails to guarantee genuine integration and access to fundamental rights. The reality on the ground is often shaped by informal systems, bureaucratic barriers, and social perceptions that undermine the protocol's intent. This gap between de jure policy and de facto experience is a critical lens through which to understand the challenges faced by migrants in the region.

The migration of Nigerian youth to Ghana is driven by a mix of push and pull factors. The project synopsis highlights the significant push of high unemployment and limited decent work opportunities in Nigeria. This is balanced by the perceived pull of a more stable economic environment in Ghana. The interview data provides qualitative support for these drivers. For Mr. Blessing, a mobile phone accessories entrepreneur in Ghana for over a decade, the motivation is primarily economic. For Mr. Clinton, who initially moved to Ghana for five years, the impetus was educational, seeking a "better educational system." For Mr. Sylvester, the collapse of his business in Nigeria due to COVID-19 and high operational costs pushed him to seek better opportunities in Ghana. Mr. Ola was motivated by the growing tech scene in Ghana, while Mr. Daniel sought better living conditions and educational opportunities. This illustrates that migration decisions are not solely based on economic hardship but also on aspirations for self-improvement and future opportunities. The diverse motivations underscore the complexity of intra-regional mobility, challenging monolithic views of migrants as purely economically driven.

The most significant finding of this study is the profound disconnect between established policy and the migrants' lived realities. This study points to "structural deficiencies in labour migration governance" as a key factor. This is powerfully validated by the interview data:

- **Financial exclusion**: Mr. Blessing's account of being unable to open a bank account in Ghana is a prime example of institutional failure. Despite being a long-term resident and business owner

1 African Union Commission and Joint Labour Migration Programme, *Report on Labour Migration Statistics in Africa*, third edition (2019), 2021.

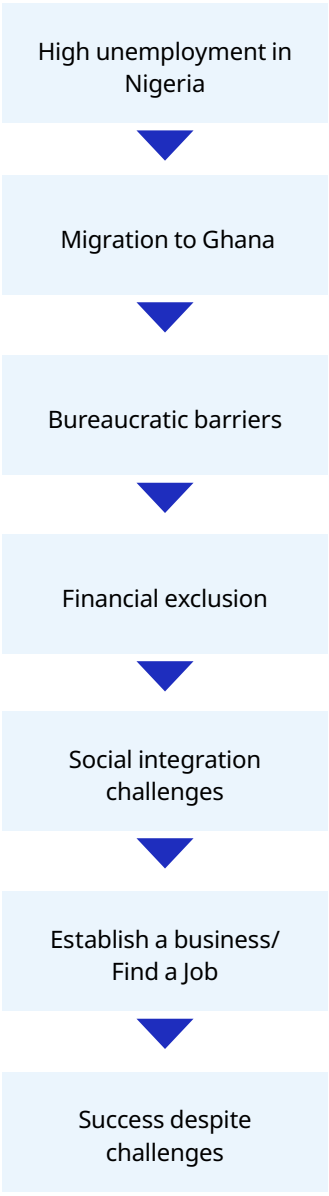
from an ECOWAS member state, his inability to access basic financial services forces him to rely on informal methods for remittances, exposing a critical policy gap that hinders financial inclusion and economic stability. This is in sharp contrast to the observation that Ghanaians can easily open bank accounts in Nigeria.

- **Informal bureaucracy**: The widespread requirement for a "guarantor" to secure housing and even informal labour jobs, as recounted by Mr. Blessing, demonstrates the prevalence of informal systems over formal legal frameworks. This not only creates a barrier to entry but also places migrants in a vulnerable position, dependent on personal networks rather than institutional protection. This phenomenon directly correlates with the synopsis's finding of "fragmented oversight" and a lack of coherent migration policies.
- **Social integration and discrimination**: Both Mr. Blessing and Mr. Clinton provide evidence of social challenges. Mr. Blessing's account of being stereotyped as "wicked" and facing business-related demonstrations, as well as Mr. Clinton's experience with minor campus discrimination, shows that while official policies may promote free movement, social prejudice and xenophobia remain significant hurdles. Mr. Sylvester and Mr. Ola also faced discrimination, with Sylvester noting that customers were initially hesitant to trust him with their devices and Ola mentioning stereotypes about Nigerians being "loud" or "troublesome." Mr. Daniel experienced occasional negative stereotypes about Nigerians being untrustworthy and people from his tribe being cannibals.

This highlights the need for policies that are not only economically focused but also socially and culturally sensitive.

Despite these systemic challenges, the migrants interviewed demonstrate remarkable resilience and entrepreneurial drive. Both Mr. Blessing and Mr. Clinton are successful business owners, carving out niches for themselves in Ghana's informal economy. Mr. Clinton's statement that "Nigerian businesses are big in Ghana" and that a business could achieve "x5 revenue" due to currency appreciation underscores the positive economic impact of these migrants. Mr. Sylvester, Mr. Ola, and Mr. Daniel have also found success in their respective fields, with Sylvester running a service canter, Ola working as a senior software engineer, and Daniel operating as a digital nomad and tech entrepreneur. Their ability to navigate a challenging environment and establish viable enterprises is a testament to their ingenuity. However, this success is often achieved despite, rather than because of, existing governance structures.

▶ **Figure 1. Systemic challenges**



▶ **Table 1. Voices**

Source	Motivation	Challenges faced	Success achieved
Mr. Blessing	Economic opportunities	Financial exclusion, social prejudice	Successful business owner
Mr. Clinton	Educational opportunities	Minor campus discrimination	Successful business owner
Mr. Sylvester	Business collapse (COVID-19)	Initial customer distrust	Runs a service centre
Mr. Ola	Tech scene	Stereotypes about Nigerians	Senior software engineer
Mr. Daniel	Better living conditions	Occasional negative stereotypes	Digital nomad and Tech entrepreneur

The migration of Nigerians to Ghana, while supported by the ECOWAS Protocol, is not a seamless process. The project's findings, supported by first-hand accounts, reveal that the journey is marked by asynchronous experiences where a free movement policy coexists with institutional exclusion, where economic opportunities are tempered by social prejudice, and where entrepreneurial success is achieved amidst significant structural barriers. This project contributes to academic debates on migration by humanizing intra-African mobility and situating individual stories within a broader institutional and policy critique.

John Appiah (Ghana)

is a final year student at the University of Media Arts and Communication (UniMAC) - Institute of Journalism (IJ), Accra, Ghana, pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Development Communication. He is also a holder of a Diploma in Journalism and Media Studies from the Multimedia Institute of Ghana and a graduate in Human Resources from the Institute of Management and Human Capital Development in Nigeria. John is a goal-oriented and resourceful individual committed to developing his career path and expanding his working experience with specialized institutions. He gained experience in the field of broadcast media, social media and public relations from different working environments. He has demonstrated strong leadership throughout his academic and professional journey. John is highly committed to youth empowerment and a political activist with strong communication skills. He is very passionate about learning new things.

Jessica Hanson (Nigeria)
is a dynamic and versatile professional with a strong foundation in media and communication. She is a graduate of the School of Media and Communication, where she earned a degree in Mass Communication from Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria. Jessica's passion for the creative arts is evident in her multifaceted career. Jessica is a photographer and filmmaker, founder of Crosswalk Studios, capturing compelling stories and visuals both within and outside the Pan Atlantic University community. In addition to her creative expertise, Jessica is a realtor at Capital City Development, where she combines her communication skills with real estate acumen to deliver exceptional client experiences. She also serves as a Digital Marketing Strategist at Rivulet Solutions Limited. Jessica has demonstrated strong leadership throughout her academic and professional journey. Among other roles, she was the head of the set design team for a school play, led the camera and lighting department for a school serial production, and served as the head of the media department for Pan Atlantic University's Finance Society for a year. Her technical proficiency spans photography, cinematography, photo editing, and graphic design. These skills have been honed through hands-on experience, including an internship with the media team at Cinfores Limited and significant contributions to Pan Atlantic University, while working with its Media Unit. Her portfolio includes coverage of a wide range of events, both on and off campus. With a strong interest in cinematography, photography, and outreach, Jessica remains committed to growth and innovation in the media space.

2. Digital traps

How online promises are hurting migrants across the Nigeria-Ghana corridor

Emmanuella Agbezukey, Blessing Bolaji, and Henry Nwachukwu

It started with a WhatsApp message. "Ghana hotel needs young ladies. Good pay. Free travel. Accommodation included." For 24-year-old Anita*[2] from Warri, Delta State, Nigeria, that was the ticket out of poverty. Days later, armed with borrowed hopes and the promise of a better life, she set out on a long road trip to Accra. What she met, however, was no promise at all. Instead of a hotel, she was taken into a crowded apartment where she would be made to do "private work" – a euphemism for sex work. Her papers were seized, and the boss made it clear to her: there was no going back.

On the other side of the corridor, Richard*, a 25-year-old aspiring football player from Ghana, had Europe on his mind. When his friends in France discussed an organization that would get him a slot in a football club if he could work for a couple of months in Nigeria, he jumped at the opportunity. He handed his passport and all his savings to an office in Abuja, only to realize later on that it was all a scam.

These are no new stories. Every month, teen migrants in Nigeria and Ghana fall victim to fabricated online recruitment adverts. Promoted via Facebook and WhatsApp forwarded messages, these ads promise fast-track success across borders. However, behind these flashy promises are manipulation, exploitation, and despair.

Youth unemployment remains a pressing issue in West Africa. Thus, for many young Ghanaians and Nigerians, the promise of a greener pasture abroad, even if it is on the other side of the border is irresistible. While the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) enshrines free movement within borders, the same freedom has created a fertile ground for informal and unstructured job recruitment.

Job promises vs. reality

Nigeria ⇔ Ghana migration stories

Promise	Reality
Hotel job in Accra - ₦100k/month, free travel, no experience	Cramped shared room, forced sex work, unpaid
Football trial in France after 6 months in Nigeria	Passport seized, extra payments demanded, no trial
Work in packaging company with full benefits	No contract, poor conditions, unpaid
Free accommodation provided	Accommodation overcrowded and unsafe

Across borders, many young migrants are promised safety and success. What they find instead is exploitation.
(Data based on testimonies collected)

2 All names marked with an asterisk (*) are pseudonyms used to protect identities of the individuals interviewed.

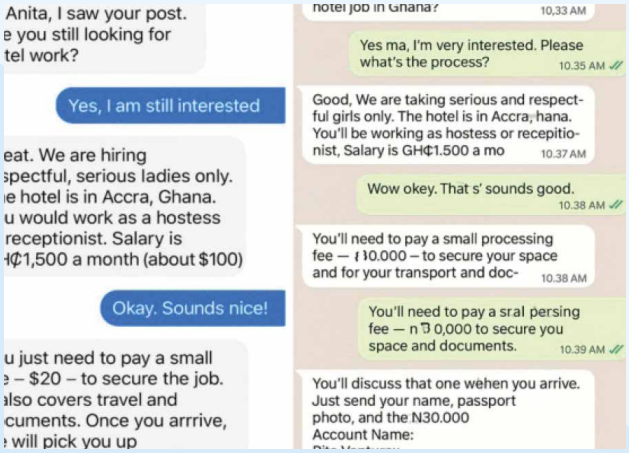
With the advent of social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram, the recruitment market has become virtual, and these social media platforms are not just used by legitimate employers, but also by traffickers and fraudsters who prey on desperation. These actors take advantage of the absence of digital literacy and regulatory oversight, especially among disadvantaged teenagers in rural and peri-urban communities.

Without the official routes for safe migration and fair recruitment, many young people rely on word-of-mouth and social media recruitment, which are always advertised in enclosed online groups. This informality leaves space for the exploiters to operate in the underground, thus rendering redress for injury uncertain.

Deceptive recruitment leads to commercial sexual exploitation

Anita is one of many young Nigerians who crossed into Ghana chasing a dream that turned into a nightmare. At 24, with her parents gone and her hair styling handwork barely keeping her afloat in Warri, the forwarded WhatsApp job ad seemed like a miracle. It read: "Hotel job in Ghana. ₦100k/month. Free travel. No experience needed."

After replying to the ad, she was contacted by a woman named *Auntie Kay*, who shared photos of clean hotel rooms and smiling girls in uniforms. Auntie Kay claimed she was helping young women settle and thrive in Accra. All Anita had to do was pay ₦30,000 for processing and border fees.



Facebook and WhatsApp messages sent to Nigerian girls offering fake hotel jobs in Ghana. Victims are often asked to pay ₦30,000 upfront for "processing fees".

Source: Anonymous. This image reproduces Facebook and WhatsApp messages sent to Nigerian girls offering fake hotel jobs in Ghana. Victims are often asked to pay ₦30,000 upfront for "processing fees".

> I came here thinking I was going to work in a hotel. Instead, I ended up selling my body to survive.

She borrowed the money from a family friend and boarded a vehicle with other young women from Lagos. The journey was quite rough, especially at the border where bribes had to be paid. But nothing could prepare her for what she would meet in Accra. Instead of a hotel, it was a cramped apartment filled with young women like her, and a blunt message: there were no hotel jobs. Only commercial sexual exploitation.

With no money and no return plan, Anita felt trapped. Her phone remained with her, but her movement was tightly controlled. Sometimes clients refused to pay, and some were violent. The emotional toll was immense, but she endured, sending small amounts back home to justify her sacrifice.

"I came here thinking I was going to work in a hotel," she says. "Instead, I ended up selling my body to survive."

Jobseekers are often victims of a lack of vigilance and awareness

25-year-old Richard grew up in Ghana with one dream: to be a professional footballer. After years of setback, his optimism and willpower did not wane. When two of his childhood friends texted him from France that they survived through the intervention of a Nigerian recruitment agency, Richard seized the opportunity. They told him about a recruitment agency in Abuja that would get him registered in a French club after a short stay in Nigeria.

He connected with the agency on WhatsApp and was offered a French football trial but there was a clause. He would have to work in a Nigerian packaging factory for six months. It all sounded completely reasonable, and the agent reassured Richard that this was the opportunity of a lifetime.

> I should have done more research, but I trusted my friends and let hope blind me.

He had travelled to Abuja in high spirits, but on getting to the agency's office, he noticed that things felt off. "The questions they asked were not professional and the environment didn't feel right," he said. They took his passport, money and documents, claiming that it was the standard procedure. Soon, they asked for additional money, as what he paid wasn't *sufficient*.

Feeling uneasy, Richard left the office and called the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ghana through WhatsApp. Although the response was slow, the Ministry advised him to wait patiently while they investigated. It was clear as day: the agency was a scam.

"I should have done more research," Richard admits. "But I trusted my friends and let hope blind me." The incident crushed his dreams temporarily, but he remains determined to recover and find legitimate opportunities.

How technology enables exploitation

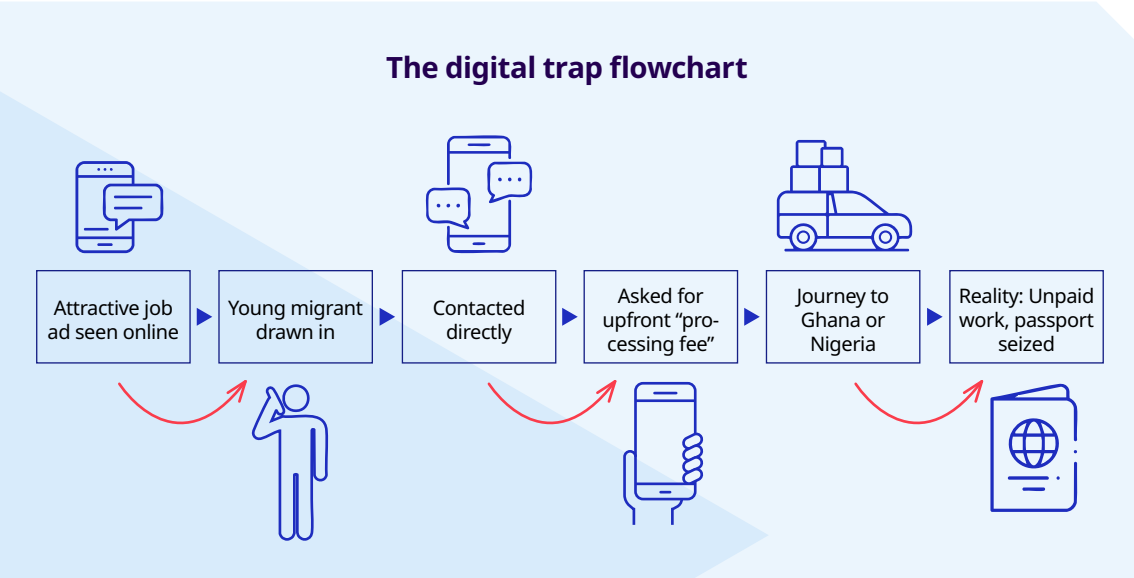
Digital platforms have become central to youth migration and job hunting across West Africa. But while they offer access, they also offer anonymity, a double-edged sword that scammers exploit with precision.

On platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, job ads circulate rapidly. They often come from familiar sources like a friend, a community group, or someone who "knows someone." These networks build trust, making it easier for false promises to take root. Once a user responds, private chats begin. The language is often convincing, and photos or

Voice notes help sell the illusion. Fake job agencies use emotional triggers (poverty, aspiration, urgency) to bypass critical thinking.

In Anita's case, the ad was forwarded by a local contact. For Richard, it was mutual friends on WhatsApp. In both stories, hope was manipulated, and digital spaces became traps.

▶ **Figure 2. The digital trap flowchart**



Note: A simple online ad can set off a chain of events from fake promises to border crossings. This flowchart shows how quickly hope turns into exploitation.

What's missing is verification. There are no checks for recruitment legitimacy on these platforms. Ads aren't flagged. No digital hotline exists for vulnerable job seekers. Even when victims try to report the scams, they are often ignored or too ashamed.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) identifies indicators of forced labour[3] such as deception, coercion, and restriction of movement which are all present in these cases. Yet the informal nature of digital recruitment means many such stories go unreported and unaddressed.

Experts and academics call for greater action and regulation

Experts warn that the gap between digital innovation and policy protection is growing dangerously wide. "They're social media companies providing 'free office space' for criminal activities," says Kathy Waters,[4] co-founder of Advocating Against Romance Scammers, in an interview with Wired. The platforms enabling scam recruitment, including Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, continue to serve as unchecked digital spaces for exploitation.

In both Nigeria and Ghana, these scams are evolving. "West Africa, particularly Ghana and Nigeria, is witnessing the rise of 'hustle kingdoms' - informal academies that train individuals to carry out digital scams," says Mark Button, professor at the University of Portsmouth.[5]

Labour officers acknowledge the cross-border challenge. These scams exploit ECOWAS protocols by operating in grey zones, using digital tools to avoid accountability. One proposed solution is the creation of a Verified Jobs Portal co-managed by both governments, where cross-border job listings can be vetted and flagged. Another is the launch of a Digital Fair Work Charter under ECOWAS, outlining clear principles for ethical online recruitment.

NGOs are also stepping in. Migration rights organizations advocate for e-literacy among the youths, particularly in the disadvantaged

3 ILO, *ILO indicators of forced labour*, first edition, 2012.

4 Kevin Poulsen, "Yahoo Boys: Scammers Are Using Facebook, Telegram, TikTok, and YouTube," *Wired*, 18 September 2024.

5 Suleman Lazarus and Mark Button, "Hustle Academies: West Africa's Online Scammers Are Training Others in Fraud and Sextortion," *University of Portsmouth Blog*, 16 September 2024.

communities. They stress the need to sensitizing the communities by making the youths aware of red flags and verify the job opportunity before acting on them.

Unless there are prompt policies implemented and cyber-protections in place, the number of young lives derailed by online traps will only continue growing.

A call to action

Anita and Richard represent thousands of young West Africans who dared to believe in better and were deceived. Their journeys reflect a growing crisis in digital freedom and migration vulnerability. These are not isolated incidents; rather, they are symptoms of a larger failure to protect the region's youth.

What is needed is not just awareness, but action in terms of digital accountability, regional cooperation, and grassroots education. Governments must regulate online recruitment and collaborate on cross-border protections. Platforms must be pushed to flag suspicious content. Communities must empower young people to question and verify.

Above all, young migrants must no longer walk alone. Richard still dreams of playing football. Anita still finds strength in her survival. Their voices, and those like them, must guide the path toward safer migration and fairer work in the digital age.

Emmanuella Agbezukey (Ghana)

is a driven student of Development in Communication, currently undertaking her national service at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, Ghana. She holds a Diploma in Communication, specializing in Public Relations and Journalism, from University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) - Institute of Journalism (IJ), Accra, Ghana. Her academic exposure to labour and migration issues has cultivated a strong passion for advocating fair recruitment practices, reflecting her commitment to impactful communication and social development.

Blessing Bolaji (Nigeria)

is a Mass Communication student at Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria. With a strong interest in academia, corporate corporate communication, and storytelling, she has contributed to several student journalism projects that drive social change. She is committed to using writing and research as tools for advocacy and social impact.

Henry Nwachukwu (Nigeria)

is a creative solutionist, event curator, brand strategist, and media enthusiast passionate about storytelling, culture, and youth engagement. A final-year Mass Communication student at Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria, he uses media to shape narratives, spark conversations, and drive social impact. His portfolio spans documentary filmmaking, photography, content creation, and strategic communications. Through film, he explores cultural identity and human stories with authenticity, earning national and international recognition. Beyond the screen, his photography and writing document moments, celebrate heritage, and challenge perspectives through intentional storytelling. As an event curator and manager, Henry has helped bring cultural, educational, and media experiences to life through creativity and strategy. His layered approach blends narrative craft with communication strategy to inspire, engage, and create lasting impact. Positioned among a new generation of African storytellers and changemakers, he continues to explore innovative ways to connect media, culture, and community.

3. Youth, work, and the West African dream

Experiences of young migrants across the Nigeria-Ghana migration corridor

Shine Acquah, Abolore Oreshade, and Wahab Fauzeehat Yetunde

The migration corridor between Nigeria and Ghana is one that is shaped with a long and complex history. Their geographical proximity and shared colonial legacy as two of the few English speaking West African countries in the region, unlike their neighbouring francophone countries like Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and Benin, have made movement between the two countries relatively easy for their respective citizens. In times of economic or political strife in the respective countries, citizens move from one to the other. This has led to a history of entries and exoduses between the two countries as exemplified in the 1969 deportation of Yoruba Migrants from Ghana[6] and the 1983 deportation of over a million Ghanaians from Nigeria.[7]

Therefore, it is apt and expected for youths from Ghana and Nigeria to set off to one or the other in a search for greener pastures. One of the dreams these youths travel for is football. In West Africa, football is more than a sport, it is a pathway to opportunity, recognition, and, in many cases, a better life.

For players like Kingsley Francis and Samuel Ayorinde, football is not just a passion it is a mission. Kingsley, a Ghanaian who resides in Nigeria recalls, "My greatest target was to become a footballer and to be known globally... I began to work toward it.". Backed by his uncle and grandmother, he trained intensely from the age of six and eventually earned a scholarship through a trial at The White Dove Schools in Nigeria. He says, "The White Dove Schools gave me the chance to show my skills in so many football tournaments... it impacted a lot of knowledge in me."

Kingsley's decision to come to Nigeria to play football was rather easy as he had family in Nigeria. However, the road to success has not been without setbacks. On the day of his scholarship trial, Kingsley's boots were damaged, and he had no money for transport. It was his grandmother, who stepped in, giving him just enough to fix his gear and make it to the venue. Out of 250 players who showed up, only six were selected, and Kingsley made the cut. "I was the fifth name they called," he remembers. "That trial changed my life." At White Dove, he gained exposure through tournaments, won multiple MVP awards, and learned to express himself with confidence both on and off the pitch.

After graduating in 2022, Kingsley set his sights on playing professionally. He went on trial at Beyond Limits Academy in Ogun State, one of Nigeria's top academies, but wasn't selected. Still, his journey didn't stall. He was posted to Atlantic Business FC, where he trained for six months under a technical coach and gained valuable league experience. For Kingsley, each opportunity, whether it ends in triumph or redirection, is a necessary part of the climb. Football remains not just a dream, but the clearest path to a life he can be proud of.

For Lawrence Agyekum, a footballer with dual Nigerian and Ghanaian citizenship, national identity has played a surprisingly minimal role in shaping his career. "Most people know me as Ghanaian," he says, noting that he ultimately chose to represent the country where he was raised.

6 Rasheed Olaniyi, *The 1969 Ghana Exodus: Memory and Reminiscences of Yoruba Migrants*, IMI Working Paper, International Migration Institute, 2008.

7 International Organization for Migration (IOM), "Migration Data in Western Africa," *Migration Data Portal*.

> I dropped out of university... because I knew I was talented and needed to focus on my talent.

> Many of these agents scam players... I have seen a case where an agent promised a player an opportunity in Europe, and the player was later dumped in Togo.

While there was some pressure in his teenage years to decide which national team he might play for, the pull of home won out.

Reflecting on the broader football landscape in West Africa, Lawrence points to a persistent challenge: the lack of meaningful investment in young talent. "It's quite difficult for people to invest in talents," he says, "because they might see it as a waste of time and money." For him, the choice to pursue football, or where to pursue it, ultimately comes down to one thing: "It's just a matter of the heart."

Similarly, Samuel Ayorinde, a Nigerian, who has migrated to different parts of West Africa including Ghana to play football said, "I dropped out of university... because I knew I was talented and needed to focus on my talent." Despite a serious leg injury that sidelined him for two years, Samuel persisted, eventually playing for teams like Shooting Stars and Rivers United. These stories show how football offers an alternative path where formal systems fall short.

Coach Michael Soniregu, a football coach who coaches teams in Nigeria and Ghana, highlights the fluid movement between both the countries. "Although I cannot mention some names, I am aware of Nigerian players playing in Ghanaian leagues and vice versa."

He describes a mutual football culture where players migrate to where opportunities are better. For instance, Samuel Ayorinde, once considered Ghanaian academies like Out of Hope, which he believed offered better financial support, a better space to nurture his talent.

Coach Micheal shared his sentiment saying "Some of them move for the experience or the money. When I was playing in Delta, I had a lot of Ghanaian players in my team."

Migration between these countries is often based on access, affordability, and proximity rather than formal or official agreements. While some Nigerian academies, such as Beyond Limits FC and The White Dove Schools, are creating structured and impactful development systems, the football migration experience is often fraught with risk. Coach Michael said "Many of these agents scam players... I have seen a case where an agent promised a player an opportunity in Europe, and the player was later dumped in Togo."

Samuel also cautions aspiring migrants, "Before migrating, get at least a 70 per cent assurance... many people end up sleeping under bridges."

These narratives show the need for regulation and verification mechanisms in football migration, especially in the informal corridors between West African nations like Ghana and Nigeria.

Family and mentors emerge as the backbone of most footballers' success stories. Kingsley's grandmother played a decisive role in his career, "my grandma gave me N150 to amend my boot... and also gave me transport fare."

Samuel's journey was initially discouraged by his parents, "My dad threatened to disown me... but they later accepted it when they realized I was earning from it. Right now, they are my emotional support system."

These support systems, though often informal, help players navigate the psychological and logistical challenges of the migration and football world. In a similar way, older migrants often serve as anchors for younger ones, offering advice, housing, or even job leads. Mr. Kofi, a Ghanaian who migrated to Nigeria over two decades ago,

may not be a footballer, but his experience mirrors this role. Now in his sixties and working at a Lagos hospital, he's helped younger Ghanaians find their footing in a new city, just as someone once helped him. "Since I left Ghana, I was moving up and down… no work," he recalled. "So, I decided, okay, I will travel."

Without knowing anyone in Nigeria, he arrived alone and eventually found work at St. Nicholas Hospital through a fellow Ghanaian. In his two decades in Lagos, he says the job gave him dignity and community. "Immediately they see you're working at St. Nicholas, they respect you." Though he has not personally faced discrimination, he adds, "It depends on how you live your life… If you don't jump by the group, and don't talk anyhow, you are safe."

Yet things have shifted, "Now, many Ghanaians don't want to stay here again. Our place don't change. We have another president… the country is moving forward." For today's Ghanaian youth, he believes the equation has changed, "If you get something to do in Ghana, there's no need to come here." He talks about Nigeria with fondness but insists that the youth have no reason to come here as things are hard in Nigeria right now.

On migration safety, all participants agree on the need for safer migration systems. Coach Michael offers a stark truth, "It's not written on the faces of people or agents their level of capability… many players fall victim every time." This concern is echoed on the policy side by Chief Superintendent Michael Amoako-Atta, Head of Public Affairs at the Ghana Immigration Service, who underscores the vulnerability of youth caught in illegal or exploitative migration networks. "When we encounter undocumented youth at our borders or checkpoints, we don't treat them as criminals, we see them as victims," he said. "Many have been lured or misled by others, brought into the country for exploitation or used as transit toward other destinations."

While the ECOWAS free movement protocols encourage mobility, enforcement agencies like GIS face gaps in infrastructure and cooperation that make it difficult to fully protect young migrants. "We lack adequate holding facilities, and even feeding becomes a challenge, especially for minors," Amoako-Atta noted. He also pointed to the growing role of cyber fraud and online job scams, schemes that entice youth from Nigeria and other countries into Ghana under false pretences. "Many are misled by connection men who vanish with their money and documents." Without coordinated efforts across housing, technology, and border enforcement, many youths continue to fall through the cracks.

To make migration safer, players, coaches, and organizations must ensure formal invitations and contracts are issued before travel, regulate football agents and require certification and provide legal and emotional support networks for players abroad.

Samuel suggests that players carefully evaluate offers and not rush into decisions, "It is dangerous… people end up in terrible situations." He said.

Football migration along the Ghana–Nigeria corridor is fuelled by hope, shaped by resilience, and often shadowed by exploitation. While private academies and grassroots support systems offer vital opportunities, the journey is still a gamble for many young athletes. Structural reforms such as institutional regulation, support networks, and transparency are crucial in ensuring that migration becomes a bridge to growth, not a trap. By strengthening these systems, both Ghana and Nigeria can harness football not only as a means of economic upliftment but also as a vehicle for regional integration, youth development, and global recognition.

Shine Acquah (Ghana)

is a final-year Development Communication student at the University of Media Arts and Communication (UniMAC) - Institute of Journalism (IJ), Accra, Ghana. He works as a reporter, producer, and presenter with the Multimedia Group Ltd, Ghana, creating news and social programmes that engage wide audiences. Shine is also a documentary producer with a focus on exposing illicit activities and drug abuse among young people, reflecting his commitment to using communication as a tool for social change. His work has earned national recognition, particularly for reporting on disasters and vulnerability in Ghana and across parts of Africa, and he holds an ECOWAS certification in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).

Adewande Oreshade (Nigeria)

is a Nigerian writer, aspiring director, and producer passionate about telling authentic African stories that challenge stereotypes and broaden perspectives. She recently graduated with a degree in Mass Communication from Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria, where she gained experience in media production, cultural studies, and communications. Her storytelling, which spans fiction, nonfiction, and digital media, often explores culture, identity, and memory, with particular attention to grief, familial bonds, and the intersections of tradition and modern life. She has written pieces that address subjects such as mental health stigma, reconciliation, and loss, and she draws inspiration from her upbringing in Lagos as well as from contemporary African and global voices. Adewande is committed to creating narratives that resonate both locally and internationally, whether through literature, film, or media.

Wahab Fauzeehat "Faulz" Yetunde (Nigeria)

is a Mass Communication student at Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria, passionate about storytelling, media, and culture. She has earned recognition as 1st Runner-up in the Yemisi Shyllon Museum Photography Contest and has received training and certifications in photography, video shooting, editing, and production from creative academies. She actively engages in projects that enhance her skills and broaden her perspective and has participated in international platforms such as the 2024 Model United Nations. On campus, Faulz has been actively involved in programmes that foster creativity and collaboration. She enjoys photography, creative writing, and poetry, using her work to drive advocacy, cultural pride, and social impact.

4. Borders and bargains

West African traders walk the line between opportunity and survival

Adama Fuseini, Ebube Kpajie, and Emmanuella Oboro

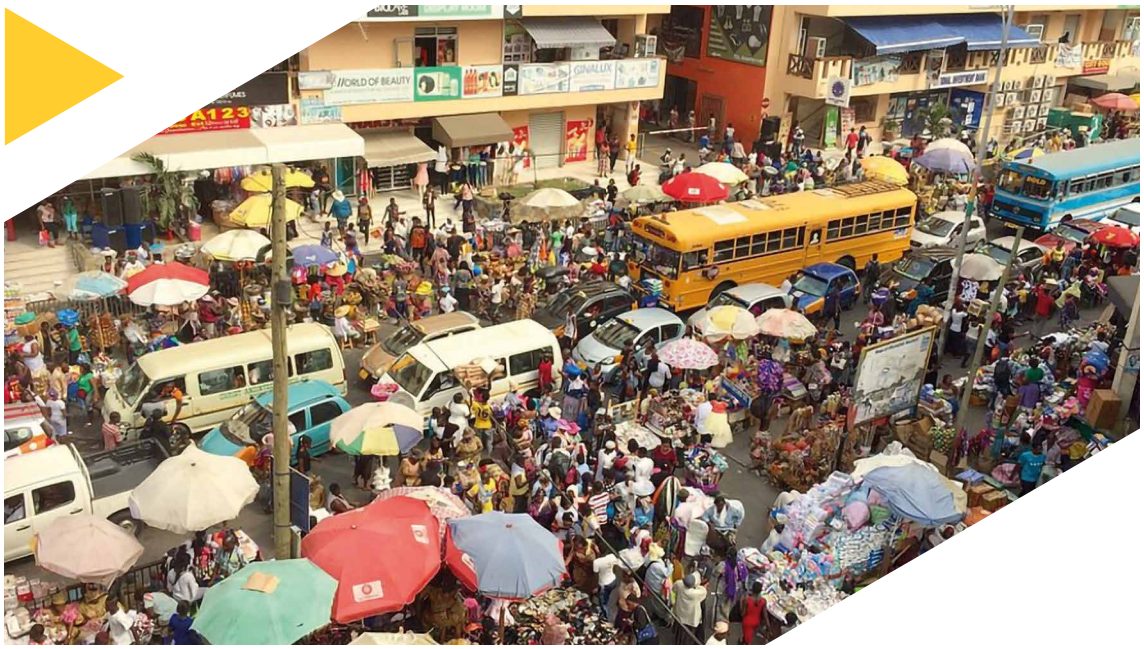
From Accra's markets to Lagos's stalls, Ghanaian and Nigerian traders chase profit across borders — navigating unstable policies, fierce competition, and the fragile promise of ECOWAS free trade.

In West Africa's bustling markets, trade is as much about relationships as it is about goods. But for many traders crossing the Ghana-Nigeria corridor, the dream of free movement under ECOWAS often collides with border bureaucracy, policy barriers, and economic uncertainty.

From Accra's Makola Market to Lagos's Balogun stalls, the stories of Efua Kaba, Lady E, and Mr. Emmanuel reveal the complex realities of doing business across borders — stories shaped by ambition, resilience, and a shared determination to survive.

Efua Kaba: The business that borders broke

In the heart of Makola Market, surrounded by bolts of lace and rows of cosmetics, Efua Kaba remembers a time when trade with Nigeria was effortless. For over 12 years, the Ghanaian trader built her wholesale business on fabrics, wigs, and cosmetics sourced from Lagos. A trip across the border meant lower costs, better quality, and higher profits.



Makola Market, Accra, Ghana © TripAdvisor

> The process is unpredictable, and security isn't guaranteed. Goods can be seized without reason, and checkpoints are full of harassment and bribery.

> In Ghana, things were tight – business wasn't moving. Here in Lagos, people love fashion and buy every day.

In 2018, she even considered opening a branch in Lagos to sell made-in-Ghana sandals and tie-and-dye fabrics. But witnessing a colleague's collapse under rising exchange rates and border delays forced her to abandon the plan.

Her own fortunes changed in late 2019, when Nigeria shut its land borders.

"The process is unpredictable, and security isn't guaranteed," she said. "Goods can be seized without reason, and checkpoints are full of harassment and bribery. ECOWAS sounds good on paper, but on the ground, it doesn't work."

The closure sparked price instability, eroded her profit margins, and forced her to lay off staff. Today, she sources from Dubai, China, or within Ghana — at higher costs. Still, she refuses to give up. "My biggest fear is losing my business. But my family depends on me, so I keep going."

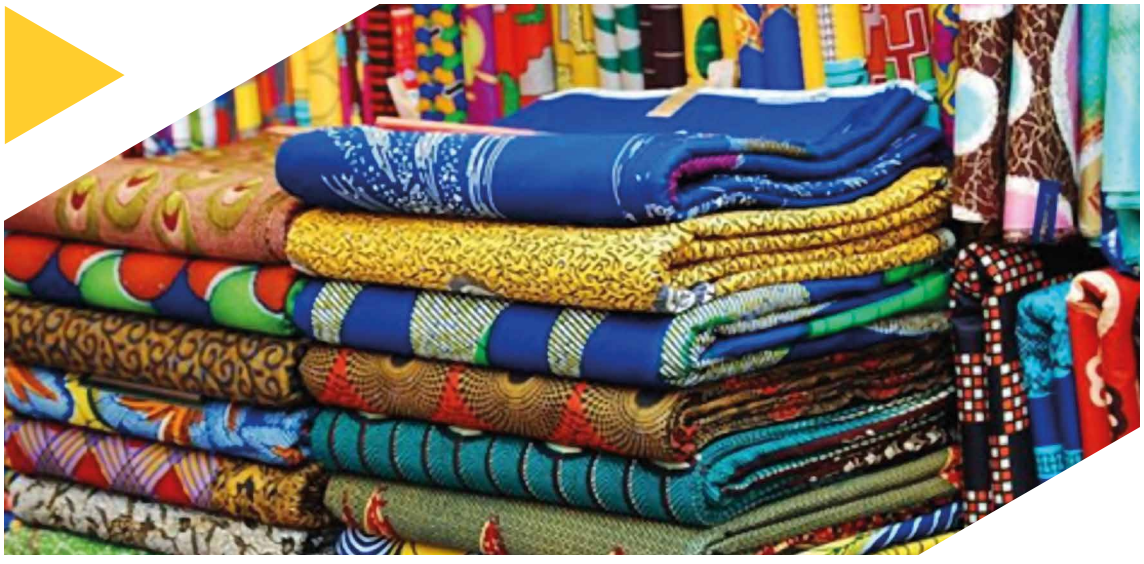
Lady E: Finding space to breathe in Lagos

While Efua's hopes of expansion into Nigeria faded, Lady E, another Ghanaian trader, has made Lagos her home. Selling clothes, accessories, and fabrics in a busy market, she says the Nigerian commercial spirit fuels her success.

"In Ghana, things were tight — business wasn't moving," she said. "Here in Lagos, people love fashion and buy every day."

She admits there are challenges — licensing delays, rising rents, and language barriers — but she values the relative openness. "As long as you're respectful and pay your dues, no one disturbs you," she said. "I haven't experienced the harassment Nigerians face in Ghana."

Still, she sees the need for stronger protections for foreign traders. "We need ECOWAS to mean something real — not just freedom to move, but freedom to work without fear."



Market Hopping around Lagos, Nigeria @Transitions Abroad

Mr. Emmanuel: A Nigerian's long game in Ghana

In Accra's bustling Circle Market, Mr. Emmanuel, a Nigerian electronics trader, has quietly built a life over more than a decade. His children were born in Ghana, and he says he wouldn't refuse citizenship if offered.

But his business operates under the shadow of Ghana's Investment Prom-otion Centre (GIPC) Act, which requires foreigners to invest at least $1 million USD before legally running retail shops. The Ghana Union of Traders Association (GUTA) defends the rule as a shield for local businesses, while Nigerian traders see it as a selective barrier.

"We're not the problem," Emmanuel said. "We just want to work in peace."

Local Voices: Competition or coexistence?

A Ghanaian electronics seller in Circle, who asked not to be named, admits the friction is partly economic. "Let's say we both buy something for 20 cedis," he said. "The Ghanaian might sell for 40, but the Nigerian could sell for 25 or 30 and still be fine. That's when people say they're spoiling the market."

While he conceded that "greediness" plays a role, he ultimately framed it as national interest: "Every country protects its own. Nigerians must pay more — it's policy."

This perspective captures the uneasy balance between protecting livelihoods and embracing regional competition.

A shared reality

Across all three stories, a pattern emerges: ECOWAS promises integration, but traders live with a patchwork of laws, unpredictable enforcement, and economic volatility. Some — like Efua — step back from cross-border trade; others — like Lady E and Emmanuel — adapt and endure.

Their resilience is the quiet backbone of West Africa's markets, but without policy enforcement and trust between nations, hope alone cannot sustain them.

As Lady E puts it: "They talk about ECOWAS, but what we need is freedom to live and trade safely — whether in Nigeria, Ghana, or anywhere."

Takoradi Market Circle in Sekondi-Takoradi, Western Region, Ghana. © ViewGhana (n.d.).

Adama Fuseini (Ghana)

is a confident and committed student of Development Communication at the University of Media Arts and Communication (UniMAC) - Institute of Journalism (IJ), Accra, Ghana. She holds a Diploma in Communication Studies with a focus on Public Relations and Journalism from the same institution. Beyond academics, Adama actively engages in advocacy and community service, particularly in women's empowerment, youth development, and social change. She has contributed to initiatives with Labour Lens, where her exposure to labour and migration issues, especially irregular migration, has deepened her commitment to advocating fair recruitment practices, promoting decent work, and addressing communication gaps that often leave migrants vulnerable. She has also worked with organizations such as the Young Urban Women Movement as a volunteer leading programmes on gender-based violence, menstrual health, and sustainable development. Her experiences in digital marketing, public relations, and community outreach reflect a passion for impactful communication, leadership, and driving positive societal transformation.

Ebube Kpajie (Nigeria)

is a student at Pan-Atlantic University in Lagos, Nigeria. She is a creative and dynamic individual entering the fields of Public Relations and Advertising. With a passion for storytelling and a talent for effective communication, she excels in presentation, research, and building compelling narratives. Ebube is dedicated to using her communication skills and proficiency in English to elevate businesses and enhance their public presence. Known for strategic thinking, adaptability, and a results-driven mindset, she is passionate about empowerment, creativity, and making a meaningful impact in the industry.

Emmanuella Oboro (Nigeria)

is a Mass Communication student at Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria, with a strong passion for storytelling, creativity, and brand communication. She has developed skills in creative writing, PR, advertising, brand management, and social media. A former President of the PAU Book Club and a former member of the Finance Society's Corporate Communications team, Emmanuella honed her leadership, writing, and content creation abilities. With experience in videography and corporate strategy, she is committed to crafting impactful narratives that blend creativity with communication for social and professional impact.

5. Beyond borders

The realities of Nigerian creatives in Ghana

Momoreoluwa Ajayi, Mordi Menashi, Minerva Ofusu and Joy Samuel

"Nigeria is currently unstable. Right now, the country is a mess," says Olagbenro James, a 30-year-old creative from Ibadan who recently moved to Ghana. His words echo a trend that is becoming more common among the young Nigerians who leave to find what they hope to be safer, more stable opportunities across the border. Olagbenro's testimony, along with others featured in this story, which was collected through a survey sent to five respondents mirror the same narrative; none had offered specific work before departing, and most acknowledged they had worked without contracts or, in fact, any sort of agreement. More specifically, Nigerian creatives, including animators, videographers, illustrators, musicians, and other digital content creators, migrating to Ghana is indicative of a broader pattern - economic challenges driving the migration, an underfunded entertainment sector, and the search for the predictable work environment Ghana, as many suggest, has.

For many Nigerian creatives, leaving home isn't just about chasing bigger markets, it is about chasing a system that they feel has failed them. All the years of underfunded art programmes, lack of institutional support, and erratic economic conditions have created what Olagbenro James described as a "Borderline suffocating" environment. "Be open minded and prepared to adapt. Ghana is not easy, but it's better structured", says 34-year-old Paul Tunde, who left Lagos for Accra. He is right for a complicated reason; While Ghana can guarantee stability and a lively cultural environment, most Nigerian migrants end up situated in informal labour with little to no legal recourse at all.

Ghana's appeal lies in what many Nigerian migrants describe as "order"; a more stable political climate, structured systems, and a cultural industry that feels supported rather than neglected. The country's growing creative scene, backed by government recognition and international collaborations, acts as a pull for young talents looking to build careers without the constant friction of Nigeria's economic uncertainty. "Ghana is better organized," Paul Tunde adds, a sentiment echoed across multiple responses. Yet, that organization doesn't always guarantee security. With most migrants reporting no formal contracts or clear terms of employment, the journey to stability often begins in the same informal labour conditions they were trying to escape.

For many, the move began with hope. None of the sources conducted for this story were promised jobs before migrating, but all carried the belief that Ghana's creative economy would offer more structure and opportunity. "I expected better pay and a clear path to growth," says Bello Taofikat, 38, from Lagos. That expectation reflects a common narrative among young creatives leaving Nigeria: the idea that crossing the border means stepping into a more organized industry. The reality was way more complicated, with no contracts in place and payments often delayed. Survival meant constant negotiation and adapting to an unfamiliar system. Feyikemi, a 20-year-old creative from Ekiti, describes it simply: "It takes patience. You have to learn how things work here before you can really belong." Between the promises of stability and the struggle of navigating informal labour, their stories expose the gap between what many migrants imagine and what they face.

The absence of contracts in most of the testimonies highlights a deeper structural problem. According to the International Labour Organization's Fair Recruitment Guidelines, clear agreements and transparent terms are essential to protect migrant workers from exploitation. When asked, most respondents either answered "No" or "Maybe" when questioned about having contracts in Ghana. This lack of formal protection leaves

many Nigerian creatives vulnerable to withheld payments and unfair conditions, echoing what labour experts describe as a recurring pattern in informal cross-border recruitment within West Africa. Nigeria still lacks a comprehensive labour migration framework, while Ghana has begun implementing a National Roadmap on Fair Recruitment with ILO support, a gap that makes the border itself a dividing line between vulnerability and potential security.

Beyond work, migration also means learning to live within a different social fabric. Several respondents described cultural adaptation as a slow but necessary process. "It takes patience. You have to learn how things work here before you can really belong," says 20-year-old Feyikemi, reflecting on her first months in Accra. 23-year-old creative, Joseph Collins Adu-Marfo from Ghana, provided the opposite angle, and highlighted that integration often involves "being prepared to fit into the system that's already there." Their comments underscore that, in addition to the economics and contracts, this journey is also about the experience of identity, culture, and belonging in a new creative landscape.

While most of the movement flows from Nigeria to Ghana, there are also creatives making the journey in the opposite direction. Joseph Collins Adu-Marfo, a 23-year-old Ghanaian creative, highlighted the challenges of entering Nigeria's creative space: "You have to fit into the system that's already there," he explains, noting how competitive the market can be. This reverse perspective raises a much larger question about Nigeria's creative industry in the context of gatekeeping, and whether structural barriers governing the system impact both local creatives and foreign creatives. It suggests that when crossing borders between the two countries, it is not simply a process of economic migration, but also about locating one's way within a series of creative ecosystems established by policy, culture, and access.

Together, these stories paint a picture of passion caught between borders — young Nigerians willing to risk uncertainty for the chance to create in a more stable environment, and a region still struggling to build fair systems for its growing creative economy. The testimonies expose a pattern that policy alone can't ignore; opportunity without protection leaves talent vulnerable, no matter how vibrant the industry looks from the outside. As the International Labour Organization's Fair Recruitment Guidelines emphasize, cross-border work must be built on transparency, legal safeguards, and ethical practices. For every Olagbenro, Paul, Bello, Feyikemi, and Joseph navigating this journey, the call is the same: a creative economy that values not just their work, but their rights.

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is a final-year Mass Communication student at Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria. As a dedicated cultural artist and storyteller, she is developing expertise in visual narrative, set design, and creative writing. She brings together skills in writing, photography, and editing, supported by a strong background in art and design. She is committed to creating immersive stories and seeks to contribute to the creative industries, focusing on cultural narratives.

Joy Ugochi Samuel (Nigeria)

is an undergraduate of Mass Communication at Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria, with academic and professional interest spanning advertising, media production, and creative storytelling. She has served as a Production Assistant at Group 8 Africa and currently holds the position of Vice Head of Media for The Community Service Project at Pan-Atlantic University, where she impacts social initiatives through communication. Joy's work combines writing, photography, and multimedia production. She is passionate about digital storytelling through video editing, content creation, and animation, to engage diverse audiences.

Mordi Menashi (Nigeria)

is a final-year Mass Communication student at Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria, passionate about storytelling, animation, and media creativity. He served as the Head of the Iberokodo Division in the University's Community Service Project, where he demonstrated leadership and a strong commitment to social development. A member of the Drama and Musical Theatre Society, Mordi actively contributes to the creative culture on campus. Beyond academics, Mordi is committed to using art and storytelling as tools for advocacy and social impact. His work blends creativity with purpose, drawing inspiration from pop culture, gaming, and animation to produce content that is both engaging and meaningful. He aspires to build a career at the intersection of media, storytelling, and social change, contributing to projects that entertain, educate, and inspire.

Minerva Ofusu (Ghana)

is a Development Communication student at the University of Media Arts and Communication (UniMAC) - Institute of Journalism (IJ), Accra, Ghana, with a strong foundation in communication studies. Her passion for development drives her to merge theory with practice, using communication to reframe narratives, challenge misconceptions, and advocate for sustainable and inclusive growth.

6. Beyond borders

The plight of migrants; a Nigerian and Ghanaian focus

Magdalene Nana Konadu Agyemang, Joshua Amoga Mbabugri, and Adaora Ndaguba

This small-scale journalistic research project aims to investigate the social, legal, and economic experiences of migrant workers and traders, particularly Nigerians in Ghana and Ghanaians in Nigeria. While the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons promotes inter-regional mobility, the real-world experiences of migrants suggest a complex web of hostility, inconsistent policies, and discrimination.

The Ghana- Nigeria labour migration landscape

Labour migration between Ghana and Nigeria is nothing new, dating back to the pre-colonial and colonial eras. However, labour securitization efforts—such as Ghana's 1969 Aliens Compliance Act and Nigeria's 1983 "Ghana Must Go" expulsion exercise—have left lasting tensions between the two countries. Recent developments, such as Ghana's 2019–2020 closure of Nigerian-owned shops under the Investment Promotion Act during the COVID-19 pandemic, have reignited these tensions, despite ECOWAS guarantees of free trade and movement.

According to data from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) cited by the Migrants and Refugees Section, there were 238,284 Ghanaian migrants in Nigeria as of 2020. In contrast, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as cited by the Scalabrini Institute for Human Mobility in Africa (SIHMA), reported 79,023 Nigerian migrants in Ghana in 2019.

However, many of the current Ghanaian migrants in Nigeria—as well as the Nigerian migrants in Ghana encountered during this study—were found to be second-generation or lower or had migrated a decade or more ago.

Why do they go?

Most Nigerians cite greener pastures as their motivation for seeking work in Ghana, in light of the current unstable economic and security situation in the country. One Ghanaian business owner in Nigeria, Mr. Agbonu Peter of Max continental brand, gave his main motivation to be the large and diverse consumer base and cheaper rates in Nigeria.

Challenges faced by migrant traders and impacts on their economic and social well-being

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) free movement protocol of 1979 is split into three goals to attain the overarching goal of strengthening West African economies and promoting regional integration. Its fifteen member states (of which Nigeria and Ghana are inclusive) were to allow citizens could any member state without a visa by 1985, settle and seek work by 1990, and open businesses by 1995. However, many modern migration policies in member states hinder the full realization of these goals, particularly pertaining to working and opening businesses. Our focus below will be on the policies surrounding business and trade for migrants in Nigeria and Ghana.

Ghana

The Ghana Investment Promotion Centre Act under the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) of 2013, laid out some conditions required by foreigners if they have interest in investing Ghana's domestic economy and retail sector. The Act sets aside the retail sectors for Ghanaian nationals, as they were previously dominated by migrants. Articles 27 and 28 of the Act state some fields that are inaccessible to non-wholly Ghanaian enterprises, some of which include the sale of goods or provision of services in a market, petty trading, hawking, or selling of goods in a stall at any place.

Nigeria

For the most part, Nigeria's immigration laws and processes codified in the Immigration Act, 2015 are in line with the ECOWAS free movement protocol, and do not directly threaten Ghanaian or other foreign traders. When a survey of the Bar Beach market in Jakande was carried out, it was found that most of the Ghanaian goods being sold there were being sold by Nigerians, primarily Igbo traders.

Nonetheless, there are some Ghanaian owned small to medium enterprises in Nigeria, such as Bina Foods, Lagos, and Max Continental brand, owned by Mr. Peter Agbony, mentioned earlier. Max Continental brand is a multipurpose enterprise that deals in fashion, and international logistics. Having emigrated from Ghana about 20 years ago, Mr. Agbonu spoke to us about his experiences, living and running his business in Nigeria:

"My Name is Peter Agbonu. Nigeria is a good place to market your product and sell your brand as well, because it has the market value and customer basis. You can't compare the population of Nigerians to Ghanaians. Nigeria – Ghana migration happens both ways, but I can say recently, like a few months back, a few months ago, in 2025, Ghana currency is getting more value than Nigeria currency. It's still manageable though (i.e. the naira for him as a business owner). But things are more expensive in Ghana than Nigeria. I know people who I buy spare parts for, in Ladepo here and then send to Ghana. They still prefer the rates because it's still much cheaper for them. In Ghana, the price is times two or three."

"As for my immigration process, I just believe when you're a foreigner or you're travelling from one country to another, you make sure to get your international passport or ECOWAS passport for West Africans, and you get your yellow card. Then you are free to cross any border without issue. Once you get your passport and your stamp and your yellow card, you are good to go. Nobody will harass you or embarrass you. There are no policies that hindered me. Yes, so my process was smooth coming to Nigeria, it was just the bad road and traffic."

"Do I face any challenges due to being a Ghanaian running my business? No, it's just the markets and the customer base challenges. For here in Nigeria, you know, the difficulties we face most times, are light, dispatch delivery, they disappoint, then our tax from the government, and yes, increased import duties for importers or market sellers selling fabrics to us. It tends to affect us, who produce to sell to customers as well."

"How would I say Nigerians feel about Ghanaians and other migrants? I would say positive, and I would say vice versa, because I've never been harassed, I've never been said, go back to your country, you know. Just do the right thing and do your business legally. I enjoy both Nigerian culture and my own. I feel both are almost the same because they are both English speaking countries. Yeah. So, it was easy to adapt."

"Is it still a good idea to come and start a business or your business in Nigeria? Compared to when I started? Hm, It's very dicey. Back then, it was more favourable. Now, it still is, but let's say, 60 per cent okay. I'd recommend anyone should

be where their customer base is, but if you want to expand, opening branches is fine. It depends on the kind of business and if you're ready to face the government taxation."

Mr Agbonu's story paints a picture of a Nigeria that welcomes Ghanaian and other foreign business owners, as long as they abide by the laws. However, the few Nigerian traders and business owners working in Ghana gave us some insights that tell a much more dismal story.

Mr Festus

"My name is Festus, and I've been trying to make a living in Ghana as a Nigerian entrepreneur. I initially started selling phone cases, but the competition was fierce, so I had to adapt. I switched to selling spare parts, hoping to find a more stable footing. However, life hasn't been easy."

"Beyond the usual business challenges, I've faced hostility and exploitation specifically because I'm Nigerian. Local authorities and 'area boys' frequently harass me, demanding illegal payments and threatening my business. It's like I'm being robbed daily, with no protection or recourse. Despite these obstacles, I'm determined to succeed and contribute to the local economy. I'm not asking for special treatment; I just want a fair chance to run my business in peace, under the same rules as everyone else. I'm holding on to hope that things will get better, and I'll be able to build a thriving business."

Mr Kwame

"My name used to be something else, but around here, at the Aflao border, it's easier to blend in. I've learned to call myself Kwame to make my work smoother with the locals."

"What I do isn't glamorous, but it's honest work. I help travellers with their registration and entry processes or find parking slots for them. It's chaotic here, and people appreciate a helping hand. On the side, I sell phone chargers to Ghanaians heading into Togo – they always seem to need them."

"But life as a border hustler isn't easy. The challenges are endless – scorching sun, long hours, and endless queues of frustrated travellers. Sometimes, officials can be unreasonable, demanding bribes or causing delays for no reason. The competition is fierce, too, with many others offering similar services. My biggest struggle is getting paid fairly for my work. Some people try to haggle or don't pay at all, leaving me to scrape by."

"Despite all this, I keep going. This border might be tough, but it's also full of opportunity. I just wish for a bit more stability and respect for people like me who are just trying to make a living."

Mr Sunday

"My name is Mr. Sunday. I moved to Ghana with the simple dream of starting a legitimate business, engaging in trade, and positively contributing to the local economy. However, my experience has been far from what I hoped. Instead of opportunity, I have been met with consistent challenges that specifically target me because of my Nigerian nationality. This report details the serious difficulties I face daily in trying to run my business."

"The first and most constant challenge is the atmosphere of fear. I am regularly subjected to verbal abuse from people who come to my shop and even from passersby on the street. They often accuse Nigerians like me of being the cause of local problems, claiming we are taking their jobs and customers. This constant negativity is deeply discouraging and makes it hard to stay motivated."

"Beyond words, the actions against me are worse. Local officials and neighbourhood gangs, often called "area boys," frequently visit my shop. They pretend that their visits are to check my business documents, such as my permit and license. These documents have been checked countless times and are always in perfect order. Their real purpose is to harass me, to remind me that I am being watched, and to make my business feel unstable. This seems to be a strategy to make me nervous and willing to pay any amount of money just to be left in peace."

"The financial pressure this creates is crippling. I am forced to pay significantly more money than Ghanaian traders for the same things. For example, if a local trader is asked to pay 100 cedis for a permit or a so-called 'fine,' I will be demanded to pay 400 cedis for the same thing. This is four times the amount. These payments are completely unofficial—I am given no receipt and no valid reason for the charge. The only explanation is my nationality."

"The most persistent issue comes from the 'area boys.' These informal gangs have decided they can tax my business. They come to my shop every month, and sometimes every week, to collect an illegal levy. They call it a 'protection fee' or 'market dues,' or sometimes they do not give any reason at all. They simply say, "Oga, we are here for our thing." If I refuse to pay, they openly threaten to break my shop windows, scare away my customers, or force me to close down entirely. I feel I have no one to report this to, as these individuals often seem to operate with the silent approval of some local authorities. Reporting them would likely only make my situation much worse."

"Perhaps the most painful problem is the outright theft. Individuals, some claiming to be from local associations or even pretending to be security personnel, will walk into my shop, pick up valuable items like phones or accessories, and simply walk out without paying. When I try to ask for payment, they become aggressive. They accuse me of selling my goods too cheaply and "spoiling our market," using this as an excuse to take my products by force. This is not a sale; it is a forceful confiscation. They are stealing my capital and my inventory. No business can survive when its goods are regularly taken without payment. It feels like being robbed over and over again."

"This is my reality: a cycle of intimidation, illegal payments, and theft that is making it impossible to run my business. I did not come to Ghana for special treatment or favours. I only wish to be allowed to do my business in peace and under the same rules that apply to everyone else. I am sharing my story in the hope that something can be done. We need protection from these acts. We need a safe and reliable system where we can report these crimes without fear of revenge. Most importantly, we need the authorities to see us not as targets for exploitation, but as legal traders who are simply trying to make an honest living."

Through these stories we get a glimpse into what it's like to be a Ghanaian or Nigerian migrant trader/entrepreneur in Nigeria or Ghana respectively. In Nigeria there appears to be a low level of Ghanaian traders/entrepreneurs selling domestically, though importing and exporting between the countries is more prevalent amongst Ghanaian traders, due to the cheaper rates at which goods are sold in Nigeria. The stories we've shared tell of the very different realities of being a migrant entrepreneur in either country.

7. Behind the promises

How labour migration fuels human trafficking

Magdalene Nana Konadu Agyemang, Joshua Amoga Mbabugri, and Adaora Ndaguba

Across West Africa, the promise of opportunity through labour migration is increasingly shadowed by the grim reality of human trafficking. Ghana and Nigeria, two of the region's most active migration hubs, are grappling with a surge in trafficking cases that exploit vulnerable youth under the guise of employment and escape from poverty. Between September 5 and 19, 2025, Ghanaian police rescued 60 victims — 41 foreign nationals trafficked into the country and 19 Ghanaians exploited abroad. NGO Challenging Heights reported rescuing 82 victims this year, including 57 children forced into labour on Lake Volta and 25 Nigerian girls trafficked into prostitution.

Among those affected is Adaku, an 18-year-old Nigerian apprentice hairdresser. She was lured to Ghana by a compatriot who promised legitimate work and a better life. Instead, she was forced into prostitution. After escaping, she found refuge with the Ghana Police Service and was later transferred to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), where she received shelter and protection. Today, Adaku uses poetry and song to raise awareness about trafficking, turning her trauma into advocacy.[8]

Meanwhile, Nigeria's anti trafficking agency, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Person (NAPTIP) in April, received 231 Nigerian victims rescued from Ghana, most of them minors coerced into cyber-enabled crime under false pretences. These figures underscore the transnational nature of trafficking networks and the urgent need for coordinated regional action. Despite ongoing efforts, both countries remain on Tier 2 of the U.S. State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report, indicating that while progress is being made, significant gaps in prevention, prosecution, and victim support persist.

Speaking to a panel of officials at the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), we looked at some of the ways in which challenges involved with migration and human trafficking between Nigeria and Ghana can be mitigated. The panel consisted of Mrs. Hajara Tunde-Osho, Mr. Etuk Imoh and Mr. Fredrick Oko. Here are some of their insights:

Why do they go?

"For greener pastures and then better opportunities, and, of course, the strength of the currency, that's like a greater push. After the boys who came in from Ghana for cybercrime, we had the boys, about 70 something of them, who came in from Ghana. And these boys were lured with the promise of a job in a company, a plastic company."

"So now get this, a plastic company in Ghana, but we have plastic companies in Nigeria. We have industries in Kano. But they were led from Kano all the way to Ghana. Promised jobs in Ghana, and they were not idle in Kano. That's the funny part. All these boys had something they were doing. There were even graduates among them. They have things they were doing in Nigeria. But when they were told that they'll be earning a certain amount, and then they, you know, you do the exchange rate, and you see how the naira is, they all went for it."

"But when they got there, the job was not there. They didn't even meet the person who had invited them. So, it got so bad. But luckily, the government talked to the Nigerian embassy, and they were able to get find their way back. They had to find their way back. So, you see that it's just the promise of better opportunities, the promise of, oh, the exchange rate is better, it's higher. So go work

8 International Organization for Migration (IOM), "Survivors of Trafficking – Adaku's Story," *IOM Ghana*, 2021.

> Most times, people feel they can go wherever they want to go to without even asking the right questions, the needed questions.

> If you follow the correct route, do your research before you move. There are laws that protect your interest.

there. By the time you come into Nigeria, the little you make there comes into Nigeria. Those are the things."

"If you look at our mandates, our mandate is centrally focused on areas of trafficking. We actually have little information about trade or those that are going to get jobs legally in Ghana. If we're talking about the policies, it's important to point out that even though you have the free movement protocol now you find out that those who facilitate irregular migration will not tell you the provisions of that protocol. The fact that you are a member of the ECOWAS does not mean that you can leave your country without a passport, even though you have 30 days to stay without the need for visa, but you still need your documents. There has to be documentation of your entry and your exit into any country."

"Most times, people feel they can go wherever they want to go to without even asking the right questions, the needed questions. Over 95 per cent of victims we rescue don't have documents. When someone in the informal sector like a trader or an artisan wants to travel, and he just packs his things and goes, not knowing that there is a law that actually protect whatever happens to you, wherever you're going to. It's only when they get there and there's a problem and they can't escape that's when you now get calls to us and other agencies to come and intervene."

"So by and large, the ECOWAS free movement doesn't really affect human trafficking because, you know, recently, we found out that they don't even travel across the terrestrial borders. What they now do is they go through from mile two they go through the waterways close to camp them there temporarily, then make cyclists move them to Ghana, Togo, etc. That's why we have a robust synergy with the FOB navy. They patrol the waterways, because they found out that immigration and the enforcement officer have been intercepting them in along that bada-seme border."

"If you follow the correct route, do your research before you move. There are laws that protect your interest. But a law doesn't become active until you assess it, and you put it into play. If you don't put it into play, it continues to be negative. And I'm happy we're having this kind of research. If there's anything we need to do, yes, we need to educate people more."

What steps is NAPTIP currently taking to improve migrant safety when traveling to neighbouring countries?

"We have been doing a lot. Much of which has been awareness. Like if you look at this bus (it was behind us), it's called the Blue Bus. That was an awareness programme with IOM, sponsored by Netherlands. It was used to carry out awareness for women like the public travel rights, teach people how to travel the regular way not the irregular way."

"And we also had what we call the community dialog, which was centred at the community level, where artisans, group leaders, community leaders, will assemble and trade ideas on the issue of irregular migration, and also to see how we can

develop home grown solutions to what we call the push and pull factors, which are the factors that push people out of the communities, make them vulnerable, and factors that actually attract them to wherever they're going. Like if you are in a fishing community, you can leverage on that rather than embarking on irregular migration. It was used in Lagos, Delta State, and others."

So what programmes are you running currently?

"What is on ground now, is what we call a community-based planning (CBP). Some local governments where you have high return of migrants were selected. Then, based on that the community in line with NAPTIP and our partners like IOM will assess it and say, okay, is this what is making the people here to migrate regularly? Then the partner will be looking for who will now sponsor the project. So, it's no longer an issue of taking situation alone, no longer an issue of asking you to go and look for what you can do, but also to see what can be done for you. And currently, now that worked out to a reasonable extent, particularly in Lagos."

"We have also tried to establish clubs in schools where people have been made to know that we can do it better here, anywhere is greener, but the only way you water it as it becomes green, rather than embarking on the journey that at the end of the day you don't come back, or you end up being a business or being a being a victim of human trafficking."

And what about partnerships? Do you usually work with other private or government agencies or individuals?

"Yes, we also work closely with law enforcement, as well as the immigration service, even the customs. Then we also have stakeholders in some border communities because migrants often camp in the border communities. We talk to the traditional authorities in those border communities so if they find anything sinister within their environment, they can always talk to us."

"Then we also have synergy with the transporters, long distance ones, the ones that run interstate. Not even just the interstate transporters, we also work with drivers in Benue, because a lot of traffickers and victims from around the country go through Benue before they go out. So, if the transporters notice any suspicious behaviour, they get in touch with us. We also try to train the transporters. A lot of survivors will tell you, "I travelled with this one", but the transporters do not actually know they are carrying possible victims of human trafficking. The training is basically on indicators of human trafficking. So, when they see a victim, they can actually identify, then they have a number they can reach out to us with 627. It's also toll free on MTN."

"We equally have synergy with our partners in Ghana. We work with IYOKO in Ghana. Most of the rescues we've been having recently were with them. And then we work with the Nigerian community leaders in Ghana, so that anything suspicious they let us know. Equally they send in their petitions, research and the likes."

"All in all, we try to mitigate irregular migration by stopping it before it happens through border patrol and enlightenment and rehabilitation activities."

The stories emerging from Ghana and Nigeria reveal a troubling pattern: young migrants, driven by hope and desperation, are being ensnared in trafficking networks that exploit gaps in policy, enforcement, and public awareness. While agencies like NAPTIP and IOM are making strides through rescue operations, community engagement, and cross-border partnerships, the scale and sophistication of trafficking demand more than reactive measures. As Adaku's journey shows, survival is possible—but prevention must be prioritized. Strengthening documentation protocols, educating communities on safe migration, and investing in local opportunities are critical steps toward dismantling the lure of false promises. Until then, the dream of a better life will continue to be weaponized against the region's most vulnerable.

Magdalene Nana A. Konadu Agyemang (Ghana)

is a passionate broadcast journalist, dedicated orthoepist, student leader, and a final-year Development Communication student at the University of Media Arts and Communication (UniMAC) - Institute of Journalism (IJ), Accra, Ghana. She is the convener of *The Prodigy Network*, a vibrant community committed to bringing brilliant minds together to support, equip, and empower one another for success in the job market. With a strong interest in academia and development communication, Magdalene thrives on imparting knowledge and making a meaningful impact in the lives of others. She enjoys reading and writing and actively contributes to gender-related advocacy initiatives, driven by a deep commitment to social change and personal growth.

Joshua Amoga Mbabugri (Ghana)

is a final-year Development Communication student at the University of Media Arts and Communication (UniMAC) - Institute of Journalism (IJ), Accra, Ghana. Deeply passionate about community development, he focuses on leveraging storytelling and creativity to drive meaningful social change. His mission is to amplify human stories that highlight community needs and inspire transformative development.

Adaora Ndaguba (Nigeria)

is a 200-level Mass Communication student at Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria. A passionate learner and expressive individual, she is deeply committed to using creative mediums to tell compelling stories, inspire positive change, and build meaningful connections.

8. The invisible corridor

Nigerian women in Ghana's domestic and hospitality work

Psalma Ackon and Sarah T. A. Eruchalu

Treasure recalls her life as being split into two periods: The Before and the After. The Before is marked by her fiancé's passing, which spurred her to search for something new, a fresh start. She recalls: "I spoke to my mum and told her I needed to travel. At least let me just meet new friends, change my environment." The After period is everything that follows that harrowing point in her life.

Treasure's journey saw her make her way to Ghana, with promises of greener pastures and more opportunity guaranteed by her friends. However, the reality was far from the rosy picture that she was sold, it included long hours and deception. Lured in by an acclaimed radio producer's promise of mentorship, his proposition hit her like cold water in the face. She was given two options: pay for the radio producer's expertise with her body or pay with money she couldn't afford. When she expressed dismay, he dismissed her coldly: "Go and do prostitution. That's what your mates are doing." Treasure refused, but she never forgot the experience. It taught her a vital lesson: the corridor linking Nigeria and Ghana is filled with women running towards survival and better opportunities yet exposed to exploitation and coercion.

The invisible labour corridor is the unseen and overlooked movement, and sometimes exploitation, of migrant workers. This corridor has been fuelled by the dire situation in Nigeria. The ever-worsening economic conditions - rampant unemployment, insecurity, gender inequality - continue to leave more and more women behind, and dependent. On the other side of this, growth of the hospitality and domestic sector in Ghana heightens the demand for cheaper labour. More than this, this corridor holds a tale of mistreatment and silent burdens. Stories of wage theft, mistreatment by employers, and even sexual harassment are passed around in hushed tones, as if the very thought of speaking out is worse than the victimization itself. Their fears are not unfounded - word spreads fast amongst employers in these spaces and being labelled as 'difficult' or 'haughty' spells doom for their source of income.

Despite all this, Treasure continues to fight for her dreams in music rather than succumb to the objectification that befalls most women. Her voice cracks as she recalls their plight; women trafficked into brothels, working and living hand to mouth because of employers refusing to pay on time, women forced to work without contracts, barely surviving in a system designed to erase them. Treasure says: "They pray to God almost every day, asking for help to take them out of their predicament, because it is not easy."

Treasure's testimony reveals a bitter irony: women who are merely existing, surviving and whose labour sustains families back home through their earnings. These women are amongst the most underreported and overexploited workers in West Africa.

Migration, especially labour migration, does not happen in a vacuum. Nigerian women who migrate to Ghana are driven by a connected web of personal, economic and societal factors. In Nigeria, the factors are not overt: a shaky government with poor leadership that has weakened its economy, a personal desire for more than what one's immediate surroundings can offer. Coupled with the outdated gender norms that offer women fewer choices than men, migration can seem like a lifeline to many women.

In contrast Ghana is a beacon of stability. Its bursting service economy in cities like Accra and Kumasi has created demand for domestic workers, caregivers, and low-wage hospitality staff. Middle-class families seek childcare and cleaning services; hotels and eateries rely on low-paid waitresses, cleaners, and receptionists. In Ghana, female labour force participation is estimated at around

65 per cent; meaning more women than ever have access to job opportunities. Many of these women have careers which take them out of the home, increasing the need for contracted domestic work.

For Nigerian women, the country's stability and open borders make it a logical destination. But beneath all this, lies a trap. The jobs available are nearly always informal, poorly paid, and unregulated. Recruitment happens through friends, relatives, or middlemen who rarely disclose the true conditions. By the time women arrive in Ghana, the cost of turning back is too high.

This was the case for Graze Eze, a Banking and Finance graduate who chose to migrate after struggling with the weight of unemployment as well as the added responsibility of being the family breadwinner. The loss of Eze's parents meant that the futures of her younger siblings rested on her shoulders. Inspired by her aunt's success, she took the plunge but what she faced was far from the straightforward path she envisioned for herself. Grace would soon find out that her degree counted for little.

Grace recalls the rampant discrimination she and many other Nigerian women face in the domestic and hospitality work sector. After two years of enduring slurs and rumours surrounding her nationality, Grace secured a job as a hotel cleaner, and as luck would have it, a side gig cleaning the hotel owner's home. The work was backbreaking, and the abuse further demeaned her as she endured episodes of verbal abuse. The breaking point came when Grace survived a near-assault incident. Other women, as Grace puts it, are not so lucky. Grace's survival, and subsequent silence, undercuts a deeper message of this dark corridor: women often bear the burden of psychological scars.

As Treasure puts it, many good women have become trapped in a dark and violent cycle that exploits them with no rescue in sight. "When you hear their stories, you would not actually judge them," she says. "Most of them are good people. They pray every day for help to take them out of their predicament."

The presence of women's labour itself in these spaces becomes a commodity. In hotel lounges, managers often hire young women not only for their work, but for their presence. They are needed to smile at guests, to embody the "warmth" of service, while treating them as expendable.

It would not be a stretch to say that the true cost of this labour migration is not only measured in wages. Many women deal with a sense of longing, mothers enduring separation from their children, daughters unable to run home for sanctuary, friends isolated away from their support system. Treasure testifies of the loneliness she has seen among her peers.

For many women, they find solace in faith, solidarity with fellow migrants, and the belief that wages sent home will justify the sacrifice. Even small sums sent back to Nigeria play a huge role in supporting households, financing school fees, paying for healthcare or delighting a loved one with gifts.

These labour migration cases thrive in the shadow of weak law enforcement. Ghana's labour inspections are sporadic and its protections for migrants insufficient. Many Nigerian women rely on the word of their agents and recruiters and have no community to fall back on when promises are reneged upon. Employers in turn exploit the informality of spoken contracts to backtrack promises. Recruitment happens through referrals, leaving women with no leveraging power if promises are broken.

This system benefits households and businesses while leaving workers invisible. Nigerian women's labour fuels the machinery of Ghana's urban economy, yet they remain hidden from policy debates, unrepresented, and powerless in negotiations about their own conditions.

Despite all of these, it would be a disservice to treat this story as one solely built on victimhood. Women like Treasure resist, by refusing exploitation and refusing to have their futures defined by others.

Treasure continues to pursue music production, even as she acknowledges the challenges of being a woman in a male-dominated field. She has learned to see criticism as a tool, to channel her grief into creative work. Around her, she sees other women surviving with resilience, forming sisterhoods that protect them when society turns a blind eye.

These women are owed recognition, as Ghana's service economy thrives on low-paid labour, and Nigerian communities rely on the assistance from remitted wages. Without that due recognition, the corridor will remain shrouded in darkness, sustained by women who are only seen when they serve, and silenced when they cry out.

Psalma Ackon (Ghana)

holds a diploma in Communication and is currently pursuing a degree in Development Communication at the University of Media Arts and Communication (UniMAC) - Institute of Journalism (IJ), Accra, Ghana. She has a keen interest in labour and migration issues, particularly their impact on women in West Africa. Her academic work has shed light on the often-overlooked exploitation women face in their search for employment. Psalma advocates for stronger regulation and oversight of migration corridors to protect the rights and dignity of women in transit for work.

Sarah T. A. Eruchalu (Nigeria)

is a final-year Mass Communication student at Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria, whit a strong interest in the relationship between media and cultural critique. Her areas of focus include Nollywood, digital communication, and fitness. She aspires to foster open and fair discourse on how media and media education shape identity, challenges social norms, and reflect cultural realities.

9. Student migrants to working professionals

The Nigerian-Ghanaian educational and labour mobility experience

Matthew Azure and Christine Keke

African university students on campus. © Anonymous (n.d.).

The concept of studying abroad is not new. In fact, the term "student migrant" is one that has become increasingly popular amongst the youth. However, while it is one thing to study abroad, it is another thing to continue to reside in the said country as a worker. This report focuses on student migration and the following transition into the workforce, citing Nigeria and Ghana.

Student migration has evolved as an important component of labour mobility in West Africa, representing both the pursuit of a quality education and strategic career paths. For instance, in 2021 the number of students from Sub-Saharan Africa enrolled in degree programmes outside their home countries was over 441,000; nearly a 170 per cent increase from 1998. In 2021, about 20 per cent of mobile students from Sub-Saharan Africa were enrolled in another African country. This percentage has decreased over time from a high of 35 per cent in 2004 indicating a growing preference for studying outside the region.[9]

Despite the existence of student mobility for some time, the transition from student to worker in countries of destination remains riddled with

9 Stefan Trines, "The State of Intraregional Student Mobility in Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for Greater Regionalization?," *World Education News & Reviews (WENR)*, 9 October 2023.

structural challenges. This report leverages the Nigeria-Ghana corridor as a case study to show how Ghanaian higher education, which is regarded among the best in West Africa for professions such as medicine, attracts Nigerian students looking for affordable, internationally recognized degrees. However, outside academia, these migrants suffer discrimination in housing, restricted work permit regimes, and inconsistent recognition of skills—barriers that undercut broader goals of social inclusion and equitable labour access.

Why study in Ghana?

A number of sources positively describe the Ghanaian education system. Ghana has even emerged as a significant destination for Nigerian students seeking higher education. As of 2016, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has reported 13,919 Nigerian students were studying in Ghana representing a 50 per cent increase from 2012. This trend is driven by capacity strain in many Nigerian universities and the desire for better career prospects, which many believe are more accessible through international education.

Adaugo Modilim, a Nigerian who graduated from Kwame Nkrumah University with a first-class degree in Business/Accounting, described bureaucracy in the Nigerian tertiary education system as her main reason for schooling in Ghana. She explained that she had begun her tertiary education in one of Nigeria's federal universities, the University of Lagos (UNILAG). However, this phase of her education was delayed for two reasons. The first is the frequency of indefinite strikes commonly associated with federal universities in Nigeria. These strikes often result in students having to pause their education for long periods of time. In Adaugo's case, her education was paused for a year. The second reason for her delay in tertiary education was because, as she explained, the process of gaining admissions into another university in Nigeria was particularly lengthy. This was because students, such as herself, who were looking to change universities are required to obtain Advanced Level (A Level) qualifications. This process typically takes at least a year to complete. Once completed, students can then enrol in a university's "direct entry" programme that allows them to continue their education in another university. She, therefore, decided to apply to a university in Ghana "rather than wasting a year".

Ifediora Obialor, a Nigerian studying mechanical engineering at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) claims "KNUST was once announced as one of the best schools in the world in quality education having above 200 universities in their MoUs (Memoranda of Understanding), supporting students with various scholarships to further their education (master's and PhD) and having exchange programmes. It is also a public university". He went on to say, "If it were Nigeria, one would finish a five-year course in seven years due to strike."

Christinuella Anthony-Bassey, a Nigerian studying medicine at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana, stated her reason for choosing to study in Ghana to be because "Ghanaian medical schools are ranked top five in West Africa." She goes on to describe the degrees as "credible" and the campus environment to be "nice" and "safe."

Furthermore, there are several reasons why students choose not to study outside Africa, such as funding issues. Christinuella, for instance, went on to describe the process of studying outside Africa to be "cumbersome." She further stated that, for her, "It's better to study here (in Ghana) for six years and have a certificate that is internationally recognized than to drive myself into debt for eight years."

The migration process from Nigeria to Ghana

Sources confirm that the migration process itself certainly has its demands.

Emmanuella Ulamba, a Nigerian studying computer science at the Catholic University of Ghana, describes her migration experience as being relatively easy given her familial ties with "very reliable" educational agents. Christinuella Anthony-Bassey stated that she applied online. Adaugo Modilim also stated that her application process to a Ghanaian school happened online. She went on to say that she did not need the aid of an educational agent as the process was "easy".

Ifediora Obialor stated that he applied through Ordinary Level (O Level) educational qualifications; specifically West African Senior School Certificate

Examination (WASSCE). However, one could also obtain such qualifications through credits in the following examinations: International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), or General Certificate of Education (GCE). He said, "One can apply with all the necessary documents (such as evidence of academic credentials, identification cards and birth certificates) and do an interview at the Ghana Immigration Centre. Then, they would get back to you on whether you've gained admission." He also described his migration process as "fluent as humanly possible" claiming that "the only stressful part (for him) was travelling to Ikoyi (an Island in Lagos, Nigeria)."

Challenges faced by Nigerian students in Ghana

Student migrants face several challenges. One of the major challenges includes the shock that comes with cultural shifts. Many migrant students struggle to culturally adapt to their new environment. This particularly includes language barriers, along with other forms of communication and customs (most of which tend to take place outside of class). However, this does not mean that adaptation is unachievable. Emmanuella Ulamba, for instance, acknowledged language barriers as a struggle she faces while studying in Ghana. However, she also mentioned that most classes are taught in English, so the language barriers do not strongly affect her education. On a separate note, Emmanuella also mentioned that she has observed greeting and courteous speech (such as "please" and "thank you") to be more reinforced in Ghana compared to Nigeria. Similarly, Adaugo Modilim describes language barriers as a struggle she faced while studying in Ghana.

Another challenge faced by migrant students is discrimination and unfair bias. Emmanuella Ulamba mentions that she was unable to secure accommodation in some areas in Ghana, as several of them had a "No Nigerians" policy; this means that some areas of residence do not allow or cater for Nigerians. She says, "I've experienced some bias with how Nigerians are treated here in Ghana in some situations." Similarly, Christinuella Anthony-Bassey states that "there's some discrimination and bias against Nigerians." She goes on to state that while the school she attends has an ISA (International Students Association), it "does not take priority" and does not cater to the minority international students such as herself.

From students to workers

The desire for post-study work opportunities is a key driver behind international student migration. A 2022 survey found that more than half of Nigerian students studying abroad wanted to seek post-study work, and 80 per cent wanted to improve career prospects.

The transition process from migrant student to worker is peculiar. This process would require one to obtain a work permit as well as permanent residence in the said country. Sources confirm just how demanding this process can be, describing it as "really stressful" and one that "requires connections."

Adaugo Modilim, however, described her process of seeking employment in Ghana as "easy". She says she was able to work in a "television broadcasting start-up operation". She went on to positively describe her recruitment process claiming that there were no issues at all with working conditions and wage. However, she also described the process of renewing one's work permit in Ghana to be burdensome. She explained that it costs workers about USD$ 1,000 to renew their workers' permit. This would prove a burden to some employers who typically sponsor their employees. She went on to say that she still experienced some incidents of discrimination in the workplace as she was the only female worker in there. She said that, because of this, there were times she felt left out in certain operations. She even recalled a time that the male workers deliberately spoke in a Ghanaian language she did not understand when they did not want to involve her in certain projects.

Christinuella Anthony-Bassey states that she will spend two years doing housemanship (a requirement for all medical students and doctors that involves working in a hospital for some time during their first year after completing their medical degree) in Ghana "because the starting salary is 8,000 cedis, which is currently about 700,000 naira. Doctors in Nigeria are paid about 200,000 naira monthly." She goes on to say, "There's job opportunities and more security here.". She also described the Ghanaian currency to be "stronger" than that of Nigeria and the government to be "more stable."

Future plans

Many student migrants prefer to stay in their said countries of migration either permanently or temporarily. While some may choose to permanently reside and work in the said countries, others may choose to leave and find work elsewhere. Various reasons inform the above decisions.

Emmanuella Ulamba says, "I would love to stay in Ghana longer if I get a job after studying."

Adaugo Modilim decided to return to Nigeria after working in Ghana for some time due to "family reasons" and continue working there. In Nigeria, she currently works at the Matela Foundation, serving as the deputy head of administration. She also said that she would love to work somewhere else maybe even outside of Africa "purely for experience".

Similarly, Christinuella Anthony-Bassey says, "I plan on staying in Ghana for about two years post-graduation before migrating abroad because I'd like to experience a more advanced and developed medical system."

Conclusion

Overall, student migration from Nigeria to Ghana has consistently increased over the years. Although some Nigerian students in Ghana have had mixed experiences that could be improved through specified policies, the overall sentiment is positive.

Matthew A. Azure (Ghana)

is a Ghanaian climate change and political activist, as well as a consultant and radio presenter. He holds a Diploma in Communication Studies from the University of Media Arts and Communication (UniMAC) - Institute of Journalism (IJ), Accra, Ghana, with a specialization in photojournalism, visual communication, and political science. He completed his national service with the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands (OASL) and the Lands and Mineral Commission of Ghana. Currently, he is a final-year student pursuing a bachelor's degree in development communication at (UniMAC-IJ). Passionate about using visuals and imagery to inform, engage, and advocate for change, he strives to create meaningful impact in society.

Christine Keke (Nigeria)

is a second-year Mass Communication student at Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria. Passionate about storytelling, media, communications, art, and literature, she currently serves as General Secretary of the Mass Communication Society (PAU Chapter). Her motivation and collaborative spirit have earned her several leadership roles and responsibilities. She actively pursues learning and skill development through online and in-person training, complemented by volunteering experiences, for which she has received various certifications. Committed to using storytelling for social impact, she also enjoys reading, filmmaking, drawing, and arts and crafts.

10. Threads beyond borders

Intra-West African labour migration and perception of the textile industry

Rita Naa Ayeley Armah and Oluwademilade Oguntade

Migration between Ghana and Nigeria has long been framed through the lens of high-skilled professionals, political instability or pan-African cooperation, yet beneath those narratives lies a complicated web of semi-skilled and informal labour mobility that rarely enters policy papers or headlines. The textile and fashion ecosystem, one of the region's oldest industries, has quietly facilitated centuries of cross-border movement, trade partnerships and intermarriage, long before ECOWAS systemized the right of free movement. Yet in the 21st century, this traditional pathway to prosperity now competes with digital economies, shifting perceptions of manual work, etc. The lives of individuals such as Mr Philip, a Ghanaian weaver in Nigeria and Nigerian women like Mama Emeka and Favour, who crossed in the opposite directions of their borders, provide a window into what intra-West African labour migration truly looks like when stripped of political notions.

Unlike narratives of exodus towards Europe or North America, migration within West Africa is intimate, negotiated through kinship, apprenticeships and word-of-mouth rather than embassies or recruitment agencies. It is charged not by dreams of Western glamour, but by the calculation of "where can I make something of myself, even if temporarily?" In that sense, the textile trade has functioned as both bridge and buffer. Before this whole digital influencing era, young men and women travelled with nothing but their hands and stamina to places where craftsmanship was in demand. Mr Philip recalls that "the late 90s and early 2000s saw young people who migrated temporarily for skilled manual labour gigs that allowed them a well-funded long vacation period." They would weave in Nigeria for a season, convert their earnings into cedis and return to Ghana to enjoy a lifestyle that would have been impossible had they stayed put.

But those patterns have shifted. Today, the motivations remain, but the conditions around them have transformed. According to Mr. Philips, the problem is no longer opportunity but attitude. "Internet fraud, depreciation of naira, large-scale import threats as well as unpredictable tax policies are factors contributing to this declining interest in skilled manual labour for migrants and even residents. If Nigerians are not willing, why would foreigners be willing?" In his eyes, Ghanaian migrants have always moved not because their homeland failed them, but because labour markets are cyclical; at different times, one country becomes the temporary land of advantage.

His journey began not with an agency contract or certainty, rather with economic stagnation. Patronage from Nigerians had declined while he was still working in Ghana. Export customers disappeared. When a Ghanaian domestic worker, herself working in Nigeria returned home to visit, Philip seized the opportunity not through formal documentation but through connection. He secured details, packed what little he could afford and embarked on a trip that was less planned migration and more leap of survival. As many Nigerians say, he came to "hustle". He crossed the Ghana-Nigeria border without passport or permit and was immediately flagged by security officials and detained until a deal allowed him passage. His English accent gave him away even in Nigeria's heavily multilingual environment. Food, not language, became the greater threat, the fiery stews and heavy starches were his only affordable option, until weeks of surviving on dry *garri* left him seriously ill.

Yet he stayed. He found a small group of Ghanaians clustered within the weaving industry, and through them, he found lodging and eventual work. Within months he had gained a reputation for speed and discipline, delivering output that

doubled that of his Nigerian peers. The informal economy has no medals, yet there are silent hierarchies; he rose through them until he could lead his own operations. Today he is married to a Yoruba woman, holds legal documentation and leads a workshop employing both Nigerians and fellow Ghanaians on contract terms. He travels back to Ghana for festivals and has built two houses there with proceeds from his Nigerian enterprise. He now sponsors younger Ghanaians on temporary weaving jobs in Nigeria, a reverse settlement of opportunity rather than cash.

His story complicates simple notions of economic migration. It was not a story of poverty or desperation, but of mobility within a shared cultural economy, a movement predicated on the belief that craftsmanship retains market relevance even in digital times. Yet the structure that supported his ascent, cheap transport, favourable exchange rates, consistent demand for local production, has weakened. "Initially, the exchange rate was favourable for remittance, but in recent years the value has declined," he notes. Even his own apprentices now hesitate. The appeal of online income, legal or otherwise, outweighs the slow satisfaction of mastering loom work. Where he once employed dozens, now he often struggles to assemble teams.

The same logic, reversed in direction, brought Nigerian women such as Mama Emeka and Favour to Ghana not for glamorized entrepreneurship, but through personal relationships and survival-based adaptation. "I didn't come to Ghana to do business," Mama Emeka said plainly. "I came to help my sister's children after she died." Marriage to a Nigerian man in Ghana warranted her settlement. Business was not ambition but necessity, "After school, I decided to settle on fabrics because it was what was available." She did not import from Nigeria, her reason being that "Nigeria doesn't manufacture fabrics." She has lived over 30 years in Ghana, naturalized as Ghanaian and unlike the classic migrant entrepreneur she doesn't express nostalgia. Cultural identity dissolves when livelihood takes precedence.

Favour's migration was more deliberate yet equally complex. Formerly a banker in Nigeria, she married a Ghanaian man abroad and relocated by bus, a journey which was almost ruined by armed robbery. She entered textiles because according to her she already knew that was what her husband was into. She imports Adire and lace from Nigeria and China through formal customs channels despite high taxation, which makes her goods relatively expensive. Still, she sustains business through loyal customers. To her, Ghana is safer, Nigeria is cheaper, but Ghana is friendlier. She has adapted linguistically and socially, but cost of living limits her expansion.

Between Philip in Nigeria and Mama Emeka and Favour in Ghana, a clear pattern surfaces: migration in the West African textile sector is not aspirational, it is instrumental. Individuals do not move to pursue passion but to stay afloat through adaptability. None describe their first choice as entrepreneurship; rather, they fell into textiles through survival but stayed through viability. Yet the ability to sustain, succeed or work as intended is no longer guaranteed. Their testimonies reflect the broader structural tension facing informal industries in an age of automation.

The 21st century development includes rapid technological advancements that were only partly predicted during the previous generation. Due to rapid tech advancements like AI and its influence on almost every profession, labour all around the world are urged to embrace these developments and up-skill to prevent their premature exit from the portion of the labour market that remains relevant. However, what does this really mean for labour that migrate in search of more profitable commercial opportunities? Could it be that many are so focused on the AI vs Human competence Cold War that they become ignorant of some commercially viable competencies that contribute largely to the informal economy. Simply put, are they conscious of the labour demand gap in industries that require skilled manual labour? Philip, a Ghanaian textile weaver who migrated to Nigeria to scale his venture has confirmed the viability of this business however stressing the growing demand for labour in that sector. He recounts that the late 90s and early 2000s saw young people who migrated temporarily for skilled manual labour gigs that allowed them a well-funded long vacation period. Philip affirms that they came for a while and then later went back to convert the Naira into Cedis to enjoy at home. Philip, as one of the major migrant textile workers in Nigeria, now believes that the youths are being taken aback by the simplicity of the other technological alternatives; whether legal or illegal. Internet fraud, depreciation of Naira, large

scale import threats as well as unpredictable tax policies are factors contributing to this declining interest in skilled manual labour for migrants and even residents in large-scale and small-scale, particularly in artisanal industries like textile. If Nigerians are not willing, why would foreigners be willing? This is a question that explores the motivations of migrants who relocate for work. Especially with Ghanaians and Nigerians who have significant history and cultural synergies; there are uncharted territories and opportunities to explore. Considering the nature of pull factors in Nigeria such as the increased demand for a new generation of labour, Ghanaian migrants may consider the similarities between their home country and Nigeria to seal their migrating decisions. It is not uncommon for migrants to take up job roles that citizens of their destination country have abandoned. Thereby, contributing to economic development and closing labour demand gaps. However, in reality, it is more complicated than this owing to updates in remittance value, technological advancements across various occupations, the growing rate of remote workers across Africa and the incentives available for such jobs. Labour demand cannot be separated from the incentives to work. When these incentives are no longer attractive and less strenuous job opportunities are valued at relatively higher prices, decline in labour supply is unavoidable.

If migration once relied on physical strength, today it also demands guiding intelligence, the ability to discern which economies still reward effort in tangible form. For decades, West African migration narratives followed a predictable cycle; move, earn, send money home and return with dignity. Now that linear model has tweaked. With fluctuating currencies, strained remittance value and rising digital alternatives, making it undesirable. Migrants speak of staying only as long as this place makes sense, a logic both practical and emotionally detached.

In Nigeria, the textile economy remains deeply layered. At the top sit industrial-scale importers who bring in Chinese wax and lace at bulk rates, dominating urban markets. Beneath them exist workshop owners like Philip, who maintain cultural authority by producing locally woven fabrics, often used for ceremonies that demand authenticity, funerals, chieftaincy events, age-grade uniforms. Beneath even that lies a flexible tier of migrant workers, apprentices or temporary labourers who cycle in and out depending on season and exchange rate. In Ghana, the structure is similar, but with a stronger formal identity due to the legacy of companies such as GTP and Akosombo Textiles. Yet, ironically, much of Ghana's market is now flooded with Nigerian lace and Chinese polyester. The irony is cyclical: Ghanaians leave to produce in Nigeria while Nigerians leave to sell in Ghana.

Labour flow, therefore, is not simply north to south or poor to rich, it is craft to market, familiarity to opportunity. Migrants do not move randomly, they move where their skill has cultural value. For a Nigerian selling *Ankara*, Ghana is not merely a safer option, it is a ready-made audience that understands the textile language. For a Ghanaian weaver, Nigeria is not just a higher-paying destination, it is a society that still assigns status to fabric as social identity.

Yet this shared reverence is losing ground to imported alternatives and digital shortcuts. Large-scale textile importation from China has eroded the value of painstaking craftsmanship. The labour-to-profit ratio is declining. Why spend hours weaving or dyeing when one can resell factory-printed imitations at double the margin? Why master a loom when cryptocurrency trading offers faster turnover? The textile sector finds itself caught between cultural nostalgia and economic realism.

This erosion does not only affect artisans, it threatens a regional knowledge system built on apprenticeship. Traditionally, skill transfer in textiles was embedded in kinship, uncles mentoring nephews, aunties training nieces. Now, even when older migrants like Philip attempt to recruit new hands from Ghana, they are met with reluctance. Younger men prefer motorcycle ride-hailing, betting businesses or online hustles. These alternatives offer autonomy without skill-building, attractive in the short term, hollow in the long term.

Women migrants express similar sentiments, all though through different pressures. When asked if she would recommend textile trading to her children, Favour hesitated. She acknowledged its stability but questioned its future appeal. "Our children are not looking at this kind of work and

even if they enter it, they want to do it online." For them, the business is not in holding cloth but in flipping visibility, like TikTok live selling, WhatsApp broadcast lists, Instagram reselling.

What emerges is a labour economy in quiet transition, not collapsing, but mutating. The informal textile trade will not disappear, it will split. One arm will remain tied to physical craftsmanship, weaving, dyeing, tailoring, sustained by ceremonial demand. The other will drift into logistics, branding and resale, no longer about producing cloth but moving it. In this new model, migrants will no longer be defined by their hands, but by their networks.

Yet networks are built on perception and perception is shifting unevenly across borders. Certain Ghanaian migrants in Nigeria express pride in being regarded as disciplined and hardworking. This stereotype, while flattering on the surface, doubles as justification for exploitation. Employers praise their speed and seriousness but often hesitate to pay them proportionally. Nigerian women in Ghana report a similar contradiction, welcomed for their energy yet monitored with suspicion when economically successful. They are allowed to work but discouraged from thriving too visibly, an example is one of some Ghanaians protesting and arguing that Nigerians are taking over customers by reducing prices of their products.

Despite these tensions, the textile economy remains one of the rare spaces where foreignness can be softened through contribution. Even when legal documentation is lacking, usefulness serves as a visa. A weaver who can increase production, a trader who supplies in-demand cloth, a dyer who revives a forgotten technique, their legitimacy is negotiated not at the embassy but at the marketplace. Borders bend when profit is involved.

This is why migration in this sector cannot be understood through official labour statistics. These movements occur outside formal registration. They are circulatory rather than permanent. One does not emigrate, one shifts location temporarily until further notice. Many do not even inform family officially; departure is framed as visiting a cousin or staying for business a while. Years pass before it is acknowledged as migration.

But even as movement persists, rootedness persists. Philip speaks of Nigeria not as home but as base. His real home remains Ghana, but Ghana cannot currently sustain the version of him he has become through Nigeria. Likewise, Favour calls Ghana peace but Nigeria profits. Neither fully belongs to one; both belong to the circle.

Migration, at its core, has always been a negotiation between hope and pragmatism. For generations, movement between Ghana and Nigeria was not framed in the language of official policy reports or bilateral agreements, it was defined by instinctive economics. People moved because money moved. Skills followed opportunity, not passion. In this exchange, textiles, often dismissed as an old-fashioned or outmoded or low-tech industry, became an unlikely standard of shifting labour values in West Africa.

These stories dismantle the academics' obsession with structured migration frameworks. There is no neat binary between push and pull. There is just movement and adaptation.

The great irony of this moment in history is that technological advancement, designed to expand opportunity, may be quietly washing away the dignity of labour in sectors that still feed thousands.

In other words, migration is no longer guaranteed just because opportunity exists. The hunger that drove men like Philip across borders is no longer the dominant instinct. Young people today are not comparing weaving to hunger, they are comparing weaving to crypto trading, TikTok influencing, remote digital gigs. They may not earn as steadily, but they earn without sweating. Poverty, once feared, is now negotiated.

The result? A paradox. Labour demand in artisanal sectors is rising, but labour supply is falling. Mr. Philip now struggles to find apprentices. He once paid Ghanaians to join him temporarily in Nigeria; today, the payment equation no longer motivates them. He is expanding, but alone.

So what does this mean for the future of intra-West African migration?

It means policy discussions must move beyond "border control" and "economic integration." The real question is whether both nations can restore dignity and incentive to manual labour without romanticising suffering. Whether migration can be reframed from desperation to strategy, not just for those running from scarcity, but for those seeking leverage. Whether someone like Favour, Mama Emeka or Mr. Philip would still make the same decision if they were twenty again and whether their children will.

Migration used to be about survival. Now it is about calculation. The challenge for Ghana and Nigeria is to ensure that those calculations, whether digital or manual, still lead somewhere worth going.

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11. Culinary migration between Nigeria and Ghana

Sunshine Eze and Linalin Otu-Dumah

Food as a tool for survival

In West Africa, stories of migration are often framed through hardship and escape. But in between those lines lie quieter, powerful stories of creativity, of perseverance, and of women using food as both a livelihood and identity.

This book examines the journeys of Nigerian migrants, particularly women, who have crossed into Ghana not only to survive but to rebuild. It focuses on how culinary skill becomes a powerful currency in times of uncertainty. Two powerful figures Christiana Temitope Oferen and Madam Ify show us how pots and pans can do what politics often cannot: bridge nations, feed families, and restore hope.

The journey of Christiana Temitope Oferen

In 2012, Christiana Temitope Oferen left Nigeria with nothing but faith. Without a job, family, or financial backing, she crossed into Ghana looking for a fresh start. Ghana, she said, was more peaceful and convenient a country where the lights stayed on, and services worked when paid for.

Christiana enrolled in Sikkim Manipal University. But while books were part of her routine, so were pots. She began cooking and selling food to her classmates. Nigerian dishes from *egusi* to *jollof* became her way of surviving the harsh early years in a foreign country.

After four years of online food sales, she saved enough to open her own business "Soups and Grills" in East Legon. Today, the restaurant is a go-to spot for both Ghanaians and Nigerians craving authentic Nigerian cuisine. Christiana earns thousands of cedis daily and attributes her success to consistency, good taste, and never giving up.

She says she has no plans to return to Nigeria permanently. For her, Ghana is home now. Her daughter still lives in Nigeria, but she hopes to reunite with her once stability improves there.

Madam Ify's path to purpose

Madam Ify's story began in Nigeria, where she once owned a retail business for women's and children's clothing. But a devastating economic downturn pushed her to the brink. With little warning, she sold her belongings, boarded a bus, and moved to Ghana in search of opportunity.

At first, life in Ghana was difficult. She lived in a hotel for two years, working as a cleaner, doing laundry, and taking up any job she could find. But the turning point came when she realized she had something valuable her ability to cook.

She started small. She carried her food in a wheelbarrow through the streets of Spintex, offering samples and building trust. Slowly, she gained loyal customers. Her food began appearing in hotels, offices, and shops. Eventually, she saved enough to open Ambassador's Bar and Pub, a thriving culinary business in Accra.

Despite her success, she faced stigma. Rumours circulated that her rise must be due to rituals or supernatural means. But Madam Ify insists her only secret is planning, sacrifice, and the power of good food. Her business today stands as a testament to resilience and faith in one's gift.

Cooking through crisis – Women in informal labour

Across West Africa, migration is increasingly driven by necessity. For many Nigerian women, the path to Ghana is paved not with hope, but with desperation a need to escape economic instability, unemployment, and domestic hardship. What awaits them, however, is rarely easy. And yet,

it is through the informal economy particularly cooking and catering that many of these women begin to carve out new lives.

In cities like Accra, Kumasi, and Takoradi, informal labour is the largest employer of migrants. For Nigerian women, food preparation offers a unique entry point: it doesn't require a formal education, institutional approval, or heavy capital investment. All it requires is skill, discipline, and the willingness to hustle.

Survival, not ambition

Women like Christiana and Madam Ify did not migrate with business plans. Their culinary careers began with necessity feeding classmates to pay school fees or selling meals to strangers to pay rent. There was no safety net, no formal job contracts. This is a reality for most female migrants in Ghana's informal labour sector. They work without benefits, without social protection, and often without legal recognition.

But what they lack in institutional support, they often make up for in community building and adaptability.

The labour behind the label

Catering is not merely cooking it is cleaning, chopping, packaging, transporting, negotiating, marketing, and managing. Migrant women in this field wake up early, shop in bulk markets, prepare hundreds of meals in hot kitchens, and deliver them across the city. The physical labour is intense, and the mental load just as heavy.

Many caterers begin working from home, often from single rooms with shared utilities. They cook over coal pots or gas burners and store ingredients in plastic tubs. Without refrigeration or electricity stability, timing becomes everything.

Gender and vulnerability

As women in a male-dominated economic structure, Nigerian migrant caterers often face double discrimination as foreigners and as females. Some are harassed by landlords, underpaid by customers, or asked to offer favours for business deals. Others deal with rumours or jealousy, as Madam Ify did, when her success triggered whispers of ritual involvement.

Despite this, women have turned kitchens into spaces of control. Their ability to prepare Nigerian dishes not only brings them income it gives them a sense of purpose, cultural pride, and agency.

From labour to leverage

While formal employment remains inaccessible to many migrants, the informal food sector continues to grow. It provides more than income it offers leverage. As their businesses expand, many women begin employing others, mentoring younger migrants, and investing in better equipment and locations. Their role evolves from survivalists to entrepreneurs.

The journey from frying pan to financial stability is not quick, and it is rarely linear. But it is happening across Ghana, one plate at a time.

From Ghana to Nigeria

When migration is discussed in West Africa, the narrative usually flows in one direction: Nigerians moving to Ghana. But the story is incomplete without its lesser-told counterpart Ghanaians who have migrated to Nigeria and brought their culinary heritage with them.

In bustling cities like Lagos, a quiet but vibrant Ghanaian food scene has taken root. For decades, Ghanaian entrepreneurs have built kitchens that blend cultures and feed thousands daily. Two powerful examples stand out: Ghana High Restaurant and Flora Kitchen both testaments to longevity, adaptation, and culinary pride.

Ghana high restaurant: A legacy by association

Tucked beside a popular Ghanaian establishment decades ago, what started as a modest food spot evolved into one of the most recognizable Ghanaian-owned restaurants in Nigeria Ghana High Restaurant. The name wasn't planned. Locals simply referred to them as "Ghana High," after their location beside a Ghanaian building that housed many public workers. The nickname stuck, and so did the customers.

Ghana High has been in operation for over 50 years. It is one of the oldest examples of Ghanaian culinary presence in Nigeria. The restaurant sells a wide variety of meals that cater to both Ghanaians and Nigerians from *banku* and groundnut soup to rice-based dishes with spicy stews.

What's remarkable is their earning potential. On a good day, Ghana High can make as much as ₦500,000. For a kitchen that started with nothing but local roots and a loyal base, it's a testament to consistency, quality, and cultural relevance. Their continued success proves that food is one of the most enduring bridges between neighbouring nations.

The ownership reflects the nature of West African integration: Ghanaian and Togolese influences coexist within the same kitchen. Staff move fluidly between languages English, Ewe, Twi, and Yoruba mirroring the blend of identities found in each dish.

Flora Kitchen: Waakye on the roadside

A more recent but equally powerful story is that of Flora Kitchen another Ghanaian-owned business that planted its roots in Nigeria, starting from the roadside and growing into a full-scale food operation.

The founder, a Ghanaian woman with deep culinary experience, moved to Nigeria with a determination to share her food and heritage. At first, her meals were met with suspicion. Locals questioned the unfamiliar spices, the unfamiliar names, and the seemingly higher prices.

"I remember people saying, 'Why is waakye so expensive?'" she shared. "But it was never expensive. It was just different."

Flora Kitchen didn't back down. Over time, customers began to understand the value. A single plate of waakye, once misunderstood, is now a favourite among their diverse clientele. Prices start as low as ₦500, making it accessible while maintaining its identity. Their income? Over ₦600,000 per day a significant leap for a business that began with pots on a roadside table.

The kitchen now serves more than food it serves trust, community, and cultural education. It shows that when food is done right, people will learn to love it, no matter where it comes from.

Migration in Reverse, Identity in Focus

Both Ghana High and Flora Kitchen challenge the idea that Nigerians are always the migrants, always the exporters. These businesses show that Ghanaian migration into Nigeria has its own rich legacy. And they do more than sell food they shape palates, build local economies, and deepen the understanding between neighbouring cultures.

In both cases, the road was not easy. Cultural bias, economic unpredictability, and initial market resistance made the start slow. But with persistence, these Ghanaian-owned businesses now thrive earning hundreds of thousands of naira daily and building cross-cultural acceptance.

Their presence is not just economic it's emotional. In a place far from home, they recreate "home" for others like them and introduce new Flavors to those willing to try.

Cultural identity and culinary expression

Food is more than sustenance it is memory, identity, and belonging. For migrants, especially those in the culinary space, cooking becomes a form of cultural preservation. Whether it is a pot of jollof rice, a steaming plate of waakye, or a bowl of spicy *egusi* soup, the dishes cooked and served across borders carry with them not only flavours, but history.

In both Ghana and Nigeria, food is intimately tied to national pride. But when migration occurs, these culinary identities meet, merge, and sometimes clash creating space for new traditions while keeping old ones alive.

Recipes as reminders

For Christiana Temitope Oferen, preparing food in Ghana was a way to maintain her Nigerian identity in a foreign land. Her restaurant, *Soups and Grills*, became more than a business it was a home for displaced culture. Her jollof rice, made in the Nigerian style, offered comfort to students and expatriates who missed home.

Similarly, Madam Ify described cooking not as a career, but as a "gift." Even when she had nothing, the ability to recreate familiar tastes allowed her to survive and connect with others. Her dishes became a bridge between where she had come from and where she was trying to go.

In reverse, Ghanaian businesses like *Ghana High Restaurant* and *Flora Kitchen* in Nigeria offered *waakye*, *shito*, *banku*, and *kontomire stew*, dishes

that not only nourished the body but reminded Ghanaians in Nigeria that they belonged somewhere, even if far from home.

Hybrid cuisines, shared spaces

Migration doesn't just preserve culture it transforms it.

Over time, customers in both countries begin to adopt and adapt the "foreign" foods. Nigerians in Ghana start appreciating the rich textures of light soup and the simplicity of *banku*. Ghanaians in Nigeria start to enjoy bolder Nigerian spices and the oil-rich flavours of *ogbono* and *banga* soup.

In some kitchens, recipes evolve. A dish might be made with local Ghanaian ingredients but prepared in a Nigerian style. Others combine elements jollof with Ghanaian-style fried plantains, waakye served alongside suya. This hybridization is not dilution it is innovation. It is the culinary version of diplomacy.

Language, presentation, and meaning

Even the way food is ordered and presented tells a story. In Ghana, dishes are often accompanied by pepper and *shito* in Nigeria, you might hear "add stew" "add *pomo*" or "*make am e choke*."

Migrants learn to adjust their menus not just for taste, but for communication. A successful migrant caterer must not only cook well she must learn how to explain, package, and price her meals to appeal to a new audience. That, too, is cultural work.

Food as home

When nations struggle with instability or inequality, it is often women and the informal sector that carry the heaviest burden. Through food, many have reclaimed power. They may be far from home, but a well-cooked meal restores something internal: dignity, direction, and identity.

Culinary migration is not just about income. It is about survival and self-expression. It is about telling the world: "I may be in a different land, but I know who I am."

Barriers, stigma, and stereotypes

No migration journey is without obstacles. For those who enter the culinary sector particularly women the road to stability and recognition is often paved with misunderstanding, resistance, and social stigma. These barriers take many forms: economic hardship, public scepticism, cultural misinterpretation, and gendered assumptions.

Across Ghana and Nigeria, the migrants featured Christiana, Madam Ify, and the founders of Ghana High and Flora Kitchen have all faced moments where their identity, intentions, or legitimacy were questioned. The most painful challenges were not the lack of money, but the lack of understanding.

Suspicion of success

For Madam Ify, success didn't bring applause at first. It brought whispers.

As her food business began to grow, and more people flocked to her roadside meals, rumours began to spread. Some accused her of using spiritual rituals or "juju" to attract customers. To them, a woman who rose from cleaning jobs to owning a fully operating food bar seemed too good to be true.

"I had people say, 'it's not normal,'" she recalled. "They think because you're a woman and you succeed, you must be doing something dark."

This type of gendered suspicion is common across West Africa, especially in informal sectors where documentation is rare, and visibility is high. Women who grow successful businesses from humble beginnings are often seen as "lucky" or "suspect," rather than talented or strategic.

The burden of legitimacy

In both Ghana and Nigeria, migrants in the food industry often operate without formal business licenses, health permits, or insurance not by choice, but by circumstance. Many cannot afford legal fees, navigate bureaucratic red tape, or secure official recognition.

This leaves them vulnerable to harassment from authorities, inconsistent income, and limited growth.

In Accra, for example, many Nigerian caterers work from rented apartments, using basic kitchen setups. In Lagos, Ghanaian vendors like those at Flora Kitchen often operate on the roadside or in semi-permanent stalls. A single visit from the local government can shut them down.

This informal status becomes a double-edged sword. It allows flexibility and independence but also exposes migrants to fines, extortion, or displacement.

Language and accent bias

Another layer of challenge comes from communication. Migrants who speak with a foreign accent or mix languages may be treated with less respect or even mocked. Nigerian Yoruba terms may sound strange in a Ghanaian food market, just as Ghanaian Twi may draw blank stares in a Lagos neighbourhood.

Caterers must learn to adjust not just their cooking, but their speech. A misnamed dish, a mispronounced word, or unfamiliar slang can cost a sale.

Still, many have adapted. Christiana, for instance, uses simplified local terms in her menu and trains her staff to communicate with both Nigerian and Ghanaian customers. Flora Kitchen redesigned their menu boards to include Nigerian pricing norms and translated dish names to Pidgin English to appeal to a wider base.

Gendered expectations

Perhaps the deepest bias is gendered. Female migrants in food businesses are often expected to remain small, humble, and invisible. A woman carrying food on her head is acceptable a woman owning a bar and hiring staff may be viewed as too ambitious or "too exposed."

Many face unsolicited advice or warnings: not to expand too fast, not to hire male workers, not to work late. Some are even discouraged by family members who worry that food businesses attract the wrong attention.

Despite this, women like Madam Ify and Christiana press on redefining what it means to be both provider and professional.

Overcoming through service

What ultimately breaks the barrier is consistency. Over time, communities stop questioning and start accepting. A good meal, well served, speaks louder than stereotypes.

For Madam Ify, returning customers became her greatest defence. For Christiana, the growing line outside *Soups and Grills* silenced doubt. For Flora Kitchen and Ghana High, decades of daily service created a reputation stronger than any rumour.

Barriers remain, but they are being pushed back — one plate at a time.

The Ghanaian-Nigerian food connection

Few topics spark more playful controversy between Ghana and Nigeria than food. Particularly, the subject of jollof rice a dish both nations claim as their own has ignited social media battles, celebrity endorsements, and even political banter. But beyond the friendly rivalry lies something deeper: food is a mirror of identity, migration, and shared West African heritage.

The culinary connection between Ghana and Nigeria is both historical and evolving. Migration has allowed this relationship to move from competition to collaboration especially in urban centres where Ghanaians and Nigerians live, eat, and work side by side.

The Jollof debate – Rivalry and respect

Ask any Nigerian or Ghanaian who makes the best jollof rice, and you'll get a passionate answer. The truth is: both versions are beloved for their unique ingredients and cooking styles. Ghanaian jollof tends to be milder, cooked with aromatic spices and local rice varieties like perfumed jasmine or broken rice. Nigerian jollof is often richer, smokier, with bold tomato flavours and seasoned oils.

For migrants, these differences are not just about taste they're about home.

Christiana, for example, insists on cooking jollof in the Nigerian style at *Soups and Grills* because it reminds her customers of home. Meanwhile, at Ghana High Restaurant in Lagos, Ghanaian-style jollof is served proudly not just as a meal, but as a statement of cultural pride.

What once sparked rivalry is now driving curiosity and appreciation. Many Nigerian customers now enjoy *waakye*, *shito*, and *kenkey*. Ghanaians living in Lagos have developed a taste for *suya*, *nkwobi*, and *egusi*.

A shared table

Markets, food stalls, and local restaurants across both countries increasingly serve dishes from each other's menus. In Accra, it's common to see Nigerian pepper soup or *moi moi* on the menu. In Lagos, *banku* and groundnut soup are available in many neighbourhoods with Ghanaian migrant populations.

This cross-pollination has given rise to hybrid menus combinations like Ghanaian jollof with Nigerian-style grilled meat, or waakye with Nigerian-style dodo (fried plantains).

The migration of recipes mirrors the migration of people. Food becomes the easiest way to cross borders, introduce cultures, and form unexpected connections.

Culinary diplomacy

What politicians struggle to accomplish with speeches, food sometimes achieves through simplicity. A shared meal builds trust. It allows for conversation without confrontation.

For many migrant women featured in this book, food is not just about income it's about diplomacy. It's how they're seen, understood, and valued in a new society. Their kitchens are soft power hubs bringing Nigerians and Ghanaians to the same table, not to argue, but to enjoy.

In a world of tension and uncertainty, food provides a language that needs no translation.

Youth and the new wave of migrant entrepreneurs

Migration is no longer only a story of struggle and survival it is also a story of strategy. In recent years, a new generation of West African youth have begun to redefine the culinary migration narrative by leveraging technology, creativity, and speed. While older migrants built their businesses with wheelbarrows and roadside stalls, younger migrants are building theirs with smartphones, digital menus, and social media.

These new culinary entrepreneurs often in their 20s or early 30s are reshaping the landscape of informal labour. They are not waiting for traditional business structures to accept them. Instead, they are creating new models, where mobility, community, and branding work together to build fast, flexible food businesses.

From street food to screens

One of the key shifts among this new wave of migrant cooks is their ability to go digital. In Ghana, Nigerian migrants like Christiana Temitope Oferen began their careers selling food to classmates. But instead of opening a physical shop right away, she started online taking orders through WhatsApp and Instagram, using mobile delivery platforms, and branding herself with vibrant photos and hashtags.

It wasn't just about the food it was about presentation, packaging, and personalization. With digital tools, migrants are able to operate from anywhere, reach more customers, and maintain low overhead costs.

Similarly, in Nigeria, Ghanaian-run kitchens like *Flora Kitchen* began showcasing their meals on social media, attracting curious Nigerian foodies and diaspora customers looking for something new. What used to rely on word-of-mouth now relies on Wi-Fi and content strategy.

Fast, flexible, fearless

Younger culinary migrants are often bolder in how they approach business. Many operate without permanent structures working from home, shared kitchens, or mobile setups. Some start with meal-prep services, while others offer niche foods (e.g., vegan waakye, custom party packs, intercontinental-African fusion).

This flexibility makes them resilient in the face of economic shocks, inflation, or rent hikes. It also allows them to respond faster to trends, tweak their menus based on feedback, and shift between physical and online markets.

While they still face challenges like access to funding or formal registration their comfort with technology gives them an edge that older entrepreneurs may not have had.

Targeting the diaspora and the youth market

One unique trend among these young entrepreneurs is their ability to target specific niches:

- Nigerian students in Ghana looking for authentic food.
- Ghanaians in Lagos craving home-cooked *banku.*

- Young professionals seeking affordable but stylish lunch packs.
- Diaspora clients ordering food deliveries for family back home.

They understand branding, audience engagement, and the power of reviews. Many even partner with influencers, build community via giveaways, or launch limited-edition "food drops" all techniques borrowed from e-commerce and entertainment culture.

Innovation in identity

What defines this new wave is hybrid identity. These are young people who are not afraid to blend cultures, ingredients, and formats. A single menu might include Ghanaian waakye, Nigerian jollof, and Caribbean pepper shrimp all on the same plate. These fusions are not forced; they reflect real lived experience in border-crossing environments.

They're not selling nostalgia alone they're selling creativity, speed, and cultural exchange.

Challenges remain

Despite their energy and innovation, young culinary migrants still face:

- Legal ambiguity.
- Currency instability.
- Platform fees and delivery delays.
- Internet access limitations in low-income areas.

However, many are finding workarounds pooling resources with peers, operating under cooperative models, or joining community food markets and fairs.

They are the face of a new generation not just surviving migration; but thriving within it.

Beyond borders, through food

Migration in West Africa is not a new phenomenon. But the way migrants are using food to reshape their lives and societies is worthy of deep recognition. From Nigeria to Ghana, and Ghana to Nigeria, the pot has become more than a tool it has become a passport, a planner, and a proclamation of resilience.

We have seen how women like Christiana Temitope Oferen and Madam Ify took their culinary skills across borders, built businesses from scratch, and served meals that restored dignity. We've followed institutions like Ghana High Restaurant and Flora Kitchen, who didn't just bring food they brought community, jobs, and cultural continuity into foreign lands.

And we've witnessed a new generation of migrant entrepreneurs using social media, mobile kitchens, and niche food marketing to redefine what migration means in modern Africa.

Food, in all these cases, has done what even governments struggle to do it has built bridges. Across culture, language, class, and border.

Where there is struggle, there is also strategy. Where there is hunger, there is ingenuity. And where there is movement, there is always meaning.

This book is not just about food or migration. It is about the quiet, powerful revolutions happening in kitchens all across West Africa. It is a reminder that even in hardship, there is heat and, in that heat, women are rising.

Their stories deserve not just to be told, but to be remembered.

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is a Mass Communication student at Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria, currently pursuing her BSc. With a strong background in leadership, she combines communication skills with organizational excellence. Passionate about branding, social media, and storytelling, particularly within the food and lifestyle industry. Sunshine is also a culinary enthusiast with a vision of becoming not just a chef, but a culinary artist, blending creativity, culture, and communication. Her interests include cooking, fashion, singing, and mathematics, reflecting her versatile and innovative personality. Sunshine's work and studies are driven by a desire to influence, inspire, and build meaningful connections through media, culture, and brand experiences.

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