

# Combating Human Trafficking in Nigeria A Case Study of Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

Human trafficking is a pressing human rights issue in Nigeria, where the country serves as a source, transit, and destination for trafficked individuals. This illegal activity manifests in various forms, including forced labor, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and child trafficking, with women and children being the most vulnerable. Despite international and national efforts to curb the practice, human trafficking remains rampant due to a combination of socio-economic factors, including extreme poverty, unemployment, and gender inequality. Furthermore, weak legal frameworks, corruption, and inadequate law enforcement exacerbate the issue, making Nigeria a hotspot for human traffickers.

This research investigates the root causes and mechanisms of human trafficking in Nigeria, exploring the socio-economic drivers and the challenges faced by the Nigerian government and international organizations in their efforts to address the issue. It critically examines the effectiveness of existing laws and policies, including the role of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and international conventions such as the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol). Through a mixed-methods approach involving interviews, surveys, and analysis of secondary data, this study provides insights into the complexities of human trafficking in Nigeria and proposes targeted recommendations for improving prevention, victim protection, and law enforcement strategies.

The study concludes that while progress has been made, a more robust, multi-sectoral approach, involving stronger law enforcement, public awareness campaigns, and international collaboration, is essential to combat the growing menace of human trafficking in Nigeria effectively.

**Keywords:** Human trafficking, Nigeria, law enforcement, NGOs, public awareness, victim rehabilitation, corruption, poverty, international collaboration.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Human trafficking is a serious violation of human rights, with Nigeria being a major source, transit, and destination country for trafficked persons. Despite numerous efforts, the issue persists due to socio-economic factors, weak enforcement mechanisms, and organized criminal networks. This study aims to explore the extent of trafficking in Nigeria, the underlying causes, and the effectiveness of governmental and international interventions in combating the practice.

In Nigeria, human trafficking is a deeply ingrained problem, exacerbated by socio-economic challenges, cultural practices, and inadequate law enforcement. The country is a major source, transit, and destination for trafficked persons. Women and children are disproportionately affected, with many trafficked for domestic work, forced labor, or sexual exploitation. Internally, children are trafficked from rural areas to urban centers, often under the guise of providing better education or employment opportunities, only to be exploited as domestic servants or laborers. Internationally, Nigerian women and girls are trafficked to Europe, particularly Italy and Spain, for prostitution and sexual exploitation.

Nigerian human trafficking has many different and intricate causes. Poverty remains the most significant factor, pushing vulnerable individuals to seek better opportunities, often falling prey to traffickers who promise them a better life abroad or in urban centers. Unemployment, lack of education, and gender inequality also contribute to the high incidence of trafficking. In addition, traditional practices, such as child fostering and early marriage, sometimes blur the lines between cultural norms and exploitation, further complicating the fight against trafficking. Corruption within law enforcement agencies, border control, and the judiciary also undermines anti-trafficking efforts, allowing traffickers to operate with impunity.

Despite the introduction of laws like the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act and the establishment of NAPTIP, human trafficking remains pervasive in Nigeria. Efforts to combat the issue are further complicated by inadequate funding, limited resources, and a lack of coordination between governmental agencies, NGOs, and international bodies. The Nigerian government has also struggled to reintegrate victims into society, with many trafficked individuals facing stigmatization, psychological trauma, and lack of economic opportunities upon their return.

This research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the human trafficking situation in Nigeria. It explores the socio-economic drivers of the crime, the effectiveness of current laws and policies, and the roles of various stakeholders in combating trafficking. By shedding light on the complexities surrounding human trafficking in Nigeria, this study seeks to propose viable solutions to address the problem and ensure the protection of vulnerable populations from exploitation. A multi-sectoral approach, involving stronger law enforcement, public education, and international cooperation, is essential for an effective response to the ongoing human trafficking crisis in Nigeria.

### 1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVE

The following research goals are the focus of this independent study:

- a. To examine the root causes and factors that contribute to human trafficking in Nigeria.
- b. To analyze the roles of governmental, non-governmental, and international organizations in the fight against human trafficking.
- c. To propose new strategies for prevention, protection, and prosecution in tackling human

trafficking in Nigeria.

### 1.3 DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Combatting:** This is the act of proactively combating or lessening something detrimental. However, in this context, combatting means engaging in efforts, policies, and strategies to fight against or stop human trafficking.

**Human:** Refers to a member of the species *Homo sapiens*, distinguished by characteristics like rationality, consciousness, and social behavior. But, in the context of human trafficking, "human" emphasizes that the victims involved are people.

**Trafficking:** In general, the illicit movement or trade of goods or people is referred to as trafficking. In the context of human trafficking, it specifically means the recruitment, transportation, harboring, or receipt of persons through coercion, abduction, fraud, or deception for the purpose of exploitation, often in forms such as forced labor, sexual exploitation, or slavery.

### 1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

Human trafficking has attracted significant scholarly attention globally and in Nigeria, where the issue is deeply entrenched. Scholars have examined various aspects of the problem, including its root causes, the effectiveness of government responses, the roles of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international cooperation, and the challenges in eradicating the menace. This review highlights the perspectives and findings of other scholars on combatting human trafficking in Nigeria

#### Socio-Economic Factors Driving Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Numerous academics have emphasized that the main causes of human trafficking in Nigeria are socio-economic reasons. According to Akor (2011), vulnerable populations are driven into the hands of traffickers by a number of important variables, including poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy. He contends that traffickers take advantage of these weaknesses by making exaggerated claims of improved living and work circumstances, particularly to women and children. In support of this theory, Adepoju (2005) notes that because victims are searching for ways out of poverty, traffickers find both domestic and international trafficking to be quite profitable.

Osakwe & Ibe (2016) further elaborate on how poor economic conditions standing has made it more difficult for vulnerable groups to obtain chances and education, so putting them in a high-risk situation. They contend that in order to fully comprehend the problem of human trafficking—particularly the smuggling of Nigerian women to Europe for the purpose of sexual exploitation—it is important to take into account these socioeconomic variables in addition to societal pressure and family pressure.

#### Role of NGOs and Civil Society in Combatting Human Trafficking

Civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been instrumental in tackling Nigeria's human trafficking problem. Academics such as Durojaye & Okeke (2020) contend that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a crucial role in addressing the

deficiencies in government agencies, namely in the areas of victim rehabilitation and reintegration. They draw attention to the assistance that groups like the National Network on Human Trafficking (NATHAN) and the Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON) provide victims with in the form of housing, therapy, and career development.

Akor (2011) commends NGOs for their advocacy efforts in bringing attention to human trafficking on a national and worldwide scale. He points out that NGOs have been instrumental in drawing attention to the suffering of victims of Nigerian human trafficking in Europe and exerting pressure on policymakers to enhance their handling of the situation. In order to provide a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to combating trafficking, Akor recommends strengthening collaborations between government agencies and non-governmental organizations.

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#### International Cooperation and Transnational Trafficking

Scholars such as Adepoju (2010) and Ikeora (2016) emphasize the significance of international collaboration in the fight against transnational trafficking, a major component of the trafficking issue in Nigeria. Nigerian women are trafficked for sexual exploitation along established routes between Nigeria and Europe, especially Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom, as noted by Adepoju (2010). In order to combat these trafficking networks, he highlights the necessity of more robust bilateral and international collaborations. These should include intelligence sharing, cooperative law enforcement operations, and well-coordinated victim repatriation initiatives.

International organizations like the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) have been crucial in the fight against transnational trafficking, according to Ikeora (2016). She contends that although there has been some progress in the fight against human trafficking on a global scale, issues like destination nations' unwillingness to address the underlying causes of trafficking in source nations like Nigeria must be addressed.

Chukwu (2021) highlights that although international organizations' support for repatriation initiatives is important, it is insufficient to completely destroy trafficking networks. Chukwu supports more thorough reintegration initiatives that offer long-term economic prospects, vocational training, and psychological care to victims who have been returned. Additionally, he urges destination nations to take more initiative in addressing the market for trafficked people, especially for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

#### Victim Protection and Rehabilitation.

Another area of scholarly investigation has been the defense and rehabilitation of victims of human trafficking. According to Akor (2011) and Ajayi (2020), Nigeria's victim rehabilitation programs are still deficient, particularly when it comes to long-term assistance. They point out

that although shelters and short-term services are offered by NAPTIP and certain NGOs, long-term care—especially psychological therapy and economic reintegration programs—is frequently lacking. Many victims experience stigmatization and struggle to reintegrate into society, particularly those who have been repatriated from overseas.

Ajayi (2020) highlights the necessity for more extensive rehabilitation programs that prioritize giving victims economic empowerment via job placement and vocational training. Additionally, he emphasizes the significance of providing care that is trauma-informed, especially for victims of sexual exploitation who frequently have severe psychological damage. Ajayi proposes that in order to create additional centers offering comprehensive support services, such as healthcare, education, and legal help, government agencies and non-governmental organizations should work together.

However, a comprehensive approach is essential to tackle the complicated and diverse issue of human trafficking in Nigeria, as evidenced by the literature on the subject. Academics concur that in order to effectively prevent human trafficking, the core causes of the problem—poverty, unemployment, a lack of education, and corruption—must be addressed. Nigeria has made progress in creating organizations like as NAPTIP and legal frameworks, but problems still exist with public awareness, victim rehabilitation, and enforcement. Although NGOs are essential in filling the gaps created by government institutions, their effectiveness can be increased with greater cooperation and funding. Last but not least, tackling the transnational aspects of human trafficking requires international collaboration, especially when it comes to breaking up cross-border trafficking networks and returning victims to their home countries.

### **1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A mixed-methods approach will be employed, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. Primary data will be collected through interviews with key stakeholders (victims, law enforcement officials, NGOs), and surveys targeting communities at risk. Secondary data will be obtained from official reports, research papers, and policy documents related to human trafficking in Nigeria.

Qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, are employed to understand the lived experiences of trafficking victims, law enforcement personnel, and civil society organizations. These methods help uncover the socio-cultural drivers of trafficking, including poverty, gender inequality, and traditional practices.

### **STATE IN NIGERIA THAT HAS THE MOST HUMAN TRFFICKING SHOWN RED IN THE MAP.**



Figure 1: Edo State, located in southern Nigeria, is widely recognized as a major source of trafficked persons, particularly women and girls. It has gained international attention due to the high number of victims trafficked from the state, often for sexual exploitation in Europe, especially in Italy and Spain. Several factors contribute to Edo State's prominence in human trafficking.

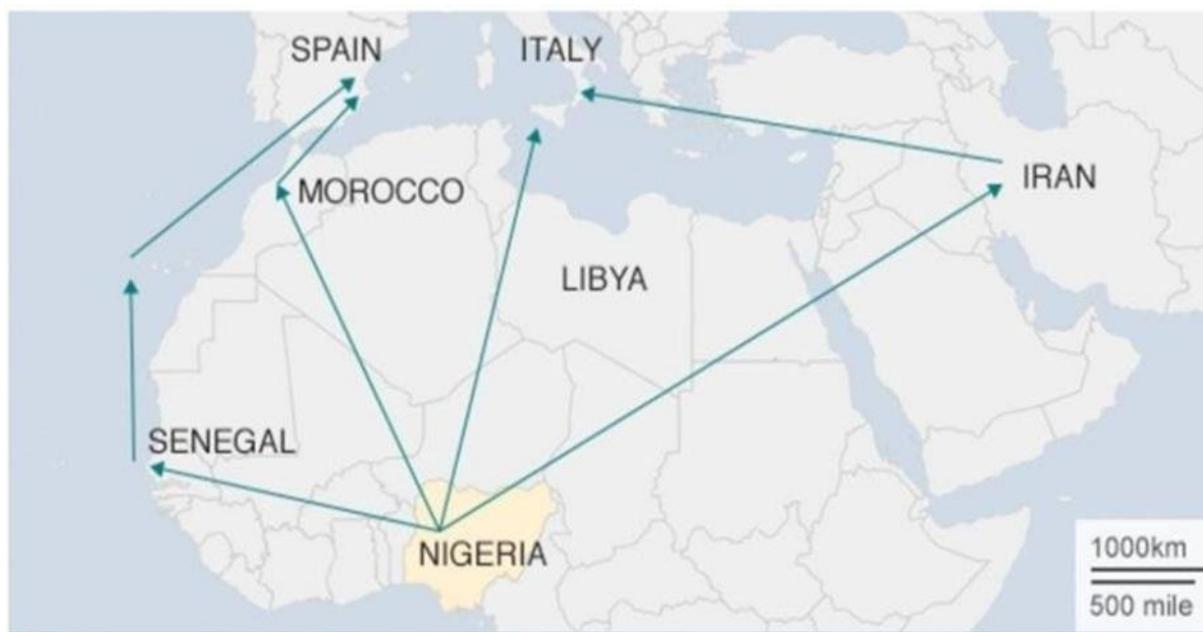


Figure 2: Shows the various routes in which human traffickers transport their victims, according to some findings made, major cases were confirmed from the European countries as shown in the diagram linking Nigeria, Italy, and Spain as the major routes used by the traffickers.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data from the interviews is analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying key themes such as challenges in enforcement, victim support mechanisms, and public awareness campaigns. Quantitative data, including statistics on trafficking cases, is analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends over time.

TABLE 1: SHOWS THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF THE CAUSES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA.

S/N	CATEGORIES	PERCENTAGE
1	Extreme Poverty	50%
2	Unemployment	20%
3	Lack of Proper Education	10%
4	Corruptions	20%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

Reading the table above, it is revealed that the causes of human trafficking that was received by the legal and prosecution department of the Agency for legal opinion. 50% percent where as a result of extreme poverty, 20% was known for unemployment due to economic crisis. 10% was labelled for lack of proper education in Nigerian. While the number of corruptions increased to 20% as shown in the table

TABLE 2: SHOWS THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF THE CASES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING REPORTED TO LEGAL AGENCIES IN NIGERIA.

S/N	AGENCY	NUMBER OF CASES
1	Nigeria Police Force	4
2	Ministry of Women Affair	2
3	FIDA	1
4	NAPTIP	5
5	HISBAH	1
6	NHRC	3
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>

Sixteen cases were reported to the Agency between the month of February to August 2024 which were out of the Agency's mandate after careful investigation, thus the Agency referred accordingly, four (4) to the Nigerian Police Force, two (2) to the Ministry of Women Affairs, only one (1) case was reported to the FIDA agency, NAPTIP had the major number of cases reported totaling 5, while HISBAHB has only one case reported due to its relevance, Three (3) cases of human trafficking was reported to NHRC respectively.

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key Findings

Interview data reveals that one of the major challenges in combatting human trafficking in Nigeria is the lack of adequate law enforcement. While Nigeria has strong anti-trafficking laws, their implementation remains weak due to corruption, lack of resources, and poor training for law enforcement officers.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a critical role in addressing human trafficking, particularly in victim rehabilitation and awareness campaigns. However, many NGOs face financial constraints, limiting their reach and effectiveness.

The findings indicate that public awareness of the dangers of human trafficking remains low, especially in rural areas. This lack of awareness makes it easier for traffickers to lure individuals with false promises of employment or education abroad.

Victims of trafficking face numerous challenges upon their return to Nigeria. While there are rehabilitation programs in place, many victims struggle to reintegrate into society due to stigma, lack of economic opportunities, and insufficient psychological support.

Data from NAPTIP shows that while there has been an increase in the number of prosecutions for human trafficking, the conviction rate remains low. This is attributed to challenges in gathering evidence, witness intimidation, and lengthy legal processes.

### Discussion

The results show that while significant efforts are being made to combat human trafficking in Nigeria, there are still numerous challenges that hinder progress. Corruption within the law enforcement and judicial systems remains a major barrier to successful prosecutions. Additionally, the lack of public awareness, particularly in rural areas, allows traffickers to continue their operations with relative ease.

The role of NGOs is pivotal in both prevention and rehabilitation, but these organizations need more financial and governmental support to expand their impact. Victim rehabilitation programs need to be enhanced to address the long-term psychological effects of trafficking and to provide economic opportunities for survivors.

## CONCLUSION

Human trafficking remains a critical issue in Nigeria, driven by factors such as poverty, unemployment, and weak law enforcement. Despite efforts by the Nigerian government, international bodies, and NGOs, significant challenges persist, particularly in the areas of enforcement and public awareness. The current legal framework, while comprehensive, requires more effective implementation and resource allocation.

To effectively combat human trafficking, Nigeria must address the root causes, including poverty, unemployment, corruption, and lack of education. Comprehensive efforts that integrate economic empowerment, public education, and access to opportunities for vulnerable populations are essential. Public awareness campaigns need to be strengthened to challenge the cultural norms and practices that contribute to trafficking, such as the normalization of irregular

migration or traditional oaths used to control victims.

Furthermore, the Nigerian government and agencies like the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) must bolster their capacity to enforce anti-trafficking laws, ensure the prosecution of traffickers, and provide long-term rehabilitation and reintegration services for survivors. Regional and international collaboration, especially with transit and destination countries such as Libya, Italy, and Spain, is vital for disrupting trafficking networks and enhancing victim identification and protection.

Community-level interventions should also be prioritized, with local leaders, civil society organizations, and religious institutions playing an active role in prevention, support for victims, and advocacy for human rights. Survivors of trafficking should be supported with access to justice, healthcare, and psychosocial services to rebuild their lives and prevent re-trafficking.

While progress has been made in combatting human trafficking in Nigeria, much more needs to be done to dismantle the entrenched systems that allow trafficking to thrive. A multifaceted approach that includes law enforcement, policy reform, social interventions, and international cooperation is essential to eradicate this crime and protect vulnerable Nigerians from exploitation. By addressing both the symptoms and the root causes of trafficking, Nigeria can make significant strides toward ensuring the dignity, safety, and human rights of all its citizens.

#### Recommendations

- a. **Strengthening Law Enforcement:** There is a need for better training and resources for law enforcement officials to effectively combat human trafficking. Anti-corruption measures should be enforced to ensure that law enforcement agencies are not compromised.
- b. The government should increase funding and support for NGOs working on anti-trafficking initiatives, particularly in the areas of victim rehabilitation and public awareness.
- c. Nationwide campaigns should be launched to raise awareness about the dangers of human trafficking, particularly targeting vulnerable populations in rural areas.
- d. Comprehensive rehabilitation programs should be developed to provide long-term psychological and economic support for trafficking survivors. This includes vocational training and job placement services to aid reintegration into society.
- e. Nigeria should strengthen its collaboration with other countries and international organizations to tackle the cross-border nature of human trafficking. Sharing of intelligence and joint operations could enhance efforts to dismantle trafficking networks.

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