



Migration and development dynamics in Awe, Nigeria

Awe is a long-standing migration destination for agricultural workers across Nigeria, yet livelihoods and mobility are increasingly impacted by conflict, erosion, and flooding.

Most young adults (80%) grew up in Awe, the rest (20%) are internal in-migrants from elsewhere in Nigeria.

Out-migration is uncommon. Most young adults (84%) expect to stay in Nigeria over the next five years, the majority of whom (75%) expect to stay in Awe.

When people do leave, it is largely to other areas of Nigeria. One-third (35%) of young adults know of someone who has migrated internally in the past five years – often for farming in areas considered more peaceful.



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Photo: George Genyi and Esther Gbaden for MIGNEX.

Awe is a town and administrative centre in Nasarawa State, North-Central Nigeria.

Awe is a long-standing migration destination. Groups from across Nigeria have travelled there - for herding, farming and trading - for centuries. Agriculture remains a major livelihood; one-third (30%) of young adults surveyed work in farming, fishing and rearing animals. Salt mining is another traditional economic activity, yet its importance is declining due to erosion, flooding and unregulated construction on water ways.

Heightened tensions between farmers and herders over land resources since 2014 have led to violent clashes in the area. Persistent conflict is having a major impact on lives and livelihoods in Awe.¹

There is a high degree of poverty, and socio-economic inequality in Awe. The town is divided into two zones where infrastructure and services vary greatly. Around half (47%) of surveyed young adults consider it difficult to earn a living and feed a family in Awe.

Almost half of young adults' households (49%) received social protection support in the past year. Two conditional cash transfer programmes – one jointly funded by Federal Government and the World Bank – have enabled some residents to open small-scale businesses.² Nearly one-third (31%) of young adults are self-employed or running their own business in Awe. However, outcomes vary, and women continue to face financial losses without adequate assets, such as fridges.

This case study brief is based on fieldwork and survey data. The MIGNEX team also conducted research in Down Quarters and Ekpoma, and carried out a review of migration-relevant policies in Nigeria.³

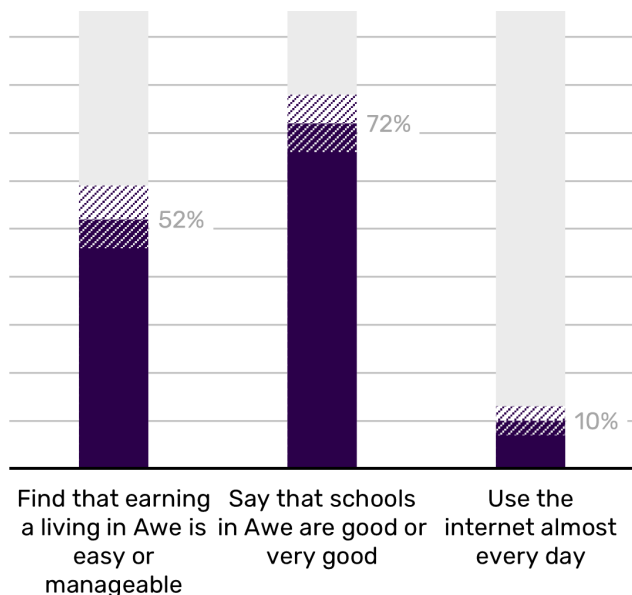


Figure 1. Indicators of development

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

Migration from Awe

While there is some out-migration from Awe, it is not a prominent aspect of the area. Most

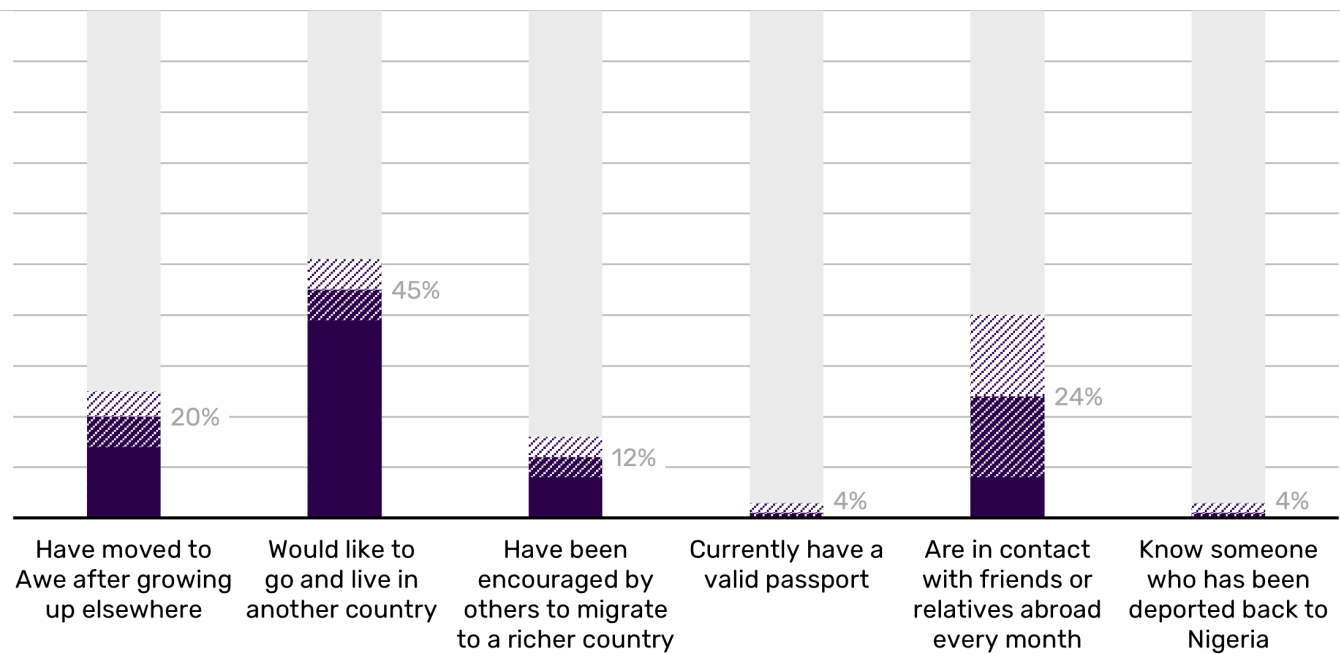


Figure 2. Indicators of migration dynamics

Source: MIGNEX survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

(84%) of surveyed young adults expect to stay in Nigeria over the next five years, the majority of whom (75%) expect to stay in Awe.

When people do leave the town, it is largely for other parts of Nigeria. Around one-third (35%) of young adults know of someone from Awe who has migrated internally in the past five years. Popular destinations include the states of Taraba, Bauchi and Niger or south-west Nigeria, either to farm or to provide manual labour on other farms.

Overall, international out-migration is uncommon; perceived by many as a distant, risky option. Potential low returns and the dangers of migration abroad make it an unpopular choice. There are also few social ties abroad – few young adults surveyed (6%) have family or friends living abroad.

Migration aspirations

Recent, persistent farmer–herder conflict has greatly impacted life in Awe. Many feel it has cast a shadow on the entire community. Beyond farming, the conflict has affected most economic activities, as many avoid moving freely for fear of being kidnapped.

This is impacting migration aspirations. Recently, the tendency of the Tiv people – who are largely farmers – to migrate internally has been driven by the insecurity and violence.

Further, some young adults have moved to more peaceful areas of Nigeria to continue farming. Around one-fifth of young adults (21%) have seriously considered internally migrating within Nigeria in the past year.

Beyond this, with a decline in the quality of education and lack of investment in Awe, many young adults feel prospects for the future are low. Feelings of hopelessness, despair and resignation were prominent.

Nearly half (45%) of respondents would prefer to leave Nigeria in the next five years. For those who would rather stay in the country, more than one-third (38%) would prefer to leave Awe and migrate internally.

However, aspirations for international out-migration vary somewhat between men and women. If given the necessary papers, considerably fewer young women (54%) would migrate to a richer country, compared to young men (73%).

Before, we had peace in Awe. We ate together, we sat together. But now, the crisis makes a difference, a big difference. In that way, we also have changes in Awe.

Focus group participant

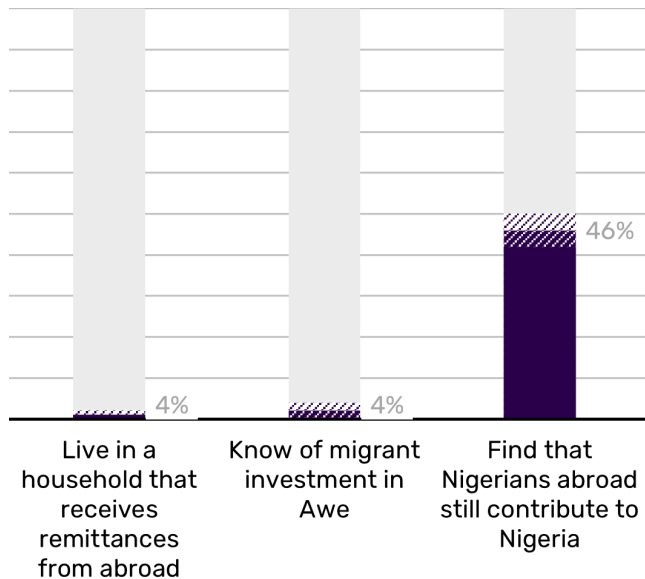


Figure 3. Migration–development interactions

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

Internal in-migration

A long history of internal in-migration - including from ethnic groups in Taraba, Plateau, Niger states - and other parts of Nasarawa state - has shaped Awe. Most surveyed young adults (80%) grew up in Awe, and the rest (20%) elsewhere in Nigeria.

Awe is still considered a destination for herders, farmers and traders in grains and (increasingly) small-scale businesses. This mobility is often seasonal and many who do not intend to stay long-term.

Until the renewed herder–farmer conflict in 2014, residents noted that migrants were welcomed into the area. The farmer-herder conflict is impacting these relations and could also be impacting migration in-flows.

Links between migration and development

Ties with the diaspora are not widespread or strong in Awe. Of those young adults with migrant family, relatives or friends abroad (6%), around half (52%) have been in contact over the past year. One-quarter (25%) of those adults have received remittances in the past year, though they were not the most important source of income for any household.

Collective investments are not widespread either, with few young adults (2%) reporting that they know of migrant investment in Awe.

In contrast, one-fifth (18%) of young adults know of foreign development interventions in the town, of whom nearly half (49%) perceive these interventions to make a big difference.

Beyond this, transnational ties are limited. Few formal employment opportunities and development interventions mean that many struggle to sustain an escape from poverty.

Ten years back people visited us here yearly and work to improve their lives. It gave us joy as business improved while they improved their welfare.

Focus group participant

Notes

1. Stopping Nigeria's spiralling farmer–herder violence. Africa Report No. 262. Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2018.
2. National Social Safety Net Program Scale-Up (NASSP-SU), World Bank, December 2021
3. Fieldwork consisting of key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations was carried out by George Genyi, Esther Gbaden and Moizza Binat Sarwar in November 2021, with research assistance provided by John Ihuman. A face-to-face survey of 500 randomly selected residents (aged 18–39 years) was conducted by NOIPolls Limited and ODI in July–August 2021.

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MIGNEX – Aligning Migration Management and the Migration–Development Nexus – is a five-year research project (2018–2023) with the core ambition of creating new knowledge on migration, development and policy. It is carried out by a consortium of nine partners: The Peace Research Institute Oslo (coordinator), Danube University Krems, the University of Ghana, Koç University, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Maastricht University, ODI, the University of Oxford and Samuel Hall.

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