

ORGANIZED CRIME IN NIGERIA: A THREAT ASSESSMENT



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UNODC
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



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Preface

Organized crime is multifaceted, ranging from drug and human trafficking, smuggling of migrants, cultism, illegal wildlife trade, kidnapping, advanced fee fraud and others. This phenomenon has actual or potential effects across national borders as the perpetrators are determined to obtain, directly or indirectly, financial or material benefits from these crimes. Like other nations, Nigeria is challenged in several important ways by the perpetrators of these crimes. The Nigerian Government in its quest to stem the tide of organized crime has over time supported the efforts of multilateral organizations to curb illegal activities in the country. Relevant international bodies such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have partnered with the Nigerian Government to collectively tackle the hydra-headed menace of transnational organized crime and its attendant negative effects on society and governance.

To deepen our understanding of the phenomenon, a coalition of various organizations in the security sector, coordinated by the National Institute for Security Studies (NISS), collaborated to produce this in-depth and authoritative national report on Nigeria, under the auspices of UNODC.

Good knowledge and understanding of the key components of organized crime will enable major stakeholders to address the underlining factors and causes, as well as to channel available resources in the right direction for its mitigation. This report is recommended to the leadership and operatives of the various intelligence and law enforcement agencies to enhance their operational capabilities in the fight against transnational organized crime. Researchers in peace, security and development studies will also find this report useful for further research.

A.S. ADELEKE,

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Foreword

Over the past two decades, organized crime in Nigeria has evolved structurally, grown more sophisticated and become both more violent and better organized. Organized criminal groups of Nigerian origin have created operational hubs in various countries, engaging in drug trafficking, trafficking in persons, cyber fraud and money laundering. Phenomena that previously had been limited to Nigeria, such as cults, have come under the radar of law enforcement in various other countries. Illegal activities, such as wildlife and forest crime, have evolved into major criminal markets of both national and international concern. Across the region, organized crime has become a significant driver of instability and insecurity with considerable negative impacts on people, economies and the environment.

The present threat assessment, conducted together with our partners at the NISS and with the involvement of more than two dozen Nigerian law enforcement and security sector agencies, seeks to help us better understand and respond to these developments. Indeed, with an ever faster evolving organized crime phenomenon, our ability to rapidly collect and analyse relevant data and identify and predict trends will be critical.

For UNODC, this assessment delivers on our commitment made in our *Strategic Vision for Nigeria*, namely, to support data collection, analysis and research for a deeper understanding of transnational organized crime, its actors, markets and trends. It also provides critical data to the UN system in support of the implementation of Pillar Four of the United Nations Sustainable Cooperation Framework 2023-2027 on Governance, Peace, Security; Access to Justice and the Rule of Law, and its specific aim to strengthen institutions and systems to better protect people, the environment and the economy from crime, including organized crime.

We hope that the findings of this study will help to inform policymakers, practitioners and international partners alike in forging a coherent approach to preventing organized crime, protecting the victims, pursuing and prosecuting the actors, and promoting partnerships and collaboration, both domestically and at the international level.

Dr. Oliver Stolpe

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Database
ARQ	Annual Report Questionnaire
CSD	Center for the Study of Democracy
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CITES	Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
DSS	Department of State Services
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
EIA	Environmental Investigation Agency
EU	European Union
Europol	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
Eurostat	European Statistical Office
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
NAPTIP	National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons
NCS	Nigeria Customs Service
NDLEA	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency
NENDU	Nigerian Epidemiological Network on Drug Use
NESREA	National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency
NFIU	Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit
NIS	Nigeria Immigration Service
NISS	National Institute for Security Studies
NPF	Nigeria Police Force
POMO Act	Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act
SDN	Stakeholder Democracy Network
SOM Protocol	Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air
THC	Tetrahydrocannabinol
TIP Protocol	Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNTOC	United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
UNTS	United Nations Treaty Series
World WISE	World Wildlife Seizures Database



YOU ARE WELCOME

Executive summary

This report provides an assessment of one of the core drivers of insecurity in Nigeria: organized crime. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of the phenomenon. Chapter 1 focuses on one of the most notorious forms of criminal organization in Nigeria: cult groups. Though found throughout the country, cultism is most prominent in the South-South geopolitical zone, and some cult groups are actively involved in maritime crime, a rapidly changing phenomenon that is the subject of Chapter 2. Kidnapping, including mass abductions by non-state armed groups, has risen to unprecedented heights, as discussed in Chapter 3. The report then focuses on a series of criminal markets: drugs, wildlife and forest crime, trafficking in persons, and migrant smuggling (Chapters 4 to 7). Policy implications and recommendations of these findings are outlined in Chapter 8.

Cult groups engage in a variety of criminal activities for profit and power (Chapter 1)

Cults are primarily social and networking organizations. They are not inherently organized criminal groups, but rather enabling organizations for a range of criminal as well as non-criminal activities. Their main criminal activity seems to be collective violence for various ends. This capacity for violence is used for extortion, sold to politicians and is employed in regulating various illegal enterprises in which the cult groups are engaged. Cult groups are involved in oil theft, refining and dealing, and sabotage of pipelines or other equipment. These groups protect businesses from attacks by random criminals but also make business impossible for those who refuse to pay extortion money (homage) or to cooperate otherwise. Through this homage, cult groups fill a governance vacuum for a profit. It appears that some groups even register their security activities with the local authorities. Acting as vigilantes in preventing rival criminals from operating on their territory does not mean, however, that they are constrained in committing offences themselves. Once a cult group has secured the monopoly on violence in an area it controls, the group is able to license the criminal enterprises carried out in that area to group members or to outsiders, such as illegal oil bunkering groups. Those attempting to

carry out unauthorized criminal activities in areas of cult control are severely punished.

Maritime criminals are shifting away from kidnapping at sea (Chapter 2)

Maritime crime, more colloquially referred to as “piracy” in Nigeria, has gone through several distinct phases over the past 27 years. Prior to the amnesty granted to the Niger Delta militants in 2010, most of the attacks were simple robberies, where ships’ stores and crews’ property were taken by force. By 2011, a second type of crime became prominent: vessels carrying petroleum products were targeted for hijacking, with the objective of offloading the contents. The price of oil began to drop in 2014 and by 2016 a wave of kidnappings for ransom began, targeting crews rather than cargo. In 2020, there were at least 23 successful kidnapping incidents at sea. But then the price of oil began to rise again and in 2021 the number of kidnappings plummeted. By mid-year in 2022, not a single successful kidnapping had been recorded.

While some self-identified pirates interviewed by UNODC for this report are specialized, many are opportunists, seeking to capitalize on maritime vulnerabilities as they emerge. Largely comprised of former boatmen and fishermen, they also see their work as a response to the environmental destruction the Delta has experienced. As with cultists, some of the pirates styled themselves as providers of security, extorting payments from oil companies and illegal oil bunkering gangs alike. Others saw themselves as ruthless predators, their actions justified by the injustice of their circumstances. Some claimed to be able to corrupt the maritime security forces for a pittance, while others said they intimidated law enforcement agents.

Nigeria has not one but several distinct kidnapping problems (Chapter 3)

Nigeria has not one but several distinct kidnapping problems. It is unique in the number and scale of its mass abductions, such as the kidnapping of the Chibok girls, but also the broader incidence of individual kidnappings. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Database (ACLED), the number of incidents doubled between 2019 and 2020, and doubled again between 2020 and 2021. The largest number of incidents in recent

years have been seen in the North-Central and North-West zones of the country. Kidnapping has become associated with banditry, combined with attacks that include murder and rape as forms of political violence. Instead of political concessions, the bandits are seeking ransoms. A recent attack on the Abuja-Kaduna railway, for instance, appears to have involved both political and criminal actors. Beyond these spectacular events, prison interviews conducted for this report revealed another face of kidnapping in Nigeria: the amateur. Working in small groups of three to six, these offenders target local community members or even their own relatives, hoping for a quick profit from a crime with low barriers to entry.

While cocaine and heroin trafficking remain of concern, synthetic opioid addiction represents the fastest growing national drug use challenge (Chapter 4)

Another threat emanating from organized crime in Nigeria is the production, use and trafficking of illicit drugs. Although Nigeria is home to varied climates and could be used to grow a number of drug crops, cannabis is the only drug crop cultivated widely. Nigeria furthermore possesses the capacity to produce illicit synthetic drugs and is a major importer of precursor chemicals for the local pharmaceutical industry, but the only synthetic drug commonly produced today is methamphetamine, with a total of 16 methamphetamine labs seized by the Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) over the period 2011-2019. However, the most important domestic drug market is that of synthetic opioids. The number of consumers is so large that the market is estimated to be worth more than \$1 billion annually, thereby likely representing the single highest value drug market in Nigeria. Most of this opioid usage seems to be connected to a drug called tramadol, which comes in pill form. Tramadol acts as a serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor so, in addition to killing pain, it also improves a user's mood. Tramadol is not in itself an illicit drug, but it is widely used non-medically in Nigeria. Almost all the tramadol seized in Nigeria in containers between 2011-2019 was manufactured in South and Southeast Asia. Ports in Benin Republic and Togo, which often serve as conduits for goods destined for Nigeria, also seize large volumes of the

drug. Following the import and production ban of codeine cough syrup in Nigeria in 2018, it is likely that supplies are being diverted from neighbouring countries. Prices of tramadol in Nigeria rose five-fold between 2017 and 2021. Moreover, Nigeria remains a hub in the transnational cocaine and heroin trade, with cocaine coming from Latin America using Nigeria and neighbouring countries as a transit hub also a matter of concern. Most cocaine couriered into Nigeria today comes from São Paulo (Brazil) through Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) to Cotonou (Benin Republic) or Lagos (Nigeria).

With little wildlife left, Nigeria became a wildlife trafficking hub (Chapter 5)

Around 2014, a major shift was seen in the global markets for endangered wildlife. Before this time, most ivory exported from Africa came out of East Africa, close to major elephant populations. Most pangolin scales emanated from the Central African countries where the creatures appear to be most numerous. And while most rosewood was coming from West Africa in the early 2010s, the 2020 UNODC *World Wildlife Report* highlighted that Nigeria was one of the few countries not exporting this valuable and endangered timber. From 2014 on, Nigeria has become an increasingly important hub as well as source for the illicit extraction and trafficking of various wildlife and forest products. Despite being home to less than 0.2 per cent of the world elephant population, more than 25 per cent of all seizures of elephant tusk made by authorities in Nigeria and around the globe between 2015 and 2019 could be traced back to Nigeria. By 2019, Nigeria was also a major source country for the trade in pangolin scales, with eight of the 11 largest pangolin scale seizures being either made by Nigerian authorities in Nigeria or being seized in other countries but originating in Nigeria. Moreover, after 2014, the country became an important source of illicitly extracted rosewood, predominantly for export to Asian markets. While the trade in rosewood has fallen since a 2018 export ban, seizures of pangolin scales and ivory remain frequent.

Nigerian women and children remain the principal victims of both domestic and international trafficking (Chapter 6)

Most Nigerian victims are trafficked within Nigeria for sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude and forced begging, and a large proportion of these victims are children. Having said that, domestic trafficking of children and adults within Nigeria, in some cases appears to be a first step before they are trafficked abroad to other parts of West and Central Africa, North Africa, the Middle East, Southern Africa, Europe, East Asia and the Americas. Most of the cross-border trafficking is perpetrated by transnational organized criminal groups for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labour and domestic servitude. Another more recently identified form of trafficking in Nigeria is “baby selling”. This involves the exploitation of two distinct groups of victims: Nigerian women and girls trafficked in order to give birth to babies, and the babies trafficked domestically or internationally for illegal adoption. Transnational organized trafficking groups include both men and women who recruit Nigerian victims for different forms of trafficking in the localities and states of origin of the victims. Some groups form and remain active over longer periods of time and trafficking multiple victims, while others collaborate on a more ad hoc basis, with recruiters, transporters and intermediaries working with a number of different organizers and organized groups.

Nigerian migrants often see no alternative to using a smuggler (Chapter 7)

Nigerians’ migration journeys by land and sea through West, Central and North Africa, and to Europe involve both regular and irregular border crossings, and both independent and facilitated travel. The period 2019-2021 saw a significant reduction, particularly evident on the Mediterranean Sea routes to Europe. Prospective Nigerian migrants contact smugglers to facilitate their migratory journeys because of lack of access to legal migration pathways and lack of access to travel documents. They also rely on smugglers to protect them during the journey and to manage the negotiation of bribes that might need to be paid to various border and other security agencies along the way. Perpetrators of migrant smuggling and related offences are mostly Nigerian men, though around one-fifth are women. Typically, they are organized in loosely connected networks where each smuggler is only in control of a certain part of the journey or a specialized service such as providing fake or illicitly obtained travel documentation. The main modus operandi is for prospective Nigerian migrants to contact a smuggler in their state of origin, who connects them with the next smuggler along the route by sharing a phone number, and so on throughout the smuggling journey, forming a transnational smuggling network. Fees range from \$500 to \$1,500 per person for land smuggling routes within West and North Africa. For Nigerian migrants who continue across the Mediterranean to Europe, the sea crossing is generally paid separately, and to different actors. Corruption in the context of smuggling of migrants from Nigeria is systematic and may often be included in the smuggling fee, with smugglers paying bribes to various actors along the way on behalf of Nigerian migrants.



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Introduction

Organized crime in Nigeria is driven by the country's regional and international context. Nigeria's strategic location along global shipping routes between the Americas, Europe and Asia, as well as its large-scale transport infrastructure, in particular its ports, make it an attractive target for criminal organizations that use the country as a base and a transit point for their operations. Nigeria's porous borders, in some cases with fragile states, further facilitate the movement of illicit goods and people. Organized crime trends in Nigeria are moreover affected by changes taking place in illicit markets elsewhere, such as supply and demand shocks for illegally traded commodities and changing conditions along migration and trafficking routes.

The prevalence of organized crime in Nigeria is driven by diverse and complex factors. Though their individual importance cannot be easily weighed, together they seem to constitute a fertile ground for organized criminal groups. According to the National Bureau of Statistics,¹ multidimensional poverty affects 63 per cent of people living in Nigeria. Youth unemployment and underemployment also provide a large pool of potential recruits for criminal organizations. Governance gaps and weak public service delivery, combined with easy access to natural resources, offer strong incentives for engaging in criminal activities. Widespread insecurity, poor synergy amongst law enforcement agencies and a weak criminal justice system tend to facilitate the operations of criminal organizations and pose comparatively little risks for their operations and profits.

The high prevalence of organized crime in Nigeria has dire consequences for the well-being of Nigerians. Organized crime creates political instability, hinders economic activity and diverts resources and attention away from key sectors such as education, health and infrastructure. Indeed, when people were asked in the 2022 Afrobarometer survey "What are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?", the most popular first response was "crime and security", well ahead of other responses like "poverty" and "unemployment".

Rationale

This organized crime threat assessment for Nigeria updates, expands and deepens existing knowledge to support national policy and strategy making. It provides key findings on organized crime in Nigeria to support the Government in effectively countering organized crime affecting the country, the West African region and beyond.

The Nigerian National Security Strategy identifies transnational organized crime as a national security threat and lists countering transnational organized crime as one of its core objectives.² Similarly, the National Development Plan 2021-2025 for Nigeria highlights organized crime as a security threat for peace and security and reiterates the Government's commitment in the National Security Strategy to combatting organized crime.³ In order to leverage these national policies, the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2023-2027 for

1 National Bureau of Statistics, Multidimensional Poverty Index Survey 2022, <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/news/78#:~:text=Highlights%20of%20the%202022%20Multidimensional,quarter%20of%20all%20possible%20deprivations>.

2 Federal Republic of Nigeria. National Security Strategy, December 2019, accessible at <https://ctc.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ONSA-UPDATED.pdf>.

3 Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning. National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2025, 2022, Ch. 17 (Defence, Peace and Security), accessible at https://nationalplanning.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/NDP-2021-2025_AA_FINAL_PRINTING.pdf.

Nigeria identifies as one of its targets strengthened institutions and systems to better protect people, the environment and the economy from crime, including organized crime.⁴ Moreover and in line with the UNSDCF, the *UNODC Strategic Vision for Nigeria 2030* defines the protection of people, the economy and the environment against organized crime as one of its priority areas and highlights the importance of data collection, analysis and research for a deeper understanding of organized crime, its actors, markets and trends.⁵

Prior Analysis

UNODC is mandated to strengthen Member States' capacities to prevent and combat transnational organized crime, tackle corruption, strengthen crime prevention and build effective criminal justice systems. As the guardian of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), UNODC supports Member States to address the threats from transnational organized crime by collecting and disseminating data to formulate evidence-based policies. To deepen the knowledge to develop effective national, regional and international responses to organized crime threats, UNODC has produced a series of regional and thematic organized crime threat assessments over the years.

In 2005, UNODC published the report *Crime and Development in Africa*, which, based on evidence regarding the continent's significant crime phenomena, advocated for development resources for the less tangible dimensions of economic performance: the respect of laws, the culture of legality and the integrity of government. The report analysed organized crime, corruption and conventional crime trends at a macro level and argued that conflict and crime exist in mutually reinforcing cycles on the African continent. The report recommended various steps to address crime as part of the development process including: generating knowledge as a first step; helping governments deliver security, efficiency and integrity; breaking the crime/conflict continuum; including crime prevention in

grassroots interventions; and making public/private partnerships part of the solution.⁶

In 2009, UNODC published a threat assessment on *Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa*. As a response to the detection of large cocaine shipments transiting the region on their way to Europe, organized crime in West Africa became an international security concern. In the report UNODC explored a number of transnational organized crime problems, including oil bunkering, arms trafficking, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, toxic waste dumping, fraudulent medicine, cigarette smuggling and the looting of natural resources. Recommendations included increasing the capacity to produce and provide valid and reliable data on drug trafficking, organized crime and drug abuse problems affecting the region; improving regional and international coordination efforts; harmonizing national legislation and legal frameworks; and creating and strengthening synergies between relevant law enforcement structures.⁷

Lastly in 2013, UNODC conducted another regional organized crime threat assessment for West Africa that highlighted the involvement of Nigerian criminal groups domestically, regionally and internationally in various types of criminal activities such as trafficking of drugs and arms, trafficking in persons, and smuggling of migrants. The 2013 assessment acknowledged that unless illicit markets are addressed, instability and lawlessness will persist, and it will remain difficult to build state capacity and the rule of law in the region.⁸

Since the 2013 assessment, substantial development in terms of crime areas, modus operandi of organized criminal groups as well as knowledge and capacity to counter organized crime in West Africa generally and Nigeria particularly have occurred.⁹

Methodology

The research for this report was carried out with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of illegal markets and a better sense of the portion of

4 United Nations Nigeria. Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2023-2027 – Results Framework: Validated Structure, Outcomes & Indicators, Outcome 4.1, Output Area 4.1.3 (forthcoming).

5 UNODC. *Strategic Vision for Nigeria 2030*, 2022, Priority Area 4, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/nigeria/UNODC_Strategic_Vision_for_Nigeria_2030-WEB_VERSION.pdf.

6 UNODC. *Transnational Organized Crime in the West African Region*, 2005, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/pdf/transnational_crime_west-africa-05.pdf.

7 UNODC. *Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa: A Threat Assessment*, 2009, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/West_Africa_Report_2009.pdf.

8 UNODC. *Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment*, 2013, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/West_Africa_TOCTA_2013_EN.pdf.

9 Another regional organized crime threat assessment focusing on the Sahel region is forthcoming.

each market that is controlled by criminal groups. The assessment also sought to create more understanding around the structures and modus operandi of criminal groups operating in Nigeria, as well as the demographic profile of the actors involved. The research also delves into the motivations for involvement in organized criminal activity and the recruitment methods of those groups. Finally, this report is concerned with gaining a deeper understanding of the victims of organized crime, their profiles and the means used to target or recruit them.

On the other hand, this report does not attempt to assess in depth the legal, institutional and operational frameworks and capacities established by the Government of Nigeria to tackle organized crime. This task is being carried out in the context of the ongoing Nigeria country review within the framework of the Implementation Review Mechanism for the UNTOC and its protocols.

To prepare this report, UNODC conducted a comprehensive desk review, analysed official data and conducted in-depth interviews with experts, prisoners and victims. In addition, the research for each market required its own unique methodology, which is presented in each chapter. The report furthermore incorporates valuable feedback and input received from a broad range of Nigerian Government stakeholders at a review workshop conducted by UNODC and NISS in May 2022 at Zuma Rock near Abuja, Nigeria.¹⁰

Even under the best circumstances, administrative data on organized crime are not readily available, and are difficult to gather and to disaggregate from crimes carried out by individuals.¹¹ Representative data of suspects arrested, prosecuted and convicted for the various forms of organized crime in Nigeria are equally difficult to obtain. Since statistical data on organized crime are not centrally collected, the most comprehensive data set available is that of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), separately listing crimes

committed or alleged to have been committed in conspiracy, which is how the Nigerian criminal code criminalizes participation in an organized criminal group, in keeping with its common law traditions.¹² Data with significant numbers collected by the NPF include conspiracy to commit armed robbery, cultism, kidnapping and trafficking in persons.¹³

The Nigerian Government's response to organized crime

Nigeria's mixed legal system derives its laws from the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, various types of legislative enactments, judicial precedents, customary law, Islamic law and received English law. Two criminal law regimes operate concurrently in Nigeria. The investigation, trial and punishment of criminals in the country's south is governed by the Nigeria Criminal Code Act (1916), while northern states, which enforce Sharia law, refer to the Nigeria Penal Code Act (1960). Drawing on the common law tradition, Nigerian courts use an adversarial procedure to adjudicate crime whereby the prosecution and the defence compete against each other to make their case, with the judge serving as a referee to ensure fairness to the accused and that legal procedures are followed. In criminal proceedings, the burden of proof always falls on the prosecution, which must gather and present evidence necessary to establish the guilt of the accused beyond reasonable doubt.

Nigeria is a State Party to the UNTOC and to its three supplementing protocols, i.e., the trafficking in persons, the smuggling of migrants and the firearms protocols.¹⁴ Nigeria is furthermore a State Party to all international treaties dealing with specific forms of organized crime.¹⁵ In line with its commitments under the UNTOC, Nigeria has established as a criminal offence the participation in an organized criminal group, defined by the Convention as "a structural group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more

10 On this workshop, see also UNODC. 'NISS, UNODC gather law enforcement and security sector agencies to review transnational organized crime threat assessment for Nigeria (NOCTA)'; accessed at <https://www.unodc.org/nigeria/en/niss--unodc-gather-law-enforcement-and-security-sector-agencies-to-review-transnational-organized-crime-threat-assessment-for-nigeria-nocta.html>.

11 Cf. UNODC. Measuring Organized Crime: Assessment of Data in the Western Balkans, 2019, accessible at www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Macro/Research_brief.pdf.

12 Conspiracy is an essential feature for committing organized crime in common law systems and requires an agreement between two or more persons to commit a crime. Unlike in the UNTOC, this does not require that the purpose of the agreement between the conspirators is to obtain a financial or other material benefit.

13 The data were obtained by UNODC from the Force Intelligence Bureau of the NPF Headquarters, Abuja, with letter dated 20 April 2020, Ref No CB:9000/FIB/FHQ/ABJ/UNODC/VOL.3/446.

14 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, 15 November 2000, United Nations Treaty Series (UNTS) vol. 2237, p. 319; Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, 15 November 2000, UNTS vol. 2241, p. 507; Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition, 31 May 2001, UNTS vol. 2326, p. 208.

serious crimes". The Nigerian legal system does so by criminalizing conspiracy, or the agreement between two or more persons to commit a criminal offence.¹⁶ The conspiracy offence constitutes an important legal route to tackling organized crime by allowing the prosecution of multiple persons involved in a criminal enterprise, including those who organize and plan a crime but do not themselves execute those plans. Moreover, it enables law enforcement agencies to prevent organized crime by extending criminal liability temporally, so that individuals may be arrested and prosecuted before preparation for the contemplated offence has taken place, or the offence itself has been committed.¹⁷

Over the last three decades, Nigeria has sought to build a dedicated legal and institutional framework to tackle organized crime. In 1999, the Department of State Services' (DSS) core mandate, relating to national security, counter-terrorism and counter-intelligence, was expanded to include the prevention, detection and investigation of economic crimes of national security dimension, thus encompassing all forms of organized crime. In 1989, Nigeria established the NDLEA to lead national drug policy and control, making it the country's first specialized agency dedicated to the fight against organized crime. The NDLEA was granted wide powers to execute its drug prevention, enforcement and rehabilitation mandate with the ultimate goal of eliminating both supply and demand for drugs in Nigeria. In 2007, the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) was established to enforce compliance with environmental laws and standards, and to coordinate the fight against wildlife and forestry crime with national and international stakeholders. In 2018, Nigeria increased penalties for violating environmental laws and granted additional powers to the Agency, such as the ability to conduct searches without a warrant and to arrest and detain suspected offenders. The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), as the main agency responsible for the prevention of smuggling, has continuously supported the country's efforts to counter trafficking in drugs, wildlife and forestry products. In 2004, the Service's administrative structure and zonal commands were

reformed to improve its efficiency and its ability to coordinate efforts nationally.

Nigeria has also taken significant steps to address the acute threat posed by maritime crime. As part of target-hardening measures to protect the oil industry from criminals, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps Act (2003) established the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps and tasked it with the protection and surveillance of national public infrastructure. In 2007, the Act was amended to grant additional powers to the Corps, allowing it to initiate legal proceedings against suspected offenders. That same year, the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency Act (2007) created the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency through the merger of the National Maritime Authority and the Joint Maritime Labour Industrial Council. Mandated to promote and regulate maritime safety and security, the Agency was empowered to inspect ships, investigate accidents at sea, and supervise logistic support for patrols against piracy and other illegal activities in Nigeria's waters. In 2019, Nigeria passed the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act (POMO Act), the first bill of its type in the region. The Act domesticated two key international instruments to address maritime crime, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation. By clearly defining a number of maritime offences, including piracy, and granting unambiguous jurisdiction to the Federal High Court to prosecute them, the Act has equipped Nigeria with the necessary legal and institutional framework to bring pirates and other criminals to justice.

Moreover, the Government of Nigeria has taken targeted measures to curb trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling, both of which have become key security concerns for Nigeria and its international partners. The Trafficking in Persons Enforcement and Administration Act (2003) established the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons in line with Nigeria's international

15 The 1961 Convention on Narcotic Drugs; the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property; the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances; the 1973 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS); the 1988 Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation; the 1989 Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal; the 1989 Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances; and the 2012 Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products.

16 See Sections 516 to 518 of the Nigerian Criminal Code and Sections 96 and 97 of the Nigerian Penal Code.

17 See UNODC, "Conspiracy", E4J University Module Series: Organized Crime, accessible at <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/organized-crime/module-2/key-issues/conspiracy.html>.

commitments under the UNOTC's Trafficking in Persons Protocol. In 2015, the Act was amended to grant the Agency more autonomy and broader powers, a new holistic survivor-centred approach, and improved mechanisms for cooperation with national and with international partners. Nigeria also passed the Immigration Act (2015) to strengthen its immigration system. The Act raised penalties for non-compliance with Nigeria's immigration rules, criminalized migrant smuggling and a number of related offences, and designated the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) as the country's leading anti-migrant smuggling agency. To enforce its mandate, the NIS was granted broad powers to investigate, arrest and prosecute suspected offenders, and to provide protection and assistance to victims of migrant smuggling. In 2017, the Immigration Regulation was passed to provide appropriate operational avenues for the implementation of the Act.

Furthermore, Nigeria has invested important resources in better combatting the illicit financial flows linked to organized crime, recognizing that individuals involved in such criminal enterprises are first and foremost driven by the prospect of financial gain. The Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act (2000) established the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission as the country's main anti-corruption agency. The Commission was mandated to prohibit and prescribe punishment for corrupt practices and other related offences in the public sector. In addition, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Act (2004) set up the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) as Nigeria's leading financial crime agency. As such, the Commission can initiate proceedings against individuals and legal persons suspected of economic and financial crime, and seize proceeds derived from terrorist activities and criminal offences. The Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) was initially established by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Act (2004) as a unit of the EFCC. In 2018, the NIFU Act established the Unit as an autonomous and independent agency domiciled within the Central Bank of Nigeria. The Act designated the NIFU as the central coordinating body for the country's anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing framework. Together with these institutional measures, Nigeria has recently strengthened its legal framework against illicit financial flows. The Money Laundering Act (2022) tightens restrictions on cash payment transactions and increases reporting

requirements for entities highly exposed to money laundering, while the Proceeds of Crime Act (2022) facilitates the recovery and management of proceeds of crime, in particular by enabling non-conviction-based confiscation procedures and increasing inter-agency cooperation to trace ill-gotten assets.

Finally, Nigeria has in recent years deployed significant efforts to reform and strengthen its criminal justice system at large, a necessary step in effectively responding to organized crime. The introduction of the Evidence Act (2011) has materially increased the potential of the Nigerian criminal justice system to investigate and prosecute criminals by providing for the admissibility of electronically generated evidence in court. Nigeria has also introduced major reforms to the NPF through the Nigerian Police Act (2020), seeking to rebuild public trust in the institution and to strengthen the country's first line of defence against crime. The Act provides for a more effective and well-organized force, with an emphasis on professionalism, transparency and accountability. Most significantly, it highlights the protection of human rights as the Force's core duty, going beyond its traditional law and order mandate. In addition, Nigeria has attempted to overhaul the administration of its criminal justice system through the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (2015). The Act seeks to build prosecutorial, prison and judicial capacity at the federal level to improve the management of criminal justice institutions and to ensure that the rights of all Nigerians are protected. It seeks to address delays in the dispensation of justice in Nigeria, which cause many individuals to be detained for extended periods of time while awaiting trial.¹⁸ The Act, which repealed the Criminal Procedure Act (1945) and the Criminal Procedure Code (1960) hitherto applicable to southern and northern Nigeria respectively, also provides for harmonized criminal justice procedures throughout the country. To further address challenges pertaining to its prison system, Nigeria passed the Nigerian Correctional Service Act (2019). The Act outlines the obligations of the Nigerian Correctional Service while administering custodial and non-custodial measures and provides operational avenues to reduce pre-trial detention. It also seeks to protect the rights of inmates by bringing the practices of the Nigerian Correctional Service in line with international human rights standards and provides additional focus on the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders.

18 See '51,541 prison inmates awaiting trial – Minister', The Guardian, October 9, 2022. Accessible at <https://guardian.ng/news/51541-prison-inmates-awaiting-trial-minister/>



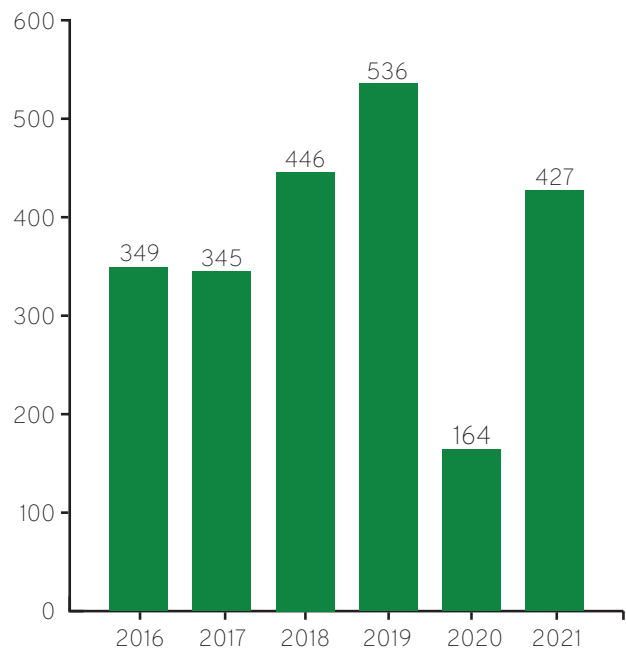
1. Cultism

1.1 Introduction

UNODC first discussed the cult phenomenon in its 2009 organized crime threat assessment for West Africa. The report noted that cults were a syncretic phenomenon, melding university fraternities with traditional secret societies, vigilante and militant groups, and street gangs.¹⁹ Since that time, cultism has become an even more prominent issue in Nigeria and internationally. Recent media accounts in Europe and Africa have portrayed cults as brutal mafias, steeped in secrecy and blood ritual, and active in a wide range of international criminal activities.²⁰

While cultism is a nationwide and even an international phenomenon, the incidence of cult-related violence appears to be greatest in the South-South geopolitical zone of the country. A study of individually targeted killings in the country found that “Rivers, Edo and Lagos are the states that experienced the highest levels of cult-related targeted killings,” with almost all these killings occurring in the south of the country.²¹ The South-South is also the geographic origin of many of the best-known cult groups in Nigeria and, according to statistics compiled by the NPF, the South-South state of Bayelsa had the highest number of cultism incidents detected in 2019.²²

Figure 1: Number of cult attacks in recent years



Source: Nigeria Watch²³

Data on cult-related violence similarly show a concentration of incidents²⁴ in the South-South, with Rivers State having the highest number of incidents. For these and other reasons explained in the methodology below, the field research for this chapter was focused on three states in the South-

18 See ‘51,541 prison inmates awaiting trial – Minister’, The Guardian, October 9, 2022. Accessible at <https://guardian.ng/news/51541-prison-inmates-awaiting-trial-minister/>

19 UNODC. *Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa: A Threat Assessment*, 2009, p. 24, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/West_Africa_Report_2009.pdf.

20 See, for example, Africa Eye. ‘The ultra-violent cult that became a global mafia’, BBC World Service, 13 December 2021, accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-59614595>.

21 See Hilary Matfess. *Power, elitism and history: Analyzing trends in targeted killings in Nigeria, 2000 to 2017*, 2018, accessible at <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/TGIATOC-Targeted-Killings-in-Nigeria-Report-1975-web.pdf>.

22 NPF. *Annual Report 2019*, Abuja, 2020. While these data are national, the reporting of cultism by the police is limited to those states that have passed legislation criminalizing membership in cults.

23 Nigeria Watch. *Sixth Report on Violence in Nigeria 2016; Seventh Report on Violence in Nigeria 2017; Eighth Report on Violence 2018; Ninth Report on Violence 2019; Tenth Report on Violence 2020; Eleventh Report on Violence 2021*, all accessible at <http://www.nigeriawatch.org/index.php?html=7>.

24 Partners for Peace. ‘Peace Map’, accessible at <https://p4p-nigerdelta.org/peace-map>.

South: Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers, where members of many of the cult groups active nationally and internationally were interviewed. Many of their insights could be valid for their respective groups wherever they are located.

The most comprehensive recent assessment of violence in the South-South geopolitical zone is the 2021 publication *Insecurity in the Niger Delta*. This study looks at a wide range of issues driving instability in each of the six states of the region, and cultism features prominently throughout the discussion. For example, in the discussion of Rivers State, the authors say: “There is a general perception that the proliferation of grassroots-based armed cult groups and associated violence are the most important security threats to the life, safety, and livelihoods of the people in Rivers State.” The authors also highlighted how cultists are recruiting even at the elementary school level today.²⁵

1.2 Definition of terms

While the word “cult” is generally used to describe ideological or religious groups characterized by fanaticism and secrecy, the term has a special meaning in the Nigerian context. In the 1999 Constitution, “secret societies” are defined under Section 318 (1) as:

“...any society, association, group or body of persons (whether registered or not)—(a) that uses secret signs, oaths, rites or symbols and which is formed to promote a cause, the purpose or part of the purpose of which is to foster the interest of its members and to aid one another under any circumstances without due regard to merit, fair play or justice to the detriment of the legitimate interest of those who are not members; (b) the membership of which is incompatible with the function or dignity of any public office under this Constitution and whose members are sworn to observe oaths of secrecy; or (c) the activities of which are not known to the public at large, the names of whose members are kept secret and whose meetings and other activities are held in secret. ”

The Constitution explicitly excludes secret society membership from the right of association and bans members of secret societies from being elected to be a State Governor, a member of the Legislature or President of the Republic.²⁶ In addition, many states have enacted legislation banning cults. Some states adopted the definition in the Constitution, while others define cultism through an annex of prohibited groups and ban similar groups. For example, the Bayelsa State law defines a cult as:

“...any organization, association, group or body of persons listed in the Schedule to the Law or otherwise deemed to be a secret cult under this Law and includes any organization, association, group or body of persons whose membership, meetings and other activities are kept secret and or which; promotes, causes or engages in acts of violence, intimidation or harm, in whatever manner, including kidnapping of person(s).²⁷ ”

Nigerian cults represent the confluence of several distinct social phenomena:

- I. From pre-colonial times, certain ethnic communities in Nigeria have fostered secret societies and age-grade groups to promote social cohesion and member advancement, particularly in the south of the country.
- II. Their direct antecedents are university confraternities, as discussed below.
- III. The university-based groups later spawned or merged with street wings, which display many characteristics of street gangs.
- IV. In some locations, the street wings have been coopted by or behave like vigilante groups.
- V. In the South-South, the street wings have been involved in the ethnic militias and other militant groups associated with the Niger Delta conflict, as well as involved in, or provided services to, illegal oil bunkering organizations²⁹ and, more recently, maritime piracy camps.³⁰

25 Tarila Marclint Ebiede, Celestine Oyom Bassey and Judith Burdin Asuni. *Insecurity in the Niger Delta: A Report on Emerging Threats in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers States*. London, 2021.

26 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, Sections 38(4), 182(1)(h), 66(1)(g), 107(1)(g) and 137(1)(h), respectively.

27 Secret Cults/Societies and Similar Activities (Prohibition) Law, Bayelsa State, 2012, Section 13.

28 For more detail see F.W. Butt-Thompson. *West African Secret Societies: Their Organisations, Officials and Teaching*. London, 1929.

29 The illegal oil industry in West Africa, though often referred to as “bunkering” is a complex phenomenon, encompassing the artisanal oil industry (those involved in the black-market value chain of oil), those syphoning crude oil from pipelines, domestic unofficial refineries, and international marketers. A complex web of fraud has also developed around the oil industry, and bunkering operations are often a part of this.

30 See Chapter 2 on maritime crime below.

1.3 Methodology

To better understand cults in the context of organized crime in Nigeria, UNODC designed a study in late 2020. The research centred around a series of interviews, both in groups and one-on-one, with cult members in the Niger Delta. These interviews were followed by a questionnaire covering much of the same material but allowing quantification of the responses. An implementation partner – Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) – was identified.

At the time, SDN was concluding a major project to promote stability in the Niger Delta through community outreach initiatives and through facilitating a policy process at the Federal Government level. Consequently, it was well networked in the states of Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers. While this geographic focus may limit the generalizability of the observations made in this chapter, most of the major cult groupings known nationally and internationally were covered in the sample, and it is possible to apply what is happening in the Delta to cults operating elsewhere.

Making use of their networks, SDN recruited 116 self-declared cultists for participation in interviews and questionnaires, mainly conducted in December 2020. Among these were 10 female cult members. Both focus groups and key informant interviews were conducted in all three states (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Distribution of focus groups and key informant interviews between the three states

	Focus Group	Key informant and interviews
Bayelsa	5	15
Delta	2	7
Rivers	4	15

In related research on maritime crime for this report, 40 “sea pirates” were interviewed, many of whom were active or former cult members.³¹ This chapter summarizes the results of the research, with an emphasis on conveying the views of the cultists in their own words.

1.4 Evolution of cultism in Nigeria

1.4.1 History of confraternities

Remarkably, the origins of cultist street violence are found in Nigeria’s institutions of higher learning. The University of Ibadan, founded in 1948, was not only the first university in Nigeria,³² it was also the birthplace of the first Nigerian “confraternity”. In 1952, when Nigeria was still a British colony, seven students founded the Pyrates Confraternity, later known as the National Association of Seadogs. The group was formed, according to its current website:

“...in response to the prevailing predisposition, at the time, of notions of class privilege, elitism and indifference to the social realities of the nation, Nigeria, especially by students of middle-class upbringing, scions of business tycoons and colonial aristocracy.”³³ ”

In other words, the group was formed by students who felt alienated by their wealthier peers. According to the statements and documents of the founders, it was dedicated to a set of counter-cultural values, including anti-tribalism, anti-elitism, non-conformity and chivalry.³⁴ In other respects, it resembled the fraternal societies seen in the West, both on and off campus, with membership granted by invitation, a ceremony of ritual initiation, the use of symbols and coded language, a general code of secrecy, and engagement in public service.³⁵

For over a decade, through the end of the colonial period, the Pyrates were the only confraternity in Nigeria, until two others evolved at the University of Ibadan in the mid-1960s and early 1970s:³⁶

31 See methodology section in Chapter 2 below.

32 University of Ibadan, accessible at <https://www.ui.edu.ng/History>.

33 National Association of Seadogs. *History of NAS*, accessed at <https://www.nas-int.org/about-nas/history>.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Stephen Ellis. *This Present Darkness: A History of Nigerian Organised Crime*, London, 2016, p. 111. The exact dates are debated as other sources state different years.

- I. The Eiye group was founded in 1965. It then instituted the Supreme Eiye Confraternity in 1969, also known as the Air Lords, with an emphasis on promoting traditional Yoruba culture.
- II. Around 1971/72, a splinter group called the Buccaneers Association of Nigeria was formed in response to perceived elitism among the Pyrates. The group retained its seafaring imagery.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, rival confraternities began to proliferate on campuses around the country, particularly in the south:³⁷

- I. In 1977, the Neo Black Movement, or Black Axe, was formed at the University of Benin in Edo State, with an explicit agenda of African empowerment and anticolonialism.
- II. In 1983, the Eternal Fraternal Order of the Legion Konsortium, also known as the Klansmen Konfraternity, was formed at the University of Calabar in Cross River State.
- III. In 1984, the Supreme Vikings Confraternity, also known as De Norsemen Kclub of Nigeria, was founded at the University of Port Harcourt in Rivers State, another maritime-styled splinter of the Pyrates/Buccaneers line.

As these groups branched out, it became common for the same campus to host several competing confraternities. Rivalries on and off campus led to the incorporation of “street sets” for many of the cults, drawing in members who lacked the educational background to join a confraternity. Female “confraternities” also emerged, although most of these appear to have been auxiliaries to the male groups.³⁸

As with fraternal organizations elsewhere, one of the key purposes of these groups was networking, with graduates helping students advance their careers in school, business and government.³⁹ Consequently, friction between the confraternities was inevitable

as rival groups jostled for opportunities and power. During military rule in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s, students were at the forefront of democratic activism. In response, it appears that the military governments began to recruit students to counter the increasing political activism in Nigerian universities and the confraternity provided a pre-existing organization through which to channel these efforts.⁴⁰

The 1980s and 1990s were also the time when the confraternities became associated with acts of horrific violence on campus, including everything from rape to mutilations and beheadings. In 1984, in order to disassociate itself from the violence, the Pyrates closed down all their student branches of the organization. As Nobel Prize laureate Wole Soyinka, a founding member of the Pyrates, explained in 2005:

“The imitators mimic the fraternity culture, intrigued by, and envious of, its outer shell – the structure – but what they stuff inside that shell comes entirely from the observed and evidently successful norms in a predatory society, from the obscenities of power, the corrupt lifestyle of their parents and mentors, the culture of impunity that has dominated Nigerian nation space for over 30 years of military rule, poisoning the nation’s humanity with exhibitionist affluence and a culture of decadence and alienation.⁴¹”

In response to the violence, the Pyrates reframed themselves from a campus confraternity to a charitable organization, the National Association of Seadogs. Over time, other confraternities have evolved into similar charitable entities. In the 1990s, though, the violence was so intense that all campus residences were eventually closed. Following the killing of five students at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Osun State, in 1999, President Obasanjo ordered university vice-chancellors to expel cult members from their schools within a specified time period or lose their jobs.⁴²

37 Ibid.

38 The female cults typically take their names from the male cult to which they are affiliated (e.g., the Black Axe begot the Black Brassier, the Vikings gave birth to the Viqueens, the Greenlanders produced the Green Queens and the Icelanders have the Ice Queens). Interviews with both male and female cultists focused on their role as spies and sex workers.

39 Writing in 1929, Captain FW Butt-Thompson compared some secret societies of the West African coast to the Rosicrucians and the Freemasons. F.W. Butt-Thompson. *West African Secret Societies: Their Organisations, Officials and Teaching*. London, 1929.

40 See, e.g., Biko Agozino and Unyierie Idem. ‘The Militarization of Nigerian Society’, in Viviane Saleh-Hanna (ed.), *Colonial Systems of Control: Criminal Justice in Nigeria*. Ottawa, 2008, pp. 69-118, at pp. 90-92; Stephen Ellis. *This Present Darkness: A History of Nigerian Organised Crime*, London, 2016, pp. 108-114.

41 Wole Soyinka. ‘A dream perverted’, *The Guardian*, 29 June 2005, accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2005/jun/29/internationaleducationnews.highereducation>.

42 See Daniel Offiong. *Secret Cults in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions*, Enugu, 2003, p. 139.

1.4.2 History of the street cults

The 1990s also saw the growth of off-campus street affiliates of the confraternities. These “junior” confraternities recruited their membership from a much larger pool of unemployed youth, out-of-school children, as well as secondary school students. The resulting groups were essentially street gangs, used for political agitation and for any other activities where widespread grassroots action was necessary. Some of the existing confraternities, such as Eiyé and Black Axe, established street wings under their own names, while others gave their street wings different names:

- I. In 1991, the Klansman Konfraternity produced Deebam (“be strong”), the first street cult in the Niger Delta.
- II. In 1999, the Supreme Vikings Confraternity gave birth to the Junior Vikings Confraternity (later transformed into Deewell) as competition to Deebam.
- III. In 2000, the Supreme Vikings Confraternity created the Icelanders, after Deewell began losing territory to Deebam. The Icelanders later became enmeshed with the militant group Niger Delta Vigilante Services (NDVS).⁴³

The relationships between these street wings have varied over time, but most are territorial, and conflicts over turf are common. While some street cults participated in political violence and sabotage against the oil industry, others sold protection services to the industry (while also selling them to illegal oil bunkering operations). The alignment of the groups in defence of, or in opposition to, the oil industry has been a continuing source of conflict.⁴⁴ Similarly, rival politicians may recruit opposing groups for support during election campaigns, leading to further clashes.

1.5 Discussion of the research findings

Today, the cults appear to be umbrella networking organizations, a template for organizing a wide range of activities that vary between regions. They appear to grow organically, with the rate of new admissions being entirely a matter of local discretion. As discussed further below, the respondents often described a hierarchical structure with local, national and international elements. Within a local cell, roles and hierarchy are generally clear, but the relationship between these cells and national leadership is less well defined. The cultists interviewed for this report portrayed a complex and contradictory world, where the cults both manipulate and are manipulated by forces that stretch to the highest ranks of government and society.

“I get tired when people talk about cultism like it is a strange thing because the majority are cultists in this part of the world. The government is comprised of people in cults, the President, the Senate and cultism everywhere. The army, the police, are all cultism. They only believe that it is only those boys in the streets and in the river that are cultists, No! Everybody in these categories mentioned are all cultists.”⁴⁵

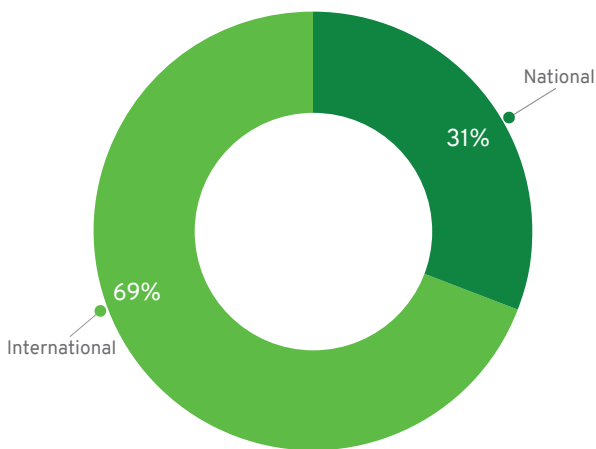
When asked about the number of members in their cult, most of the cultists interviewed put the number in the thousands or tens of thousands. Female cultists, however, put the figure much lower, in the hundreds. Many admitted they did not know. The cultists who live in the Nigerian diaspora appear to be at liberty to export their franchises. Most of the cultists thought that their group had expanded internationally, and, for some groups, this has been confirmed by media reports and law enforcement sources abroad.

43 See Bestman Wellington. ‘Origins of the Niger Delta’s Deewell and Deebam Militias’, Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor, vol. 5, issue 18, 27 September 2007, accessed at <https://jamestown.org/program/origins-of-the-niger-deltas-deewell-and-deebam-militias>.

44 See Chapter 2 on Maritime Crime, pp. 57-60.

45 Interview 6B.

Figure 2: What is the geographical coverage of your cult group?



Despite the widely expressed belief in the ubiquity and the international character of cults, some said that the core membership is relatively limited and cooperation between local branches is possible because the leadership all know one another. In the words of one respondent:

“The world of the fraternity is a very small world. Everybody knows each other, unless you are not popular or you don’t communicate. People from Port Harcourt know people from Lagos, and people from Lagos know people from Warri. There is actually a time when conventions are held, where everybody comes together in numbers, maybe 2,000 to 5,000 in one venue, and that gives an opportunity to know each other.”⁴⁶ ”

This interconnectivity means that local cultists can act nationally by contacting their counterparts in other parts of the country. As another respondent stated: “If someone offends me, and the person is in Bayelsa, I can call any of the cult members there to report the person, and before you know it, they will execute the plan for that person.”⁴⁷ In addition to allowing local cult members to strike opponents throughout the country, this also allows local cultists to travel around the country and be sure of a warm reception and safe passage wherever they go. For those working to expand illicit markets, these ready networks are handy:

“If I’m going to a state like Akwa Ibom, places like Ikot Abasi and other places, I will call some of my people there, and [check] if they say I should come. And if I get to the bus stop, they will even...send someone to come and pick you [up]. They will give [you] a shelter and we will eat together as brothers. Sometimes, if you are in a particular place and some people come to attack you, you will instantly make a call to your members, and before you know it, they will appear in the place and rescue you by fighting against those that came to attack you.”⁴⁸ ”

Still, this interconnectedness appears to be limited to the leadership, with rank-and-file members responding to directives given by their local cult authorities. Over three-quarters said they know the identity of the top member of their cult, but a significant share do not. Most of the respondents seemed to agree that cult members are found in the highest ranks of society, and that the cult can expect support from these members in times of crisis.

1.5.1 Reasons for joining and remaining in a cult

The reasons for making any life decision are complex, and most of the cultists interviewed expressed a range of motivations for joining and remaining in cults. Different cultists were also motivated by different drivers. As one respondent put it:

“Some people go to church because they want to go to heaven. Some go to church because they want God to give them prosperity. Some go to church because they want God to give them protection. So, the church means different things to different people. Similarly, confraternities mean different things to different people.”⁴⁹ ”

When asked about their reasons for joining a cult, the single most mentioned motivation was money. Female members were even more likely than males to indicate that money was their main reason for joining. But in the qualitative responses, there was a greater emphasis on protection, and later questions suggest

⁴⁶ Interview 7D.

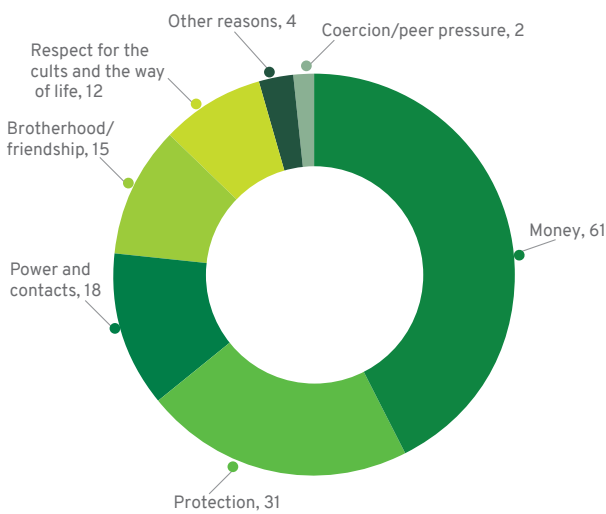
⁴⁷ Interview 1R.

⁴⁸ Interview 12R.

⁴⁹ Interview ID 7D.

that the cultists did not regard their participation as a regular source of income. Also important were the creation of networks, both for career advancement and for other forms of support, including economic opportunities.

Figure 3: Which of the following is the most important reason you joined a cult? (number of mentions)⁵⁰



On money, the qualitative responses were clear. Most respondents said they would not need cultism if they had jobs.⁵¹ As one respondent put it: “Cultism is consequence, it is not a cause. What is the cause? Hunger! The basic things. If a man’s stomach is filled, he can think well.”⁵²

The link between the universities and the streets is easier to understand when, as many respondents explained, even graduates are unable to find good jobs. Some saw the cult as a route to gaining the networks necessary for success in a country where patronage is seen as required for advancement.⁵³ But again and again, the cultists told stories of being vulnerable and oppressed before joining a cult, including by other cultists. They reported joining defensively, out of a need for physical protection and to gain the ability to be taken seriously in a dangerous society:

“The group means a backbone, because whenever you are in this group you are no more alone. When you are fighting, you are fighting with plenty [of] hands. They say injury for one is injury for all. Whenever I am affected, if am walking on the way, and somebody bigger than me can beat me physically, if he eventually slap[s] me anyhow, I can now call and mobilize my group [and] they will now come and fight for me.”⁵⁴”

This also gave them the ability to protect the lives and property of loved ones, increasing their status beyond that of unemployed adults.⁵⁵ Moreover, while it was not captured in the quantitative data options, many of the participants saw their current cult participation as an extension of the original idealistic goals of the confraternities.⁵⁶

The belief that only the violent are taken seriously in Nigeria was voiced.⁵⁷ In addition, cult membership was seen as a way of banding together with other oppressed people to fight back against the powerful, particularly the oil companies.⁵⁸ Some cultists pointed to their participation in vigilante activity as evidence that they were, in fact, providers of security in areas neglected by the government.⁵⁹

50 In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to select their main motivation for joining a cult (a single response), but some ignored this instruction and selected several options. In order not to lose the responses to these questionnaires, the graph shows the number of mentions.

51 For example, a focus group member in interview 1B said, “I joined a cult because I’m angry that I don’t have a job. Federal government should help us because there are no jobs and no money. This was the only thing I could do to survive from the streets.” Nearly the same thing was said by a participant in interview R12, “Some of us have finished the university, and some have also finished secondary school but no job. That’s why we are doing all these things.” In focus group R5, the moderator summarized “What they are saying is that if youths have a job to do, they may not go into cultism?” and was met with resounding agreement. Similar sentiments were expressed by many participants.

52 Interview 16D.

53 Interview 16R.

54 Interview 5R.

55 Interview 9B. Self-protection is a major motivation for joining street gangs around the world. See Luke Downey (ed.). Neither war nor peace: International comparisons of children and youth in organized armed violence, Rio de Janeiro, 2005.

56 Interview 1D.

57 Interviews 7R and 3B.

58 Interview 9R.

59 Interviews 13R and 1B.

Some reported extending this service provision to other areas where the state was seen as deficient, including payment of school fees and infrastructure improvements. This service provision helped to justify the taxation they imposed on local businesses.

1.5.2 Recruitment and initiation

Recruitment was not seen as problematic by most of the cultists, as there appeared to be plenty of prospects willing to join. As one respondent put it: “We don’t find members, members come to us.”⁶⁰ Targeted recruitment was said to take place, however. In the university confraternities and the street cults alike, talented or connected people are approached. Coopting the most promising young people has the effect of blunting potential rivals. Sometimes this targeting can be quite aggressive, especially for women, who may be raped as part of their initiation:

“Before now, we didn’t force people into the cult group...But now, when we see someone that does things in a way that his boldness would be seen, we will call him in and give him our orientation, by explaining to him how things are done. That is it. Because we know that you can fight against us some day, and in order to not let that happen, the person has to come into the group.”⁶¹ ”

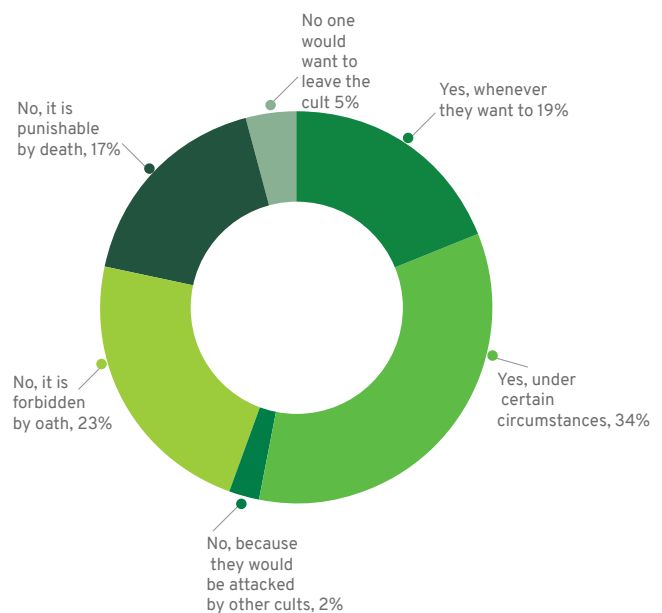
Much has been made of the role of rituals and oaths in cult initiation. While the role of traditional religion has often been sensationalized in the media, the unprompted statements in the interviews show it continues to play a role. Of course, the use of traditional shrines and religious practitioners to perform oaths is not limited to cultists. In 2004, a shrine containing a number of dismembered corpses was uncovered by Nigerian law enforcement at Okija, in Anambra State. Subsequent investigation revealed that several senior political figures had been to the Okija shrine and sworn oaths there.⁶²

Those cultists who engaged in maritime crime spontaneously mentioned the use of libations to the gods and other religious rituals to navigate and ensure their safety at sea.⁶³ Fetishes and other religious objects are reportedly believed to confer immunity to bullets. Prayers and sacrifices are made to the gods to solicit their guidance and protection.

The initiation rituals described by the cultists are remarkably similar between cults. They generally involve being taken to a remote area and beaten so severely that some initiates reportedly die. Candidates’ skin is then cut and they are made to drink a mixture of alcohol and their own blood. An oath is then administered, binding them to the cult for life.

Whether this oath is taken literally or not was a matter of dispute between the cultists interviewed. While some maintained that leaving the cult is unthinkable, more experienced cult members mentioned many instances of people being allowed to leave. In particular, a newfound religious faith is reportedly considered a good excuse for leaving.⁶⁴

Figure 4: Can people leave the cult if they decide to?



60 Interview 8D.

61 Interview 12R.

62 Steven Ellis. ‘The Okija Shrine: Death and Life in Nigerian Politics’. *Journal of African History*, vol. 49 (2008), pp. 445-66.

63 See Chapter 2 on maritime crime below.

64 Religious conversion is also seen as a legitimate basis for leaving street gangs in other contexts.

The primary requirement is that the departing cultist agrees to maintain secrecy and to renounce all criminal activities, in order to not pose a threat or competition to the group they are leaving. “Crossing the floor” to join another cult is seen as the greatest betrayal, punishable by death:

“If someone wants to leave the group, it is likened to a military man that wants to leave the military without a resignation letter. That would make such a person an AWOL [absent without leave] that will become a threat...So, if you are leaving, that means you are leaving with our secrets, and they are likely to be leaked out. So there is no means of leaving and we are brothers for life.⁶⁵”

1.5.3 Getting paid

Given that money was the most frequently mentioned motivation for joining a cult, it might be assumed that cultism is a lucrative activity, but this does not seem to be the case. When asked “How were you paid as a cult member (circle all that apply)?”, the most popular response was “We were not paid.” After that, the most popular choices referred to indirect forms of support or the right to pursue criminal enterprises

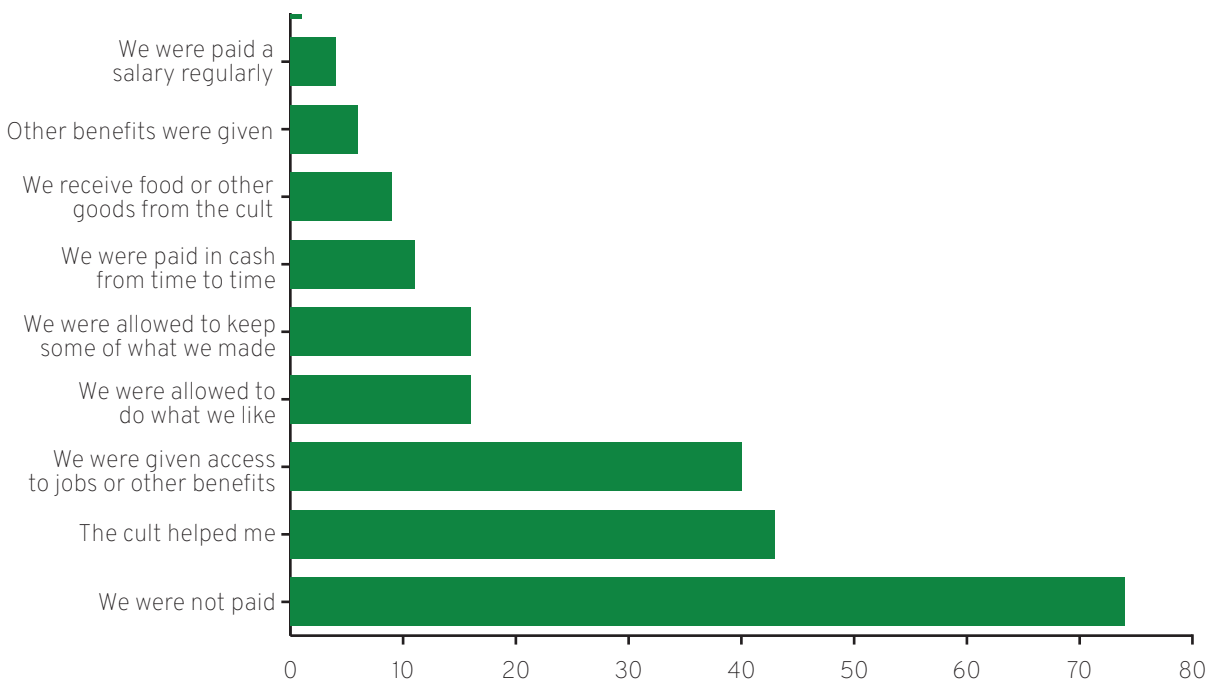
and retain some of the profits. None of the female respondents said they were paid, although two said they were given access to jobs or other benefits. Only four respondents, out of 116 interviewed, mentioned being paid regularly.

The qualitative responses suggested that cult membership entitles cultists to the protection and support of the group in any activity, legal or illegal, they choose to pursue. Some of the proceeds of these activities are fed back to the group. One of the more common criminal activities mentioned was extortion of the businesses in the territory the group controlled.

1.5.4 Sources of income

In the qualitative responses, the most commonly mentioned form of income was extortion of businesses and communities within the cult’s territory, often framed as payment for the provision of security services. Cultists protect businesses from attacks from random criminals, but also make business impossible for those who do not subscribe. This “homage” is what one respondent referred to as “an informal security taxation fee”. Another respondent explained the concept the following way:

Figure 5: How were you paid as a cult member (circle all that apply)?



65 Interview 2B.
66 Interview 2B.

“When you hold your territory ransom, there are people that would be paying you homage, because we are not government workers and have no salaries we depend on, other than our cult activities. We approach these clubs and bars operating within our territories to make demands. When they fail to attend to our demands, then we attack and rob the place. So, they are forced to employ at least one of us as security to be watching over the place. We also continue with our illegitimate activities irrespective of this.⁶⁷”

At the same time, the cultists provide a mechanism for enforcement of contracts, collection of debts and resolution of disputes:

“They might have a land dispute between two persons. A man might call us in terms of that: to assist him to achieve a particular property that belongs to him that is under dispute with somebody. So, we might use force to collect it.⁶⁸”

However crudely, cults attempt to fill the governance vacuum for a profit. It appears some groups even register their security activities with the local authorities. Some mentioned working for particular security services.⁶⁹ Just because the cultists act as vigilantes in preventing rival criminals from operating on their territory does not mean they are constrained from committing offences themselves, either in their neighbourhood or beyond.⁷⁰

1.5.5 Fundraising

Once a cult has secured a monopoly on violence in the area they control, it is able to license the criminal enterprises carried out in that area to cult members or to outsiders, such as illegal oil bunkering groups. Those attempting to carry out unauthorized criminal activities in areas of cult control are severely punished. While cult members are allowed to carry out their activities with impunity, backed by the

threat of violence from the group, the group does not appear to direct these activities. Rather, individual members appear responsible for finding ways of generating income and feeding this money back into strengthening the group.

These activities cults undertake are not necessarily illegal, however. Rather, the preponderance of illegal activities may reflect the income generating activities in the areas where the cult is most active:

“You will find out that within the fraternity there is what we call a “cartel”. Everyone belongs to a certain cartel. Your cartel determines your group of like minds within the fraternity. You will find some people, they belong to a cartel of armed robbers. You find a group where their cartel are into business, they are business minded, within the same fraternity.⁷¹”

While grassroots members are expected to raise funds for the group, leadership also derives income from political sponsorship. This extra income was frequently cited as a source of discontent by the rank-and-file. Since achieving a leadership position means access to these funds, cult members may work for little money in the hopes of eventual advancement.⁷²

“We raise funds by ourselves, like normally we go around looting phones at the streets, point [a knife at] somebody, steal phones, and other things. From there, if you used a knife to steal that phone then when you sell it you will now have money to buy a gun. That is how you will now go about robbing shops and that is how you will fund yourselves. Sometimes if politicians give us donations, such funds do not even get to members. Those at the top will grab such monies most times. That is why you will not find a Bayelsa cultist that is happy. They must want to steal and sustain themselves where they will get their share and strive to get to that top level of the hierarchy.⁷³”

67 Interview 5B.

68 Interview 5R.

69 Interview 11B.

70 Interviews 2B, 1B.

71 Interview 7D.

72 The prospect of earning a lot of money through advancement can keep prospects involved in gang activity for years, even when current income is low. See Steven D. Levitt and Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh. ‘An Economic Analysis of a Drug-Selling Gang’s Finances’. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 115, no. 3 (2000), pp. 755-789.

73 Interview 9B.

From time to time, groups are paid for election rigging (see 1.5.7 below), and while all cultists benefit, some felt these windfalls were not distributed equitably.⁷⁴ In addition, some cultists mentioned the requirement to pay regular dues, usually of a very small amount (the equivalent of a few dollars per week). These funds are paid to leadership, and through them, the cult secures the organizational structure to maintain its monopoly on violence. As one respondent put it: “The organization does not sustain the members. The members sustain the organization.”⁷⁵

1.5.6 Most common criminal activities

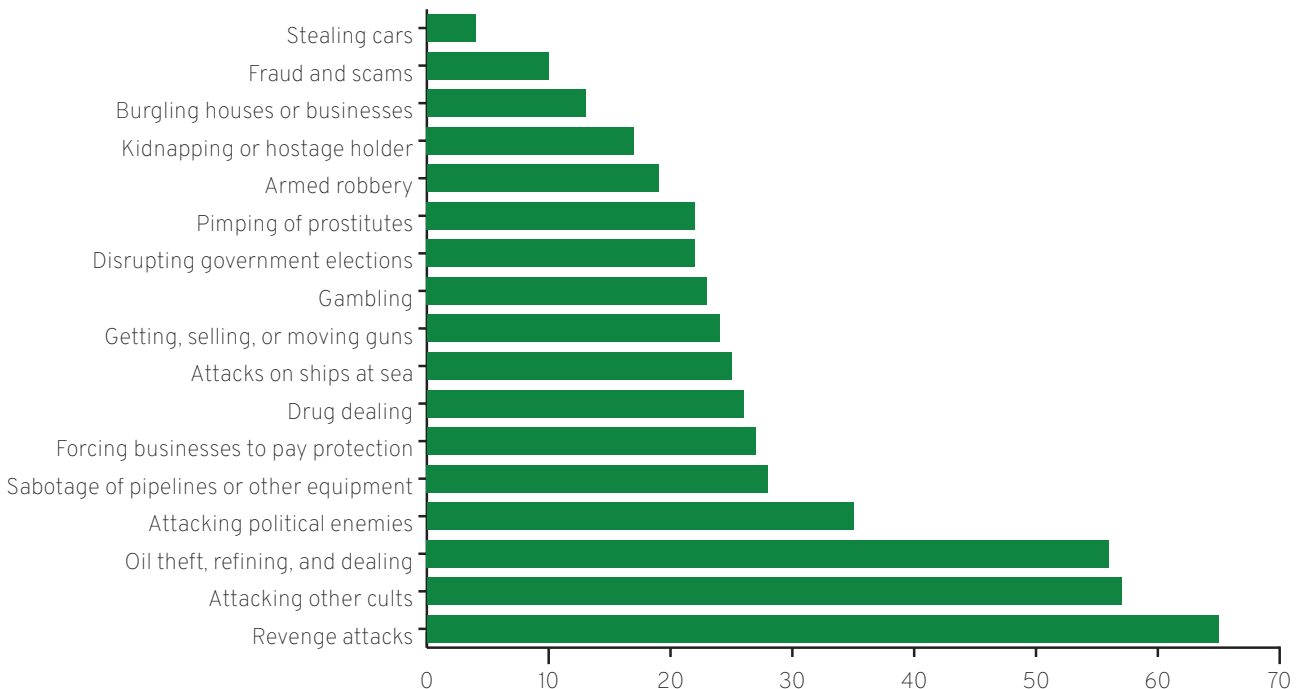
When asked about the criminal activities that each respondent had personally engaged in as a cult member, the emphasis was not on financially gainful crimes. Rather, it appears that the main criminal activity of the cults is collective violence: three of the top four responses had to do with conflict. Perhaps not surprisingly given the region, the most mentioned income-generating activities were related to the oil industry, followed by protection rackets. Only after

these came participation in criminal markets, like drug dealing, piracy and firearms trafficking. Female members were more likely than the overall group to report involvement in drugs and prostitution.

These responses refer to lifetime personal participation, however, not a hierarchy of income sources. The questionnaire did not ask about the most lucrative activities, so it may be that uncommon activities are large sources of income. In the qualitative discussion, it was suggested that while bold ventures like armed robbery are accepted, petty theft is frowned upon.

At their core, the cults are collective violence units, and almost all of the cultists interviewed had engaged in violent activities. This capacity for violence is the basis for extortion, is sold to politicians, and is used to regulate the many illegal enterprises in which cultists are engaged. The objects of this violence are often rival cults, frequently due to territorial disputes.

Figure 6: As a cult member, did you personally engage in any of the following (circle all that apply)?



74 Interviews 13R, 10R.

75 Interview 7D.

“ The entire JVC [Junior Vikings Confraternity] is not all about crime. It’s about brotherhood, togetherness, to protect their territories, which causes conflict with other groups once there is encroachment. For instance, we know that drugs are a form of raising funds and in a territory where a JVC member sells drugs and then a member of the Klansmen confraternity or Bobos [Deebam] encroaches to sell his goods to customers within the same territory usually causes a lot of conflict. They will be asked to pay loyalty to the JVC in that territory and if they fail, then it could escalate violent conflict.⁷⁶ ”

Such rivalries do not prevent different cults from collaborating, however. This is particularly true among cults that are part of the same confraternity lineage. Sea piracy is an area where members of rival cults often work together.⁷⁷

Given the long coastline and extensive riverine area of the Niger Delta, it is not surprising that many of the cultists had been involved in criminal activities along the waterways. Most of the cultists interviewed had experienced some involvement in the major industry of the region: the extraction, legal and illegal, of oil. Some had themselves been involved in illegal bunkering, or in providing protection services to the bunkering and artisanal refining groups. In addition, many had been involved in Niger Delta militant groups or ethnic militias, some of which had close ties to the cults. Cultists also reported participating in other forms of maritime crime, including “piracy”: theft from marine vessels, armed robbery at sea, hijacking of ships and kidnapping of naval crews. While the Delta conflict has long involved attacks at sea, the number of maritime piracy incidents had increased dramatically in recent years, until a sudden decrease after the first quarter of 2021.⁷⁸ Even with this reduction, the waters of the Gulf of Guinea are now considered the most dangerous in the world. Some respondents saw these attacks as a struggle to regain control over the waters from which they had traditionally derived their livelihoods.

“ We were born in the creeks and grew up in the creeks. It is from the creeks that we kill fish to survive. Our parents have been suffering and we were born to also join in the sufferings. Should we now allow for our children to be born into the same sufferings? That will not happen. The river is ours and so we decided to go into the rivers in search of fish and money from fishing trawlers.⁷⁹ ”

While many cultists reported having been involved in maritime crime, this activity seems to occur independently of regular cult activities, and the “piracy” groups bring together members of many cults with non-cultists. Some of the cultists spoke of permanent creek communities where maritime criminals live as a structured community, while others said the groups are loosely constituted on an ad hoc basis. It appears that these groups also establish turf and extort taxes, similar to cultists who focus on urban areas.⁸⁰

1.5.7 Role of politics and corruption

One of the most widely discussed topics in the focus groups was the role of “politicians” in generating violence. The word “politicians” was used by some of the respondents themselves, and was not part of the survey instrument, so it is unclear what they meant by the term. Based on their statements, they appear to be referring particularly to elected officials, although no particular party in power or in opposition was mentioned.

According to some respondents, “politicians” (who may be members of cult groups themselves) contact cult leadership for help around the time of elections. Cultists reported conducting a range of services for their political contacts, including “scattering” (causing chaos) in opposition areas to suppress voter turnout, stealing ballot boxes and intimidating (or even killing) their opponents.

76 Interview 12B.

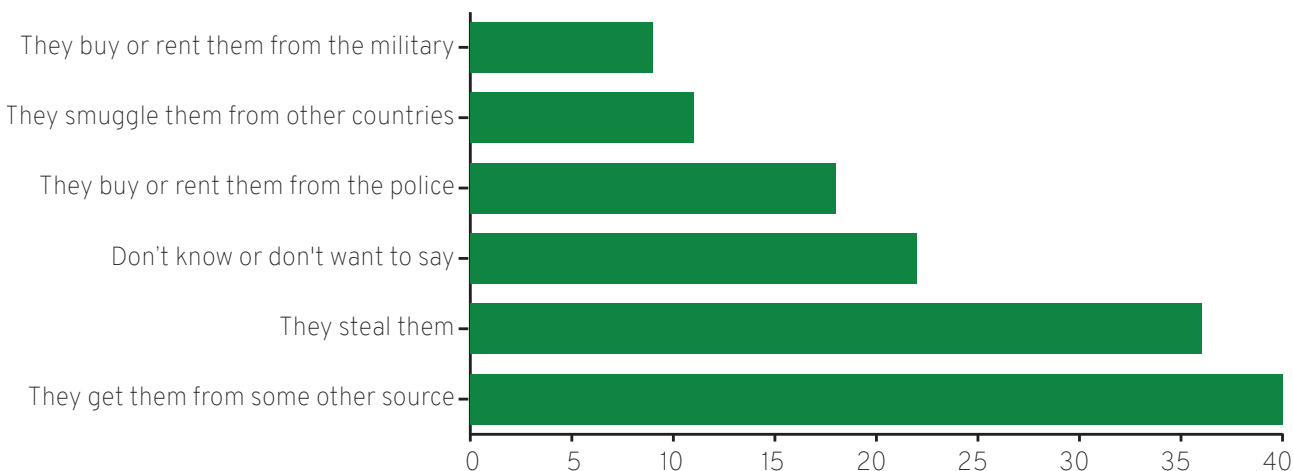
77 Interviews 9B, 3B.

78 See Chapter 2 on maritime crime below.

79 Interview 6B.

80 One respondent stated, for example, “We clash with artisanal refiners, vessels and tugboats and barges a lot, especially when they fail to comply with us by paying us our dues”. Interview 6B.

Figure 7: Where do the cults get their firearms?



“ The politicians and traditional rulers always use us to do their works, like carting away of ballot boxes, especially during election period, to make sure everywhere scatter. They buy us guns and bullets to ensure we disrupt the election process, and also kill, no matter who is involved, so that our own candidate can win the election...We know that if the person gets the seat, it will recognize our group and enable our activities to focus well.⁸¹ ”

Respondents repeatedly claimed that politicians arm their followers, although the source of these weapons was unclear. Members of cult groups are apparently allowed to keep these firearms after the elections and are provided some protection from the law. The questionnaire asked directly “Where do the cults get their firearms?” but did not include “politicians” among the response options. Since the number one response was “from another source”, it may be that this source was politicians, as explained in interviews and focus groups.⁸²

While some of the cultists argued that both sides benefit from this cooperation, others complained that politicians abandon the cultists after elections are over.⁸³

Probably the most disturbing confession made by some of the respondents was that when in need of funding, they intentionally generate violence *in order to be paid off by politicians*.⁸⁴ The cultists repeatedly claimed that only violence attracts attention in Nigeria. After a series of amnesties and other concessions during the Niger Delta struggle, it appears that the cultists have learned that they can expect settlement payments if they cause enough trouble.

In addition to direct payments, cultists have learned that enough violence will mean support to vigilante services and other private security firms they control. In effect, the cults fund themselves through two forms of extortion: downward, through threats towards community members and businesses in areas they control, and upwards, towards politicians

81 Interview 7R.

82 The fact that many criminals in West Africa acquire their firearms from police and military sources was discussed in the 2009 and 2013 UNODC West Africa organized crime threat assessments, see UNODC. Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa: A Threat Assessment, 2009, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/West_Africa_Report_2009.pdf; UNODC. Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment, 2013, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/West_Africa_TOCTA_2013_EN.pdf.

83 Interviews 1R, 2R.

84 Interview 14B.

who they support and can also topple. Cultists create violence in order to be paid to prevent violence:

“The politicians do collaborate and some of them are cultists. Some of them have been in this system and attained political positions through this system. So, they are even familiar with the boys and been through this system... Sometimes they also make promises that when we win, we will give you this and that, such as empowerment opportunities. There are some they manage to fulfill, like when you look at the Bayelsa Volunteer Security Service. It is a structure, and they are comprised of various cult groups which the government tried to put together. And they do this vigilante work, and they know these boys terrorizing the streets so when they see such cases, they provide job opportunities. Like someone that has terrorized so much is made a job offer with the Bayelsa Volunteer to help curb the same vices he was a part of.⁸⁵”

1.5.8 Relationship with the security services

Politicians were also alleged to facilitate relations between cult members and the security services. Not only does this arrangement give the cultists a sense of impunity, but the security services were also frequently mentioned as a source of arms and information. As with politicians, it was said that security personnel may themselves be members of cults, or they could be bought off with a share of the proceeds.

Some claimed that cultists do the security services the courtesy of informing them in advance and during operations, so that they can clear their staff out of the way.⁸⁶ It did appear that some honest law enforcement officers can be problematic, so the cultists are advised when and where to best plan their operations to ensure that whomever is on watch will be cooperative:

“We normally have understanding with security services both on water and on land. There may be some that will not agree to what we are doing. Or there may be some of them that were supposed to be at the place we are going to cause the problem, but they got the call to go away from there and another man was posted. We don't know that person and maybe when we get there that person will be like a stumbling block trying to prevent us from going there to do what we want to do so sometimes we have shootout with them, and we normally go into crisis.⁸⁷”

It was also alleged that cults can have members released from police custody if requested. About half of the cult members reported having been arrested at some point, with all the female members reporting having been arrested or being unwilling to say. Of the half of the cultists who had been arrested, 37 out of 58 (64 per cent) said the cult had helped get them released. All of the females said they had received help or were unwilling to say. One cultist even claimed that security personnel carry out criminal activities on behalf of cults, as directed by politicians associated with the cults.⁸⁸ However, another argued that “looking the other way” by security personnel was not always to the benefit of the cultists:

The police and the army most times do not really show concern because I've been in the battlefield between rival cult gangs. Once they know it's a cult related clash, they don't really involve themselves. They allow cultists to fight and kill themselves, and the security services come to recover corpses afterwards knowing the gangs will settle their differences at the end of the day...I've been in the battlefield between rival cult gangs where someone was being beheaded and people being cut with machetes while the police just stood aside and watched without intervening.⁸⁹

The picture painted by the cultists was of a perennially passive security service, ready to receive bribes and unwilling to risk their lives to enforce the law. In the end, the lack of security in the areas where the cultists live appears to be the primary reason for their existence in the first place.

85 Interview 12 B.

86 Interview 17B, 1 R.

87 Interview 11B.

88 Interview 18R.

89 Interview 12B.

1.6 Conclusions and key findings

The research for this chapter indicates that cults are primarily social and networking organizations. However, they are influenced, in the words of Soyinka, by the “observed and evidently successful norms in a predatory society”.⁹⁰

- I. Motivations to join a cult among the respondents interviewed seemed to be mixed. Although respondents to the written questionnaire most often cited money as the most powerful motivation to join a cult, in group discussions, there was a greater emphasis on protection. Further questioning revealed that members of cult groups did not regard their participation as a regular source of income.
- II. The research conducted for this study revealed the cult groups are not inherently organized criminal groups, but rather enabling organizations for a range of criminal and non-criminal activities. Their primary currency today is collective violence, a tool that can be applied to everything from community security to extortion, organized crime and election manipulation.
- III. The most commonly mentioned form of income for cult groups is extortion of businesses and communities within the cult’s territory, often framed as payment for the provision of security services. Cultists protect businesses from attacks from random criminals, but also make business impossible for those who do not pay.
- IV. The scope of this research was limited to three particularly troubled states, and the sample was not large enough to provide a definite diagnosis of the nature and extent of the problem. That said, the research suggests the potential for the cults as units of social organization, units that arose to address a gap in the protections offered by the state.

90 Wole Soyinka. ‘A dream perverted’, The Guardian, 2005. Accessible at <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2005/jun/29/international-education-news-higher-education>.

91 Article 101 UNCLOS defines “piracy” as “any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends” by the crew or passengers of one craft against another, outside the territorial waters of a state.



20-0066

OPERATION

GARMIN

2. Maritime crime

2.1 Introduction

In the last decade, the Gulf of Guinea has been at the epicentre of global discussions on maritime insecurity. While maritime predation is not new to the region, its prominence is a relatively recent development, emerging with a rash of kidnappings at sea starting around 2016. The year 2020 was, in fact, the worst on record for maritime crime in Nigerian history, with at least 23 kidnapping attacks documented. But in 2021, the number of attacks plummeted and in 2022 to date, no successful kidnappings have been recorded at the time of writing. This chapter outlines the history and discusses the organized criminal groups behind these developments.

Although this chapter focuses on the Niger Delta, where most of the recent offenders are based, maritime crime in Nigeria is not limited to groups based in this area. Technically, some of the offences described below occurred outside the territory of Nigeria, but nearly all were committed by perpetrators based on Nigerian soil, and all these crimes negatively affected the country.

2.2 Definition of terms

This chapter refers to “maritime crime” rather than “piracy” due to a peculiarity of international law. Under the UNCLOS, “piracy” refers only to offences that occur outside the territorial waters of any state.⁹¹

Within the territorial waters, most of the violent acquisitive crimes described in this chapter would be referred to by the UN as “armed robbery against ships”, including acts on the inland waterways of the Niger Delta.⁹² This distinction is maintained in the Nigerian 2019 POMO Act, Sections 3 and 4. In common parlance, most of what is described in this chapter would be referred to as “piracy”.

Of course, many other forms of crime can occur at sea, from illegal fishing to toxic waste dumping and human trafficking aboard ships, but for the purposes of this chapter and consistent with the POMO Act, “maritime crime” refers to four categories of crime against maritime vessels or their crews (see Box 1 below):

- I. Theft from vessels, or the taking of property by stealth;
- II. Robbery at sea, or the taking of property by force or threat of force;
- III. Hijacking of vessels, or the taking of a marine vessel itself by force or threat of force; and
- IV. Kidnapping of crew members, or the taking of marine crew members themselves by force or threat of force.

All these offences can occur at sea or at port, and they are all colloquially referred to as “piracy”, although they do not meet the official international definition of piracy.

92 See IMO Resolution A.1025(26), 2 December 2009, Annex, paragraph 2.2: “Armed robbery against ships” means any of the following acts: (a) any illegal act of violence or detention or any act of depredation, or threat thereof, other than an act of piracy, committed for private ends and directed against a ship or against persons or property on board such a ship, within a State’s internal waters, archipelagic waters and territorial sea; (b) any act of inciting or of intentionally facilitating an act described above”, accessible at <https://www.imorules.com/GUID-5560E934-AF05-45B5-A242-0225E6C11FA0.html>.

93 A “snowball” sampling technique was used to identify participants for interviews and focus groups; existing subjects helped recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. Most of the participants had previously received a government amnesty for crimes related to cultism and/or piracy.

Box 1: Types of maritime attacks

The incidents graphed and mapped in this chapter come from the data recorded by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). These data include the name of the vessel, the exact time and place that the attack took place, and several other variables. The data provided by the IMO do not include crime classifications but do include narratives from which the crimes can be deduced. The definitions below were adopted for this report to track the development of different crimes in Nigeria.

In general, an attempted theft, robbery, hijacking or kidnapping is still a crime. Any attempt to board a ship without permission, particularly aggressively, could constitute a crime. But in about half the incidents examined below, the aggressors failed to achieve their objective, and it is often unclear what crime the perpetrators were attempting to commit. For example, there were many instances in which groups of armed men on skiffs attempted to board vessels underway but were thwarted by evasive action by the crews. It is unclear whether these incidents were attempted robberies, hijackings or kidnappings. As a result, about half the incidents discussed below are simply classed as “attempts”.

Most attacks on marine vessels have one of four objectives. In many cases, the objective is simply **theft from vessels**, in which a small group of people sneak on board a vessel, at port or at sea, to steal property. Some of these offences appear opportunistic, where anything from mooring lines to paint are stolen, while, in other cases, the thieves come equipped with hoses or other equipment designed to steal cargo. In many cases, the thieves are caught mid-act and escape leaving only broken locks and other damage to the vessel. Any incident in which property is taken but the perpetrators are unseen is deemed a theft.

Robbery at sea is different. Rather than attempting to escape attention, robbers confront their victims, often taking hostages, destroying communications equipment and inflicting injuries, including committing murder. Frequently armed with nothing more than knives, they board a ship and take cash, personal property of the mariners, the ship’s stores and whatever else they can carry. Incidents are considered robberies in this chapter if force was used and property taken, without the robbers having taken control of the ship. In this analysis, events where the robbers are visibly “armed” are considered robberies, even if they flee when confronted, as the brandishing of weapons is deemed a threat of force.

The third type of attack is more sophisticated: **hijacking of a vessel** for its cargo or to take possession of the vessel itself. In these cases, the perpetrators often drive the vessel into the labyrinthine waterways of the Niger Delta to a remote camp, where it is divested of its cargo, or it can be lightered at sea. Hijacked vessels can also be used as mother ships for further attacks. If the vessel is to be retained, it can be repainted upstream. This kind of attack is often aimed at oil and fuel vessels in Nigeria, as the cargo can easily be introduced into the profitable black market. In this chapter, an incident is considered a hijacking if control of the ship is taken and the ship relocated, even if the cargo is not taken.

The final type of attack is **kidnapping of crew members**, almost always for the purposes of extorting a ransom. Kidnapping for ransom is more logistically sophisticated and requires more organization than the other crimes because it involves housing the crew in a remote location for a period of time and negotiating with ship owners for delivery of the ransom. Foreign crews are generally targeted. While the costs and risks are greater, so are the rewards: negotiated ransoms may amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars. In this chapter, incidents where crew are removed from ships are considered kidnappings, whether or not ransom is sought. Incidents where crew members are held hostage on board during a robbery or hijacking are not considered kidnappings in this analysis.

In short, if the target of the attacks is movable property, it is considered a theft or a robbery in this analysis, depending on whether force is used. If the target is to offload the cargo or take the ship itself, then this is classed as a hijacking. If the target is the crew, then it is considered a kidnapping. Any attack where no property or people were taken is classed as an attempt, even if the attack resulted in property damage, injury or death.

2.3 Methodology

Two primary data sources were used for this analysis. Information on the number of attacks at sea was gathered from the records of IMO, the UN body responsible for monitoring these incidents. Based on the narrative section of these reports, the incidents were classified into the four types of crime described above. When none of the four crimes listed above were successfully committed, they were classified as “attempts”, even when other crimes (such as damaging or firing on a ship) were committed. A total of 1,290 such incidents were so coded, and the number of maritime criminals noted where this information was available. This information was then mapped by the years for which consistent location data were available. The analysis of these data comprises the first part of this chapter.

As described in the previous chapter on cultism, UNODC contracted a non-governmental organization

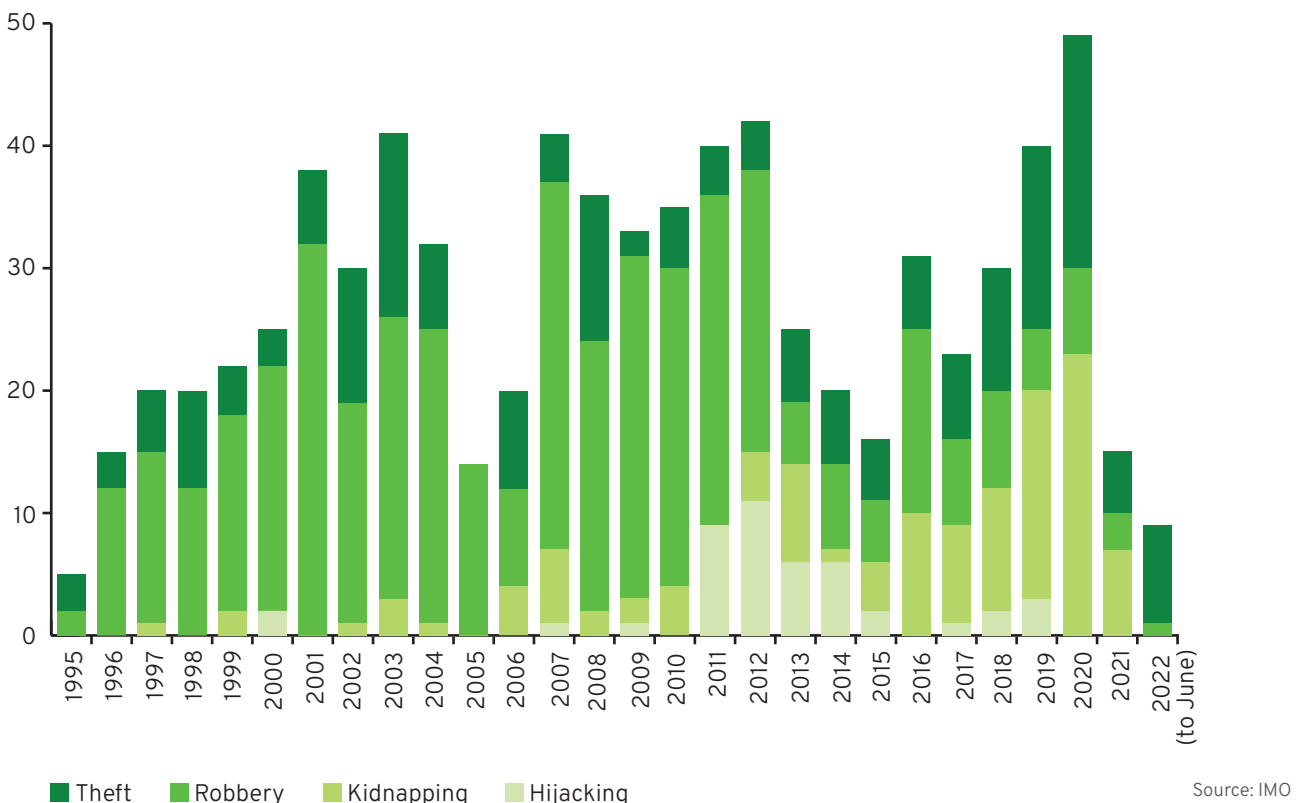
called SDN, which has experience working with communities in the Niger Delta, to conduct a series of interviews and focus groups with self-declared active “pirates”. Some 40 people participated, and these interviews were transcribed for analysis.⁹³ This information is discussed in the second part of this chapter.

In addition, some data from the 2021 UNODC report *Pirates of the Niger Delta: Between Brown and Blue Waters* were incorporated into the analysis,⁹⁴ as well as past UNODC findings from maritime crime research in West Africa and Somalia.

2.4 The evolution of maritime crime in Nigeria

Based on the IMO records, three of the four maritime crimes – namely robbery, hijacking and kidnapping – have been prominent in different periods in Nigeria’s recent history:

Figure 8: Number of successful maritime crime attacks associated with Nigeria recorded by crime type, August 1995-June 2022⁹⁵



94 UNODC. *Pirates of the Niger Delta: Between Brown and Blue Waters*, 2021, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/res/piracy/index_html/UNODC_GMCP_Pirates_of_the_Niger_Delta_between_brown_and_blue_waters.pdf.

95 Piracy and armed robbery at sea, attempted and completed, as per the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

- I. Between 1995 and 2010, most (71 per cent) of the recorded successful attacks were robberies;
- II. Between 2011 and 2015, robberies remained prominent, but there was an additional wave of hijackings (about 25 per cent of recorded successful attacks); and
- III. From 2016 to 2020, a wave of kidnappings was evident (40 per cent of recorded successful attacks).

Petty thefts were recorded throughout this period, but, due to their relatively small impact on crews and vessels, these are not discussed separately in this chapter. Since 2021, there has been a drastic reduction in the number of successful attacks, and few were reported in the first five months of 2022, including no successful kidnappings.

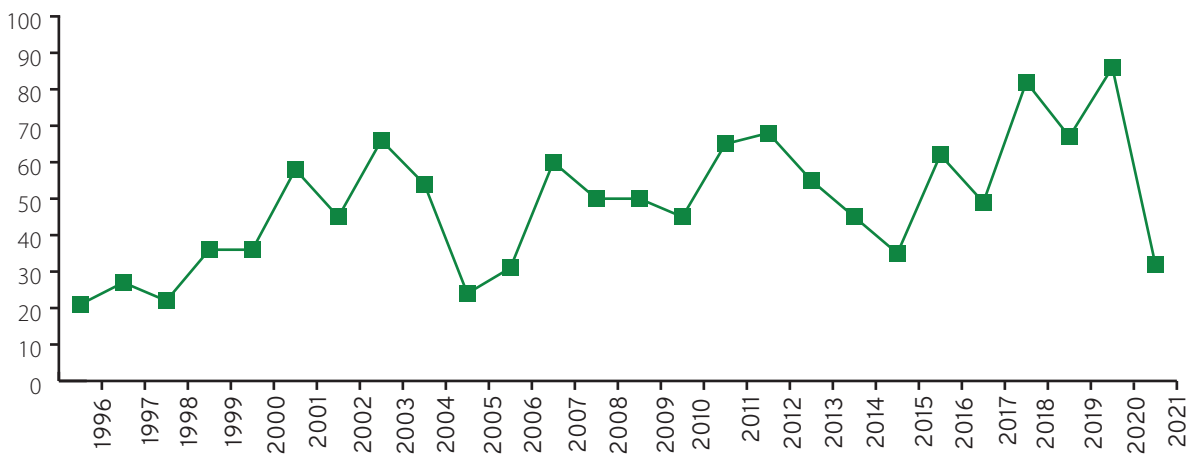
The transition from one form of predation to another tracks the evolution of maritime crime in Nigeria, from maritime mugging to mass cargo thefts to an industry comparable in character, if not in profitability, to Somali maritime crime.

The number of recorded maritime attacks in West Africa climbed between 1996 and 2020, the year

when more attacks were recorded than in any previous year on record, before plummeting in 2021. Between 2018 and 2020, 40 per cent of the attacks and attempted attacks committed globally occurred in West Africa, which is comparable to the share (45 per cent) associated with Somalia during the peak of maritime crime there (between 2008 and 2012) (see Figure 9 below). The number of Nigerian incidents is likely to be an underestimate, however. The Somali attacks occurred in a shipping lane of great international importance, and were therefore closely monitored, while for several reasons, incidents in Nigeria are undoubtedly underreported.⁹⁶

Maritime attacks are nothing new in Africa, however. Records from the IMO stretch back to the end of 1995, but, unfortunately, geographic coordinates for these attacks were only systematically gathered from the second quarter of 2006, and there were many gaps in these data until mid-2008. Data from the International Maritime Bureau show that through 2005, most of the incidents in Africa occurred around Somalia and Nigeria, but many other countries in West Africa showed significant problems, and it was not until 2003 that most of the incidents were associated with Nigeria (see Figure 11 below).

Figure 9: Number of recorded maritime attacks⁹⁷ in West Africa, 1996-2021

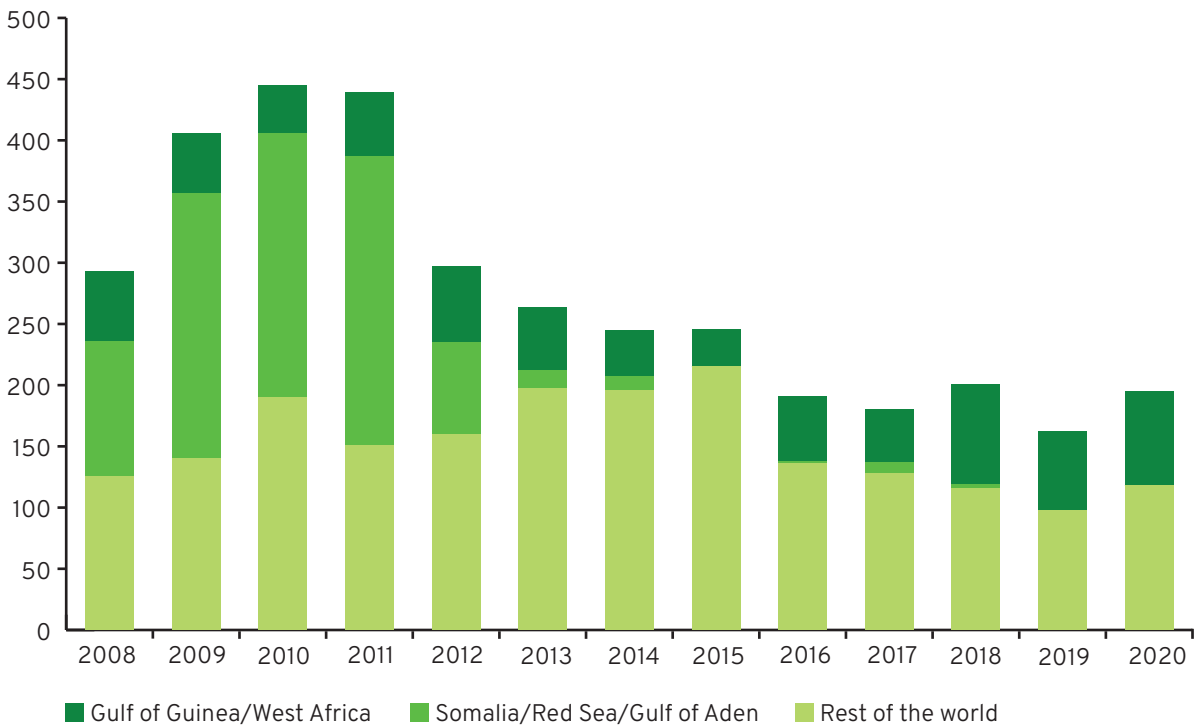


Source: IMO

⁹⁶ Shipping to Nigeria is expensive because marine insurance costs more for vessels entering dangerous waters. The Nigerian situation has proven advantageous to the neighbouring states of Benin Republic and Togo, which can charge a premium to receive and tranship goods destined for Nigeria. Attacks by Nigerian maritime criminals, which were common during the hijacking era, threaten their good insurance status. See Report of the United Nations assessment mission on piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, 7 to 24 November 2011, UN Doc. S/2012/45. As a result, maritime attacks are likely to be underreported. In addition, many of the vessels targeted by Nigerian maritime criminals may themselves be involved in illegal activity, such as oil bunkering or illegal fishing, as described by the respondents in this study. Finally, the ships hijacked by Somali maritime criminals were usually large and encamped on a highly exposed coastline, whereas Nigerian maritime criminals can conceal their quarry, often smaller vessels, over a very wide range of riverine area.

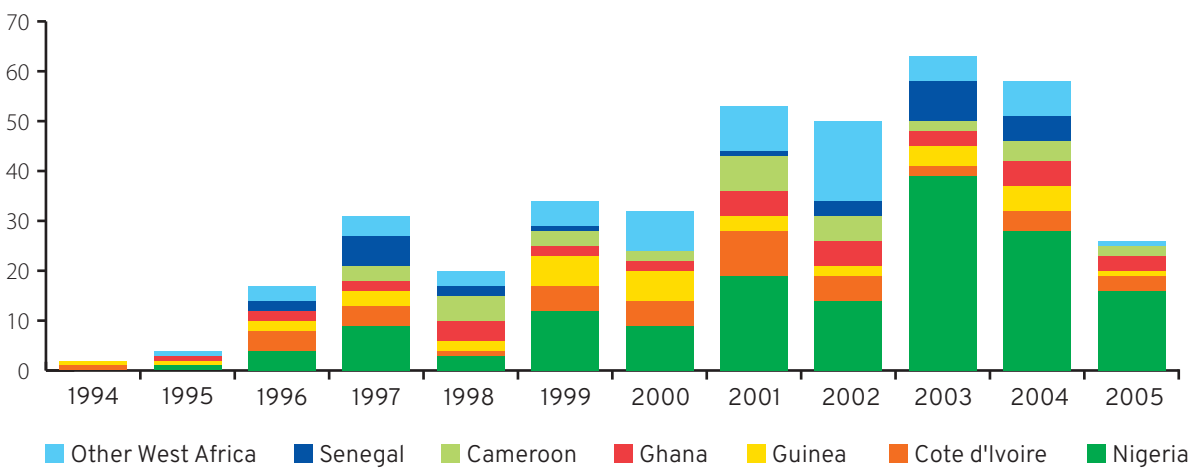
⁹⁷ Piracy and armed robbery at sea, attempted and completed, as per the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Figure 10: Location of all maritime attacks⁹⁸ reported to the International Maritime Bureau, 2008-2020



Source: International Maritime Bureau.

Figure 11: Coastal state associated with maritime attacks in West Africa, 1994-2005⁹⁹



Source: International Maritime Bureau.

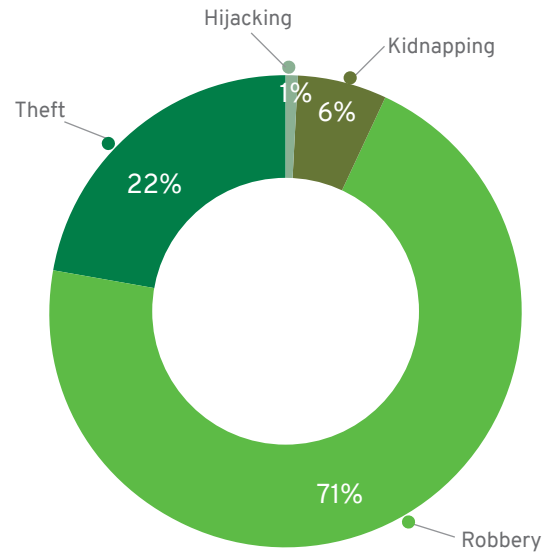
98 The International Maritime Bureau Piracy Reporting Centre (IMB PRC) follows the definition of Piracy as laid down in Article 101 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and Armed Robbery as laid down in Resolution A.1025 (26) adopted on 2 December 2009 at the 26th Assembly Session of the IMO.

99 The IMO associates each incident, including those occurring on the high seas, with a coastal state.

2.4.2 Phase One: Maritime robbery (1995-2010)

Available IMO records only extend back to 1995. Between 1995 and 2010, most (71 per cent) of the incidents were robberies. The share of all successful maritime attacks that were robberies was high throughout most of this period, before dropping sharply in 2010, the year the Presidential Amnesty Programme was initiated (see Figure 12 and Box 2 below). While the location of the incidents is not available for most of the attacks prior to 2006, it appears that most occurred at, or close to, the Lagos ports (see Maps 1-4 below). In other words, most of the attacks during this period do not appear to be a direct side effect of the conflict in the Niger Delta, which began in the early 1990s.

Figure 12: Successful maritime attacks by type of crime, 1995-2010 (427 offences)



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

Figure 13: Share of all successful attacks that were robberies, 1996-2020



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

Map 1: Successful maritime attacks in 2007¹⁰⁰



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

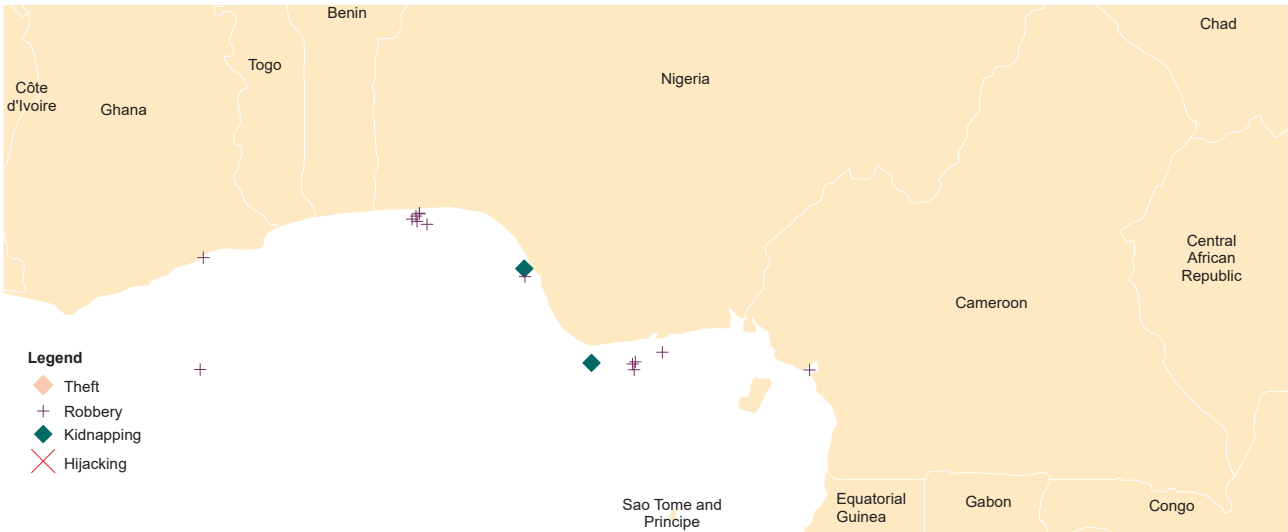
Map 2: Successful maritime attacks in 2008



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

100 The maps used in this chapter only illustrate data points for which a precise location was available.

Map 3: Successful maritime attacks in 2009



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

Map 4: Successful maritime attacks in 2010



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

There were 26 incidents of kidnapping during this period (1995-2010), with most occurring from 2006 onward. These attacks, as well as an increasing number of robberies around Port Harcourt in Rivers State and Warri in Delta State, appear to be related to the Niger Delta conflict. They were part of a larger campaign, most of which occurred on land, of kidnapping oil company employees. There were at least 350 kidnappings of expatriates on land during this period, a campaign that served both as a fundraising device and a form of protest. These kidnappings resulted in less than a half dozen deaths.¹⁰¹ Based on IMO data, most of the

kidnappings at sea during this period involved Nigerian nationals.

Spurred by a strong sense of injustice, widespread unemployment and the decay of traditional livelihoods due to environmental damage, popular protest movements in the Delta stretch back decades. One of the most prominent militias to emerge from the Delta conflict was an umbrella group calling itself the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which took centre stage from about 2005 until the Presidential Amnesty Programme was initiated

101 Chris Newsom. Conflict in the Niger Delta: More Than a Local Affair, United States Institute of Peace Special Report 271, June 2011, accessible at https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Conflict_Niger_Delta.pdf.

in 2009. Bringing together militants and cultists from several different groups under a single banner, MEND's stated objective was to cripple the oil industry until demands for local ownership were met.¹⁰² Prominent MEND leaders were cultists and known criminals, so it remained unclear throughout MEND's tenure where the politics stopped and the looting began.

While most of these attacks were coastal, there was one spectacular incident that served as a harbinger of things to come. According to media sources, in June 2008, MEND attacked Shell Oil's giant Bonga FPSO (Floating Production, Storage and Offloading) vessel, which was based 65 nautical miles offshore, immediately cutting Nigerian oil production by one-tenth.¹⁰³ The intent was to detonate the computerized control room, but the attackers were unable to gain access to this part of the facility.¹⁰⁴ An attack of comparable scale was never repeated, but it showed that armed groups had the potential to strike vessels far offshore, a potential that would be realized in criminal attacks many times in the coming years.

According to Canadian authorities, by October 2009, several prominent leaders in MEND had accepted amnesty,¹⁰⁵ under which they agreed to surrender

their weapons and stop the attacks in exchange for immunity from prosecution and the promise of reintegration, including a monthly stipend. According to media sources, about 30,000 militants would eventually become enrolled, although according to media reports, fewer than 3,000 weapons were surrendered.¹⁰⁶ While pressure on the oil industry immediately lightened, the amnesty was not entirely successful. According to Canadian authorities, during 2010 and 2011, several attacks followed as two of the main militant groups refused to participate.¹⁰⁷

In addition, as part of the process, several security contracts were granted to former militant leaders. For example, a former MEND commander was given a security contract granting him responsibility for securing waterways in Delta State. The official amount of this contract was \$103 million and ceded the former leader 'control' over certain areas without government interference, including areas known for bunkering.¹⁰⁸ According to media reports, an international scandal broke when the commander purchased seven decommissioned Norwegian warships from a brokerage in the United Kingdom, leading to a parliamentary investigation and corruption charges in Norway.¹⁰⁹

Box 2: The Presidential Amnesty Programme

In 2009, the Presidential Amnesty Programme, modelled after the United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programme, was introduced for Niger Delta militants. While the programme – which is, as of 2022, still ongoing – has reduced insecurity in the region, many experts believe it is not sustainable. A recent assessment by the international development consulting firm Nextier SPD, for instance, found that there seems to be no end date of the programme in sight; that the programme is becoming too expensive to maintain, while being prone to corruption and nepotism; and that it suffers from a lack of transparency, consistency and efficient management of resources¹¹⁰. Earlier reports were similarly sceptical about the lasting success of the programme, highlighting that root causes of the conflict in the Niger Delta like chronic poverty and environmental pollution remain unaddressed¹¹¹.

102 See Elias Courson. Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND): Political Marginalization, Repression and Petro-Insurgency in the Niger Delta, Nordic Africa Institute Discussion Paper 47, 2009, accessible at <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/112097/47.pdf>.

103 Eric Watkins. 'Rebel attack shuts Shell's Bonga FPSO production'. Oil & Gas Journal, 20 June 2008, accessed at <https://www.ogj.com/drilling-production/article/17268638/rebel-attack-shuts-shells-bonga-fpso-production>.

104 Ibid.

105 See Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. Nigeria: Government amnesty program for Niger Delta militants, particularly with respect to the Movement for the Emancipations of the Niger Delta (MEND) (2009-August 2011), 5 August 2011, accessible at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/50740a192.html>.

106 'Up to 15,000 Nigerian gunmen took amnesty – govt', Reuters, 8 October 2009, accessed at <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-nigeria-delta-idUKTRE59743X20091008>.

107 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. Nigeria: Government amnesty program for Niger Delta militants, particularly with respect to the Movement for the Emancipations of the Niger Delta (MEND) (2009-August 2011), 5 August 2011, accessible at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/50740a192.html>.

108 UNODC. Pirates of the Niger Delta: Between Brown and Blue Waters, 2021, p. 23, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/res/piracy/index_html/UNODC_GMCP_Pirates_of_the_Niger_Delta_between_brown_and_blue_waters.pdf.

109 Andrew Smith. 'The Mysterious Sale of Warships to an Ex-Nigerian Warlord—And Why the U.K. Let It Happen', Newsweek, 29 May 2017, accessed at <https://www.newsweek.com/tompson-niger-delta-avengers-nigeria-oil-616154>.

110 NEXTIER SPD, Report on the Assessment of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP), August 2020, p. 4, accessed at <https://nextierspd.com/report-on-the-assessment-of-the-presidential-amnesty-programme-pap>.

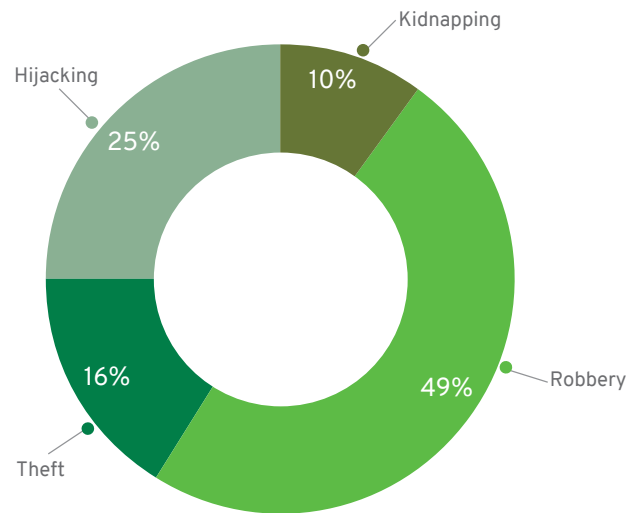
111 International Crisis Group. Curbing Violence in Nigeria (III): Revisiting the Niger Delta, Africa Report No. 231, 29 September 2015, accessed at <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/231-curbing-violence-in-nigeria-iii-revisiting-the-niger-delta.pdf>.

2.4.2 Phase Two: Maritime hijacking (2011-2015)

After the amnesty, the hijacking of entire vessels began to rise in prominence. Between 2011 and 2015, about one-quarter of all successful attacks resulted in the hijacking of vessels. The purpose of these hijackings was the acquisition of the cargo, which, in most cases, was oil and fuel. Vessels would be hijacked and the fuel offloaded to another vessel, often at sea.

As petroleum products appear to have been the target of many of these attacks, it seems likely that the growth of hijacking is in some way related to developments in the oil market.¹¹² It was around this time that the fuel subsidy scandal emerged (see Box 3 below). In response to the scandal, the fuel subsidy was removed at the beginning of 2012, only to be reinstated at a much lower level shortly afterwards due to popular protest.¹¹³ Because neighbouring

Figure 14: Successful maritime attacks by type of crime, 2011-2014 (127 offences)



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

Box 3: The fuel subsidy scandal¹¹⁴

Because of insufficient refining capacity, Nigeria imports almost all the fuel it needs to function. In compensation, the government provides a subsidy on fuel imports, keeping prices as low as one-third of those in neighbouring states. This subsidy comes at a great cost to the public coffers, but by lowering the cost of transportation, it reduces the price of virtually everything in the country. In addition, a large share of the electricity used in Nigeria comes from private generators, so the subsidy allows power expenditure that would be impossible otherwise, greatly boosting productivity. Between 2009 and 2011, the amount the government paid in subsidies tripled, from \$5 billion to more than \$15 billion. Clearly, legitimate consumption did not increase at this pace during this period. On 1 January 2012, the Nigerian Government removed the subsidy. The price of fuel rose from 65 naira (\$0.41) to 140 naira (\$0.89) overnight, sparking demonstrations and a week-long, nationwide strike. Some of the subsidy was restored two weeks later, and the petrol price was set to 97 naira (\$0.61) per litre. From January through April 2012, the Nigerian National Assembly conducted a series of investigations. It found:

- I. The number of fuel importers increased from six in 2006 to 140 by 2011.
- II. Many of these new “importers” had no permits, no storage tanks and no experience in oil trading.
- III. While Nigerians consumed only 35 million litres of fuel per day, subsidies were being provided for 59 million litres per day.
- IV. \$6 billion had been defrauded from the country’s Petroleum Support Fund in 2011.

A very wide range of techniques were used to defraud the fund, from crude embezzlement to methods that may be technically legal. For example, it appears that some importers collected the subsidy through “round-tripping”, i.e., exporting and reimporting the same fuel.

¹¹² Nigerian subsidized fuel is sold throughout the region. On the implications outside Nigeria see United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). *Transnational Organized Crime in the Sahel: A Threat Assessment – Fuel Trafficking*, forthcoming.

¹¹³ See Masami Kojima. ‘Petroleum Product Pricing and Complementary Policies: Experience of 65 Developing Countries Since 2009,’ World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 6,396, April 2013, accessible at <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/13201>.

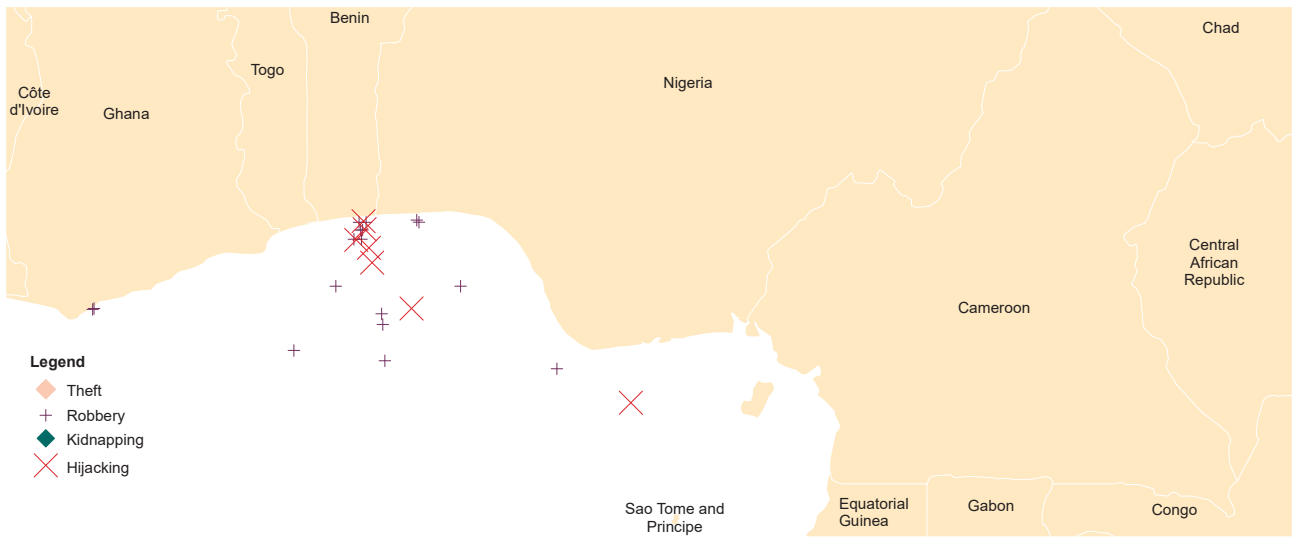
¹¹⁴ Text originally published in UNODC. *Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment*, 2013, pp. 46-47, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/West_Africa_TOCTA_2013_EN.pdf.

countries were also reliant on smuggled subsidized fuel, this caused prices throughout the region to spike. These increased prices could have motivated the wave of hijacking for fuel theft.

The data show that a very large share of the vessels targeted for hijacking during this period were fuel

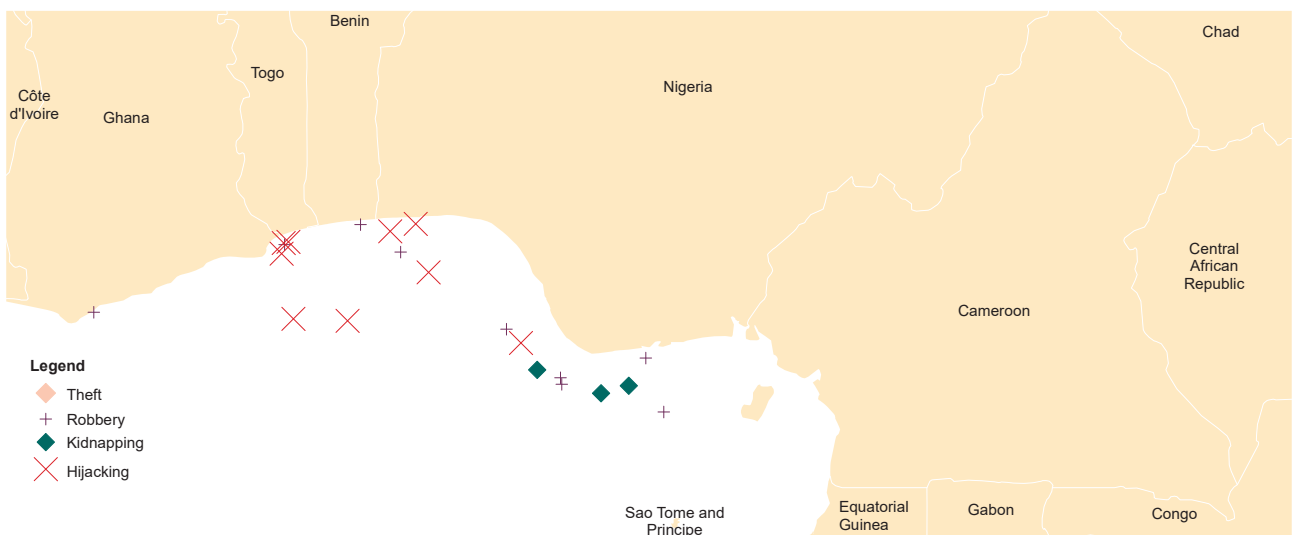
tankers travelling in the territorial waters of Benin Republic and Togo (see Maps 5-8 below).¹¹⁵ Since some of these vessels may have been engaged in subsidy fraud (see Box 3 above) or other forms of smuggling, and were therefore less prone to reporting, the true number of cases may have been much higher.

Map 5: Successful maritime attacks in 2011



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

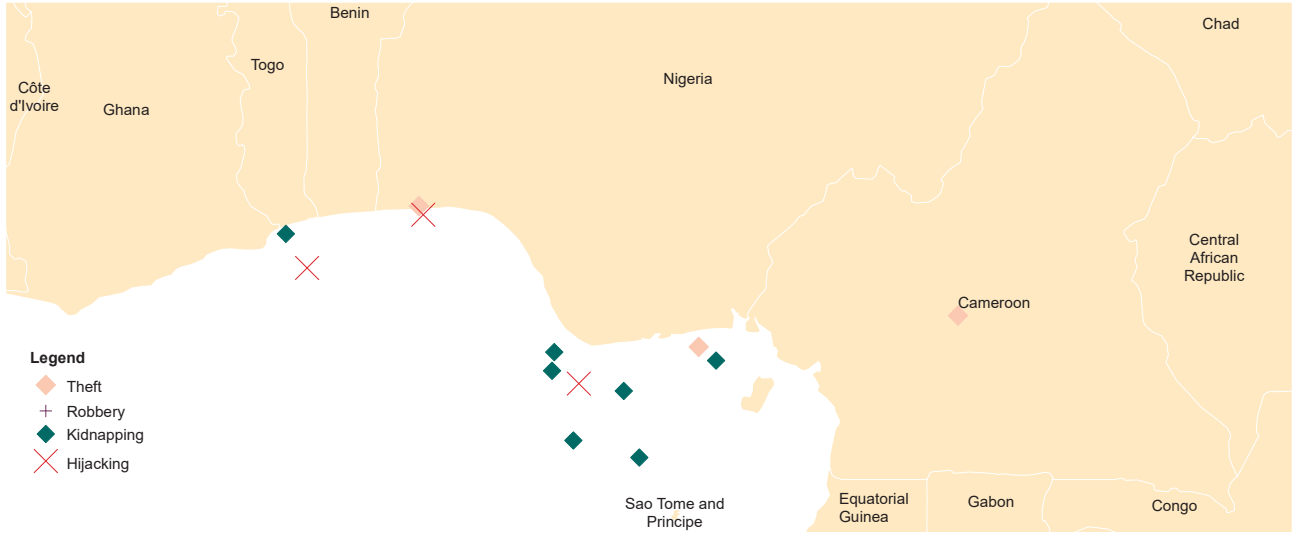
Map 6: Successful maritime attacks in 2012



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

115 UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

Map 7: Successful maritime attacks in 2013



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

Map 8: Successful maritime attacks in 2014



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

2.4.3 Phase Three: Kidnapping for ransom (2015-2020)

The shift from hijacking to kidnapping may be related in part to a global decline in the price of oil. Between June 2014 and December 2014, global oil prices halved, from over \$100 per barrel to less than \$50 a barrel, dropping further to just over \$25 per barrel by the beginning of 2016.¹¹⁶ According to experts from Nigerian law enforcement and security sector agencies at a review workshop for this report, the shift was additionally influenced by disputes between the hijackers and their mainland sponsors. Unhappy with terms, possibly due to declining prices, the hijackers decided to hold the crews of some vessels for ransom.¹¹⁷ This was found to be more lucrative than oil theft and the crime gained momentum.

Unlike in Somalia, the entire vessel was not necessarily taken. Rather, crew members were often removed from their vessel and transported in the attackers' vessel to a riverine camp.¹¹⁸ The number of seafarers abducted rose sharply between 2015 and 2020 (see Figure 15) and two other trends can be seen, indicative of a more systematic approach to the crime:

- I. The kidnapers were increasingly targeting foreigners, with the share of foreigners amongst victims of kidnapping increasing from 38 per cent in 2015 to 89 per cent in 2020 (see Figure 16).
- II. The number of victims kidnapped per incident increased, from just over three victims per incident in 2015 to just over six in 2020 (see Figure 17).

Figure 15: Successful maritime attacks by type of crime, 2015-2021 (203 offences)

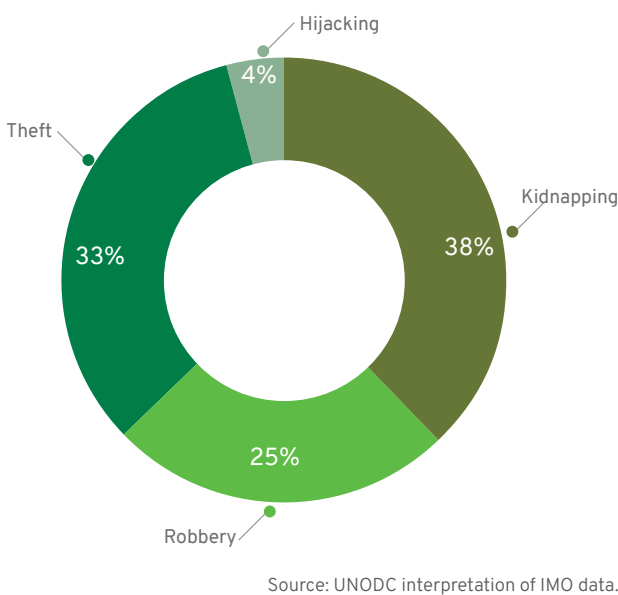
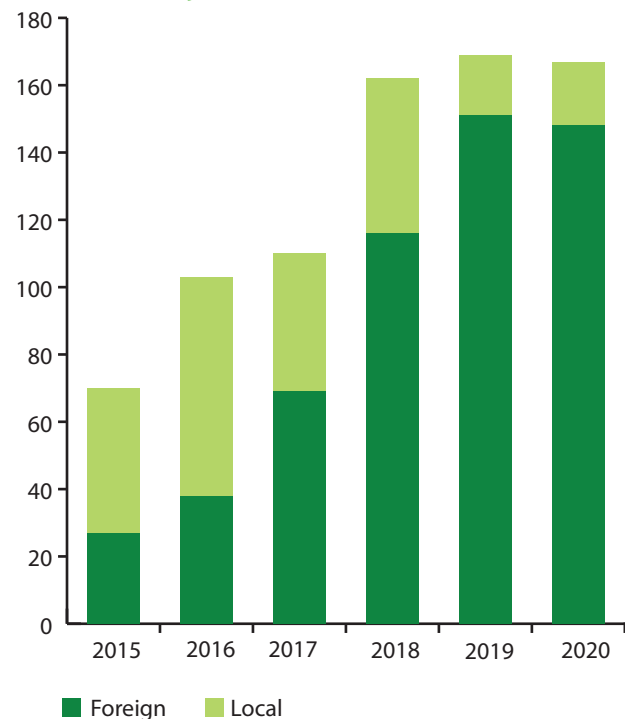


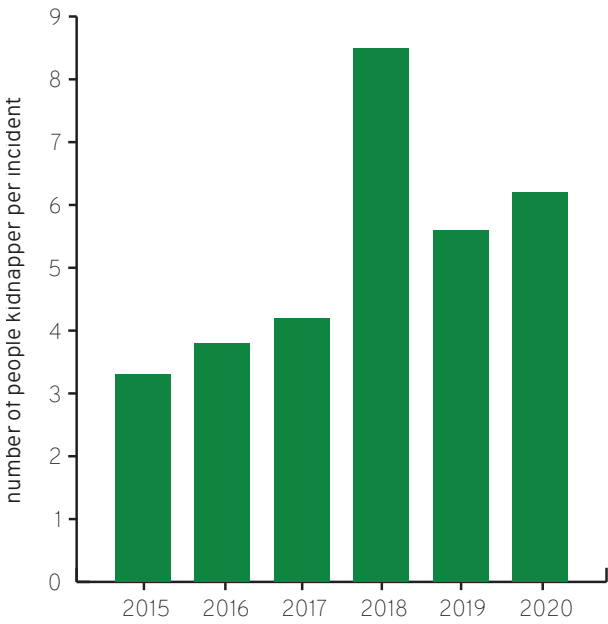
Figure 16: Number of kidnapping incidents tied to maritime criminals based in Nigeria, foreign and national victims, 2015-2020



Source: UNODC¹¹⁹

116 International Energy Agency, Key World Energy Statistics 2021, September 2021, accessible at <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/52f66a88-0b63-4ad2-94a5-29d36e864b82/KeyWorldEnergyStatistics2021.pdf>.
 117 Technical Review Workshop, Suleja, Niger State, Nigeria, 23-26 May 2022.
 118 For example, according to data by the IMO, there were three kidnapping incidents in West Africa in December 2020. In all three, the hostages were taken from their ship by the maritime criminals while at sea.
 119 UNODC, Pirates of the Niger Delta: Between Brown and Blue Waters, 2021, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/res/piracy/index_html/UNODC_GMCP_Pirates_of_the_Niger_Delta_between_brown_and_blue_waters.pdf.

Figure 17: Number of people kidnapped per incident, 2015-2020

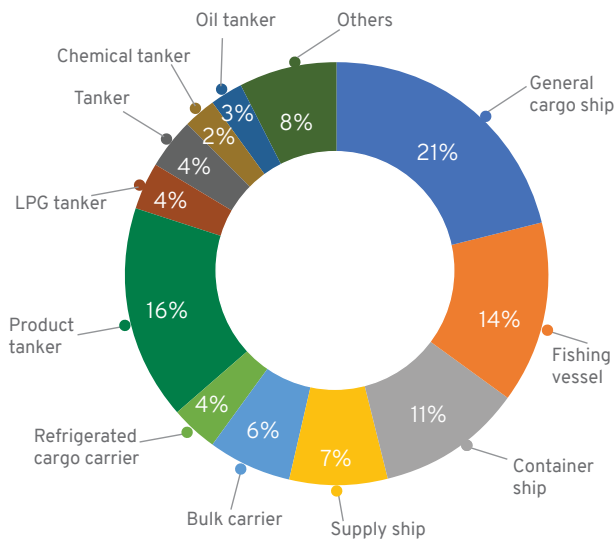


Source: UNODC¹²⁰

Because the object was the crew, not the cargo, a wider range of vessels was vulnerable to attack (see Figure 18). General cargo, fishing vessels, container ships, supply ships, bulk carriers and refrigerated containers comprised the bulk of the vessels targeted in reported successful kidnapping attacks during this period.

As highlighted in the UNODC study *Pirates of the Niger Delta*, the total amount of ransom paid also increased during this period. This may have been partly a result of demanding ransom for each crew member held, rather than a lump sum for all of them. In 2008, when an average of three victims were taken, the average total ransom was about \$25,000. In 2016, the average number of victims was five, with average total ransom increasing to \$150,000. In 2020, the average number had increased to six and a half, and the average total ransom to half a million dollars. The abduction time in the more recent attacks was about four or five weeks.¹²¹

Figure 18: Types of vessel targeted in kidnapping attacks (1,274 incidents), 2015-2021



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

120 Ibid.

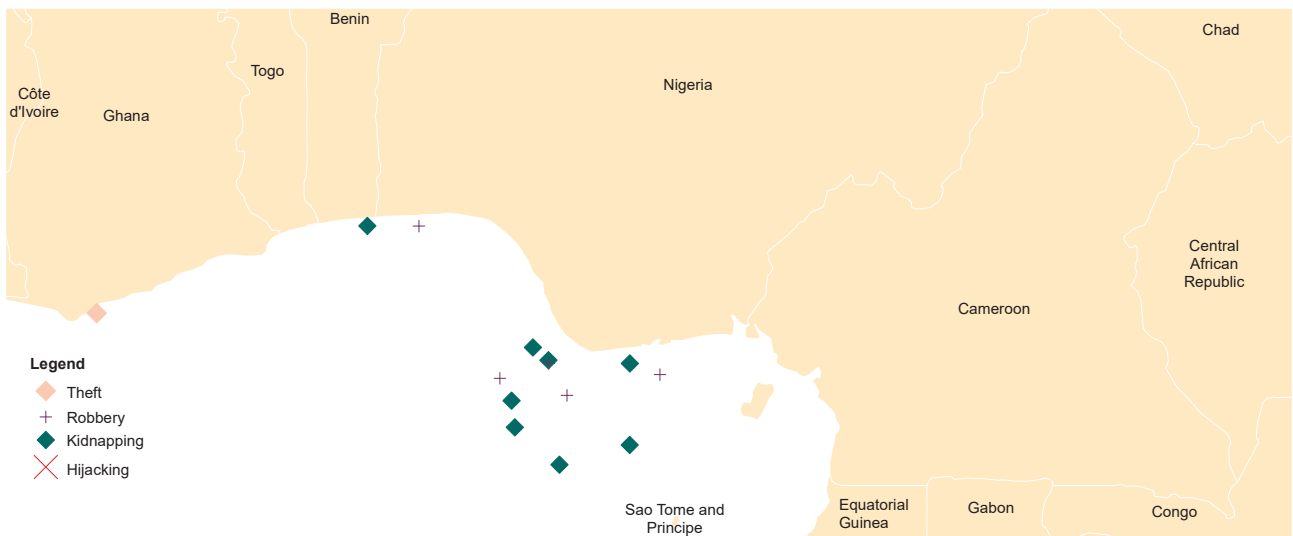
121 Ibid.

Map 9: Successful maritime attacks in 2015



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

Map 10: Successful maritime attacks in 2016



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

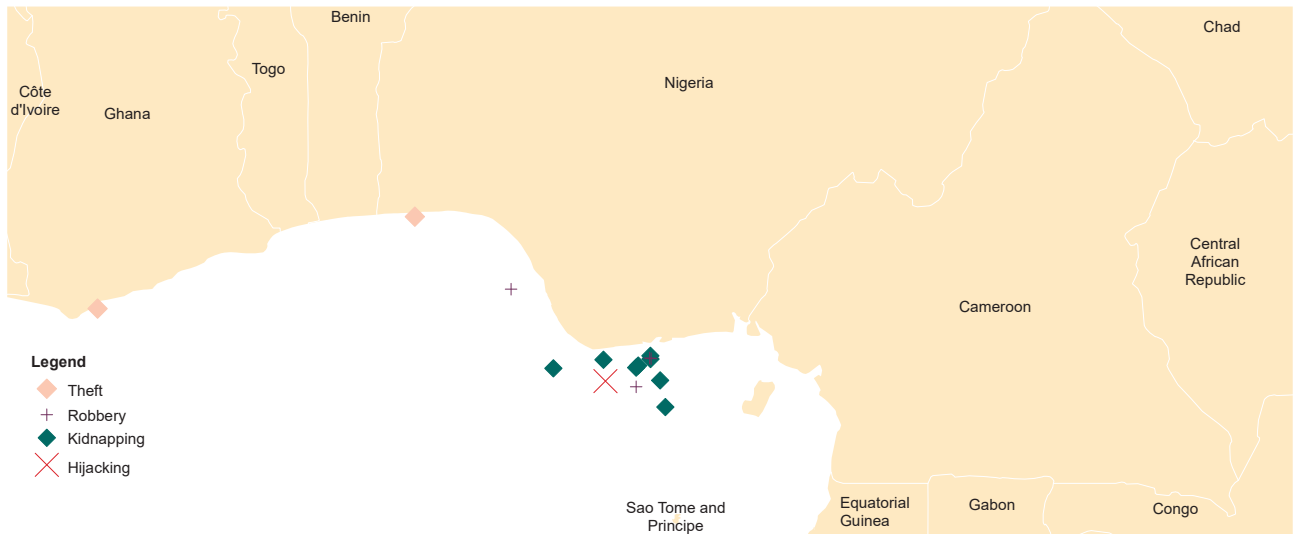
As is clear from the maps, the range of the attacks has also increased, with maritime criminals using dual engines and carrying additional fuel.¹²² Because many of these attacks occurred in international waters, they fell under the UNCLOS definition of

piracy. In the abovementioned UNODC study, it was estimated that only a rather limited number of groups are capable of carrying out these long-range attacks, with perhaps six groups operating presently.¹²³

122 UNODC. *Pirates of the Niger Delta: Between Brown and Blue Waters*, 2021, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/res/piracy/index_html/UNODC_GMCP_Pirates_of_the_Niger_Delta_between_brown_and_blue_waters.pdf.

123 Ibid.

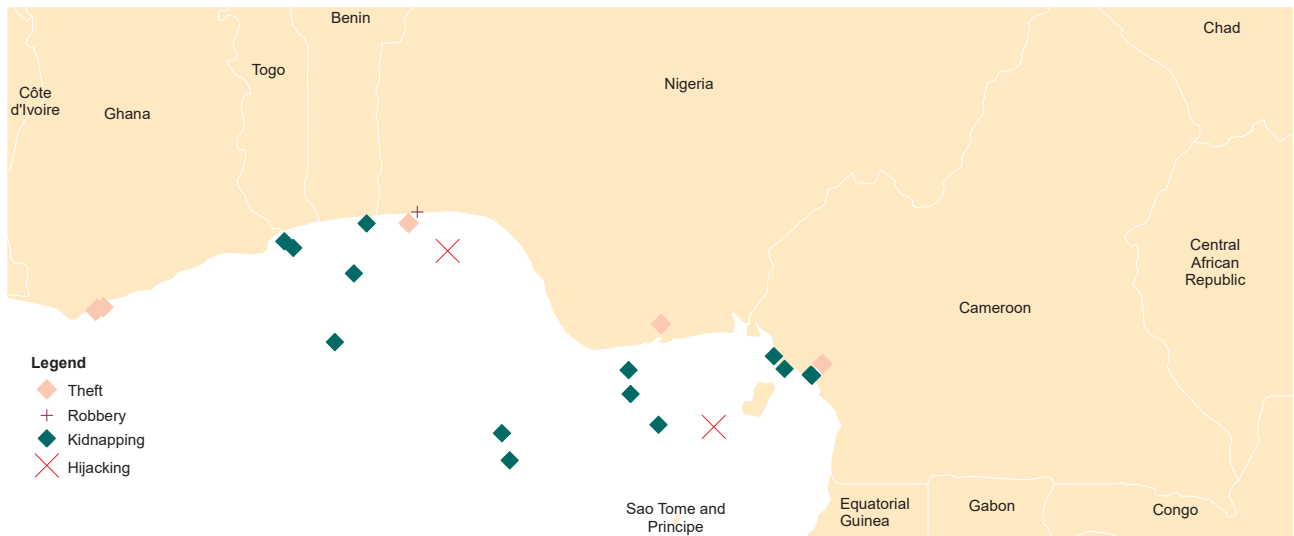
Map 11: Successful maritime attacks in 2017



Map 12: Successful maritime attacks in 2018

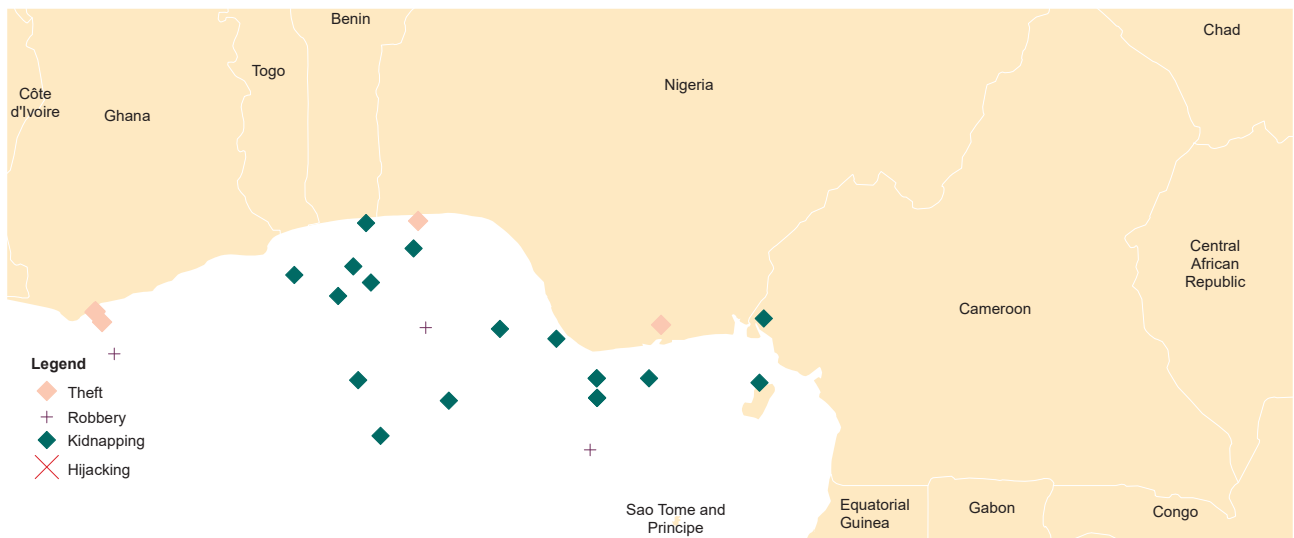


Map 13: Successful maritime attacks in 2019



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

Map 14: Successful maritime attacks in 2020



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

2.4.4 A fourth phase?

In 2021, the number of successful attacks dropped steeply, from 86 incidents in 2020 to just 32. And from January to August 2022, only three incidents were recorded. This massive drop in the number of attacks has been attributed to several possible factors, including the positive impact of piracy convictions in Nigeria and Togo in July 2021, the deterrent effects of increased naval patrols by the Nigerian Navy, coupled with improved cooperation with regional counterparts. The deterrence effect has further been amplified by the deployment of non-Gulf of Guinea navies, including through the continuous presence of naval assets under the European Union Coordinated Maritime Presences concept and the regular patrols of other internal navies.¹²⁴

Representatives of Nigerian law enforcement and security sector agencies that attended a review workshop for this assessment credited a recent increase in the technology and personnel dedicated to addressing this issue.¹²⁵ In particular, two new long-range detection systems have been brought on-line, allowing surveillance of Nigeria's coastal space. It was similar target hardening that led to the decline of maritime crime in Somalia,¹²⁶ so this explanation seems plausible.

However, an additional factor may be the conflict in Ukraine, which had led to a spike in global oil and fuel prices. Since many of the maritime criminals have a close relationship with illegal oil bunkering groups (see Discussion of the research findings below), they may have suspended their kidnapping activities to focus on profiting from these increased prices. If so, it is unclear why they have not returned to the hijacking activities they displayed during the oil price spikes of Phase Two.

2.5 Discussion of the research findings

2.5.1 Nature of the maritime criminal groups

In the interviews, respondents spoke at length about their backgrounds and reasons for joining maritime criminal groups, most of which centred on the lack of employment opportunities, including for people with university degrees and skills relevant to the oil industry.¹²⁷ Many interviewed emphasized the diversity of people in their groups in terms of education, gender and age.¹²⁸ Some groups claimed all male membership, while others included women, generally as camp supporters or as spies:

“ We have women working with us. They serve as informers and we send them to the jetties and workshops where the white men are working, to go befriend them and give us information about what is happening. After some time, they will tell us what is happening there: the number of soldiers that are there, the number of ships leaving Nigeria for Togo, Iran, Cameroon, Australia and all other places. Sometimes, we will send them to the jetty. They will tell us how many boats they are loading from there, how many gun boats they have at the river. And they sometimes enter the boat with the white men and then inform us by calls or text messages so that we could block them and kidnap them to our various places.¹²⁹ ”

Some people operating on the waterways joined groups defensively, to insulate themselves from predation, similar to cult membership. Others saw criminal activity as a way of extorting further payments from the government. Some interviewees revealed that government payoffs may be seen as one of the few sources of economic hope in the region:

124 'Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of

125 Guinea and its underlying causes', United Nations Security Council, 1 November 2022, accessible at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/666/09/PDF/N2266609.pdf?OpenElement>.

126 Technical review workshop, Suleja, Niger State, Nigeria, 23-26 May 2022.

127 See UN Economic and Social Council, Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ). World crime trends and emerging issues and responses in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice, 7 March 2017, UN Doc. E/CN.15/2017/10.

128 Interviews IDs 22R, 14R.

129 Interviews IDs 4R, 6B, 11D, 26B.

“ As a [maritime crime group] member, I know I am getting somewhere. I believe that all the militants [whose names you know] started from somewhere. And I know that one day I will have support from the Federal Government that will take me to my further destination. I am receiving amnesty, but just 65,000-naira amnesty. If I get business, if someone can give me 30 million naira to start up the business I want, then I will stop this.¹³⁰ ”

2.5.2 Organizational structure

UNTOC defines an “organized criminal group” as

“ ...a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.¹³¹ ”

Under this definition, most groups engaged in maritime crime in Nigeria would be considered organized criminal groups, as they almost always involve three or more persons who interact for a period of time to commit the serious crimes of armed robbery at sea or piracy for the purposes of gaining money.

There appear to be many different types of organizations involved in maritime crime, all operating in parallel. Some show all the characteristics of classic organized criminal groups, with participants seasoned in multiple crimes, while others appear more opportunistic. Many coastal young men have some maritime skills, and the low barriers to entering this market are manifest in the diversity of groups afloat. Some crews appear to be comprised of independent specialists, perhaps affiliated through cult membership, who work together when mutually convenient:

“ One thing about sea piracy is that we don’t have specific numbers on piracy. I can inform different persons about a sea operation and once the boat is full to capacity, then we are good to go. We just look for people that are willing to embark on each particular operation and then we proceed after taking oaths.¹³² ”

In contrast, some of the 40 respondents reported belonging to standing groups with a fixed hierarchical structure. In some focus groups, the participants identified themselves as “number one” or “number four”, referring to their rank in this hierarchy. These groups held the joint resources needed for mounting attacks. Within these groups, the resources gained through successful attacks were distributed based on rank:

“ We see ourselves as soldiers – we have Commander, we have Captain – and we organize our hierarchy according to what we have in the Army. We have the armorer in charge of guns. When we return from operation, we submit our weapons to the armorer and he will check them, service them and ensure that weapons and bullets are readily available when needed.¹³³ ”

Yet other respondents reported coming from larger parent communities based in the creeks, engaging in a kind of subsistence piracy. These communities are networked together, with regular communication between the leadership. Individual members set to sea as needed to provide for the community. Community members include women, children and older men whose role is to support, rather than participate in, attack missions.¹³⁴ The longstanding groups reported providing not only security to their home communities, but also other forms of development support. Some were transparent about the instrumental nature of this relationship:

130 Interview ID 4R.

131 Interview ID 12D.

132 UNTOC, 15 November 2000, UNTS vol. 2225, p. 209, Article 2(a). The meanings of the terms “serious crime” and “structured group” are laid out in Article 2(b) and (c), respectively.

133 Interview ID 6B.

134 Interview ID 4 R.

“ Within our village areas, we don’t do anything from that area. We help to develop the area... so that they go like us. So that if anything happens, if we run, they can save us. If we go steal, once we return, we gave money to all the villages around...empower students to go to school, buy your uniform and books...¹³⁵ ”

The relationship between groups was alternately reported as highly territorial or mainly cooperative:

“ There is no particular area [that we control]. We deal with information. Sometimes we might leave our areas and go to a very far distance and make operations then come back to our areas. People may even be thinking that people close to them are the ones operating, whereas we are the ones that carried out such operations. Sometimes, we have clashes with other gangs and we shootout and retreat, whereas other times we reconverge and collaborate again.¹³⁶ ”

The diversity of the groups was also reflected in their relationship to the cults. Some groups were strongly identified with a particular cult,¹³⁷ while many others spoke about how the maritime groups combined members of many cults, including those who would normally be rivals. In addition, many respondents denied cult membership entirely.¹³⁸

Similar differences were expressed in relation to militant groups. Some claimed to be directed by members of these groups, others merely suggested a common background, while still others distanced themselves:

“ When I started 10 years ago, when I was 10 years old, that was when John Togo [ex-militant leader] teach me how to shoot gun in my community...Many ex-militant work with us. We are the ex-militant. We are the sea pirates. We are working together.¹³⁹ ”

Similarly, some participants claimed their group had financial sponsors, while others denied this. Spoils could be divided evenly or according to hierarchy. Some groups had prohibitions against flashy spending to avoid attention, while others made clear that having money to spend on alcohol, drugs and partying was part of the lifestyle. One gang leader reported regularly entertaining at the most expensive hotel in Port Harcourt. Others invested their money in their families or other businesses, and some put it in the bank.

2.5.3 Main activities; in particular, the oil trade and kidnapping for ransom

Interview participants reported great heterogeneity in rules and activities. Some had a clear proscription against killing or rape, while others said they embraced violence. Some specialized in a particular form of maritime crime, while others were more opportunistic.

“ We rob boats and dispossess passengers of their belongings, our treasures, all the valuables. Sometimes we also take the boat and the boat engines which we use to run our operations then sometimes abandon the boats after the operation. There are some vessels that we attack, and we realize they don’t have a lot of products onboard, so we take our decisions on the platform there. But if we find out that they have a lot of products, we siphon and sell. We had to adopt changes because sometimes we attack vessels or equipment and nothing comes in as ransom or negotiation, so we change our priority and then rob all valuables on board, both the equipment and crew members.¹⁴⁰ ”

¹³⁵ Interview ID 14 R.

¹³⁶ Interview ID 11D.

¹³⁶ Interview ID 24 B.

¹³⁷ On cultism see Chapter 1 above.

¹³⁸ Cf. Interview ID 26B (“We don’t discriminate, anybody can be part of the group, whether cultists or not.”); Interview ID 24R (“...you need to part of a cult first, like Iceland.”); Interview ID 12 D (“I am a cultist. I am an Iceland member, full-time Iceland member...When I go to the sea, as I be Iceland, I have seen another Iceland member that belonged to another sea pirate group. The gang itself is not a cult group, but the members might be one, or two, or different cult groups.”); Interview ID 4R (“I am no one. I am not a cultist, but I am a very stubborn street man, and I don’t like cultism...When it comes to piracy in the camp, you will hide your identity as a cult member. We will not operate it there, neither drink any drink that any particular cult group drink.”).

¹³⁹ Interview ID 11D.

¹⁴⁰ Interview 6B.

According to some interviewees, some attacks were unplanned while others were targeted.¹⁴¹ Leads for targeted attacks were reported by interviewees to come from a variety of sources, including political connections,¹⁴² community members,¹⁴³ deck hands,¹⁴⁴ fishermen¹⁴⁵ or ex-militants.¹⁴⁶

Oil trade

As the primary source of income for the country, it is not surprising that the oil industry is a popular target of predation. There were allegations by interviewees that their groups originally sold protection to the oil industry, but turned to piracy when this failed:

“ We also provide escort services for companies, and everything goes smoothly...but those opportunities are not available anymore because they condemn us sometimes, saying we are criminals and deny us of what belongs to us. These things are making us go crazy because we are trying to do something good, but they are condemning us.¹⁴⁷ ”

Some respondents claimed direct involvement in illegal oil bunkering or refining, with one group even claiming that “piracy” was a vehicle for getting started in the illegal oil trade:

“The normal business that we normally do is bunkering business...We have a point [facility to syphon crude from the pipes]. We also have our own pots [artisanal refineries]...You have to start somewhere, because the bunkering business deserves money. You can't do it just so. We started...sea pirates stuff for us to gather some money to start the business.¹⁴⁸ ”

More commonly, though, the bunkerers were the targets of extortion or robbery.¹⁴⁹ The respondents justified taxing the industry because, they argued, they ensured that the security forces would not interfere with the illegal oil industry.¹⁵⁰

One interviewee claimed that Nigerian groups escorted foreign bunkering vessels to ensure that they were not hijacked, sometimes in cooperation with military vessels:

“ Sometimes, we do escort. Like some of these people will come from Ghana, Benin, Togo. They will bring their vessels and load them and ask us to escort the vessels. Sometimes, the army will escort the vessels to some point and return back because they understand [the foreign vessel is] with us, then we will push them from there to their destinations. Some of these people come from Ghana and they know us. We have contact and we get help from them. Like all these bunkerers from outside countries, they render help to us, so from these we have support from other countries.¹⁵¹ ”

Some interviewees claimed to be involved in pipeline surveillance groups or other bodies in place to protect the oil trade, including vigilante groups.¹⁵² In addition to extortion, a few interviewed groups reported a focus on hijacking vessels involved in the illegal oil trade. Some claimed their hijacking targets were politically directed.¹⁵³

141 Interviews IDs 6B, 26B.

142 Interview ID B5: “Most times it is politicians that give us information we use to operate on sea during attack, such as the vessels to attack and who the owners of the vessels are.”

143 Interview ID R24: “I don't disturb our community so they can give us information and they know that I am a pirate.”

144 Interviews IDs D10 (“We attack fishing trawlers once in a while in the sea and we move only with connection, and most times the workers are the ones giving us information, and they have a percentage in the operation.”); and D11 (“Fishing trawlers we don't attack them much...It is the workers who are the ones giving us connection. They communicate to us through phone call and text message, and they can give us any information. Yes, they have a percentage when we finish the operation.”).

145 Interview ID R26: “Some of the fishermen are our members and they give us information or sometimes, we hang around for some hours and can have something.”

146 Interview ID R24: “The ex-militant knows about us but their own is a high level. They call us to give us information and we share the money.”

147 Interview 23B.

148 Interview 14R.

149 Interview IDs 6B, 14R.

150 Interview 4R.

151 Ibid.

152 Interview IDs 24 R, 4R. According to the Sustainable Development Network, “Surveillance contractors are ostensibly tasked with monitoring sections of oil pipeline, identifying any breaks and protecting them from vandalism. However, the concept of pipeline surveillance contracts in the Niger Delta is a misnomer. They rarely involve any actual surveillance but are used as a disguised ‘payment for peace’ to agitator groups and as patronage for political allies.” SDN. ‘Pipeline Surveillance Contracts in the Niger Delta’, SDN Policy Brief, 2019, accessible at <https://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Pipeline-surveillance.-Brief.-2019.pdf>.

153 Interview ID 13D.

The trade of oil at sea for firearms and ammunition was mentioned repeatedly across interviews. There were claims of connections to foreign militant groups, particularly in Cameroon, highlighting the interplay between maritime crime and conflict in the region:

“ There are so many soldiers within or outside Nigeria, especially dismissed soldiers, that are not happy. They connect and supply us any quantity of bullets needed. Besides, we also exchange crude with bullets from other people. Like this year, 2020, Cameroon invited us to come and help them because of the problem they had with Southern Cameroon. With the price, we also demanded some bullets from them.¹⁵⁴ ”

Kidnapping for ransom

Those interviewees involved in kidnapping ranged from specialized groups to the more opportunistic. Some groups appeared to search at random for potential victims, while others reported operating on tips received from a variety of sources, including maritime workers, political connections and security forces:

“ If we don't have anywhere to storm to collect cash money, we kidnap those big men. Whether black man or white man, if we see, we can kidnap...we move only with connection. And most times the workers are the ones giving us information, and they have a percentage in the operation.¹⁵⁵ ”

Some respondents claimed a political basis for their kidnappings, targeting white people as a way of signalling discontent to the government:

“ Our target is to abduct the white men, so if we see a white man, we will not forgive him. To let the government know that we are not happy and that when we kidnap the white men, government would like to pay us. The person we kidnap will be the one to use his or her phone to call the person that will pay his or her ransom. We get...the island where we will dump the kidnapped person. If the money does not come, fish and crocodile will eat you.¹⁵⁶ ”

Others made clear that although they were aware of kidnapping, they chose not to engage in this activity.¹⁵⁷

2.5.4 Relationship with “politicians” and the security services

Some interviewees claimed their groups were directed by prominent political figures or that these figures provided them with guidance, information and protection. As in the chapter on cultism, respondents referred to these contacts as “politicians”, but it is unclear exactly to whom they were referring. Also like the cultists, some of the interviewees said they worked for the “politicians” during elections, but once the elections were finished, they were forgotten. A few reported kidnapping political opponents on behalf of political candidates and trafficking firearms through the riverways for use in electoral violence. In the words of one respondent:

“ Sometimes the government normally use us... to do some security job, some dirty job for them...and they pay us...Politicians...make you angry because after using us, they still dump us...They don't come back again. Just go to Abuja and stay. Next election, they come again. That is why you hear some of them are assassinated. Not because somebody really need them to die, but...we have to clear them off so that the next person can also get his own chance.¹⁵⁸ ”

154 Interview ID 4R.

155 Interview ID 11D.

156 Interview ID 4R.

157 Interview ID 12D.

158 Interview ID 14R.

While some interviewed groups reported avoiding contact with security services, others appeared not to take them seriously. Security services were reportedly bribed for very little money, even paid in cell phone charging cards. Some said the security forces had no interest in confrontation and pretended not to notice maritime crime.¹⁶⁰

Interviews revealed other forms of corruption that do not involve financial benefits. Some interviewees claimed security force members as allies or part of their group, through cult affiliation or otherwise:

“ Some of [the security forces] do normally work with us. Some of them are one of us...I have some of my boys that are in the army, some are in the navy, some are in the police force, and they are still one of us, so they work with us.¹⁶¹ ”

Several interviewees reported getting operational information or weaponry from the security services.¹⁶² Other groups actively pursued security forces to rob them of their guns.¹⁶³

2.6 Conclusions and key findings

This research has attempted to bring some clarity to the phenomenon of maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea:

- I. Maritime crime in Nigeria appears to have been rooted in unemployment and environmental grievances. Fishermen, unable to make a living in overfished and contaminated waters, began preying on maritime commercial flows, both for subsistence and as a form of protest.
- II. Targeting the oil industry caused Nigerian maritime crime to become entangled with both illegal oil bunkering and the militant campaigns waged in the 1990s and 2000s.
- III. Like the cultists, the respondents for this chapter appear to be assuming the monopoly on violence in the insecure areas where they reside, charging illegal oil bunkering operations a “tax” for their protection. The bunkering operations were also targeted for predation, especially during the fuel price boom of 2011-2015. Many of the changes in the nature of the maritime attacks over the years can be explained in terms of oil price trends.
- IV. The respondents interviewed for this chapter also described a similar relationship to authorities as the cultists did. They claimed to be involved in electoral manipulation and to receive information for targeting attacks from people on the inside of business and government. They said that those governmental authorities who were not directing the attacks could be paid off or intimidated into tolerating their operations.

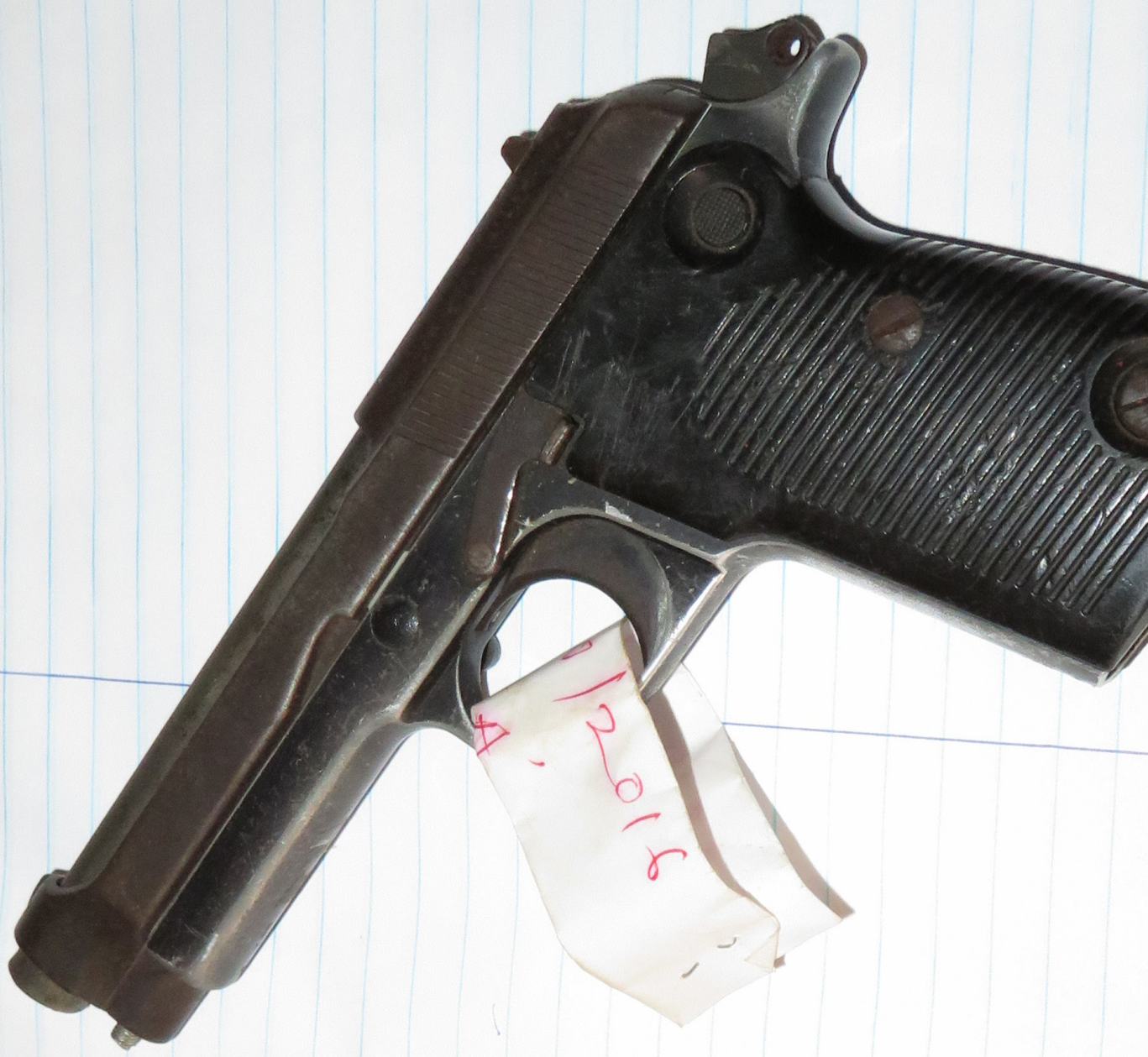
159 Interview ID 23R.

160 Interview ID 4R.

161 Interview ID 14R.

162 Interview ID 11D.

163 Interview ID 12D.



SP. NASIRY S. AHMED
INSPEKTOR SUPRADO HARJATI

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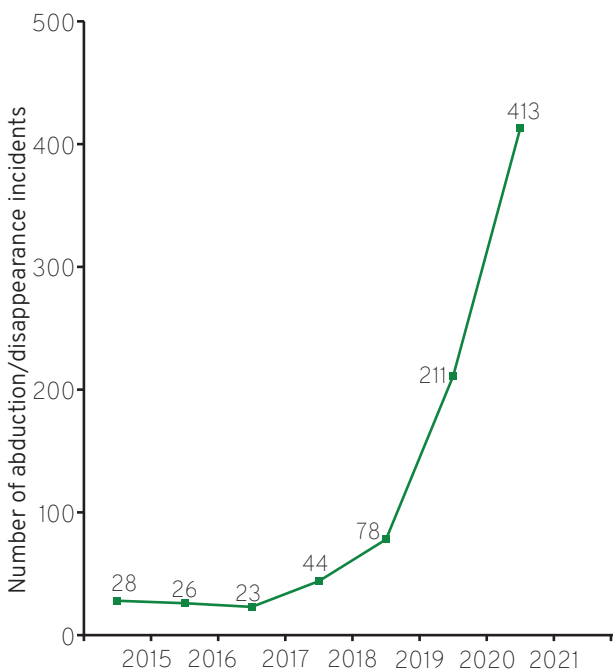
3. Kidnapping

3.1 Introduction

While kidnappings at sea may be in decline, the same cannot be said for kidnappings on land. Based on data from ACLED, the number of kidnapping events reported in open sources more than doubled between 2019 and 2020, and then almost doubled again in 2021 (see Figure 19).¹⁶⁴

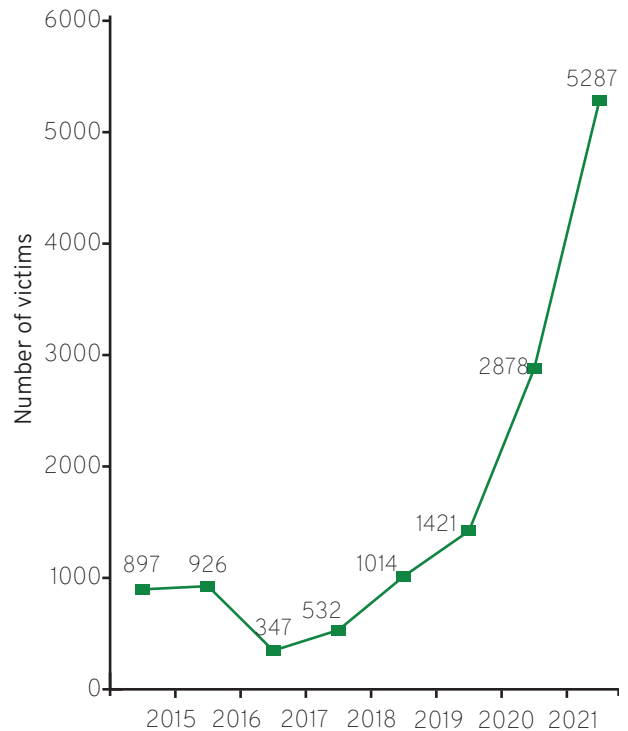
These data refer to events, not the total number of people taken. While official counts of the numbers of victims are not available, data from the Nigeria Security Tracker of the Council on Foreign Relations suggest that the number of victims also increased five-fold between 2018 and 2021 and that 2022 should be close to 2021 (see Figure 20).¹⁶⁵

Figure 19: Number of abduction/disappearance events in Nigeria, 2015-2021



Source: ACLED.

Figure 20: Number of kidnapping victims in Nigeria, 2014-2021



Source: Council on Foreign Relations.¹⁶⁶

164 ACLED, accessible at <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool>.

165 That is, 13 victims per day in 2022 as of 22 September, compared to 14 in 2021.

166 Council on Foreign Relations. 'Nigeria Security Tracker', accessible at <https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>.

3.2 Definition of terms

Under the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes, “kidnapping” is defined as:

“Unlawful detainment and taking away of a person or persons against their will (including through the use of force, threat, fraud or enticement) for the purpose of demanding an illicit gain, any other economic gain or other material benefit for their liberation, or in order to oblige someone to do or not to do something.¹⁶⁷”

This definition encompasses kidnappings for ransom, for prisoner exchange and for trafficking in persons. In Nigerian criminal law, kidnapping is defined as:

“Any person who (1) unlawfully imprisons any person, and takes him out of Nigeria without his consent; or (2) unlawfully imprisons any person within Nigeria in such a manner as to prevent him from applying to court for his release or from discovering to any other person the place where he is imprisoned, or in such a manner as to prevent any person entitled to have access to him from discovering the place where he is imprisoned...¹⁶⁸”

While this definition makes no reference to motivation and therefore includes all involuntary takings of people, motives for kidnappings in Nigeria may vary and often seem mixed. For example:

- I. Some may be intended to extort a ransom, including some kidnappings by groups that claim to be politically motivated.
- II. Some may be executed by political actors for the purposes of garnering publicity for a cause, fomenting social unrest and embarrassing the government.

- III. Some may be used to extort concessions from the government, including the meeting of political demands or for negotiating “prisoner exchange”.
- IV. Some may be perpetrated for the purposes of trafficking in persons, including for armed-group recruitment, forced labour, sexual exploitation or ritual purposes.

Kidnappings can furthermore be differentiated by their number of victims. While abductions of a single victim can be carried out by a smaller group of people, mass kidnappings are often associated with non-state armed groups and, in many cases, the distinction between political and financial objectives is unclear. For example, over a quarter of the abduction/forced disappearance events recorded by ACLED between 2015 and 2022 took place in the North-West geopolitical zone of the country, where much of the violence is associated with banditry, a criminal activity. The banditry itself, however, is taking place in the context of pastoralist-agrarian conflict, a political issue.¹⁶⁹ As discussed below, these groups frequently demand ransoms, which would classify them as organized criminal groups under UNTOC.¹⁷⁰

3.3 Methodology

To supplement the publicly available information on kidnapping in Nigeria, UNODC conducted 10 in-depth interviews with convicted criminals for kidnapping in correctional centres in Abuja, Benin City, Enugu, Jos and Kano between June and September 2021.¹⁷¹ In addition, two expert interviews were conducted in November 2021 with representatives from the Nigerian DSS.¹⁷² The interviewed convicts were all male, had Nigerian nationality and were between the ages of 36 and 44. While the kidnappings described in these interviews do not comprise a representative sample, they anecdotally illustrate this form of the crime in Nigeria.

167 UNODC. International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS), Version 1.0, Vienna, March 2015, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/ICCS/ICCS_English_2016_web.pdf.

168 Criminal Code of Nigeria (1990), Chapter 31, Section 364.

169 See International Crisis Group. ‘Violence in Nigeria’s North-West: Rolling Back the Mayhem’. Africa Report No. 288, 18 May 2020, p. 10, accessible at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/288-violence-nigerias-north-west-rolling-back-mayhem>.

170 UNTOC, 15 November 2000, UNTS vol. 2225, p. 209, Article 2(a). On the definition of organized criminal groups see the Introduction of this report.

171 Interviews with convicted inmates in Suleja Medium Custodial Centre, Abuja, FCT, on 3 September 2021 (respondent IDs ABJ-05-4-AR-SUL and ABJ-05-6-AR-SUL); Ojo Medium Security Custodial Centre Benin, Edo State, on 17 August 2021 (respondent IDs BEN-02-1-KID, BEN-02-2-KID; BEN-02-3-KID; BEN-02-05) and 19 August 2021 (respondent ID BEN-04-4-KID); Enugu Custodial Centre, Enugu State, on 11 June 2021 (respondent ID ENU-2-3-KID); Jos Custodial Centre, Jos, Plateau State, on 24 June 2021 (respondent ID JOS-04-1-KID); and Kano Medium Custodial Centre, Kano State, on 1 July 2021 (respondent ID KAN-04-5-KID). The tenth respondent committed the crime on his own, and his interview was therefore not considered for this organized crime assessment.

172 Interviews with key informants, Abuja, 15 November 2021 (respondent IDs KI-E-01 and KI-E-02).

3.4 Evolution of kidnapping in Nigeria

Nigeria's kidnappings first came to international attention during the Niger Delta conflict in the 1990s. As discussed in the previous chapters on cultism and maritime crime, there is a substantial overlap between the individuals involved in militant movements and those involved in cults and maritime criminal groups today. By the mid-2000s, the prevalence of kidnapping in the Niger Delta had increased dramatically, with the Shell Petroleum Development Company alone claiming 133 of its staff had been kidnapped between 2006 and 2008,¹⁷³ although the kidnappings typically lasted only a few hours or days and victims were rarely injured or killed. The abduction of oil workers, particularly expatriates, was part of a wider attempt to draw attention to the distress in the region.¹⁷⁴ But it was also a major source of revenue for the groups and the individuals leading them.

From the late 2000s onwards, kidnappings began to be seen in other regions of the country.¹⁷⁵ For example, in 2012, two construction workers – one British and one Italian – were kidnapped by Ansaru, a terrorist group based in northeast Nigeria.¹⁷⁶ By 2013, media sources estimated 1,500 people were being kidnapped each year.¹⁷⁷

In 2014, Boko Haram abducted 276 girls from their school in the town of Chibok, Borno State.¹⁷⁸ According to statements given to the media by Boko Haram, the purpose of the kidnapping was to acquire slaves, a practice permissible under their understanding of Islam.¹⁷⁹ Boko Haram later offered to exchange the girls for Boko Haram members in custody, thereby providing an additional political motivation for the kidnapping.¹⁸⁰ Eighty girls were reportedly recovered in an exchange.¹⁸¹ According to media sources, the fact that the attack occurred in a predominately Christian village gave it additional context.¹⁸² As of September 2022, not all the girls had been recovered.¹⁸³ It is interesting to observe that this form of kidnapping for the purpose of enslavement would also fall under the definition of trafficking in persons as per Article 3(a) of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (TIP Protocol) supplementing UNTOC.¹⁸⁴

As the incidents recorded by ACLED show, more than half of the abductions/disappearances in Nigeria since 2015 have taken place in the North-West or North-Central geopolitical zones (see Figure 21).

173 See Randy Fabi. 'Lax Regulation Fuels Niger Delta Unrest: Amnesty', Reuters, 30 June 2009, accessed at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-delta-report-idUKTRE55T5YY20090630>.

174 On the origins of kidnapping in Nigeria see Akachi Odoemene. 'Evolution and Socio-Political Economy of Ransoming in Nigeria since the Late Twentieth Century', *African Economic History*, vol. 42 (2014), pp. 185-214, 187-189 and Freedom Chukwudi Onuoha and James Okolie-Osemene. 'The Evolving Threat of Kidnapping for Ransom in Nigeria', in: Oshita O. Oshita, Ikenna Mike Alumona and Freedom Chukwudi Onuoha (eds.), *Internal Security Management in Nigeria: Perspectives, Challenges and Lessons*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 233-258, pp. 237-238.

175 Odoemene. 'Evolution and Socio-Political Economy of Ransoming in Nigeria since the Late Twentieth Century', pp. 193-199; Onuoha and Okolie-Osemene, 'The Evolving Threat of Kidnapping for Ransom in Nigeria', pp. 239-241.

176 Robert Booth. 'British Hostage "likely to have been killed" in Nigeria, says William Hague', *The Guardian*, 10 March 2013, accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/10/william-hague-british-hostage-killed-nigeria>.

177 'Kidnapping: Nigeria's Fastest Growing Industry!', *The Street Journal*, 9 April 2013, cited in Onuoha and Okolie-Osemene, 'The Evolving Threat of Kidnapping for Ransom in Nigeria', p. 239.

178 See Jason Warner with Ryan O'Farrell, Héni Nsaibia and Ryan Cummings. *The Islamic State in Africa: The emergence, evolution, and future of the next Jihadist battlefield*, London, 2021, pp. 159-161.

179 See Tim Lister. 'Boko Haram: The essence of terror', CNN, 22 October 2014, accessed at <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/05/06/world/africa/nigeria-boko-haram-analysis/index.html>.

180 Jacob Zenn. 'Boko Haram and the Kidnapping of the Chibok Schoolgirls', *Counterterrorism Center Monitor*, vol. 7, no. 5 (2014), pp. 1-7.

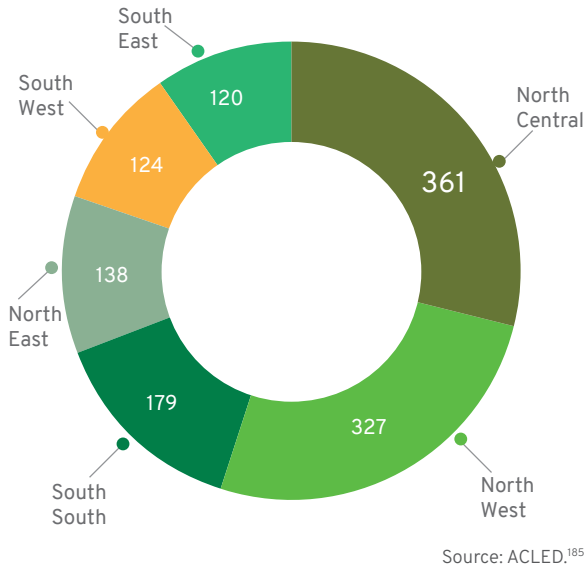
181 'Two more abducted Chibok girls freed in Nigeria, military says', *Al Jazeera*, 22 June 2022, accessed at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/22/two-kidnapped-chibok-girls-freed-in-nigeria-after-eight-years>.

182 'Nigeria Chibok abductions: What we know', *BBC News*, 8 May 2017, accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32299943>.

183 'Two more abducted Chibok girls freed in Nigeria, military says', *Al Jazeera*, 22 June 2022, accessed at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/22/two-kidnapped-chibok-girls-freed-in-nigeria-after-eight-years>.

184 See definition p. 138 of this report.

Figure 21: Abduction/disappearance events in Nigeria by region, 2015-15 September 2022



Mass kidnappings, targeting in particular schools in northern Nigeria, have been on the increase in recent times. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), between 2014 and 2022, a total of 1,436 school children and 17 teachers were abducted from schools and 16 school children lost their lives. Moreover, the closure of 11,536 schools in December 2020 in reaction to the abductions impacted the education of approximately 1.3 million children in the 2020/21 academic year.¹⁸⁶

It is not always clear whether ransoms are paid in mass kidnappings. In order not to encourage kidnapping, payment of ransom, particularly by the government, is rarely publicized. In the North-West and North-Central geopolitical zones, where the conflict is less about religion and more about

Box 4: A wave of school kidnappings December 2020-September 2021

In December 2020, 344 schoolboys were kidnapped in Kankara, Katsina State. While the kidnapping was compared in the media to the 2014 Chibok kidnapping, this time, the release was secured after only six days. Contrary to claims by authorities, the media reported that the government paid a 30-million-naira ransom to secure the boys' release.¹⁸⁷ In a similar attack in February 2021, 277 schoolgirls were kidnapped from a boarding school in Jangebe, Zamfara State. According to media sources, one week after the attack, government officials engaged in talks with the kidnapers and all the schoolgirls were freed; again, authorities denied that any ransom had been paid to secure the release.¹⁸⁸ Up until September 2021, a series of further attacks was carried out in schools in Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger and Zamfara States, although curiously, no mass school kidnappings appear to have been reported since then. In March 2022, the Nigerian Senate passed a bill banning the payment of ransoms, with sentences of up to 15 years for noncompliance.¹⁸⁹

the competition for resources, criminal groups are involved in kidnappings for ransom.¹⁹⁰ Mass kidnapping raids in these areas often include murder, rape and arson.¹⁹¹ There is also evidence that terrorist groups and criminal gangs are colluding,¹⁹² so participants' motivations may be mixed. For example, it was suggested that a recent attack on the Abuja-Kaduna train was conducted by a coalition of criminal and political actors (see Box 5).¹⁹³

¹⁸⁵ ACLED, accessible at <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool>.

¹⁸⁶ UNICEF, 'UNICEF Calls for Safety of Learners in Schools to Encourage Girls' Education', 14 April 2022, accessed at <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/press-releases/unicef-calls-safety-learners-schools-encourage-girls-education#:~:text=ABUJA%2C%2014%20April%202022%20%E2%80%93%20UNICEF,retention%2C%20and%20completion%20of%20education>.

¹⁸⁶ See 'Katsina Government Paid Us N30m Ransom for Release Of Kankara Schoolboys - Bandits Leader, Awulu', Sahara Reporters, 4 February 2021, accessed at <https://saharareporters.com/2021/02/04/exclusive-katsina-government-paid-us-n30m-ransom-release-kankara-schoolboys-%E2%80%94-bandits>.

¹⁸⁷ Emmanuel Akinwotu, 'Almost 300 Schoolgirls Kidnapped in Nigeria are Free, Says State Governor', The Guardian, 2 March 2021, accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/02/almost-300-schoolgirls-kidnapped-in-nigeria-are-free-says-state-governor>.

¹⁸⁸ Nosmot Gbadamosi, 'Can Nigeria Ever End Its Kidnap-for-Ransom Industry?' Foreign Policy, 4 May 2022, accessed at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/05/04/nigeria-kidnapping-abduction-law-security>.

¹⁸⁹ International Crisis Group, 'Violence in Nigeria's North-West: Rolling Back the Mayhem', Africa Report No. 288, 18 May 2020, p. 10, accessible at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/288-violence-nigerias-north-west-rolling-back-mayhem>.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 11-12.

¹⁹² Patrick Markey and Aminu Abubakar, 'Nigeria: Who is behind the Abuja-Kaduna train attack?', The Africa Report, 8 April 2022, accessed at <https://www.theafricareport.com/192729/nigeria-who-is-behind-the-abuja-kaduna-train-attack>. See also statement of UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore, 7 July 2021, accessed at <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/press-releases/concerns-deepen-over-attacks-against-children-and-child-abductions-parts-west-and>.

¹⁹³ See, e.g., 'Nigerian Railway Corporation Suspends Abuja-Kaduna Service After Bandits' Attacks on Train', Sahara Reporters, 21 October 2021, accessed at <https://saharareporters.com/2021/10/21/nigerian-railway-corporation-suspends-abuja-kaduna-service-after-bandits%E2%80%99-attacks-train>.

Box 5: The 2022 Abuja-Kaduna train attack

In 2016, a rail line was opened connecting the capital Abuja and Kaduna in northwestern Nigeria. On 28 March 2022, after a number of smaller attacks in preceding months,¹⁹⁴ the train was derailed by explosives. Gunmen opened fire with automatic weapons, killing eight people. According to media sources, 168 passengers were kidnapped or declared missing just after the attack,¹⁹⁵ although later reporting suggested that only 65 had been abducted.¹⁹⁶ In the days that followed, the Governor of Kaduna State asserted that the attack was carried out by Boko Haram in collaboration with bandits.¹⁹⁷ No immediate demands for ransom were made,¹⁹⁸ but hostages began to be released as payments were privately negotiated. On 6 September 2022, Tukur Mamu, the principal ransom negotiator for the kidnappers, was detained in Cairo on his way to Saudi Arabia and subsequently flown to Nigeria, where he was arrested by the DSS.¹⁹⁹ On 24 November 2022, the DSS withdrew a suit filed at the Federal High Court of Abuja to prolong his detention.²⁰⁰ According to media sources, there were still 23 hostages in captivity six months after the attack because families could not afford the ransom demanded.²⁰¹ These final 23 hostages were released in October 2022, reportedly without use of force or payment of ransom.²⁰²

3.5 Discussion of the research findings

3.5.1 Composition and entry into groups

Persons interviewed in prison for this study included “amateur” kidnappers typically acting in small groups. One respondent acted entirely on his own, spontaneously abducting the child of the owner of a hotel at which he stayed regularly.²⁰³ All of the others were involved in groups of three to six people, and according to their own statements most were arrested the first time they attempted the crime. Most were labourers or tradesmen who had agreed with friends or acquaintances to assist in the kidnapping of someone they knew from the community.

Concerning past criminal experience of kidnappers, one convict who identified himself as a leader of a kidnapping group stated that he had been involved in drug dealing as well as trafficking in persons before getting into kidnapping.²⁰⁴ Apart from this respondent, the other convicts interviewed claimed that they had no previous criminal experience. All the convicts stated that they became involved with the kidnapping group through acquaintances or friends. Their targets were mostly relatives, friends or people they knew from the community. Only one convict was a professional criminal and only one had participated in multiple kidnappings.

193 See, e.g., ‘Nigerian Railway Corporation Suspends Abuja-Kaduna Service After Bandits’ Attacks on Train’, Sahara Reporters, 21 October 2021, accessed at <https://saharareporters.com/2021/10/21/nigerian-railway-corporation-suspends-abuja-kaduna-service-after-bandits%E2%80%99-attacks-train>.

194 ‘Over 20 Kaduna Train Passengers Spend Six Months with Terrorists Despite Promises by Buhari Government’, Sahara Reporters, 28 September 2022, accessible at <https://saharareporters.com/2022/09/28/over-20-kaduna-train-passengers-spend-six-months-terrorists-despite-promises-buhari>.

195 ‘Nigerian military says last hostages from March train attack freed’, Reuters, 6 October 2022, accessed at <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/nigerian-military-says-last-hostages-march-train-attack-freed-2022-10-05>.

196 See Ismail Bello and Mukhtar Imam. ‘Terrorist incursion in Northwest Nigeria: a dangerous trend’, *The Round Table*, vol. 111, no. 4 (2022), pp. 530-553.

197 Ibid.

198 DSS. ‘Tukur Mamu is in DSS Custody’, press release, 7 September 2022, accessed at https://www.dss.gov.ng/dss_more?id=qclvbQs69hhaCmlmXBIFow==.

199 ‘DSS withdraws suit against ex-terrorists’ negotiator, Tukur Mamu’, *Vanguard*, 24 November 2022, accessible at <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/11/dss-withdraws-suit-against-ex-terrorists-negotiator-tukur-mamu/>.

200 ‘Over 20 Kaduna Train Passengers Spend Six Months with Terrorists Despite Promises by Buhari Government’, Sahara Reporters, 28 September 2022, accessible at <https://saharareporters.com/2022/09/28/over-20-kaduna-train-passengers-spend-six-months-terrorists-despite-promises-buhari>.

201 ‘Nigerian military says last hostages from March train attack freed’, Reuters, 6 October 2022, accessed at <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/nigerian-military-says-last-hostages-march-train-attack-freed-2022-10-05>.

202 Interview with BEN-02-05-KID.

203 Interview with BEN-02-KID.

204 Onuoha and Okolie-Osemene. ‘The Evolving Threat of Kidnapping for Ransom in Nigeria’, pp. 242-245.

205 Ibid., at pp. 243-244.

3.5.2 Modus operandi

The literature on kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria suggests a typology involving four categories of operations: the highway model, the insider model, the invasion model and the routine model.²⁰⁵

In the highway model, targets are abducted spontaneously along major highways such as the Abuja-Kaduna or the Benin-Lagos roads. Kidnappers typically block the road, sometimes disguised in army or police uniforms, and force vehicles to stop. Passengers suspected to be of high financial value are abducted and brought to a remote and often rural area. Ransoms are negotiated with the victim's family.²⁰⁶

In the insider model, someone who lives or is closely associated with the potential victim plays an active role by initiating, directing or enabling the kidnapping. Insiders can be family members, household staff, friends or any other person who is in close contact with the potential target. The insider typically takes on the role of informant by providing useful information about the potential target, such as the victim's financial worth, residence, daily routine or location.²⁰⁷ Several of the prisoners interviewed participated in insider kidnappings.

In the invasion model, a kidnapping group raids a community, an estate, a school, a place of worship or any other population centre to abduct a sizeable number of persons. Kidnappings following this model will usually involve extensive pre-attack planning and will often be conducted by well-organized and experienced kidnapping groups,²⁰⁸ particularly terrorist or bandit groups.

Kidnappings that do not resemble any of these specific models are likely to follow the routine model. Routine model kidnappings are generally comprised of five stages: "The group must identify a victim; plan for the abduction, captivity and negotiation; conduct the abduction and secure the hostage; successfully leverage the life of the victim for financial or political gain; and then escape."²⁰⁹

205 Ibid., at pp. 243-244.

206 Ibid., at p. 245.

207 Ibid., at p. 243.

208 Ibid., at p. 242.

209 Interviews with ABJ-05-4-AR-SUL; ABJ-05-6-AR-SUL; BEN-02-3-KID; BEN-04-4; BEN-05-1; ENU-02-3-KID.

210 Interview with JOS-04-1-KID.

211 Interview with ENU-02-3-KID.

212 Interview with BEN-02-2-KID.

213 Interviews with ABJ-05-4-AR-SUL; ABJ-05-6-AR-SUL; BEN-02-1-KID; BEN-02-3-KID.

214 Interview with JOS-03-1-KID.

215 Interview with BEN-02-2-KID.

216 Interview with KAN-04-5-KID.

Planning

While some of the kidnappings committed by the interviewed prisoners were spontaneous, others were preceded by long monitoring of the target, sometimes lasting several weeks.²¹⁰ In some cases, informants were used to obtain useful information about the target or to signal the location of the victim at the time of the abduction. One respondent stated that the personal driver of the target was paid a bribe for providing useful information.²¹¹ In another case, a relative of the target suggested abducting an uncle who he knew was receiving money from his son living abroad.²¹² A third respondent stated that his group mostly used social media to identify potential targets.²¹³

Abduction and captivity

The abductions described in the interviews followed either the insider or routine models. In several instances, targets were kidnapped within or in front of their homes.²¹⁴ Violence and weapons were regularly used, usually only to intimidate targets. However, one respondent explained that if the target had security guards or escorts, they usually attacked them before abducting the victim; during the process, people sometimes lost their lives.²¹⁵

In the cases that followed the insider model, no violence was used, and targets were rather lured into the abduction. In one case, the convict's girlfriend met the target, with whom she was friends on Facebook, in a hotel room, got her drunk, chained her up and eventually brought her to the convict's house where she was kept in captivity.²¹⁶ Another respondent described how his group abducted a 10-year-old relative of one of the group members by instructing the child to follow the perpetrator to another apartment.²¹⁷ Victims were kept either in group members' homes or rented apartments; sometimes, they were brought "to the bush". Generally, the captivity lasted only a few days.

3.5.3 Targets of kidnapping

Targets of kidnapping for ransom can be any person or group of people that are perceived to be of financial value. Until a few years ago, targets and victims of kidnappings in Nigeria were predominantly businesspeople, political or religious leaders, athletes and other prominent individuals or their family members. Recent examples reported in the media include the kidnapping of the head of the Methodist Church in Nigeria in May 2022 and the kidnapping of the former Secretary-General of Nigeria's football federation one month later.²¹⁸ More recently, however, the trend has increasingly shifted from targeting affluent individuals to the general population. In the kidnappings described in interviews, all the targets came from the general population, and most were women.

3.5.4 Ransoms

According to the consultancy SB Morgan, between June 2011 and March 2020, Nigerians paid kidnappers an estimated \$18.34 million in ransom.²¹⁹ About 60 per cent of this amount was paid between January 2016 and March 2020 alone, indicating a heavy increase in recent years.²²⁰ An expert interviewed for this report estimated that in 2020, kidnappers received ransoms of over 2 billion naira (\$4.8 million).²²¹ Interviews with convicted kidnappers revealed that ransoms per operation ranged from 500,000 to 2 million naira for a single victim.

3.5.5 Involvement of state actors

Allegations of cooperation and collusion between kidnapping groups and state actors benefitting from the kidnapping business in Nigeria are regularly reported in the media and were also echoed in the interviews conducted for this report. One respondent maintained that his group had an informant in a security agency who warned them when danger was perceived.²²² Another respondent stated a security agency officer had supplied the group with weapons and bullets for their kidnapping operations.²²³ A third respondent claimed

to have enlisted the help of a high-ranking politician in being awarded bail.²²⁴

3.6 Conclusions and key findings

Based on the best available data, kidnapping appears to be rapidly expanding in Nigeria, with a growing number of attacks and victims. These crimes are being carried out by a wide variety of perpetrators, including terrorists, bandits, vigilantes, cultists, pirates, organized criminal groups and amateurs. With the perpetrators motivated by different interests and operating at different levels, Nigeria faces not one but several kidnapping problems:

- I. The problem is often associated with the North-East geopolitical zone, where it is linked to transnational terrorism. But it is in the North-Central and North-West geopolitical zones where most incidents are occurring today, including the recent train attack close to the capital. The involvement of bandits in mass kidnappings for ransom is a worrisome development, as their status as belligerents is unclear. There also appears to be a geographic spread of the phenomenon southward.
- II. Kidnappings at sea have declined, but the South-South geopolitical zone continues to be a region with a high number of kidnapping incidents in recent years. With no active conflict in the area, the abductions in this region appear to be motivated by material gain.
- III. There is no area of the country that is spared by kidnappings today. It may be that the well-publicized successes of the political kidnappers have created awareness of the potential profits to be made for a crime requiring few specialized skills. The arrested kidnappers interviewed for this report presented few distinguishing characteristics. They were often working-class Nigerians, most with little criminal background, who saw an opportunity to make quick money, and seized it.

217 Chris Ewokor. 'Samuel Kanu: Kidnapped Nigerian Methodist Church leader freed', BBC News, 30 May 2022, accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-61632802>; Oluwashina Okeleji, 'Kidnappers in Nigeria Release Ex-NFF Official Ahmed Sani Toro', BBC Sport, 21 June 2022, accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/sport/africa/61870722>.

218 SB Morgen. Nigeria's Kidnap Problem: The Economics of Kidnap Industry in Nigeria, May 2020, accessible at https://www.sbmintel.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/202005_Nigeria-Kidnap.pdf.

219 Ibid.

220 Interview with KI-E-01.

221 Interview with ENU-02-3-KID.

222 Interview with BEN-02-2-KID.

223 Interview with ENU-02-3-KID.

224 'Guinea-Bissau president: 'Attack on democracy' thwarted', AP, 1 February 2022, accessed at <https://apnews.com/article/europe-africa-portugal-west-africa-guinea-bissau-15480dcb7a9cd6b407ce7651135c2d46>.



4. Illicit drugs

4.1 Introduction

Drug trafficking has been a source of instability in Africa in the past. For example, in the mid-2000s, a series of massive cocaine seizures was detected off the coast of West Africa. This was accompanied by political instability in some of the smaller West African countries, particularly Guinea-Bissau. Brought to international attention, this flow appeared to ebb for a decade, but 2019 saw another series of remarkable cocaine seizures in the region. In 2022, media reported that another attempted coup in Guinea-Bissau was, according to the President, connected to drug trafficking.²²⁵

Nigerian nationals have long been prominent among the traffickers detected in many West African countries and around the world. The resumption of the flow of cocaine through West Africa to Europe could spell renewed instability in the region. This chapter looks at several drug markets affecting Nigeria, including drug production (cannabis and methamphetamine), domestic drug markets (tramadol and codeine) and international trafficking of cocaine and heroin.

Nigeria is a producer of cannabis, for both local consumption and possibly regional export. It has also emerged as a minor producer of methamphetamine, mainly for export to Asia and South Africa. In addition to domestic production, Nigerian nationals have long been active around the world in trafficking relatively small amounts of cocaine and heroin, especially as air couriers. Despite the small volumes

of these shipments, these air courier networks supply markets that could otherwise have been overlooked by larger traffickers. Nigerian nationals have also been associated with much larger drug shipments transiting the West African region. They are also involved in retail markets around the world (see Discussion of the research findings below), and, in many countries, Nigerian nationals represent the leading foreign nationals arrested for drug trafficking.

But despite access to all these street drugs, the most important domestic drug issues in Nigeria involve synthetic opioids, including illegally produced pharmaceuticals and those produced by pharmaceutical companies and legally imported before being diverted to street markets. While Nigeria has a system in place to limit the distribution of controlled medicines to licensed pharmacists, it appears to be widely disregarded. As one group of academics observed:

“Community or retail pharmacists have registered premises for the sale and dispensing of drugs. However, there are persons (non-pharmacists) who are also authorized to sell patent medicines. These are holders of patent and proprietary medicine vendor’s licenses. These vendors unfortunately are generally involved in the sale of virtually all categories of drugs including antibiotics, narcotics, toxoids, and antihypertensives, in addition to what can be classified traditionally as patent medicines.²²⁶”

225 W.O. Erhun, O.O. Babalola, and M.O. Erhun. ‘Drug Regulation and Control in Nigeria: The Challenge of Counterfeit Drugs’. *Journal of Health and Population in Developing Countries*. vol. 4, no 2. (2001), pp. 23-34.

226 Charles T Orjiakor, Michael Ezenwa, Michael Ukwuma, and Henry Oraetue. ‘Nigeria’s Tramadol abuse problem: How illicit users access controlled drugs’, in: Isidore S. Obot and Akanidomo J. Ibanga (eds), *Availability and use of psychoactive substances in Nigeria: Qualitative and Quantitative studies in diverse settings*, Uyo, pp. 105-114.

Both pharmacists and patent medicine vendors source their drugs from open public markets.²²⁷ In practice, it is not difficult for members of the public to access controlled drugs.

Millions of Nigerians are daily non-medical users of highly addictive pharmaceutical opioids.²²⁸ They are relatively inexpensive, but the number of consumers is so large that the market is estimated to be worth more than \$1 billion annually. There have been recent major policy changes in these opioid markets, the effects of which have not yet been evaluated, but do not seem to have eliminated misuse.

4.2 Definition of terms

For the purposes of this chapter, “illicit drugs” includes both drugs that are scheduled under the international drug conventions as well as pharmaceuticals that are used non-medically. These include cannabis, methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin and the non-medical use of the pharmaceutical drugs tramadol and codeine.

4.3 Methodology

The data used for this analysis are largely derived from the responses by the Nigerian Government to the United Nations Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ), as well as information provided by the NDLEA. In addition, this chapter draws on the findings of the *2017 Drug Use in Nigeria Survey* supported by UNODC,²²⁹ as well as the reports of the Nigerian Epidemiological Network on Drug Use (NENDU). Some additional information was derived from the prison interviews conducted for the threat assessment and described in the methodology section of the previous chapter on kidnapping for ransom.

4.4 Discussion of the research findings

4.4.1 Drug production

Nigeria is home to varied climates and could be used to grow a number of drug crops.²³⁰ Today, however, the only drug crop cultivated widely is cannabis. Similarly, Nigeria possesses the capacity to produce synthetic drugs and is an importer of precursor chemicals for the local pharmaceutical industry. However, the only synthetic drug commonly produced today is methamphetamine. Much of the cannabis produced is consumed locally, while most of the methamphetamine produced seems to be exported.

Cannabis

While cannabis could be grown across most of the territory of Nigeria, large-scale cultivation appears to be most prominent in certain regions of the country, particularly in Ondo, Oyo, Edo, Delta, Osun, Ekiti, Ogun and Kogi States, and also in Anambra, Benue, Kebbi, Plateau and Taraba States.²³¹

In 2019, UNODC conducted a survey in the six states in Nigeria considered to have the highest concentration of cannabis cultivation.²³² In these states, there were an estimated 8,900 hectares of cannabis, with the highest density found along the border between Edo and Ondo States. It is very difficult to say how much land is under cannabis cultivation, however, because there are many small plots of very different sorts, including intercropped plants. Cannabis growers can expect two main seasons in southern Nigeria, a wet season crop and a dry season crop, with the possibility of a third, which further complicates the picture, since not all plots may be cultivated in all seasons. The cannabis fields detected in the 2019 survey were usually located deep inside dense forest, with 85 per cent of those detected being farther than three kilometres from the nearest road.²³³

227 UNODC. Drug Use Survey in Nigeria, 2018, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Drugs/Drug_Use_Survey_Nigeria_2019_BOOK.pdf.

228 Ibid.

229 For example, cocaine was produced in Nigeria under the colonial administration. See J. Hutchinson and J.M. Dalziel. *Flora of West Tropical Africa*. London, 1958, p. 423 (“...the Cocaine plant, a native of tropical S. America, is cultivated in our area”).

230 UNODC. ARQs, various years.

231 Edo, Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo States. See UNODC. *Nigeria Cannabis Survey: 2019 Baseline Assessment in Six States, 2021* accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Nigeria/Nigeria_Cannabis_Survey_2022.pdf.

232 Ibid.

233 Ibid. 234 Interview with respondent ID ABJ-02-3-DT-KUJ.

It is also difficult to say how much each hectare yields, because some plots receive a lot of attention, including sprouting in nurseries and irrigation, while some appear to be relatively low-investment operations. Plants can grow to great heights, up to four or five metres, but this vertical growth undermines drug production and is likely to negatively impact quality. The harvest is also sundried, leading to further degeneration of the product.²³⁴

Based on the 2019 survey results, at least some of this cultivation is highly organized. While the individual plots are generally small, there is evidence that land has been cleared specifically for the purposes of cannabis cultivation: of all detected cannabis fields in 2019, 39 per cent were cleared in the same year, and the plots, though isolated, were often found in clusters. In this way, drug production may be contributing to deforestation.

A prisoner interviewed by UNODC for this report relayed the details of his role as a recruiter of labour for a cannabis plantation. He said he recruited dozens of boys from his community who were transported by bus to work for a year on cannabis fields in another state. The boys were paid 120,000 naira for one year's work after their living costs had been deducted. Some of the boys used these funds to buy cannabis to sell in the city. In this way, part of the distribution network proceeded organically from the cultivation operation.²³⁵

One survey of communities in Bayelsa State found that “the typical cultivator was a wealthy or a rich man with a strong network and connections with government officials.”²³⁶ One cultivator interviewed in prison by UNODC described a 50-member association of farmers who democratically elected officers to represent their common interests, including protection from law enforcement. The chairman of this group was said to be a person of considerable social and financial influence. The cultivator interviewed claimed to net two million naira (about \$5,000) per year.²³⁷

The NDLEA reports that cannabis sold for between 40,000 and 50,000 naira for a 50-kilogram bag in 2015,²³⁸ and 25,000 naira for a 25-kilogram bag in 2016,²³⁹ although there is considerable seasonal variation, with dry season prices rising to 80,000 naira per bag. On the low end, this is about \$100 for 50 kilograms, or one-fifth of one US cent per gram, suggesting a low-quality, low-investment bulk product. Data on THC levels were not available at the time of publication.

Nonetheless, this relatively cheap product can generate significant profits for the people who work in this market. Distributors interviewed reported purchasing large volumes of cannabis and reselling them for two or three times the purchase price. One female prisoner interviewed, who bought from source and sold to urban retailers, reported getting a loan for this purpose from a registered microfinance bank in Nigeria.²⁴⁰ Interviewed distributors reported bringing cannabis from the rural areas to the cities by every conceivable means, including by post and public transport.

While the annual totals are highly volatile (see Figure 22), the NDLEA reports seizing about 200 metric tons of cannabis on average each year. At the wholesale level, and based on 2016 prices, 200 tons of cannabis (the entire annual seizure total) would sell for about half a million dollars in Nigeria. If seizures are anything to go by, this is a low-value drug market.²⁴¹ In 2017, the NDLEA Edo State Command arrested two people with 18 metric tons of cannabis, which suggests that large-volume dealers do exist.²⁴²

234 Interview with respondent ID ABJ-02-3-DT-KUJ.

235 Gboyega E. Abikoye, Dennis O. Edewor, Demain B. Sunday, Olukayode Abayomi, Isidore S. Obot and Ediomu-Ubong Nelson. ‘Socioeconomic context of cannabis cultivation and trafficking in selected Nigerian communities’. *Bulletin on Narcotics*, vol. 62 (2019).

236 Interview with JOS-03/3/Production/Cultivation.

237 UNODC ARQ 2015.

238 UNODC ARQ 2016.

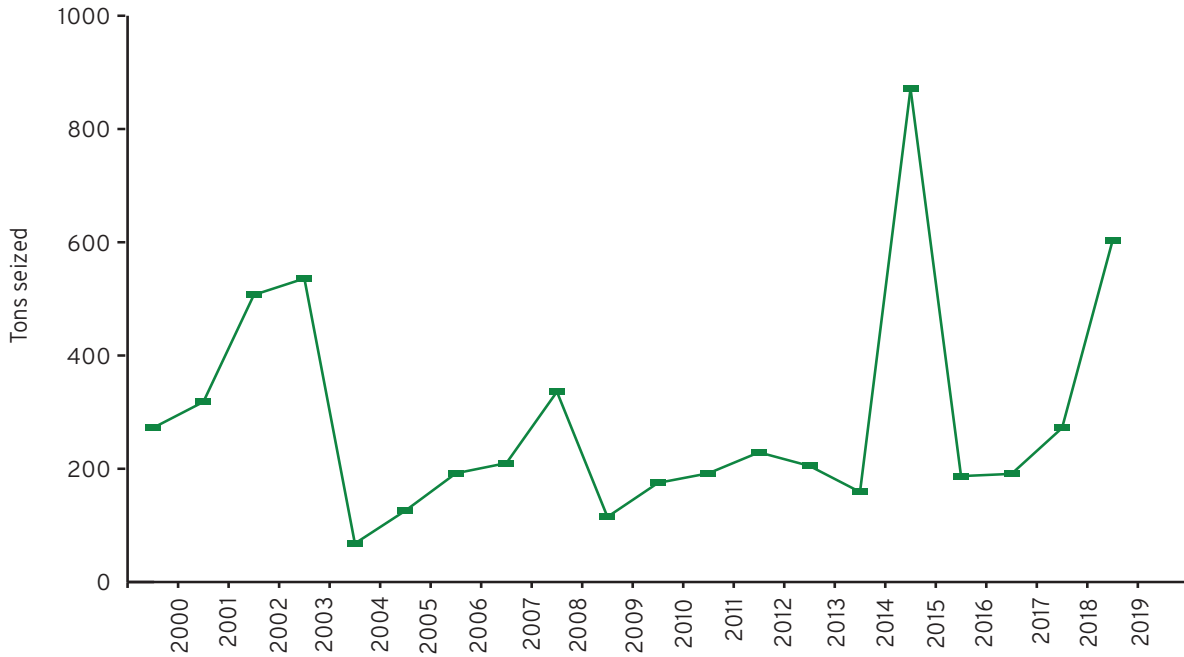
239 Interview with respondent ID ABJ-04-5-DT-SUL.

240 Based on data supplied in the ARQ (50,000 naira for a 50-kilogram bag, or 1,000 naira per kilogram), at an exchange rate of about two-tenths of a US cent to the Naira, one kilogram of cannabis at wholesale volumes would sell for about \$2.50. Two-hundred thousand kilograms would thus sell for about half a million dollars.

241 IDEAS network data, an informal database maintained by a network of security officials, primarily based in European airports.

242 UNODC ARQ 2015, as completed by the NDLEA.

Figure 22: Cannabis seizures in Nigeria, 2000-2019



Source: UNODC ARQs.

It is unclear whether Nigeria is a net importer or exporter of cannabis. In response to the ARQ, the Nigerian authorities report that some of their seized cannabis is exported to West Africa,²⁴³ and Niger reports that it has seized cannabis coming from Nigeria, but other countries in the region also claim to have seized cannabis destined for Nigeria. For example, in 2019, Togo officials said that all the cannabis seized in their country came from Togo and Ghana and that cannabis seized in those two countries was destined to Nigeria.²⁴⁴ One prisoner interviewed by UNODC said he was involved in importing cannabis from Ghana to Nigeria.²⁴⁵ Since there are very few recent detections of Nigerian cannabis in other countries, this suggests that most of the cannabis produced in Nigeria is consumed domestically. In August 2022, however, Dutch customs at the port of Rotterdam seized three tons of cannabis concealed inside a container originating from Nigeria.²⁴⁶ Since this cannabis is likely to be of lower quality than is the standard in the European market, it is possible it was intended for use as a

substrate for synthetic cannabinoid-adulterated cannabis, which has been detected in at least eight European countries.²⁴⁷

According to the UNODC-supported *2018 Drug Use Survey*, adjusted for current population figures and age structure, more than 12 million people consume cannabis in Nigeria annually, which is over 10 per cent of the adult population.²⁴⁸ The cultivation figures cited above suggest this use level could be supplied by local production. One survey of market women in Ibadan, Oyo State, found that cannabis was common enough to be frequently used in cooking.²⁴⁹

According to NENDU, over half of those admitted to treatment for illegal drugs in 2018 in Nigeria were admitted for cannabis use, which only amounted to about 500 users.²⁵⁰ According to a US-based study, about 9 per cent of cannabis users will develop dependence,²⁵¹ which would be about one million potential dependent cannabis users in Nigeria. As the UNODC-supported *Drug Use Survey* revealed,

244 UNODC ARQ 2019.

245 Interview with respondent ID LAG/09/4/DT/ICC.

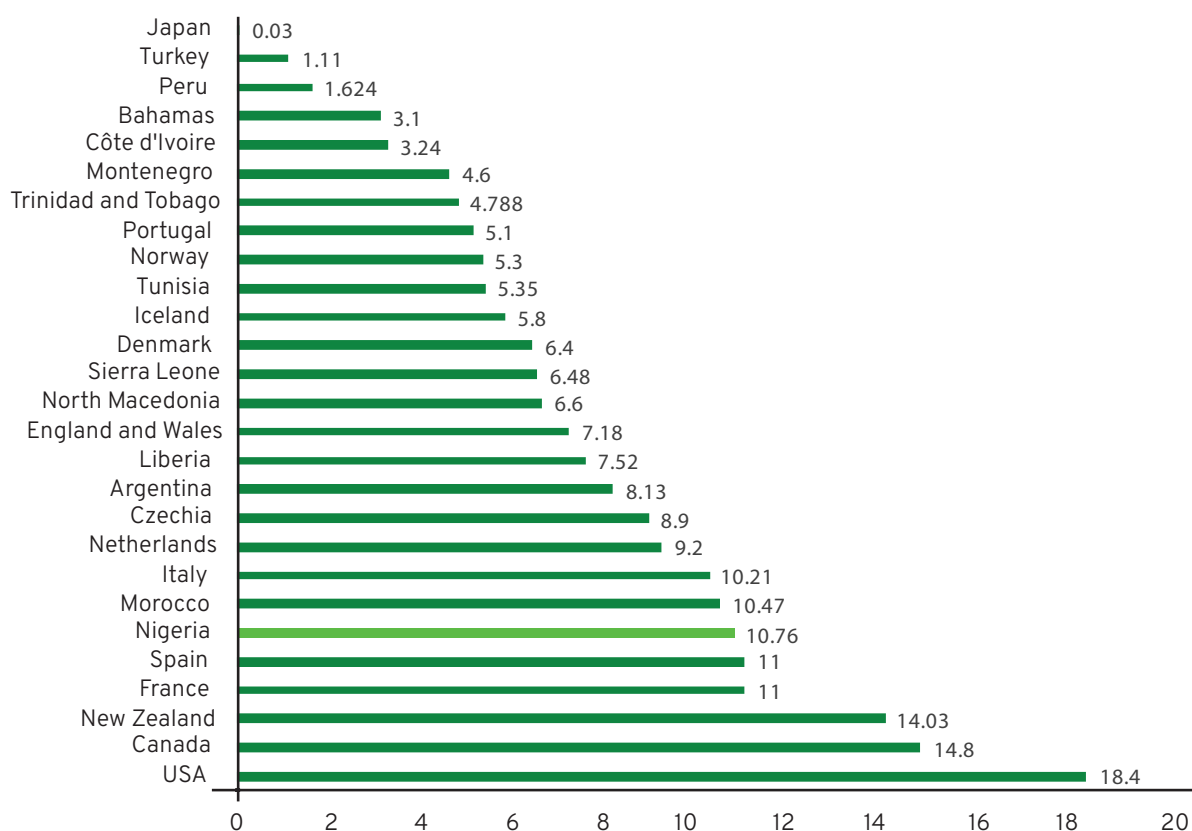
246 "Enorme cannabis vangst in Rotterdamse haven, 3000 kilo aangetroffen", 112 Nederland, September 1st, 2022. Accessible at: <https://112nederland.nl/2022/09/01/enorme-cannabis-vangst-in-rotterdamse-haven-3000-kilo-aangetroffen/>

247 Pieter E. Oomen, Dominique Schori, Karsten Tögel-Lins, Dean Acreman, Sevag Chenorhokian, Anton Luf, Alexandra Karden, Carlos Paulos, Elisa Fornero, Enrico Gerace, Raoul P.J. Koning, Liliana Galindo, Laura A. Smit-Rigter, Fiona Measham, and Mireia Ventura. 'Cannabis adulterated with the synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonist MDMB-4en-PINACA and the role of European drug checking services'. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 100 (2022).

248 UNODC. *Drug Use Survey in Nigeria, 2018*, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Drugs/Drug_Use_Survey_Nigeria_2019_BOOK.pdf.

249 B. O. Olley, O. W. Odeigah, S.O Kolawole, and H. Mohammed. 'Prevalence of Non-Medical Opioid Use Among Market Women in Ibadan, Nigeria'. *Bulletin on Narcotics*, vol. 62 (2019).

Figure 23: Share of adults consuming cannabis annually in 2017



Source: UNODC

almost one-third of Nigerian cannabis users indicated that they would require some form of medical intervention to be able to discontinue their drug use,²⁵² which would suggest nearly 3.5 million cannabis-dependent people in need of treatment. The small number of users in treatment is likely a product of limited access to drug treatment services rather than a reflection of real need.

Methamphetamine

Detections of large numbers of methamphetamine couriers on flights between West Africa and Asia have been reported since at least 2008, two years before the first production sites were detected

in the region. It appears that synthetic drugs manufacturing was already taking place in the region for some time before that. In May 2010, the first evidence of methamphetamine manufacturing in West Africa emerged. The Government of the United States indicted members of a large international cocaine trafficking organization for attempting to establish an illicit laboratory for the large-scale manufacture of methamphetamine in Liberia. The methamphetamine was allegedly intended for the United States and Japan.²⁵³

In Nigeria, the first manufacturing operation was detected in 2011. Since then, at least 16 such operations have been dismantled, including two

250 NENDU. 2018 NENDU Report: Policy Brief, 2019.

251 Theodore Leggett. 'A review of the world cannabis situation'. Bulletin on Narcotics, vol. 58, nos 1 and 2(2006), pp. 126-128. For a more recent discussion, see Nora Volkow, Ruben Baler, Wilson Compton, and Susan Weiss, 'Adverse Health Effects of Marijuana Use'. New England Journal of Medicine, vol. 370, (2014) pp. 2,219-2,227

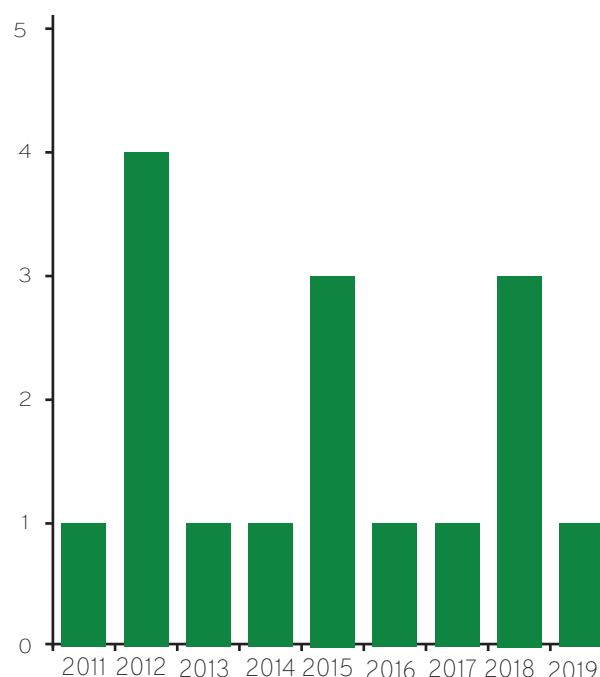
252 UNODC. Drug Use Survey in Nigeria, 2018 accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Drugs/Drug_Use_Survey_Nigeria_2019_BOOK.pdf.

253 UNODC. Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment, 2013, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/West_Africa_TOCTA_2013_EN.pdf 2013 TOCTA.

“superlabs”, capable of producing many tons of methamphetamine per week (see Figure 24). All but one of these operations involved manufacture directly from ephedrine, the most common and direct synthesis route.²⁵⁴ Notable incidents over the past decade include:

- I. In July 2011, the first operational methamphetamine manufacturing facility was detected in Nigeria. The NDLEA discovered a site with the capacity to manufacture 25- to 50-kilogram batches of methamphetamine just outside Lagos.²⁵⁵
- II. Eight months later, a second facility was identified in Satellite Town, Lagos State. Some 41 kilograms of ephedrine and almost five kilograms of finished methamphetamine were seized. Three Bolivians and one Nigerian were arrested. The Bolivians appeared to be experienced methamphetamine cooks who travelled to Nigeria to help establish local production.²⁵⁶
- III. In March 2016, a manufacturing operation was discovered in Asaba, Delta State, capable of manufacturing four metric tons of methamphetamine, and four Mexican nationals were arrested. Again, the presence of the Latin Americans may have been to instruct production, but Mexican drug cartels are also actively involved in international methamphetamine trafficking.²⁵⁷
- IV. In July 2018, according to the Government of the United States, the NDLEA’s Sensitive Investigative Unit reported that it seized 50 kilograms of ephedrine destined for a methamphetamine lab in Anambra State.²⁵⁸
- V. In March 2019, a controlled delivery of 100 kilograms of ephedrine led to the discovery of another lab.²⁵⁹

Figure 24: Methamphetamine laboratories seized in Nigeria 2011-2019



Source: UNODC ARQs.

- VI. In August 2022, the NDLEA dismantled two labs in Lagos and Anambra States. In the Lagos lab, a total of 259 kilograms of methamphetamine was recovered. The NDLEA estimated that the lab produced 50 kilograms of methamphetamine each week, with plans underway to double production.²⁶⁰

The Government of Nigeria has been assisted by UNODC in reviewing the annual legitimate requirements for ephedrine in Nigeria, and it appears that legal imports in the past (six to 10 metric tons, according to the International Narcotics Control Board) have been in excess of legitimate needs (national average consumption of 1.8 metric tons between 2016 and 2018).²⁶¹ In April 2019, a pharmacist

254 The exception was the superlab seized in Delta State in 2016 described below, which, with the help of Mexican advisors, was producing from P-2-P.

255 UNODC ARQ, 2011.

256 UNODC ARQ, 2012.

257 Ibe Uwaleke and Odita Sunday. ‘Court arraigns four Mexicans, five Nigerians for operating methamphetamine laboratory in Asaba’, *The Guardian*, 26 April 2016, accessed at <https://guardian.ng/news/court-arraigns-four-mexicans-five-nigerians-for-operating-methamphetamine-laboratory-in-asaba>.

258 US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. 2019 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, vol. I, accessible at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/INCSR-Vol-1-1-1.pdf>.

259 Patience Ogbodo. ‘NDLEA Arrests 3 Drug Suspects, Seized 100 kg Of Ephedrine’, *Independent*, 20 March 2020, accessed at <https://independent.ng/ndlea-arrests-3-drug-suspects-seizes-100-kg-of-ephedrine>.

260 Friday Olorok. ‘NDLEA dismantles Lagos, Anambra drug labs, arrests barons’, *Punch*, 3 August 2022, accessed at <https://punchng.com/ndlea-dismantles-lagos-anambra-drug-labs-arrests-barons>.

261 Federal Ministry of Health of Nigeria and UNODC. Quantification of Opioid Medicines and Estimation of Psychotropic Substances and Precursors in Nigeria – Consumption-Based Method (Report of 2019 Survey). Abuja, 2021, p. 38.

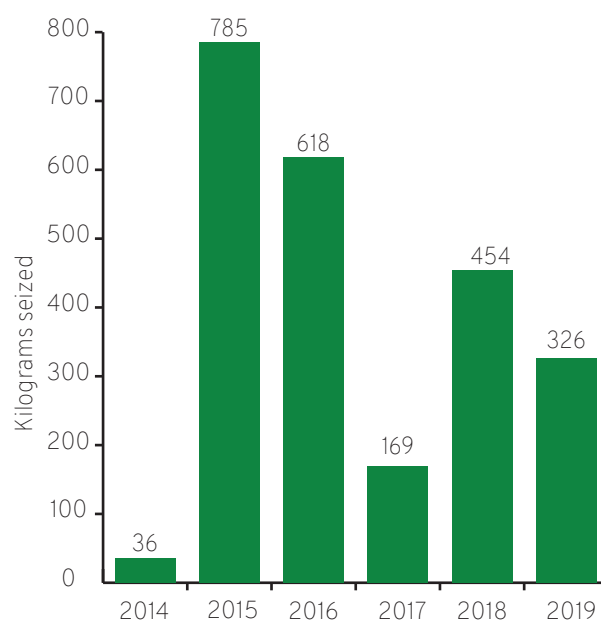
was convicted for the diversion of 500 kilograms of ephedrine, so diversion has been documented.²⁶² The current consumption estimate for ephedrine in 2019 was about 1.6 metric tons, much less than the six to 10 tons imported annually between 2015 and 2019.

About 22 per cent of this consumption estimate (353 kilograms) comes from proprietary and patent medicine vendors. These licensed retail outlets, which may also sell cosmetics and sundries, can be opened by anyone, with no pharmacological qualifications required, and are allowed to sell a limited number of non-prescription medicines. Ephedrine is a prescription-only medication in Nigeria and is not on the list of drugs that can be legally sold by patent medicine vendors.²⁶³ Nonetheless, the usage review conducted by the Nigerian Government shows that these outlets are a major source of supply of the drug.²⁶⁴

The illicit ephedrine supply is also diverted from licit imports into other West African countries, particularly Ghana.²⁶⁵ Countries such as South Africa have reported receiving illicit ephedrine from Nigeria.²⁶⁶ Some has clearly been used for the local production operations that have been detected.

There is not sufficient evidence to estimate the volume of methamphetamine being produced in Nigeria today or its value. According to the Nigerian authorities, methamphetamine sold for 5 million naira per kilogram in Nigeria in 2018, which is about \$12,000 per kilogram, or \$12 per gram.²⁶⁷ According to the United States Department of State, in 2020 one kilogram of pure methamphetamine sold for as little as \$7,500 in Nigeria but could be re-sold for over \$250,000 in Australia.²⁶⁸

Figure 25: Kilograms of ephedrine seized in Nigeria, 2014-2019



Source: UNODC ARQs and NDLEA.

It is known that methamphetamine is trafficked from Nigeria to countries in Asia, historically to Japan and more recently to the Philippines.²⁶⁹ A number of Nigerian air couriers have been detected in Europe carrying methamphetamine, typically men over the age of 40.²⁷⁰ According to a 2019 European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) report: “Europol has repeatedly noted an increase in the number of methamphetamine couriers originating from the European Union (EU) arrested in destination markets, particularly in Japan, with methamphetamine produced in West Africa.”²⁷¹ In its 2019 ARQ, Japan said that methamphetamine remained its main problem drug, and although Southeast Asia appeared to be the main origin of the

262 INCB. Annual Report 2020, 2021, p. 14, accessible at https://www.incb.org/documents/PRECURSORS/TECHNICAL_REPORTS/2020/AR_with_Annexes/Precursors_with_annex_E_eBook_final_rev.pdf.

263 See Pharmacists Council of Nigeria (PCN). PCN Approved Patent Medicine List, PCN.ReC.004, 2016.

264 See Federal Ministry of Health of Nigeria and UNODC. Quantification of Opioid Medicines and Estimation of Psychotropic Substances and Precursors in Nigeria – Consumption-Based Method (Report of 2019 Survey), Abuja, 2021. The survey found proprietary and patent medicine vendors consumed over 350 kilogram of ephedrine and suggested that codeine and diazepam were available through these vendors (at p. 19).

265 INCB. Annual Report 2019, 2020, accessible at https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2019/Annual_Report_Chapters/English_ebook_AR2019.pdf; UNODC ARQ, 2018.

266 INCB. Precursors Annual Report 2020, 2021, p. 14, accessible at https://www.incb.org/documents/PRECURSORS/TECHNICAL_REPORTS/2020/AR_with_Annexes/Precursors_with_annex_E_eBook_final_rev.pdf.

267 UNODC ARQ, 2018.

268 US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. 2020 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, vol. I, accessible at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Tab-1-INCSR-Vol.-1-Final-for-Printing-1-29-20-508-4.pdf>.

269 UNODC. World Drug Report 2021, accessible at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr2021.html>.

270 IDEAS network data, an informal database maintained by a network of security officials, primarily based in European airports.

271 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and Europol. Methamphetamine in Europe: EMCDDA-Europol Threat Assessment, 2019, accessible at https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/12132/20195788_TD0119853ENN.pdf.

drug, West African syndicates were prominent in its trafficking.

However, methamphetamine prices have plummeted in Southeast Asia over the last decade, propelled by surging production in Myanmar and elsewhere in the region.²⁷² The growth of this proximate supply is likely to undercut exports from Nigeria to Asia. This is likely to lead to a reduction in Nigerian production unless alternative end markets can be identified. It could also lead to dumping of the drug on local markets. According to the media, concerns have been raised about growing methamphetamine consumption in Nigeria, particularly in the South-East geopolitical zone, where it is known as “*mkpurummiri*”.²⁷³

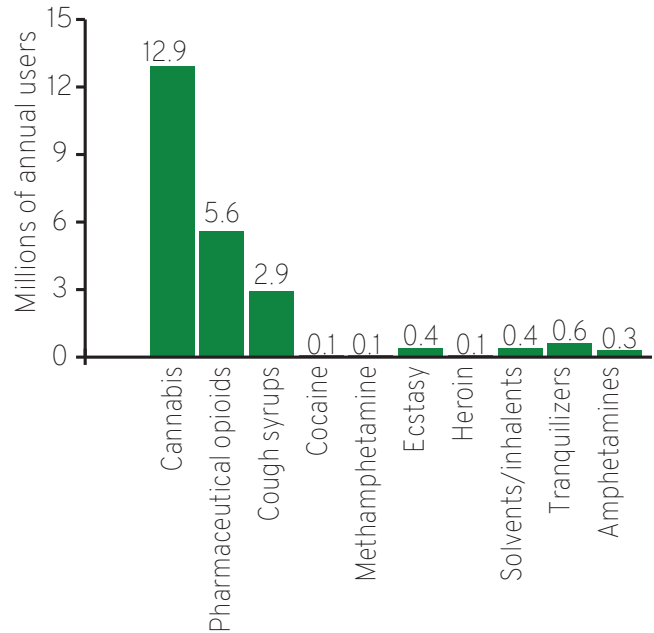
South Africa is another country known to be a destination for methamphetamine trafficked from Nigeria, although local manufacture of methamphetamine within South Africa also takes place,²⁷⁴ organized by both South African and Nigerian criminal groups.²⁷⁵ UNODC interviewed a prisoner who was apprehended transporting 10 kilograms of methamphetamine concealed in solar lamps exported from South Africa to Nigeria for repair.²⁷⁶ In recent years, South Africa has repeatedly reported Nigeria as one of its leading foreign sources of methamphetamine, and Nigerian nationals are the number one foreign national group arrested for drug trafficking in the country.²⁷⁷

In addition to producing methamphetamine, Nigeria continues to be a source for ephedrine for other countries in Africa. The destination of this ephedrine is usually South Africa or Mozambique, presumably for the manufacture of methamphetamine for the South African market, although Cameroon and Tanzania have also been detected as destination countries.²⁷⁸

4.4.2 Domestic drug markets

To assess Nigeria’s domestic drug market, the extent of drug use must be understood. Based on data from 38,850 households and 9,344 high-risk drug users, the UNODC-supported *Drug Use Survey* found that 14.4 per cent of Nigerian adults (aged 15-64) had used at least one illicit drug in the previous year. The exact share varied greatly by region, however, with over 22 per cent of respondents in the South-West reporting use of illegal drugs in the previous year (Map 19). One in five of these drug users were found to be dependent on drugs.²⁷⁹

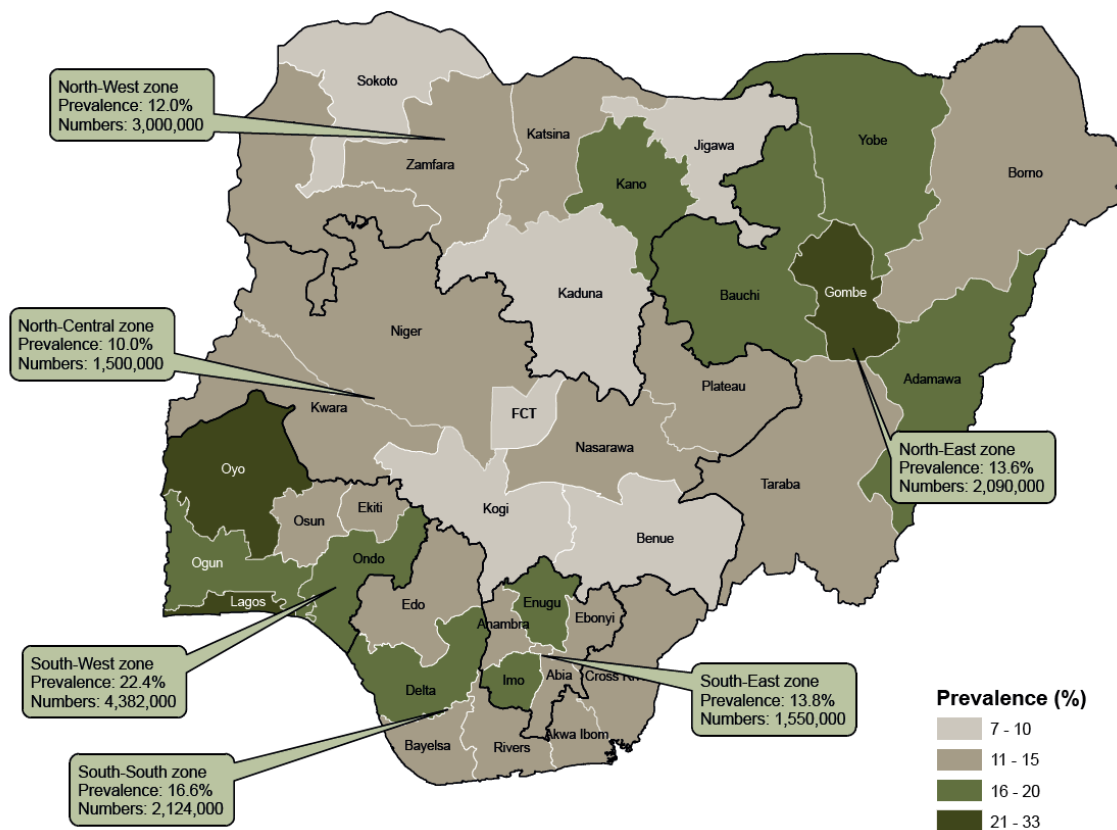
Figure 26: Estimated number of drug users in Nigeria in 2023 (based on 2017 use rates)²⁸⁰



Source: Government of Nigeria and UNODC.

272 UNODC. World Drug Report 2021, accessible at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr2021.html>; UNODC. Transnational Organized Crime in Southeast Asia: Evolution, Growth and Impact, 2019 accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2019/SEA_TOCTA_2019_web.pdf.
 273 ‘Why community leaders decried use of Methamphetamine for southeast Nigeria’, BBC News Pidgin, 17 November 2021, accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-59322367>.
 274 UNODC ARQs, various years.
 275 UNODC ARQ, 2017.
 276 Interview with respondent ID LAG/08/2/DT/ICC.
 277 UNODC ARQs, various years. South Africa has a serious problem with methamphetamine use in the Western and Eastern Cape provinces, where it was the primary problem for over half the young people admitted to treatment in the first half of 2020. See South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use. Phase 48 Report, January-June 2020, July 2021, accessible at https://www.samrc.ac.za/sites/default/files/attachments/2021-07-29/SACENDU%20Full%20Report_Phase%2048_July%202020.pdf.
 278 INCB. Annual Report 2019, 2020, accessible at https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2019/Annual_Report_Chapters/English_ebook_AR2019.pdf.
 279 UNODC. Drug Use Survey in Nigeria, 2018 accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Drugs/Drug_Use_Survey_Nigeria_2019_BOOK.pdf.
 280 These figures have been updated using five-year age internal population data from the United Nations Population Division and annual drug use prevalence by substance and five-year age group from the 2017 survey findings.

Map 19: Drug use prevalence by geopolitical zone



Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

Assuming usage did not change much in five years and based on today’s population’s age structure, the adult annual prevalence rates can be applied to the adult population in 2023 (about 121 million people between the ages of 15 and 64)²⁸¹ to estimate the number of drug users. Based on that assumption, aside from over 12.9 million cannabis users, today there would be an estimated 5.6 million non-medical users of pharmaceutical opioids and another 2.9 million non-medical users of codeine cough syrup. The 2018 *Drug Use Survey* revealed considerable variation in opioid use rates between regions in the country. In the South-West geopolitical zone, which contains Lagos State, nearly 8 per cent of the respondents had used pharmaceutical opioids for non-medical purposes in the previous year.²⁸²

Users can access a wide range of psychoactive drugs from pharmacies, patent medicine vendors and informal street vendors. As a commercial sex worker interviewed in 2020 said: “I could spend 20,000 naira [about \$50] on Roche and codeine alone. Once I get money, I would just go to the chemist and deposit the money for a regular supply of substances.”²⁸³

According to the 2018 *Drug Use Survey*, nearly 80 per cent of all non-medical opioid users were daily or near daily users. In other words, based on 2023 population estimates, about 4.5 million Nigerians have been consuming opioids (not including codeine) on a near daily basis.²⁸⁴ According to the survey, those regular non-medical opioid users were estimated to have been regularly using opioids for 12 years on average.

281 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, custom data accessible at <https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications>.

282 UNODC. Drug Use Survey in Nigeria, 2018 accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Drugs/Drug_Use_Survey_Nigeria_2019_BOOK.pdf.

283 Cited in Victor A Enejoh, Henry Ojenya, Praise M. Hon, Taiwo J. Obindo. ‘Subjective Experience of Problematic Drug Use Among Subgroups of Female Commercial Sex Workers in Nigeria: A Qualitative View’, in: Isidore S. Obot and Akanidomo J. Ibanga (eds). Availability and use of psychoactive substances in Nigeria: Qualitative and Quantitative studies in diverse settings, Uyo, 2021, pp. 53-64.

284 UNODC. Drug Use Survey in Nigeria, 2018 accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Drugs/Drug_Use_Survey_Nigeria_2019_BOOK.pdf.

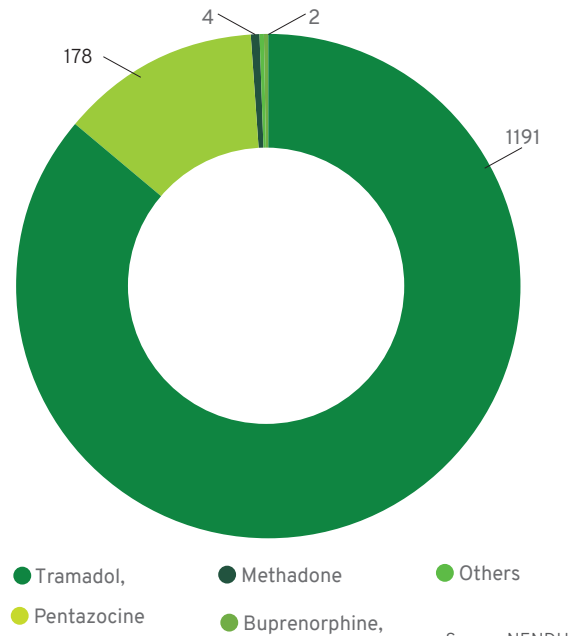
According to NENDU data, between 2015 and 2019, 86 per cent of pharmaceutical opioid treatment admissions involved tramadol, as opposed to other opioids (see Figure 27).²⁸⁵ In addition, data from the 2021 demand-based estimate from the Federal Ministry of Health suggests that Nigerians consumed at least 10 times as much tramadol as any other opioid by weight between 2016 and 2018.²⁸⁶ As a result, it seems likely that the majority of survey respondents reporting opioid use other than cough syrup consumed tramadol.

Small surveys among vulnerable subpopulations have shown high levels of lifetime tramadol use. For example:

- I. A survey of 196 commercial bus drivers in Kano (Kano State, North-West) in 2016 found 64 per cent had used tramadol in their lifetimes;²⁸⁷
- II. A survey of 430 tertiary students in Owerri (Imo State, South-East) in 2017 found lifetime tramadol usage at 12 per cent;²⁸⁸
- III. A survey of 382 irregular migrant returnees in 2018 found that 16 per cent had used tramadol during their travels and, of those migrants who sold drugs, 43 per cent had sold tramadol;²⁸⁹ and
- IV. A survey of 847 internally displaced people found about a 5 per cent lifetime tramadol prevalence, with half of these being current users, and about 10 per cent displaying problematic use.²⁹⁰

Most tramadol users spent between \$1 and \$3.60 per day on their opioids.²⁹¹ With the increase in prices since the Government of India scheduled tramadol in April 2018 (see box 6), the total amount spent on tramadol could have increased five-fold.

Figure 27: Number of pharmaceutical opioid treatment admissions by drug type, 2015-2019



In addition, there were estimated to be about 2.6 million non-medical users of codeine cough syrup in 2020, bringing the total of annual non-medical opioid users to nearly 8 million Nigerians (about 4 per cent of the population). This market, however, may have recently changed. The survey was conducted in 2017, but the national ban on the production and import of codeine cough syrup was only enacted in April 2018. The impact of this ban on cough syrup use has not been nationally assessed.

285 Dominique Lopez. NENDU. 5 years report (2015-2019), 2020.

286 See Federal Ministry of Health of Nigeria and UNODC. Quantification of Opioid Medicines and Estimation of Psychotropic Substances and Precursors in Nigeria – Consumption-Based Method (Report of 2019 Survey). Abuja, 2021.

287 Umar Yunusa, Umar Lawal Bello, Munir Idris, Mahfuz Muhammad Haddad and Dalhatu Adamu. 'Determinants of Substance Abuse among Commercial Bus Drivers in Kano Metropolis, Kano State, Nigeria'. *American Journal of Nursing Science*. vol. 6, no. 2 (2017), pp. 125-130.

288 That is, 53 out of the 430 students interviewed. Chukwuma Duru, Uche Oluoha, Chukwuma Okafor, Kevin Diwe, Anthony Iwu, Chinyere Aguocha, Ikechi Ohale, and E Nwaigbo. 'Socio-Demographic Determinants of Psychoactive Substance Use among Students of Tertiary Institutions in Imo State, Nigeria'. *Journal of Addiction Research and Therapy*, vol. 8, no. 5 (2017).

289 Ikenna Daniel Molobe and Oluwakemi Ololade Odukaya. 'The Prevalence of Drug Use and Illicit Trafficking: A Descriptive Cross Sectional Study of Irregular Migrant Returnees in Nigeria'. *Journal of Migration and Health*, 2021.

290 Kurkat Maigida and Abraham Hassan. 'Prevalence and pattern of substance use among internally displaced persons in north-central Nigeria', *Bulletin on Narcotics*, vol. 62 (2019), pp. 49-64.

291 UNODC. Drug Use Survey in Nigeria, 2018 accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Drugs/Drug_Use_Survey_Nigeria_2019_BOOK.pdf.

292 David Epstein, Kenzie Preston, and Donald Jasinski. 'Abuse liability, behavioral pharmacology, and physical-dependence potential of opioids in humans and laboratory animals: Lessons from tramadol.' *Biological Psychology*, vol. 73, no. 1 (2006), pp. 90-99.

Box 6: What is tramadol?

Tramadol is not simply a synthetic opiate. It also acts as a serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor, increasing the availability of both neurotransmitters. As a result, in addition to killing pain, it acts as a mood elevator. Consequently, regular users who do not get their drugs will experience both opiate and SSRI withdrawal symptoms and these symptoms last longer than with other opioids.²⁹² With an estimated potency of about one-tenth that of morphine, tramadol is not included in international drug control schedules.

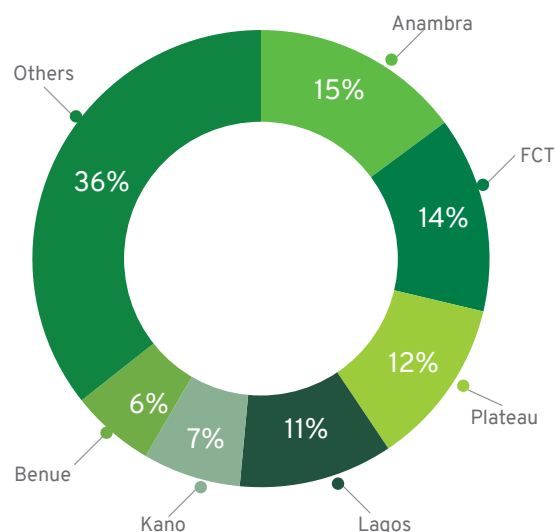
Non-medical use of tramadol has been documented in West Africa since the mid-2000s.²⁹³

Tramadol

Tramadol is not, in itself, an illicit drug, but it is widely used non-medically in Nigeria. There is some evidence that tramadol can be used for ergogenic purposes, to ease the pain of physically demanding labour. For example, interviews with timber traffickers in Nigeria found the drug was used to allow loggers to haul large logs from remote areas to the roads.²⁹⁴ Recent seizure data indicates that the drug is used throughout the country: in the South-South, North-Central, South-West and North-West.

While tramadol is an important pain killer for the region, most countries of West Africa, including Nigeria, have strict limits on the acceptable potency of tablets. The normal starting daily dose for an adult is 50 to 100 milligrams. As tolerance grows, more tramadol may be necessary in a 24-hour period, but, with the exception of time-release formulations, it is never administered in doses larger than 100 milligrams.²⁹⁵ For this reason, tramadol tablets of over 100 milligrams are illegal in Nigeria, as they are in most of the region. Despite this, of 2,632 shipments of tramadol to the region between January 2013 and August 2018, 70 per cent were of dosages greater than 100 milligrams.²⁹⁶

Figure 28: Distribution of tramadol seizures in 2021 by state

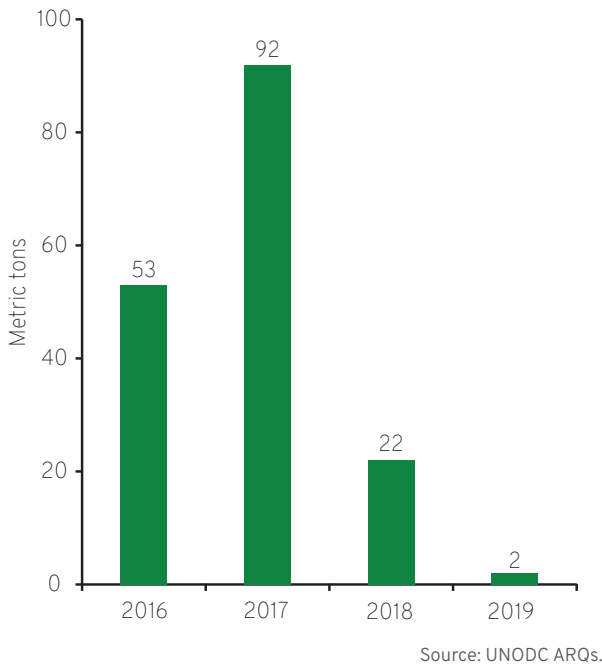


No legitimate manufacturer should be producing tramadol in doses higher than 100 milligrams for export to Nigeria. These pills have no legal use in West Africa, and therefore are destined for the illegal market.²⁹⁷ In addition, most of the boxes of these products either do not mention the manufacturer or they list a spurious one. They are, in effect, pills manufactured exclusively for non-medical use. They are treated like contraband when encountered by the Nigerian authorities.

Nigeria led the world in tramadol seizures in 2016 and 2017, although seizures were sharply down in 2019 (see Figure 29). Tramadol has also been seized elsewhere in the world on its way to Nigeria. For example, in September 2018, eight containers were seized in Port Klang, Malaysia, with over 122 million high-strength pills and 600 litres of tramadol liquid. The medicines originated in Nhava Sheva, India, with Nigeria listed as the final destination.²⁹⁸

293 See UNODC. At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit: Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa, 2021.
 294 See UNODC and CITES Secretariat, West and Central Africa Wildlife Crime Threat Assessment. CITES CoP18 Doc. 34 Annex 4, p. 76, accessible at <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/prog/enforcement/E-CoP18-034-Threat-Assessment.pdf>.
 295 Time-release formulations containing larger amounts have been developed, but these are not available in the West African region.
 296 UNODC. At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit: Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa, 2021.
 297 Benin Republic is the only country in West Africa which allows higher dosage formulations.
 298 UNODC. At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit: Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa, 2021.

Figure 29: Total annual tramadol seizures in Nigeria



Ports in Benin Republic and Togo, which often serve as conduits for goods destined for Nigeria, also seize large volumes of the drug. For example, on 19 February 2019, the Togolese police seized 9,950 tablets of 225-milligram tramadol in a taxi travelling between Togo and Benin on its way to Nigeria.²⁹⁹ Tramadol is also re-exported from Nigeria to other destinations, including North Africa.

While production in Nigeria is possible and has been licensed, the largest share of tramadol, both approved and non-approved, sold in West Africa in recent years appeared to have originated in South Asia.³⁰⁰

In the past, tramadol was scheduled under the Indian Drugs and Cosmetics Act, but on 26 April 2018, India scheduled tramadol under the National

Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985, requiring certification of all exports by the Narcotics Commissioner.³⁰¹ While the Indian rescheduling did not yet stop all exports of tramadol to Nigeria, a significant drop in seizures as well as a significant increase in retail prices suggests that the legislation had some impact. Nigerian seizures were down substantially in 2018 and 2019, although countries like Benin continued to report large seizures in the first half of 2019.³⁰² The Indian authorities have also taken action against several unlicensed manufacturers in India.³⁰³

According to NENDU contacts, prices of tramadol have gone up five-fold between 2017 and 2021. One early adaptation may be an increase in the imports of tapentadol, a more powerful synthetic opioid with similar norepinephrine reuptake inhibiting effects.³⁰⁴ In addition, the Indian crackdown may have displaced tramadol production for the West African market to other countries. Between June and August 2020, the NDLEA reported a series of seizures of tramadol that originated in Pakistan, including mislabelled container shipments.³⁰⁵

Codeine cough syrup

In May 2018, the BBC launched a televised exposé on the misuse of codeine cough syrup in Nigeria.³⁰⁶ The short documentary showed men and women all over the country drinking from bottles of cough syrup. Undercover filming showed a network of corrupt pharmaceutical producers and retailers diverting supplies to recreational use. That month, Nigeria imposed a ban on codeine cough syrup import and production.³⁰⁷

As with tramadol, the effects of this ban have not been formally assessed. It does appear that the ban has contributed to rising prices. According to one academic speaking of prices on his own campus,

299 UNODC. At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit: Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa, 2021.

300 Ibid.

301 INCB. Alert 7 Tramadol: Review of the global situation, 2018 accessible at www.incb.org/documents/News/Alerts/Alert7_on_Control_of_Psychotropic_Substances_June_2018.pdf.

302 UNODC. The growing complexity of the opioid crisis. Global SMART Update, vol. 24 (2020), p.5, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/scientific/Global_SMART_Update_2020-Vol.24-Eng-Final.pdf.

303 For example, in May 2018, the Indian authorities raided two manufacturing units in Maharashtra, seizing about 130 million tramadol tablets and over 900 kilograms of tramadol in powder form that were destined for the Nigerian market. See UNODC. At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit: Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa, 2021.

304 National Agency for Food & Drug Administration and Control. Public Alert No. 0030/2020.

305 See also UNODC. Global Synthetic Drugs Assessment 2020 - Regional Overview: Africa, 2020, p.22, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/scientific/Regional_Overview_Africa.pdf.

306 'Sweet Sweet Codeine - inside Nigeria's deadly cough syrup trade', BBC, 2 May 2018, accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43982302>.

307 See Micheal O. Ezenwa, Tochukwu C. Orjiakor, Michael C. Ukwuma, Henry I. Oraetue, Eze N. Ude and Tochukwu Nweze. 'Tracking opiate routes in Nigeria: identifying trafficking routes through dealers and users of tramadol and codeine'. Bulletin on Narcotics, vol. 62 (2019), pp. 27-48.

after the ban, the price of one bottle increased from between 250 and 800 naira to between 2,500 and 5,000 naira.³⁰⁸ This represents an increase from as low as \$0.63 per bottle to as much as \$12.62 per bottle. NENDU recorded a five-fold increase in prices between 2017 and 2021.

Rising prices are an encouraging sign that the supply has been constrained, but since codeine addicts experience physiological dependence, demand is not likely to suddenly drop. Almost two-thirds of respondents in a recent survey of 210 cough syrup users said they could not go one day without codeine.³⁰⁹

It is also likely that supplies will be diverted from neighbouring countries. In Ghana, where a ban was imposed shortly after the Nigerian one, 864 bottles of codeine cough syrup were seized from a passenger at Kotoka International Airport in March 2019.³¹⁰ In late July 2018, the Nigeria Customs Command in Lagos seized 498 cartons – each containing 200 bottles – of codeine cough syrup imported from the United Kingdom.³¹¹

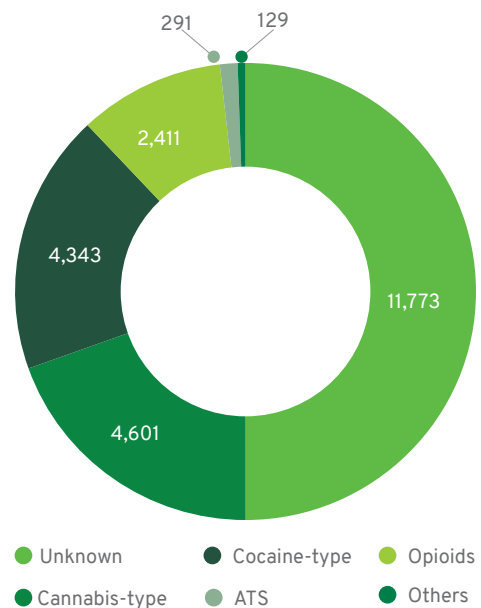
The volume and value of this trade are difficult to estimate. A survey of 487 cough syrup users in northern Nigeria in 2011 found that 60 per cent used about half a bottle per day.³¹² Since codeine is addictive, most of the 2.7 million annual users estimated for 2020 are likely to be daily users, so this suggests demand for over 1 million bottles per day. At current prices (about 6,000 naira per bottle), this is about \$16 million in turnover per day or close to \$6 billion annually.

4.4.3 International trade

Over the years, Nigerian nationals have been prominent in cocaine and heroin trafficking

organizations around the world. These networks specialize in moving comparatively small amounts of cocaine and heroin between source countries and destination markets, most often with air couriers.³¹³ Nigerian nationals also play an important role in street distribution in some countries, including cannabis dealing. Nigerian nationals have been arrested for drug trafficking in over 70 countries around the world, according to the ARQs received by UNODC between 2010 and 2019.³¹⁴ At least 38,220 Nigerians were reported arrested for drug trafficking overseas in those 10 years. Between 2015 and 2019 alone, more than 4,300 were arrested for cocaine trafficking and another 2,400 for opiates trafficking, mostly heroin.

Figure 30: Substances associated with global arrests of Nigerian nationals for drug trafficking, 2015-2019



308 Cited in UNODC. At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit: Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa, 2021.
 309 Garba Uthman S., Sholey Zakama G., Maryam Modu B., Usama Bugaje U. 'A Survey of the Usage and Users of Codeine Containing Cough Syrups in Maiduguri Nigeria'. *Advances in Psychology and Neuroscience. Special Issue: Substance Abuse: Perspectives, Trends, Issues and the Way Forward*, vol. 2, no. 2-1 (2017), pp. 42-46.
 310 Phone exchanges with law enforcement official, March 2019.
 311 UNODC. At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit: Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa, 2021.
 312 I.M. Dankani. 'Abuse of Cough Syrups: A New Trend in Drug Abuse in North-western Nigerian States of Kano, Sokoto, Katsina, Zamfara and Kebbi'. *International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences*, vol 2, no. 8 (2012).
 313 See, for example, UNODC. Drug trafficking as a security threat in West Africa, 2008, accessible at <https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Drug-Trafficking-WestAfrica-English.pdf>. This report showed that among foreign nationals arrested for cocaine trafficking or general drug trafficking (depending on data available), Nigerians comprised 53 per cent of those arrested in South Africa, 31 per cent of those arrested in France, 27 per cent of those arrested in Austria, 9 per cent of those arrested in Italy, 22 per cent of those arrested in Ireland, 12 per cent of those arrested in Portugal, 19 per cent of those arrested in Switzerland, and 10 per cent of those arrested in Spain (various years).
 314 Including Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, China (including Hong Kong SAR), Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Czechia, Ecuador, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, France, Gabon, The Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Guyana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Nepal, Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Türkiye, Uganda, UAE, US, Uruguay and Venezuela.

The largest numbers of arrests took place in Europe, particularly Italy, Switzerland, Austria and Spain. In 2018 and 2019, Nigerian nationals were also the foreign group most arrested for drug trafficking in Brazil, South Africa, India and Pakistan. In addition, Nigerian drug couriers have been found to use the passports of other nationalities to avoid suspicion.³¹⁵

Aside from moving drugs between third countries, the UNODC Individual Seizures Database shows a number of significant³¹⁶ drug seizures originating in Nigeria between 2016 and 2018, including cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, cannabis, tramadol, ecstasy and ephedrine. These shipments were destined for Asia, other parts of Africa (particularly South Africa) and Europe. The volumes were mostly relatively small, carried by air couriers or in postal shipments.

In late 2020, a number of Nigerian air couriers were apprehended in Europe with cocaine or heroin either swallowed or concealed on their persons. These couriers had Nigerian backgrounds but European citizenship or residency cards (mostly Italian), allowing them to board flights to Europe despite COVID travel restrictions. Due to decreased passenger volumes, they appeared to carry as much as possible. Flights originated from Cotonou, Benin Republic, and were destined first for Brussels but, as detections mounted, later to Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris. Around the same time, Nigerian groups ran air couriers out of Bissau (Guinea-Bissau) to Portugal, making use of Portuguese passports or residence permits.³¹⁷

In addition, the trafficking of cocaine through West Africa, which involves Nigerian nationals active in both other West African countries and Nigeria, has been an issue since around 2005. Cocaine trafficking through the region has been volatile, with a peak in 2006-2008 and a resurgence in the last few years.

For example, in January 2019, the largest seizure ever confirmed in the region was made in Cabo Verde, involving nearly 10 metric tons of cocaine on a vessel from Panama, and another two tons were seized in August of that year. Guinea-Bissau, once the epicentre of trafficking in the region, also made a seizure of 789 kilograms in March 2019, larger than those made during the peak of trafficking. Another ton was seized in July 2019 in the port of Dakar, Senegal.³¹⁸

Seizures related to the territory of Nigeria have typically been more modest, at least until the seizure of 1.8 tons in Lagos in September 2022. The drugs were reportedly destined for Europe and Asia. Four Nigerians and a Jamaican were arrested, according to media sources.³¹⁹ But Nigerian networks are clearly involved in trafficking, especially in the use of air couriers, and Nigeria appears to play an increasing role in the consolidation of cocaine entering the subregion and in the distribution to other countries.³²⁰ According to monitoring by UNODC through the Aircop programme, most cocaine couriers into Nigeria today comes from São Paulo (Brazil) though Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) to Cotonou (Benin Republic) or Lagos (Nigeria). Based on an informal programme conducted at European airports, the share of cocaine couriers detected whose flights originated in West Africa declined from as high as 59 per cent in the second quarter of 2007 to zero in the third quarter of 2020. Between 2016 and 2020, about 5 per cent of the cocaine couriers detected in this European airport network were Nigerian in nationality, the most common nationality outside Europe and Latin America. The average age of couriers was 39, and 83 per cent were male. Nigeria, Spain and the Netherlands were the most common origins of these flights.

315 One prisoner interviewed for this research said he used a Malian passport when trafficking and knew of an agent in Mali who provided false Malian passport for other Nigerians. Interview with respondent ID LAG/09/2/DT/ICC.

316 A seizure is considered significant if over 1,000 grams for cannabis, and over 100 grams for cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, tramadol, ecstasy and ephedrine.

317 Information based on IDEAS network data, an informal database maintained by a network of security officials, primarily based in European airports.

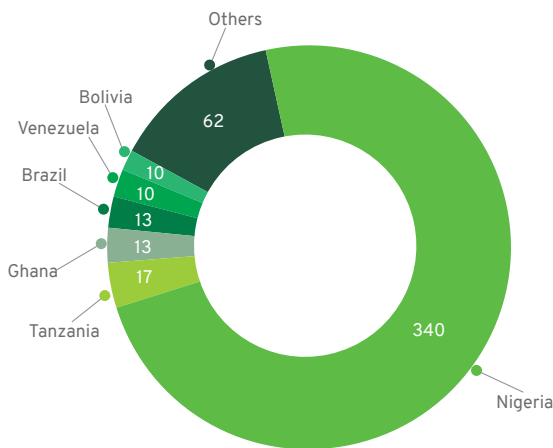
318 INCB. Annual Report 2019, 2020, accessible at https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2019/Annual_Report_Chapters/English_ebook_AR2019.pdf.

319 Camillus Eboh. 'Record 1.8 tons of cocaine seized, Nigeria's drugs agency says', Reuters, 20 September 2022, accessed at <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/record-18-tons-cocaine-seized-nigerias-drugs-agency-says-2022-09-19>.

320 UNODC. Global Cocaine Report 2023, forthcoming.

There are also many Nigerian dealers residing in Pakistan. Between 1999 and 2017, Pakistan reported arresting at least 1,432 Nigerians in connection with significant drug seizures, mostly heroin but also cocaine, although the frequency of these seizures has declined since 2004.³²¹ There have been many instances of couriers, sometimes carrying 100 kilograms or more, having been detected travelling from Pakistan to Nigeria. One prisoner interviewed by UNODC about his experience trafficking cocaine from Islamabad to Nigeria reported that he was escorted around security by collaborators working inside Islamabad Airport.³²² There is also a growing number of Nigerian traffickers in India, where Nigerian nationals represented 37 per cent of the foreign nationals arrested for drug trafficking between 2016 and 2018, according to the ARQs. The Indian government has noted that Nigerian nationals are involved in a wide range of drug markets, including opioids, cannabis, amphetamine-type stimulants and cocaine.³²³

Figure 31: Foreign nationals arrested for cocaine trafficking in India, 2016-2019



Source: UNODC ARQs.

4.5 Conclusions and key findings

Research conducted for this threat assessment sought to shed light on the most prominent drug production and trafficking trends in Nigeria. While transnational drug trafficking is the major regional threat to stability and security, also in terms of its political ripple effects, the biggest immediate threat to Nigeria’s people and society is the widespread non-medical use of opioids.

- I. The cannabis market is diffuse and low value, but cannabis is the major drug of concern in treatment, and resources for treatment may be insufficient.
- II. Methamphetamine manufacture remains a risk for the international community because of the surplus of ephedrine in the country and its sale by unauthorized vendors, and while this risk may be declining due to high levels of production and low prices in Asian destination countries, there is a risk of dumping on local markets.
- III. Transnational cocaine and heroin trafficking by Nigerian nationals remains a matter of international concern.
- IV. By far the most important issue for Nigerians is the widespread non-medical use of opioids, a market that, with recent price increases, could be worth over \$10 billion annually.

321 UNODC ARQ.

322 Interview with respondent ID ABJ-02-4-DT-KUJ.

323 UNODC ARQ, 2017.



5. Illegal wildlife trade

5.1 Introduction

The illegal wildlife trade in Nigeria covers various species of flora and fauna, with products originating from within Nigeria and further afield. The species traded differ depending on whether they are destined for the small-scale bushmeat and traditional medicine markets in Nigeria³²⁴ or for the transnational trade. For the purposes of this assessment, this chapter focuses primarily on the transnational trade, with its more complex trafficking chain, since this is where organized crime involvement is most evident.³²⁵ This involves species protected under the Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which regulates international wildlife trade.³²⁶ It is important to note, though, that overlaps exist between the local Nigerian bushmeat and traditional medicine trade and international illegal wildlife trade given that some species and products, for example pangolins, are targeted for both.³²⁷

5.2 Definition of terms

As highlighted in the 2020 UNODC *World Wildlife Crime Report*, in contrast to markets that are subject to complete prohibition, wildlife trade may involve goods that can be legally or illegally traded, depending on when, where and how they were acquired. Like firearms, pharmaceuticals or antiquities, the legality of this acquisition is demonstrated through a licensing system.³²⁸ Therefore, for the purpose of this chapter, “illegal wildlife trade” refers to trade of the world’s fauna and flora contrary to Nigerian law, particularly, but not exclusively, the laws Nigeria implemented in fulfilment of CITES obligations.

5.3 Methodology

This chapter is based on information collected through: extensive fieldwork carried out on the ground in Gashaka-Gumti National Park in Nigeria and in Niamey, Ayorou, Gaya and Ham-de-li in the

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- 324 Smaller-scale illegal wildlife trade in Nigeria typically involves local or domestic trade in wildlife products to satiate demand for bushmeat or traditional medicine, see Vivienne L. Williams, Anthony B. Cunningham, Alan C. Kemp and Robin K. Bruyns. ‘Risks to Birds Traded for African Traditional Medicine: A Quantitative Assessment’, *PLoS One*, vol. 9, no. 8 (2014); Durojaye A. Soewu. ‘Zootherapy and Biodiversity Conservation in Nigeria’, in: Rômulo Romeu, Nóbrega Alves and Ierecê Lucena Rosa (eds.), *Animals in Traditional Folk Medicine*, London, 2013; Fidelis A. Atuo, Timothy J. O’Connell and Peter U. Abanyam. ‘An assessment of socio-economic drivers of avian body parts trade in West African rainforests’, *Biological Conservation*, vol. 191 (2015), pp. 614-622; Sylvester Chibueze Izaz and Enetimi Idah Seiyaboh. ‘Challenges of wildlife with therapeutic properties in Nigeria; a conservation perspective’, *International Journal of Avian & Wildlife Biology*, vol. 3, no. 4 (2018), pp. 252-257. The practice of traditional medicine in Nigeria is so broad that most wildlife is associated with medicinal value, translating into an extensive and diverse trade. For instance, 24 per cent of Nigeria’s 848 bird species are traded for traditional medicine (compared to 3 per cent of Brazil’s 1,721 bird species), Fidelis A. Atuo, Timothy J. O’Connell and Peter U. Abanyam. ‘An assessment of socio-economic drivers of avian body parts trade in West African rainforests’, *Biological Conservation*, vol. 191 (2015), pp. 614-622.
- 325 UNODC. *World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in protected species, 2020* accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/World_Wildlife_Report_2020_9July.pdf. See also the cases on wildlife, forest, and fisheries crime combined with participation in an organized criminal group in the UNODC SHERLOC Case Law Database, accessible at <https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/v3/sherloc/cldb/#/crime-type>.
- 326 There are 294 flora species listed on CITES for which Nigeria is categorized as a range state, and 217 fauna species.
- 327 D.A. Soewu and I.A. Ayodele. ‘Utilization of Pangolin (Manis sp.) in Traditional Yorubic Medicine in Ijebu province, Ogun State, Nigeria’. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, vol. 5 (2009).
- D.A. Soewu et al. Trade in Wild Mammalian Species for Traditional Medicine in Ogun State, Nigeria, *Global Journal of Medical Research*, vol. 12 (2012).
- 328 UNODC. *World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in protected species 2020*, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/World_Wildlife_Report_2020_9July.pdf

Niger; expert interviews with the NCS, the NESREA and other government officials;³²⁹ interviews with civil society stakeholders;³³⁰ on-site visits of Dei-dei (Abuja), Sagamu (Lagos) and Aba Road (Port Harcourt) log markets; and analysis of the UNODC World Wildlife Seizures Database (World WISE) and supplementary desk research.

The research focused on illegal trade in rosewood and pangolin scales because the UNODC *World Wildlife Crime Report 2020* highlighted Nigeria's growing role in their trafficking as both a source and transit country. For the rosewood case study, in order to determine the status of the illegal rosewood trade since the CITES trade suspension for *Pterocarpus erinaceus* from Nigeria as of 1 November 2018, UNODC conducted in-country field research from February to March 2021. This research involved interviews with approximately 30 key stakeholders, government officials, researchers and conservationists, as well as with traders with knowledge of the trade in the public and private sectors.³³¹ This information was then triangulated with findings from an analysis of legal trade and seizure data from the following sources:

- I. Chinese Customs data³³² (imports of Hongmu³³³ species and all other non-Hongmu species³³⁴);
- II. UN Comtrade data;³³⁵
- III. CITES data as reported by the Nigerian CITES Management Authority and by the CITES Legal Trade Database;³³⁶
- IV. Data from the Central Bank of Nigeria on wood exports;³³⁷

- V. Data on Chinese furniture imports, sourced from online Chinese trade databases and UN Comtrade; and
- VI. Vietnamese import data, sourced from Vietnamese Customs data.³³⁸

For the pangolin case study, a researcher spent two weeks in June 2021 in Niger travelling to the northern border of Benin and the southwestern corner of Niger that borders northern Nigeria, largely following the course of the Niger River. The researcher observed and, when possible, interviewed poachers, transporters and traders in the region. This required observing illegal trade networks and building relationships with traders to learn details of their activities. In total, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with seven local traders/consolidators buying product from local poachers (five individuals from Niger, one from Gabon and one from Benin). Four out of seven of these traders had legal import/export businesses alongside their illegal wildlife activities.

5.4 Evolution of wildlife crime in Nigeria

West Africa has developed a booming trade in log exports since 2010, going from zero exports to hundreds of millions of dollars' worth by 2015.³³⁹ With the depletion of Asian rosewood stocks, timber traffickers rushed to illegally harvest and export similar non-protected rosewood species like *Pterocarpus erinaceus* from other regions such as West and Central Africa, where lack of enforcement

329 Representatives of the following institutions were interviewed as part of this research: Federal Department of Forestry, Federal Ministry of Environment; CITES MA Authority (housed in the Federal Forestry Department); National Park Service Headquarters; NESREA; Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria (FRIN); Special Wildlife Crime Office of the NCS; NCS, Apapa, Tin-Can and Onne Commands.

330 Africa Nature Investors (ANI); Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

331 During this study, the following log markets were visited: Sagamu, located in Ogun State; Dei-dei wood market on the outskirts of Abuja, FCT; and Aba Road wood market, found in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The researcher visited the two main ports in Lagos, Apapa and Tin Can, and met with officials from Onne Port in Port Harcourt. A second port in Port Harcourt, known as Rivers Port, was not visited.

332 Accessible at <https://globaltimber.org.uk/china.htm>.

333 The Chinese term for "rosewood" species.

334 For these data, the Harmonized System (HS) customs codes 44034980, 44039930, 44072940, and 44079910 were used. These could refer to imports of *Pterocarpus erinaceus*, *Dalbergia melanoxylon* and *Diospyros crassiflora* Hiern (*Dalbergia crassiflora*). There is no way to distinguish between the three species in the Chinese Customs data. These data are unlikely to refer to *Dalbergia melanoxylon* because the species is deemed extremely rare in the region and there have been no reports of it being traded in and from Nigeria, or the broader ECOWAS region.

335 Accessible at <https://comtradeplus.un.org/>.

336 Accessible at <https://cites.org/eng/node/7691#:~:text=The%20CITES%20trade%20database%2C%20managed,of%20taxa%20listed%20by%20CITES>.

337 The data are not publicly available, it was shared by the Central Bank of Nigeria with a UNODC research consultant.

338 Data from the General Department of Vietnam Customs was compiled by Forest Trends and the Vietnamese timber associations and shared with UNODC researchers.

339 UNODC. *World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in protected species*, 2020 accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/World_Wildlife_Report_2020_9July.pdf.

capacity and economic incentives fueled the timber trade. In the case of Nigeria, this practice was illegal because of the country's ban on log exports.³⁴⁰ Since 2014, there has also been a dramatic rise in pangolin scale seizures from Nigeria, from a low of 2 metric tons in 2015 to a high of 51 metric tons in 2019.³⁴¹ Nigeria was either the source or seizing country for eight of the 11 largest pangolin seizures in 2019. The country continues to regularly seize shipments of pangolin scales. From March to November 2021, the NCS reported confiscating 7.5 metric tons of scales. On 2 February 2022, the NCS made a seizure of 14 sacks containing 40 pieces of cut ivory weighing 145 kilograms. This came after Vietnamese Customs seized 6.2 metric tons of pangolin scales and 456 kilograms of ivory in Da Nang, Vietnam, shipped from Lagos in January 2022. Further, in February 2022, the NCS made a seizure of 14 sacks containing 839.4 kilograms of pangolin scales and four sacks containing 40 pieces of cut ivory weighing 145 kilograms.³⁴² Additionally, Vietnam Customs seized 6.2 tons of pangolin scales and 456 kilograms of ivory in Da Nang, reportedly shipped from Lagos, Nigeria, in January 2022.³⁴³

While the UNODC *World Wildlife Crime Report 2020* notes an apparent decline in the ivory market since 2011,³⁴⁴ ivory trafficking does remain a problem for Nigeria. Ivory seizure data show a clear displacement of illegal ivory shipments from East Africa

(particularly from Mombasa, Kenya) to Nigeria. From 2015-2019, Nigeria was the leading source of global elephant tusk seizures (23 per cent), although, based on population estimates, it accounted for only 0.02 per cent of elephants residing in African countries in 2015 (with less than 1 metric ton of ivory).³⁴⁵ Nigeria likely plays a key role in the transit of illegal ivory shipments given that it is unlikely to be the origin country³⁴⁶ of the 97 metric tons of ivory from seized shipments that cite Nigeria as the source or seizing country of shipment.³⁴⁷

5.5 Discussion of the research findings

Nigeria is a key transit hub and consolidation point for various forms of illegal wildlife trade, especially for pangolin, ivory and rosewood,³⁴⁸ with trafficked wildlife coming primarily from other countries in the region including Cameroon, Gabon, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire and Benin Republic.³⁴⁹ The broader literature also suggests that individuals are involved in trafficking multiple key species together, a sign of crime convergence.³⁵⁰

Analysis of World WISE³⁵¹ provides a wide-angle view of Nigeria's role in the international illegal wildlife trade. While this chapter will focus on the high-volume, high-value species of rosewood, pangolin and ivory,

340 NCS. 'Export Prohibition List', accessed at https://customs.gov.ng/?page_id=3079.

341 UNODC. *World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in protected species*, 2020 accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/World_Wildlife_Report_2020_9July.pdf.

342 NCS data.

343 Another Vietnam Nigeria Connection – Da Nang seizes 6.2 tonnes of pangolin scales and 456 kg of ivory', SEEJ Africa, 16 January 2022, accessible at <https://www.seej-africa.org/international/another-vietnam-nigeria-connection-da-nang-seizes-6-2-tonnes-of-pangolin-scales-and-456-kg-of-ivory/#:~:text=On%20January%2011th%2C%202022%2C%20Vietnamese,that%20had%20arrived%20from%20Nigeria>.

344 UNODC. *World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in protected species*, 2020 accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/World_Wildlife_Report_2020_9July.pdf.

345 International Union for Conservation of Nature. *African elephant status report 2016: an update from the African Elephant Database*, 2016, accessible at <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/46878>.

346 Here, origin country implies the country where the wildlife was originally poached from, whereas source country refers to the source of shipment.

347 World WISE. Using seizures of tusks, ivory pieces, carvings and jewellery. The primary destination countries for ivory are in Asia; Nigeria is not considered a likely destination country for these shipments.

348 EIA. *Out of Africa: How West and Central Africa have become the epicentre of ivory and pangolin scale trafficking to Asia*, December 2020, accessible at <https://eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2020-Out-of-Africa-SPREADS.pdf>; EIA. *Double Impact: The nexus where wildlife and forest crime overlap*, January 2021, accessible at <https://eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/Double-Impact-2020-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf>; Daniel J. Ingram et al. 'Characterising trafficking and trade of pangolins in the Gulf of Guinea'. *Global Ecology and Conservation* vol. 17 (2019); James Kehinde Omifolaji et al. 'The emergence of Nigeria as a staging ground in the illegal pangolin exportation to South-East Asia', *Forensic Science International: Reports* vol. 2 (2019).

349 The literature also notes that Nigeria is one of the biggest consumers of pangolin meat internationally. Since most seizures involve scales, the likelihood is that bodies and skin are incorporated into the national or regional meat trade. Wildlife Justice Commission. *Scaling up: The Rapid Growth in the Industrial Scale Trafficking of Pangolin Scales 2016-2019*, 2020, accessible at https://wildlifejustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The_Rapid_Growth_in_the_Trafficking_of_Pangolin_Scales_2015-2019.pdf; WildAid. *Understanding Urban Consumption of Bushmeat in Nigeria*, January 2021, accessible at <https://wildaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Nigeria-Bushmeat-Consumption-Survey-Report.pdf>.

350 EIA. *Out of Africa: How West and Central Africa have become the epicentre of ivory and pangolin scale trafficking to Asia*, December 2020, accessible at <https://eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2020-Out-of-Africa-SPREADS.pdf>; EIA. *Double Impact: The nexus where wildlife and forest crime overlap*, January 2021, accessible at <https://eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/Double-Impact-2020-SINGLE-PAGES.pdf>.

351 See the methodological annex of the 2020 UNODC *World Wildlife Crime Report* for a description of the database and its structure, as well as the types of data it contains, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/WWCR2_Methods_Annex.pdf.

World WISE data put these lucrative bulk trades in context. The database contains 1,001 seizure records from 2011 to 2020 with Nigeria listed as a reporting, source, transit or destination country, or where the offender was Nigerian (out of about 302,000 seizure records total). Although this analysis portrays the nature of the illegal wildlife trade involving Nigeria, it should be acknowledged that ‘source’, ‘transit’ and ‘destination’ refer to the specific shipment seized, meaning it is possible that the actual wildlife products seized may have originated from or be destined for locations further afield.

5.5.1 Seizures

The 1,001 entries in World WISE involving Nigeria span 46 identified families of species.³⁵² Some 54 per cent of these seizures included elephant species (*Elephantidae*). The next largest group of seizures by family were pangolins (*Manidae*), which accounted for 20 per cent percent, followed by three families of reptiles: *Pythonidae* (4 per cent), *Crocodylidae* (3 per cent) and *Varanidae* (2 per cent). This latter group of seizures of reptiles was primarily for the skin trade, as 91 per cent of those seizures were leather products and skin pieces. Elephant and pangolin seizures were primarily of ivory in various forms (96 per cent) and scales (88 per cent), respectively. A noteworthy point here is that rosewood does not feature prominently in the seizure record. This is because most illegally sourced rosewood is laundered through the legal trade. This highlights the importance of analysing legal trade records for certain species that are traded legally and for which laundering is a common modus operandi.

Seizure data suggests that Nigeria’s role in the illegal wildlife trade is primarily as a source or transit country (see Table 2), although, as previously stated, the precise source of the products may differ from the source of the individual shipments seized. A pangolin, for example, can be sourced from Cameroon, then smuggled to Nigeria where its scales can be stockpiled with others until export. If that pangolin’s scales are intercepted as they travel via a shipping container from Nigeria to East Asia, the source of shipment can be recorded as Nigeria, if no further sourcing information is available from

investigations or intelligence. If, as is the case with pangolins, the wildlife is native to the source of shipment recorded, it can be difficult to ascertain if Nigeria was where the pangolin was poached, or if it was just a consolidation point along the way. These nuances make drawing conclusions from seizure data difficult, but triangulating information from seizure data with field observations and other complementary data sources provides a more complete understanding of key wildlife trafficking flows. Later sections in this chapter provide triangulating information from UNODC fieldwork and legal trade data, where appropriate.

Table 2: Role of Nigeria according to seizure records involving the country (where known)

Role according to seizure records	Per cent of seizures involving Nigeria
Reporting country	27
Source of shipment	86
Transit country	2
Destination of shipment	2

*Note that for some seizures Nigeria may be, for example, both a reporting and a source country.

Source: UNODC World WISE.

Almost two-thirds of seizures involving Nigeria in the World WISE were reported by other countries, first and foremost China, including Hong Kong, (24 per cent of seizures) and the US (16 per cent of seizures). Nigeria itself is not detecting this illegal trade as it is being exported, losing, without knowing it, significant potential revenue from its own natural resources. Data on destination countries is limited to about 35 per cent of the 1,001 seizure records involving Nigeria. When looking at families of species that are most commonly traded and have at least 10 seizure records,³⁵³ the top two known destinations are China, including Hong Kong, (19 per cent) and Vietnam (4 per cent). These destinations are in keeping with the findings of the 2020 UNODC *World Wildlife Crime Report* and other research that highlight that China and Vietnam are both major markets for elephant and pangolin products.

³⁵² 33 seizures were not identified.

³⁵³ *Elephantidae*, *Manidae*, *Pythonidae*, *Crocodylidae*, *Varanidae*, *Felidae* and *Rhinocerotidae*.

5.5.2 Modes of transport

Various modes of transport are used to move wildlife products sourced from outside Nigeria into the country. Transport into Nigeria is often on buses or trucks from Liberia and the Central African Republic, speedboats from Gabon and Cameroon, and canoes or by foot from Cameroon.³⁵⁴ UNODC fieldwork has identified border towns like Gaya in the Niger, on the border with Benin Republic and less than 100 kilometres from the Nigerian border, as a site where wildlife products like elephant ivory and pangolin scales are kept prior to import into Nigeria.

UNODC fieldwork further found that volumes and types of wildlife product moved in each shipment differ substantially, with many traffickers using their own vehicles to transport product like pangolin scales. Traffickers sometimes choose to transport illegal wildlife products at festival times or when harvests are underway. Authorities are less likely to search trucks during these high-volume periods when large quantities of animals and foodstuffs need to reach their destinations quickly.

Within Nigeria, the Lagos-Ibadan highway is considered a major entry point for the transportation of pangolin scales into Lagos.³⁵⁵ UNODC fieldwork has identified Lagos as an important transit hub for a variety of illegal wildlife products. Interviews with middlemen indicated that they regularly sold ivory to contacts in Lagos. Additionally, an assortment of wildlife products, including ivory and pangolin products, can be purchased from Bode Market in Ibadan, Oyo State.

The export of wildlife products from Nigeria occurs predominantly via sea and air. Nigeria's largest port, the Apapa Port Complex, is known to be used to export elephant ivory and pangolin scales in container loads often hidden under timber, plastic waste or food products like dried nuts.³⁵⁶ Yet UNODC fieldwork suggests that concerns about enforcement may be stimulating increased use of other ports, such as Onne Port. Apapa and Tin Can Ports are also used for exporting rosewood. This suite of ports engaged in international shipping may be part of the reason that illegal wildlife traffickers commit their activities in Nigeria instead of in neighbouring countries with smaller ports like Benin Republic, Togo and Côte d'Ivoire.

As highlighted in a 2020 study by the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), illegal wildlife traffickers exploit an array of international maritime shipping and air transport companies to move illegal wildlife products. Once exported, shipments sometimes stop once or more en route to their final destination in order to disguise the origin of the container. For marine transport to China and Vietnam, common trans-shipment³⁵⁷ locations are Singapore and Malaysia.³⁵⁸ Trans-shipments involving air freight often take place in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Ethiopia.³⁵⁹ Vietnam and Hong Kong are common transit hubs for goods destined for China. In Vietnam, for example, wildlife product shipments may be broken down into smaller batches and repackaged to enable overland smuggling.³⁶⁰

354 EIA. *Out of Africa: How West and Central Africa have become the epicentre of ivory and pangolin scale trafficking to Asia*, December 2020, accessible at <https://eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2020-Out-of-Africa-SPREADS.pdf>.

355 James Kehinde Omifolaji et al. 'The emergence of Nigeria as a staging ground in the illegal pangolin exportation to South-East Asia', *Forensic Science International: Reports*, vol. 2 (2019).

356 EIA. *Out of Africa: How West and Central Africa have become the epicentre of ivory and pangolin scale trafficking to Asia*, December 2020, accessible at <https://eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2020-Out-of-Africa-SPREADS.pdf>; Wildlife Justice Commission. *Scaling up: The Rapid Growth in the Industrial Scale Trafficking of Pangolin Scales 2016-2019, 2020*, accessible at https://wildlifejustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The_Rapid_Growth_in_the_Trafficking_of_Pangolin_Scales_2015-2019.pdf; James Kehinde Omifolaji et al. 'The emergence of Nigeria as a staging ground in the illegal pangolin exportation to South-East Asia', *Forensic Science International: Reports* vol. 2 (2019).

357 Trans-shipment involves moving containers from one ship to another without a customs check prior to onwards transport.

358 EIA. *Out of Africa: How West and Central Africa have become the epicentre of ivory and pangolin scale trafficking to Asia*, December 2020, accessible at <https://eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2020-Out-of-Africa-SPREADS.pdf>

359 Ibid.

360 Ibid.

5.5.3 The involvement of organized criminal groups in Nigerian illegal wildlife trade

Wildlife crime in Nigeria appears to be primarily opportunistic, perpetrated by logisticians/businesspeople who broker consolidation and transport logistics for both legal and illegal trade of goods and cash in on lucrative products to trade. They finance locals in places with available wildlife to source product and then use their existing transport infrastructure to supply international investors with wildlife products. While for certain types of wildlife crime like totoaba trafficking there is evidence that organized criminal groups (i.e., Mexican drug cartels) are engaged in the illegal trade for diversification purposes,³⁶¹ fieldwork suggests that Nigeria's illegal trade infrastructure and the motivations of its actors seem more a choice of convenience by individuals than a concerted decision by a crime group to expand their business type.³⁶²

In Nigeria, those involved in illegal wildlife trade are loosely connected individuals involved in both legal and illegal trade of various sorts, adding a product to their line because there is a strong profit to be made with varying levels of organization and sophistication.³⁶³ A possible exception to this general rule is the timber trafficking market (as discussed in the rosewood case study below), where well-financed armed groups are involved in the felling of trees. Interviews with traders as part of UNODC's fieldwork in Nigeria suggest that Nigerian individuals involved in wildlife crime are not necessary wildlife or even species specialists. They only get involved in quantities of product and in wildlife goods that provide maximum profit with limited risk. They think like organized criminal groups in terms of risk and rewards, but the group structure is loose, hierarchy unclear and most are not driven by criminal dynamics. They are businesspeople driven by profit, dabbling in all sorts of products. They may be more akin to the "enterprise model" of organized criminal

groups.³⁶⁴ From a criminal justice perspective, categorizing crimes as "organized" involves penalties for conspiracy under the Nigerian domestic legal framework that may be more reflective of the seriousness of the crime than the low-level fines that are currently used to punish infractions.

5.5.4 Case studies

The following case studies describe the scale, modus operandi and actors involved in the trafficking of rosewood and pangolin products as examples of illegal wildlife trade involving Nigeria. These species were chosen because 1) they represent some of the more lucrative wildlife products where organized networks are involved in the trade and 2) they feature prominently in either the seizure data involving Nigeria (for pangolins) or the country's legal trade (for rosewood). On the other hand, while ivory remains a commonly seized wildlife product in Nigeria, findings from the 2020 UNODC *World Wildlife Crime Report* and subsequent analyses by the CITES Elephant Trade Information System suggest that the market for ivory is in decline. Mixed seizures of pangolin scales and ivory, with larger percentages of pangolin scales than ivory, suggest the trade is shifting towards pangolin. Traders also suggested during interviews for the *World Wildlife Crime Report* that they preferred dealing with pangolin products because there is both less risk and weaker enforcement for that species.³⁶⁵ While ivory trafficking is likely to remain an issue for Nigeria, illegal trade of products like rosewood timber and pangolin scales are more pressing issues given overall market trends and the small native population of elephants remaining in Nigeria.

Rosewood

The 2016 and 2020 editions of UNODC's *World Wildlife Crime Report* highlighted the emergence of Nigerian rosewood species in the illegal trade as a replacement for depleted Asian supplies. Rosewood is the international trade name given to a group of

361 Arroyo-Quiroz, I. & Wyatt, T. (2019). Wildlife trafficking between the European Union and Mexico. *International Journal for Crime, Justice, and Social Democracy*, 8(3), 23-37.

362 This assessment is based on the responses provided by a variety of actors involved in the trafficking of ivory, pangolin scales, and rosewood interviewed during fieldwork.

363 Ibid.

364 Le, V. (2012). Organised crime typologies: Structure, activities, and conditions. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, 1, 121-131.

365 UNODC. *World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in protected species*, 2020, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/World_Wildlife_Report_2020_9July.pdf.

precious woods that have a dark red colour. These types of wood are used by the Asian furniture market, particularly in China.³⁶⁶

According to Chinese Customs data, rosewood species account for approximately 10 per cent of China’s total log imports, and it is the highest value sector of the log and timber market in the country.³⁶⁷ The Chinese National Hongmu Standard, which defines what Chinese authorities recognize as “rosewood”, identified 29 species as of 2017, four of which are found on the African continent. Table 3 below provides a list of these species and their protection status under CITES and conservation status under the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Red List of Threatened Species. This case study will focus on West African rosewood (*Pterocarpus erinaceus*), which, prior to 2018, was the main rosewood species exported from Nigeria in terms of volume, but other species (both rosewood and non-rosewood) will be discussed as they intersect with this trade.

Table 3: List of African species on the National Hongmu Standard

Species Name	CITES Listing	IUCN Red Listing	No. of countries in range
<i>Pterocarpus erinaceus</i>	Appendix II	Endangered	17
<i>Diospyros crassiflora</i> Hiern* (<i>Dalgerbia crassiflora</i>)	Not listed	Vulnerable	6
<i>Dalbergia melanoxylon</i>	Appendix II	Near threatened	29
<i>Millettia laurentii</i> ³⁶⁸	Not listed	Endangered	5

* Not to be confused with *Diospyros crassiflora* H. Perrier (non Hiern), which was renamed as *Diospyros mcphersonii* G.E. Schatz and Lowry in 2011, with *D.mcphersonii* actually listed on CITES.

Source: CITES and the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Nigeria was one of the biggest exporters of rosewood to China in 2017, despite an existing ban on timber exports (rough or sawn).³⁶⁹ This all-time high in Nigerian rosewood exports in 2017 occurred the same year that State Parties to CITES increased the level of protection (called “up-listing”) for West African rosewood by placing it on Appendix II of the Convention.³⁷⁰

While this up-listing took effect in January 2017, it does not appear to have made any difference in the rosewood trade coming from Nigeria during 2017 and up to November 2018, when a ban was put in place. In fact, as seen with some species like pangolins,³⁷¹ the up-listing to Appendix II can have the opposite effect of spurring trade in highly profitable species as buyers rush to trade before further restrictions are put in place. Nigerian exports of rosewood logs continued increasing in 2017, with 632,369 metric tons imported from Nigeria by China that year, doubling the volume imported the year before in 2016 (311,006 tons) (see Figure 32). A similar trend can be observed in the trade data for sawn timber, with a peak in Chinese imports from Nigeria in 2018. Import statistics from Chinese Customs indicate that China is the main consumer of rosewood logs and sawn wood from Nigeria, with the total weight imported in 2018 representing 60 per cent of all sawn rosewood imported from Nigeria to China in the last 11 years.

This escalation in the rosewood trade precipitated the CITES Standing Committee’s recommendation to suspend all trade in West African rosewood from Nigeria as of 1 November 2018.³⁷³ This trade ban was reinforced by a notice of suspension of wood and allied product (and charcoal) export from Nigeria as of 29 July 2020, issued by the Federal Executive Council of Nigeria. After the CITES trade suspension came into effect, legal trade statistics suggest a downward trend in the rosewood trade

366 Ibid.

367 The data can be downloaded at <https://globaltimber.org.uk/china.htm>.

368 *Millettia laurentii*, commonly called ‘Wenge,’ is primarily found in the Central African countries of Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Experts based in Cross River State, Nigeria, reported that the species was not found there and there are no reports from UNODC’s fieldwork of cross border smuggling of the species.

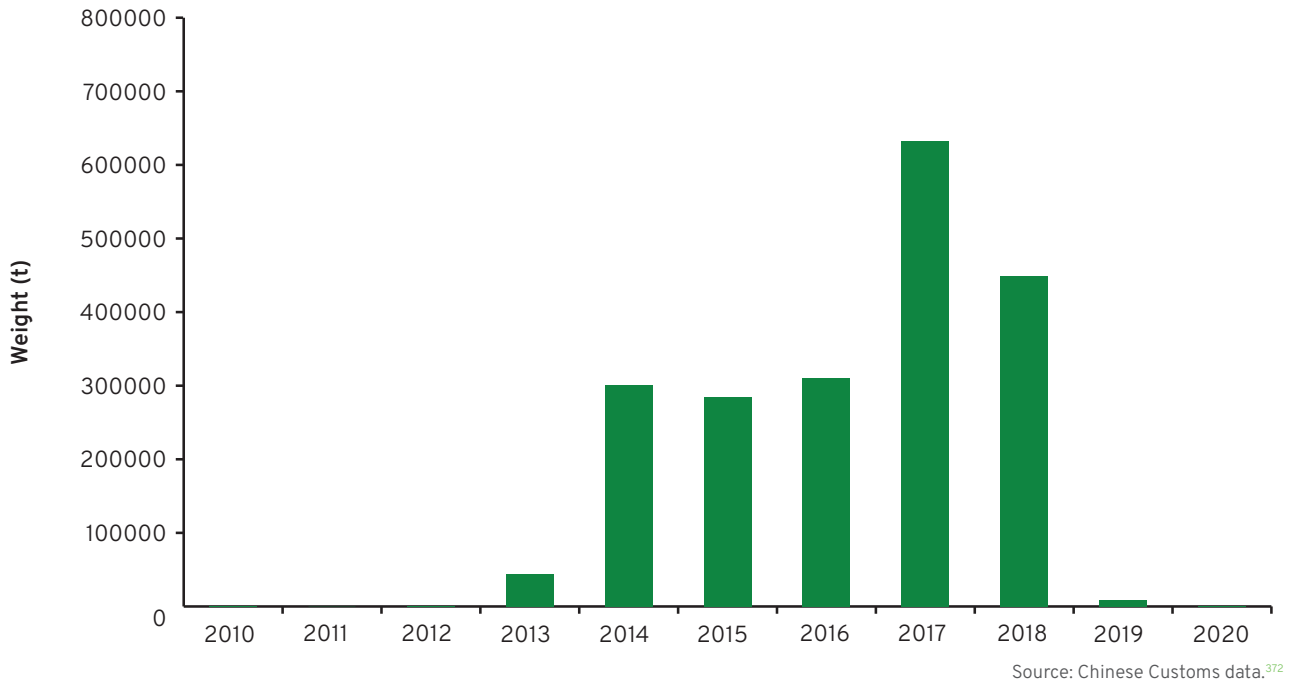
369 Nigeria Custom Service (NCS). *Export Prohibition List*, accessed at https://customs.gov.ng/?page_id=3079.

370 Seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, Johannesburg, 24 September to 5 October 2016, Decision No. 57. Under Appendix II, trade in these species is regulated and requires the granting of an export permit or a re-export certificate if transshipping. These permits should only be granted by authorities if they can prove that the trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species.

371 See UNODC. *World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in Protected Species*, 2020, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/World_Wildlife_Report_2020_9July.pdf.

372 The data can be downloaded at <https://globaltimber.org.uk/china.htm>.

373 CITES Standing Committee, Recommendation No. 2018/084, 1 November 2018.

Figure 32: Total weight of rosewood logs imported by China from Nigeria 2010 to 2020

from Nigeria (see Table 4). Chinese Customs data show that while China imported a total of 522,398 metric tons of rosewood (logs and sawn wood) from Nigeria in 2018, that number dropped in the first three months of 2019 to 15,213 tons. In the next 21 months, from April 2019 to December 2020, China recorded imports from Nigeria of rosewood logs (no sawn wood), but for a very small amount totalling 341 tons, which represents just 12 20-foot containers of logs.³⁷⁴ While the expectation is that if the trade ban was properly implemented, there would be no such imports past November 2018, it is possible that some containers arrived at their destination in early 2019 after leaving Nigeria before the trade ban came into effect in November 2018. Past that point, the rosewood imported appears more suspect. One possible explanation is that traders, realizing there was limited ability to export before the ban came into effect, pushed their last remaining container loads of before the ports fully closed. Nevertheless, the quantities are minimal. On paper, this suggests

that the CITES export ban from Nigeria created the circumstances necessary to curb the rosewood trade. In practice, that assumption is less certain, as suggested by data obtained through UNODC fieldwork in Nigeria in 2020 and 2021.

Table 4: Weight of rosewood logs and sawn wood imported to China from Nigeria between 2016 and 2020

Year	Weight of rosewood logs (t)	Weight of sawn rosewood (t)
2016	311,007	8,196
2017	632,369	33,412
2018	449,252	73,146
2019	8,589	6,856*
2020	111	0

*Imports only occurred during first three months of 2019.

Source: Chinese Customs data.

³⁷⁴ Where an average 20-foot container of rosewood logs represents around 28 tons or 20 cubic metres of wood.

A trade suspension on one species risks displacing the trade to other less regulated species. An export ban like the November 2018 CITES *Pterocarpus erinaceus* trade ban does not reduce the demand for rosewood in consumer markets. It simply limits the supply of the product in demand. As traders under the ban are faced with remaining consumer demand but limited sourcing options for the product, they can either switch to other sourcing locations (in this case Sierra Leone, Mali and Ghana) where there is no ban or switch to similar products that will satisfy consumers.³⁷⁵ This displacement highlights the need to consider trade in other species from that same ecosystem when analysing the impact of trade bans.

Legal trade data show that Nigerian exports of rosewood more or less stopped once the CITES trade ban was implemented in November 2018, but the situation on the ground in source locations remains complex. UNODC fieldwork in June 2021 found that the cutting and processing of logs is still ongoing in key states like Taraba. *Pterocarpus erinaceus* logs are still visible and available for sale on roadsides next to settlements, and traders also report purchasing logs and squaring them to be packed in containers. A UNODC field visit to Sagamu in June 2021 revealed rosewood logs packed in containers, ready for sale or export. Anecdotal reports from traders suggest these containers are now being exported out of Onne Port in Rivers State, although further research is needed to explain this switch from previous exports out of Apapa and Tin Can Ports, among others. While traders report exports out of Onne Port, the Federal Department of Forests has no such records. The customs officials consulted by UNDOC field research staff at Apapa, Tin Can and Onne Ports stated that since the trade suspension in November 2018, they have not witnessed any export of rosewood or made any seizures.

Customs officials interviewed at Onne Port mentioned reports of rosewood being cut down in the north of Nigeria and being transported out of Nigeria over land borders. In particular, they

mentioned rosewood being cut and exported from Katsina State to Niger and from Taraba State and Adamawa State to Cameroon. These reports have come up in previous UNODC fieldwork, but warrant further investigation given recent increases of rosewood exports by nearby countries like Mali, Ghana, The Gambia and Sierra Leone.

Park authorities for Taraba State's Gashaka-Gumti National Park, the largest national park in Nigeria with an area of 6,730 square kilometres, reported during UNODC fieldwork that illegal logging of rosewood since 2018 has intensified. While other types of illegal extraction activities occur in the park,³⁷⁶ such as illegal grazing and hunting, park officials stressed the higher risk of violence from the heavily armed logging gangs. The officials furthermore reported that while poachers have guns, they are old-style hunting guns, not the more sophisticated weapons that the loggers carry to protect their business. Nine park rangers have lost their lives to violence related to illegal logging in the last three years in Gashaka-Gumti National Park.³⁷⁷

Trucks are driven into the park, loaded with logs and driven out. The contraband product is then transported to the open log markets around Jalingo, the capital of Taraba State. UNODC fieldwork revealed that logging gangs go as far as to call park headquarters to warn rangers not to intervene as they transport logs out of the park. All along the road from Serti (Gashaka-Gumti National Park Headquarters) to Jalingo, piles of rosewood are observable at every village: cut, squared and stacked, ready for sale. Park officials report that infrastructure is being built to support the trade. A new hotel recently opened in the town of Bodel, near Serti, which local people report was built with illegal logging proceeds and meant to serve those coming to the park for that illicit business.

Rosewood traders and exporters alleged that sawmills and processing plants in locations such as Sagamu, often owned and operated by foreign

375 UNODC, *World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in protected species*, 2020, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/World_Wildlife_Report_2020_9July.pdf.

376 Malik Reuben and Gabriel O. Yager. 'Assessment of illegal activities carried out by rural dwellers in selected support zone communities of Gashaka-Gumti National Park in Taraba State, Nigeria'. *Nigerian Journal of Agriculture, Food, & Environment*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2016), pp. 52-55.

377 'Illegal loggers kill 9 Gashaka Gumti National Park workers in Taraba', *Vanguard*, 31 July 2019, accessed at <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/07/illegal-loggers-kill-9-gashaka-gumti-national-park-workers-in-taraba>.

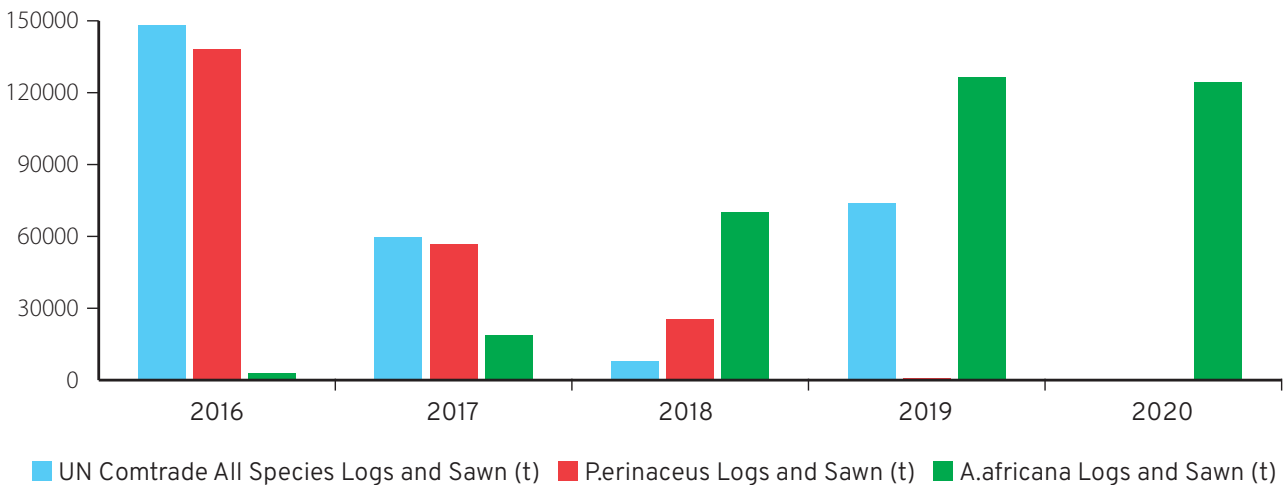
Source: UNODC interpretation of IMO data.

nationals, continue to process rosewood for export upon request, but that such requests have declined considerably since 2018. Visual confirmation of what went on in these sawmills and processing plants was not possible given safety concerns, but these facilities were well-established and active in places like Sagamu as of March 2021 and June 2022.³⁷⁸

Interviews with CITES Management Authorities staff also suggest that there is active involvement of government employees, in particular at the state level, in the rosewood trade. This can create an environment where state authorities have no interest in supporting the forestry departments to do their job. This finding is supported by other research that found that on occasion forestry staff are not deployed to the field to monitor timber populations, and that illegal sourcing and trade goes unnoticed and unchecked.³⁷⁹

A new concerning trend is a shift to the harvesting of other species, primarily *Azelaia africana*, commonly known as “apa.” One of the main destinations for *Azelaia africana* timber, since 2014, has been Vietnam, as confirmed by interviews with traders in 2018 and 2021. Data shared from the General Department of Vietnamese Customs³⁸⁰ on logs and sawn timber of the species *Pterocarpus erinaceus* and *Azelaia africana* from 2015-2020 show a significant drop in *Pterocarpus erinaceus* imports from Nigeria to Vietnam post 2018, with only 29 containers of logs and one container of sawn wood imported in 2019 and zero containers in 2020. Meanwhile, the data show a sharp increase in *Azelaia africana* log and sawn timber imports starting in 2018 (see Figure 33), highlighting the shift to this species after the CITES rosewood ban and explaining Vietnam’s continued import of timber based on UN Comtrade statistics.

Figure 33: Log and sawn wood imports from Nigeria to Vietnam by species based on UN Comtrade and Vietnamese Customs data



Source: Data shared from the General Department of Vietnam Customs,³⁸¹ and UN Comtrade (where weight in tons of rosewood is considered equal to volume of rosewood, as Vietnamese data is in cubic metres and UN Comtrade in metric tons).

378 Follow-up fieldwork on the rosewood trade was conducted by UNODC in the States of Lagos, Ogun, Rivers and Taraba in June 2022.
 379 Y.M. Ahmed and E.D. Oruonye. 'Challenges of enforcement of forestry legislation in Taraba State, Nigeria', *International Journal of Geography & Geology*, vol. 6 (2017), pp. 48-57.
 380 Data from the General Department of Vietnam Customs was compiled by Forest Trends and the Vietnamese timber associations and shared with UNODC researchers.
 381 Ibid.

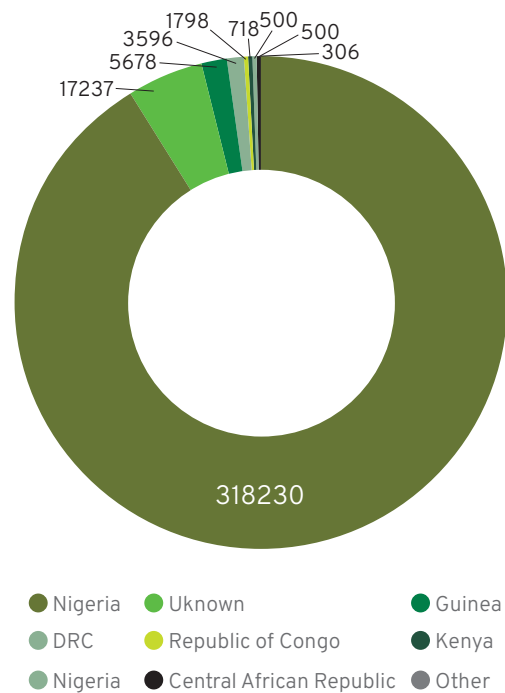
Pangolins

Over the past few years, there was a dramatic rise in pangolin scale seizures with Nigeria as a source or destination country, from a low of two metric tons in 2015 to a high of 51 tons in 2019, recorded in the UNODC World WISE. According to the same database, as of 2018, Nigeria was the source of shipment for just under 60 per cent of pangolin scale seizures, and it was the source or seizing country for eight of the 11 largest pangolin seizures in 2019. Nigeria continues to regularly seize shipments of pangolin scales, including 7.5 metric tons of scales from March to November 2021.³⁸² This rise of Nigeria as a key source or transit country for pangolin scales coincided with the shift in sourcing of pangolin products from Asia to West and Central Africa in 2013.

Nigeria is home to three pangolin species (white-bellied *Manis tricuspis*, giant *Manis gigantea* and black-bellied *Manis tetradactyla*) whose populations are declining and under threat from the illegal wildlife trade. In UNODC’s World WISE, 99 per cent of pangolin product seizures involving Nigeria are scales, with a few other minor product types like meat, live animals and derivatives (most likely for medicinal use). Ninety-four per cent of seizure records generally do not identify the species seized. Where identified at the species level for scale seizures, the data indicate the presence of *Manis culionensis*, *Manis gigantea* and *Manis tricuspis* in trade.

From 2011-2020, the World WISE has 196 seizure records of pangolin products for cases with Nigeria as a reporting, source, transit or destination country, or where the offender was Nigerian. Of those, 173 seizure records involved scales. The total weight of scales seized was 349 metric tons, corresponding to approximately 966,000 pangolins.³⁸³ The majority of these seizures by volume were reported by China (34 per cent) and Nigeria (34 per cent), followed by Vietnam (15 per cent) and Singapore (11 per cent).

Figure 34: Source of shipment for global pangolin scale seizures by weight (kg), 2011-2020



The most common source of shipment for pangolin scale seizures was by far Nigeria (91 per cent), with 5 per cent of seizure records with the source country listed as unknown. Neighbouring countries with native pangolin populations also appear as the source of shipment for a small percentage of the seizures in World WISE. These include Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic. When authorities had information on transit countries (for 30 per cent of records), the top three transit countries and locations were Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore.

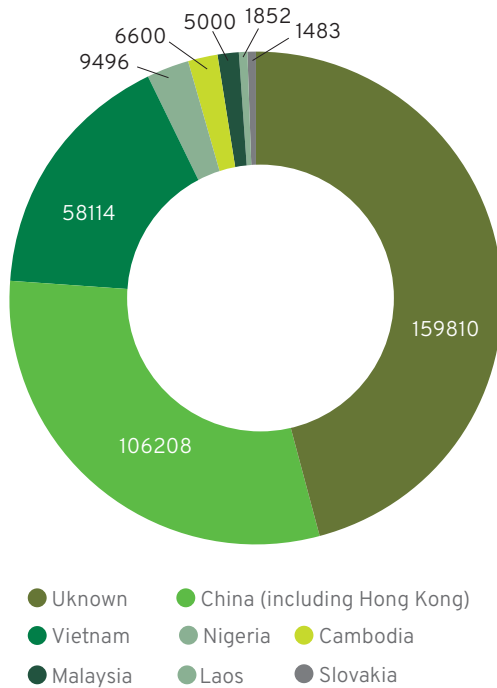
Earlier research confirms that Nigeria is a source and transit point for pangolin products: Nigeria and Cameroon are reported to be the most common export countries for the international trafficking of

382 Data shared by the Nigerian Customs Service with UNODC researchers.

383 For a description of the conversion factors used for this analysis see Methodological Annex to the 2nd Edition of the *World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in protected species*, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/WWCR2_Methods_Annex.pdf.

pangolin scales, with incidents of pangolin scales imported from Cameroon into Nigeria prior to subsequent international export, demonstrating that Nigeria also serves as a transit country.³⁸⁴ As the World Wide shows, international export for these pangolin scale seizures involving Nigeria was mainly to China (30 per cent) and Vietnam (16 per cent) (see Figure 35 below).³⁸⁵ Smaller amounts of pangolin scales were also seized en route to destinations like Cambodia, Malaysia and Laos.

Figure 35: Destination of shipment for pangolin scale seizures by weight (in kilograms), 2011-2020



While the 2020 UNODC *World Wildlife Crime Report* highlighted the roles of Cameroon and Uganda as transit countries, further research carried out for this report studied lesser-known smuggling routes into Nigeria from Niger and Benin Republic. The results of the fieldwork show that border towns such as Gaya are used to smuggle wildlife products to Nigeria. Wildlife commodities are smuggled by truck drivers and hidden in shipments of livestock and agricultural products (such as groundnut).

Fieldwork suggests that festivals or harvest seasons for local bulk products like groundnuts are prioritized for trafficking to Nigeria because there is less chance of being searched at checkpoints given the high volume of trucks passing through during those periods. The unloading of trucks full of cattle or agricultural products is cumbersome at these checkpoints, so smuggling wildlife products among these goods is relatively low risk. Traders reported that Nigeria was a prime transit point because its ports are generally bigger and busier than others in the region. Given that most pangolin scale trafficking to Asia is done via maritime containers, with the next most common method being air travel (both with passengers and via air cargo),³⁸⁶ the busyness of Nigeria's ports presents a definite advantage in terms of ability to export product, especially given the limited staff resources at ports noted during UNODC's rosewood trade analysis. The main downside reported by traders was that the risk of being robbed or fleeced by contacts and other traders/traffickers was higher in Nigeria than in other countries.

³⁸⁴ Daniel J. Ingram, Drew T. Cronin, Daniel W.S. Challender, Dana M. Vendetti and Mary K. Gonder. 'Characterising trafficking and trade of pangolins in the Gulf of Guinea', *Global Ecology and Conservation*, vol. 17 (2019).

³⁸⁵ Destination of shipment is unknown for 46 per cent of seizure records. Note that a small proportion of seizures reported Nigeria as a final destination. Upon further inspection of these data points, the source of shipment for these seizures is either Nigeria or Cameroon, suggesting these are either domestic seizures before export or that Nigeria is a transit country given recorded incidents of pangolin scales imported from Cameroon into Nigeria prior to subsequent international export

³⁸⁶ According to World WISE, the mode of transport for 45 per cent of pangolin scales seizures involving Nigeria was maritime shipping, with 6 per cent of seizures flown by air transit. Mode of transportation was unknown for 38 per cent of cases.

Overall, trade in pangolin scales (and live animals) for traders³⁸⁷ in Gaya and similar localities is opportunistic. Fieldwork assessed that Nigerian citizens, along with Congolese nationals, act as traders and intermediaries in the scale trade.³⁸⁸ They get involved in pangolin trafficking only when others need their trafficking services and are only willing to do bulk trades to make it worthwhile financially when they charge their commission on the trade.³⁸⁹ They are polyvalent brokers of goods (both legal and illegal) and take commission for providing logistics and transport to get the goods to (sometimes foreign) buyers. Their suppliers are either villagers who travel to Gaya or consolidators who buy from villagers in regional markets and come to Gaya for transport of the product onwards to other countries. Sourcing of pangolins is done informally with buyers funding young men to travel by motorbike between remote villages to inform communities that they will pay for live pangolins, and then returning regularly to collect what people harvest. World WISE data from seizure records on offenders (only available for 19 per cent of cases) show the involvement of nationals from East Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Northern Africa.

5.6 Conclusions and key findings

Nigeria has emerged in recent years as a key transit hub and consolidation point for various forms of illegal wildlife trade, especially for pangolin, ivory and rosewood. This assessment sought to highlight the key actors and characteristics of these markets:

- I. The most criminally significant, lucrative and organized of these trades is the illegal rosewood trade, despite a ban for all trade for African rosewood from Nigeria being in effect since 1 November 2018. A new concerning trend is a shift to the harvesting of other species, primarily *Azelia africana*, commonly known as “apa”, mainly destined for Vietnam.
- II. Since 2014, there has also been a dramatic rise in pangolin scale seizures from Nigeria, from a low of two metric tons in 2015 to a high of 51 metric tons in 2019. Nigeria was either the source or seizing country for eight of the 11 largest pangolin seizures in 2019.
- III. While there has been an apparent decline in the ivory market since 2011, ivory trafficking does remain a problem for Nigeria. From 2015-2019, Nigeria was the leading source of global elephant tusk seizures (23 per cent), when, based on population estimates, it accounted for only 0.02 per cent of elephants residing in African countries in 2015 (accounting for less than one metric ton of ivory).
- IV. Nigeria likely plays a key role in the transit of illegal ivory shipments given that it is unlikely to be the origin country for the 97 metric tons of ivory from seized shipments that cite Nigeria as the source or seizing country of shipment.

387 The traders were nationals of Niger, Nigeria, Benin and Gabon.

388 UNODC. *World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in protected species*, 2020 accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/World_Wildlife_Report_2020_9July.pdf.

389 Rosewood was said to be the best way to earn money fast.



STOP SEXUAL VIOLENCE



A DAINA FIADE



6. Trafficking in persons

6.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the involvement of organized criminal groups in the trafficking in persons within, into and from Nigeria.³⁹⁰ Much of the research and analysis on trafficking of Nigerian victims has hitherto focused exclusively on trafficking for sexual exploitation to Western European countries. While this form of trafficking to European destinations has been significant since the 2000s, Nigerian victims are also trafficked by organized criminal groups to other destinations and for other purposes.

Organized criminal groups perpetrate trafficking of Nigerians for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude and organ harvesting. In addition, a form of trafficking of Nigerians that has received particular attention from policymakers and practitioners in Nigeria during the past decade is trafficking for “baby selling”. This involves the victimization of Nigerian women and girls who are trafficked in order to give birth to babies. The babies are then trafficked domestically or internationally for illegal adoption.

6.2 Definition of terms

In line with Article 3(a) of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (TIP Protocol) supplementing UNTOC, trafficking in persons in this chapter shall refer to:

“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.”³⁹¹ ”

According to Article 3(b) of the TIP Protocol, “The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used.” Article 3(c) of the TIP Protocol specifies that “The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered trafficking in persons even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a).” In Nigerian law, the 2015 Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act defines trafficking in persons in Part III, Article 13, as covering all forms of trafficking in persons, in line with the TIP Protocol.

³⁹⁰ On the definition of organized criminal groups in the sense of the UNTOC see Introduction, above.

³⁹¹ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UNTOC, 15 November 2000, UNTS vol. 2237, p. 319.

6.3 Methodology

The field research for this chapter comprised interviews with 84 key informants (32 women and 52 men) and 38 Nigerians who were returned or intending migrants (22 women and 16 men), conducted in the seven Nigerian states of Adamawa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Enugu, Kano and Osun, as well as in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), during the period April to July 2021. The interviews covered both trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, and therefore are used to inform the analysis both for this chapter and for Chapter 7 on smuggling of migrants.

Desk-based research involved reviewing reports from other international organizations produced over the last five years. Academic articles published in peer-reviewed journals were also considered and referenced where relevant. The desk research further included analysis of data sources provided by NAPTIP, the NIS, the National Bureau of Statistics, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), and the European Statistical Office (Eurostat). Data and information were analysed and used to triangulate and substantiate the findings of the field research.

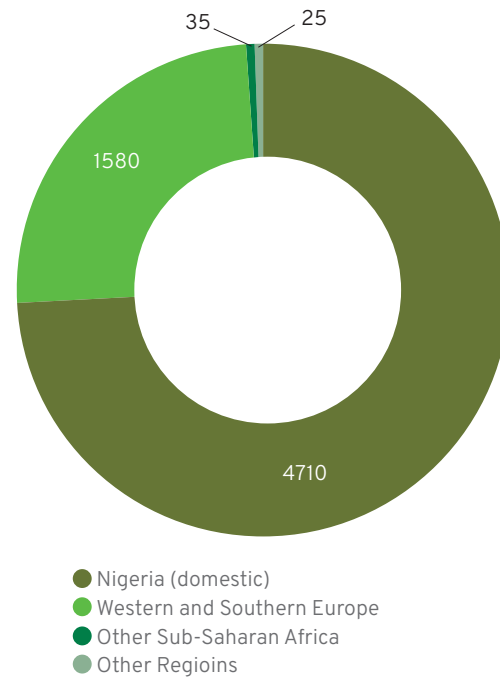
6.4 Discussion of the research findings

6.4.1 Trafficking routes

Identified Nigerian victims of trafficking in persons are trafficked domestically (within the country), within the West Africa region and the African continent, and to other continents. Around 74 per cent of all Nigerian victims recorded between 2015 and 2018 in the UNODC Global Trafficking in Persons Database were identified within Nigeria (domestic trafficking), while a further 25 per cent were identified in Western and Southern Europe. In certain countries in Western Europe – Sweden,

Denmark, France and Germany – Nigerian citizens accounted for more than 40 per cent of all foreign victims of trafficking identified.³⁹²

Figure 36: Detected Nigerian victims, by region of detection (2015-2018, or most recent) (n=6,350)



Source: UNODC Global Database on Trafficking in Persons.

Most forms of domestic trafficking in Nigeria follow a rural-to-urban pattern, and are perpetrated by individuals or loosely associated opportunistic groups, limiting the scope of the related movement to relatively proximate areas.³⁹³ However, the trafficking of women, girls and newborn babies for illegal adoption and/or sale (referred to in Nigeria and elsewhere as “baby factories”, see further below) is a form of domestic trafficking that is facilitated by well-organized groups, as women and girls are first trafficked within Nigeria, and then their babies may be trafficked domestically or internationally.³⁹⁴ Transnational organized criminal groups are also involved in domestic trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation, sometimes prior to trafficking them abroad.³⁹⁵ In an interview conducted for this

³⁹² The UNODC Global Trafficking in Persons Database consists of data collected from Member States for the biennial *UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*. Between 2015 and 2018, 6,350 Nigerian victims were reported in 34 countries, including Nigeria. For the latest edition of the report see UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022, 2023*, accessible at www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/glotip.html.

³⁹³ Interview with key informant, FCT, Nigeria. 13 July 2021. FCT_KI_7; Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 13 April 2021. Edo_KI_5.

³⁹⁴ Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 29 June 2021. Cross River_KI_3.

³⁹⁵ Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 13 April 2021. Edo_KI_4.

report, an NGO representative described trafficking for sexual exploitation from Edo State:

“Internal trafficking that entails child trafficking is very high in Edo State. Also, they train the girls, groom them before they are trafficked out of the country. Edo State is largely a transit state because it is both a receiver state where young girls are taken from the east [of Nigeria] to Edo State, while girls are taken from Edo State and taken to Osun State and Oyo State as a form of internal trafficking. From this internal trafficking, with some level of tutorial on prostitution, then they are trafficked abroad.”³⁹⁶ ”

Other forms of domestic trafficking in Nigeria involve neither a transnational component nor organized criminal groups with transnational structures.

In relation to international trafficking, during the period 2015 to 2018, 1,640 Nigerian victims of cross-border trafficking were identified in 33 countries,³⁹⁷ mostly in Western Europe, but also in the Middle East, East Asia and the Pacific, and South, North and Central America. These identified victims represent just a fraction of the overall prevalence of trafficking of Nigerian citizens, and qualitative sources indicate that trafficking of Nigerians within West and Central Africa is more common than trafficking to Europe.

Routes for trafficking of Nigerians by land lead north to Niger, west to Benin Republic and southeast to Cameroon.³⁹⁸ These are countries of destination and exploitation, as well as countries of transit for trafficking further afield. According to a NAPTIP official interviewed for this research, Nigerian victims of trafficking travel “to Lagos [City], to Seme border [Lagos State, bordering Benin Republic] and

from there to other African countries like Togo, Mali, Senegal, Ivory Coast [and] Burkina Faso.”³⁹⁹ In the South-East geopolitical zone, Cross River State is a hub for traffickers transporting victims by sea or land to the Central African countries of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.⁴⁰⁰ Nigerian victims have also been identified in East African countries, such as Rwanda, and in Southern African countries, including South Africa and Lesotho, though in far lower numbers.⁴⁰¹

Nigerians trafficked to North Africa and Europe are transported along the same land, sea and air routes used for smuggling of migrants (see Chapter 7 on smuggling of migrants), or they enter these countries independently and irregularly, or regularly. For victims transported along land and sea smuggling routes, the routes are primarily from Nigeria through Niger to Libya or Tunisia by land, before crossing by sea to Italy. Nigerian victims are also exploited in Libya before being trafficked onwards to Europe.⁴⁰²

Smugglers and other actors along this route traffic people on the move, subjecting them to labour or sexual exploitation, sometimes to coerce them into paying the smugglers more.⁴⁰³ A smaller number of victims are transported through Niger and Mali to Algeria and Morocco. Other victims travel to Western and Southern Europe from Nigeria by air using tourist visas (regular travel) or fraudulent travel documents (irregular travel and/or smuggling of migrants).⁴⁰⁴

Trafficking from Nigeria to the Middle East is also significant.⁴⁰⁵ Nigerians are trafficked to the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Lebanon and Jordan,⁴⁰⁶ travelling by air from the Kano, Lagos and Abuja airports.⁴⁰⁷ Trafficking from Nigeria to the Middle East is primarily for the purposes of forced labour, particularly in domestic work. However,

396 Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 13 April 2021. Edo_KI_4.

397 UNODC Global Trafficking in Persons Database. This number excludes the 4,710 victims of domestic trafficking detected in Nigeria during the time indicated.

398 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 19 April 2021. Delta_KI_2.

399 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 21 April 2021. Delta_KI_10.

400 Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 29 June 2021. Cross River_KI_3; Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 29 June 2021. Cross River_KI_6.

401 UNODC Global Trafficking in Persons Database.

402 Based on a collection of cases involving Nigerian victims of trafficking in persons, UNODC SHERLOC Case Law Database.

403 International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). *The Strength to Carry on: Resilience and Vulnerability to Trafficking and Other Abuses among People Travelling along Migration Routes to Europe*, April 2019, accessible at https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/56491/file/STRIVE_Briefing_Papaer_English.pdf.

404 Rafaela Hilário Pascoal. *Stranded: The new trendsetters of the Nigerian human trafficking criminal networks for sexual purposes*, Cooperazione Internazionale Sud Sud, 2018.

405 Kennedy Atong, Emmanuel Mayah and Akhator Odigie. *Africa Labour Migration to the GCC States: The case of Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda*, 2018, accessible at https://www.ituc-africa.org/IMG/pdf/ituc-africa_study-africa_labour_migration_to_the_gcc_states.pdf.

406 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 30 March 2021. Kano_KI_3.

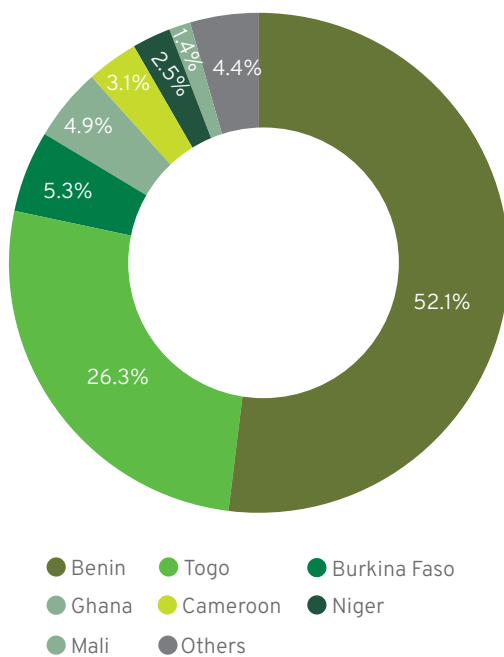
407 Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 29 June 2021. Cross River_KI_3.

many cases of Nigerian women and girls trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation have also been reported in the UAE.⁴⁰⁸

Nigerian victims of trafficking have also been identified in the Americas and Australia, though in much smaller numbers.⁴⁰⁹ One key informant in Kano mentioned trafficking from Nigeria for the purpose of organ removal in Malaysia and Singapore,⁴¹⁰ but no other sources were available to confirm this.

Victims from surrounding West and Central African countries are also trafficked into and through Nigeria. The 2019 NAPTIP Country Report shows

Figure 37: Non-Nigerians identified as victims of trafficking in persons in Nigeria (2019-2021)



Source: NAPTIP.

that between 2014 and 2019 the vast majority of the foreign victims of trafficking identified in Nigeria were from Benin Republic, Togo, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Cameroon, Niger and Mali.⁴¹¹

6.4.2 Forms of trafficking

Nigerian victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are almost exclusively women and girls, and are trafficked within Nigeria, to other countries in sub-Saharan and North Africa, to Europe, and to the Middle East.⁴¹² Nigerian women and girls are also trafficked to Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and other Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for the purpose of sexual exploitation connected to gold mining sites.

Trafficking networks also recruit Nigerian victims for the purpose of forced labour or domestic servitude abroad, particularly to destinations on the African continent or in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC),⁴¹³ as well as Lebanon and Jordan. Many West and Central Africans are also trafficked to Nigeria for work in the agricultural sector.⁴¹⁴

According to NAPTIP, many victims recently have been recruited in Kano State, deceived into travelling abroad with promises of employment in the GCC countries of Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or the UAE.⁴¹⁵ Interviews with key informants and research by the European Asylum Support Office show that trafficking for forced labour to the countries of the GCC has intensified in the past few years.⁴¹⁶ Traffickers to the countries of the GCC appear to focus their recruitment efforts on the northern parts of Nigeria, though a few interviewees for this research described how victims from the states of Edo and Delta (South-South), Imo (South-East), and Osun (South-West) had been trafficked in the same way. According to one officer interviewed:

408 Ibid.

409 UNODC Global Trafficking in Persons Database.

410 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 30 March 2021. Kano_KI_3.

411 NAPTIP. *Nigeria Country Report on Human Trafficking 2019, 2020*, p. 32, accessible at https://naptip.gov.ng/resources/country_report.pdf.

412 EASO. *Nigeria: Sex Trafficking of Women, Country of Origin Information Report, 2015*, accessible at https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1294857/90_1445949766_2015-10-easo-nigeria-sex-trafficking.pdf.

413 The GCC is a regional intergovernmental union consisting of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

414 Interview with key informant, Osun State, Nigeria. 4 May 2021. Osun_KI_6.

415 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 30 March 2021. Kano_KI_3.

416 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 1 April 2021. Kano_KI_9; Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_KI_7; Interview with victim, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_V_3; Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 30 March 2021. Kano_KI_2; Interview with Migrant, Kano State, Nigeria. 30 March 2021. Kano_M_3; Interview with victim, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_V_5; EASO. *Nigeria: Trafficking in Human Beings, Country of Origin Information Report, April 2021*, accessible at https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2021_04_EASO_COI_Report_Nigeria_Trafficking_in_Human_Beings.pdf.

“ I’m telling you about the ones from the north; a lot of Hausa [women and] girls and they are the ones that go into all these Islamic countries, they may not be going to Italy or France or Spain, but they are going to Libya, Sudan, Saudi, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait all these places are their own special areas.⁴¹⁷ ”

Assessments and data from NAPTIP document high numbers of victims exploited domestically for forced labour. Predominantly children, but also adults, are identified as victims of various forms of forced labour, including in domestic work, agriculture, commercial farming, construction, quarries and mines, hawking, and begging.⁴¹⁸

The research for this chapter revealed important information about a specific form of trafficking for sale of a person/illegal adoption, referred to as “baby selling”. In the case of trafficking for baby selling, trafficking networks with many individuals work together for the purpose of establishing locations where trafficked women and girls give birth – referred to as “baby factories”. Baby factories have been detected in hospitals, orphanages, social welfare homes and even water bottling factories, which had been converted into shelters for girls and young women delivering babies for the purpose of illegal adoption.⁴¹⁹

Domestically, the demand for illegal adoption of newborn babies is high due to the social stigma associated with infertility within Nigeria; however, the market also supplies cross-border illegal adoption and trafficking to high-income countries.⁴²⁰ According to a NAPTIP official interviewed for this chapter, trafficked Nigerian babies have been intercepted on international flights, and Nigerian

nationals living abroad have returned to Nigeria to “buy” babies.⁴²¹ While there are reports of this form of trafficking across Nigeria, the highest number of reports relate to women and girls trafficked from the South-East geopolitical zone and exploited for the purpose of selling the babies they give birth to in Delta and Cross River States.⁴²²

Compared to other types of trafficking in persons, there are fewer examples of traffickers exploiting victims by organizing the removal of their organs.⁴²³ Trafficking for organ removal requires a complex business model that involves identifying victims, conducting surgery to remove their organs, and professionally storing and transporting the organs to sell them. One law enforcement official interviewed in Delta State spoke of a young man from Benue State, in the North-Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, who travelled to Cyprus to study and was later found dead with organs removed.⁴²⁴ Victims of trafficking for organ removal are reportedly both male and female.⁴²⁵

6.4.3 Composition and organizational structure of trafficking groups

Nigerian organized criminal groups involved in trafficking in persons have varied organizational arrangements. Often organizers live abroad in the country of exploitation or along trafficking routes, while low-level recruiters are based in Nigeria, often in the state of origin of the victims, and/or collaborating with intermediaries in transit cities.⁴²⁶ Collaboration varies from simple, business-oriented partnerships to more advanced setups that benefit from elaborate coordination and governance models.⁴²⁷ According to a NAPTIP official interviewed for this study, the groups involved in regional trafficking are

417 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 1 April 2021. Kano_KI_9.

418 NAPTIP. *Nigeria Country Report on Human Trafficking 2019*, p. 22, accessible at https://naptip.gov.ng/resources/country_report.pdf.

419 Olusesan Ayodeji Makinde, Olalekan Olaleye, Olufunmbi Olukemi Makinde et al. ‘Baby Factories in Nigeria: Starting the Discussion Toward a National Prevention Policy’, *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2017), pp. 98-105; Svetlana S. Huntley. ‘The Phenomenon of “Baby Factories” in Nigeria as a New Trend in Human Trafficking’, ICD Brief 2, October 2013, accessible at <https://humantraffickingsearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/20131030T045906-ICD-Brief-3-Huntley.pdf>.

420 Olusesan Ayodeji Makinde, Olalekan Olaleye, Olufunmbi Olukemi Makinde et al. ‘Baby Factories in Nigeria: Starting the Discussion Toward a National Prevention Policy’, *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2017), pp. 98-105.

421 Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 29 June 2021. Cross River_KI_3.

422 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 21 April 2021. Delta_KI_10; Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 29 June 2021. Cross River_KI_6.

423 UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, 2018, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2018/GLOTIP_2018_BOOK_web_small.pdf.

424 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 19 April 2021. Delta_KI_2.

425 Interview with key informant, Enugu State, Nigeria. 16 April 2021. Enugu_KI_7.

426 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 20 April 2021. Delta_KI_4; Interview with key informant, Enugu State, Nigeria. 15 June 2021. Enugu_KI_3.

427 UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, 2020, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/Global_Report_on_TIP.pdf.

sophisticated and organized “syndicates”, though it is difficult to ascertain the size of the groups and to identify all the actors involved.⁴²⁸

Although trafficking for baby selling is often domestic, involving smaller numbers of perpetrators, there are examples of baby selling involving a somewhat higher level of criminal organization.⁴²⁹ According to law enforcement interviews in Nigeria, instances of traffickers working together in large numbers and trafficking a high number of victims (women, girls and newborn babies) have been reported. For instance, in one case from Rivers State, 32 pregnant women and girls were rescued from what investigators referred to as a “baby home”.⁴³⁰

Organizers, in particular “madams”

The organizers of trafficking for sexual exploitation include Nigerian men and women, some of whom may be family members of the victim or religious leaders. Female organizers of trafficking for sexual exploitation are often referred to as “madams,”⁴³¹ and may hold high positions in the hierarchy of organized criminal groups, but may also be involved at lower levels in the exploitation of victims, and are often former victims themselves.⁴³² Madams can lead networks that vary from a small group of one or two members to a larger organization operating in origin, transit and destination countries.

While some madams manage entire trafficking schemes and participate in decision-making, others play peripheral roles.⁴³³ Some may position themselves as leaders, while others have less

decision-making power, limited to the exploitation of victims.⁴³⁴ As established in one court case, for example, two different Nigerian madams based outside the country recruited victims through another madam based in Nigeria.⁴³⁵ That madam occupied a lower position within the criminal network and was obliged to hand over the money generated by the victims to the higher-ranking madam.⁴³⁶

“International madams” coordinate locally based recruiters – “local madams” – and are also involved in managing the victims at the country of destination, where they may be based themselves, returning funds to “local madams” in Nigeria.⁴³⁷ As described by a law enforcement officer interviewed in Osun State:

“ This big woman in Nigeria, possibly originally from Benin Republic, goes to neighbouring countries to convince parents of victims that your children can be helped to get a better living in Nigeria. They have a group in Benin Republic and a group in Nigeria. They have drivers, vehicles and standby workers who carry out orders. They even have private security organizations working for them.”⁴³⁸ ”

The structure of trafficking groups involved in baby selling resembles that of Nigerian sex trafficking networks. At the top of the chain is the trafficker acting as the organizer. Organizers operate baby selling networks, facilitate the “adoption” of the babies and transport them to the “adoptive parents.”⁴³⁹

428 Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 28 June 2021. Cross River_KI_5. See also Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 12 April 2021. Edo_KI_2.

429 UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020: Collection of Court Case Summaries*, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTIP_2020_Court_Cases_Summaries.pdf.

430 Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 29 June 2021. Cross River_KI_3.

431 The concept of the ‘madam’ is often used in the context of Nigerian trafficking in persons.

432 Paolo Campana. ‘The structure of human trafficking: Lifting the bonnet on a Nigerian transnational network’, *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 56, no. 1 (2015), pp. 68-86; Dina Siegel and Sylvia de Blank, ‘Women who traffic women: the role of women in human trafficking networks – Dutch cases’, *Global Crime*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2010), pp. 546-447; Marina Mancuso. ‘Not all madams have a central role: analysis of a Nigerian sex trafficking network’, *Trends in Organized Crime*, vol. 17, no. 1/2 (2014), pp. 66-88.

433 Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 13 April 2021. Edo_KI_6; Interview with victim, Edo State, Nigeria. 12 April 2021. Edo_V_1; Interview with victim, Osun State, Nigeria. 6 May 2021. Osun_V_1; Interview with Delta State, Nigeria. V-COWOYEM-Delta.

434 Paolo Campana. ‘The structure of human trafficking: Lifting the bonnet on a Nigerian transnational network’, *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 56, no. 1 (2015), pp. 68-86.

435 Antwerp Criminal Court, Belgium, sentence date 27 November 2018, accessible at the UNODC Sherloc Case Law Database at <https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/case-law-doc/migrantsmugglingcrimetype/bel/2018/eg.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc#1634801658171en>.

436 Ibid.

437 Dina Siegel and Sylvia de Blank. ‘Women who traffic women: the role of women in human trafficking networks – Dutch cases’, *Global Crime*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2010), pp. 546-447. Marina Mancuso. ‘Not all madams have a central role: analysis of a Nigerian sex trafficking network’, *Trends in Organized Crime*, vol. 17, no. 1/2 (2014), pp. 66-88.

438 Interview with key informant, Osun State, Nigeria. 4 May 2021. Osun_KI_6; Interview with key informant, FCT, Nigeria. 12 July 2021. FCT_KI_5.

439 Jacinta Chiamaka Nwaka and Akachi Odoemene. ‘“Baby Factories”: Exploitation of Women in Southern Nigeria’, *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence*, vol. 4, no. 2, article 02 (2019), at p. 6.

Like networks engaged in trafficking for sexual exploitation, groups involved in trafficking for forced labour are also headed by an organizer who orchestrates the scheme. Organizers may be based in Nigeria or in destination countries.⁴⁴⁰ The organizer coordinates with recruiters, such as travel agents. Law enforcement interviewees described the level of coordination between the traffickers based in the Middle East and local recruiters in Nigeria. According to one investigator: “Human traffickers in Nigeria have a connection to other colleagues abroad like in Kuwait; they network.”⁴⁴¹

Recruiters

Interviews conducted for this study and other research show that recruiters for trafficking for sexual exploitation may be people who potential victims trust, such as relatives, friends or members of their community, as well as community or religious leaders.⁴⁴² In some cases, recruiters have regular jobs and engage in recruitment to earn income on the side.⁴⁴³ Women and girls are often trafficked with the promise of some form of employment, only to be exploited sexually.⁴⁴⁴ According to one law enforcement officer: “They might not really know [each other], but they are working in the same chain. It’s like two people who are working in the same office, but they don’t know themselves.”⁴⁴⁵ According to the same officer, recruiters are often not in direct contact with the higher-level trafficking organizers.⁴⁴⁶

Recruiters may work for multiple trafficking groups at once, referring victims to different traffickers on an ad hoc basis. For example, in one state it was reported that there were three women recruiting women and girls for different traffickers.⁴⁴⁷ Recruiters may also identify further trafficking recruiters.⁴⁴⁸

Trafficking recruiters for labour exploitation are often organized in the form of real or fictitious travel or recruitment agencies, deceiving their victims into travelling abroad with promises of employment. Some of these may be based in populous cities such as Kano, where they advertise lucrative job offers abroad.⁴⁴⁹ Interviews conducted for this research with vigilante groups (community-based security, conflict resolution and policing groups) highlighted how it is common practice for traffickers based abroad to operate through local recruitment agencies.⁴⁵⁰ To illustrate, in 2018, NAPTIP detected 19 women and eight children in Kano State who were being “processed” for suspected domestic servitude in the countries of the GCC.⁴⁵¹ The arrested suspects were officials of two travel agencies based in Kano.⁴⁵² Travel agents, whether with an officially registered business or not, may also operate as recruiters for sexual exploitation, organizing travel from the victim’s state of origin to Libya, Europe or Dubai (UAE).⁴⁵³

440 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 20 April 2021. Delta_KI_9; Interview with victim, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_V_3.

441 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_KI_7.

442 Interview with victim, Edo State, Nigeria. 12 April 2021. Edo_V_1; Interview with victim, Osun State, Nigeria. 6 May 2021. Osun_V_1; Interview with victim, Osun State, Nigeria. 6 May 2021. Osun_V_2; Interview with victim, Delta State, Nigeria. V - COWOYEM - Delta; Paolo Campana. ‘The structure of human trafficking: Lifting the bonnet on a Nigerian transnational network’, *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 56, no. 1 (2015), pp. 68-86.

443 Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 29 June 2021. Cross River_KI_6. Interview with victim, Edo State, Nigeria. 12 April 2021. Edo-V-1.

444 Interview with key informant, FCT, Nigeria. 13 July 2021. FCT_KI_7; Interview with victim, Osun State, Nigeria. 6 May 2021. Osun_V_2; Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 13 April 2021. Edo_KI_6. See also Olufunke Aluko-Daniels. ‘At the Margins of Consent: Sex Trafficking from Nigeria to Italy’, in: Simon Massey and Rino Coluccello (eds.), *Eurafrican Migration: Legal, Economic and Social Responses to Irregular Migration*, London, 2015, pp. 74-87.

445 Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 29 June 2021. Cross River_KI_6.

446 Ibid.

447 Interview with victim, Edo State, Nigeria. 12 April 2021. Edo_V_1; Interview with victim, Osun State, Nigeria. 6 May 2021. Osun_V_2. See also EASO. *Nigeria Trafficking in Human Beings, Country of Origin Information Report*, April 2021, accessible at https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2021_04_EASO_COI_Report_Nigeria_Trafficking_in_Human_Beings.pdf.

448 Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 12 April 2021. Edo_KI_2.

449 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 30 March 2021. Kano_KI_3.

450 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 2 April 2021. Kano_KI_11.

451 ‘NAPTIP rescues 19 women being trafficked to Saudi Arabia’, *Punch*, 13 April 2018.

452 Ibid.

453 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 30 March 2021. Kano_KI_3.

Intermediaries

Trafficking intermediaries provide services such as transport and accommodation to facilitate trafficking of Nigerians for sexual exploitation, including the provision of fraudulent travel documents, where necessary. Interviews for this report and further research show that intermediaries are located at various points along sex trafficking routes.⁴⁵⁴ Depending on the destination, this may involve roles such as delivering the victim to or collecting the victim from a motor park (bus station); buying transport tickets; transferring money to the victim to cover travel and other costs; transporting the victim in a private car, motorbike (“*okada*”) or rickshaw (“*keke*”); providing accommodation; directing the victim to a hotel or collective accommodation; and/or directing the victim to a migrant smuggling network.⁴⁵⁵ While some of the travel may be regular, in other cases, these intermediaries are also committing migrant smuggling offences.⁴⁵⁶ Similar to recruiters, intermediaries are not bound to a single trafficker or recruiter. Often, they host or transport victims recruited by different recruiters, travelling to different destinations, and/or intended for different traffickers, while simultaneously hosting or transporting men and boys being smuggled or trafficked for other exploitative purposes.⁴⁵⁷

Interviewees from law enforcement reported that in some cases, nurses at maternity clinics were working together with traffickers.⁴⁵⁸ Medical doctors and nurses assist with the delivery of the babies and are sometimes the operators of baby factories. As

this form of trafficking involves a medical procedure (childbirth), it necessitates the cooperation of health-care personnel.⁴⁵⁹ Intermediaries for this form of trafficking serve a purpose much like adoption agents. They are responsible for finding “buyers” and negotiating the prices. In other scenarios where girls and women are recruited or kidnapped and are not pregnant yet, men working for the trafficker rape the girls and women at the “factories” for the purpose of impregnating them.⁴⁶⁰

Travel agencies involved in trafficking for labour exploitation may also provide fraudulent travel documents or other necessary paperwork, such as proof of vaccination (yellow cards).⁴⁶¹ However, some victims interviewed explained how they had only been provided with a 90-day tourist visa to enter countries in the Middle East. Once they arrived, they were promised a permanent work permit, which the agent did not provide: “The original plan was for him to give me a one-year work visa, not a tourist visa. From Kano Airport, I became suspicious...[T]he travel agent was not free to talk to me. He was fidgeting, he called me aside at the airport and gave me my visa and yellow card.”⁴⁶²

Enforcers

During the sexual exploitation of Nigerian victims, traffickers make use of enforcers, to monitor and ensure compliance. Young men are employed by the trafficking organizer to monitor the victims when the organizer is absent. The trafficking organizer communicates with enforcers by phone.⁴⁶³ Some

454 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 21 April 2021. Delta_KI_6; Paolo Campana. ‘The structure of human trafficking: Lifting the bonnet on a Nigerian transnational network’, *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 56, no. 1 (2015), pp. 68-86; EASO. *Nigeria Trafficking in Human Beings: Country of Origin Information Report*, April 2021, p. 30, accessible at https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2021_04_EASO_COI_Report_Nigeria_Trafficking_in_Human_Beings.pdf.

455 Interview with victim, Edo State, Nigeria. 12 April 2021. Edo_V_1; Interview with migrant, Delta State, Nigeria. 21 April 2021. Delta_M_1; Court case 2 – Italy, 2019; Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 13 April 2021. Edo_KI_6; Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 14 April 2021. Edo_KI_9; Interview with victim, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_V_3. See also Court Case Italy - Sentence N. 883/2019, accessible at the UNODC Sherloc Case Law Database at https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld//case-law-doc/criminalgroupcrimetype/ita/2019/sentence_n_8832019.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc; Court case Proc. Nr. 3714/2016 R.G.N.R. – Italy, 2016: https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld//case-law-doc/criminalgroupcrimetype/ita/2016/proc_nr_37142016_r.g.n.r.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc.

456 See Chapter 7 on smuggling of migrants below.

457 Interview with victim, Osun State, Nigeria. 6 May 2021. Osun_V_2; Olufunke Aluko-Daniels. ‘At the Margins of Consent: Sex Trafficking from Nigeria to Italy’, in: Simon Massey and Rino Coluccello (eds.), *Eurafrican Migration: Legal, Economic and Social Responses to Irregular Migration*, London, 2015, pp. 74-87.

458 Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 29 June 2021. Cross River_KI_6.

459 Ibid.

460 Jacinta Chiamaka Nwaka and Akachi Odoemene. ‘“Baby Factories”: Exploitation of Women in Southern Nigeria’, *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2019), article 02.

461 Interview with victim, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_V_5.

462 Ibid.

463 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 1 April 2021. Kano_KI_9; Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 12 April 2021. Edo_KI_2.

enforcers are traditional or religious leaders, or travel agents.⁴⁶⁴ For some victims, exploitation by illegal and unethical recruitment agencies begins even before reaching countries of the GCC. Victims are required to pay exorbitant fees to the agencies and deception is used as to the true nature of the work, the monthly wages, the location and other working conditions. Some recruitment agencies blackmail and threaten victims and their family members prior to departure.⁴⁶⁵

Enforcers may use deception and sometimes even resort to coercion to recruit their victims. Coercion may also be used when a victim seeks to leave the situation, realizing that he or she is being, or is going to be, exploited.⁴⁶⁶

6.4.4 Modus operandi

Recruitment

Traffickers tasked with the recruitment of victims on the street often rely on word-of-mouth to establish rapport with potential victims. Field research shows that many victims who are trafficked initially contact traffickers through word-of-mouth⁴⁶⁷ on the streets, or vice versa, in a place of worship or in the marketplace; generally, in places where people meet and interact for various purposes.⁴⁶⁸ Victims become aware of an opportunity to travel abroad through friends or relatives and take initiative themselves,⁴⁶⁹ only later finding out the malicious intent of the traffickers. Traffickers in Nigeria may also proactively

approach families with teenage or young adult sons or daughters for the purpose of encouraging them to migrate.

On the other hand, families themselves commonly contact recruiters, who present themselves as migrant smugglers or travel agents, seeking passage of their younger family members.⁴⁷⁰ These individuals benefit from having a good reputation of being able to facilitate irregular migration.⁴⁷¹ This reputation harmonizes well with the general perception in some local communities that migrating abroad is an effective way of alleviating economic hardship.⁴⁷²

Traffickers use a variety of methods for targeted recruitment. In some instances, young men and boys popular within the community portray life abroad in a positive light to potential victims.⁴⁷³ In some cases of trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation, recruitment is carried out by other victims who are instructed by their trafficker to reach out to friends or relatives using parties, drugs and food as enticements.⁴⁷⁴ Social gatherings, such as sports competitions and religious festivals, are also used to recruit potential victims.⁴⁷⁵ Recruiters for trafficking for sexual exploitation of girls and young women may also actively search for victims in street markets or on the campuses of schools and colleges. Victims are told that they will need to pay a debt of a certain amount of money in naira, only to be told, once they reach their country of destination, that this amount is actually to be paid in euros.⁴⁷⁶

464 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 21 April 2021. Delta_KI_10; Interview with key informant, Osun State, Nigeria. 5 May 2021. Osun_KI_14.

465 Kennedy Atong, Emmanuel Mayah and Akhator Odigie. *Africa Labour Migration to the GCC States: The case of Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda*, 2018, accessible at https://www.ituc-africa.org/IMG/pdf/ituc-africa_study-africa_labour_migration_to_the_gcc_states.pdf.

466 See Maria Ioannou and Miriam S.D. Oosting. 'An empirical framework of control methods of victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation', *Global Crime*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2015), pp. 34-49. On the use of violence see 6.4.4 ("Control and exploitation") below.

467 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 20 April 2021. Delta_KI_4; Court Judgement, Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber), the United Kingdom, 17 October 2016.

468 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 20 April 2021. Delta_KI_5.

469 Interview with key informant, FCT, Nigeria. 13 July 2021. FCT_KI_7.

470 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 20 April 2021. Delta_KI_5.

471 Myriam Cherti, Jenny Pennington and Peter Grant. *Beyond Borders, Human Trafficking from Nigeria to the UK*, January 2013, accessible at https://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2013/01/nigeria-trafficking_Jan2013_10189.pdf.

472 Ibid.; Jørgen Carling. *Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe*, IOM Research Series no. 23 (2006).

473 Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 13 April 2021. Edo_KI_4.

474 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 20 April 2021. Delta_KI_9.

475 Finnish Immigration Service. *Human Trafficking of Nigerian Women to Europe*, 2015, accessible at https://migri.fi/documents/5202425/5914056/60332_Suuntaus_NigSuuntaus_HumanTraffickingfromNigeriaFINAL200415.pdf/8f310379-7101-447b-826c-5d34a12ab8ab/60332_Suuntaus_NigSuuntaus_HumanTraffickingfromNigeriaFINAL200415.pdf.

476 Ibid.

In the case of trafficking for labour exploitation, traffickers use legitimate businesses to recruit victims, particularly for forced labour in the countries of the GCC and neighbouring countries of the Middle East. Victims are offered employment abroad and are transported via regular or irregular means to destination countries where they are exploited. According to interviewed experts, criminal groups involved in this form of trafficking have registered offices in Nigeria with certification from the Government to recruit workers.⁴⁷⁷ Recruitment advertisements and interest groups on social media are used to target potential Nigerian and other African victims of labour exploitation.⁴⁷⁸ In some cases, Nigerian migrant workers recruit other prospective migrants offering attractive promises of well-paid jobs.⁴⁷⁹

Once the victim registers with the travel agency, the agents take photographs of the victim, collect all necessary details, and process papers and documentation for the travel.⁴⁸⁰ The process is coordinated with another agency based in the destination country.⁴⁸¹ While, in some cases, this is regular labour migration or migrant smuggling, such recruitment schemes often involve deceptive methods, indicating the incidence of trafficking in persons. In one case, nine women destined for Egypt were intercepted at the Abuja airport.⁴⁸² The victims were told that they would be engaged in domestic work and signed a two-year employment contract prior to departure.

An emerging trend in the recruitment of Nigerian victims is the use of information and communication technologies. Over the last few years, traffickers have been increasingly relying on social media platforms to identify and recruit potential victims.⁴⁸³ According to one official interviewed: “Initially (about five to 10 years ago) traffickers get in contact with

the victims through personal recruitment done by them [the traffickers] but currently they use online [platforms] and minimal contact is permitted such that the victims do not know the traffickers or any of the agents.”⁴⁸⁴ Interviews with victims indicate that social media is sometimes used directly by the organizers themselves. For instance, a victim in Delta State was lured by a driver who connected the victim with a madam based in Europe. The organizer video-called the victim regularly on WhatsApp to get to know her better.⁴⁸⁵

Transportation

Traffickers also require strategies to facilitate the movement of victims across territory and country borders. Victims are either transported by traffickers themselves or their movement is somehow orchestrated by them. In these contexts, traffickers use specific strategies that are designed to facilitate movement, communicate between the members of the trafficking networks and allow for passage across international borders.

Intermediaries are involved in the transfer of victims. Connection travel starts from the recruiter accompanying the victim who is then handed over to another person; this process may also involve smuggling of migrants offences.⁴⁸⁶ The transportation of a single victim may involve up to six facilitators with each of them having a particular role.⁴⁸⁷ For example, a woman trafficked from Nigeria to Senegal was first accompanied by a man who took a picture of her and then handed her over to another man at the border with Togo.⁴⁸⁸ The victim was then transferred two more times until reaching Senegal, where she was met by her sexual exploiter. In connection travel, traffickers move victims from one location to another in a relatively short period. Some are responsible for providing documentation, others

477 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 30 March 2021. Kano_KI_3; Interview with key informant, Osun State, Nigeria. 6 May 2021. Osun_KI_8.

478 Kennedy Atong, Emmanuel Mayah and Akhator Odigie. *Africa Labour Migration to the GCC States: The case of Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda*, 2018, accessible at https://www.ituc-africa.org/IMG/pdf/ituc-africa_study-africa_labour_migration_to_the_gcc_states.pdf.

479 Ibid.

480 Interview with victim, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_V_3.

481 Ibid.

482 Interview with key informant, FCT, Nigeria. 13 July 2021. FCT_KI_8.

483 Interview with key informant, FCT, Nigeria. 13 July 2021. FCT_KI_4.

484 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_KI_6.

485 Interview with victim, Delta State, Nigeria. 21 April 2021. Delta_V_2.

486 Interview with victim, Edo State, Nigeria. 12 April 2021. Edo_V_1. On smuggling of migrants see Chapter 7 below.

487 Interview with victim, Edo State, Nigeria. 13 April 2021. Edo_V_3.

488 Interview with victim, Edo State, Nigeria. 12 April 2021. Edo_V_1.

are responsible for funding and others for picking up the victims at borders.⁴⁸⁹ Traffickers coordinate their activities by phone, and victims are instructed to bring neither money nor a phone with them.⁴⁹⁰

In the case of trafficking of children, fraudulent documents are used to obscure the identity of the victim. Europol has reported that in the case of Nigerian trafficking networks involved in the trafficking of children, counterfeiting of documents is often used to conceal the age of the victim to reduce the likelihood of detection by law enforcement.⁴⁹¹ In one example, a Nigerian girl aged 17 was deceived into travelling from Benin City to Cyprus to pursue further education. She was instructed by her trafficker to change her age to 22 upon arrival at the airport so she could travel.⁴⁹² In other instances, children are instructed by traffickers to falsify their age to avoid being placed in a child protection facility.⁴⁹³ Besides fraudulent documents, traffickers may also use other methods to conceal the age of the victims they are transferring.⁴⁹⁴

Control and exploitation

Deception, coercion and violence are used as means for controlling victims of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, often in order of severity, starting with deception and coercion and subsequently physical and sexual violence.⁴⁹⁵ The means of deception used include lies, debt bondage,⁴⁹⁶ isolation, restriction of movement and

abuse of traditional belief systems, the latter being particularly relevant in the case of sex trafficking from the South-South geopolitical zone.

Debts may be deceptive, fictitious, progressively increased and/or compounded by fines. The psychological effect of a debt bondage system can also lead to a misplaced sense of loyalty to the trafficker on the part of the victim.⁴⁹⁷

Violence is perpetrated against victims by organizers, exploiters and enforcers. A woman from Osun State who was trafficked for sexual exploitation described in an interview how her trafficker had assaulted her: “In the course of the argument, she took two bottles and broke them on my head. I even still have the scars, look at it on my forehead.”⁴⁹⁸ A study on trafficking for baby selling identified deception and the abuse of a position of vulnerability as means of recruitment, followed by physical violence as a means of control.⁴⁹⁹ In other cases, traffickers threaten violence against the family members of victims.⁵⁰⁰

Another modus operandi for establishing control over victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation is isolating them from contacts outside the trafficking network, to ensure that victims lack access to any contacts who could assist them in exiting the exploitation and that they develop a psychological dependency on the trafficker.⁵⁰¹ Isolation may be achieved through cutting off contact between the

489 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 30 March 2021. Kano_KI_2; Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_KI_6.

490 Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 13 April 2021. Edo_KI_6; Interview with victim, Edo State, Nigeria. 12 April 2021. Edo_V_1.

491 Interview with a law enforcement official from the Spanish Police Force. 29 November 2021.

492 Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 13 April 2021. Edo_KI_6.

493 IOM. *Human Trafficking Through the Central Mediterranean Route: data, stories and information collected by the International Organization for Migration*, 18 October 2017, accessible at https://reliefweb.int/attachments/2146bc34-fbdc-3128-933c-01936d574b6d/IOMReport_Trafficking.pdf.

494 Interview with key informant, FCT, Nigeria. 12 July 2021. FCT_KI_6.

495 Marcel van der Watt and Beatri Kruger. ‘Breaking Bondages: Control Methods, “Juju,” and Human Trafficking’, in: John Winterdyk and Jackie Jones (eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, 2020, pp. 935-951; Maite Verhoeven et al. ‘Relationships between suspects and victims of sex trafficking: Exploitation of prostitutes and domestic violence parallels in Dutch trafficking cases’, *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, vol. 21 (2015), pp. 49-64.

496 UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020*, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_15jan_web.pdf; Marcel van der Watt and Beatri Kruger. ‘Breaking Bondages: Control Methods, “Juju,” and Human Trafficking’, in: John Winterdyk and Jackie Jones (eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, 2020, pp. 935-951.

497 Marcel van der Watt and Beatri Kruger. ‘Breaking Bondages: Control Methods, “Juju,” and Human Trafficking’, in: John Winterdyk and Jackie Jones (eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, 2020, pp. 935-951; UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020*, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_15jan_web.pdf; Myriam Cherti, Jenny Pennington and Peter Grant. *Beyond Borders, Human Trafficking from Nigeria to the UK*, January 2013, accessible at https://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2013/01/nigeria-trafficking_Jan2013_10189.pdf.

498 Interview with victim, Osun State, Nigeria. 6 May 2021. Osun_V_1.

499 Yinka Olomajobi and Ajoke Oluwakemi Agbetoba. ‘The Abyss of Baby Factories in Nigeria’, *Women & Criminal Justice*, vol. 30, no. 4 (2020), pp. 220-242.

500 Interview with key informant, Enugu State, Nigeria. 15 June 2021. Enugu_KI_1.

501 Interview with key informant, Osun State, Nigeria. 6 May 2021. Osun_KI_9; Marcel van der Watt and Beatri Kruger. ‘Breaking Bondages: Control Methods, “Juju,” and Human Trafficking’, in: John Winterdyk and Jackie Jones (eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, 2020, pp. 935-951.

victim and their relatives, seizing any means of communication, and confiscating documentation.⁵⁰² Culture and language may also contribute to the isolation of victims.⁵⁰³ For instance, most Nigerian victims trafficked to the Middle East for sexual or labour exploitation do not speak Arabic and experience difficulties even after they have exited the exploitation. As a trafficked woman from Kano State described: “I could only speak English and Hausa, I could not speak the Arabic language, so nobody was willing to employ me.”⁵⁰⁴ Isolation is also evident in trafficking of women and girls for baby selling. For instance, a “baby factory” in southern Nigeria was fenced with high walls to prevent visitors from entering. Trafficked women and girls were denied access to their phones and had no interactions with outsiders.⁵⁰⁵

Limiting the movement of victims also contributes to preventing them from exiting exploitation independently or being identified by authorities. Victims of sexual exploitation are taken to brothels and kept inside, with only the madam providing food, water and other necessities.⁵⁰⁶ One woman interviewed for this research was trafficked for sexual exploitation to another country in West Africa and locked inside the house of her madam for one week. There, she was starved and beaten until she was rescued by a neighbour.⁵⁰⁷ Cases of Nigerian victims trapped in “connection houses” experiencing similar treatment in Libya were also reported.⁵⁰⁸ According to a law enforcement official in Cross River State, women and girls recruited for baby selling are not allowed to leave the “baby factories”

until they deliver the baby.⁵⁰⁹ To control victims both physically and psychologically, traffickers seize their passports, visas and other identification documents, as well as personal belongings, particularly in the case of trafficking for sexual exploitation.⁵¹⁰

In the case of trafficking of women and girls from Edo State and neighbouring states for the purposes of sexual exploitation, traffickers abuse traditional belief systems – “juju” – and oath-taking to psychologically control victims. Some potential victims of sex trafficking are taken to *juju* priests (“*Babaaláwos*”) and made to swear an oath of loyalty to the trafficker in their state of origin, an abuse of the common practice among many people in the region to undertake similar rituals before embarking on significant journeys.⁵¹¹ The *Babaaláwo* acts as a sort of notary in relation to the agreement on debt repayment. Some *Babaaláwos* may be independent of the trafficking network and simply remunerated for their services, while others work in partnership with traffickers and share in the proceeds.⁵¹² One court transcript included a wiretapping of a trafficker asking a *Babaaláwo* to help with a victim who wanted to escape. The *Babaaláwo* replied: “I will text her the curse. Even if she does not pick up her phone, the curse will reach her.”⁵¹³ While the Oba of Benin in Edo State and other traditional leaders have “placed curses on all oathtaking for human trafficking, [*juju*] priests are still used.”⁵¹⁴ In response, some *Babaaláwos* have relocated to the neighbouring state of Delta where they can continue their activities unhindered.

502 Interview with victim, Edo State, Nigeria. 12 April 2021. Edo_V_1; Myriam Cherti, Jenny Pennington and Peter Grant. *Beyond Borders, Human Trafficking from Nigeria to the UK*, January 2013, accessible at https://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2013/01/nigeria-trafficking_Jan2013_10189.pdf.

503 Interview with key informant, FCT, Nigeria. 13 July 2021. FCT_KI_8; Marcel van der Watt and Beatri Kruger. ‘Breaking Bondages: Control Methods, “Juju,” and Human Trafficking’, in: John Winterdyk and Jackie Jones (eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, 2020, pp. 935-951.

504 Interview with victim, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_V_3.

505 Jacinta Chiamaka Nwaka and Akachi Odoemene. ‘Baby Factories’: Exploitation of Women in Southern Nigeria’, *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2019), article 02

506 Interview with key informant, FCT, Nigeria. 13 July 2021. FCT_KI_7.

507 Interview with victim, Osun State, Nigeria. 6 May 2021. Osun_V_2.

508 Interview with victim, Delta State, Nigeria. 21 April 2021. Delta_V_2.

509 Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 28 June 2021. Cross River_KI_5.

510 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 20 April 2021. Delta_KI_9; Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 29 June 2021. Cross River_KI_4; Marcel van der Watt and Beatri Kruger. ‘Breaking Bondages: Control Methods, “Juju,” and Human Trafficking’, in: John Winterdyk and Jackie Jones (eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, 2020, pp. 935-951.

511 Anthony W. Dunkerley. ‘Exploring the use of juju in Nigerian human trafficking networks: considerations for criminal investigators’, *Police Practice and Research*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2018), pp. 83-100; C.S. Baarda. ‘Human trafficking for sexual exploitation from Nigeria into Western Europe: The role of voodoo rituals in the functioning of a criminal network’, *European Journal of Criminology*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2016), pp. 257-273; Marcel van der Watt and Beatri Kruger. ‘Exploring “juju” and human trafficking: Towards a demystified perspective and response’, *South African Review of Sociology*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2017), pp. 70-86.

512 C.S. Baarda. ‘Human trafficking for sexual exploitation from Nigeria into Western Europe: The role of voodoo rituals in the functioning of a criminal network’, *European Journal of Criminology*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2016), pp. 257-273.

513 Ibid.

514 Interview with key informant, Delta State, Nigeria. 21 April 2021. Delta_KI_10.

6.4.5 Trafficking proceeds

Trafficking Income

Organized criminal groups earn substantial revenues from their activities. In Nigeria, the transfer of substantial funds, often from destination countries, follows the organization of the trafficking networks, with some of the proceeds being returned to the origin states and localities of the victims and traffickers. Financial transactions associated with trafficking in persons in Nigeria are detected in the recruitment, transportation and exploitation phases of the trafficking process. The most significant share of the profit, however, is reportedly generated during the exploitation phase.⁵¹⁵

As different studies have shown, traffickers may generate revenue by requiring payments so high that they become a “debt” that victims are coerced into repaying through exploitation at the country of destination.⁵¹⁶ Victims are told they must pay back costs for transportation, accommodation and other living expenses.⁵¹⁷ This has been observed among Nigerian women and girls trafficked to Europe for sexual exploitation, who are forced to “pay back” sums of €30,000 to €65,000.⁵¹⁸

In one court case from 2015, a Nigerian sex trafficking network operating in Spain and Italy required victims to pay a debt of an average of €50,000 each through sexual exploitation. The time it took victims to repay the debt ranged between one and three years.⁵¹⁹ Other cases illustrate that victims

of sexual exploitation trafficked from Nigeria to France were coerced into repaying debts amounting to €60,000.⁵²⁰ In another case reported by German authorities, Nigerian women trafficked for sexual exploitation had to pay approximately €50,000 each to their traffickers.⁵²¹ Such amounts are usually far higher than the costs incurred by the traffickers over the course of exploitation, leading to substantial profits.⁵²²

Trafficking of Nigerian victims to the countries of the Middle East, particularly UAE, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Jordan, also yields high profits.⁵²³ One woman from Edo State was trafficked to Dubai with a promise of a job in a restaurant. Once in the UAE, the woman was told she had to pay a debt of approximately €3,200 (1.5 million naira).⁵²⁴ In another case, a male victim of forced labour was asked to pay around €2,500 (1.2 million naira) to a travel agent for his journey to Dubai.⁵²⁵ Another victim paid €425 (200,000 naira) to a travel agent for her trip to Oman where she worked for one year without pay because she was told she had not paid the costs for her travel.⁵²⁶

Income associated with trafficking in persons in Nigeria is reported in cases of baby selling, with a distinction by sex. In Enugu State, baby boys are sold for illegal adoption for between, approximately, €1,500 and €3,000 (700,000 to 1.5 million naira) and baby girls for between €1,000 and €2,000 (500,000 to 850,000 naira).⁵²⁷ Prices for babies may also increase during the trafficking process. For example, in Cross River State, a mother can sell a baby for

515 Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 13 April 2021. Edo_KI_6.

516 EASO. *Nigeria Trafficking in Human Beings, Country of Origin Information Report*, April 2021, p. 16, accessible at https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2021_04_EASO_COI_Report_Nigeria_Trafficking_in_Human_Beings.pdf.

517 CSD. *Financing of Organised Crime: Human Trafficking in Focus*, 2018, accessible at https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2018_12/FINOCA_2_WEB.pdf.

518 Europol. *Criminal Networks Involved in the Trafficking and Exploitation of Underage Victims in the European Union*, 2018, p.15, accessible at https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/23-11_report_child_trafficking.pdf; IOM. *Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe*, IOM Migration Research Series no. 23 (2006), p. 28, accessible at <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mrs23.pdf>.

519 See UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons: Annex II: Court Case Summaries*, 2020, p. 395 (Case 270 – France, 2015), accessible at www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTIP_2020_Court_Cases_Summaries.pdf.

520 See UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. Annex II: Court Case Summaries*, 2020, pp. 396 (Case 271 – France, 2015) and 574 (Court Case 417 – France, 2018), accessible at www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTIP_2020_Court_Cases_Summaries.pdf.

521 Court Case – Germany, 2019 - 33 KLS 17/18, accessible at the UNODC Sherloc Case Law Database at https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/case-law-doc/traffickingpersonscrimetype/deu/2019/33_kls_1718.html?lng=en&tmpl=sherloc.

522 Marcel van der Watt and Beatri Kruger. ‘Breaking Bondages: Control Methods, “Juju,” and Human Trafficking’, in: John Winterdyk and Jackie Jones (eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*, 2020, pp. 935-951.

523 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 30 March 2021. Kano_KI_3; Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_KI_4.

524 Interview with victim, Edo State, Nigeria. 13 April 2021. Edo_V_3.

525 Interview with victim, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_V_5. The agent had an office in Kano and covered costs related to travel by air and visa issuance.

526 Interview with victim, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_V_3.

527 Interview with key informant, Enugu State, Nigeria. 16 June 2021. Enugu_KI_10; Interview with key informant, Enugu State, Nigeria. 15 June 2021. Enugu_KI_2.

around €20 (10,000 naira), the trafficker may sell the baby for €50 (25,000 naira), the next person for €200 (100,000 naira) and so on until the final buyer, who may pay as much as €3,000 (1.5 million naira) for the baby.⁵²⁸ Such a trafficking chain may involve many persons, the price increasing two times or more.⁵²⁹ Scouts, who work to find the babies, are reportedly paid €750 per child (350,000 naira), with a potentially higher payout for a boy.⁵³⁰

Payment modalities

Illicit revenues from the exploitation of Nigerian victims are transferred via different means, including bank transfers, informal channels and mobile banking. Interviews conducted for this report and other research show that in general, Nigerian traffickers operating in sexual exploitation move cash through cash couriers or use money transfer services.⁵³¹ According to one key informant interviewed for this report, financial transactions between the client and victim, the victim and the trafficker, or between different traffickers, in cases of selling or reselling victims, are mostly in cash.⁵³² A 2018 study by the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) reported that when transferring cash abroad, the money is concealed in suitcases carried by cash couriers, whose commission fees amount to a small percentage of the amount to be transferred.⁵³³ Cash may also be shipped in containers through seaports, which has been reported in the movement of cash from Europe to Nigeria.⁵³⁴

Cash may also be transferred by the victims, who conceal it on or in their bodies.⁵³⁵ A Nigerian man trafficked to Europe for labour exploitation was instructed by his trafficker to conceal €320 (150,000 naira) on his person. Another reported method of concealing cash is taping the money to one's body in order to move it across borders.⁵³⁶

Money transfers through banks and other formal channels are less frequently employed by Nigerian traffickers, due to the ease of tracing such transactions. According to the aforementioned CSD study, if the banking system is used, the money is broken down into smaller amounts and transferred by family members, intermediaries or victims to avoid the risk of detection.⁵³⁷

Western Union is often used to transfer illicit profits across borders. One Nigerian law enforcement official explained that traffickers go to the “connection house” (collective accommodation for victims of trafficking and/or smuggled migrants in West or North Africa), pick up money from the victims and then call their relatives in Nigeria to transfer money to a specific account via services such as Western Union.⁵³⁸ The CSD study mentioned that Western Union has also been used by criminal groups in Libya in cases of kidnapping Nigerian victims on their way to Europe.⁵³⁹ Organized criminal groups active in Europe have been reported to use Ria Money Transfer, also known as Ria Financial, to transfer proceeds from major cities of operation back to Nigeria.⁵⁴⁰

528 Interview with key informant, Cross River State, Nigeria. 29 June 2021. Cross River KI_6.

529 Ibid.

530 Interview with Cross River State, Nigeria. 29 June 2021. Cross River KI_3.

531 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_KI_4. Interview with a law enforcement official from the Spanish National Police Force. 29 November 2021; CSD. *Financing of Organised Crime: Human Trafficking in Focus*, 2018, accessible at https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2018_12/FINOCA_2_WEB.pdf; Europol. *Criminal Networks Involved in the Trafficking and Exploitation of Underage Victims in the European Union*, 2018, accessible at https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/23-11_report_child_trafficking.pdf.

532 Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_KI_4.

533 CSD. *Financing of Organised Crime: Human Trafficking in Focus*, 2018, accessible at https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2018_12/FINOCA_2_WEB.pdf.

534 Ibid.; Interview with a law enforcement official from the Spanish National Police Force. 29 November 2021.

535 Interview with Migrant, Delta State, Nigeria. 21 April 2021. Delta_M_1; Interview with victim, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_V_5.

536 Interview with a law enforcement official from the Spanish National Police Force. 29 November 2021.

537 CSD. *Financing of Organised Crime: Human Trafficking in Focus*, 2018, accessible at https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2018_12/FINOCA_2_WEB.pdf.

538 Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 13 April 2021. Edo_KI_6; Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 15 April 2021. Edo_KI_10; Interview with key informant, Kano State, Nigeria. 31 March 2021. Kano_KI_7.

539 CSD. *Financing of Organised Crime: Human Trafficking in Focus*, 2018, p.277, accessible at https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2018_12/FINOCA_2_WEB.pdf.

540 Interview with a law enforcement official from the Spanish National Police Force. 29 November 2021.

A recent assessment by INTERPOL revealed that organized criminal groups active in Africa use mobile money services to manage financial transactions and launder illicit revenues from trafficking in persons.⁵⁴¹ A law enforcement official from Osun State in the South-West geopolitical zone explained that mobile banking is commonly used by traffickers in the region.⁵⁴²

Since transactions via registered money transfer companies are easily traceable, alternative clandestine payment modalities have also been reported to be used by Nigerian criminal trafficking networks.⁵⁴³ Money is transferred by placing orders in telephone shops and grocery stores.⁵⁴⁴

“*Hawala*” is an international informal money transfer system that allows for the transfer of currency without physically moving money across borders. Nigerian criminal groups sometimes use *hawala* to transfer proceeds of trafficking in persons from the country where victims are exploited back to Nigeria. Payments with *hawala* are facilitated using codes among *hawaladars* acting as trusted brokers.⁵⁴⁵ As described in one court case, several Nigerian intermediaries were working for a madam based in France by facilitating the transportation of victims from Nigeria to France for sexual exploitation. One of the intermediaries, located in France, was responsible for the transfer of funds through *hawala*. He was in contact with two other members of the criminal group who were based in Nigeria. The profits earned through the sexual exploitation of victims were transferred from the intermediary based in France to the intermediaries in Nigeria.⁵⁴⁶

Another informal value transfer system utilized by Nigerian trafficking networks for sending money to the country of origin is known as “euro-to-euro”. As described in the aforementioned CSD study, the system is based on the credibility of intermediaries in the country of origin and money collectors located in the country of destination. As illustrated in a case reported by European authorities, an intermediary located in the destination country receives payment details directly from the madam. Then, the same intermediary calls another person in Nigeria and communicates the account details. The latter receives the money at the country of origin. In some cases, grocery stores and other retailers are utilized for the parallel transfer of money.⁵⁴⁷

Money laundering and investment of criminal proceeds

Money laundering of trafficking proceeds ranges from investment in legitimate businesses and real estate in destination countries to having trusted individuals physically move cash across borders and investing or expending the criminal proceeds in economies outside of the country of exploitation.⁵⁴⁸

Criminal proceeds from sexual exploitation are often transferred back and invested in the country of origin. Trade-based money laundering is one technique used by Nigerian traffickers to conceal and legalize illicit profits.⁵⁴⁹ The method itself involves the use of trade transactions to move value obtained from illicit activities in an attempt to legitimize the origin of the proceeds.⁵⁵⁰ Easily tradable second-hand goods, such as electrical appliances, clothes, vehicles and

541 INTERPOL. *Mobile Money and Organized Crime in Africa*, June 2020, accessible at <https://www.interpol.int/ar/content/download/15457/file/2020%2007%2015%20PUBLIC%20VERSION%20-%20Strategic%20Analysis%20Report%20-Mobile%20Money%20in%20Africa%202020.pdf>.

542 Interview with key informant, Osun State, Nigeria. 5 May 2021. Osun_KI_14.

543 MYRIA, Federal Migration Centre. *Annual Report 2018, Trafficking and Smuggling of Human Beings: Minors at major risk*, 2018, accessible at <https://www.myria.be/files/RATEH-EN-2018-DEF.pdf>.

544 CSD. *Financing of Organised Crime: Human Trafficking in Focus*, 2018, accessible at https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2018_12/FINOCA_2_WEB.pdf; Federal Centre for the Analysis of Migration Flows, the Protection of Fundamental Rights of Foreigners and the Fight against Human Trafficking. *Human Trafficking. Building Bridges. Annual Report of the independent rapporteur on human trafficking 2013*, October 2014, accessible at https://www.gla.gov.uk/media/1575/human-trafficking-building-bridges-2013_en.pdf.

545 Éva Ladányi and István Kobolka. ‘The Hawala System’, *Interdisciplinary Management Research*, vol. 10 (2014), pp. 413-420.

546 See UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons. Annex II: Court Case Summaries*, 2020, p. 580 (Case 419 – France, 2018), accessible at www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTIP_2020_Court_Cases_Summaries.pdf.

547 CSD. *Financing of Organised Crime: Human Trafficking in Focus*, 2018, p.82, accessible at https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2018_12/FINOCA_2_WEB.pdf.

548 Richard O. Iroanya, Gabriella Nguluwe and Salomo Ndapulamalo. ‘Human trafficking and illicit financial flows in Africa’, *Journal of Namibian Studies*, vol. 25 (2019), pp. 47-70; Europol. *European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment, A Corrupting Influence: The Infiltration and Undermining of Europe’s Economy and Society by Organised Crime*, April 2021, p. 66, accessible at https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/socta2021_1.pdf.

549 CSD. *Financing of Organised Crime: Human Trafficking in Focus*, 13 December 2018, accessible at https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2018_12/FINOCA_2_WEB.pdf.

550 Financial Action Task Force (FATF). *Trade Based Money Laundering*, 2006, accessible at <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/reports/Trade%20Based%20Money%20Laundering.pdf>.

furniture, are purchased in the destination country and resold in Nigeria.⁵⁵¹ The goods are usually shipped in containers departing from European seaports, similar to how cash is transported. Reportedly, the average value of goods transferred in shipping containers is around €1,500, to be divided among members of the criminal group.⁵⁵² Part of the money earned from reselling the goods in Nigeria is then returned to the country of exploitation to cover costs of the trafficking, completing the cycle.⁵⁵³

Another form of laundering criminal proceeds is the establishment of stores selling Nigerian goods in the country of exploitation.⁵⁵⁴ A case in point was the use of an African goods shop established in a major European city to launder proceeds of the sexual exploitation of Nigerian victims. Beauty products were sold mainly to African customers and used for sending cash back to Nigeria on a frequent basis. According to one court case analysed in a study by the Belgian Federal Migration Centre: “This Africa shop wasn’t the only Nigerian money transfer agency. In the building housing this Africa shop, another office was also actively involved in money laundering.”⁵⁵⁵ Similarly, one trafficker opened a store for African products in a city in Spain, where money was delivered for transportation to Nigeria and placed among the belongings of couriers.⁵⁵⁶

As a key informant reported in an interview for this study, confirming findings from earlier research, criminal proceeds are invested in real estate in Nigeria, particularly in Edo State, either by the traffickers or the victims and their family members.⁵⁵⁷ Special vaults are sometimes constructed inside properties to conceal cash securely.⁵⁵⁸

Traffickers also use internet-based platforms to launder money. For example, authorities discovered a Nigerian criminal network operating in Spain.⁵⁵⁹ The network was running several websites on which victims were advertised for sexual exploitation services. To launder the proceeds of the trafficking activity, criminals relied on online platforms that allowed them to open bank accounts in different countries and make instant money transfers. Locations of companies were traced back to at least 15 countries and cryptocurrencies were purchased in the Netherlands to launder part of the criminal proceeds. As part of the investigation, law enforcement seized bank accounts in Finland and Hong Kong, amounting to €422,000 and €1,500,000, respectively.⁵⁶⁰

6.5 Conclusions and key findings

This chapter attempted to assess the involvement of organized criminal groups in the trafficking in persons within, into and from Nigeria. Organized criminal groups perpetrate trafficking of Nigerians for the purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labour and domestic servitude.

- I. Members of organized trafficking groups include both men and women, usually of Nigerian nationality, who are based in Nigeria, in transit countries along trafficking routes and in countries of exploitation. These members carry out various roles within the criminal groups, serving as organizers, recruiters, transporters, intermediaries, enforcers and exploiters.

551 Interview with a law enforcement official from the Spanish National Police Force. 29 November 2021.

552 Ibid.

553 CSD. *Financing of Organised Crime: Human Trafficking in Focus*, 13 December 2018, accessible at https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2018_12/FINOCA_2_WEB.pdf.

554 Ibid.

555 MYRIA, Federal Migration Centre. *Annual Report 2018, Trafficking and Smuggling of Human Beings: Minors at major risk*, 2018, p. 93, accessible at <https://www.myria.be/files/RATEH-EN-2018-DEF.pdf>.

556 El Periodic. ‘Desarticuladas dos organizaciones nigerianas que explotaban sexualmente a más de 50 mujeres, algunas menores’, 26 April 2016, accessed at https://www.elperiodic.com/torrevieja/desarticuladas-organizaciones-nigerianas-explotaban-sexualmente-mujeres-algunas-menores_434863.

557 Interview with key informant, Edo State, Nigeria. 14 April 2021. Edo_KI_7; MYRIA, Federal Migration Centre. *Annual Report 2018, Trafficking and Smuggling of Human Beings: Minors at major risk*, 2018, accessible at <https://www.myria.be/files/RATEH-EN-2018-DEF.pdf>; CSD. *Financing of Organised Crime: Human Trafficking in Focus*, 2018, p. 284, accessible at https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2018_12/FINOCA_2_WEB.pdf.

558 Kato Gogo Kingston. ‘Concealment of Illegally Obtained Assets in Nigeria: Revisiting the Role of the Churches in Money Laundering’, *African Journal of International and Comparative Law*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2020), pp. 106-121.

559 El Periodic. ‘Desmantelada una red transnacional dedicada al blanqueo de los beneficios obtenidos por la gestión de páginas web de prostitución’, 10 July 2019, accessed at https://www.elperiodic.com/torrevieja/desmantelada-transnacional-dedicada-blanqueo-beneficios-obtenidos-gestion-paginas-prostitucion_630832.

560 Ibid.

- II. The levels of organization and collaboration between these actors varies, with some acting as a distinct group over longer periods of time and trafficking multiple victims, while others collaborate on a more ad hoc basis, with recruiters, transporters and intermediaries working with several different organizers and organized groups.
- III. In terms of modus operandi, recruitment of victims for different forms of trafficking is largely family- and community-based, with recruiters operating within the victims' localities and states of origin. In some cases, religious, traditional or community leaders are involved in the recruitment of trafficking victims, particularly for sexual exploitation. For forced labour, travel agencies are also involved.
- IV. Nigerian traffickers use various methods of control to keep victims in situations of exploitation, often using more severe methods over time, from deception, isolation and abuse of traditional belief systems to restriction of movement, threats of violence and violence.
- V. Nigerian trafficking organizers earn high incomes from trafficking for sexual exploitation in particular. Higher sums are reported for sexual exploitation in European countries, as compared to Middle Eastern and West African countries. Payments for exploitative services, transfers of costs and proceeds, and money laundering generally take place in cash, through cash couriers (intermediaries, traffickers or victims) or in shipping containers.
- VI. Formal and informal money transfer systems, as well as mobile banking, are also used, though to a lesser extent. Trafficking proceeds are sometimes used to buy property or run businesses in countries of exploitation as well as back in Nigeria, in the origin states of the traffickers and/or victims. Value transfers in the context of trafficking of Nigerian victims perpetrated by transnational criminal organizations constitute illicit financial flows between Nigeria, countries of transit and countries of exploitation.

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7. Smuggling of migrants

7.1 Introduction

Every year millions of people cross Nigeria's borders, and Nigerians regularly travel abroad for education, business or employment. The focus of this chapter is the small minority of these people who are smuggled into and out of Nigeria, and Nigerians who are smuggled across borders of other countries. The chapter covers migrant smuggling routes; the profiles and modus operandi of migrant smugglers in this context; the smuggling and smuggling-related offences committed (facilitating irregular entry and/or irregular stay for financial or material benefit, provision of fraudulent travel documents and aggravated smuggling offences); links between smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons; smuggling fees; and corruption.

As citizens of the ECOWAS, Nigerians have the right to enter and reside in another ECOWAS Member State⁵⁶¹ for up to 90 days without needing a visa, provided that they present themselves at an official border crossing point with the required travel documents. However, smugglers facilitate the journeys of some Nigerians travelling within West Africa if they do not have travel documents, because they are not aware of their free movement rights, or because travel within the ECOWAS region is not always possible without assistance from intermediaries due to dangers along the routes,

including violence perpetrated by state and non-state armed actors. As a consequence, smuggling of migrants is often committed in the context of a migratory journey that also involves regular travel.

7.2 Definition of terms

For the purpose of this chapter, the term “smugglers” refers to the definition outlined in Article 3 of the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol (SOM Protocol) supplementing UNTOC, which defines smuggling of migrants as “the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident”.⁵⁶² Producing, procuring, providing and possessing a fraudulent travel or identity document for the purpose of enabling smuggling of migrants and enabling someone to irregularly stay in a country are smuggling-related offences, as per Article 6(1) of the SOM Protocol, provided that they are carried out in order to obtain a financial or material benefit. Sections 64-101 of the 2015 Nigerian Immigration Act domesticate the relevant provisions of the SOM Protocol. The Act provides for the protection of and provision of remedies and assistance to smuggled people and criminalizes smuggling of migrants to and from Nigeria.

561 The 15 ECOWAS Member States that implement the Free Movement Protocols are: Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

562 SOM Protocol, 15 November 2000, UNTS vol. 2241, p. 507.

7.3 Methodology

Three separate phases of field research on migrant smuggling of Nigerians were carried out for this analysis.

In November 2019, a total of 76 qualitative in-depth interviews were carried out with key informants (law enforcement, civil society organizations, immigration officers and community policing units) and returned Nigerian migrants in the Nigerian states of Lagos, Kano, Edo and Imo. The research was carried out in the framework of the UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants,⁵⁶³ in partnership with the NIS, NAPTIP, the Network Against Child Trafficking, Abuse and Labour, and the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons.

Phase two of the field research for this chapter is identical to the field research outlined in the chapter on trafficking in persons. It comprised interviews covering both trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants with 84 key informants (32 women and 52 men) and 38 Nigerians who were returned or intending migrants (22 women and 16 men) conducted in the seven Nigerian states of Adamawa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Enugu, Kano and Osun as well as in the FCT during the period April to July 2021.

The third phase of field research comprised quantitative surveys among Nigerians on the move in Burkina Faso, Libya, Niger, Mali and Tunisia during the period April to December 2021. A total of 746 Nigerians were surveyed in the context of this field research.⁵⁶⁴ This research focuses on migrant smuggling of Nigerians to and through West and North Africa, and onward to Southern Europe. Smuggling of Nigerians on other routes and smuggling of people of other nationalities to and through Nigeria are also analysed here, but in less detail than smuggling of Nigerians through West and North Africa, due to the availability of data and information. Some West and Central Africans displaced by conflict or insecurity, particularly Cameroonians, are smuggled into Nigeria. Nevertheless, limited information was obtained through the research and data collection on smuggling routes into Nigeria. Another limitation of the research conducted for this chapter was that no field research was conducted at airports, therefore little information was obtained in relation to smuggling by air.

The primary sources were analysed and triangulated with desk-based research, including data sources provided by the IOM, Frontex, Eurostat, UNHCR and the NIS, as well as academic research and reports by international organizations

	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three
Time Period	November 2019	April to July 2021	April to December 2021
Location	Edo, Imo, Kano and Lagos States, Nigeria	Adamawa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Enugu, Kano, and Osun States and FCT, Nigeria	Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Niger and Tunisia
Methods	Qualitative in-depth interviews	Qualitative in-depth interviews	Surveys
Nigerian Migrants	37	38	746
Key Informants	39	84	-
Total	76	122	746

563 See UNODC. *Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants*, accessible at <https://www.unodc.org/res/som/index.html>.

564 The three phases of field research carried out for this chapter also form the basis for a more detailed research study on migrant smuggling from Nigeria by the UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants, see 'Migrant Smuggling from Nigeria: Research Findings on Migrant Smuggling of Nigerians', September 2022, accessible at <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/edc15a9dd4cf411c8d8edd061c6c9460>.

7.4 Discussion of the research findings

7.4.1 Smuggling routes

Nigeria has five international airports in the cities of Abuja, Kano, Lagos, Enugu and Port Harcourt. There are six seaports in Cross River, Rivers, Lagos and Akwa Ibom States, and 114 official land border crossing points in 15 Nigerian states: Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Jigawa, Yobe, Borno, Taraba, Benue, Niger, Kwara, Oyo, Ogun, Lagos and Cross River. The northern border crossing points with Niger experience the most regular traffic.⁵⁶⁵ The main routes for migrant smuggling of Nigerians by land and sea lead from the country to other parts of West Africa, Central Africa, Southern Africa, North Africa and Europe, while air smuggling routes lead to Europe, North Africa, the Gulf States and Middle East, and North America.

Migrant smuggling routes from Nigeria northward to Niger and North Africa often start in the south, from Edo, Delta and Lagos States, or in Abuja (FCT), where people from other states also gather before travelling north through Kano. Kano is an important transit hub generally for West and Central Africans on the move, although due to increasing law enforcement efforts there, Katsina and Jigawa States are also being used as smuggling hubs, as well as being hubs for regular travel and migration.⁵⁶⁶

Some Nigerians use smugglers to cross into Niger because of fears of corruption and/or insecurity at official border crossing points (see section 7.4.7 below on corruption), or because they do not have the required travel documentation. The proliferation of non-state armed actors outside of Nigeria, especially on the routes from Niger and Mali to Libya, controlling territories used for transit and extorting fees for passage, also necessitates resorting to professional facilitators or smugglers. Nevertheless, in many cases Nigerians travel regularly through ECOWAS States and only use smugglers upon entering North Africa, despite generally being in

contact with smugglers or smuggling groups from the beginning of their journey in their respective origin states.⁵⁶⁷

Nigerians often travel through Maradi or Zinder in Niger Republic onwards to the smuggling and mixed migration hub of Agadez in central Niger. Among Nigerians on the move surveyed along land routes in West and North Africa in 2021, the most important preferred final destinations for their migratory journeys were Italy, Germany, Libya, Niger, Algeria, the United Kingdom, Mali and the United States. Together, Italy, Germany and Europe in general were the preferred destinations for 32 per cent of all Nigerians surveyed.

Although the border crossing in Seme, Lagos State, in the South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria bordering Benin Republic, is also an internal ECOWAS border, there has been some reported migrant smuggling activity. In 2018, the NIS reported arresting smugglers in Seme,⁵⁶⁸ and migrants and key informants interviewed in Nigeria in 2019 asserted that this route was used for smuggling.⁵⁶⁹ Some Nigerian return migrants interviewed in Nigeria in 2019 were themselves smuggled via Benin Republic to Libya. As one man interviewed in Lagos described: “the man is a specialist on the Cotonou [Benin Republic] route, which he used to connect us to Sabha, Libya... The agent worked with other agents from Nigeria and other countries.”⁵⁷⁰

There is also some migrant smuggling in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, from Akwa Ibom State (by sea) and Cross River State to Cameroon, and in the other direction, from Cameroon to Nigeria, despite visa liberalization arrangements between the two countries. A law enforcement officer interviewed in Imo State in 2019 described smugglers of Nigerians operating in Cameroon and Gabon who have links with security personnel and ferry operators: “while some of them stay permanently in [Gabon], the majority of them do find their ways to Europe and South Africa using different [travel] documents.”⁵⁷¹

565 NIS. *Annual Report 2018*, Abuja, 2018.

566 According to key informant interviews conducted in 2021: KI-3-Kano; KI-3-Edo; KI-4-Kano; KI-5-Kano; KI-6-Kano; KI-2-Delta.

567 Return migrant interviews conducted in 2019: NG_Imo_M_6; NG_Imo_M_7.

568 NIS. *Annual Report 2018*, Abuja, 2018.

569 Key informant and migrant interviews conducted in 2019: NG_Imo_K_13; NG_Imo_M_2; NG_Lagos_K_19.

570 Migrant interview conducted in 2019: NG_Lagos_M_12.

571 Key informant interviewed in 2019: NG_Imo_K_18.

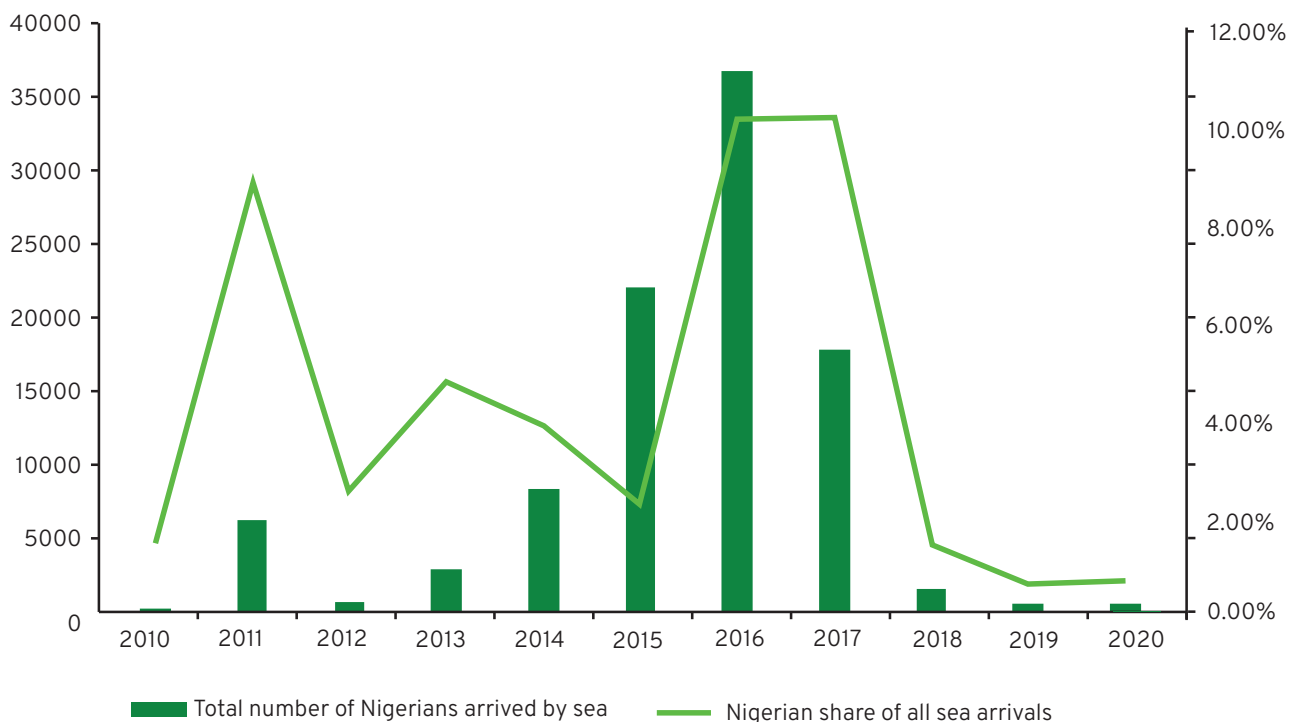
Other Nigerians are smuggled south, particularly to South Africa, though the vast majority of Nigerians residing there migrated regularly by air.⁵⁷² Some undocumented Nigerians in South Africa arrive regularly but overstay their visas and have difficulty regularizing their status.⁵⁷³ Other Nigerians are smuggled onwards from South Africa to Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan as a response to current socioeconomic and security conditions in South Africa or as part of their original migration plans.⁵⁷⁴

On the Central Mediterranean route from Libya or Tunisia to Italy, the number of Nigerians arriving peaked during 2015 and 2017, after which there was a significant decline. Due to the fact that most Nigerians departed from Libya, it is likely that the vast majority were smuggled, as transnational

organized criminal groups perpetrate smuggling in the context of irregular migration journeys from Libya to Italy.

The dynamics have since changed, and during 2021, a total of just 1,912 Nigerians were detected irregularly entering an EU country, with the majority using the Eastern Mediterranean route through Türkiye to Greece (1,142), 728 using the Central Mediterranean route to Italy and 37 the “Eastern Borders route” (through Belarus to Latvia, Lithuania and Poland). During 2022 (through the end May), a total of 2,683 Nigerians were detected irregularly entering an EU country, with the majority using the Eastern Mediterranean route through Türkiye to Greece (2,266), 384 using the Central Mediterranean route to Italy and 28 the Northwest African (Atlantic) route to the Canary Islands, Spain.⁵⁷⁵

Figure 38: Trends in irregular sea crossings by Nigerians, and share of Nigerians of all irregular border crossings by sea into the EU, 2010-2020



Source: UNODC calculation based on FRONTEX data. People may cross or attempt to cross several times, and therefore the numbers do not reflect the actual number of people arriving.

572 Lucia Bird. *Human Smuggling in Africa: The creation of a new criminalised economy?*, ENACT Continental Report 04, July 2020, pp. 16, accessible at <https://enact-africa.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/2021-05-20-continent-report-stripped-version.pdf>.

573 Olayinka Akanle, Abebe Ejigu Alemu and Jimi O. Adesina. 'The existentialities of Ethiopian and Nigerian migrants in South Africa'. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies-Multi-, Inter-and Transdisciplinarity*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2016), pp. 139-158.

574 Olubunmi O. Akintola and Olagoke Akintola. 'West Africans in the informal economy of South Africa: The case of low skilled Nigerian migrants'. *The Review of Black Political Economy*, vol. 42, no. 4 (2015), pp. 379-398; Olayinka Akanle. 'Kinship socio-economics of Nigerian international migrants', *Diaspora Studies* vol. 4, no. 2 (2011), pp. 105-124.

575 Frontex, Migratory Map and Detections of illegal border-crossings statistics, both accessible at <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-map/>

Nevertheless, around 32,000 Nigerians were present in Libya as of April 2022, according to IOM, with limited options for leaving Libya due to increased border controls on the Central Mediterranean Route.⁵⁷⁶ The number also comprises Nigerians who arrived in Libya in previous years, some of whom continue to attempt to cross the sea to Europe. Others are not necessarily in transit but are residing in Libya.

For the small number of Nigerians who are smuggled by air, the destinations are usually outside the region, such as the US, Canada, Australia, or countries in Europe. Preparation for these trips may involve the assistance of smugglers specialized in providing forged or fraudulent travel documents. Both Frontex and Europol have detected an increasing trend of Nigerians arriving by air at European airports with fraudulent travel documents.⁵⁷⁷ While there is not complete clarity on the air smuggling routes used, Frontex has identified the use of airports in Istanbul (Türkiye) and Casablanca (Morocco) for rerouting to European airports.⁵⁷⁸

7.4.2. Profiles of smugglers

While the majority of migrant smugglers used by Nigerians on the move are men, 19 per cent of Nigerians surveyed in 2021 in countries of transit and destination who had used smugglers and facilitators stated that the person was a woman, and 3 per cent said they used smugglers and facilitators of both sexes, while 79 per cent indicated that the person was a man.⁵⁷⁹ From this finding, it was evident that the proportion of female smugglers in Nigeria was higher compared to smugglers of other nationalities.⁵⁸⁰

Key informants interviewed in Nigeria in 2021 indicated that along the routes through Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger and Libya most smugglers are

Nigerian, with Cameroonians also involved in smuggling their co-nationals through Nigeria, and Nigeriens involved in Niger.⁵⁸¹

Smugglers also act as guides, travelling together with migrants. The contacts of smugglers operating in Nigeria and along the routes connecting Nigeria with North African countries work in different constellations and are referred to by key informants and migrants interviewed in Nigeria in 2019 as agents, crossers and trolleys. Similarly, among the main smuggling actors mentioned by interviewees in Nigeria in 2021 are connection men, burgers (or 'bogás') and trolleys. A burger, according to one migrant interviewed in Delta State in 2021, is someone who has passed through the desert more than once and who knows the routes, acting as a guide. It is notable that this nomenclature is only used to describe those facilitating the travel north through Niger to Libya. No such references are made to people involved in migration to the Middle East.

One connection man is a Nigerian in his 40s from Delta State, where all intending migrants, both male and female, gather before heading north. The Nigerian connection man is based in Libya and has connections to organize sea crossings. Another male interviewee who had travelled to Libya via Chad described in 2021:

“ The connection man is the Nigerian man that connects the people from Niger, Chad, Libya; he has contacts that could help him traffic or smuggle Nigerians. The connection man is a very powerful figure in trafficking and smuggling. He controls all the other members of the group, and he works in strong collaboration with Nigerians in the destination countries in Europe. He knows the person in Niger, in Libya and in Italy, he is mostly a Nigerian that makes all the connections.⁵⁸² ”

576 IOM. *IOM Libya Migrant Report Round 41*, February-April 2022, accessible at https://displacement.iom.int/sites/default/files/public/reports/DTM_Libya_R41_Migrant_Report_FINAL.pdf.

577 Frontex. *Annual Risk Analysis for 2020*, March 2020, accessible at https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2020.pdf; Europol. *European Migrant Smuggling Centre 4th Annual Activity Report – 2020*, accessible at https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/emsc_4th_annual_activity_report_-_2020.pdf.

578 Frontex. *Annual Risk Analysis for 2020*, March 2020, accessible at https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2020.pdf.

579 According to surveys among smuggled Nigerians carried out on behalf of UNODC by the Mixed Migration Centre during 2021 (Phase three of the field research).

580 See UNODC. *Global Study on the Smuggling of Migrants*, 2018, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glosom/GLOSOM_2018_web_small.pdf.

581 Key informants interviewed in 2021: KI-6-Kano; KI-4-Kano.

582 Smuggled migrant WPS-Delta interviewed in 2021.

Research indicates that there are two types of smugglers operating from Agadez (Niger) through Libya, who smuggle Nigerians as well as people of other nationalities: Toubou people from southern Libya who use Toyota pick-up trucks and are involved in the entire trip from Agadez to Sebha (Libya); and truck drivers, who are also Libyans but who transport both goods as well as people. UNODC field research found that drivers across Libya are always nationals of that country. According to a trafficked person interviewed in Delta State in 2021, Nigerians “need Arab men to drive them through the desert. Sometimes the driver will carry a person to Libya and kidnap the person, then start torturing the person demanding for ransom from the person’s family.”⁵⁸³ A key informant interviewed in Kano in 2021 referred to recruiters as ‘travel agents’ in the migrant’s state of origin who instruct and pay agents in Kano:

There are agents in Kano who help the migrants when they get to Kano. They pick them up at the [motor]parks, provide them with accommodation based on the instructions and payment from the travel agent in the state of origin. There is also another person in Libya and in Europe who would receive the migrant. The migrants are made to pay for these services in order for the travel agent to facilitate the journey.”⁵⁸⁴

One key informant interviewed in Edo State in 2021 spoke of the threats made on his life when he advertised the names of transport companies complicit in smuggling and trafficking from Edo State.⁵⁸⁵ According to an interview with officials from the National Union for Road and Transport Workers (NURTW) in the city of Kano in 2019, smugglers regularly change meeting points with clients and use different motor parks in order to evade law enforcement operations.

NIS figures show a total of 22 smugglers arrested in 2018, the majority of whom were arrested on the route northward connecting states in the south of Nigeria, such as Edo, with Kano and subsequently Katsina, the next stop on the route to the smuggling hub of Agadez in Niger.⁵⁸⁶ Katsina, together with the other northern border city of Sokoto, also has a high number of regular border crossings.

7.4.3 Modus operandi

Nigerian law enforcement officers interviewed by UNODC in 2019 and 2021 generally described smugglers as working in “networks and hierarchies” and contended that the groups involved are large. In the words of an investigator interviewed in Nigeria in 2019, the smugglers often “operate in proxy where a trolley [facilitator] stands in between the smuggler and the migrant...but the actual smuggler’s identity would never be revealed.”⁵⁸⁷ Europol’s European Migrant Smuggling Centre refers to well-developed networks of Nigerian migrant smugglers operating on mixed migration routes and collaborating regularly with European organized criminal groups.⁵⁸⁸ Recent research by the Mixed Migration Centre in West and North Africa finds that most smugglers work as part of a network, with some coordinating travel all the way from the point of origin to Europe and others relying on looser connections with other smugglers.⁵⁸⁹

Returned Nigerian migrants interviewed during the same period, and one key informant interviewed in 2021, pointed towards more ad hoc arrangements among individual smugglers, which corresponds with earlier UNODC research on the topic.⁵⁹⁰ This may suggest that Nigerians who are smuggled are not fully aware of the organized groups involved in the smuggling process. However, it is likely that the reality is multifaceted, with some groups that are

583 Smuggled migrant WPS-Delta interviewed in 2021.

584 KI-3-Kano.

585 KI-7-Edo.

586 NIS. *Annual Report 2018*, Abuja, 2018.

587 Key informant interviewed in 2019: NG_Imo_K_17.

588 Europol. *European Migrant Smuggling Centre 4th Annual Activity Report – 2020*, accessible at https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/emsc_4th_annual_activity_report_-_2020.pdf.

589 IOM. *Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean: Trends, Risks, Development and Governance*, 2020, accessible at <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/Migration-in-West-and-North-Africa-and-across-the-Mediterranean.pdf>.

590 Key informant interviewed in 2021: KI-3-Kano; UNODC. *Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants*, 2018, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glosom/GLOSOM_2018_web_small.pdf; UNODC. *The Role of Organized Crime in the Smuggling of Migrants from West Africa to the European Union*, 2011, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Migrant-Smuggling/Report_SOM_West_Africa_EU.pdf.

highly organized, sophisticated and hierarchical, others that are opportunistic and acting individually, and the majority of smugglers falling somewhere along this spectrum.

Eighty-four per cent of smuggled Nigerians surveyed in 2021 in countries of origin and destination used a single smuggler for all or part of their journey, while 16 per cent used multiple smugglers. From the perspective of the Nigerian migrants surveyed who had used multiple smugglers, 20 per cent believed that they all worked together all the time, while 38 per cent believed that some worked together, and some worked independently. Forty-two per cent of the Nigerians on the move had identified each smuggler separately.⁵⁹¹

Many returned migrants referred to the travel as being organized ‘stage by stage’, by interconnecting groups of people responsible for different geographical regions, who know the locality and the territory. For example, one Nigerian interviewed in Edo State in 2021 mentioned organizers in Kano being directly in communication with people running ‘camps’ in Libya.⁵⁹² Other research on mixed migration in West and North Africa finds that most smugglers work as part of a network, with some able to coordinate travel from the point of origin to Europe themselves and others relying on connections with other smugglers “in a sort of a chain movement from one hand, one person to the other.”⁵⁹³

Migrant and law enforcement interviewees in Nigeria in 2019 indicated how migrants are initially in contact with organizers based in Europe or Libya through local agents in the migrant’s origin state.⁵⁹⁴ In these situations, organizers provide them with contacts for local cashiers tasked with collecting fees in exchange for providing contact to smugglers who organize the trip by, for instance, providing a phone number for the next person to contact.⁵⁹⁵ Through this approach, the migrants travel along the route and systematically connect with the next person.

Some returned migrants indicated that smugglers receive instructions over the phone from other individuals who inform them about the next steps to be taken.⁵⁹⁶ One informant interviewed in Kano in 2021 described how smuggling groups stationed their operatives all along the routes and how law enforcement operations against them sometimes led to the arrest of up to 14 members of a group.⁵⁹⁷ In Libya specifically, smuggling groups have become increasingly organized, and smuggling from Libya to Italy involves a different set of criminal actors than smuggling within West and North Africa.⁵⁹⁸

Although law enforcement sources in Europe report on the involvement of Nigerian cult groups in trafficking and smuggling of Nigerians in Europe,⁵⁹⁹ there was no direct reference in the field research to their involvement in Nigeria.⁶⁰⁰

591 According to surveys among smuggled Nigerians carried out on behalf of UNODC by the Mixed Migration Centre during 2021 (Phase three of the field research).

592 Return migrant interviewed in 2021: V4-Edo.

593 See IOM. *Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean: Trends, Risks, Development and Governance*, 2020, p. 222, accessible at <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/Migration-in-West-and-North-Africa-and-across-the-Mediterranean.pdf>.

594 Return migrants interviewed in 2019: NG_Edo_M_10; NG_Imo_M_9; NG_Kano_M_11.

595 Return migrant interviewed in 2019: NG_Edo_M_9.

596 Return migrant interviewed in 2019: NG_Lagos_M_13.

597 KI-4-Kano.

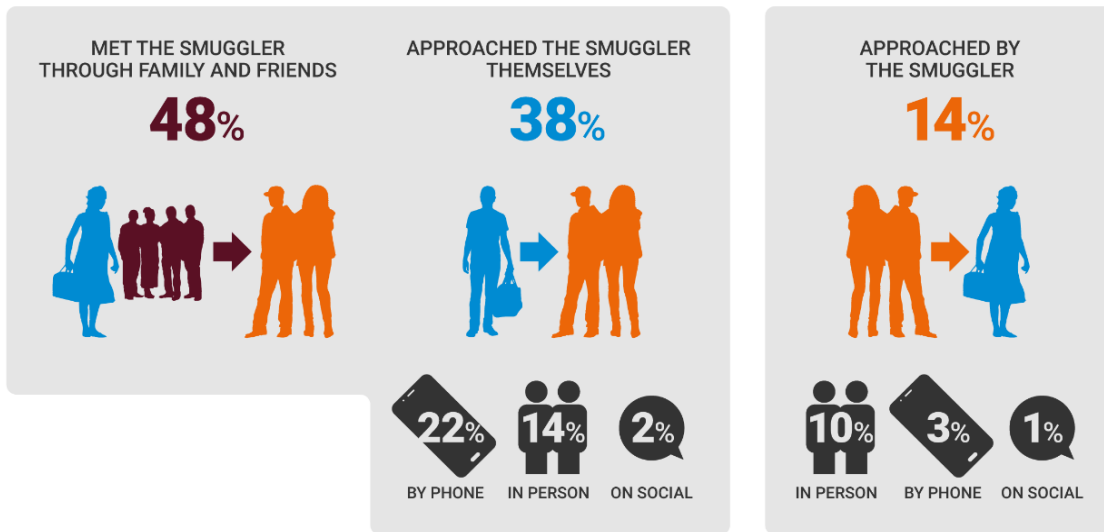
598 UNODC. *Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants*, 2018, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glosom/GLOSOM_2018_web_small.pdf.

599 On cultism in Nigeria see Chapter 1 above.

600 One key informant in Abuja in 2021 made indirect reference to the role of gangs and cults in facilitating trafficking in persons, leading to the local community’s reluctance to speak out about trafficking (KI-1-FCT).

Figure 39: How smugglers make contact with prospective migrants

FIRST CONTACT OF MIGRANTS WITH SMUGGLERS



Source: UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants.

While smugglers sometimes identify potential clients by approaching them directly, most commonly their services are sought out by people on the move (see Figure 39).

7.4.4 Migrant smuggling offences

According to Nigerians surveyed in transit and destination countries in 2021, smugglers and travel facilitators provide various licit and illicit services in addition to transit across borders, accommodation and in-country transportation. They also introduce migrants to other smugglers and facilitators, help migrants find jobs, provide food or water, assist in dealing with the authorities and provide travel documents.⁶⁰¹

The most typical activity of smugglers and travel facilitators operating along smuggling routes is to offer connections for people intending to migrate. Two-thirds (14/21) of the Nigerians interviewed in Nigeria in 2021 started their journeys with valid travel documents – obtaining a passport from the NIS as a first step in their travel preparation – indicating an intention to travel regularly, at least through the ECOWAS region. Despite this, these interviewees had been smuggled within West Africa or from West Africa to North Africa.

Even if Nigerian migrants travel with valid travel documents, the migration journey entails the active involvement of different categories of established facilitators at each of the transit points, including the point of initial departure, transit and expected destination. In many situations, travel facilitators are legitimate market actors. However, they may provide connections to migrant smugglers further along the routes.

Returned Nigerian migrants and law enforcement officers interviewed in Nigeria in 2019 described how, on the routes between Nigeria and Niger, migrants use smuggling services by buying travel packages that include accommodation. Accommodation is an important service, as journeys from Nigeria to North Africa may take several years given the time needed for people to obtain the funds to continue to the next stage of the journey, creating significant demand for accommodations along these routes.⁶⁰² Migrants also described how they stayed for longer durations in hubs along the routes – such as Agadez or larger cities in Libya – sometimes for more than a year in order to obtain the finances to pay for the next step.⁶⁰³

601 According to surveys among smuggled Nigerians carried out on behalf of UNODC by the Mixed Migration Centre during 2021 (Phase three of the field research).

602 Key informant interviewed in 2019: NG_Lagos_K_10.

603 Return migrant interviewed in 2019: NG_Edo_M_11.

The need to use facilitators and smugglers for basic travel organization, including accommodation, may be due to the difficulties and dangers associated with movement between Nigeria and Niger, the language differences between the two countries, as well as uncertainty along the route. According to a male NIS officer interviewed in Lagos in 2019:

“From my understanding so far, the most typical activity of smugglers operating along the migration routes is to offer connection assistance in forms of “crossing” [transfer across borders] and accommodation for the would-be migrants from one point to the other...and for forward transportation to southern Libya. Though in most cases the expected assistance would never come to reality despite the payment made, the smugglers’ usefulness rarely transcends the southern fringes of Libya.⁶⁰⁴”

Different informants and migrants interviewed in Nigeria in 2021 spoke of ‘safe houses’ en route and transfers to new people often at border crossings or important migration hubs, such as Kano and Agadez, who provide accommodation and take charge of the onward movement:

“In Katsina [in the North-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria] the migrants have a ‘safe house’ where they can relax and connect for their next trip. Usually at this point, migrants disengage from the transporter or smuggler that brought them to [a border crossing point with Niger] from Kano. Another syndicate, who is a local dweller who may be the owner of the safe house and who has knowledge of the community, takes over from [the border crossing point]. The safe houses are not like normal houses, they are usually off the road.⁶⁰⁵”

Safe houses often accommodate tens of migrants. One trafficked person interviewed in Edo State in 2021, who had travelled together with smuggled migrants, spent time at a safe house in Kano with 50 other migrants waiting to depart to Niger and Libya. The locations where migrants and trafficked people are housed in Agadez are referred to as “ghettos” and house upwards of 100 people, according to the same interviewee. In this case, the safe house was run by a Nigerian man. The interviewee stayed over three weeks and was not allowed outside during the entire time, surviving on the little food and water that he could source and cook himself.⁶⁰⁶ Reference was also made to the existence of ghettos in Zinder (Niger).⁶⁰⁷ Other research indicates that such ghettos in Niger Republic are decreasingly used because of the risks of police raids.⁶⁰⁸

Depending on the destination, providers of travel assistance and accommodation may involve numerous men, women and children. Several interviewees provided examples of such facilitation services rendered *en route* in Mali, Senegal, Niger and Libya. These included delivering the person to a motor park and buying the transport ticket for them; transferring money to cover her travel and other costs; collecting the person from a motor park en route; driving the person in a private vehicle, motorbike or rickshaw; providing accommodation or directing the person to a hotel or safe house.

The individuals specialized in transportation and accommodation do not provide these services for a single trafficker or smuggler. There are numerous examples of them hosting and/or transporting migrants and victims of trafficking who had been recruited by multiple people and who were travelling to different destinations or intended for different *madams* (traffickers) alongside other men being smuggled or trafficked.⁶⁰⁹

604 Key informant interviewed in 2019: NG_Lagos_K_19.

605 Key informant interviewed in 2021: KI-5-Kano.

606 Return migrant interviewed in 2021: victim NAME-Edo.

607 Return migrant interviewed in 2021: V-4-Edo.

608 See Mark Micallaf et al. *Conflict, Coping and Covid> Changing human smuggling and trafficking dynamics in North Africa and the Sahel in 2019 and 2020*, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime Research Report, April 2021, accessible at <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/GI-TOC-Changing-human-smuggling-and-trafficking-dynamics-in-North-Africa-and-the-Sahel-in-2019-and-2020.pdf>.

609 See Chapter 6 on trafficking in persons above.

As mentioned earlier, Nigerians have the right to travel regularly throughout the ECOWAS region, as far as the border crossing to Libya, provided that they carry a valid travel and vaccination certificate, cross at regular border crossing points and stay less than 90 days in each country. In some situations, Nigerians lose their passport or are not aware of its importance. One man interviewed in Lagos in 2019 described how he had bought his travel documents on the black market in Libya.⁶¹⁰ Interpol describes similar cases, in which travel documents constitute a crucial pillar of the smuggling industry, with some examples of smugglers renting out passports to individuals to cross borders in North Africa.⁶¹¹

7.4.5 Links between smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons

In many cases, smuggling and trafficking routes overlap, and the situation of vulnerability of smuggled Nigerians is abused in order to traffic them for sexual or labour exploitation. Trafficking and other human rights abuses are perpetrated against Nigerians by smugglers, constituting aggravated smuggling offences, defined by Article 6(3) of the SOM Protocol supplementing the UNTOC, as acts “that endanger, or are likely to endanger, the lives or safety of the migrants concerned; or that entail inhuman or degrading treatment, including for exploitation, of such migrants.”⁶¹²

Smugglers occasionally act as labour intermediaries, assisting migrants with finding jobs along routes. One law enforcement officer interviewed in Lagos in 2019 emphasized that they were aware that smugglers also connect migrants with job offers along the routes to finance further travel.⁶¹³

Migrants take up various jobs along their journeys to finance their running expenses, which is sometimes planned from the moment of departure. Examples

mentioned by interviewees in Nigeria in 2019 showed how migrants run out of finances and take up jobs as farm workers or other menial tasks to generate cash to allow them to progress further. One law enforcement officer described that smugglers and facilitators organizing travel between Nigeria and Niger also had the purpose of providing labour to employers in Niger.⁶¹⁴ In some of these examples, working conditions amounted to exploitation, and these cases are often in connection with detention, suggesting the incidence of both the crimes of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons for forced labour.⁶¹⁵

Twenty-three per cent of Nigerians surveyed in 2021 in transit and destination countries had not made any initial payment but committed to pay during the course of their journey, potentially indicating a higher level of vulnerability to abuses perpetrated by smugglers or others during the journey. Similarly, 29 per cent stated that their initial funds had not been enough to pay for their journey so far, while for 69 per cent it was enough. The shortfall for these people was mostly covered by working en route (66 per cent) or getting family and friends to send them more money (26 per cent). Others came to an agreement with the smuggler to pay later (11 per cent) – putting them at risk of debt bondage – or borrowed money from other migrants (7 per cent). Still others reported engaging in transactional sex (7 per cent), in-kind labour (5 per cent) or begging (3 per cent).

Most examples of people working during the journeys occurred in Libya. For example, one Nigerian man interviewed in Delta State in 2021 reported that he was “sold” to a Nigerian in Libya, ostensibly because his *burger* had not paid for his travel from Agadez, and his mother had to pay 170,000 naira, transferred to the buyer’s account in Nigeria, to secure her son’s release.⁶¹⁶ The migrant continued to work for the same man in his carwash for a year to raise money for his onward journey to Tripoli (Libya), where he

610 Return migrant interviewed in 2019: NG_Lagos_M_2.

611 Interpol. *Overview of Serious and Organized Crime in North Africa*, 30 September 2018, accessible at <https://www.interpol.int/content/download/12852/file/Overview%20of%20Serious%20and%20Organized%20Crime%20in%20North%20Africa-EN.pdf>.

612 On aggravated smuggling offences see UNODC. *Abused and Neglected: A Gender Perspective on Aggravated Migrant Smuggling Offences and Response*, 2021, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2021/Aggravated_SOM_and_Gender.pdf.

613 Key informant interviewed in 2019: NG_Lagos_K_19. See also Mixed Migration Centre Snapshot on the roles of migrant smugglers, produced in partnership with the UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants, 2021, accessible at <https://mixedmigration.org/resource/roles-of-migrant-smugglers-and-movement-facilitators-in-west-and-north-africa/>.

614 Key informant interviewed in 2019: NG_Lagos_K_17.

615 Return migrants interviewed in 2019: NG_Edo_M_2; NG_Imo_M_1.

616 Return migrant interviewed in 2021: Victim Mega Foundation-Delta.

worked in another carwash to raise money for the sea crossing.

A Nigerian from Abia State interviewed in 2021 also worked for someone in a carwash in Libya to save for the journey to Europe but was never paid. He managed to escape but was “caught” by other Libyans who put him to work on a farm for three months, also without pay. Another Nigerian then bought the man’s freedom and took him to Tripoli. He found work there, but while waiting for the sea crossing in Sabratha (Libya), he was arrested by police.⁶¹⁷

Labour intermediary services reflect the characteristics of migrant smuggling in the region, as journeys often extend over several years and it may not always be possible for migrants to save up enough funds to cover the entire travel from beginning to end. A UNODC study conducted a decade ago on migrant smuggling in West Africa described migrant smuggling as a dynamic process of moving between travel and remaining in the same location. During these movements, migrants take up work in communities along the route, with the work in some cases presenting characteristics of labour exploitation.⁶¹⁸

In contrast to those who seek to fund their migration journeys with various modes of employment along the way, others seek to migrate expressly because of work opportunities abroad. Particularly in the case of migration to the GCC, as well as to Lebanon and Jordan, regular, irregular and smuggler-facilitated migration is linked with provision of employment. Registered travel agents are involved in procuring visas and intermediating jobs that may or may not result in exploitation in destination countries. These agents collaborate with agencies in the destination countries, some of which pay for flights and transportation costs for those travelling.⁶¹⁹

Most of the agents referred to by interviewees in Nigeria in 2021 in this context were Nigerian men, often with offices, although one key informant in Kano stated that most of those recruiting for jobs in the Gulf were women.⁶²⁰ Another key informant interviewed in Kano in 2021 spoke of the proliferation of ‘travel agents’ whose main activity was intermediating jobs in the Middle East, and the use of fictitious job offers provided by the agents abroad. Many of these companies have authorization from the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

“The people offering these jobs are not Nigerian; there is a Ghanaian man in Dubai which we have been trying to track down. He is very notorious and highly connected; he has been offering jobs to Nigerians for years now; he arranges their travel documents and we have not been able to get him. So, Nigerians go to countries like Jordan, Oman, Kuwait, Dubai and so on. Many people take advantage of these opportunities because there is a high level of unemployment in Nigeria. The offer of employment is part of the visa requirement and travel agencies do this for migrants.

So, in order to smuggle migrants, travel agents engage in document fraud and to eliminate these kind of cases, there has been a ban on the 90-days working visa to those countries. This kind of smuggling exposes victims to cases of sexual exploitation and forced labour. They are told that they will be engaged in jobs like cleaning, massage and babysitting.⁶²¹”

Nigerian press reports in mid-2021 indicated that the UAE stopped issuing direct employment visas and work permits to Nigerians, ostensibly due to COVID-19-related restrictions, but reportedly also because of violent clashes in the city of Sharjah involving Nigerian confraternities.⁶²² In September 2021, the suspension was lifted.

617 Return migrant interviewed in 2021: Nocta-3-Delta.

618 UNODC. *The Role of Organized Crime in the Smuggling of Migrants from West Africa to the European Union*, 2011, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Migrant-Smuggling/Report_SOM_West_Africa_EU.pdf.

619 Return migrants and key informants interviewed in 2021: V5-Kano; V3 Kano; KI-11-Osun. See also Chapter 6 on trafficking in persons, above.

620 KI-6-Kano.

621 KI-3-Kano.

622 Oghenekevwé Uchechukwu. ‘Why UAE refuses work permit applications from Nigerians’, International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), 6 July 2021, accessed at www.icirnigeria.org/why-uae-refuses-work-permit-applications-from-nigerians; ‘UAE suspends direct employment visas for Nigerians over rising crimes’, Sahara Reporters, 29 June 2021, accessed at <http://saharareporters.com/2021/06/29/exclusive-uae-suspends-direct-employment-visa-nigerians-over-rising-crimes>. On cultism in Nigeria see Chapter 1 above.

Although some work permits and visas for GCC countries, Lebanon and Jordan may be applied for based on fictitious grounds, interviewees in Nigeria provided no further information on the irregular entry of Nigerians into these countries. Most travel from Nigeria to these countries is by air with passports and visas, some of which may be fraudulent and some *bona fide*. Others enter with a short-term visa and remain and work in those countries with an undocumented status. The irregular immigration status might arise from the expiration of a visa, breaching the conditions of a visa or leaving the designated employer under the *Kafala* system regulating the issuance of work permits, where the worker is tied to a given employer leading to their irregularity if they leave that employment.⁶²³

7.4.6 Fees

Nigerians surveyed in transit and destination countries in 2021 paid an average of \$584 each for smuggling services. On average, the total they had spent for the entire journey, including bribes, transportation and pre-departure expenditure, in addition to smuggling services, was \$807. Payments were usually made in cash to locally-based contacts in the interviewees' cities of origin – Kano, Lagos, Benin City (Edo State) or Owerri (Imo State). Prices typically covered travel from Nigeria and up to destinations in Libya such as Sabha or Tripoli.⁶²⁴

Most returned migrants interviewed in 2019 who had experience with using migrant smugglers to facilitate their journeys reported smuggling fees that were considered the direct costs to make use of the smuggling service. The direct costs often took the form of an up-front payment, paid by the migrant to the recruiter of the smuggling network, who in many cases was in the same location as the migrant. The direct cost covered access to the smuggling network of contacts along the route, transportation costs, accommodation (in some cases), bribes and other expenses. The amount for these smuggling

packages ranged between \$390 and \$1,570. The fees were paid to smugglers by the migrants at the beginning of the journey.⁶²⁵ One Nigerian interviewed in Lagos in 2019 described the arrangement and the understanding that the fee would cover the whole trip: “I paid 550,000 [naira, approximately \$1,440] directly, in cash, to the man who facilitated my trip in Lagos.”⁶²⁶

Usually, fees are paid in exchange for a phone number of a smuggler based at another point further along the route. Migrants travelling from Edo State, for instance, paid locally and received several phone numbers to contact when they reached the first transit point along the way, usually Kano. The smuggler linked them with the next person in the network, to continue their trip. One man interviewed in Nigeria in 2019 described how he paid a significant amount to a local representative of a Nigerian agent based in Libya.⁶²⁷

Not all interviewees described in detail what was included in the fees they paid to their smugglers, nor the estimated amount they paid for their combined travels. The fees mentioned did however indicate fluctuating prices that may be influenced by the location of the migrants, services included in the package provided by the smuggler(s), security levels at border crossing points, perceived wealth of migrants, the nature of their connection with the smugglers, and their age and gender.⁶²⁸

Prices often did not include other running expenses that needed to be paid by migrants during their travels. Migrants described different scenarios of services included in the packages they were offered by smugglers. According to one man, apart from the initial fee paid to the smuggler: “I spent another 150,000 naira [approximately \$390] on other things like bribing security operatives as we were progressing with journey and also on food and other personal effects.”⁶²⁹

623 Kennedy Atong, Emmanuel Mayah and Akhator Odigie. *Africa Labour Migration to GCC States: The Case of Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda*, 2018, accessible at [ituc-africa_study-africa_labour_migration_to_the_gcc_states.pdf](https://www.ituc-africa.org/study-africa-labour-migration-to-the-gcc-states.pdf).

624 See UNODC, ‘Key Findings on the Characteristics of Migrant Smuggling of Nigerians’, 2020. Accessible at https://www.unodc.org/res/som/docs/observatory_storymap_3_nigeria_25mar.pdf.

625 Ibid.

626 Return migrant interviewed in 2019: NG_Lagos_M_13.

627 Return migrant interviewed in 2019: NG_Kano_M_13.

628 Key informant interviewed in 2019: NG_Imo_K_12.

629 Return migrant interviewed in 2019: NG_Imo_M_2.

The price for buying fraudulent passports in North African countries fluctuated widely and was often influenced by the migrant's ability to speak Arabic, ethnic affiliations (Nigerians from the same ethnic community as the smuggler were offered lower prices) or perceived levels of wealth.⁶³⁰

One Nigerian man interviewed in Delta State in 2021 described paying for his wife to be smuggled to join him in Libya and paying 350,000 naira (\$840) for her to be brought directly from Edo State, with the journey taking eight days.⁶³¹ Another Nigerian man interviewed in Edo State in 2021, who had hoped to travel to Germany in 2016, paid his *burger* 350,000 naira (\$840) with an agreement to pay the balance of 120,000 (\$290) if he made it to Europe. The agreed amount was to cover the entire route, including the Mediterranean crossing.⁶³²

Smuggling fees are often paid in cash. There were also a few examples of interviewees in Nigeria in 2019 whose families sent money during their travels in case they ran out of funds.⁶³³ Payments can also be made in kind. One Nigerian man interviewed in 2019 reported that the *trolley* (guide), who was accompanying a woman from Edo State being trafficked to Italy, was also migrating himself, and was to be paid with a free 'crossing' across the Mediterranean if he successfully delivered the victim to the *madam*.

The modalities of payment among Nigerians surveyed in transit and destination countries in 2021 who had used a smuggler varied, but a significant number (43 per cent) had paid in full before departure. Just 13 per cent were intending to pay in full at the destination. As a possible indicator of labour exploitation and trafficking for forced labour, 17 per cent had paid through labour. Ten per cent were paying in instalments along the way, and 9 per cent were intending to pay in full upon service delivery. Seven per cent responded that the smuggler had not been paid.⁶³⁴

Nigerian migrants mostly financed their journeys through their own funds or savings (44 per cent), with help from their families (29 per cent), by selling assets (20 per cent) or by borrowing money (12 per cent).⁶³⁵ One migrant interviewee in Nigeria in 2021 mentioned people trying to work in Agadez to raise money to continue with their journeys, particularly when they had been abandoned by their *burgers*,⁶³⁶ though no examples were cited of people working directly for the smuggler.

It is interesting to note that none of the men interviewed in 2021 who had been smuggled to Libya spoke of having their costs covered or being provided with money (a strong indicator of trafficking), even though some had entered into partial debts with their smugglers, to be settled after arrival.⁶³⁷

630 Ibid.

631 SOM-WPS-Delta.

632 Victim-NAME-Edo.

633 Key informant interviewed in 2019: NG_Imo_K_12.

634 According to surveys among smuggled Nigerians carried out on behalf of UNODC by the Mixed Migration Centre during 2021 (Phase three of the field research).

635 Ibid.

636 Victim Mega Foundation-Delta.

637 On the gender distinctions in relation to smuggling of Nigerians, see also Mixed Migration Centre (MMC). Nigerian Refugees' and Migrants' Use of Smugglers, August 2021, accessible at https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/188_Nigerian_Refugees_and_Migrants_Use_of_Smugglers.pdf.

7.4.7 Corruption

As the UNODC *Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants* highlighted, corruption is one of the prerequisites for committing smuggling of migrants offences across global migrant smuggling routes.⁶³⁸ Research for this report found that smugglers of Nigerian nationals pay bribes, which are included in the fees charged to migrants, to security and border control officials along smuggling routes on behalf of migrants. Bribes are demanded by corrupt security actors at internal security checkpoints and at international borders, with personnel at international borders demanding higher sums.⁶³⁹

In some cases, bribes are not included in the fixed fee paid to the local agent of the smuggling network that the migrant makes use of, and additional expenses need to be borne by the migrant during their travels. Some migrants are aware of these additional expenses and carry a small amount of cash to cover them.⁶⁴⁰

Another indication of corruption is the impression among some returned migrants and key informants interviewed that it is extremely difficult to bring perpetrators to justice for abuses committed in the context of smuggling. Migrants and key informants indicated that smugglers and law enforcement work together in certain cases.⁶⁴¹ To the knowledge of 56 per cent of the Nigerians on the move who had used smugglers or travel facilitators surveyed in countries of transit and destination in 2021, state officials had neither been involved in nor facilitated migrant smuggling. Twenty-one per cent said that this had taken place once, 8 per cent occasionally and 6 per cent frequently on their journey, while 8 per cent did not know.⁶⁴²

7.5 Conclusions and key findings

This chapter sought to bring clarity to the range of migrant smuggling offences that are committed within Nigeria, with Nigerians and non-Nigerians as objects of the offences, and outside Nigeria, affecting Nigerians on the move. Measuring the incidence of the crime is a challenge, since the journeys of Nigerians travelling by land and sea involve both regular and irregular border crossings, travelling independently and facilitated by smugglers and other actors.

- I. Nevertheless, it can be estimated that cases of the facilitation of the irregular entry of Nigerian citizens into other countries for a financial or material benefit are in the tens of thousands per year, and one Nigerian may be smuggled across multiple borders. The period 2019-2021 saw a significant reduction compared to previous years, particularly evident on the Mediterranean Sea routes to Europe.
- II. Some intending Nigerian migrants contact smugglers to facilitate their migratory journeys because of lack of access to legal migration pathways, lack of access to travel documents, corruption and insecurity. These obstacles create a demand for migrant smuggling.
- III. Migrant smuggling-related offences covered in the UN *Smuggling of Migrants Protocol* are also committed with Nigerian migrants as objects of the offences, including facilitating irregular stay and provision of fraudulent travel and identity documents. In addition, aggravated smuggling offences are committed that endanger the lives of Nigerians and/or entail inhuman or degrading treatment. Perpetrators other than smugglers also abuse the situation of vulnerability of smuggled Nigerians to commit acts of violence, arbitrary detention, exploitation and trafficking in persons.

638 See UNODC. *Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants*. 2018, accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glosom/GLOSOM_2018_web_small.pdf.

639 Key informants and return migrants interviewed in 2019: NG_Imo_K_14; NG_Imo_K_17; NG_Imo_M_7; NG_Imo_M_1.

640 Return migrant interviewed in 2019: NG_Lagos_M_12.

641 Key informants and return migrants interviewed in 2019: NG_Imo_K_14; NG_Imo_K_17; NG_Imo_M_7; NG_Imo_M_1; and in 2021: M2-Kano; KI-7-Delta.

642 According to surveys among smuggled Nigerians carried out on behalf of UNODC by the Mixed Migration Centre during 2021 (Phase three of the field research).

- IV. The perpetrators of migrant smuggling and related offences are mostly Nigerian men, though up to one-fifth are women. In addition to Nigerian nationals active in Nigeria and in countries of transit and destination, citizens of transit and destination countries are also involved. These players range from opportunistic actors working independently, to loosely organized groups in sporadic contact with one another, to sophisticated organized transnational networks.
- V. In many cases, various smuggling actors are connected from the beginning of a smuggled Nigerian's journey. The prevalent modus operandi is for the intending migrant to contact a smuggler in their state of origin, who connects them with the next smuggler along the route by sharing a phone number, with this pattern replicated throughout the smuggling journey, forming a transnational smuggling network.
- VI. Fees range from \$500 to \$1,500 per person for land smuggling routes within West and North Africa. For Nigerians who continue across the Mediterranean to Europe, the sea crossing is generally paid separately, and to different actors. Information on fees was not obtained for any of the other smuggling routes. Air smuggling, due to the requirement for forged and fraudulent documents, tends to be more expensive.
- VII. Corruption in the context of smuggling of migrants from Nigeria is systematic and may often be included in the smuggling fee, with smugglers paying bribes to various actors along the way on behalf of Nigerian migrants.



8. Policy implications of the research findings

This threat assessment has attempted to increase the understanding of the multidimensional threats organized crime poses to Nigeria's people, economy and environment. As such, the present report provides national stakeholders with critical evidence to initiate the development of a national strategy to prevent and counter organized crime.

In order to prevent organized crime, their drivers and pathways need to be addressed and vulnerable targets need to be hardened. As discussed throughout this report, some of the main drivers of organized crime in Nigeria relate to the dynamics of national, regional and global illicit markets, while others are rooted in the conditions of the victims and perpetrators of organized crime. Lack of economic opportunity, youth unemployment and underemployment, multidimensional poverty, violence, weak rule of law, poor governance and corruption also facilitate organized crime.

The diversity of these factors calls for a strategic approach to prevent and fight organized crime including elements of:

- I. The creation of jobs and economic opportunities, enhanced access to education, community-oriented policing aimed at reinforcing public trust in law enforcement and security agencies as well as community-based and community-owned (youth) crime prevention initiatives;
- II. Criminal justice response through improving capacities of law enforcement to identify, investigate, prosecute and adjudicate organized

crimes, and to disrupt the business model of organized criminal groups and dismantle their structures;

- III. Stronger rule of law and governance, particularly with the tackling of corruption and better justice; and
- IV. International cooperation to address the transnational dimension of organized crime groups and illicit markets.

While this report provides important knowledge on the operations of organized crime in Nigeria, it also highlights the many information gaps still existing. The importance of improved data and analysis are overarching, as they inform all elements of the response to organized crime. More specifically there is a need to:

- I. Create a national crime database for the systematic, disaggregated as well as coherent recording of all crimes reported, investigated and prosecuted across all relevant criminal justice agencies, in line with the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes and other relevant standards and good practices;⁶⁴³
- II. Maintain standardized and accurate records concerning arrests, detention, any injuries or deaths in custody, or firearms incidents for all police stations and detention facilities; and
- III. Consider the establishment of a dedicated function within the government or in partnership with academia or the UN to periodically collect, analyse and disseminate trends and patterns of organized crime and the state response to it.

643 See for instance UNODC's *Guidelines for the production of statistical data by the police* (2022). Accessible at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Statistical_guideline_Police_Forces.pdf

As concerns wildlife and forest crime, a good first step would be to create a shared database of all seizures made by all agencies that work on wildlife and forestry crime issues, which would also help to improve Nigeria's CITES reporting.

Other information gaps relevant to the fight against organized crime relate to specific fields of transnational organized crime, including a lack of understanding of the role of foreign nationals as well as persons of Nigerian origin holding foreign passports or resident permits. These individuals could be targeted with visa refusals and orders to leave the country.

Another evidence gap relates to the role of corruption, including in the form of obstruction of justice used by groups to pre-empt detection and arrest, gather intelligence on law enforcement activities and presence, sabotage investigations and prosecutions, influence judicial decision-making as well as obtaining political protection.⁶⁴⁴

In line with the UNODC *Organized Crime Strategy Toolkit (The Toolkit)*, the following policy implications and recommendations are organized in four principal categories, namely prevent, pursue, protect and promote, also referred to as the 4Ps.⁶⁴⁵

Prevent

Prevention of organized crime falls into three categories: drivers, enablers and target hardening. As noted in *The Toolkit*, in the case of organized crime strategies, prevention consists of making it harder for criminal groups to take hold within societies, recruit new members, gain support, co-opt political institutions, infiltrate the economy and, ultimately, challenge the authority of the State.

The chapter on cults in Nigeria described the complicated and often mixed motivations of new members, which frequently fall into meeting both economic and social needs. Preventing recruitment into cults, youth gangs and other organized criminal groups will be key to the response to organized crime

and related criminality in Nigeria. At the same time, communities need to be empowered to manage their security environment in close cooperation with law enforcement and security sector agencies. Interventions aimed to create jobs and economic opportunities, especially for the youth, should target, in particular, communities most vulnerable to crime, drug use and violence.

The cult chapter also emphasized the targeted recruitment techniques that are used to bring in new members who display the types of characteristics that are seen as favourable, such as boldness or social connections. Awareness-raising campaigns should also be developed to challenge the narratives that cults and other organized criminal groups use in their recruitment efforts and reduce their attractiveness. These campaigns should be regionally customized and delivered through social media or other communication tools that are most likely to reach the youth populations most at risk of recruitment into cults.

In terms of enablers, the various forms of corruption that enable all forms of organized crime covered in this report should be further analysed, including through the conduct of corruption risk assessments and countered through targeted interventions reducing vulnerabilities while strengthening the integrity and resilience of institutions and individuals.

The chapters on migrant smuggling and drug production and use in Nigeria demonstrate that the demand for illegal services and goods (e.g., migrant smuggling and drugs) is a crucial driver of these markets and needs to be further understood to ensure that respective policies do not unintentionally enhance demand or create markets, and that awareness campaigns sensibly address understandable aspirations, vulnerabilities and demands.

As noted in the chapter on migrant smuggling, the facilitation of the irregular entry of Nigerian nationals into other countries for a financial or material benefit are in the tens of thousands per

⁶⁴⁴ Nigeria is one of the few countries in Africa that is consistently monitoring the scope and nature of corruption. Since 2017, it has conducted two national surveys on corruption with the support of UNODC: *Corruption in Nigeria Bribery: public experience and response (2017)* and *Corruption in Nigeria: patterns and trends (2019)*, with a third iteration forthcoming. Nevertheless, more studies are needed to assess the linkages between corruption and organized crime in Nigeria.

⁶⁴⁵ See UNODC. *UNODC Organized Crime Strategy Toolkit*, 2021, accessible at https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/uploads/pdf/Strategies/OC_Strategy_Toolkit_Ebook.pdf.

year. The lack of legal pathways to migration creates a demand for migrant smuggling. Some intending Nigerian migrants contact smugglers to facilitate their migratory journeys because of lack of access to travel documents, corruption and insecurity. Awareness-raising campaigns about the dangers of smuggling as well as the legal migration pathways open to Nigerians, and how to access services and documents, would decrease at least some of this demand.

Pursue

As noted in *The Toolkit*, the logic of pursuing organized criminal groups is typically aimed at disrupting their business model (or the economic system comprising criminal actors as well as supply and value chains), in addition to increasing the operating costs and risk involved, in order to effectively deter organized criminal groups from operating.

In terms of law enforcement's capacity to counter organized crime in Nigeria, one of the main findings of the research from all of the crime types covered in this report revealed that lack of coordination between law enforcement agencies across the board led to inefficiencies and duplications in responses. A national strategy is critical to ensure a more coordinated, coherent and effective action against organized crime with a view to ensuring that investigations do not stop at charging individual crimes but seek to disrupt and dismantle markets and groups. The implementation of any new strategy would be aided by deconflicting existing institutional mandates and the creation/determination of a central coordination body that is endowed with the proper political authority needed to effectively serve as a convening power. In addition, designing an organized crime strategy may be enabled by the development of a government-wide theory of change to identify long-term goals and map the explicit pathways for reaching those goals.

While this threat assessment did not systematically analyse the State response to organized crime in Nigeria, it is clear that the development, understanding and utilization of appropriate legal frameworks will be critical to pursuing and deterring organized criminal groups. On the legislative front,

the Nigerian Government should ensure that relevant laws establish offences typically committed by organized criminal groups as serious offences as defined by the UNTOC, that the commission of such offences by an organized criminal group is consistently applied as an aggravating factor, that business structures involved or utilized in the commission of offences are dismantled, and that laws in general provide for a wide range of sanctions suitable to deter and pre-empt the further commission of organized criminal offences.⁶⁴⁶

The chapter on trafficking in persons detailed the ways in which organized criminal groups operating in Europe transfer proceeds back to Nigeria undetected by *hawala*, euro-to-euro or trade-based money laundering. In order to ensure that organized criminal groups are not able to access and use the income of their illicit activities there is a need strengthen the capabilities of the Nigeria Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) and of the Special Control Unit against Money Laundering in detecting, analysing, referring and disrupting illicit financial flows. More specifically, the NFIU and the Special Control Unit against Money Laundering, in cooperation with the NCS, need to further perfect their capabilities to produce compelling intelligence reports concerning potential money laundering activities, improve their techniques to track the use of cash couriers and monitor the activities of registered and informal money transfer systems. At the same time, law enforcement agencies should prioritize the implementation of the 2022 Proceeds of Crime (Recovery and Management) Act, including the establishment of dedicated asset recovery departments, the training of staff in financial investigations as well as in the legal competencies related to the drafting and advocacy of seizure and confiscation orders. Moreover, with some law enforcement agencies well advanced in the detection, tracing, seizure, confiscation as well as international recovery of the proceeds of crime, there is a unique opportunity for peer-to-peer learning as well as the development of harmonized standard operating with a view to targeting the profits of organized crime more consistently across different criminal markets.

⁶⁴⁶ For example, none of the penalties associated with wildlife crime (e.g., \$0.48 per tree and \$7,000 per container) are likely to deter serious traffickers. Updating Nigeria's wildlife crime legislation requires a careful assessment of the sustainability of trade quotas and the deterrence potential of suggested penalties given the profits possible from the illegal trade.

As also confirmed by the second UNODC Corruption Survey in Nigeria, citizens' reluctance to report crimes constitutes a significant obstacle to effectively prevent, detect, investigate and prosecute crimes. This is even more a challenge as concerns the activities of organized criminal groups where, in addition to those reasons presently discouraging citizens from reporting crimes in general, the fear or retaliation is likely to be even greater. The passing of the Witness Protection Bill and its implementation could certainly help to strengthen the protection as well as eventually the confidence of witnesses to come forward; however, by itself it will not be sufficient to instill confidence in the public to report crimes. Law enforcement agencies will need to improve their strategic communication capabilities with a view to becoming more credible in the eyes of the public when highlighting operational successes as well as failures.

The dismantling of several drug laboratories and the seizure of significant quantities of synthetic drugs in particular during the past years confirm a growing domestic production of synthetic drugs. It is therefore critical to further strengthen the abilities of relevant law enforcement and regulatory authorities to detect the import of precursors, in particular ephedrine, which is presently imported in large quantities, including by unlicensed vendors, far exceeding the needs of legitimate drug production.

As concerns the trafficking of wildlife and forest products, the findings of this research showed that many customs officers are presently not able to identify wildlife as well as forest species or determine whether they are protected under CITES. More training is necessary to enhance detection and seizure capabilities.

Protect

Policy implications and recommendations that are meant to protect victims of organized crime identify and recognize the harmful impact it has on vulnerable individuals across societies. Protection objectives also apply to witnesses, whistle-blowers and informants, all of whom play an important role in tackling organized crime.

Based on the research presented in this report, kidnapping appears to be rapidly expanding in Nigeria, with growing numbers of attacks and

victims, and with perpetrators motivated by different interests and operating at different levels. Victims need to be provided with first respondent physical and psychosocial support services, as well as ongoing care and guidance on seeking justice and accountability from the perpetrators of these attacks.

The chapter on drug production and use in this report emphasized that Nigeria is presently suffering from one of the highest known rates of drug use and drug use dependence worldwide. Law enforcement efforts need to be complemented by extensive prevention and treatment programmes, with a view to reducing demand for illicit drugs as well as the use of pharmaceutical drugs for non-medical purposes. Therefore, school-based drug prevention programmes, such as UNPLUGGED, need to be rolled out to all public and private secondary schools, specific programmes need to be developed and rolled out to reach out-of-school children, and drug prevention and counselling services need to be established within tertiary educational institutions and at the National Youth Service Corps. Drug treatment facilities need to be established in all states, including facilities exclusively for women and girls that cater to their specific needs and close the presently existing treatment gap.

Since most of Nigeria's trafficking victims are exploited domestically, the government should ensure that the victim protection and assistance measures, including enhanced rehabilitation and reintegration programs where relevant, are implemented robustly at the national level. Protection measures against trafficking in persons should also presumably build on targeted referral as well as strategic communications campaigns recently piloted and subsequently evaluated by the government. In light of the high prevalence of child trafficking in the region, child-sensitive protection services are required, and law enforcement officials need to be trained in the child-sensitive treatment of trafficking victims.

As noted in the chapter on migrant smuggling, sexual abuse, violence, exploitation and extortion are just some of the aggravated smuggling offences that are faced by Nigerians who migrate. Few smuggled Nigerians who are victims of human rights violations and aggravated smuggling offences are provided with protection and assistance services, other than

repatriation. The government should ensure correct identification, protection and assistance to victims of aggravated smuggling.

The chapter on cults emphasized that leaving such groups may be impossible, or at least very complicated, depending on certain specific circumstances, such as those which will ensure one would pose no threat to the group after leaving. Those seeking to exit organized criminal groups and cults should be given opportunities to exit safely. This includes providing them with viable alternative sources of income, guaranteeing their protection and giving them assistance with rehabilitation and reintegration.

Promote

According to *The Toolkit*, the principle of promote recognizes that every effective set of actions to counter organized crime will require encouraging cooperation and partnerships from across all sectors in what amounts to a whole-of-society approach.

As interviewed experts emphasized during the research for many crime areas covered in this report, inter-agency cooperation, especially between law enforcement, security sector agencies, ministries of justice, courts and correctional services needs to be strengthened with the objective to tackle these dynamic and complex crimes in an integrated, well-coordinated and coherent manner. While effective domestic coordination and inter-agency cooperation is a cross-cutting challenge, it is particularly evident in the response to wildlife and forest crime, with the mandate for inspecting shipments and verifying their legality falling under the responsibility of NCS,

while the storage and analysis of seized products, as well the investigation of the underlying offences and arrests of those involved, falls predominantly under the responsibility of NESREA. Moreover, wildlife crime offenders do not separate their activities cleanly between national parks and non-protected land. It is therefore cumbersome for enforcement agencies, in this case the NPF and the National Park Service, to have their jurisdictions split in this way. Finally, policy and legislative interventions need better coordination, coherence and consistency between the federal and state-level interventions.

Since the majority of the crimes and criminal networks described in this report affect multiple jurisdictions, it is critical to strengthen Nigeria's capacity to effectively cooperate with the relevant counterparts in other countries, particularly to strengthen regional cooperation. Informal networking, peer learning and the familiarization with formal and informal platforms to exchange information and cooperate in investigations and prosecutions will all contribute towards this objective, as will the establishment of mirror investigations in transnational organized crime cases as a standard operating procedure for Nigerian law enforcement and its partners abroad.

Government experts interviewed for various chapters in this report noted repeatedly that resource constraints continue to limit the effectiveness and capabilities of Nigerian law enforcement in countering organized crime. It is therefore critical to continue raising awareness among individuals in the Ministry of Budget and National Planning and in the National Assembly of the immense economic costs of transnational organized crime, with the goal of securing the resources to address it.

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