



## ► Media and Labour migration in Nigeria: Lessons from the FAIRWAY Global Programme

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### Introduction

Labour migration is a key feature of the contemporary world of work with an estimated 169 million migrant workers constituting a component of the global labour force.<sup>1</sup> Thus, recognizing the need for “protecting interests of workers when employed in countries other than their own” as a concern for safe, orderly, and regular labour migration, is at the core of the International Labour Organization’s engagement on enhancing labour migration governance, including through strengthening policy and practice environments that respect the fundamental rights of migrant workers, and offer them opportunities for decent work.

Media coverage plays an important role in the framing of narratives and policy discourses that affect how people act, what people think, how policymakers prioritize agendas, and how migrants make decisions.<sup>2</sup> Journalists’ voices are crucial in shaping public opinions, setting agendas, and exposing wrongdoings impacting the lives of migrant workers<sup>3</sup>; which brings out the significance of labour migration as a dedicated field - or beat - in journalism. Labour migration journalism can be understood as the practice that involves gathering and presenting information and data pertaining to migration.<sup>4</sup>

Conversely, media reportage (and/or research) on migration - and labour migration in particular - from the perspective of countries of origin is low as it is just an evolving field. The African Women in Media notes that “the focus of labour migration journalism and reporting in Africa is limited.” In Nigeria, reporting labour migration is evolving as an emergent beat. Communication scholars<sup>5</sup> point out “that reportage of migration experiences in Nigeria is still in its *infancy* ... [with] no direction among media owners and reporters on how to go about it” which leads to “limited media coverage of migration, either from a quantitative or qualitative perspective.” To bridge this gap, the World Migration Report 2018 called for uptake into researching how the media from countries of origin are reporting migration.

The ILO has been promoting balanced reportage of labour migration, through facilitating media engagement and capacity building initiatives; including a country adaptation of ILO’s Media Toolkit for Journalists on reporting forced labour and fair recruitment in Nigeria, which is a contextualized edition of the global media toolkit.

This brief is hinged on learning documented during processes leading to the country adaptation of the global media toolkit, taking into account other related media engagements, trainings and sensitization activities on implementation of ILO’s FAIRWAY global Programme in Nigeria. The brief aims to place in context, media perspectives and experiences to support future programming, and strengthening partnerships with the media for promoting balanced and evidence-based labour migration reporting in the country. Particularly, the brief addresses the extent to which:

1. ILO’s engagement with the media impacted labour migration reporting in the country, and
2. Elucidate factors that make reporting labour migration attractive, or unattractive to journalists in Nigeria.

The brief was drafted by Tunde Salman and edited by Augustine Eramah, Grace Sebageni and Charles Autheman.

<sup>1</sup> ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers (2021); International Labour Organization

<sup>2</sup> See: Allen W, Blinder S, and McNeil (2017), “Media Reporting of Migrants and Migration” Chapter 8 in World Migration Report 2018. Geneva, Switzerland: International Organization for Migration.

<sup>3</sup> See: ILO, “Reporting on Forced Labour and Fair Recruitment: An ILO Toolkit for Journalists”. ILO, “Promoting balanced media reporting on migrant workers in the Arab State”, ILO Brief, March 2021.

<sup>4</sup> <https://africanwomeninmedia.com/labour-migration-media-research/>

<sup>5</sup> See amongst others: Chukwu et al (2018), “Migration and media reportage in Nigeria in the 21st century: Issues and challenges” in: Migration and Human Experiences in the 21st Century; October 2017 Conference at: Federal University Ndufu Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria; Ate et al (2019), “Migration Reporting in Nigeria: Towards an Effective Model”. Global Media Journal, Vol. 17 (32:159).

# Media coverage of labour migration in Nigeria

## Literature and context review

The underreporting of migration stories in Africa is largely attributed to a variety of reasons, including limited knowledge of the subject matter. Communication scholars point out that ownership structure, government policy, gate-keeping activities, dearth of infrastructural facilities, non-domestication of migration policies by government and security challenges are among the issues limiting the production of media reportage of migration and human experiences in Nigeria<sup>6</sup>.

According to African Women in Media<sup>7</sup> (AWM), the general perceptions of media editors on labour migration journalism is a mix of both positive and negative. Journalists often point out that though editors see it as an interesting beat, it is still unpopular, hence, not so welcoming in most press houses.

A few media organizations infuse the beat into the foreign desk, as such, the AWM's Labour Migration Media Research acknowledges that there has been little or no work done in this area, pointing out that the little research on labour migration journalism seems to focus more on media content than the lived experiences of the journalists that cover the beat. AWM's study noted the role the gender of the journalist plays in covering this beat, as well as the relevance of labour migration being one of the most interesting and exciting but underrated areas of specialized reporting in Africa.

In the context of Nigeria and Ghana, for instance, "reporting migration is a new trend. Basically, because media organizations do not place emphasis on stories relating to migration, except the aspects relating to human trafficking and smuggling." Journalists reportage of migration issues are not well articulated due to "inadequate information on the subject matter...[as many] do not have good understanding about migration issues"<sup>8</sup> Therefore, "media reportage of migration in Nigeria is still at its nascent stage and also fraught with challenges."<sup>9</sup>

However, over the course of the last decade, there appears to have been nominal improvements in media coverage of labour migration due to sustained interest in migration of a wide array of stakeholders, including development partners and donor agencies. This perhaps explains why most of the stories published in the print and/or broadcast channels as features, or documentaries emanate from workshops on the subject matter, and majorly facilitated by development partners.

Development partners, including the ILO have implemented series of projects geared towards better governance of migration in Nigeria, including through raising awareness on the benefits of regular migration, as well as the dangers of irregular migration. This has arisen from the expectation that with adequate awareness, irregular migration, especially from Africa to Europe would reduce significantly.<sup>10</sup>

"The necessity of frequent reporting of quality migration stories cannot be over-emphasized and as such, it should be significantly featured in mainstream reporting, to bring awareness on cross-cutting dimensions of labour migration and the experiences of the journalists bringing the stories

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<sup>6</sup> Chukwu et al (2018), "Migration and media reportage in Nigeria in the 21st century: Issues and challenges"

<sup>7</sup> <https://africanwomeninmedia.com/labour-migration-media-research/>

<sup>8</sup> NOMRA, 2011, cited in Chukwu, et al (2018)

<sup>9</sup> Ate et al (2019), "Migration Reporting in Nigeria: Towards an Effective Model". Global Media Journal, Vol. 17 (32:159).

<sup>10</sup> See: NBS and IOM, 2020 Statistical Report.

to light". To this end, communication scholars propose a reporting model<sup>11</sup> to engender a paradigm shift from casual to more thoughtful approach in dissecting migration issues in Nigeria. They consider such a reporting model as a desirable and inevitable given what the communication researchers called "lack of indigenous models in Nigeria that address the critical issues of migration". It is believed that "the model will provide a benchmark for professional journalists and equip them to better handle migration reporting."

Accordingly, the Migration Reporting Model (MRM) "shows that the reporter (communicator) lives in a migrating environment and is connected to a political, social, economic, legal, cultural, and religious environment that are charged with push and pull factors for migrating<sup>12</sup>. The reporter communicates the message objectively or subjectively through different platforms of choice (social media, broadcast, print media, [...]) to different types of audience. The audience receives the message and reacts through a feedback mechanism which goes back to the reporter.

### **Nigeria's media landscape and coverage of labour migration**

Nigeria has a vibrant and diverse press covering various categories of the media landscape, including traditional/conventional and new media. The traditional media comprises print and broadcast media, while the new media is acknowledged through growing popularity of online citizens' journalism, using different social media platforms and/or tools.

In recent years, much of what is reported in Nigeria's media are feature stories or news reporting propelled by training workshops on migration related themes largely organized as part of sensitization to commemorate special days set aside to call attention to migration, refugees, diaspora, etc.

In terms of frequency, a media monitoring conducted between June and July 2019 shows that only 275 migration news/stories were published across 10 media outlets, out of which 230 were news items. Out of 435 editorials, only six were dedicated to migration.<sup>13</sup> Research by the ILO on the media coverage related to returning of Nigerian migrant workers, covering the period between May 2020 and February 2021, has showed a similar pattern of low media coverage on the subject matter.<sup>14</sup> As one journalist puts it, "many newspapers are not reporting migration issues with the kind of commitment that will make impact or a change...and if we don't report (to)...tell the story in such a manner that can enlighten Nigerians on the implication of irregular migration (and benefits of regular migration pathways), it means we are not going to make the needed impact possible."<sup>15</sup>

## **Assessing reach and impact of ILO's media engagement**

### **Access to training opportunities on reporting labour migration**

About 83% of respondents from a survey<sup>16</sup> conducted by ILO to assess the impact of media engagement within the country component of the FAIRWAY Programme, indicated previous participation in trainings on reporting labour migration (fig. 1a), with contents covering topics such as forced labour, fair recruitment, and/or international labour standards. An estimated 69%

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<sup>11</sup> Ate et al (2019), Migration Reporting Model (MRM), the ILO's media Toolkit offers more robust model to advance media reportage on the subject matter.

<sup>12</sup> Push factors include religious and political persecution, discrimination, depletion of natural resources, natural disaster etc. and pull factors (e.g. employment opportunities, better income, favourable conditions, climate, tolerance, etc.)

<sup>13</sup> Mwantok, M and Godwin, A (2019) "Media tasked on migration reporting" Guardian, September 10, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Promoting better media reporting relating to returning Nigerian migrant workers, ILO, 2022

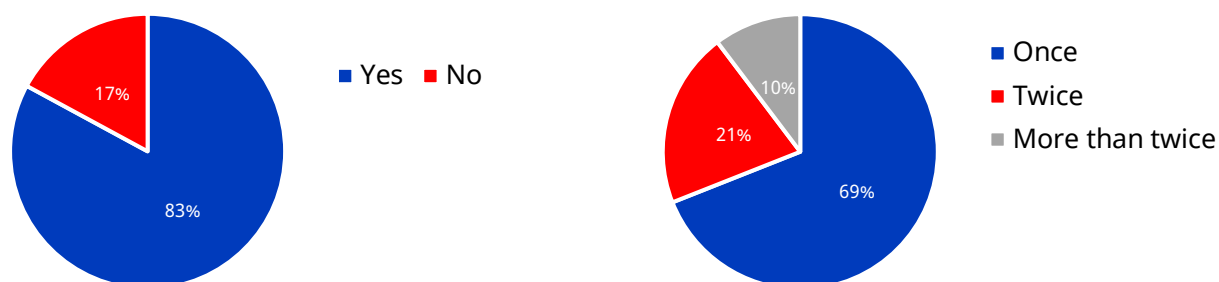
<sup>15</sup> See, ILO's Media Toolkit for key questions that journalists may consider in reporting labour migration.

<sup>16</sup> A set of 22 questions were developed and peer-reviewed at two focused group levels prior to its deployment between July 18 and August 8, 2022. The instrument collected information on existing knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience of journalists and other stakeholders in reporting labour migration and related topics in Nigeria. Of the target sample size of 150, actual respondents formed a quarter of the total number of the training beneficiaries approximately.

of this figure attended a minimum of one training (fig. 1b). A significant number of respondents attributed knowledge about concepts related to labour migration to the work of the ILO, while others attributed their trainings to other development partners.

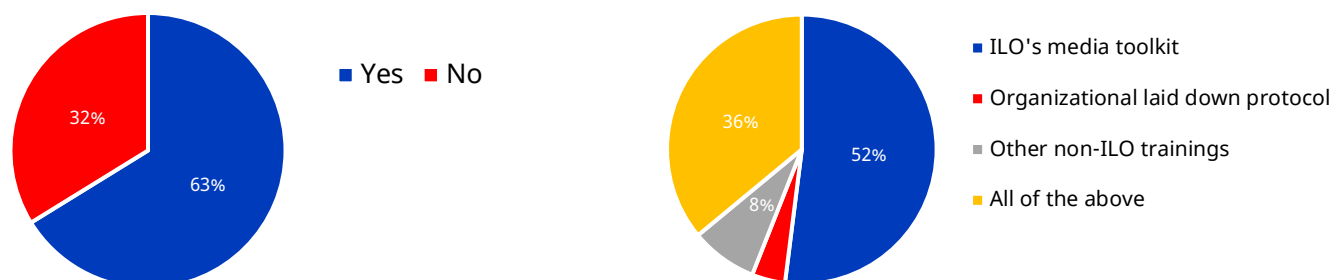
Respondents with no prior knowledge of concepts and understanding in terms of reporting labour migration and related topics (estimated 17%, fig. 1a) adduced limited awareness and or access to information as major reasons.

Fig. 1a and 1b: Access to Training Opportunities



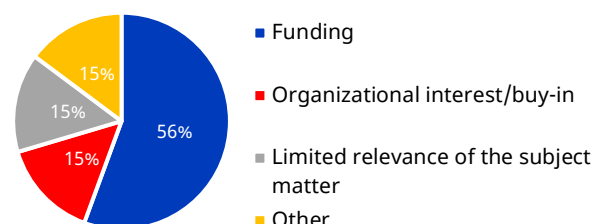
Out of about 63% of respondents (fig. 2a) that have produced media contents on the subject, more than half (fig. 2b) acknowledge that the ILO's Media Toolkit forms the major reference material or resource guide used in developing their reports.

Fig. 2a: Reporting labour migration prior to ILO training, Fig. 2b: Use of reference after the training



Approximately 56% of respondents consider funding as constituting gap in the application of the contents of the ILO media toolkit given that undertaking investigative reporting on any subject involves finance amongst others (fig. 2c).

Fig. 2c: Improving media engagement and application of ILO's Media Toolkit



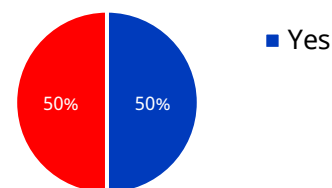
In terms of adherence to ethical standards of journalism with reference to reporting forced labour and other human rights abuses within the context of labour migration, respondents rating initially were not clearly discernible. However, when the same question was repeated with minor differences, the evidence of conformity to high ethical standards of journalism from existing media coverage or reportage on labour migration remains mixed (fig. 3).

Experts' opinion<sup>17</sup> across literature indicate that attaining acceptable standards of accuracy and fairness is hampered by factors that include the inability of journalists to grasp the essence and in

<sup>17</sup> See, Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (FES). African Media Barometer: Nigeria 2011.

some instances, the basic facts of news events; as “many journalists demonstrate limited skills required for news reporting and unaware of the ethical principles of the profession.”

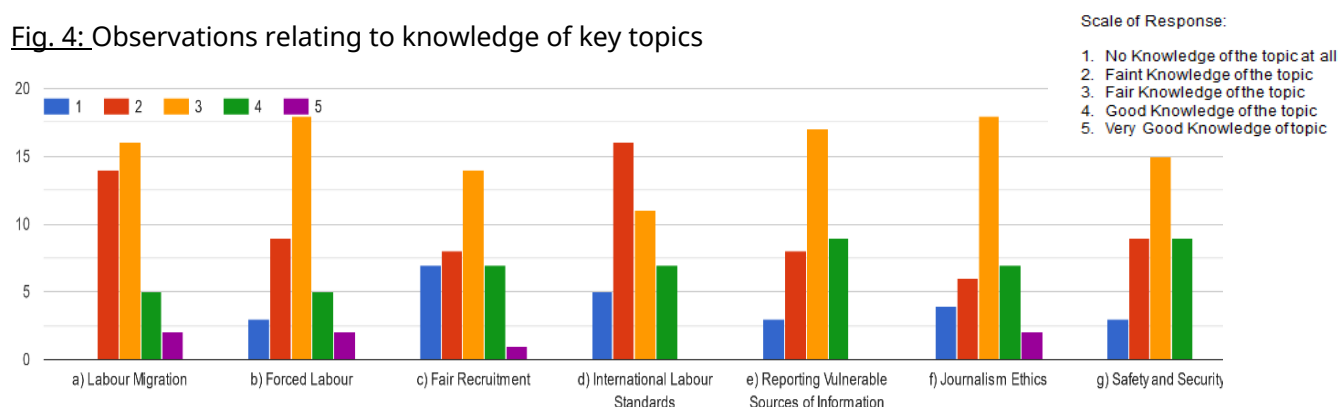
This is also why labour migration policy actors emphasize the need for fair and balanced reporting by the media.<sup>18</sup>



**Fig. 3:** Adherence to ethical standards of journalism when reporting labour migration

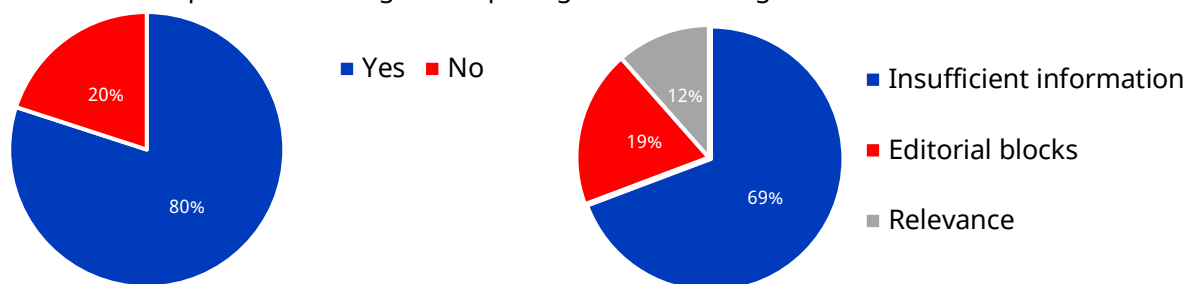
Respondents were asked about their knowledge of key concepts, to assess the extent of awareness and understanding of topics around labour migration, forced labour, fair recruitment, international labour standards, ethics of journalism, as well as safety and security to appreciate how grounded they were as regards knowledge of normative concepts under reference (fig. 4). One inference that can be made from the survey is that the level of awareness and knowledge of labour migration and forced labour have improved as results indicated that the respondents gained reasonable awareness or understanding of the key concepts. However, the level of awareness and understanding across these concepts somewhat oscillated largely towards fair knowledge (yellow legends) indicating room for sustained capacity development in terms of normative frameworks.

**Fig. 4:** Observations relating to knowledge of key topics



80% of the respondents indicated that they have never carried out any special investigative reportage or media research/programing on labour migration of which 69.2% stressing insufficient information on the subject matter as the major reason (fig. 5a and 5b). The few that have done so only made claims in terms of number of such reports (on radio conversations) without sharing evidenced links. However, a returnee migrant shared links of collaborative interventions as part of citizen journalism.<sup>19</sup>

**Fig. 5a and 5b:** Low uptake of investigative reportage on labour migration and reasons behind



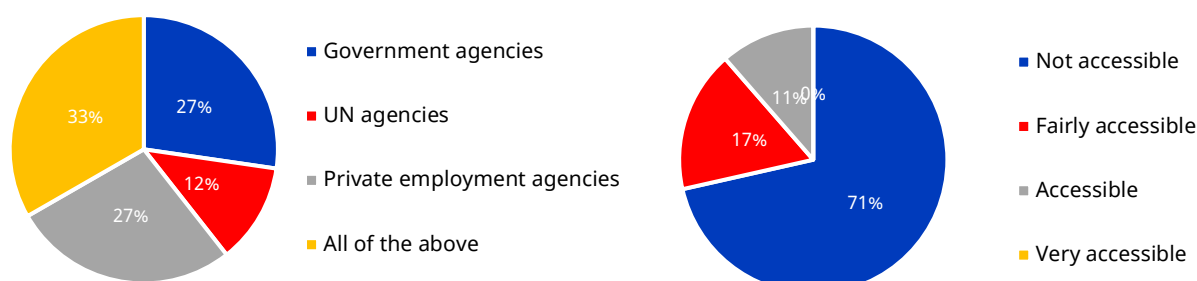
<sup>18</sup> <https://fmic.gov.ng/fq-calls-for-fair-balanced-reportage-on-labour-migration/>

<sup>19</sup> [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=657397228792486&id=100035666446608](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=657397228792486&id=100035666446608)

<https://anchor.fm/agidigbo887podcasts/episodes/DIGGING-DEEP-EPISODE-18-The-plight-of-female-migrant-Returnees-e195rqqt>

In terms of sourcing background information on labour migration, 12.1% of respondents consider UN agencies when sourcing for background information against 27.3% from government agencies and private employment agencies (fig 6a). On the level of accessibility in terms of information available on labour migration related issues in public, 71.4% of the respondents confirmed these were generally accessible (fig. 6b).

Fig. 6a and 6b: Sourcing background information and level of their accessibility



### Lessons learnt and observations

Findings further reinforce the position of available literature on the low reportage on labour migration from the perspective of countries of origin. While recognizing the ILO's contribution to strengthen the knowledge of journalists and other stakeholders on balanced coverage of labour migration, the foregoing analyses indicate the need for sustained engagement of the media around reporting labour migration.

Although, evidence points to advancements in knowledge being recorded by beneficiaries of ILO's FAIRWAY Programme through delivery of training workshops, there is clear recognition that future programming should include specific topics such as: knowledge of regular pathways to labour migration, investigating predatory migration networks or specific issues such as forced organ harvesting<sup>20</sup>, intensifying efforts on the use of social media space and radio programs, internal migration and notably rural-urban migration within states.

Other recommended areas of future programming include awareness or knowledge of relevant national and international labour laws and policies to protect the potential migrant from exploitative labour practices and maltreatment. There should also be discussion on how to report on irregular migration.

<sup>20</sup> This could be done through increased inter-agency collaboration, for example by collaborating on issues such as forced organ harvesting with UNODC.

Based on the learning it is also suggested to:

- Support Community of Practice on FAIRWAY Programme as a forum for knowledge exchange, information sharing and mentorship, between media and other stakeholders; through synergies with civil society organizations (CSOs) working around labour migration thematic issue, including migrant/returnee associations.
- Sustain regular capacity enhancement Programmes and periodic seminars, including the possibility of considering the provision of grant/funding to support step-down engagement beyond the ILO's reach in order to scale up the training for more journalists; more importantly, promoting the inclusion of the contents of the ILO Toolkit into the curriculum of journalism schools and university programs.
- Enact related legislations that will provide legal teeth and protection to journalists, CSO and other relevant stakeholders to back investigations, reportage without fear or intimidation.
- Improved access to information that will help reporters better interpret the current situation of forced labour and irregular migration appropriately; including through public enlightenment as there is need for more awareness creation to address inadequate information on labour migration pathways.
- Address the menace of unscrupulous private employment agencies in labour migration and forced labour as the involvement of all relevant stakeholders cannot be over emphasized.

In conclusion, this ILO brief, including its findings, highlights and reemphasizes the need for sustained support to enhancing the engagement of the media as it relates to coverage of labour migration, including through knowledge on application of labour standards relating to forced labour and fair recruitment. It generates information for evidence-based engagement with the media and a wide range of stakeholders in Nigeria.

## Recommendations

1. **Bridge knowledge and information gaps in labour migration reporting** as many journalists demonstrate limited knowledge of basic concepts and related topics due to inadequate awareness and or access to information.
2. **Encourage investigative reporting on forced labour and fair recruitment** beyond routine news coverage, including through funding the work and engagement of journalists, CSOs and migrants/returnees' associations.
3. **Cultivate the buy-in of media professionals**, including editors and media owners, to increase reportage on labour migration from the country-of-origin perspective as an area of specialization.
4. **Establish/strengthen a Community of Practice** for information sharing with respect to knowledge exchange and mentorship opportunities.
5. **Develop/promote code of ethics and ethical guidelines** for journalists covering forced labour and other human rights abuses within the context of labour migration.
6. **Popularize ILO's Media Toolkit on Reporting Forced Labour and Fair Recruitment** contextualized for Nigeria use.
7. **Consider inter-agency collaboration** to help journalists when reporting complex issues.

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