

Forced Migration and the Nigeria Experience: Navigating Crisis and Resilience

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ABSTRACT

Forced migration has emerged as one of the most pressing humanitarian and development challenges confronting Nigeria in the twenty-first century. This study critically examines the historical evolution, drivers, impacts, and response mechanisms associated with forced migration in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on conflict-induced displacement, environmental degradation, and socioeconomic instability. The study adopts a systematic literature review methodology guided by the PRISMA framework to synthesize multidisciplinary evidence from peer-reviewed journals, institutional reports, policy documents, and international development publications. A total of 120 records were identified through database searches, of which 45 studies met the inclusion criteria and were subjected to qualitative thematic analysis. The findings reveal that forced migration in Nigeria is driven by interconnected structural and proximate factors, including armed conflicts, ethno-religious violence, climate change, desertification, oil-related environmental degradation, poverty, governance failures, and economic instability. The Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, farmer-herder conflicts in the Middle Belt, and ecological destruction in the Niger Delta were identified as major displacement triggers, collectively contributing to millions of internally displaced persons across the country. The study further demonstrates that forced migration generates multidimensional consequences, including livelihood loss, food insecurity, social disintegration, educational disruption, health crises, and severe psychological trauma among displaced populations. The review also highlights the limitations of existing institutional and policy responses, including weak implementation frameworks, inadequate coordination among stakeholders, funding constraints, and insufficient inclusion of displaced populations in decision-making processes. Despite these challenges, community-based resilience mechanisms, civil society interventions, informal support systems, and international humanitarian efforts have contributed significantly to coping, adaptation, and recovery among affected populations. The study concludes that forced migration in Nigeria is not merely a humanitarian issue but a multidimensional governance and development challenge deeply rooted in historical inequalities, environmental vulnerabilities, and institutional fragility. It recommends the adoption of integrated policy frameworks that combine conflict prevention, climate adaptation, socioeconomic development, humanitarian protection, and community-centered resilience strategies. The study contributes to migration scholarship by providing a comprehensive and interdisciplinary understanding of forced migration dynamics in Nigeria while offering policy-relevant insights for sustainable displacement management and national development.

Keywords: Forced Migration, Internal Displacement, Humanitarian Crisis, Community Resilience, Migration Governance



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INTRODUCTION

Forced migration has become one of the most critical global development and humanitarian challenges of the 21st century, reflecting the intersection of conflict, economic instability, environmental change, and governance dynamics (World Bank, 2019; UNDP, 2020). In the Nigerian context, migration is not a new phenomenon; rather, it has historically functioned as a mechanism for socioeconomic mobility, regional integration, and human development (Oyeniya, 2013; Adewale, 2005). However, contemporary migration patterns reveal a significant shift from voluntary mobility toward forced displacement, driven by increasingly complex and interrelated structural and proximate factors. Nigeria occupies a central position in African migration systems due to its large population, economic significance, and geopolitical influence. Migration decisions in the country are shaped by a combination of push and pull factors, including unemployment, income inequality, and aspirations for better living conditions (Darkwah & Verter, 2014; Kari et al., 2018). Yet, recent evidence suggests that migration is increasingly involuntary, as individuals and communities are compelled to move due to insecurity, environmental degradation, and institutional fragility (Osayemwenre et al., 2023; Nicolle et al., 2024). These dynamics are further embedded within broader social constructions of migration, where identity, discourse, and perception influence mobility patterns (Oparinde & Makombe, 2024).

Armed conflict remains the most significant driver of forced migration in Nigeria, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, which has resulted in large-scale internal displacement and humanitarian crises (Abdulrahman, 2021; Amnesty International, 2020). The evolution of this insurgency and its widespread impact on civilian populations have been well documented (Institute for Security Studies, 2021), highlighting how violence disrupts livelihoods, education, and social systems. Similarly, ethnic and communal conflicts, particularly in the Middle Belt region, have intensified displacement through competition over land and resources (Adeleke, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2020). These conflict dynamics are further compounded by governance challenges, weak institutional responses, and policy implementation gaps (Fadeyi, 2019; Arhin-Sam, 2019).

Beyond conflict, environmental change is increasingly recognized as a critical driver of migration in Nigeria. Climate variability, desertification, flooding, and resource depletion exacerbate livelihood vulnerabilities, particularly in agrarian and oil-producing regions (Ogunjimi, 2018; Dada & Oyebamiji, 2022; Mafimisebi et al., 2026). The interaction between climate change and conflict further intensifies displacement patterns, creating complex migration systems that are difficult to manage (Akanbi, 2021). These environmental pressures not only trigger migration but also deepen socioeconomic inequalities and regional disparities.

The socioeconomic consequences of forced migration are profound and multidimensional. Displacement often results in loss of livelihoods, increased poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to essential services such as healthcare and education (Mastrorillo & Vick, 2021; WFP, 2021; Oni, 2020). Internally displaced persons (IDPs) frequently experience social exclusion and marginalization, particularly in urban areas where integration challenges persist (Madu, 2021; Uzum, 2020). Furthermore, psychological trauma and mental health challenges are widespread among displaced populations, reflecting the long-term human cost of displacement (Yahaya, 2022; Hassan, 2022; Egbunike, 2020).

At the same time, migration is not solely a crisis phenomenon but also intersects with development processes. International migration and remittances have been shown to contribute positively to household welfare, food security, and economic resilience (Osili, 2007; Obi et al., 2020). Migration also facilitates skill acquisition, knowledge transfer, and transnational linkages, which can support long-term development outcomes (Fazil et al., 2025). However, in contexts of forced migration, these potential benefits are often overshadowed by immediate humanitarian needs and structural constraints.

Migration governance in Nigeria remains a complex and evolving policy domain. While frameworks such as those proposed by the African Union (2019) and national institutions like the NCFRMI (2021) aim to address displacement, implementation challenges persist due to limited coordination, funding constraints, and institutional fragmentation (Adedokun & Ogunleye, 2020; Švedkauskas, 2025). Moreover, global migration regimes, including restrictive policies and information campaigns, shape migration aspirations and mobility patterns, often contributing to irregular migration (Pécoud & Savatic, 2026; Deriu, 2026). These governance challenges highlight the need for more integrated and adaptive policy approaches.

In addition, broader structural factors such as economic instability, educational challenges, and external shocks further influence migration dynamics in Nigeria. Issues related to human capital development (de Oliveira, 2025), financial sector efficiency (Otohinoyi, 2025), and resilience to global economic disruptions (Raga et al., 2025) contribute to migration pressures. Religious institutions, social networks, and community systems also play important roles in shaping both migration decisions and responses to displacement (Shallah et al., 2025; Ojo, 2021). These factors underscore the multidimensional nature of migration as both a social and economic phenomenon.

Importantly, community resilience and local coping mechanisms have emerged as critical components of displacement management in Nigeria. Informal support systems, civil society engagement, and community-based approaches contribute significantly to recovery and

integration processes (Eze, 2022; Zubairu, 2022; Nwankwo, 2020). Civil society organizations and international agencies such as UNHCR and IOM play pivotal roles in providing humanitarian assistance, data collection, and policy advocacy (IOM, 2020; UNHCR, 2021; Burke, 2021). However, coordination gaps and resource limitations continue to constrain their effectiveness. Despite the growing body of literature, existing studies often adopt fragmented approaches, focusing on isolated aspects such as conflict, climate change, or economic factors. There remains a critical need for a comprehensive and integrative analysis that captures the interconnected nature of forced migration in Nigeria. This study addresses this gap by adopting a systematic review methodology to synthesize multidisciplinary evidence on the drivers, impacts, and responses to forced migration. By integrating insights from conflict studies, environmental research, economic analysis, governance frameworks, the study provides a holistic understanding of forced migration dynamics and contributes to and advancing both academic scholarship and policy discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brief Historical Overview of Migration in Nigeria

Migration in Nigeria has deep historical roots, reflecting complex interactions among socio-cultural systems, economic transformations, environmental conditions, and political structures. In the pre-colonial period, mobility was largely voluntary and functional, serving as a mechanism for trade, agricultural expansion, pastoral movements, and social integration (Oyeniya, 2013; Ajaero & Onokala, 2013). These movements contributed positively to human development and societal organization, reinforcing migration as an adaptive livelihood strategy within indigenous systems (Osayemwenre et al., 2023). Migration was also shaped by identity, discourse, and social structures, highlighting its embeddedness within cultural and societal norms (Oparinde & Makombe, 2024).

The colonial era marked a significant turning point in Nigeria's migration history. The introduction of a monetized economy, extractive industries, and administrative centers transformed migration into a more structured and economically driven phenomenon (Adewale, 2005). Colonial policies facilitated labor migration to urban centers, mines, and plantations, thereby institutionalizing rural–urban mobility and regional labor flows. These developments laid the foundation for contemporary migration systems and economic restructuring (Fiemotongha et al., 2024). Additionally, colonial legacies contributed to inequalities in education and human capital development, which continue to influence migration decisions (de Oliveira, 2025).

In the post-independence era, migration patterns became increasingly shaped by socioeconomic

disparities, urbanization, and globalization. Rapid population growth and uneven regional development intensified rural–urban migration, often resulting in both positive and negative impacts on rural communities (Ajaero & Onokala, 2013). At the same time, international migration expanded significantly, driven by economic aspirations, educational opportunities, and global labor demand (Darkwah & Verter, 2014; Komolafe, 2008). Push and pull factors, including unemployment, poverty, and perceived opportunities abroad, further influenced migration flows (Kari et al., 2018). Remittances from migrants became a critical component of household income and national development (Osili, 2007; Obi et al., 2020). However, migration dynamics in Nigeria have increasingly shifted toward forced displacement in recent decades. Armed conflict, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency, has emerged as a dominant driver of internal displacement, leading to large-scale humanitarian crises (Abdulrahman, 2021; Amnesty International, 2020; Adebayo, 2021). The historical evolution of insurgency and insecurity has disrupted livelihoods, education, and social systems (Institute for Security Studies, 2021; Oni, 2020). Ethnic and communal conflicts, especially in the Middle Belt region, have further intensified displacement through competition over land and resources (Adeleke, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2020). These conflicts are often linked to broader governance challenges and political instability (Arhin-Sam, 2019; Obasanjo, 2020).

Environmental factors have also become critical drivers of migration. Climate change, desertification, flooding, and environmental degradation have significantly affected agricultural productivity and livelihoods (Ogunjimi, 2018; Mafimisebi et al., 2026). In regions such as the Niger Delta, environmental degradation associated with oil production has further exacerbated displacement (Dada & Oyebamiji, 2022; Akanji, 2020). The intersection of environmental stress and conflict has created complex migration systems, reinforcing displacement patterns across multiple regions (Akanbi, 2021).

The socioeconomic consequences of migration—particularly forced migration—are profound and multidimensional. Displacement often leads to poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, and limited access to essential services (World Bank, 2019; UNDP, 2020; World Food Programme [WFP], 2021). Host communities also experience economic and social pressures due to increased population and resource competition (Uzum, 2020). Furthermore, displacement is associated with significant psychological and mental health challenges (Yahaya, 2022; Hassan, 2022; Egbunike, 2020). Gendered impacts are also evident, with women facing heightened vulnerability and human rights challenges (Bamgbose, 2019; Ladan, 2022; Khalid, 2019).

Migration governance in Nigeria has evolved in response to these challenges but remains fragmented and complex. National and regional frameworks, including those of the African Union (2019) and NCFRMI (2021), aim

to address displacement and migration management. However, policy implementation is often constrained by institutional weaknesses, funding limitations, and coordination challenges (Adedokun & Ogunleye, 2020; Fadeyi, 2019). Migration governance is also influenced by global dynamics, including restrictive migration policies and securitization trends (Pécoud & Savatic, 2026; Švedkauskas, 2025; Deriu, 2026).

At the same time, migration is shaped by broader structural and global factors, including economic reforms, financial systems, and external shocks. Developments in banking and economic policy influence migration decisions and opportunities (Otohinoyi, 2025), while global crises such as geopolitical conflicts impact African economies and migration resilience (Raga et al., 2025; O'Brien, 2026). Educational systems and human capital development also play a significant role in shaping migration trajectories (de Oliveira, 2025; Fazil et al., 2025).

Social institutions and community systems further influence migration patterns and responses. Religious institutions, traditional governance systems, and civil society organizations contribute to both migration decision-making and displacement management (Shallah et al., 2025; Ojo, 2021; Eze, 2022). Community-based approaches have been identified as critical for resilience, integration, and recovery among displaced populations (Zubairu, 2022; Nwankwo, 2020; Oluoch, 2022). Civil society advocacy and international organizations such as IOM (2020) and UNHCR (2021) play essential roles in humanitarian response and policy development (Burke, 2021; Simpson & Zubairu, 2022).

Despite the challenges associated with forced migration, migration continues to offer opportunities for development and resilience. Migration partnerships, transnational networks, and diaspora engagement contribute to knowledge transfer and economic growth (Olakpe, 2022). However, risks associated with irregular migration and unsafe mobility remain significant concerns (Deriu, 2026).

Pre-Colonial Migration Patterns

Before the advent of colonial rule, migration in Nigeria was primarily shaped by economic, environmental, and socio-cultural dynamics, functioning as an adaptive and integrative mechanism within indigenous societies. Pre-colonial mobility was largely voluntary and cyclical, driven by subsistence agriculture, pastoralism, trade, and environmental variability (Oyeniyi, 2013; Ajaero & Onokala, 2013). Communities frequently migrated in search of fertile land, water resources, and grazing pastures, reflecting the strong relationship between environmental conditions and human mobility (Osayemwenre et al., 2023; Mafimisebi et al., 2026). These early migration systems demonstrate that mobility has long been embedded in livelihood strategies and

survival mechanisms, predating contemporary migration pressures (Nicolle et al., 2024). Trade networks played a central role in shaping pre-colonial migration patterns. Long-distance trade routes, including trans-Saharan exchanges, facilitated not only the movement of goods but also the circulation of people, ideas, and cultural practices. These interactions contributed to economic specialization and regional interdependence, laying the foundation for modern economic systems (Fiemotongha et al., 2024). Migration was therefore closely linked to economic opportunity, a pattern that persists in contemporary migration dynamics (Darkwah & Verter, 2014; Kari et al., 2018). Social and cultural factors also significantly influenced migration during this period. Kinship systems, marriage practices, and traditional institutions encouraged mobility and integration across communities, contributing to Nigeria's diverse ethnic and cultural landscape (Oparinde & Makombe, 2024). Religious and social institutions further reinforced mobility patterns by facilitating social cohesion and identity formation (Shallah et al., 2025; Ojo, 2021). Education, although informal, played a role in transmitting knowledge and skills across regions, shaping early forms of human capital mobility.

METHODOLOGY

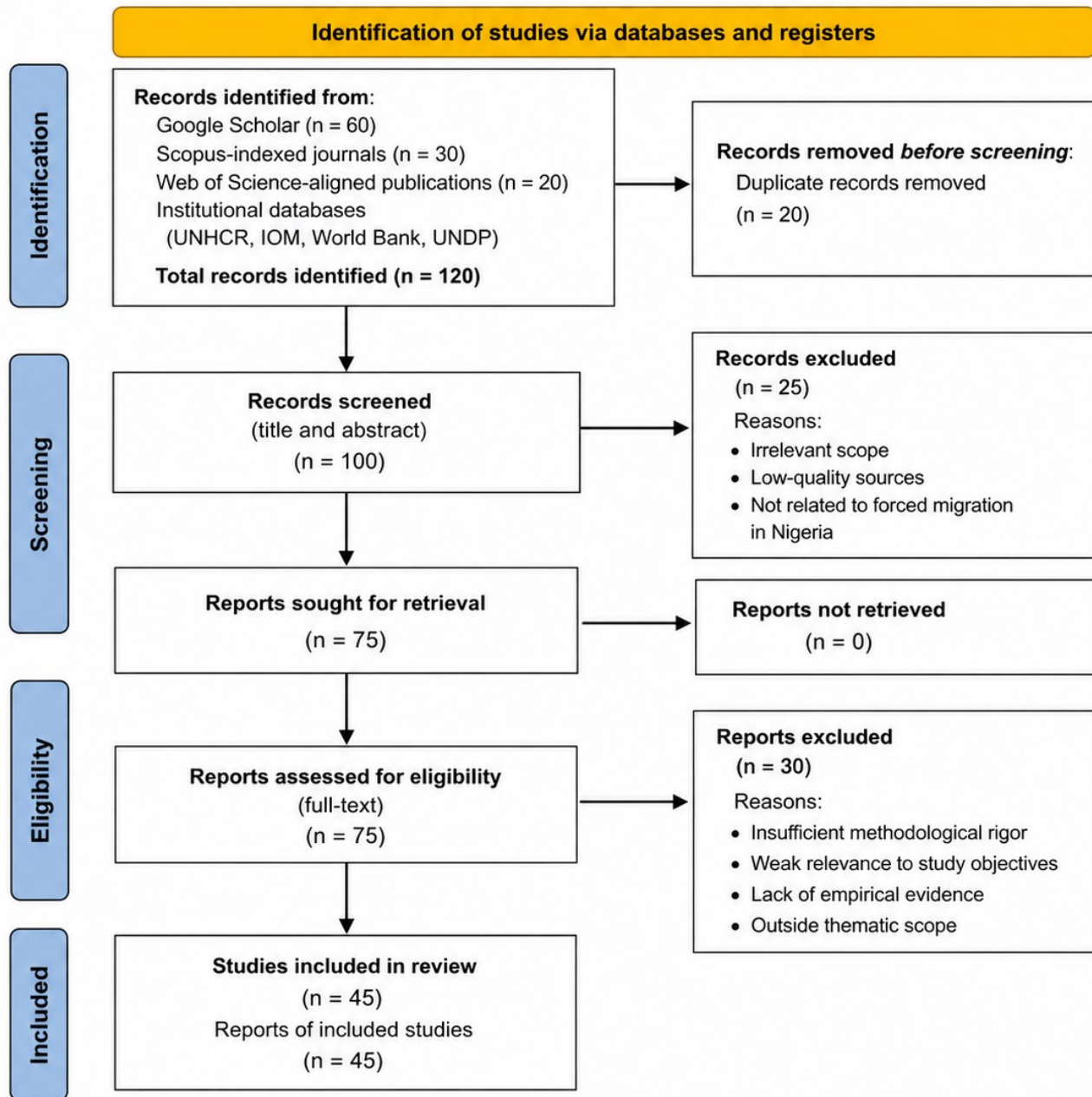
Research Philosophy and Review Design

This study adopts an analytical review orientation grounded in a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology. The choice of a systematic review approach is informed by the need to synthesize fragmented multidisciplinary evidence on forced migration in Nigeria in a rigorous, transparent, and reproducible manner. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, systematic reviews employ explicit protocols for literature identification, selection, appraisal, and synthesis, thereby reducing selection bias and enhancing methodological reliability.

The review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA framework, which provides internationally recognized standards for reporting systematic reviews and meta-syntheses. The PRISMA protocol was considered appropriate because the study seeks to critically integrate empirical, theoretical, and policy-oriented literature relating to forced migration dynamics, including conflict-induced displacement, climate-related migration, humanitarian crises, institutional responses, and resilience mechanisms in Nigeria (Figure 1).

The study relies exclusively on secondary sources of data, including peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, institutional reports, policy briefs, and international development publications. This methodological orientation is particularly suitable for a review-based doctoral investigation because it enables broad conceptual integration, comparative analysis, and

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for New Systematic Reviews which included searches of databases and registers only



Source: Page MJ, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71

Note: IDP = Internally Displaced Persons; IOM = International Organization for Migration; UNHCR = United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; UNDP = United Nations Development Programme.

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram

theory development without the logistical and ethical constraints associated with large-scale fieldwork in conflict-sensitive regions. The review design combines descriptive synthesis, thematic analysis, and comparative interpretation to construct a comprehensive understanding of forced migration patterns and response systems in Nigeria.

Systematic Review Protocol

The study followed a four-stage systematic review procedure consisting of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. The review protocol was designed prior to data collection in order to ensure procedural consistency and methodological transparency throughout the review process.

Identification Stage

A comprehensive literature search was undertaken across multidisciplinary academic databases and institutional repositories to ensure extensive coverage of scholarly and policy-related publications. The databases consulted included:

- Google Scholar
- Scopus
- Web of Science
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Repository
- International Organization for Migration Publications Database
- World Bank Open Knowledge Repository
- United Nations Development Programme Digital Library

The search process incorporated Boolean operators, truncation strategies, and keyword combinations to maximize retrieval efficiency. Search terms included:

- “forced migration” AND “Nigeria”
- “internally displaced persons” OR “IDPs” AND “Nigeria”
- “Boko Haram displacement”
- “ethno-religious conflict and migration”
- “climate-induced migration Nigeria”
- “humanitarian crisis in North-East Nigeria”
- “forced displacement and resilience”

Additional manual searches were conducted through citation tracking and reference list examination of highly cited studies to identify potentially relevant publications omitted during the electronic database search. The identification process generated a total of 120 records.

Screening Stage

Following the identification process, duplicate publications were removed using title comparison, author matching, publication year verification, and database cross-referencing. A total of 20 duplicate studies were eliminated, resulting in 100 studies for preliminary screening. The remaining studies were screened based on titles and abstracts to determine thematic relevance to the study objectives. Publications were excluded at this stage if they:

- Focused primarily on voluntary migration rather than forced displacement
- Addressed migration contexts unrelated to Nigeria
- Lacked scholarly or institutional credibility
- Were purely descriptive without analytical substance
- Were inaccessible in full-text format

Following abstract screening, 25 studies were excluded, leaving 75 studies for detailed eligibility assessment.

Eligibility Assessment

The eligibility stage involved full-text evaluation of the remaining studies using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This stage focused on assessing methodological rigor, theoretical relevance, empirical depth, and contribution to the conceptual objectives of the review.

Studies were evaluated based on:

- Clarity of research objectives
- Soundness of methodological design
- Reliability of data sources
- Relevance to forced migration dynamics
- Contribution to policy or theoretical understanding

Studies lacking sufficient methodological transparency, empirical evidence, or analytical rigor were excluded at this stage. Consequently, 30 studies were removed.

Inclusion Stage

A final sample of 45 studies was retained for qualitative synthesis and thematic interpretation. These studies constituted the evidentiary basis for the review and represented diverse disciplinary perspectives, including political science, sociology, environmental studies, development studies, humanitarian policy, and migration governance.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the review if they met the following criteria:

1. Focused on forced migration, internal displacement, refugee movements, or humanitarian displacement.
2. Examined the Nigerian context directly or provided strong comparative relevance to Nigeria.
3. Were published in peer-reviewed journals or by reputable international institutions.
4. Were published between 2018 and 2023, with limited inclusion of seminal foundational studies outside this range.
5. Demonstrated methodological rigor and analytical depth.

Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they:

1. Focused solely on voluntary or economic migration.
2. Were opinion-based commentaries lacking empirical or theoretical grounding.
3. Originated from unverified or non-academic sources.
4. Had insufficient relevance to the thematic focus of forced migration.
5. Lacked accessible full-text versions.

Data Extraction Procedure

A structured data extraction matrix was developed to ensure consistency and comparability across selected studies. The extraction framework enabled systematic organization of evidence and facilitated thematic synthesis.

The following variables were extracted from each study:

- Author(s) and year of publication
- Geographical focus
- Research objectives
- Methodological approach
- Data collection techniques
- Key findings
- Theoretical orientation
- Policy implications
- Relevance to the present study

The extracted information was organized into a systematic review matrix to support analytical comparison and evidence synthesis (Table 1).

Quality Appraisal of Selected Studies

To enhance the reliability and credibility of the review findings, methodological quality appraisal was conducted for all included studies. The appraisal process assessed:

- Research design appropriateness
- Data validity and reliability
- Sampling adequacy
- Analytical coherence

- Transparency of findings
- Policy relevance

Quantitative studies were evaluated based on statistical robustness and empirical reliability, while qualitative studies were assessed according to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability principles. Institutional reports were assessed based on organizational credibility, methodological transparency, and data reliability.

Data Analysis Technique

The study employs thematic content analysis as the principal analytical technique. This approach was selected because it facilitates systematic identification, interpretation, and synthesis of recurring patterns within qualitative and mixed-method literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pre-Colonial Migration Patterns

Pre-colonial migration in Nigeria was not simply a matter of subsistence but an adaptive system embedded in socio-economic and cultural structures. Oyeniyi (2013) and Ajaero & Onokala (2013) argue that mobility was cyclical, tied to environmental variability and pastoralism. Trade networks, particularly trans-Saharan exchanges, created proto-globalization effects, facilitating cultural diffusion and economic specialization (Fiemotongha et al., 2024). Importantly, kinship and marriage practices (Oparinde & Makombe, 2024) institutionalized migration as a social norm, underscoring that displacement today cannot be understood without recognizing these deep historical continuities. This challenges simplistic narratives that treat forced migration as a purely modern crisis.

Colonial Era and Migration Dynamics

Colonialism restructured migration by coercively channeling labor into cash crop economies. Adeleke (2020) highlights how cocoa and palm oil production

Table 1: Systematic Review Matrix of Selected Studies.

Author(s)	Year	Focus Area	Methodology	Key Findings	Relevance
Abdulrahman	2021	Boko Haram and IDPs	Case study	Insurgency drives large-scale displacement	Conflict drivers
Adeleke	2020	Ethnic conflict	Historical analysis	Resource competition fuels migration	Structural causes
International Organization for Migration	2020	Displacement tracking	Quantitative analysis	High IDP concentration in North-East Nigeria	Empirical evidence
Mastrorillo and Vick	2021	Economic impacts	Quantitative study	Livelihood loss intensifies poverty	Economic dimension
Ogunjimi	2018	Climate change	Environmental assessment	Ecological stress accelerates migration	Environmental drivers
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	2021	Global displacement trends	Statistical report	Nigeria remains a major displacement context	Comparative insight
Eze	2022	Civil society response	Policy analysis	NGOs are central to humanitarian interventions	Institutional role
Zubairu	2022	Community resilience	Qualitative inquiry	Local integration enhances recovery	Policy relevance

demanded rural-to-urban migration, while Obasanjo (2020) notes that indirect rule entrenched ethnic divisions, sowing seeds of post-independence conflict. The colonial state thus transformed voluntary mobility into exploitative labor migration, embedding structural inequalities that persist in Nigeria's displacement crises. This period illustrates how colonial legacies are not merely historical but actively shape contemporary vulnerabilities.

Post-Colonial Migration: Trends and Transformations

Post-independence migration reflects both opportunity and crisis. Oil-driven urbanization in the 1970s attracted workers to Lagos and Port Harcourt (Akanji, 2020), but environmental degradation in the Niger Delta (Dada & Oyebamiji, 2022) displaced communities, showing the paradox of resource wealth. The Biafran War (Adebayo, 2021) created mass displacement, embedding trauma into Nigeria's political memory. These transformations reveal that migration is not linear but oscillates between economic attraction and forced displacement, complicating policy responses.

Drivers of Forced Migration in Nigeria

Armed Conflicts: Boko Haram's insurgency displaced over two million (Abdulrahman, 2021; Amnesty International, 2020), while Middle Belt farmer-herder clashes, intensified by climate change, displaced 1.5 million (International Crisis Group, 2020). These conflicts illustrate the intersection of ideology, resource scarcity, and militarization.

Economic Instability: Oil dependency creates vulnerability to global shocks (World Bank, 2019), pushing migration as survival strategy.

Environmental Degradation: Niger Delta pollution (Ogunjimi, 2018) and desertification (Akanbi, 2021) force communities into precarious mobility.

Insurgent Groups: Boko Haram exemplifies how non-state actors weaponize displacement, creating fear-driven migration (Boko Haram: A brief history, 2021).

Impact of Forced Migration on Displaced Populations

Psychological Consequences: PTSD prevalence among IDPs exceeds 40% (Hassan, 2022; Yahaya, 2022), yet mental health remains underfunded.

Social Disruption: Family fragmentation erodes social capital (Cohen, 2019), weakening resilience.

Economic Challenges: Livelihood loss forces reliance on informal, exploitative labor (Mastrorillo & Vick, 2021).

Education and Healthcare: Over 1.5 million children are out of school (Oni, 2020), while healthcare systems collapse under IDP influx (WFP, 2021).

Government and International Responses

Nigeria's National Policy on Internal Displacement (2012) provides a rights-based framework but suffers from poor implementation (NCFRMI, 2021). International actors like UNHCR and UNDP deliver humanitarian aid and resilience programs (Burke, 2021; UNDP, 2020), yet coordination gaps persist. Critically, displaced populations often feel excluded from policymaking, raising questions about participatory governance in humanitarian response.

Community-Based Approaches

Grassroots initiatives foster resilience through integration and social cohesion. Zubairu (2022) and Nwankwo

(2020) show how community networks reduce stigma, while civil society advocacy (Eze, 2022; Simpson & Zubairu, 2022) pressures government accountability. However, resource scarcity limits sustainability, suggesting that community-based approaches must be scaled through state and international support.

Case Studies

North-East: Boko Haram displaced 2.2 million, with women disproportionately affected (Yusuf, 2021; Oluoch, 2022). Resilience programs focus on vocational training and psychosocial support.

Middle-Belt: Farmer-herder conflicts driven by climate change displaced 1.5 million (Adeleke, 2020). Peacebuilding initiatives show mixed success.

Niger Delta: Oil exploitation displaces communities while host populations face socioeconomic strain (Uzum, 2020; Akanji, 2020). This illustrates the dual burden of displacement and hosting.

The North-East: Boko Haram and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The North-East region of Nigeria, particularly Borno State, has been the epicenter of the Boko Haram insurgency since 2009. The violence has resulted in one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the country, with millions of people forced to flee their homes. The insurgency has devastated communities, disrupted livelihoods, and created widespread insecurity. According to Abdulrahman (2021), the displacement in Borno State alone has led to overcrowded camps, inadequate access to basic services, and heightened vulnerability among displaced populations.

The insurgency's impact extends beyond physical displacement. Bamgbose (2019) highlights the gendered experiences of women, who often face sexual violence, exploitation, and limited access to education in displacement settings. Similarly, Yahaya (2022) underscores the urgent mental health challenges among IDPs, noting high levels of trauma, depression, and anxiety. These psychosocial burdens compound the already dire humanitarian situation.

International organizations have played a critical role in documenting and responding to the crisis. The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2020) has tracked displacement patterns through its Displacement Tracking Matrix, providing vital data for humanitarian interventions. The UNHCR (2021) Global Trends report situates Nigeria's displacement crisis within broader global patterns, emphasizing the scale and protracted nature of forced migration in the region.

Resilience strategies have also emerged among displaced populations. Oluoch (2022) and Oluwaseun (2021) both document how communities adapt through informal support networks, livelihood diversification, and grassroots initiatives aimed at rebuilding social cohesion. These efforts, while limited by insecurity and resource constraints, demonstrate the agency of displaced persons in navigating their circumstances.

The Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East thus illustrates the multifaceted nature of forced migration in Nigeria: a crisis shaped by violence, humanitarian need, gendered vulnerabilities, mental health challenges, and community resilience. It underscores the importance of coordinated responses that address both immediate relief and long-term recovery.

Humanitarian Crisis and Displacement

As of 2023, over 2.2 million people remain internally displaced in Nigeria's North-East due to the protracted Boko Haram conflict (Abdulrahman, 2021; UNHCR, 2021). The majority of these displaced persons are women and children, who face heightened vulnerabilities in overcrowded camps where conditions are dire. Limited access to food, clean water, and medical care has compounded the suffering of displaced populations (World Food Programme, 2021; IOM, 2020).

The destruction of infrastructure has further exacerbated the crisis. Schools and health facilities have been systematically targeted or abandoned, severely undermining the delivery of essential services. Oni (2020) notes that over 1.5 million children in the North-East are currently out of school, with insecurity and displacement preventing access to education. This educational disruption not only affects immediate learning but also jeopardizes the long-term prospects of an entire generation.

The humanitarian situation is also marked by psychosocial challenges. Yahaya (2022) and Egbunike (2020) highlight the prevalence of trauma, depression, and anxiety among IDPs, particularly women and children. These mental health burdens are often overlooked in humanitarian responses, despite their critical importance for recovery and resilience. Moreover, Bamgbose (2019) emphasizes the gendered dimensions of displacement, where women face exploitation, sexual violence, and barriers to empowerment. International and local actors have attempted to respond to these challenges.

The African Union (2019) guidelines on IDP protection, alongside interventions by UNDP (2020) and civil society organizations (Eze, 2022; Simpson & Zubairu, 2022), underscore the need for coordinated approaches that combine immediate relief with long-term strategies for resilience and reintegration. Yet, as Oluoch (2022) observes, displaced communities themselves

have developed adaptive strategies, relying on informal networks and grassroots initiatives to survive amid adversity. The humanitarian crisis in the North-East thus reflects the intersection of conflict, displacement, and systemic vulnerability. It demonstrates the urgent need for comprehensive responses that address not only material needs but also education, mental health, and gender-specific challenges.

Resilience and Coping Mechanisms in the North-East

Despite the immense challenges of displacement, communities in the North-East have demonstrated remarkable resilience. Community-based organizations and NGOs have initiated programs to improve livelihoods and provide psychosocial support. For example, vocational training initiatives targeted at women have enabled them to acquire skills that support income generation and family sustenance (Khalid, 2019; Oluoch, 2022). These livelihood programs not only reduce dependency on humanitarian aid but also foster empowerment and dignity among displaced populations.

Mental health support has also become a critical component of resilience. Yahaya (2022) and Hassan (2022) highlight the establishment of counseling and therapy programs designed to help individuals process trauma and rebuild their lives. Such interventions are vital in addressing the psychological scars of violence and displacement, which, if left untreated, can hinder recovery and reintegration. Grassroots resilience strategies, including informal support networks and community solidarity, further illustrate the agency of displaced persons in navigating adversity (Oluwaseun, 2021; Zubairu, 2022).

The Middle-Belt: Ethnic Conflicts and Displacement

The Middle-Belt region has long been a flashpoint for ethnic and communal conflicts, driven by competition over land and resources among diverse groups. Adeleke (2020) provides a historical perspective on these tensions, noting that disputes between predominantly Christian farming communities and predominantly Muslim herders have escalated into violent clashes. Climate change has intensified these conflicts by reducing arable land and grazing areas, thereby increasing competition (Ogunjimi, 2018; Akanbi, 2021).

Causes of Conflict

The primary drivers of conflict in the Middle-Belt are resource scarcity and land disputes. Changing weather patterns have exacerbated tensions, leading to recurrent clashes that have claimed thousands of lives. Reports

indicate that more than 1.5 million people have been displaced in the region due to these conflicts (International Crisis Group, 2020; NCFRMI, 2021). The displacement crisis in the Middle-Belt underscores the intersection of environmental stressors, ethnic diversity, and weak governance structures.

Community Responses and Challenges

Local communities have attempted to respond through peacebuilding initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue and collaboration. Traditional institutions and community leaders have played important roles in mediating disputes and promoting reconciliation (Ojo, 2021). These grassroots efforts have achieved some success in reducing tensions, but ongoing violence continues to undermine progress. Displaced populations often find themselves in makeshift camps with harsh living conditions and limited access to essential services. The rapid influx of IDPs strains host communities, creating new tensions between displaced persons and local residents (Adedokun & Ogunleye, 2020; UNDP, 2020). This dynamic highlights the need for integrated approaches that combine humanitarian relief with conflict resolution and sustainable resource management.

The Niger Delta: Environmental Displacement and Economic Impact

The Niger Delta, Nigeria's oil-rich region, presents a distinct case of forced migration shaped by environmental degradation and socio-economic instability. Oil extraction activities have devastated local ecosystems, forcing communities to abandon their homes and livelihoods in search of more sustainable living conditions (Dada & Oyebamiji, 2022; Akanji, 2020).

Environmental Degradation and Displacement

Oil spills, gas flaring, and pollution have severely undermined traditional livelihoods such as fishing and agriculture. Contaminated water sources and degraded arable land have compelled many to migrate to urban centers, where they face new challenges of unemployment and poverty (Uzum, 2020; World Bank, 2019). The presence of militant groups further destabilizes the region, creating cycles of violence and insecurity that exacerbate displacement (Obasanjo, 2020; Olowu, 2022).

Socio-Economic Challenges

The Niger Delta's displacement crisis is compounded by structural underdevelopment. High unemployment rates and widespread poverty increase the vulnerability of displaced populations, while host communities often

struggle to absorb the influx of migrants (Akanji, 2020; UNDP, 2020). These dynamics highlight the intersection of environmental degradation, economic marginalization, and insecurity in shaping forced migration.

Community Resilience and Activism

Communities in the Niger Delta have mobilized through activism and resilience strategies. Local organizations advocate for environmental justice, demanding accountability from oil companies and government institutions (Dada & Oyebamiji, 2022; Zubairu, 2022). Sustainable development initiatives, such as aquaculture and eco-friendly agriculture, provide displaced individuals with alternative livelihoods and pathways to recovery (Akanji, 2020; Mastrotillo & Vick, 2021). These grassroots efforts underscore the agency of affected populations in confronting displacement and rebuilding their futures.

Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive examination of forced migration in Nigeria by exploring its historical foundations, structural drivers, multidimensional impacts, and institutional as well as community-based response mechanisms. Drawing on a systematic review of multidisciplinary literature, the study demonstrates that forced migration in Nigeria is deeply embedded within broader processes of conflict, environmental change, governance failures, economic instability, and social inequality. The findings confirm that migration in Nigeria has evolved from predominantly voluntary and economically motivated mobility patterns in the pre-colonial and early post-colonial periods to increasingly involuntary displacement driven by insecurity, ecological crises, and institutional fragility.

The review identified armed conflict as the most significant driver of displacement, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East and recurrent farmer-herder conflicts in the Middle Belt. These conflicts have displaced millions of people, disrupted livelihoods, weakened social systems, and intensified humanitarian crises. Environmental degradation, especially desertification, flooding, and oil-related ecological destruction in the Niger Delta, has further exacerbated migration pressures by undermining agricultural productivity and traditional livelihood systems. Economic instability, poverty, unemployment, and weak governance structures also contribute significantly to forced migration dynamics, reinforcing cycles of vulnerability and displacement.

The study further revealed that the consequences of forced migration extend far beyond physical relocation. Displaced populations experience severe socioeconomic hardships, including unemployment, food insecurity, inadequate healthcare, educational disruption, and social

exclusion. The psychological burden of displacement, particularly trauma, depression, and anxiety among internally displaced persons, remains a critical yet insufficiently addressed dimension of the crisis. Women and children are disproportionately affected, facing heightened risks of exploitation, gender-based violence, and long-term deprivation.

Although national institutions, international organizations, and humanitarian agencies have implemented various interventions to address displacement challenges, the study found that policy responses remain fragmented and constrained by poor coordination, funding limitations, weak institutional capacity, and implementation gaps. Existing frameworks often prioritize emergency humanitarian assistance while paying insufficient attention to long-term recovery, sustainable reintegration, and structural transformation. Nonetheless, the review highlights the critical role of community resilience, civil society engagement, traditional institutions, and grassroots initiatives in supporting displaced populations and promoting social cohesion.

The study therefore concludes that forced migration in Nigeria should not be understood solely as a humanitarian emergency but as a multidimensional development and governance challenge requiring integrated and sustainable policy responses. Addressing the crisis requires a holistic framework that combines conflict resolution, climate adaptation strategies, poverty reduction, inclusive economic development, institutional strengthening, and participatory governance. Greater investment in education, healthcare, psychosocial support, environmental sustainability, and livelihood restoration is essential for enhancing resilience among displaced populations and host communities.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of strengthening collaboration among government agencies, international organizations, civil society actors, and local communities to ensure more coordinated and effective interventions. Future research should prioritize empirical investigations into long-term reintegration outcomes, gendered dimensions of displacement, climate-security interactions, and the effectiveness of community-based resilience strategies. By synthesizing diverse scholarly and policy perspectives, this study contributes to advancing theoretical and policy discourse on forced migration in Nigeria and provides a foundation for evidence-based strategies aimed at promoting human security, sustainable development, and national stability.

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