# Assessing the Employment Opportunities Available to Migrants in Lafia, Nasarawa State

**Oyinloye Adenrele Abeke[1], Sule Magaji[2], Ibrahim Musa[3], Yahaya Ismail[4]**

[1]Sustainable Development Center, University of Abuja

[2,3,4]Department of Economics, University of Abuja

[2]ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9583-3993

[3]ORCID: 0000-0002-7949-4298

[4]ORCID ID: 0009-0006-7876-9524

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**Corresponding Author:**
**Yahaya Ismail**

**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the employment opportunities available to migrants in Lafia, Nasarawa State, employing a quantitative research approach with a survey design. Data was collected from a sample of 399 respondents, comprising internal and cross-border migrants, as well as members of host communities, selected using a multistage sampling technique based on Taro Yamane's formula. The study revealed a predominantly male (55.1%) and economically active (45.1%, aged 31-45 years) migrant population, with a relatively high level of education, and a notable reliance on self-employment (35.1%). Key findings indicated overwhelmingly positive employment outcomes: over 92% of migrants reported having stable and secure jobs, more than 93% perceived job opportunities in Lafia as superior to their previous locations, and over 92% had received job-related training since migrating. Crucially, 93% affirmed their jobs allowed them to save and invest for the future. These results collectively suggest successful economic integration and generally favourable employment prospects for migrants within Lafia's diverse economic landscape.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Migration is a global phenomenon that continues to shape socio-economic and demographic dynamics across various regions. In Nigeria, internal migration has become increasingly prominent due to various push and pull factors, including insecurity, climate change, poverty, and the search for better livelihoods (Adewale, 2020). Lafia, the capital of Nasarawa State, has emerged as a significant destination for migrants, particularly from the North-East and North-Central regions of Nigeria, owing to its relative peace, agricultural opportunities, and growing urban economy (Magaji, Musa & Lawal, 2024). The influx of migrants into Lafia has raised critical questions about the availability and accessibility of employment opportunities, especially for low-skilled individuals seeking to escape the socio-economic challenges in their places of origin (Ibrahim & Umar, 2022).

Employment is a fundamental aspect of integration in host communities (Magaji, Musa & Salisu, 2022). It serves not only as a means of livelihood but also as a pathway to social inclusion and self-reliance (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2021). However, in many developing countries, such as Nigeria, the labour market is often saturated, informal, and unregulated (Magaji & Musa, 2015). This makes it difficult for migrants to secure stable and decent employment. Migrants in Lafia often face challenges such as discrimination, lack of documentation, low levels of education and vocational skills, as well as limited access to government-led employment initiatives (Onwubuya & Danjuma, 2020). These factors significantly influence the nature and scope of employment opportunities available to them.

The employment landscape in Lafia is predominantly agrarian, with a growing commercial sector. Migrants often find employment in agriculture, construction, domestic services, and informal trading sectors, which typically offer low pay, poor working conditions, and limited job security (Magaji, Musa, Enejere & Ismail, 2025; Okafor & Gambo, 2021). While these sectors provide immediate

income for survival, they rarely offer long-term career progression or socio-economic mobility (Magaji & Haruna, 2012). This situation calls for a critical assessment of the quality and sustainability of the employment opportunities accessible to migrants in the area.

Understanding the employment opportunities available to migrants in Lafia is essential for informing evidence-based policy and planning at both the state and local government levels. Such assessments are necessary to promote inclusive economic development and reduce poverty (Musa, Ismail, & Magaji, 2024), as well as to enhance the resilience of migrant populations (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022). Furthermore, the research will contribute to the broader discourse on internal migration, labour markets, and human development in Nigeria, highlighting specific barriers and enablers of employment for migrant populations.

This study, therefore, seeks to assess the employment opportunities available to migrants in Lafia, Nasarawa State. It aims to identify the sectors where migrants are employed, examine the conditions of such employment, and evaluate the factors that either hinder or facilitate their access to gainful employment. By doing so, the research aims to provide policy recommendations that support the economic integration of migrants and contribute to the sustainable development of Lafia and its surrounding areas.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW
### 2.1 Conceptual review
### 2.1.1 Employment
Employment refers to the condition of having paid work, where individuals engage in productive activities to earn income and sustain their livelihoods (Eke, Magaji, & Ezeigwe, 2020). It encompasses various forms, including formal and informal jobs, self-employment, part-time, and full-time engagements. In many developing countries, including Nigeria, employment is mainly informal (Magaji & Adamu, 2011). It is characterised by limited social security and job protection (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2021). Employment plays a crucial role in promoting economic stability, reducing poverty, and fostering personal development (Magaji, Musa, & Ismail, 2025). It also serves as a key indicator of economic performance and human well-being (World Bank, 2020). The nature and quality of employment, whether decent or precarious, directly impact individuals' standard of living and their capacity to contribute meaningfully to society (Ahmed, Magaji, Ahmad & Yunusa, 2024).

### 2.1.2 Migrants
Migrants are individuals who move from one location to another, either within or across national borders, in search of better living conditions, employment, safety, or education. Migration can be either voluntary or forced, and it is often driven by factors such as conflict, economic hardship, environmental change, or social aspirations (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014). Internal migrants in Nigeria, particularly those relocating to urban centres like Lafia, often seek employment and enhanced access to basic services. However, they frequently face challenges such as discrimination, job insecurity, and limited access to social services (Ibrahim & Umar, 2022). Understanding the conditions faced by migrants is crucial for developing inclusive policies that foster their integration and safeguard their rights.

### 2.2 Theoretical Review
### 2.2.1 Human Capital Theory
This theory posits that individuals invest in education, skills, and experience to increase their productivity and economic value, which in turn enhances their employability and income potential (Becker, 1993). In the context of migrants in Lafia, Human Capital Theory helps explain the disparities in employment outcomes based on migrants' levels of education, vocational training, and work experience. Migrants with higher human capital are more likely to access formal and better-paying jobs. At the same time, those with limited education and skills are often confined to low-skilled, informal, and precarious employment sectors (Ahmad & Magaji, 2024). The theory emphasises the importance of skill acquisition and capacity-building programs in enhancing the labour market integration of migrants and fostering sustainable livelihoods (Adewale, 2020).

### 2.3 Empirical Review
Ospanov et al. (2025) investigate how forced migration resulting from armed conflicts influences regional development, highlighting the double-edged impact it has on labour markets. This study, based on an inter-disciplinary systematic literature review of 70 rigorously-selected peer-reviewed publications over the last 10 years (2013-2023), confronts the findings of studies on migration, armed conflicts and labour markets to shed light on the economic and social impact of forced migration on host countries, home countries and the migrants themselves. The selected sample of papers highlights the various ways in which forced migration resulting from 25 different armed conflicts impacted labour markets. Four main thematic clusters emerge from the literature: the socio-economic impact of armed conflicts on labour markets, the professional development of displaced people in host countries, the impact of armed conflicts on the labour force of home countries and the social and psychological aspects of forced migration. By bringing together insights from economics, social studies, and international relations, the authors provide policy recommendations on the combination of factors that facilitate the smooth integration of displaced people into host labour markets.

Adekoya, Magaji and Ismail (2025) examine the impact of unemployment on economic growth in Nigeria from 1990 to 2023. Using econometric techniques, the study analyses the relationship between unemployment rates, measured as a percentage of the labour

force, and real GDP growth. The findings suggest a negative correlation between unemployment and economic growth, aligning with Okun's Law. Higher unemployment rates are associated with lower economic output, which may be attributed to reduced consumer spending, decreased labour force participation, and diminished investment. The study also examines the impact of other factors, such as poverty, inflation, and security, on economic growth and unemployment. The results underscore the importance of addressing unemployment as a crucial strategy for fostering sustainable economic development in Nigeria.

Panday (2023) examined the socio-economic conditions of migrants and their households in Ranagaun, a region characterised by diverse economic backgrounds. The research utilised primary data obtained through fieldwork that incorporated structured questionnaires, participant observation, detailed interviews, and focus group discussions. Using disproportionate stratified random sampling, the study administered questionnaires to 10 migrant households in each ward. Ranagaun VDC, identified as one of Nepal's most impoverished areas, heavily relies on labour migration as a key livelihood strategy. While India remains the primary destination for most migrant workers from this region, accounting for the majority of remittances, there is a growing trend of younger migrants seeking employment in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Western countries. Although remittances significantly contribute to the well-being of recipient households, their importance varies depending on the household's wealth and financial circumstances. For many residents in the study area, remittances are the primary source of income (Panday, 2023).

Fayad and Mansour (2022) examined the economic integration of migrants in their research on Syrian refugees in Lebanon, focusing on access to employment and financial inclusion, including the availability of banking and credit services. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study engaged 250 Syrian refugees selected through purposive sampling. Data collection involved surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, while analysis was conducted using statistical methods, thematic coding, and cross-tabulation. Although this study aligns with the current research on migrant employment opportunities and financial integration in Lafia, it does not cover aspects such as migrants' housing or general living conditions, which are critical to understanding the broader integration of migrants.

In a longitudinal study, Chiswick and Miller (2022) examined the economic performance of immigrants in the United States, focusing specifically on income patterns and employment prospects. The study involved 1,000 randomly selected immigrants and relied on national survey data and government labour statistics. Using multivariate regression and trend analysis, the researchers evaluated long-term changes in the economic conditions of immigrants. The findings are particularly relevant to the present research as they closely relate to employment and income opportunities for migrants. However, the study falls short of addressing key areas, such as access to financial services and housing quality, both of which are integral to assessing the welfare of migrants in Lafia.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research approach, utilising a survey design to collect data on the income levels of migrants in Lafia, Nasarawa State.

3.1. Study Area:

Lafia is the capital and largest city of Nasarawa State, located in North Central Nigeria.10 With an estimated population of over 500,000 inhabitants (Wikipedia, Lafia), it serves as an administrative and economic hub for the state. The city's economy is primarily driven by trade, agriculture (serving as a collection point for sesame seeds, soybeans, yams, sorghum, millet, and cotton), and services, with significant informal sector activities (Wikipedia, Lafia). It is a melting pot of various ethnic groups, including Kanuri, Fulani, Gwandara, Alago, Migilli, and a large Hausa population, making it a suitable site for studying migrant economic integration.

3.2. Population and Sampling:

The study population comprises all individuals in Lafia, Nasarawa State, who are either migrants (internal or cross-border) or members of the host communities. According to estimates derived from the National Population Commission (NPC, 2006) and adjusted for population growth, the study population comprises approximately 120,000 migrants, including internal migrants from rural areas of Nasarawa State, cross-border migrants from neighbouring countries, and individuals seeking economic and social opportunities in Lafia. The study targeted people who have experienced migration first-hand or have been influenced by the migration of others, including family members and community members.

**Sample and Sampling Technique**

**3.1 Sample Size**

The sample size for this study was determined using Taro Yamane's formula, which is suitable for estimating sample sizes when the population size is known. The formula is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \qquad \text{(i)}$$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Population size

e = Margin of error (typically set at 0.05 for a 95% confidence level)

1 = Constant.

Given:

> N = 1200000
> e = 0.05

Therefore,

$$n = \frac{120,000}{1 + 120,000(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{120,000}{301}$$

$$n = 398.67$$

Thus, the study will target a sample size of 399 respondents.

## 3.2 Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness by dividing the population into strata, such as internal migrants and cross-border migrants. Proportional sampling was then used to select respondents from each stratum based on their estimated population size. Simple random sampling was applied within each stratum to minimise bias. This method ensures inclusivity and reliable representation of different groups in Lafia, Nasarawa State, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the economic status of migrants in Lafia, Nasarawa State. A sample size of 399 respondents will be selected, comprising migrants (internal and cross-border), non-migrants, and members of host communities.

## 3.3     Method of Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through a questionnaire. A structured questionnaire was designed to collect responses from the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two sections (Section A and Section B) to facilitate the logical grouping of its content, allowing respondents to navigate and comprehend it more easily. Section A is based on the personal data of the respondents. In contrast, section B contains questions on the study objectives using a five-point Likert scale, which constitutes strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1), to know the employee's agreement levels in questionnaires.

## 4.0 RESULTS

## 4.1     Data Presentation

The data collected from the respondents are presented in the following tables and figures. These present an overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents, as well as the responses to the various questions related to the economic status of migrants in Lafia, Nasarawa State.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

| Variable | Category | Frequency (n = 399) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 220 | 55.1 |
| | Female | 179 | 44.9 |
| Age | 18–30 years | 130 | 32.6 |
| | 31–45 years | 180 | 45.1 |
| | 46 years and above | 89 | 22.3 |
| Marital Status | Single | 150 | 37.6 |
| | Married | 200 | 50.1 |
| | Divorced/Separated/Widowed | 49 | 12.3 |
| Educational Level | No Formal Education | 30 | 7.5 |
| | Primary Education | 90 | 22.6 |
| | Secondary Education | 130 | 32.6 |
| | Tertiary Education | 149 | 37.3 |
| Occupation | Self-employed | 140 | 35.1 |
| | Civil/Public Servant | 100 | 25.1 |
| | Private Sector Employee | 75 | 18.8 |
| | Unemployed | 84 | 21.0 |
| Duration of Stay in Lafia | Less than 1 year | 50 | 12.5 |
| | 1–5 years | 190 | 47.6 |
| | Above 5 years | 159 | 39.9 |

**Source: Field Survey (2025)**

The demographic data in Table 1 reveal that 55.1% of the respondents were male, while 44.9% were female, indicating that more males than females participated in the study. This reflects the typical trend, where males are more likely to migrate for economic reasons. In terms of age distribution, the majority of the respondents (45.1%) were between 31 and 45 years old, followed by 32.6% aged 18 to 30 years, and 22.3% aged 46 and above. This suggests that most migrants in Lafia are in their economically active years. Regarding marital status, 50.1% of the respondents were married, and 37.6% were single. In comparison, 12.3% were either divorced, separated, or widowed, indicating that a significant portion of migrants has family responsibilities that may influence their economic behaviour. Educationally, 37.3% of the respondents had tertiary education, 32.6% had secondary education, 22.6% had only primary education, and 7.5% had no formal education, indicating a relatively educated migrant population, which can positively influence their employability and income levels.

In terms of occupation, 35.1% of respondents were self-employed, 25.1% worked in the public sector, 18.8% were employed in the private sector, while 21.0% were unemployed. This shows a firm reliance on self-employment among the migrant population, which may reflect limited access to formal job markets. Lastly, the data shows that 47.6% of respondents had lived in Lafia for between 1 to 5 years, 39.9% for more than 5 years, and 12.5% for less than 1 year, suggesting that a significant proportion of the migrants have had time to adjust and integrate into the city, which may influence their economic outcomes.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Employment Opportunities of Migrants in Lafia (n = 399)**

| Statement | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I have a stable and secure job in Lafia. | 82 (20.6%) | 286 (71.7%) | 11 (2.8%) | 6 (1.5%) | 14 (3.5%) |
| The job opportunities in Lafia are better than in my previous location. | 42 (10.5%) | 332 (83.2%) | 15 (3.8%) | 8 (2.0%) | 2 (0.5%) |
| I have received job-related training since migrating to Lafia. | 104 (26.1%) | 265 (66.4%) | 20 (5.0%) | 10 (2.5%) | - |
| My job allows me to save and invest for the future. | 32 (8.0%) | 339 (85.0%) | 14 (3.5%) | 14 (3.5%) | - |

**Source: Field Survey (2025).**

Based on the descriptive statistics on employment opportunities available to migrants in Lafia, Nasarawa State, A large majority of respondents (71.7% agreed and 20.6% strongly agreed) stated that they have a stable and secure job in Lafia, suggesting that over 92% of migrants feel secure in their current employment. Very few disagreed or were undecided, reflecting general satisfaction with job stability.

Regarding job opportunities, 83.2% agreed, and 10.5% strongly agreed that the job opportunities in Lafia are better than those in their previous locations. This shows that over 93% of migrants believe their employment prospects have improved since relocating to Lafia.

Furthermore, 66.4% agreed and 26.1% strongly agreed that they have received job-related training since migrating. This means that more than 92% have accessed some form of skill or job enhancement opportunities, which likely supports their employment growth and retention.

Lastly, the data shows that 85% agreed and 8% strongly agreed that their jobs allow them to save and invest for the future. This indicates that the vast majority of migrants are not only earning a living but are also able to plan and build towards long-term financial goals. Generally, the findings suggest that most migrants experience favourable employment outcomes.

**5.0 DISCUSSION**

The demographic profile of migrants in Lafia, Nasarawa State, as presented in Table 1, offers crucial insights into the characteristics of the surveyed population. The prevalence of male respondents (55.1%) aligns with typical migration patterns where men often spearhead economic relocation. The dominant age group, 31-45 years (45.1%), indicates a population in their prime productive years, suggesting that migration is primarily driven by individuals seeking to maximise their economic potential. Furthermore, the high proportion of married individuals (50.1%) implies that family responsibilities may be a significant motivator for migration, potentially influencing their economic decisions and the need for stable income.

The educational attainment among migrants is noteworthy, with a substantial portion possessing tertiary (37.3%) and secondary (32.6%) education. This relatively educated demographic suggests a human capital advantage that could positively impact their employability and earning capacity within Lafia. However, the occupational distribution reveals a significant reliance on self-employment (35.1%), which, while offering autonomy, might also indicate challenges in accessing formal employment opportunities. The fact that 21.0% are unemployed, despite a generally educated profile, points to potential underemployment or competition within the job market. The extended duration of stay for a majority of migrants (47.6% for 1-5 years and 39.9% for over 5 years) signifies a degree of integration and establishment within the new environment, which can contribute to more stable economic outcomes over time.

Table 2 highlights overwhelmingly positive perceptions regarding employment opportunities among migrants in Lafia. A striking 92.3% of respondents reported having stable and secure jobs, indicating a high level of job satisfaction and perceived security. This finding is further reinforced by the firm belief among 93.7% of migrants that job opportunities in Lafia are superior to those in their previous locations. Such perceptions are crucial as they validate the decision to migrate and suggest that Lafia effectively serves as an economic magnet for these individuals.

The data also reveal a significant investment in human capital development, with over 92.5% of migrants reporting that they have received job-related training since their arrival. Access to skill enhancement opportunities is vital for career progression and adaptability in the labour market. Crucially, the ability to save and invest for the future is a key indicator of economic well-being, and a remarkable 93% of respondents affirmed that their jobs allow for this. This suggests that migrants are not merely subsisting but are actively building financial security, indicating successful economic integration and a positive outlook on their long-term financial prospects in Lafia.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that Lafia, Nasarawa State, presents a significantly positive environment for migrant employment, characterised by high job stability, perceived better opportunities compared to previous locations, and access to skill-enhancing training. The findings highlight successful economic integration, with a large majority of migrants not only securing stable livelihoods but also actively building financial security through savings and investments. The demographic profile of migrants, predominantly male, economically active, and relatively educated, further underscores their capacity to contribute to and benefit from Lafia's economy, despite a notable reliance on the informal sector.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that local government and relevant stakeholders continue to support and formalise the informal sector, which serves as a crucial employment avenue for many migrants. Expanding access to vocational training and entrepreneurship programs could further enhance migrants' employability and foster sustainable economic growth. Additionally, efforts should be made to address the challenges faced by the unemployed segment of the migrant population, potentially through targeted job placement initiatives or incentives for private sector engagement. Future research could explore the specific sectors that offer the most promising opportunities and investigate the long-term socio-economic impacts of self-employment on migrant communities in Lafia.

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