

# Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe

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# **Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe**

Prepared for IOM by

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IOM International Organization for Migration

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The original publication in Norwegian and the translation into English were financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police, under the Norwegian Government's plan of action against trafficking in women and children. The project was inspired by the sudden influx of a great number of Nigerian prostitutes into Norway in the summer of 2004. Since then, Nigerians account for the largest national group among foreign sex workers in Norway, and also constitute an increasing share among asylum seekers. This situation created a demand for information based on the experience of other European countries. Given the politicized nature of the issue, it was important to draw upon migration research expertise and relate prostitution and crime to the broader context of Nigerian migration and to the social context of emigration in Nigeria. This report is part of the expansion of migration research at the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO).

The translated manuscript has been adapted for an international audience by the author. Jørgen Carling is a researcher on migration issues at the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO).

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## PREFACE

This report is strongly influenced by the various source material consulted, and by the need to prioritize within the framework of the project. Those areas of Nigerian migration perceived as the most problematic in Europe are also best documented. It was therefore possible to deal with these issues in greater depth in this report. This applies especially to emigration related to trafficking and prostitution. Today there is substantial material available on Nigerian trafficking, but much of it is of doubtful value. Media coverage is often sensational and much of the investigation is done by groups or persons who, though well meaning and committed, often lack the professional competence required to assess and analyse the source material. For instance, an extensive study on trafficking from Edo State uncritically recounts that, e.g., “the abolition of female circumcision in the state [...] had made the females promiscuous” (Okojie *et al*, 2003: 43). Sadly, there is strikingly little research on the thousands of Nigerians in Europe who are neither prostitutes nor criminals. This report, therefore, is not in a position to offer a balanced view of how Nigerians live in Europe.

Two topics not covered in the report deserve mention. Firstly, I have only barely touched on people returning to Nigeria. The extensive trafficking, as well as the high number of asylum applications makes this an important topic, but it was not possible to cover it within the framework of this research. Secondly, the report does not include any discussion or recommendations for action to be taken against Nigerian trafficking. Sound recommendations would first require a review of existing measures and experiences across countries.

In the sections dealing with Nigerian prostitution in Europe, the prostitutes are called “women” and not “girls”. This does not exclude that minors are involved in some cases. “Trafficking” refers to trafficking in persons, and for the sake of simplicity the word “trafficker” is used for any person directly involved in trafficking. This is a simplification since not all links in the chain are necessarily guilty of trafficking in the legal sense. At the end of the report, there is an appendix with a brief presentation of Nigerian English usage and a glossary.





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nigerian migration to Europe has attracted considerable attention both from governments and in the media. This is partly because some elements of this migration flow are related to trafficking in persons and other criminal activities, but also because Nigerians have become prominent among sub-Saharan African asylum seekers in Europe. There are several hundreds of thousands of Nigerians throughout Europe, half of whom live in the United Kingdom. Italy is host to the second-largest group of Nigerians and is the most important destination for trafficking in persons from Nigeria. Although existing research and documentation on Nigerians in Europe concentrate on prostitution, trafficking and criminal activities, the great majority of Nigerian immigrants in Europe who lead their lives without any contacts with such activities are ignored.

Immigration, human smuggling and trafficking are overlapping concepts. Human smuggling refers to the facilitation of entry into a third country in violation of immigration regulations, against payment. Most asylum seekers depend on human smugglers to reach Europe and to present their claims. Smuggling does not necessarily imply an element of exploitation. Trafficking, on the contrary, by definition denotes that people are forced, tricked or threatened into situations in which they are exploited either sexually, financially or in through forced labour. Both human smuggling and trafficking may be involved in organized crime, but not necessarily.

Poverty, crime, corruption and violence have been part of a vicious circle adversely affecting the development of Nigerian society, where violence is in part related to ethnic and religious differences and conflict. These conditions have contributed to a considerable emigration pressure. Corruption plays an important part in facilitating emigration in violation of Nigerian and European immigration policy and laws. For instance, rings of organized crime are specialized in forging and selling travel documents to Nigerian citizens who themselves may not be aware of existing legal procedures for the issuance of passports and visas.

Traffickers offer young women to travel to Europe, usually luring them with promises of good jobs. Although women are increasingly becoming aware that they will have to work in the sex business, for many this often comes as a surprise. Before the journey, the woman and the traffickers agree that she incurs a debt in the order of, say, US\$ 40,000-100,000, which normally takes between one to three years to pay back. The pact is sealed through religious rituals and is perceived as binding. In Europe, these rituals are often characterized as voodoo and presented in a sensational manner. Once they have repaid the debt, it is not uncommon for the prostitutes themselves to enter the trafficking networks and recruit new women.

In Nigeria, international trafficking is mainly but not exclusively concentrated around Edo State with its capital Benin City, where trafficking to Italy has helped many families to escape extreme poverty.

For many Nigerians travelling to Europe without a valid passport and visa, the journey leads through a third country where the forgery is not as easily detected. Others travel by road through the Sahara and are smuggled into Europe by ship. Many thousands of Nigerians are stranded in North Africa and elsewhere in their unsuccessful attempt to reach Europe.

Nigerians account for an increasingly large share of asylum seekers arriving in Europe. In 2004 they ranked fifth on the list of nationalities. Very few are granted asylum, however. In a few cases, the asylum system is being abused by traffickers to get Nigerian women and minors into the European prostitution market.

Nigerians are one of nine nationalities from outside the European Union involved in significant organized criminal activities in Europe. The Nigerian groups are very loosely and flexibly organized and are mainly active in financial fraud, drugs trade, human smuggling and trafficking in persons.

Emigration has represented a considerable drain of highly qualified labour from Nigeria. At the same time, the Nigerians abroad represent a substantial resource to their country of origin and they send more than a billion US dollars back to their relatives every year.

# 1. MIGRATION, HUMAN SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING

Hundreds of thousands of Nigerians have migrated to Europe, and many of them have relied on human smugglers to do so, and many have also been victims of trafficking. The concepts of migration, human smuggling and trafficking overlap. In relation to Nigerian migration to Europe it is natural to see them in conjunction. Both human smuggling and trafficking may be parts of organized crime, though they do not have to be.

Human smuggling is normally understood as complicity in, or the facilitation of, immigration in violation of local immigration laws and regulations. Some definitions specify that such facilitation must occur for the purpose of profit in order to be referred to as human smuggling. Human smuggling is often the result of an agreement between two parties: a prospective immigrant who lacks the opportunity to immigrate legally, and a human smuggler offering his services in the form of forged documents and/or transport against payment. Often both parties are satisfied with the deal – the human smuggler receives the agreed payment, and the immigrant gets to enter the country as intended. Today it is nearly a necessity for people who wish to apply for asylum in Europe to use human smugglers to reach European territory and present their application for asylum. The Geneva Convention states that if a person has valid reasons to apply for asylum, immigration regulations may be waived. There is no systematic relationship between refugees' needs for protection and their degree of dependence on human smugglers for reaching a country where an asylum application can be lodged.

While human smuggling in itself does not imply exploitation, it is clear that the human smuggler has the upper hand and may exploit this situation. There are, for instance, many examples of human smugglers abandoning their charges somewhere along the way, tricking them into believing that they had reached their destination and charging the payment. In other instances, payment is deferred and to be made to a third party once the migrant has in fact reached the intended destination.

Human smuggling often occurs in dangerous conditions and costs several thousand lives at the outer borders of the European Union each year. Intensified measures to control and discourage human smuggling often deflect smuggling routes towards even more hazardous means and passages, as they fail to blunt the determination of both smugglers and their clients.

Contrary to human smuggling, trafficking in human beings involves by definition an element of exploitation. The most widely used definition of trafficking is stated in the UN Palermo Protocol:<sup>1</sup>

*Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.*

Though people smuggling can occur on an ad hoc and/or more or less individual basis, usually it involves organized criminal groups, much as in the case in trafficking in human beings.<sup>2</sup>

FIGURE 1  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRAFFICKING,  
SMUGGLING AND ORGANIZED CRIME

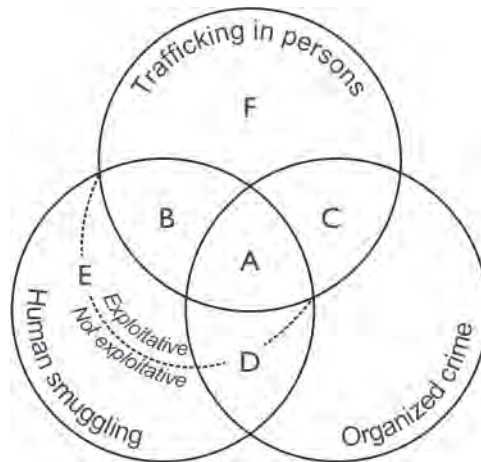


Figure 1 illustrates the overlap between smuggling, trafficking and organized crime and how the migration of a Nigerian to Europe may occur in circumstances characteristic of either none, some or all of these concepts.

Set A represents the classical image of trafficking as being both part of organized criminal activities and in conflict with national immigration and aliens laws and regulations.

Set B represents the same, but without being a part of organized crime, when, for instance a particular instance is not also part of continuous criminal activities.

Set C shows trafficking occurring without being in violation with national immigration laws,<sup>3</sup> nor part of organized crime (set F).

Sets D and E represent situations where people are smuggled or in other ways assisted to illegally enter a third country, but without being tricked or threatened into a situation of exploitation as defined by the Palermo Protocol. A persecuted person paying smugglers to reach Europe and present an application for asylum may be an example of this. The smuggling can either be a part of organized crime (set D) or not (set E). One important point is that, although this smuggling falls outside the definition of trafficking, it *may* have an element of exploitation – represented by the stippled line through sets D and E. If the smuggler takes the money but abandons the migrants along the way, this is clearly exploitation, but not trafficking. In other cases, the smuggler delivers the agreed service at the agreed price. It is not unusual to overemphasize the connection between human smuggling and exploitation, trafficking and organized crime to legitimize measures against human smuggling that, however, then also tend to affect persons with a real need for protection.

Both human smuggling and trafficking occur in different ways in different cultural and political circumstances. For instance there are great differences between the trafficking in women from eastern Europe and from Nigeria (Shelley, 2003). It is, however, a common trait that many women working as prostitutes in Europe are motivated by the opportunity to support their families in their country of origin. It is constructive to have a migration perspective on this, although the women in question are not in control of their own destiny (Brunovskis and Tyldum, 2004).



## **2. WHAT IS IT ABOUT NIGERIA?**

Most Europeans are likely to have an impression of Nigeria that is tainted by negative attention in the media. News about Nigerians in Europe often focus on prostitution and attempts at e-mail fraud. Reports from Nigeria have focused on violence or on the widely publicized Shari'a sentences of stoning women who have had children out of wedlock. The pride felt by many when Nigerian Agbani Darego was crowned Miss World in 2001 was quickly overshadowed by the violent riots that caused the following year's Miss World Final in Abuja to be moved to London. All this negative attention causes Nigerians to be confronted with considerable scepticism. This can make their integration experience in Europe particularly challenging.

Compared to other African countries, Nigeria distinguishes itself mainly by its size and its diversity. Nigeria has approximately 130 million inhabitants, and the population grows by about 3 million annually. The country is today the ninth most populous in the world, but is expected to rank sixth in a few decades.

Nigeria is a Federal Republic constituted by 36 federal states and the federal capital territory, seat of the Capital of Nigeria, Abuja.

The country was united as a British colony in 1914. The borders of present-day Nigeria are more or less a result of coincidences at the time, rather than of any cultural common bond. Already seven years after Independence in 1960, a bloody civil war broke out. The southeastern parts of the country declared their independence as the State of Biafra, but had to surrender in 1970 after three years of war. After the civil war, nearly 30 years of military dictatorship followed. Early in this period, there was considerable optimism and economic growth as a consequence of the development of the national petroleum industry. However, financial misrule and corruption limited the benefits for most people. During the 1980s, the economy continued to deteriorate. The last military regime, headed by Sani Abacha from 1993 to 1998, was especially ruthless (Schwab, 2004). Following his death, free elections were held. Since then, the country has been led by Olusegun Obasanjo, who was reinstated in 2003 after controversial elections. Substantial efforts have been made to reinforce the rule of law and the protection of the rights of the citizens, as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution. Despite the political reforms, corruption and misrule continue to make everyday life hard for many Nigerians (Olukoju, 2004).

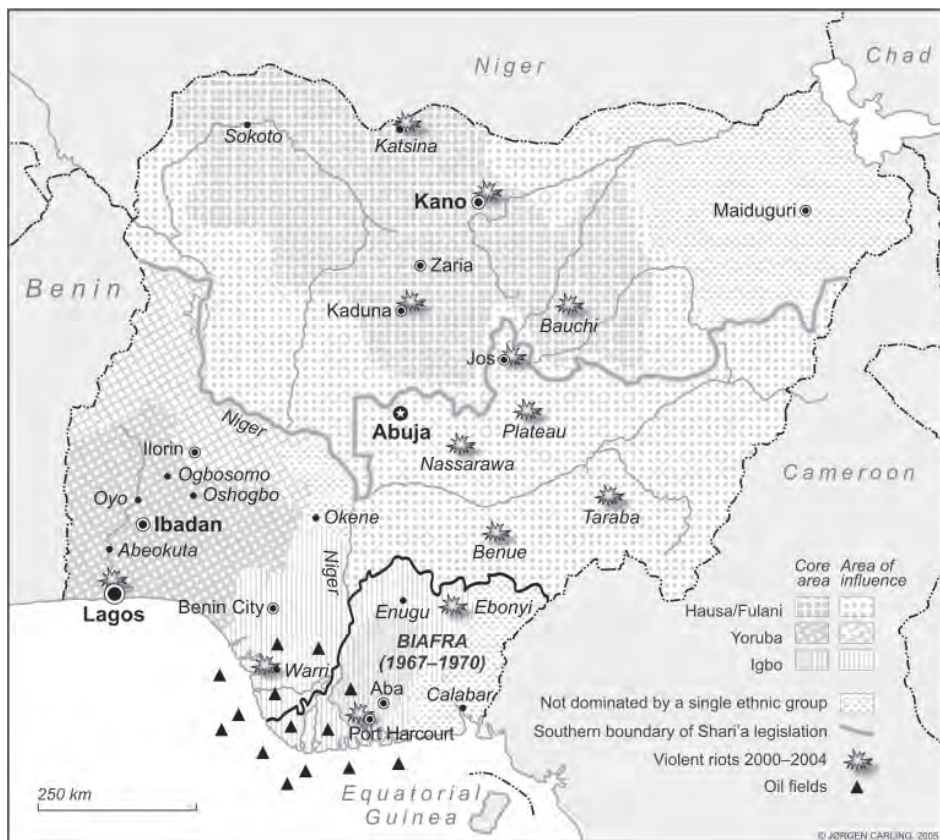
### **Ethnic groups, regional and religious differences**

Nigeria's ethnic diversity is unparalleled in Africa. It is often difficult to say what constitutes an ethnic group. The most widely used marker was that of language. In

the 1970s there were close to 400 different language groupings, depending upon disagreements over whether or not closely related languages were mutually intelligible. Estimates of the number of distinct ethnic groupings varied from 250 to as many as 350-400. In the northern part of the country, the Hausa and the Fulani dominate. The two groups have so many common traits and are so intermixed that they are normally considered as one. In the southwest, the Yoruba are the most numerous, whereas the Igbo (sometimes called Ibo) are a significant group in the southeast.

The greatest religious divide in Nigeria is between the mainly Muslim north and the mainly Christian south. Altogether, it is believed that Muslims make up about half of the country's population, with Christians accounting for about 40 per cent. Evangelical congregations have grown significantly in southern and central Nigeria since the 1980s. At the same time, Islam has reinforced its position over larger parts of northern Nigeria (Gordon, 2003; Metz, 1992; Smits, 2001).

FIGURE 2  
MAP OF NIGERIA





In the predominantly Muslim areas in the north of Nigeria, Shari'a law has been practised in civilian suits for a number of years.<sup>4</sup> During the period 2000-2002, the use of Shari'a was expanded to cover the criminal legislation in 12 northern states. The expanded use of Shari'a was initially warmly welcomed in the Muslim population (Human Rights Watch, 2004). First of all, many expected that Shari'a law, with its focus on welfare and public responsibility for the individual, would be a positive contribution in the war against poverty. Secondly, frustration with the inability of the judicial system to handle the increasing level of crime had increased considerably. Shari'a was expected to be an easier, swifter and less corrupt alternative. Thirdly, Shari'a law was undoubtedly popular among many Muslims as a confirmation of their religious identity at a time of increasing tension between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

In all 12 states, Shari'a law applies only to Muslims. Non-Muslims may choose to have their case tried in the Shari'a courts or in the parallel, secular court system. Since the police work only for the federal legal system, the Shari'a courts are not able to use force to bring back persons who have left the states where Shari'a law is used (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, 2004). Shari'a is enforced in the local communities in the north by so-called *hisba* groups. These are vigilante groups operating in part independently from the police and legal system (Last, 2003).

From 2000 to September 2004, at least ten persons were condemned to death under Shari'a law. The majority of these have either been reversed or are awaiting the processing of their appeal, but at least one person has been executed. In addition to the death sentences, the Shari'a courts have condemned several dozens of persons to amputations, normally of the right hand, and a large number have been condemned to flogging. The expansion of Shari'a law to criminal law has raised concerns not only because of the nature of the punishments and the crimes, but also because fundamental rule of law principles are absent in many of the court cases.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to Christianity and Islam, local religious traditions are strong in Nigeria, and have an important link to trafficking, that will be discussed later. The local religious traditions are related to ancestral spirits and spirits related to certain places. The spiritual connections between ancestry, places and resources are traditionally used to legitimize and consolidate the distribution of financial, political and social goods and rights (Metz, 1992). Different forms of magic can be part of the local religious traditions. These are ritual acts performed for the purpose of influencing the course of events in the world with the help of hidden forces.

The local religious traditions are practised more or less openly by both Christians and Muslims throughout large parts of Nigeria. Many young people who are strong

in their faiths nevertheless reject these traditions as idol worship (Metz, 1992; Prina, 2003). The traditions as such, or the magical rituals that are part of them, are sometimes referred to as “voodoo”. This word is sometimes used because it evokes certain associations in Europeans, where the “voodoo” label is used exclusively for evil magic (van Dijk, 2001; van Dijk *et al*, 2003).

To relieve the tension between the ethnic groups and achieve greater balance and national concord, the capital was moved in 1991 from Lagos to Abuja. While Lagos is heavily dominated by the Yoruba, Abuja is in the middle of the country, practically on neutral ground between the large ethnic groups. Abuja is still a small city with a population of about half a million, as opposed to more than 10 million in Lagos (United Nations Population Division, 2004).

### **Riots, violence and crime**

Since the reinstatement of democracy in 1999, more than 10,000 people have been killed in violent riots in various parts of Nigeria (Isaacs, 2004). Most conflicts in Nigeria are not directly caused by ethnic or religious incompatibilities, but ethnicity and religion can be important factors in *mobilizing* Nigerians in conflict situations. For instance, it is common for people to call it religious persecution when they feel unjustly treated, because such claims make it easier to get support (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, 2004). Religious leaders can also have an interest in exaggerating the religious differences to secure financial and political support nationally and internationally.

Because of the high unemployment in Nigeria, large numbers of discontented young people can be easily mobilized in conflict situations. Often, the events may be ignited by people who can profit from the conflict, such as political, ethnic or religious leaders.

Criminal groups also have an interest in contributing to riots to exploit such chaotic situations for looting. Regardless of what triggers the riots, the underlying frustration is most often related to the struggle over scarce resources (Isaacs, 2004). Local authorities are often reticent to investigate riots as this could reignite conflicts and raise tensions further. The situation often reverts to normal conspicuously fast after the riots (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, 2004).

Organized crime in Nigeria has extensive networks to North America, Europe, Asia and Africa. During the military dictatorship there were close links between corruption, crime and misrule – political leaders as well as the military and the bureaucrats were

commonly bribed to facilitate business, whether it was related to the petroleum industry, public tenders or international drug trade (President's International Crime Control Strategy, 2000). Nigeria has been characterized by a particularly unfortunate combination of poverty and misrule, the circulation of large sums of money, and a corrupt and inefficient legal system. This has led to corruption and organized crime to overlap and given them a solid foothold in society (Fadahunsi and Rosa, 2002; Harnischfeger, 2003).

The high incidence of armed robbery and other serious crime has provided a fertile ground for militia-like vigilante groups that tend to be ethnically organized. For a certain time, these groups succeeded in curbing crime and enjoyed great popularity. Later, however, the people they were meant to protect became themselves victims of the conflicts between the militia groups and their involvement in violent riots (Agbu, 2004).

## **Poverty and corruption**

Nigeria is among the poorest countries in West Africa, besides being one of the countries with the greatest social inequality. The richest tenth of the population have an income 25 times that of the poorest tenth (United Nations Development Programme, 2004). The enduring financial crisis has caused gross national product to stagnate, whereas the price of food and other goods has increased steeply. The purchasing power of regular people has declined steadily since the beginning of the 1980s. Life expectancy at birth slowly rose to 50 years in 1997, but has since dropped and is now below 45 years.

The inequalities in Nigerian society are related to a so-called "patron-client culture". This means that a great deal of interaction takes place in hierarchical personal relationships. Every person nurtures the relationship to, and shows loyalty towards their contacts higher up in the system. In return, they are rewarded with resources to which these contacts have access. This happens at many levels so that in theory, everybody has patrons above and clients below. Nigerians invest far greater efforts to place their contacts into positions of power and to achieve benefits for those who are already in power, than at working politically to change society (Smith, 2001). Corruption is an integral part of such a system. A university professor who was placed in a high position with the agricultural authorities expressed it this way: "Although I would have wanted to avoid favouring my friends in awarding contracts, I would not be able to do it. They would say that I was being selfish and stupid. Who gets a powerful position like this only to refuse to help his people? Only people of the worst kind." (Smith, 2001: 808).

Nigeria is considered one of the world's most corrupt countries. In the internationally most widely acknowledged corruption survey Nigeria ranked third lowest among 146 countries in 2004, only surpassed by Haiti and Bangladesh (Transparency International, 2004a). Nigeria has had an anti-corruption commission since 2000. In February 2003, the Senate passed a new law intended to reinforce this commission, but this was soon perceived as a disguised attempt to undermine the legislation and protecting exposed senators. The law was declared null and void by the Supreme Court. The same year, the acting Auditor General was removed from his office after having submitted a report criticising the Presidential Office and ten ministries for financial irregularities. This dismissal, as well as the attempt at introducing new legislation, was met with fierce objections in Nigeria (Transparency International, 2004b).

The corruption in Nigeria touches many parts of society and takes some surprising forms. After a mission to Nigeria in 2004, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration reported that false newspaper reports have been made to support asylum applications. In other words, journalists or editors allegedly accept bribes for publishing stories that underpin specific claims of persecution, which are later used as evidence in asylum applications. Many also take advantage of their position in other ways than by taking bribes. For instance, it is a problem that physicians at public hospitals refer patients to their own private clinics, or that they steal equipment from public hospitals (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, 2004).

## **Gender and sexuality**

Because of the connection between prostitution and Nigerian emigration, it would be relevant to briefly discuss issues related to gender and sexuality. A country as diverse as Nigeria is also characterized by great variations in gender roles and sexual culture. In the area around the Niger Delta, from where most women are recruited for trafficking, it is more or less acceptable for single women to be sexually active. Girls will often have their first intercourse at a very young age. Among certain groups, polygamy is common and it is regarded as natural for married men to have sexual relations with other women (Omorodion, 1993; Smits, 2001).

Sexuality in Nigeria will often include relationships that border on what would be perceived as prostitution by many Europeans (van Dijk *et al*, 2003; Omorodion, 1993). For instance, Nigerian truck drivers often have a number of regular "girlfriends" along the road whom they will support financially and in return will get food and lodging from and have sex with (Marck, 1999). It is widely common for single women – often girls in their teens – to have sexual relationships with older men (so-called *sugar daddies*) who will give them gifts and money (Bamgbose, 2002). The exchange of

gifts and sexual services are also characteristic of a traditional “period of engagement” initiating a marriage (Smits, 2001).

There are more direct forms of buying and selling sexual services that are also perceived as prostitution in Nigeria. One important difference is that often it does not take place in the women’s own surroundings. Many prostitutes in Nigeria work in parts of the country other than where they come from. Most of them work independently, not under pimps, and many save money that they later invest in their own business, such as a café, a discotheque or a beauty salon (van Dijk *et al*, 2003).

### **Trafficking in the region**

In addition to trafficking from Nigeria to Europe – which will be thoroughly discussed in later chapters – there is also extensive trafficking in women and children in nearby areas. Nigerian women work as prostitutes in Mali, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and South Africa. West African child labour also has a clear international dimension, with trade from, through and to Nigeria, including a number of other West African countries.<sup>6</sup> Children work primarily in agriculture, building and construction as manual labourers, in trade and services or as domestic workers (Riisøen *et al*, 2004; US Department of State, 2002b). Child labour and trafficking in West Africa is closely connected to the circulation of foster children. Child fostering, where children spend part of their childhood with foster families is a widespread practice in West Africa (Findley, 1997). Such arrangements do not necessarily imply abuse or exploitation, but can be used to cover practices that amount to trafficking.



### 3. LEAVING NIGERIA

An estimated 15 million Nigerians live abroad, first and foremost in other West African countries, the US and in Western Europe (Gordon, 2003). Nigerians have a long tradition of mobility, but the volume, form and direction of the emigration has changed over time. This chapter will first focus on emigration in general, and then look at recruitment for trafficking in particular.

In the first decades after independence in 1960, thousands of Nigerians moved to other West African countries looking for work. The most important destinations were the neighbouring countries Cameroon and Benin, as well as Ghana, Sierra Leone and Liberia farther west. At the same time, there was also significant immigration to Nigeria from other countries in the region, predominantly from Ghana (Adepoju, 2004). The migration flows between West African countries also included large numbers of women, often independent business women. In the 1980s, West Africa suffered a financial crisis, and Ghana and Nigeria each deported about 1 million of each other's citizens because of increasing unemployment (Gordon, 2003).

#### Hopes and opportunities

In the course of the 1980s and 1990s, an increasing number of Nigerians lost faith in their own country and wanted to leave. The most important causes were the financial breakdown, the violent military regimes, the detrimental regional differences, the indifference of political leaders towards the suffering of the people, and the pervading corruption in the public system (Osaghae, 1999). Thousands of Nigerians migrated to the United States, Saudi Arabia and Europe. This was a period characterized by strong demand for unskilled labour and a relatively liberal immigration policy in southern Europe. Nigerian women and men found work, primarily in agriculture and the service sector.

In parallel with unskilled workers, many highly educated Nigerians also migrated to Europe and the United States. The country has been badly affected by the so-called *brain drain*, i.e. a loss of highly qualified people. This represents a loss not only in itself, but also means that other countries are reaping the benefits of Nigeria's investments in education. Most probably, only a minority of all Nigerian academics and highly skilled workers live in Nigeria. In Europe the United Kingdom especially has attracted many highly qualified Nigerians (Adepoju, 2004; Gordon, 2003).

The feeling of hopelessness in Nigeria and the view of emigration as the road to riches make many Nigerians willing to take considerable risks to gain a foothold in

a rich country. The immigration policies of western countries, however, make this an unrealistic dream for most. In short, there are three roads to Europe for Nigerians who wish to emigrate: a residence permit, a visitor's visa or illegal entry.<sup>7</sup>

- *Entry with possibility of extended or permanent residence permit on the basis of studies, work or family reunification:* This is a possibility accessible only to very few. With the exception of quota arrangements for limited immigration to Spain and Italy, it is nearly impossible for Nigerians to settle in Europe only on the basis of wanting to work (Chaloff and Piperno, 2004; Pérez, 2003; Terrón, 2004). However, as the number of Nigerians in Europe has grown, more have been able to emigrate from Nigeria on the basis of family reunification with family members residing in Europe.
- *Entry with a visitor's visa:* This does not initially offer the possibility of an extended or permanent stay in Europe, but may be used to gain a foothold.<sup>8</sup> For instance, Many Africans in southern Europe arrived on a visitors' visa, remained illegally in the country after the visa expired, and later obtained a residence permit through amnesties. The emigration pressure has led to a steady increase in the number of visa applications at the embassies of western countries, even after many embassies moved from Lagos to Abuja (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, 2004). However, most Nigerians have only limited possibilities to have their application for a visitor's visa to the Schengen area accepted. First of all, Nigeria is considered a risk country with many potential asylum seekers and illegal immigrants. Nigerians are one of only 11 nationalities that must also have a transit visa to pass through an airport in the Schengen area. Secondly, the social and financial situation in the country causes many Nigerians to be subject to the provisions restricting the issuing of visitor's visas to persons of limited resources.<sup>9</sup>
- *Illegal entry:* This means entering Europe by circumventing border controls. Persons entering Europe in this way are instantly in an illegal situation unless they apply for asylum. The circumstances of illegal entry into Europe will be discussed in the next chapter.

Both entry with the possibility of extended stay and entry with a visitor's visa may also occur in violation of immigration laws. Marriages of convenience are a case in point.

Having lived abroad is a source of status in Nigeria, and the political and financial elites will often send their children abroad to study, preferably to the United States or Europe (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, 2004). To many, emigration also provides opportunities to obtain status symbols such as houses or cars. The financial crisis makes many people regard emigration as the best means to achieve such aims



(van Dijk *et al*, 2003). Thus, despite the difficult situation in Nigeria, many do not wish to leave the country for good, but want to go abroad and make money to ensure themselves and their family a better life in Nigeria afterwards.

## **Emigration and corruption**

The widespread corruption and crime in Nigeria is also evident in connection with emigration. It is relatively easy to get genuine documents with partially or completely wrong information as long as one is willing to pay. In addition, there is a well-developed industry specialized in altering data in documents already issued. Weaknesses in Nigeria's public administration also result in weak quality control of documents being issued even when there is no corruption involved. Nigerian passports are often produced only based on birth certificates, and birth certificates may be issued based on the information provided by the applicants themselves (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, 2004).

For many European countries it is a major problem in the immigration administration that Nigerian documents are so unreliable. Dutch authorities, for instance, have blacklisted documents from Nigeria and four other countries.<sup>10</sup> Documentation from these countries is considered invalid until verified by Dutch authorities (Ministerie van Justitie, 1999). This verification will often require extensive investigations in Nigeria in form of interviews with relatives, friends and colleagues, and searches in the archives of schools, churches and hospitals. This requirement for verification has led to a steep rise in the price of false documents in Nigeria (van Dijk, 2001).

The most central document in connection with emigration, the passport, is misused mainly in three ways:

- Original passports are altered, e.g. by replacing the photograph of the visa with another one.
- Genuine passports are issued with false information by means of bribes.
- Several persons use the same passport one after the other.

Especially when a passport has a valid Schengen visa, it is often sent back to Nigeria as soon as the first holder has arrived in Europe, so that as many people as possible can enter with the same visa. Depending on which method is used to get the passport and the visa, the cost is usually between US\$ 500 and US\$ 3,000 (Okojie *et al*, 2003). Since Nigerian passports tend to raise suspicion, false passports from other West African countries are frequently used, e.g. from Benin, Ghana, Togo and Senegal (Okojie *et al*, 2003; Prina, 2003).

The experience of fraud is not necessarily the same for a Nigerian using a forged passport as it would be to a European. Identity is a far more flexible concept in Nigeria, where it is common to have a series of different names used by different persons or in different contexts. If somebody else takes care of arranging the documents, as is the case in the trafficking networks, it would not necessarily attract attention from the woman who is travelling that the personal details are unknown to her (Prina, 2003).

Even those who do use their own passport with correct information may use falsified additional information in visa applications, for instance about work and income. The embassy staff at the European embassies in Abuja note that different forms of fraud to obtain a Schengen visa are very widespread (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, 2004). However, the forgeries and the suspicion they create may also affect bona fide applicants who are then also unjustly suspected of submitting incorrect documentation. The instructions of the Schengen countries specify that any doubt as to false documentation must lead to the rejection of the visa application (Council of the European Union, 2002).

In addition to circumventing immigration laws by means of corruption or forgery, there are examples of misuse within the legislative framework itself. A new way of organizing Nigerian trafficking is for persons living in Europe to adopt teenage girls in an orderly manner with the permission of the parents, thus facilitating access to a visa and residence permit in Europe (Okojie *et al*, 2003).

## **Emigration and prostitution**

The widespread wish to emigrate, combined with the obstacles, create favourable conditions for trafficking. Young women often have a low level of education and even less possibilities than men in the local labour market. Besides, families are often favourably disposed to seeing the women emigrate because they often show more consideration towards the family than emigrating men, and become an important resource to the family members back home in Nigeria. The prostitution market in Europe makes it attractive to traffickers to facilitate the emigration of young women despite the high costs and great obstacles. Women do not normally themselves have the financial and organizational resources nor the necessary contacts needed to travel.

Young women's first contact with the trafficking network almost always happens through informal networks. It varies whether it is the woman herself or the other party who first takes the initiative. In many cases, friends or relatives of the woman are the first link. The conversations about travelling to Europe often take place in her home or in other familiar surroundings (Okojie *et al*, 2003; Prina, 2003). The first person

with whom the woman is in contact usually has no other role in the trafficking process than to establish contact. The victim may later come to regard this person as somebody who took advantage of her trust to trick her, or as a well-meaning person who was tricked, too (Prina, 2003). In this phase, the women are lured with promises of work as maids, sales personnel, or hairdressers, or with work in factories or restaurants, or with educational possibilities (Okojie *et al*, 2003; Prina, 2003).

In Nigeria, Italy is very often connected with prostitution, while the same is not true for other European countries. This means that when young women are offered to travel to Spain, the Netherlands or to Germany to work, they will be less cautious (Prina, 2003). How the women and their families relate to the possibility that she may end up working as a prostitute will be discussed later in this chapter.

The emigration of Nigerians to the European prostitution market is very concentrated in one area, namely to Edo State and its capital Benin City (Figure 3). Of the approximately 800 Nigerian women who were returned from Italy to Nigeria during 1999-2001, a full 86 per cent came from Edo State. A further 7 per cent came from the neighbouring Delta State. Altogether, this area thus accounted for 93 per cent of the returns.<sup>11</sup> Since Benin City is known as the main junction for prostitution-related emigration, women from other parts of Nigeria go to Benin City if they wish to travel to Europe (Okojie *et al*, 2003).

FIGURE 3  
MAIN AREAS OF RECRUITMENT OF PROSTITUTES  
IN NIGERIA FOR EMIGRATION TO EUROPE



The area surrounding Benin City formerly comprised the Kingdom of Benin.<sup>12</sup> The largest ethnic group in the area is called Edo, Benin or Bini. In addition, there are several other ethnic groups of a certain size. All of Edo State has between 2 and 3 million inhabitants. Edo is not among the poorest parts of Nigeria; on the contrary, three-quarters of the states in the country have a higher level of poverty than Edo (Federal Office of Statistics, 1999).

There are historical and cultural factors in this area that may provide some of the explanation why the prostitution-related emigration is so great (van Dijk *et al*, 2003; Smits, 2001). At the same time, it is not uncommon for migration flows between continents to be very locally concentrated at one or both ends. The main reason for such connections is that once migration has started, often in a fairly coincidental manner, the *self-reinforcing mechanisms* are very powerful. In other words, it is often easier to explain why migration continues and is reinforced, than why it initially originated to or from a particular location (Massey *et al*, 1998). A study among some 1,500 randomly selected women aged 15 to 20 in Benin City in 2002 showed that one in 20 had been abroad, while one in three had been contacted by somebody who offered to help them organize a trip (Women's Health and Action Research Centre, 2002).

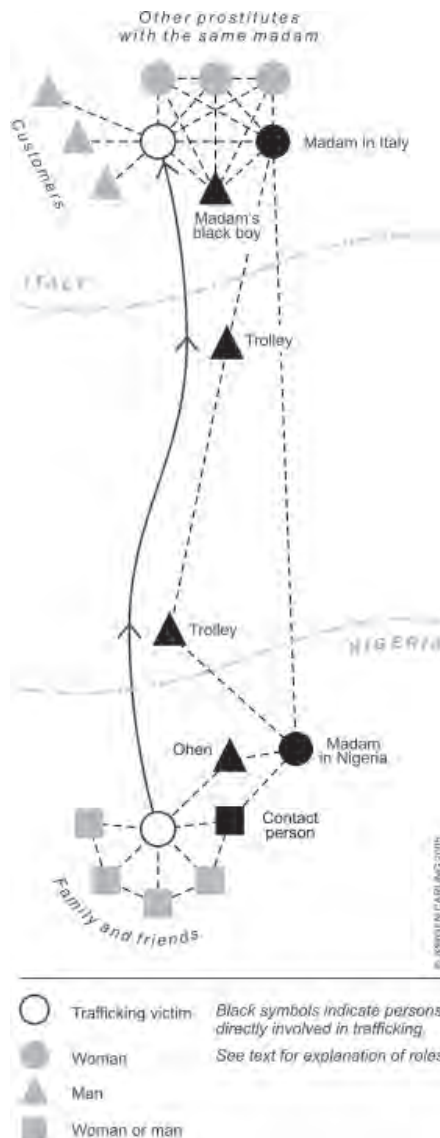
Most women leaving Edo State for Europe to work as prostitutes go to Italy, followed by the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Belgium and Austria (Okojie *et al*, 2003; Women's Health and Action Research Centre, 2002). Early Nigerian emigration to Italy in the 1980s was not dominated by prostitution, and those who did arrive to work in the sex industry were often independent and not victims of traffickers. In the first half of the 1990s, however, to enter Italy became more difficult, and an increasing number needed to take big loans to cover the costs. Initially, the lenders were friends and family, but gradually it became more common to become indebted to a sponsor (Carchedi *et al*, 2003). This laid the foundations for the establishment of a trafficking system based on a strong pact.

## **The emigration pact**

Nigerian trafficking in Europe is built on a pact between the person trafficked and the traffickers and has a specific organizational form. Figure 4 shows an example of how trafficking from Nigeria to Italy may be organized. As mentioned, the first contact is made by a person who is often a part of the family or circle of friends. This person puts the woman in touch with a "madam" who is the most important person in the network in Nigeria. Sometimes there is a third person who acts as a sponsor and finances the trip. However, the sponsor and the *madam* will often be the same person, as in this example. It is normally a woman, but it may also be a man. In addition to the

*madam* in Nigeria, there is a *madam* in Italy who is responsible for the woman after she has arrived. The *madam* in Europe is closely connected to the *madam* in Nigeria; often, they will belong to the same extended family. The other central persons are a religious leader (*ohen*) in Nigeria, the human smugglers who are responsible for the journey (*trolleys*), and a male assistant to the *madam* in Italy (*madam's black boy*).

FIGURE 4  
EXAMPLE OF ORGANIZATION OF TRAFFICKING  
FROM NIGERIA TO ITALY



The sponsor is responsible for paying all costs of the journey and settling abroad. These make up a debt that the woman is required to pay back. Required documents normally cost between US\$ 500 and US\$ 3,000. In addition, smugglers often charge as much as US\$ 10,000 for the trip (Okojie *et al*, 2003). The debt the women incur, however, is considerably larger, usually in the range US\$ 40,000 to US\$ 100,000. It normally takes between one and three years as a prostitute in Europe to pay back this amount (Okojie *et al*, 2003; Prina, 2003; Smits, 2001; Somerset, 2001). Many women do not understand the extent of what they are committing themselves to because they are not familiar with European currencies (Carchedi *et al*, 2003; Prina, 2003).

Once a woman has agreed to go to Europe, she is taken to a shrine where the pact of emigration is confirmed and sealed. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the distribution of material goods and rights is a central element in the local religious traditions. The religious leader (*ohen*) who seals the pact acts as a kind of district judge (Carchedi *et al*, 2003).

The woman and her *madam* or sponsor often visit several shrines together. During such visits, a “package” is made up by various symbolic elements (Carchedi *et al*, 2003; van Dijk *et al*, 2003; Prina, 2003). This package becomes a concrete expression of the agreement between the two, and will also often have a lucky charm function for the woman. Most often it will contain human material, possibly from both parties. These may include bits of nail clippings and hair and, in the case of the woman, underwear with remains of menstrual blood. Other common objects in the packages are kola nuts,<sup>13</sup> bent pieces of metal and soap. These three may symbolize loyalty, the power of the Ogun deity (especially important for travel) and beauty, respectively (Gore and Pratten, 2003). Parts of the contents of the packages are the same as those used in “love medicine” or “love potions” by women to attract men. The women who travel often bring such a package with them to Europe. These packages have received considerable attention in the investigation of trafficking cases in the Netherlands and Italy (van Dijk *et al*, 2003; Prina, 2003).

The visits to the shrines may also include animal sacrifice and other rituals of complex significance. The woman who is going to leave may be asked to swallow organic material, or her skin may be cut in particular ways (van Dijk, 2001). The rituals are no doubt perceived as overwhelming, but not necessarily as oppressive or threatening. They are seen as being required, they involve spiritual worlds, and they have an element of control and inspection, but do not equal the loss of the ability to express own wishes or to make own choices. On the contrary, this participation in the spiritual world may be understood as a natural part of the wish of the women to travel to Europe (van Dijk, 2001; Smits, 2001).

It is often later in the process, and if something goes wrong as seen from the perspective of the traffickers, that the use of the local religious traditions takes on a clear element of abuse. If the women are not cooperative after arriving in Europe, they may be exposed to a mixture of physical violence and new, enforcing rituals. In conversations with Dutch researchers, the women themselves called this “voodoo” as opposed to the rituals in Nigeria. “Voodoo” in their use of the language, is thereby an evil form of magic used to reinforce exploitation rather than to seal an agreement between two parties (van Dijk, 2001). It is conspicuous that the traffickers themselves often have the same faith in the magical powers as the victims. Through telephone interception in trafficking cases, Italian investigators have heard many examples of the madam in Italy asking the madam in Nigeria for help with magical rituals to keep the police at a distance (Prina, 2003).

To an increasing extent, the woman or her family must also commit themselves through a written contract. This may be legally binding in Nigeria, and use the family home as security for the debt (Carchedi *et al*, 2003; Prina, 2003; Smits, 2001). In addition to the rituals at the traditional shrines, many women also participate in prayer in the popular Pentecostal congregations prior to leaving for Europe (van Dijk, 2001).

The pact with the sponsor is perceived as very strong by the prostituted women. First of all, they may fear that breaking the pact could affect their own physical and mental health through magic. Secondly, the pact is often perceived not only as a promise to the other party, but to the local community in Nigeria. Breaking the pact represents much shame towards the entire community (Prina, 2003).

It is not necessarily the case that the women weigh the pros and cons of breaking the pact and fear the consequences, but breaking it may be considered unthinkable at a more subconscious level. A Nigerian woman in Italy expressed it like this: “You are tied to them, you are tied to this oath, you are obliged to respect it. And there are those who, I don’t know how to explain it, those who command you because this oath exists. They must command you, control you, and you are obliged to respect it.” (Prina, 2003: 28).

Many Nigerian victims of trafficking state that they left Nigeria believing that they would get a “regular job” but were forced into prostitution. The Nigerian women who came to Italy in the beginning of the 1990s were often directly tricked or threatened into prostitution. Over the last ten years, however, it has been well known in Nigeria that very many of the women who travel to Europe work as prostitutes. Some Nigerian women in Italy therefore claim that “those who come here saying they didn’t know, are lying” (Prina, 2003: 22).

It appears that the recruitment is still taking place under the cover of leading to good jobs. The question is then whether the women should know that this is not correct. In their wish to leave Nigeria and helping their family out of poverty, it may be tempting to believe in the promises and hope for the best. Then it will be unclear whether one has been tricked, pretends that one has been tricked, or is tricking oneself.

Although more women have become aware that they will work as prostitutes, they often have no idea of the conditions they will work in, that they are to be street prostitutes, that they will be submitted to strict control, and that it may take them years to pay back their debt. In other words, the deceit is in many cases not related to what they are going to do, but to the circumstances that deprive them of their independence and dignity in a way they had not been able to imagine (Aghatise, 2004; Cingolani, 2005; Prina, 2003; Smits, 2001). In the critical phase after their arrival when all of this becomes evident to the women, it is common that they have to go through another religious ritual to consolidate the pact (van Dijk, 2001; Prina, 2003). Their vulnerability is reinforced in that they are normally deprived of any papers or phone numbers that may enable them to get in touch with friends or relatives in Europe.

There are two reasons why the question of whether the women “knew what they were going to do or not” must be treated with circumspection. Firstly, as already mentioned, it is often not as simple as knowing or not knowing. There is not always a clear distinction between being tricked and tricking oneself, and it is possible to suppose that one is going to work as a prostitute without realizing how it is going to happen. Secondly, there is the risk that the allegation that they knew, or should have known that they were going to work as prostitutes, may be used to legitimize the abuse. Regardless of how the women ended up in the situation, trafficking is a criminal offence and a violation of human rights.

## **Trafficking and the local community**

To many families, having a daughter travel to Europe is the only way to escape extreme poverty. For most, there is no other way to go to Europe than to accept the offers of the traffickers. Trafficking has led many families out of poverty and into appearing successful in the local community (Prina, 2003). Until recently, women who travel to Europe were therefore often regarded as heroines, and people in Benin City were proud of what the many women who had left achieved in the material sense (The Economist, 2004; Smits, 2001). Following more than a decade of emigration from Edo to Italy, the contact with Italy has clearly left its mark on the local community – cars and big houses financed with money from Italy, queues of people in the post office sending parcels to Italy, and queues of people picking up money from Italy from the money transfer company Western Union (The Advocacy Project, 2001; Smits, 2001).



It has been claimed that in Nigeria in general, and in Benin City in particular, a certain consumer culture has emerged, making many crave quick wealth, and that this has produced favourable conditions for trafficking (Carchedi *et al*, 2003).

Trafficking is also an issue in Nigerian film production.<sup>14</sup> One of the most popular Nigerian films in the 1990s was *Glamour Girls II: The Italian Connection*, which was about a young woman working as a prostitute in Italy and sending money to her fiancé, who betrayed her by spending the money on marrying one of her girlfriends (Nnebue, 1994). While the film underlines the cynicism and the exploitation, it is also full of glitter and glamour and presents the women as driven by their own greed (The Advocacy Project, 2001; Okome, 2004). The fact that many women decide to travel must be understood in the light of several aspects of the local community and their life situation:

- Considerable pressure to emigrate: When many people dream of emigrating to the West and only very few have the opportunity, it is difficult to decline an offer.
- Poverty and unemployment: Many are in a situation in which they apparently do not have anything to lose by trying their luck.
- Strong family loyalty: Young adults feel a strong commitment to help to provide for older and younger family members.

Many of the women travelling to Europe are the eldest child or eldest daughter of their family, and thereby feel a particularly heavy responsibility to contribute financially to the household (Okojie *et al*, 2003). The frustration of not being able to do this in the local labour market may be a powerful driving force. In certain cases, the women are pressured by their families to go, while in other cases the woman herself wants to go while her family is trying to prevent it (Prina, 2003; Smits, 2001).

A 15-year-old girl from Benin City told a British reporter that she had many girlfriends who had gone to Europe as prostitutes, and that the families always played an important role: “They tell the girls ‘why don’t you go with this man and work. We don’t have any money, or anything to eat. You can send us money.’ And then the girls leave.” (Little, 2004). Another 16-year-old girl related how she had been sent by her mother to “work in Canada”, but ended up as a prostitute in Gabon.<sup>15</sup> She managed to run away and get back to Nigeria, but was scolded by her mother who told her that “You don’t want to work for me – other girls travel for three months and buy cars for their parents” (The Economist, 2004).

In recent years, the pride in the results achieved through emigration has gradually been replaced by shame. There is also greater awareness of the negative experiences

of many Nigerians who go to Europe (Skogseth, 2006). In response to pressure from women and human rights groups and the international community, Nigerian authorities are increasingly inclined to act to combat the trafficking in women. The establishment of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in 2003 was an important step in this respect. Independently of how efficient the measures have been, they have contributed to a certain shift in attitudes (Smits, 2001). Many Nigerians are also worried about the reputation the nation and the people have gained in Europe due to the prostitution business.

In May 2006, the NAPTIP headquarters were raided by armed men who destroyed computers, documents and archives, apparently in a deliberate attempt to obstruct the agency's anti-trafficking operations (Nigeria Direct, 2006). This event testifies to the brutality of the trafficking networks, but at the same time demonstrates that traffickers regard NAPTIP as a real threat to their activity.

## 4. ENTERING EUROPE

Those who have a passport and visa to enter Europe can fly directly to a number of European cities. Many nevertheless choose complicated routes to enter Europe, with false documents, or without any documents at all. This chapter will first look at the migration routes used by Nigerians on their way to Europe, and then discuss the use of asylum procedures.

### Migration routes and transit stays

The organizational infrastructure used to transport Nigerians to Europe is often the same for various categories of migrants. Female victims of trafficking may, for instance, travel together with young men who have paid for the trip themselves (Okojie *et al*, 2003). Figure 5 shows an overall view of migration routes from Nigeria to western Europe. The balance between people of different backgrounds and different motivation to travel will vary from route to route and between the different forms of travel.

FIGURE 5  
MIGRATION ROUTES FROM NIGERIA TO WESTERN EUROPE



Sources: Okojie *et al* (2003), Prina (2003) Smits (2001) and Carling (forthcoming) as well as unpublished results from the research project *Europe and the developing world: Confronting migration pressure* at the Peace Research Institute (PRIO).

The extensive use of forged documents makes many Nigerians fly not directly from Nigeria to the destination, but rather travel through other countries where they will attract less attention. It is especially common for traffickers not to send women directly from Nigeria to Italy, but through another West African country (most commonly Ghana) and from there by plane to a city in western Europe (e.g. London, Paris or Amsterdam). From there, the women then travel to Italy by train and usually arrive in Turin.

This city has become an important point of transit for trafficking. Another possibility is to fly from Nigeria to Moscow, Istanbul or a town in eastern Europe and then cross the border illegally into western Europe (Okojie *et al*, 2003; Prina, 2003; Smits, 2001). Towards the end of the 1990s the number of Nigerian illegal immigrants arrested in Turkey increased dramatically (International Organization for Migration, 2003).

In addition to those who fly directly to western Europe or via a third country, a considerable number of Nigerians travel towards Europe through the Sahara and into Europe by ship.<sup>16</sup> A few travel by sea as stowaways, but this is a relatively insignificant route.

Nigeria's membership in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) makes it relatively easy to travel to the rest of West Africa. Since 1980, citizens of ECOWAS member states have, at least in theory, been able to travel without a visa to other member states for up to 90 days (Adepoju, 2001, 2002). Nigerians can thereby travel to the transit cities that in the past 10 to 20 years have had an important role in the migration from West Africa to Europe. These are first and foremost Agadez in Niger, and Gao and Kayes in Mali. In these cities, migrants come into contact with the smugglers who can take them through the Sahara and towards Europe.

Smugglers often have to pay local criminals or other groups controlling the areas they are travelling through. This applies, for instance, to the Tuareg in the border zone between Mali, Algeria and Niger, who are active in smuggling (Bensaâd, 2003). In addition, the smugglers must bribe the police, border guards and other authorities along the way. The costs of one border crossing may amount to several hundred US dollars per passenger (Bárbulo, 2004b; Okojie *et al*, 2003).

After having crossed the Sahara, the most common routes on to Europe are by ship from Western Sahara to the Canary Islands, from Morocco to Spain and from Tunisia or Libya to Italy. Another route is through Dakar and the Cape Verde Islands to the Canary Islands. In recent years the routes from Western Sahara to the Canary Islands and from Libya to Italy have gradually become more important. Nigerians together with a number of other nationalities are present in both these flows. Spanish

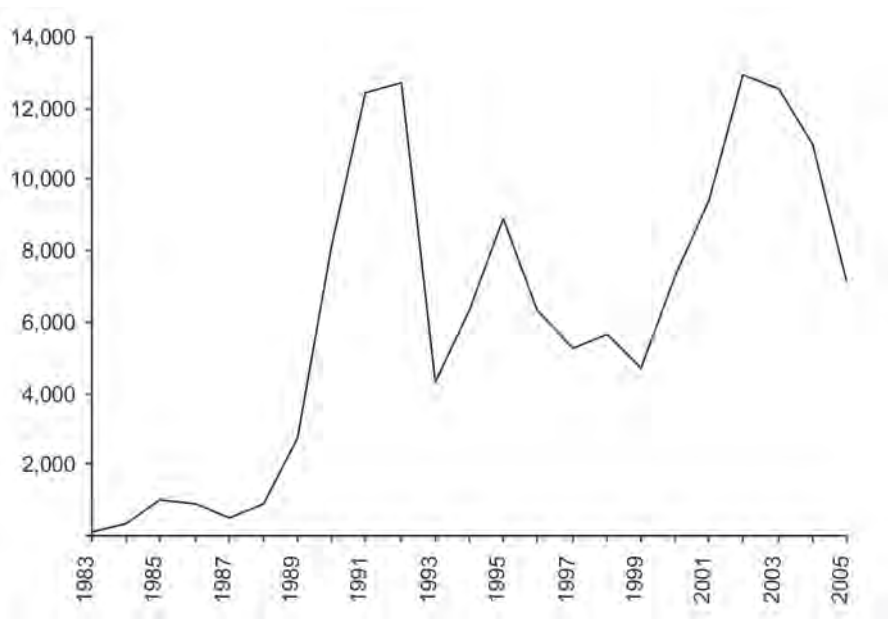
authorities fear there will be more arrivals of large ships to the Canary Islands directly from West Africa (Bárbulo, 2004a). So far, the illegal immigration to Spain has been dominated by small boats, while Italy has received a number of ships with several hundred passengers.

Women who are recruited by traffickers and who travel to Europe through the Sahara are most often accompanied by so-called trolleys, men who have this particular role in the trafficking network (cf. Figure 4). Trolleys may also be responsible for organizing plane travel, e.g. when there is a need to bribe airport personnel (Okojie *et al*, 2003; Prina, 2003). Otherwise, human smugglers in West Africa are most often known as connection men. The Nigerian trafficking networks often use human smugglers of other nationalities to transport the women part of the way to Europe.

Many Nigerian women travelling to Europe through the Sahara get pregnant on the way. This may be because they have to work as prostitutes along the way, are raped or forced to have sex with police, border guards or other persons taking advantage of their vulnerability, or simply because the journey lasts for several months and they have a sexual life during that time (Baxter, 2002; Okojie *et al*, 2003). The high number of pregnant African women arriving in Spain in small boats has been explained that many of them believe that if they give birth after arriving in Spain, the child and the mother will be guaranteed a residence permit. This may have induced some women get pregnant on purpose (El País, 2003; Okojie *et al*, 2003).

The journey through the Sahara to Europe can often take a long time and be exhausting and dangerous. It is not unusual to spend months or even years, and many migrants are returned to Nigeria before reaching Europe. In 2004, for instance, 3,400 persons were deported from Morocco to Nigeria (Pardellas, 2004). Many have managed to get to the outer border of Europe, but they cannot pay the cost of being smuggled the last stretch into Europe (Africa Research Bulletin, 2004). Among the Africans stranded in Morocco, many are Nigerians (Barros *et al*, 2002). Nigerian smugglers have nevertheless succeeded in settling down and taking control of a great share of the human smuggling from Morocco to Spain (Bárbulo, 2003).

FIGURE 6  
ASYLUM APPLICATIONS PRESENTED BY NIGERIANS IN EUROPE, 1982-2004

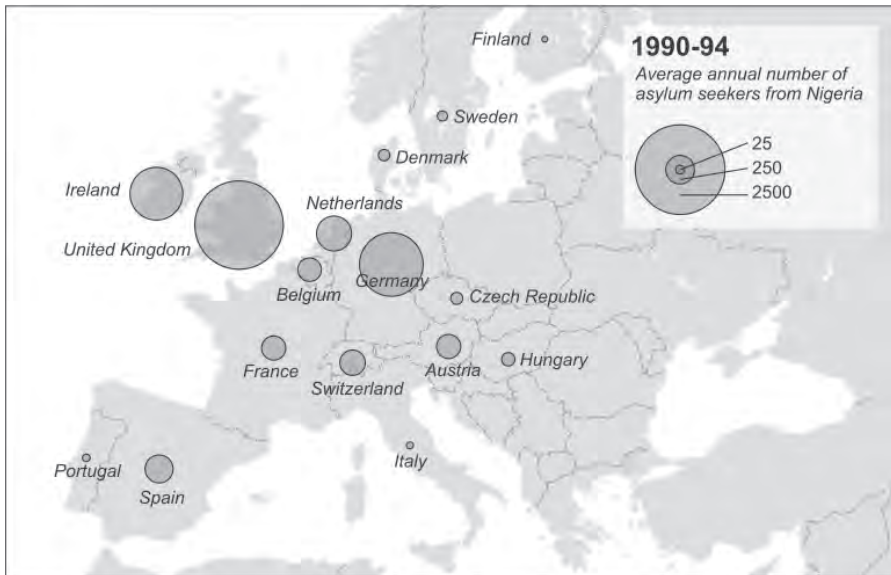


Source: UNCHR Statistics.

### **Asylum applications as a foothold**

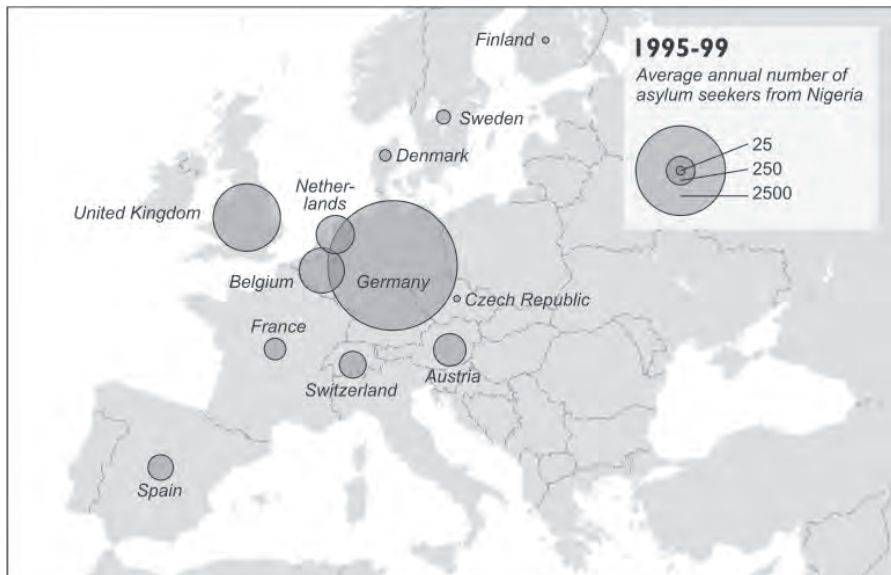
Nigeria is an increasingly important country of origin among asylum seekers in Europe (Figure 6). If in 2000, Nigeria ranked 17th on the list of asylum seekers in Europe, by 2004 they ranked fifth among asylum seekers in Europe (UNHCR, 2003, 2004). From 2004 to 2005 there was a marked decline in the number of asylum seekers from Nigeria, however. Figures 7, 8, 9 and 10 show the distribution of Nigerian asylum applications in Europe in the past 16 years. If in the 1990s, Nigerians presented their applications for asylum primarily in the United Kingdom and in Germany, since 2000, most countries in Europe are affected. Within a few years, Ireland has gone from a relatively insignificant destination to the country receiving the highest number of asylum seekers from Nigeria.

FIGURE 7  
NIGERIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS, 1990-1994



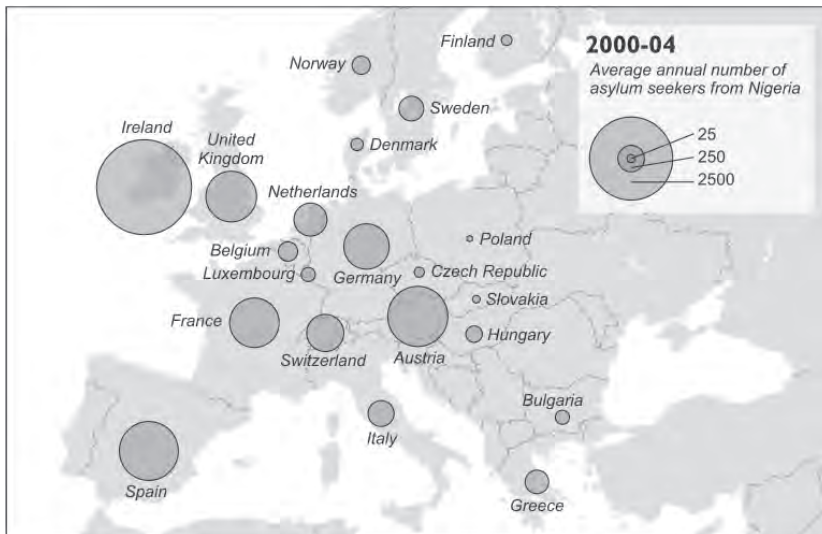
Note: Countries with an annual average of less than ten applications are not included.  
Source: UNHCR.

FIGURE 8  
NIGERIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS, 1995-1999



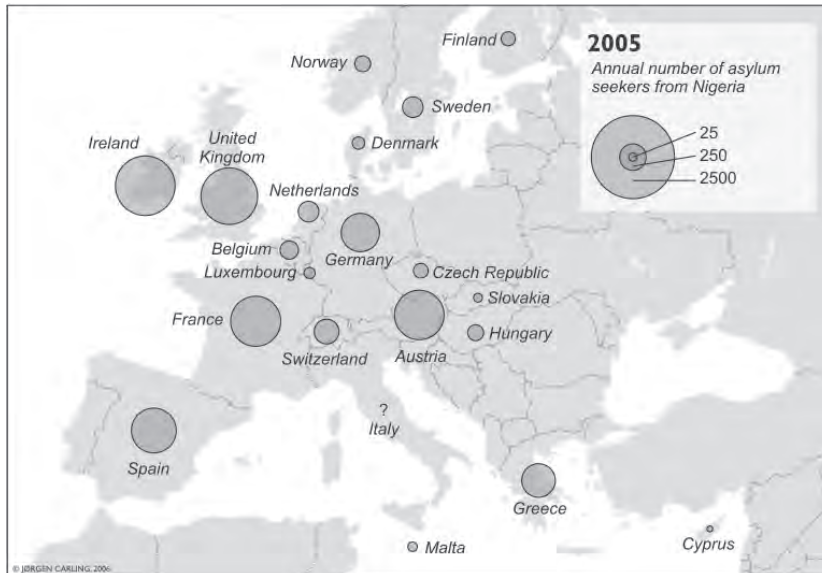
Note: Countries with an annual average of less than ten applications are not included.  
Source: UNHCR.

FIGURE 9  
NIGERIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS, 2000-2004



Note: Countries with an annual average of less than ten applications are not included. The figures for 2004 are based on the first three quarters. For Italy, the total is based on figures from 2000-2002. Source: UNHCR.

FIGURE 9.A  
NIGERIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS, 2005



Note: Countries with an annual average of less than ten applications are not included. For Italy, statistics by national origin are not available. Source: UNHCR.



Nigerian asylum seekers in the Netherlands have not been particularly numerous, but since the beginning of the 1990s they have included many under-age girls. After some time in reception centres for asylum seekers, these girls were placed in foster homes around the country, as is done with other under-age asylum seekers. The Nigerian girls, however, distinguished themselves by often disappearing from the foster homes shortly after having arrived, never to be heard from again. In the mid-1990s, this started to raise considerable concern since the number of disappearances had reached several hundred. It turned out that the asylum system was being used systematically by traffickers to get African girls into the Netherlands. Several of the Nigerian unaccompanied minors seeking asylum were later found in brothels in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany (van Dijk, 2001; ECPAT, 2003; International Organization for Migration, 2002; Venicz and Vanwesenbeeck, 1998). Nigerian girls have also been taken into the United Kingdom as unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, only to disappear from the asylum centres and starting to work as prostitutes (Somerset, 2001, 2004).

Adult Nigerian prostitutes in the Netherlands and Italy have been instructed by the traffickers to apply for asylum if the border police are suspicious of the travel documents, or if they are stopped by the police (van Dijk, 2001; Prina, 2003).

It is supposed that many Nigerians have applied for asylum in Europe under the pretext of coming from other countries devastated by war, mainly Liberia, Sierra Leone or Sudan. Those who identified themselves as Nigerian primarily gave the following reasons for applying for asylum:

- Political persecution
- Persecution due to homosexuality
- Threats related to “voodoo”
- Abuse from the Shari’a legal system
- Fear of persecution and penalties for having participated in riots
- Persecution from violent vigilante groups or “ethnic militias” (the Bakassi Boys, the Egbesu Boys, and others).

The reasons given for rejecting many Nigerian asylum applications are that Nigeria is a big country where these threats are usually of local importance. Internal displacement is therefore considered a feasible alternative to actually leaving the country and seeking asylum abroad.



## 5. NIGERIANS IN EUROPE

In 2001, about 170,000 Nigerian-born persons were legally resident in Europe. More than half of them lived in the United Kingdom (Figure 10, below). This is a large and complex immigrant community. Nigeria's membership in the British Commonwealth made it relatively easy for Nigerians to immigrate during the first ten years after independence. Many fled to the United Kingdom during the 1967-70 civil war, and by 1971, 27,000 Nigerians were already residing in the United Kingdom (Gordon, 2003). Their numbers remained relatively stable until the mid-1980s, when the financial collapse and the political repression in Nigeria led to renewed emigration. Many Nigerians also came to the United Kingdom to study.

Other Nigerians in Europe are spread over a wide range of countries. Ireland and Germany received many asylum seekers, and today have relatively large Nigerian populations. Since the mid-90s, the Nigerian population in Ireland has grown rapidly to reach about 15,000 in 2004. This is partly due to Ireland's strong economic growth attracting Nigerians from the United Kingdom and other European countries (Helm, 2004; Kómoláfé, 2002).

Italy hosts Europe's second largest Nigerian population. Illegal residence is far more common in southern Europe than in northern Europe, and most likely there are far more Nigerians in Italy than the approximately 25,000 who have a residence permit. In the 1980s, there was a great demand for unskilled labour in Italy, and Nigerians were part of a large migration flow of women and men from sub-Saharan Africa (Campani, 1994). Until the late 1980s, there were only very few women among the Nigerian population (Cingolani, 2003). In the 1990s, nearly 20,000 Nigerians in an irregular situation in Italy obtained residence permits through amnesties (Carchedi *et al*, 2003).

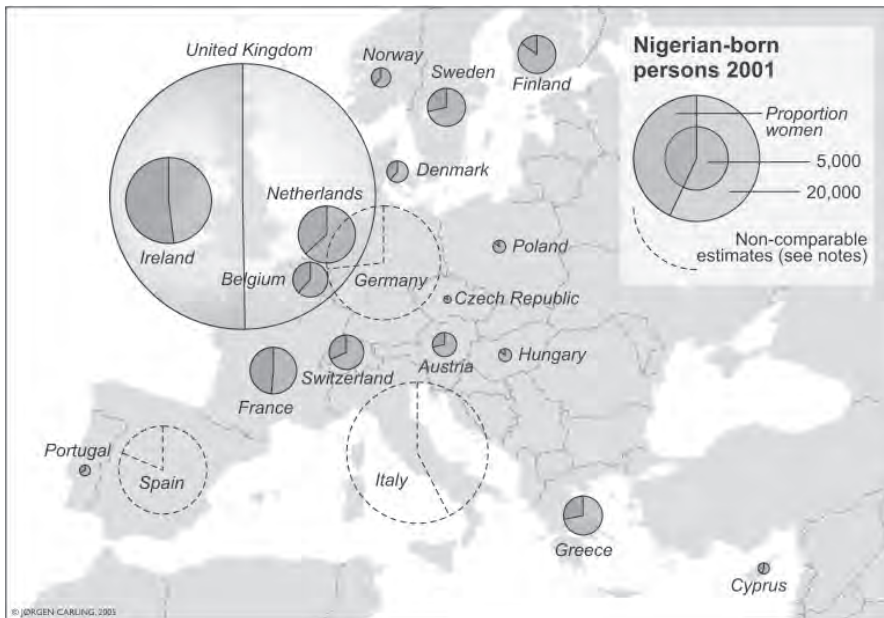
More recently, Spain has also become an important destination country for Nigerians. In the period 2001-2003, the number of legally residing Nigerians nearly doubled to about 10,000 (Secretaría de Estado de Inmigración y Emigración, 2004).

As can be seen on the map, in many countries the share of women among Nigerians only accounts for about one-third or less. Italy is the only country with a clear female majority among the legally present Nigerian population, while in the United Kingdom, Ireland and France men and women are roughly equal.

Of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Yoruba dominate in the United Kingdom, whereas in the rest of Europe the Igbo are most likely to be in the majority.

The Igbo are highly mobile within Nigeria, and their widespread networks are an important resource also for international migration (Kómoláfé, 2002; Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, 2004). In many cases, the ethnic group identity is stronger than the Nigerian identity, also among Nigerians in Europe (Cingolani, 2003).

FIGURE 10  
NIGERIAN-BORN PERSONS WITH LEGAL RESIDENCE PERMITS IN EUROPE



Source: Unpublished figures from censuses in 2001. Figures for Germany, Italy and Spain are for Nigerian citizens in 2003 (Caritas/Migrantes, 2004; Secretaría de Estado de Inmigración y Emigración, 2004; Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, 2004). The share of women in Italy has been calculated based on figures from 2000 (Carchedi *et al.*, 2003).

## Organized crime

The Nigerian presence in Europe has included connections to organized crime. Since the beginning of the 1990s, organized criminal networks have gained considerable power in West Africa. These networks consist mainly of Nigerians, and have, among other things, based their growth on established trade networks in the region and ties to the large West African populations in the United States and in parts of Europe (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2002).

Table 1 shows the main activities among the most important groups of organized criminals from outside the EU. The main activities among Nigerian organized criminals in Europe are trafficking, drug crimes and fraud. Turkish and Russian groups, who

are also involved in financial crime, are more active in money laundering, whereas the Nigerians have specialized in fraud. The Nigerian drug crime concentrates on cocaine and heroin (Europol, 2003; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2002). Although Nigeria is not a drug-producing country, it has been a very important country in the international drug trade since the 1970s. Nigeria's role has mainly been that of a transit country for heroin on its way from Asia to Europe and North America, and for cocaine on its way from South America to Europe (Monzini, 2004; President's International Crime Control Strategy, 2000).

TABLE 1  
MAIN ACTIVITIES IN EUROPE AMONG ORGANIZED CRIMINAL GROUPS  
FROM OUTSIDE THE EUROPEAN UNION

Nationality	Trafficking of goods	Trafficking of arms	Drug trafficking and distribution	Trafficking in persons	Theft and robbery	Extortion	Financial crime
Albanian			✓	✓			
Yugoslav			✓	✓	✓		
Russian						✓	✓
Turkish		✓	✓			✓	✓
Nigerian			✓	✓			✓
Moroccan	✓		✓		✓		
Colombian			✓				
Chinese	✓	✓		✓			
Vietnamese	✓				✓		

Source: Developed on the basis of information from Europol (2003).

Nigerian organized criminals are a prime example of organizing according to a network model. This distinguishes them from hierarchical organizational models common among Chinese or Italian groups, for instance. Central persons in Nigerian networks are persons with special skills who have nurtured important contacts (e.g. with public officials), or have taken the initiative to gather a small group of people to organize criminal activities. Although these people may have great influence, they rarely command a clearly structured organization. Short-term alliances are formed for specific projects, and the network as such is in constant change. Despite the fact that West African criminal networks are important in large parts of the world, they are not known by any particular name (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2002).

The loose organizational form of the Nigerian networks is often very efficient and makes it more difficult for the police to fight crime. Firstly, the central persons are less visible than in other groups. This is reinforced when the networks for particular projects often include persons who are not Nigerians. Secondly, the effect of putting the central persons out of action is not necessarily too great. While hierarchical groups

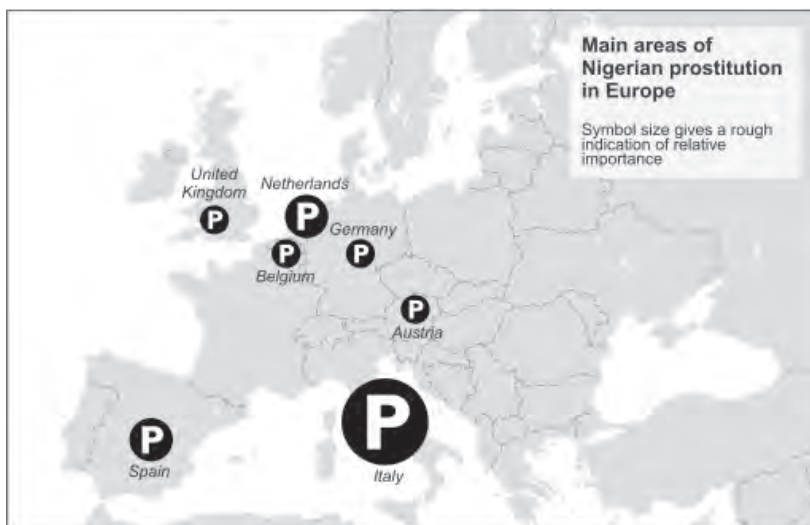
may tumble like a house of cards, the Nigerian groups rapidly restructure into new constellations (Europol, 2003; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2002). In the Netherlands, for instance, it has been observed that arrests of a relatively high number of traffickers have not had any visible effect on the number of Nigerian prostitutes in the country (International Organization for Migration, 2002).

There are examples of connections between Nigerian trafficking and the drug crime, e.g. by the partner of the *madam* (*madam's black boy*) being involved in the drug trade (Prina, 2003). However, it is not common for well-organized criminal groups to be involved in both trafficking and the drug trade, as certain eastern European groups are. In recent years, the Italian police have seen cooperation between Nigerian criminals and gypsies in the drug trade, but otherwise there is little cooperation between Nigerian and other groups of organized criminals (Ministero dell'Interno, 2004).

## Prostitution and trafficking

Since the beginning of the 1990s, trafficking and prostitution have been important elements in the Nigerian immigration to Europe. Nigerian prostitutes are often regarded as more aggressive in their attempts to attract customers than prostitutes from other countries. Conflicts have arisen with other prostitutes claiming that the Nigerian prostitutes accept to work below the “market rate” and are often willing to have unprotected sex.

FIGURE 11  
MAIN AREAS OF NIGERIAN PROSTITUTION IN EUROPE



It is estimated that 40,000 to 45,000 Nigerian women have become victims of trafficking over the past 15 years. Of these, approximately two-thirds have gone to Europe and the last third to the Gulf States, mainly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Carchedi *et al*, 2003; US Department of State, 2002b). This is naturally a highly uncertain estimate. However, if it is correct, it means that 25,000-30,000 Nigerian prostitutes have come to Europe since the end of the 1980s.

In Europe, Italy is the country with the most Nigerian prostitutes, whose number has been estimated at 10,000 to 12,000 women (Carchedi *et al*, 2003; Okojie *et al*, 2003; Segretariato Sociale della Rai, 2004). Other important countries are the Netherlands and Spain, and in Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Austria Nigerian prostitution is of a considerable magnitude (Figure 11). Nigerian trafficking also appears to be increasing in France (US Department of State, 2002b). There are examples of Nigerian traffickers recruiting women from other African countries for prostitution in Europe (International Organization for Migration, 2002; US Department of State, 2002a).

The trafficking of Nigerian women to Italy started slowly in the second half of the 1980s, to then grow significantly around 1991-1992. At that time, the lowest segment in the Italian prostitution market (i.e. street prostitution) was dominated by Polish, Romanian, Russian and Slovenian women. Towards the end of the 1990s, very young women from Nigeria and Albania made up the majority of the street prostitutes in Italy (Barbagli, 2002; Becucci and Massari, 2001). Estimates of the share of Nigerians among foreign prostitutes in Italy have varied in recent years from about a fourth to more than half (Pansa, 2004; Segretariato Sociale della Rai, 2004). Street prostitution in Italy often takes place outside the city centres, at the outskirts of the cities or at lay-bys along the main roads. A place where the prostitutes wait for customers is called a joint. Nigerian women often have the least attractive joints, sometimes far into the countryside.

The Nigerian prostitution in Italy is first and foremost concentrated in the wealthy, northern regions (Figure 13). Turin is the most important centre of trafficking and the first stop for many Nigerians arriving to Italy. The Turin region is a special case in that as much as 80 per cent of the Nigerians registered there are women (Carchedi *et al*, 2003). The greatest concentrations of Nigerian prostitutes outside northern Italy are found around Rome and Naples. The small town of Castelvolturno about 40 km north of Naples, has become an important junction of the Nigerian community in southern Italy, including Nigerian trafficking. After the 1980 earthquake many houses in the area were partially destroyed and poor immigrants moved in. At the same time, there was a high demand for agricultural workers, leading to more immigrants coming to the area. Nigerians made up a large share of this flow, initially nearly all men. These

circumstances gave the Nigerians a foothold which then led to the establishment of a larger community and a junction for Nigerian trafficking and other crime (Corriere della Sera, 1992; Prina, 2003).

In the Naples area, the Camorra mafia sets limitations on where the prostitutes can work, and often charge rent for their joints (Prina, 2003). Also elsewhere in southern Italy where there is Nigerian prostitution, it is often subject to the conditions of and against payment to the mafia (Cole and Booth, 2004). Other Italians are involved in trafficking as landlords or pro forma spouses for the *madams*. The Albanian and Nigerian trafficking networks appear to work in parallel, but without any cooperation between them (Prina, 2003).

A part of the income from trafficking is used to expand the business, e.g. by “buying” new women from Nigeria. It is clear, however, that large sums of money are transferred to Nigeria to be invested there. The *madams* often live a plain life in Italy, but have big houses built in Nigeria (Pries, 1999). There is a clear parallel between trafficking and other forms of migration: building a house in the country of origin is something migrants worldwide spend money on, whether they are Pakistanis in Norway, Mexicans in the United States or Nigerians in Italy.

FIGURE 12  
MAIN AREAS OF NIGERIAN PROSTITUTION IN ITALY





After Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium are probably the most important areas for Nigerian prostitution. Nigerian women made their appearance in the prostitution circles in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague in the mid-1990s. Many of them were very young (van Dijk, 2001). A differentiated market developed with both under-age and adult prostitutes from Nigeria. The under-aged (aged 13-17) earn twice or three times as much in a day as adult prostitutes. Although their debt to the traffickers is often a little higher than the average among the adult prostitutes, it is usually repaid much faster (Oviawe and Iyare, 1999). Until recently, in Belgium, most of the Nigerian prostitutes were 20 years and older, but it is increasingly common to see girls as young as 15 and 16 years old (Smits, 2001).

In Italy the average age among Nigerian prostitutes has also declined significantly. At the end of the 1980s, many of the women were over 25, and some had children, but since the mid-1990s, women in their late teens and early 20s have dominated. However, there seem to be few that are under-age. Among the Nigerian women who were trafficked and taken care of by the relief structures, 1-2 per cent were under-age, against 10-15 per cent among Albanians, Romanians and Moldavians (Carchedi, 2002).

## **The dynamics of trafficking**

This section is based primarily on information from Italy. The organization is somewhat different in other countries due to local circumstances in the prostitution market and the historical development of the Nigerian groups.

Once Nigerian women arrive in Europe through the trafficking network, a *madam* usually takes care of them, often in collaboration with a male partner (*madam's black boy*). This is a cohabiting partner or boyfriend who takes care of certain parts of the trafficking process. In those cases where the woman was not aware that she would be working as a prostitute, she often realizes this only a few days after her arrival when the *madam* takes her shopping for clothes (Okojie *et al*, 2003). The *madam* is usually responsible for equipping the prostitutes with working clothes and condoms, while the fellow prostitutes do the work of training the new arrival.

The women either live with the *madam* or in another flat where they are watched by a controller. This is often a former prostitute who has repaid her debt and is saving money to start her own business as a *madam*. The competition between the women of a single *madam* can also be an important part of the control. Whether the women live with the *madam* or with a controller, the living quarters can be overcrowded, with many women sharing the same room. It is not uncommon for one *madam* to

control 10 to 15 women. The flat is used to sleep and watch TV between the shifts (Prina, 2003).

The Nigerian prostitutes work at different hours, but often nearly around the clock. Expenses for lodging, food, and payment for the joint are deducted from the woman's income. This will often amount to US\$ 2,000 a month (Adarabioyo, 2003; Luda di Cortemiglia, 2003; Prina, 2003). The remainder is used to pay back the debt. The women usually have minimal access to the money they earn, and are not allowed to send money to Nigeria. Opposition against this rule is often an important form of resistance among the prostitutes. They find ways to hide away some money and get in touch with somebody who can send it to their family in Nigeria (Prina, 2003).

Many of the *madams* in Europe are highly mobile, and maintain contact with *madams* elsewhere in Europe. The prostitutes are often moved between cities or across national borders. This is done to be able to offer the customers variation, to complicate the work of the police and to prevent the women from developing ties to their customers (Cole and Booth, 2004; Oviawe and Iyare, 1999). Such moves are either organized by the same *madam* controlling various women in different places, or by the women being transferred between *madams*. The transfers may also be in response to differences in legislation or practice.

While they are still tied by the emigration pact, the women are often subject to various forms of enforcement and abuse by the traffickers. This may include confiscation of documents, physical threats and violence, threats against family members, deprivation of liberty, limitations on communication with others, confiscation of income, and sexual abuse (Okojie *et al*, 2003). Sometimes, the *madam* in Nigeria pays local gangs, so-called area boys, to threaten the family of the woman or punish them if she breaks the pact (Smits, 2001). Families of under-age prostitutes who have been taken care of by relief structures in Europe have also been threatened to cooperate with the traffickers to track down the girls (Somerset, 2001).

Violent assault is undoubtedly common, but neither a rule nor a necessity in the Nigerian model of trafficking. The psychological control the traffickers have over the women often makes violence unnecessary. A study of a group of Nigerian prostitutes in Italy showed that less than half had been threatened with violence, considerably fewer had been exposed to violence, and most had not experienced any form of sexual abuse from the traffickers. This contrasts with trafficking of eastern European women (Becucci and Massari, 2003; Carchedi *et al*, 2003; Okojie *et al*, 2003).

Albanian and other eastern European groups in Italy appear to be copying the Nigerians in the organization of trafficking by giving the women slightly more freedom.

Allowing prostitutes more liberties and responsibilities, often leads to their becoming themselves more involved in trafficking. This may make it easier to both control them and to undermine the work of the police and voluntary organizations trying to combat trafficking (Prina, 2003).

Although many Nigerian prostitutes are not exposed to violence from the traffickers, they are vulnerable to violence from customers. It is hard to tell whether the Nigerian women experience more violence from customers than others, but they are vulnerable because they make up the lowest stratum in the Italian prostitution market and are regarded with contempt by parts of Italian society. Competing prostitution groups are another source of violence. The Nigerian women often compete with Albanian and other prostitutes for good joints along the roads, and the pimps of the other groups may decide to scare the Nigerians off through violence. Where there is no clear division of labour between the criminal groups in the prostitution market, it is the prostitutes who bear the cost.

Nigerian trafficking is not only characterized through being controlled by women, but also that these women often were themselves prostitutes. Both aspects are important to the relationship between the *madam* and the prostitutes. As a young Nigerian who had worked in Italy expressed it, “when a woman asks you to work the street, you accept because she is like you; she has done so herself” (Prina, 2003: 61). The relationship between the prostitutes and the *madam* is often highly ambivalent. On the one hand, the *madam* is responsible for keeping the prostitute under slave-like conditions and, on the other, she may actually help the prostitute to earn money and to establish herself as a *madam* once the debt is paid.

In Italy, the *madams* are usually aged between 25 and 35 (Cole and Booth, 2004). In the Netherlands, there are *madams* as young as 19, who themselves came to the Netherlands as child prostitutes. Often, they will have entered into a pro forma marriage with a Dutch man to get a residence permit, before establishing themselves with their own child prostitutes from Nigeria (Oviawe and Iyare, 1999). The possibility of “promotion” from being a prostitute to becoming a controller, and later a madam, is an important motivation to stick it out. As the payback period nears the end, it is common for the prostitute to gain a greater sense of freedom, economically as well as socially. The *madam* may, for instance, accept that they have a social life or to spend some of the money they earn on themselves.

In some cases, the repayment is accelerated if the woman develops a relationship to a customer who offers to pay all or parts of the remaining debt (van Dijk, 2001; Prina, 2003). They may marry. For the woman, the motivation may partly be the prospects of getting a residence permit. While the support from a customer may

shorten the time still needed to work for a *madam*, it may also leave her in a new dependent relationship.

Although the *madam* may increase the debt as punishment for bad behaviour or in other ways extend the payback period, it is usually only a matter of time before the pact is ended. Once the debt is completely paid back, this is often marked with a big party hosted by the *madam* or several *madams* together. All the women are invited, and whoever has paid back her debt will hand over a gift to her *madam* (Prina, 2003).

While paying back the debt is necessary, it is not sufficient for a prostitute to be able to live a more independent life in Europe. Often she will lack identity documents and a residence permit, she has little knowledge of the society and lacks qualifications and contacts to be able to work outside the prostitution market. After having seen relatively large sums of money in circulation as a prostitute, it may also be difficult for many to settle for the low wages offered to unskilled immigrants without a legal residence permit in the ordinary labour market. To many, it is also unconceivable to return empty-handed to Nigeria. Contact with other Nigerians is decisive in this phase, and those who succeed in getting into the labour market often do so as employees of Nigerian small businesses, or by starting their own business. Typical Nigerian businesses are African food markets, hairdressers, telephone centres, video rental shops, travel agencies and money transfer centres (Cingolani, 2005). Many nevertheless remain in the prostitution market, either as independent prostitutes, controllers, or *madams*, especially due to the expectations of the family in Nigeria and the woman's own wish to help them (Carchedi *et al*, 2003; Prina, 2003).

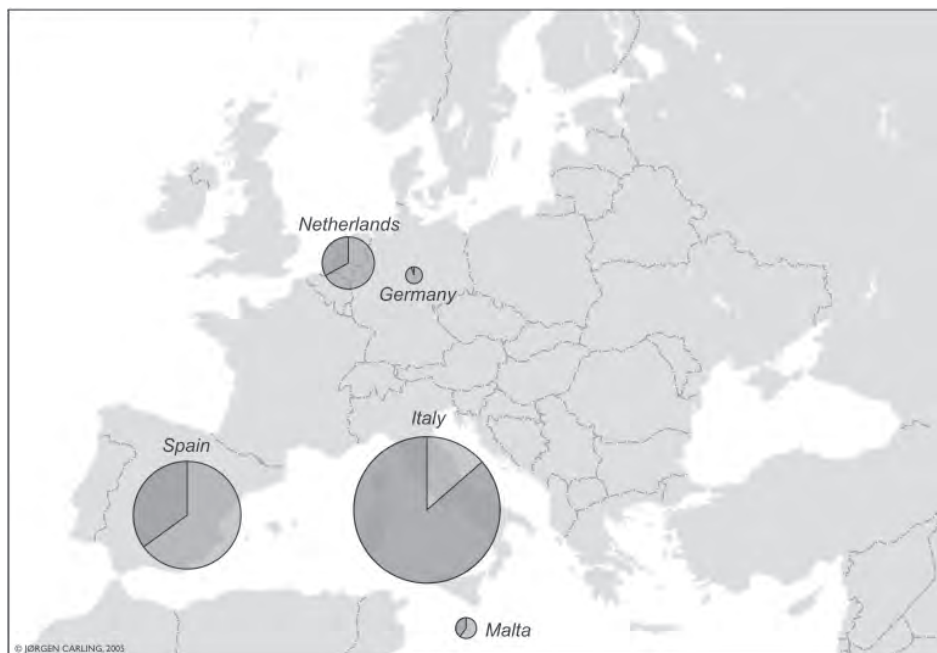
In recent years, the Nigerian trafficking model has come under pressure from within. This is because the tension of this model, combining exploitation and cooperation, has gradually become too intense (Carchedi *et al*, 2003). The strength of the pact between the woman and her sponsor is that the women have respected it so strongly and cooperated to live by it. At the same time, it contains an element of fraud, both as it is first presented and how it is then practised in Europe. Often it may be impossible for the woman to find out how much she has paid, the actual size of the debt and how much remains to be paid. The rising tension between the women and the traffickers, in combination with more outreach services from the police and voluntary organizations, appears to have made it more difficult for the traffickers to maintain their control. As a consequence, the use of violence has increased (Carchedi *et al*, 2003; Prina, 2003).

The organization of trafficking has also changed as more women have managed to pay off their debt. While it used to be common for these women to go into the traditional roles as controller or *madam*, a more hierarchical structure with several levels of *madams* has developed in the last few years (Carchedi *et al*, 2003).

Many Nigerian prostitutes have to return to Nigeria against their own will. Ever since the beginning of the 1990s, Italian authorities have issued between 1,200 and 2,600 deportation orders for Nigerians every year. The number of effectively executed deportation orders has been far lower. In 2003, only one in three was sent out of the country, even though a readmission agreement exists (Coslovi and Piperno, 2004). Deportations from Italy nevertheless represent the definitely largest group of involuntary arrivals from Europe registered by Nigerian authorities (Figure 14).

An increasing number of the women who return to Nigeria after having worked as prostitutes in Europe, warn other women against travelling (Carchedi *et al*, 2003). This is about to provide a corrective to the impression of success created by those who return with money and are often very visible in the local community. In recent years, therefore, the recruitment has tended to occur in the countryside in Edo State. In addition to the fact that young women in these areas are less informed, they are often poorer and easier to influence through religious rituals (Prina, 2003). The same shift from urban to rural areas has taken place in the recruitment of Albanian prostitutes to Italy (King and Zontini, 2000).

FIGURE 13  
NIGERIANS RETURNED FROM EUROPE, 1999-2002



Note: The figures are based on registrations by Nigerian authorities and do not necessarily agree with the data on effectively executed deportations from the respective countries in Europe.  
Source: (Okojie *et al*, 2003).

## Notions of voodoo

When the Dutch police became seriously involved in the investigation of Nigerian prostitution in the mid-1990s, they were struck by the extreme fear expressed by many women, the “packages” they were so worried about, and the rituals they explained that they had been through. The word “voodoo” was quickly applied to label these obscure powers. The police, the immigration authorities and the social welfare structure developed a common understanding of occult threats as the main reason driving the women to remain in slave-like prostitution. They found no other explanation for the fear of the women, their attempt to get back to the prostitution business as soon as possible after having been “liberated” from the brothels by the police, and the enormous problems of reaching the women to help them psychologically. The “voodoo” became a sort of rational explanation for the women’s irrational behaviour (Bovenkerk *et al.*, 2003; van Dijk, 2001).

All involved parties embraced the voodoo wave for different motives. To the police, who established a separate investigation unit named the “voodoo team”, voodoo became a central element in the fight against traffickers and pimps. To the lawyers, voodoo provided an important argument to back the powerlessness and justify the women’s illegal stay in the Netherlands. Also the social welfare structures based their work on the idea that the girls were driven by voodoo and did not have a will of their own (van Dijk *et al.*, 2003). The Dutch media attacked the topic with a sensationalist and sex-obsessed approach (van Dijk, 2001). In all the European countries concerned, the combination of voodoo, sexuality, “slave trade” and organized crime appealed to the media. Whereas references to voodoo have been made frequently in the coverage of Nigerian trafficking, it has mostly been characterized by recreating Western clichés rather than presenting any nuanced understanding (Alcaide, 2002; Altozano, 2002; Buis, 2002; De Standaard, 2003; van Dijk, 2003; El País, 2000, 2001; Folda, 1998; Garrido, 2001; Offeddu, 1998; Rotterdams Dagblad, 2000; Vermeulen, 2004; Zapperi, 1999).

In one case, Dutch police discovered a “voodoo-package” consisting of a kola-nut wrapped in paper, a little soap, some herbs, and a small sachet of pills. The police were especially interested in the last item, and contacted a West African specialist to find out whether the voodoo included enforced drug addiction. The anthropologist informed them that the pills were marked “chloroq”. and most likely contained the common anti-malaria drug chloroquine. In addition to being used against malaria, chloroquine is used in large doses mixed with soap as an abortion-inducing remedy in many parts of Africa. This example shows how the police became themselves so obsessed with the thought of voodoo that they over-interpreted and misunderstood the evidence (van Dijk, 2001).

To an increasing extent, the magic was in itself perceived as a threat to Dutch society because it apparently bereaved the women of their own will and rational behaviour. The prostitutes, who were initially regarded as victims, were gradually treated more as human manifestations of this threat. They were subject to personal investigations in which scars, colour shadings in the skin, special hairdos and similar characteristics were studied, photographed and taken as proof that the women were victims of magic. This treatment was often experienced as a denigrating by the women and a violation of their person (van Dijk, 2001; van Dijk *et al*, 2003).

It is obvious that the local religious traditions and the belief in magic have played an important part in the prostitution-related emigration from Nigeria. It is nevertheless easy to exaggerate the significance of the specific rituals. Perhaps it is more correct to understand it as a symbolic sealing of a promise, in which the word of the promise is the central and binding element (Prina, 2003).

### **The emigrants and the country of origin**

Just like the authorities in many other African countries, the Obasanjo regime in Nigeria has started to see the emigrants as an important resource (Gordon, 2003). The president and other members of the government have met Nigerians abroad and encouraged them to make investments in Nigeria. However, it is a considerable challenge to convince the emigrants that their money can be safely invested in Nigeria despite the corruption and the political unrest. Nigerians abroad nevertheless send large sums of money to their families. In the late 1990s, the registered transfers reached over a billion US dollars annually (International Monetary Fund, 2003).

Nigerian authorities have been restrictive in giving Nigerians abroad any political influence. While other countries have even given the diaspora population their own seats in parliament, the Nigerian constitution of 1999 contains a number of impediments for émigrés who wish to vote or run for election.<sup>17</sup>

Nigerians abroad have nevertheless managed to play a role in Nigerian politics. The most important organization, the Association of Nigerians Abroad (ANA), has worked actively for democracy and against violations of human rights in Nigeria. ANA was important among other factors to mobilize the international society against the execution of Ogoni activist Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995. The separatist movement MASSOB also enjoys considerable support among Igbo abroad who want to see Biafra secede from the rest of Nigeria (Commission of the European Communities, 2002; Gordon, 2003). The increasing use of the Internet among Nigerians abroad has been important in their involvement in Nigerian societal development. A number of websites gather Nigerians to debate Nigerian culture, politics and community life.





## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the transition to democratic rule, there is considerable pressure to emigrate in Nigeria. Some of what characterizes Nigeria – apart from the size – is that crime, corruption and violence are strongly interrelated and pervade society in a way that apparently surpasses other countries in the region. Often, the conflicts and riots have an ethnic or religious dimension, although the more profound causes are elsewhere. The significant emigration from Nigeria has created networks, infrastructure and a culture related to the emigration which both spreads the wish to emigrate and strengthens people's ability to emigrate despite the obstacles. For many, this must happen with the help of document forgers, smugglers or in other ways in violation of European immigration legislation.

The trafficking networks have been able to offer young women the opportunity to travel to Europe. These offers involve varying degrees of fraud. Although an increasing number of the recruited women are aware that they will be working as prostitutes, they are often not aware of the circumstances in which they will be expected to do so. In Europe, the connection to West African religious traditions is the side of Nigerian trafficking that has received the greatest attention. This is due in part to the apparent difference from the eastern European trade in women, and in part that it has been an easy “explanation” for behaviour that has been difficult to understand, and not the least that the combination of the sex trade and the “voodoo” has appealed strongly to the media.

To understand the dynamics of Nigerian trafficking, two other elements are at least as important as the use of local religious traditions as a means of coercion. The first is the emigration pact, which is perceived as a strongly binding agreement between two parties. It is sealed not only by the religious rituals, but also by the relation to the local community in Nigeria. The position of the pact is obviously strengthened by the fact that, despite the exploitation, fraud and changed conditions along the way, it is normally respected in its outer framework. The day will come when the debt is paid back and the woman will have the opportunity to earn money for herself.

The second important element is the organizational form which allows the networks to reproduce themselves. The position of the *madams* versus the prostitutes is often strengthened by her having been a prostitute herself, and the possibility for mobility within the trafficking network is important to make money once the debt is paid back. Often the women have small possibilities of getting a job in the ordinary labour market in Europe, while at the same time it is out of the question for them to return empty-handed to Nigeria.

The strong pact and the self-reproducing organizational form in combination provide a strong incentive to stick it out in a situation of serious repression instead of trying to break out of it.

This report has focused on smuggling, trafficking, prostitution and organized crime. Many of the Nigerians in Europe do not have anything to do with any of this. Nevertheless, they are all affected indirectly when so many Europeans associate Nigerians with prostitution and crime and therefore meet them with scepticism.

# APPENDIX

## Nigerian English

English is the official language of Nigeria, and is spoken as a second language by nearly all Nigerians. A bit more than half of the population have Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba as their mother tongue, and these are also common second languages in the northern, southeastern and southwestern parts of the country, respectively. Furthermore, there are nine other major languages (spoken by more than 1 million people) and an estimated 400 minor languages.

English is spoken in various forms ranging from Standard English to so-called Nigerian English and Nigerian-English Pidgin. Pidgin has its own grammar and a pronunciation more different from Standard English than Nigerian English. There are great similarities between Nigerian English and Pidgin and the equivalent dialects/languages in the other English-speaking countries in West Africa, although none of them borders on Nigeria.

Nigerian English is marked by a characteristic pronunciation, certain grammatical deviations and other ways of expressing oneself than in Standard English. Altogether, it makes the language difficult to understand for Europeans who are only familiar with standard British and American English. During the conclusion of a court case in Oslo recently, the judge gave the Norwegian interpreter acclaim for the effort, believing that the Nigerian defendant had been speaking an African language throughout the proceedings. The person had actually been speaking Nigerian English.

Vocabulary and ways of expressions differ from Standard English in several ways:<sup>18</sup>

- Words and expressions that are archaic, but understandable in Standard English, are used in Nigerian English (such as *men of the underworld* for criminals).
- Words and expressions that do not have any distinct meaning in Standard English may have a specific meaning in Nigerian English (such as to *see flower* for to menstruate).
- Words and expressions with a wider meaning in Nigerian English than in Standard English (such as *passport* used both for passports and for passport photographs).
- Words and expressions with other meanings instead of, or in addition to, the meaning in Standard English (such as *go-slow* for rush hour traffic).
- Words and expressions specific to Nigerian English (such as *kabukabu* for pirate taxis).

## Glossary

**419** – Financial fraud (from the number of the relevant article in the penal code).

**419 man** – A newly rich Nigerian who is supposed to have acquired his wealth by having defrauded foreigners or wealthy Nigerians, or through drug trading.

**Agberos** – Young, unemployed men who hang around transport junctions and often make a living by means of extortion or other criminal activities. The expression is sometimes used synonymously with area boys.

**APC** – Arewa Peoples' Congress. A violent, Hausa-dominated vigilante group in Northern Nigeria.

**Area boys** – Young men without regular work, with connections to criminal gangs.

**Bakassi Boys** – A violent, Igbo-dominated vigilante group active in the south-eastern states. The term “Bakassi Boys” is sometimes used to denote such groups in general. The term “The Real Bakassi” refers to the original vigilante groups that were exclusively fighting crime.

**Benin** – The majority ethnic group in Edo State. Benin City is the name of the State capital and the area was formerly known as the Kingdom of Benin (not to be confused with Nigeria's neighbour country Benin).

**Bini** – An alternative name for the ethnic group Benin/Edo.

**Cash madam** – Grand scale business woman.

**Coast** – Urban areas, as opposed to the countryside (He has gone to coast ~ He has moved to town).

**Connection man** – A man who can get hold of forged documents, arrange for transport or in another way facilitate people smuggling.

**Controller** – A woman who watches prostitutes who do not live with their madam.

**Dago** – Another name for a trolley (a man who escorts women on their way to Europe).

**Egbesu Boys** – A violent, Ijaw-dominated vigilante group active in the Niger Delta.

**Ethnic militia** – A common term for the violent vigilante groups promoting the interests of an ethnic group and fighting crime with extreme means. Among the best known are the Bakassi Boys, the Egbesu Boys, the OPC and the APC.

**Free girl** – A prostitute.

**Free woman** – A prostitute.

**Harlot** – A prostitute (this word is archaic in Standard English, but not in Nigerian English).

**Hisba** – Vigilante groups in Northern Nigeria enforcing the Shari'a legislation in the local communities.

**Hit** – To have sex with a woman (He hit her every day ~ He had sex with her every day).

**Ijebu** – Fraud, forgery (from Yoruba).

**Issue** – Child, progeny (He has many issues ~ He has many children).

**Italio** – A Nigerian woman who travels to Italy to work as a prostitute.

**Joint** – A regular place where a prostitute waits for customers.

**Juju** – Local religious/magic practice. Juju is also the term for a Nigerian form of music.

**Love medicine** – A magic remedy used by women to attract men. It may consist of herbs, among other things. When it is something to be eaten or drunk, the remedy is called a “love potion”.

**Madam's (black) boy** – The cohabitant/boyfriend and assistant of a female Nigerian trafficker in Europe.

**Madam** – A woman who organizes the trafficking. There is usually one madam in Nigeria and another in Europe within the same network.

**Maman** – The same as madam.

**Mama Loa** – The same as madam.

**MASSOB** – The Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra. An Igbo-dominated separatist movement, which also functions as a violent vigilante group in parts of south-eastern Nigeria.

**Naija** – Alternative word for Nigeria, also used as an adjective (Naija women ~ Nigerian women).

**Night-fighter** – A prostitute.

**Oba** – The King of the Benin in Edo state. The King lives in a palace in Benin City and still has great influence, partially connected to religious traditions.

**Ogun** – The deity for iron and metal, which, among other things, is connected to fortune and misfortune during travel.

**Ohen** – A priest of the local religious traditions in Edo State.

**Oluwole passport** – A forged passport. Oluwole Street is the street in Lagos where the forgery business is concentrated.

**OPC** – The O’odua People’s Congress. A violent, Yoruba-dominated vigilante group active in the south-western states.

**Paper boy** – A man who gets hold of forged documents.

**Passport** – A passport or passport photo (I gave him two passports ~ I gave him two passport photos).

**Sister** – A sister or a woman of roughly the same age (polite form of address).

**Sponsor** – The person in the trafficking network who pays for the journey to Europe of a woman, and to whom the woman is indebted. Often, the sponsor and the madam will be the same person.

**Sugar-daddy** – An older man who supports younger women financially in exchange for sex.

**To camp** – To rent a room to sell sex.

**Trolley** – A man who escorts women on their way to Europe. These may be the same all the way, or they may be responsible for one stretch of the journey, and they will take care of necessary bribes along the way.

**Vodun** – West African religious cult complex characterized among other things by a trance induced by drums. Vodun has provided the origin for the word “voodoo”.

**Voodoo** – Local religious/magic practice. The word is used in many ways and its meaning is unclear. In some connections, it refers to “evil” magic, which is only a small part of the religious traditions. The use of the word “voodoo” is often affected by its invoking certain associations in Europeans. “Voodoo” is also used by Nigerian Christians as a derogatory term for local religious traditions.





## NOTES

1. United Nations, 2000.
2. See, Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Air and Sea, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The Convention deals with the fight against organized crime in general and some of the major activities in which transnational organized crime is commonly involved, such as money laundering, corruption and the obstruction of investigations or prosecutions. To supplement the Convention, two Protocols also tackle specific areas of transnational organized crime that are of particular concern to UN Member States.
3. In its work against trafficking, the US Department of State (2004) specifies that this is possible.
4. Shari'a is Islam's sacred law, the sum of God's provisions and prohibitions as expressed in the Koran and other scriptures.
5. Other serious human rights violations are common all over Nigeria and are not limited to the Shari'a court system. This applies for instance to torture in detention, long periods of imprisonment without trial, corruption in the legal system, and the absence of reactions to injustice (Human Rights Watch, 2004).
6. Benin, Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Ghana, Cameroon and Togo.
7. This analysis builds in part on Carling, 2002.
8. The possibility to get an extended residence permit without leaving the country varies among European countries.
9. The instructions of the Schengen countries for the processing of visa applications express it like this: "The purpose of examining applications is to detect those applicants who are seeking to immigrate to the territory of the Contracting Parties and set themselves up there, using grounds such as tourism, studies, business or family visits as a pretext. Therefore, it is necessary to be particularly vigilant when dealing with 'risk categories', in other words unemployed persons, and those with no regular income etc." (Council of the European Union, 2002: C 313/11).
10. The other countries were Ghana, India, Pakistan and the Dominican Republic.
11. Calculated on the basis of Okojie *et al*, 2003.
12. Benin is also the name of Nigeria's neighbouring country to the west, far away from Edo State. To avoid any confusion, this country is often referred to as "Benin Republic" in Nigeria.
13. Kola nuts are large nuts containing caffeine that are grown as a stimulant. They have a great symbolic importance in West Africa.
14. Nigeria has a rapidly growing film industry. The country has in the last decade become the world's third largest producer of feature films after the USA (Hollywood) and India (Bollywood). Nigerian films and soap operas are very popular among Nigerians abroad (Duguid, 2004).
15. Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, both rich countries with large oil deposits, are the most important markets for Nigerian prostitutes in the regions.

16. The discussion on migration routes from West Africa to Europe draws upon Carling (forthcoming).
17. In theory, Nigerians must reside in Nigeria to be able to vote, they cannot vote at a foreign mission if they are abroad on election day, and they cannot run for election if they have double citizenship (Gordon, 2003).
18. The examples are mainly taken from Blench, 2003.

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Migration from Nigeria to Europe has attracted considerable attention from both governments and the media. This is partly because some elements of this migration flow are related to trafficking in persons and other criminal activities, and also because Nigerians have become prominent among sub-Saharan African asylum seekers in Europe. There are several hundreds of thousands of Nigerians throughout Europe, half of whom live in the United Kingdom. Italy is host to the second-largest group of Nigerians and is the most important destination for trafficking in persons from Nigeria. Although existing research and documentation on Nigerians in Europe concentrates on prostitution, trafficking and other criminal activities, the great majority of Nigerian immigrants living in Europe without any involvement in such activities are ignored.

