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**Socio-economic Integration of African Migrants in Russia**

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## **Problem Statement**

Russia has a growing population of African migrants. Unlike the Soviet era when the majority of African migrants were students who were on the bilateral education agreement between the Soviet government and African countries (Adetokunbo 2017), the post-Soviet era witnessed a change in the dynamics of African migration to Russia, with an increasing number of labor migrants from Africa and some coming to join their family (Oni 2020). Though the African migrant community in Russia is increasing, however, compared to other migrant groups from the Caucasus and Central Asia, it has the smallest representation of migrant community in Russia (ROSSTAT 2020). This research focuses on the sub-Saharan African labor migrants in Moscow. Considering the fact that the educational migrants are becoming labor migrants, and in some instances, the frontier between them is very uncertain; you can be both at the same time, officially educational, but de facto labor.

Despite the growing presence of African migrants in Russia, there is a dearth of scientific research on this group of migrants, which has inspired the need to explore this migrant community. Most of the scientific interest in African migrants in Russia is focused on student migrants (Katsakioris 2019; Matusевич 2008). There is a lacuna in context-specific research on African labor migrant's category in Russia. Even though there are no reliable statistics on the population of the African migrants in Russia, records from the Russian Statistics revealed that as many the African migrants that are coming into Russia, many of these migrants are also leaving the country. Although Russia is not a popular destination for African migrants, the ease of obtaining a Russian visa has contributed to the inflow of African migrants to Russia (Oni 2022). Some scholars who have studied the integration of this category of African migrants in Russia have only focused on the general idea of integration; and the impacts of external agencies such as religious and non-governmental organisations in facilitating African migrants' integration without a structured and analytical perspective on specific aspects of their integration process based on the experiences of these African migrants (Shakhbazyan 2010; Bondarenko 2017). Between 2005 and 2019, approximately 55,000 African migrants landed in Russia and approximately 38,000 left the country (ROSSTAT 2020). This reveals that it is not enough to study the challenges that African migrants are exposed to in Russia, but also to investigate their coping strategies within the socio-economic landscape of the country. Understanding their

motivation to remain in Russia and the economic spheres in which these migrant workers actively participate, this research will draw upon their experiences.

The momentum that has led to the increase of African communities in Russia, especially in Moscow, may be a recent phenomenon in the context of African migration to Russia. However, the diplomatic contact that led to the influx of African began in the Soviet Union, except for Imperial Russia when Russian travellers to Africa adopted young Africans and brought them back to Russia (Blakely 1986). Before the 20th century, there had never been any contact with the African continent. Unlike Western countries that have had long standing interactions with the African continent, such an idea among the Russians is emerging (Stent 1973). Therefore, integration, which has been defined by Penninx and Garcé's-Mascaren as a two-way process is a situation where “the host society does not remain unaffected though the size and composition of the population changes, and new institutional arrangements comes into existence to accommodate immigrants’ political, social, and cultural needs” (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016) is significant in that it allows for mutual interactions between the host society who recognized and accepted the presence of outsiders, and the migrant communities. According to Lea Klarenbeek, integration portrays “a society in which there are no social boundaries between ‘legitimate members’, or insiders, and ‘non-legitimate members’, or outsiders” (Klarenbeek 2021). Despite the popular acceptance of integration as a two-way process, many scholars believe that it is more one way which often emphasizes the participation of people of migration background trying to fit into the society and underestimating the role of the local society (Castles 2003; Ager and Strang 2008).

For African migrants, getting into a society that is culturally and ecologically different, and has a different language of communication, will be a challenging adventure to explore. Particularly, years after the disintegration of the Soviet Union witness increase in nationalistic sentiments with a group known as the ‘Skinhead’ at the forefront of attacks against people of color (SOVA 2005), settling in such an environment became daunting for many Africans in Russia. This parallel interaction between African migrants and the Russian society has continued to a psychological effect among Africans who perceive Russia to be a racist country (Bondarenko 2017).

Consequently, it is imperative to consider a study of this migrant group in order to explain their integration process in the social and economic section of Russia. This is,

however, not only because of the paucity of an academic undertaking of this group of migrants in Russia, but also to reveal the possibilities of finding a niche that will aid their integration in the country. This study seeks to find how integrated African migrants are in the social and economic sphere of Russia (Moscow), examine the challenges they encounter and opportunities opened to them. In addition to exploring these possibilities, another reason for this study is to examine the coping strategies used by the African migrants to ensure their integration into the social and economic arena in Russia. Thus, discussions about African migrant integration process in Russia could be said to be a gradual transition from parallel (unidirectional) interaction where local society and African migrant community view each other separately with the later striving for recognition and acceptance from the local society, to a straight-line integration where there is a behavioral change within the African migrant community to conform with local institutions in order to achieve their personal or collective goals.

The relevance of this study is therefore connected to the understudied nature of the African migrants' group in Russia, particularly migrants who arrived in Russia for the purpose of work. Examining their sociability with the locals, access to accommodation and their participation in economic space which are the cases chosen for this research to analyze their integration process, thereby drawing conclusions about the perception of the African migrants based on their experience.

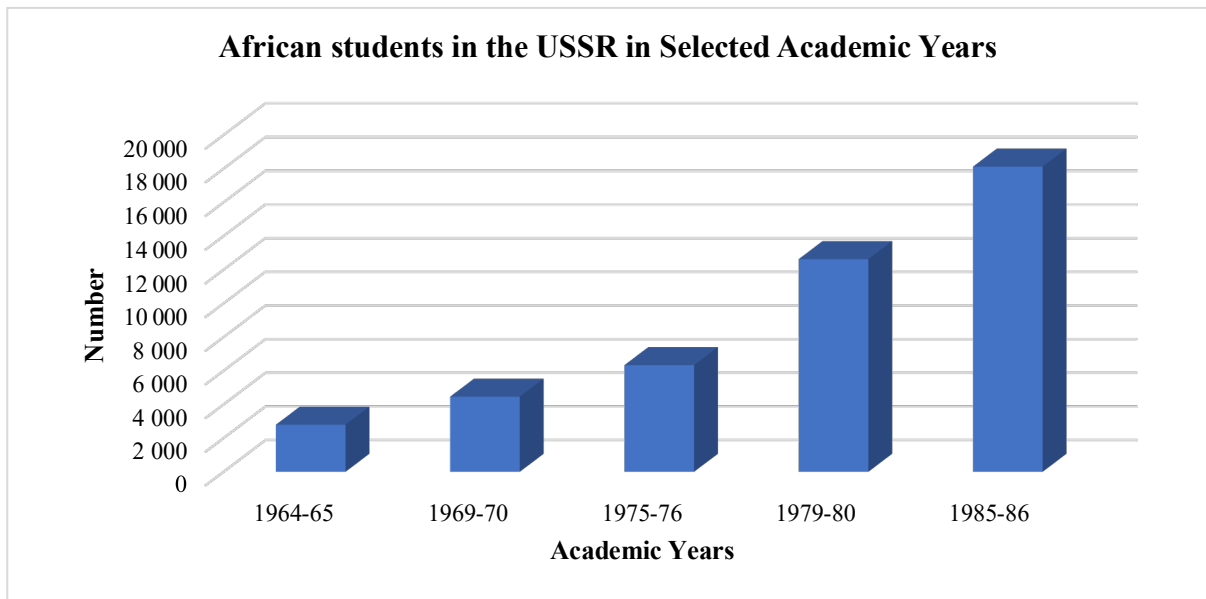
## **Literature Review**

### **Description African Community in Soviet Space**

During the colonial period in Africa, the Soviet Government played a very important role in the actualization of the African independence (Arkhangelskaya and Shubin 2013; Fedorenko 1964; Ogunbadejo 1988). The fragile African countries received support from the USSR in their struggle for independence. That the USSR was against all forms of imperial rule and supported all anti-colonial struggles. The support for the African countries continued even after their independence. With the independence of many African countries, the socio-economic and political influence of the USSR began to gain momentum in Africa (Eribo and Vaughn 1993). As described by Fedorenko, the Soviet government relations are based on mutual respect, friendship and equality. It guarantees the freedom and rights of every nation

and will by no means, trample on them<sup>1</sup>. During this period, the USSR had a huge influence on the African continent (Burger 2018) and contributed to the development of independent African countries.

The Peoples' Friendship University (PFU) was established in 1960 to cater for the academic needs of third world countries. In 1961, it was named Patrice Lumumba after one of the symbols of Africa's struggle for independence. The USSR signed various agreements with many African countries. The agreements vary from educational, cultural, economic and other areas. During this period, almost all the Africans residing within the territory of the Soviet Union were on the scholarship of the Soviet government in various academic institutions in the country. At the completion of their education, these African students returned back to their various countries and put into effect, the knowledge they have acquired (Bondarenko et al. 2014). By 1975, the University had already trained about 5600 experts, including 4250 graduates for 89 countries (Vershina, Kurbanov, and Panich 2016). Before the collapse of the USSR, 36,223 Sub-Saharan African students had graduated from the university and technical schools who were mostly from Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroun, Zambia, Angola, Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea Senegal, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa and so on (Katsakioris 2017). By 1990, the number of foreign students in USSR reached about 126,000 which was 10.8% of the stock of global international students (Грибанова and Жерлицына 2008). As part of the agreement, African students underwent one year language training aimed at strengthening the position of the Russian language as a means of interethnic communication (Anokhina and Panin 2014) and introducing foreign students to Russian history, culture, people, language and literature to foster their adaptation process within the country (Katsakioris 2019). This was, however, limited to within the academic space as these African students lived in university dormitories across the Soviet Republics, limiting contact with the local population (Bondarenko et al. 2009). The graph below shows a data representation of the growth in the number of African migrants coming to study in Soviet universities.



Sources as cited by Katsakioris Constantin: Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. R-9606, op. 1, d. 2381, ll. 1–6; d. 4387, ll. 1–6; d. 7244, ll. 1–8; d. 8660, ll. 17–21; op. 3, d. 984, ll. 8–14; Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) f. M-3, op. 8, d. 1152, l. 104(Katsakioris 2017).

### **Africans in a Post-Soviet Russian Environment**

The end of the Cold War was also the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. Russia inherited the political reign of power from the Soviet government and was faced with the challenge of building a strong economic system (transiting to a market-based economy from the state-controlled economy) and also tackling the political problems it was faced with. Towards the end of the 1990s, Russia and African relations started having a renewed form, but however, the beginning of the year 2000 birth an increased interest between Russia and the African continent. The revival of the relationship between Africa and the Russian Federation gave way to support in various means and most African countries as a friend that would rise to support when in need.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, African migrants coming into Russia perceive Russia as a transit point to Western Europe (Shakhbazyan 2010). African migrants who came to Russia perceived their stay in the post-Soviet environment as temporal and always looking for opportunities to transit to their preferred destination, particularly to the West (Ivanova 2019). Unable to realize their dream of going to the West, they try to survive by facing their present reality in Russia (Dmitri Bondarenko, et al. 1996). However, some of them are not psychologically and financially prepared to withstand the various difficulties that come their ways which include getting legal jobs and to remain documented (Shakhbazyan 2010). Some

of them also do not strengthen their social capital because they did not plan to stay longer than they currently are. Another pertinent problem that they have is the inability to communicate in Russian. Their perception of the Russia as a transit country does not make them have strong motivation to learn the language (Shakhbazyan 2010). The cumulation of these factors has complicated their pathway to integration within the social and economic facet of their host society.

Prior to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, both internal migrations among the various republics and international migration were tightly controlled during the Soviet (Heleniak 2016). However, after the breakup of the Soviet Republics, there is a need to reformulate the migration policies of the newly independent Russia because there was a huge number of migration flows from the former Soviet republics (Leal and Rodríguez 2016). In the post-Soviet era, Russia’s migration policies have gone through a different transformation in order to regulate the number of migrants coming into the country. These policies are particularly aimed towards the former Soviet republics (Igonin 2016).

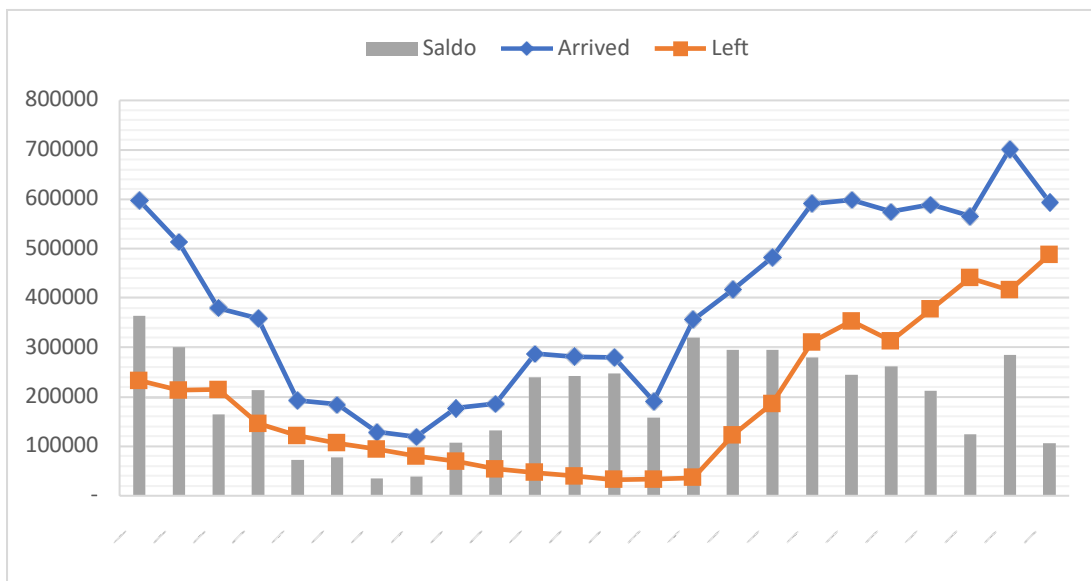


Fig 1:

*Note: immigration figures refer to the inflow of migrants who have stayed longer than one year.*  
*Source: Source: Federal Statistics Service (ROSSTAT) updated June 5, 2021*  
[https://gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/population/demo/migr1\\_bd.htm](https://gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/demo/migr1_bd.htm)

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the majority of the migrants entering into the Russian territory are majorly from the former Soviet republics occupying about 90% of the total migration (OECD 2019).



Despite acknowledging the demographic challenge of the country, and since the introduction of the new migration policy, there have been series of laws that have been passed which are against the migration policy and in turn, impede the smooth integration of migrants (Andrienko and Guriev 2005; Dave 2014). One of such policies is the limitation of the number of expatriates that an organization is allowed to employ and another is the quota set for the issuance of the temporary residence permit for migrants (V. S. Malakhov and Simon 2018). Having a cacophony of policies would not provide migrants with the enabling environment needed to thrive. Plunged into this acephalous situation in the migration policy formulation of the Russian Federation is the arrival of a growing number of African migrants who occupy an isolated space in the Russian Federation. However, the majority of them are arriving from the Northern African countries: e.g. In pre-covid 2019 there were almost 3000 persons arrived from Egypt, more than 1800 from Morocco and less than 800 from Nigeria (Ghanaians, Ethiopians, persons from French-speaking African countries are arriving almost only as the students within the educational migration). Having ambiguous migration policies have made the treatment of migrants punctured with inconsistencies (V. Malakhov and Simon 2016). The frequent maneuvering of policies has created a case for fragile migrant stance in the community.

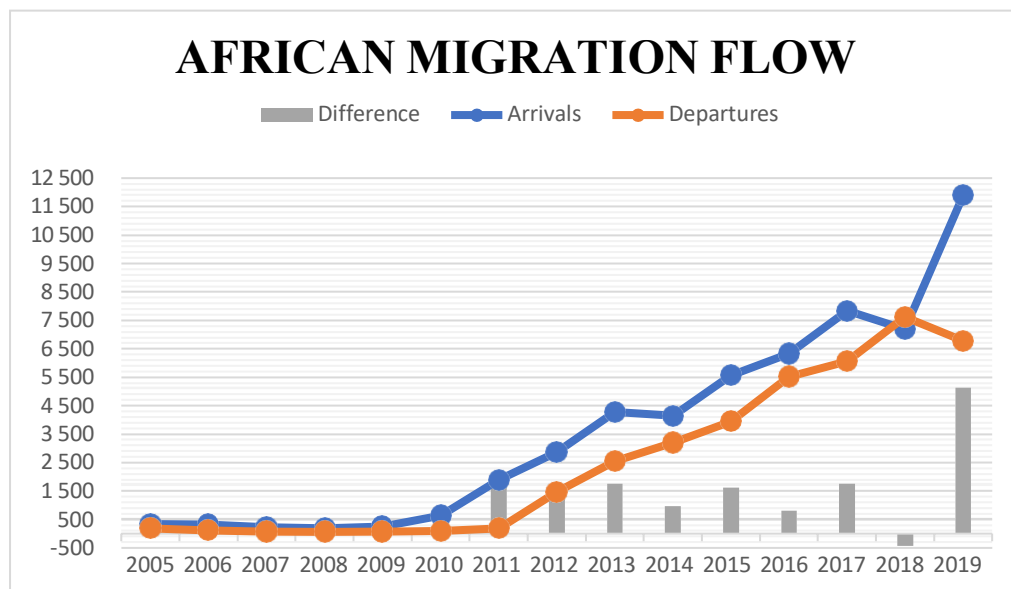


Fig 2:

*Note: immigration figures refer to the inflow of migrants who have stayed longer than one year.*

*Source: Federal Statistics Service (Rosstat) updated March 15, 2020<sup>2</sup>*

## **Description of African Community in Russia**

There are migrants from about sixty African countries in Russia (ROSSTAT 2020). The composition of African migrants in Russia spread across different regions of the African continent. One particular locus that signifies African presence in the Soviet era was the People's Friendship University, which is popularly portrayed as an 'African University' because of the number of African students and particularly, their vociferousness in making their desires known to the Soviet government (Katsakioris 2017). Living in the Soviet period for African students had its implications. They often fell victim to verbal and physical assaults from the locals who found it difficult to accommodate them within their social arena (Katsakioris 2017). The students were subject to alienation from different sections of society. They experienced both physical and verbal abuses, some were expelled by the university administration, arrested by police and also deprived of dating Russian girls (Katsakioris 2017). In 1960, Theophilus Okonkwo, a Nigerian student in Moscow along with some other students led a protest against the racial discrimination directed towards them. Later that year, they were expelled for resisting the university's ban on student unionism (Matusevich 2008).

Unlike the Soviet periods, attacks on African migrants became a daily occurrence in the first decade of the post-Soviet Russia and the early part of the year 2000s. During the Soviet era, forming a pan-African identity whereby they defend themselves against any attacks, having the mantra of 'an attack on one is an attack on all' (Allina-Pisano and Allina-Pisano 2007). Visiting public spaces, African students go in numbers, and they find companions among national students' community (Allina-Pisano and Allina-Pisano 2007). However, with the dissolution of the USSR, the composition of African migrants in the post-Soviet Russia changed from not being solely student migrants but particularly labor migrants (Oni 2020). Some students were also able to change their migration status to labor migrant but they still find safety in numbers when visiting public spaces (Allina-Pisano and Allina-Pisano 2007).

The composition of African community changed in the early 2000s. Like the students' community, African communities are formed along national borders with the aim of creating a 'safe haven' for their nationals. There are numerous African communities in Russia such

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<sup>2</sup> I got these data from Rosstat on personal request.

as the Ethiopians, Ghanaians, Cameroonians, Angolans, Beninois, Namibians and so on. The only African community with a legal establishment status is the Nigerian community (Shakhbazyan 2010) which also has Nigerians in Diaspora Organization Russian chapter aimed at improving bilateral relationship between Russia and Nigeria, and also to promote the overall socio-economic, cultural and political development of Nigerians through foreign direct investments (“Home” n.d.). However, within the national community, a dichotomy that borders around ethnic lines exist. The cognitive understanding that creates boundaries within the communities divides the community along ethnic groups such as the Ghanaian community, having the North and South dichotomy, the Nigerian community is divided among the dominant ethnic groups in the southern part of Nigeria such as the Yorubas, Igbos and Edos. Compared to other African communities in Russia, the Nigerian community has a stronger internally diversified ethnic grouping within their national migrant community in Russia (Dmitri Bondarenko,, et al. 1996).

### **Social and Economic Integration of Migrants**

Making policies alone is not enough because the inflow of migrants into Russia could become a challenge that the country would have to contend with if the necessary policy that will guarantee their integration is not adequately sought (Mukomel 2013). According to Massey, as cited by Demintseva, the rate of socio-economic integration enjoyed by migrants helps to shape their perspective of the host country (Demintseva 2017), Social-economic integration is connected to the involvement of the migrants in the labor market of their country of destination (Entzinger and Biezeveld 2003). For migrants to benefit from the social and economic aspect of their host country, a form of inclusion would enhance this possibility. Integration is a process of social inclusion of people who are new to a particular society (Rudiger and Spencer 2003). The process of migrant integration to a new environment is measured in terms of accommodation, employability, level of education, and socio-cultural adaptation to the new society (Penninx 2003). These measures are important to understand the strategies that African migrants apply to accelerate their integration process.

Berglund et al. Explain that some factors hinder the smooth integration of migrants into the labor market of the host country. Such factors include discrimination, the level of education and negative perception towards the migrants (Berglund et al. 1999). The language ability of the migrants is very important in determining their integration in the labor market of the host community (Delander et al. 2005). Using the case of migrants from the former

Soviet states in Moscow, Demintseva identifies access to accommodation and the type of settlement area where the migrants live as important factors that contribute to determining how integrated the migrants would be in the host country (Demintseva 2017). However, it is important to note that the integrative capacity of the host society, which is influenced by the historical experience of interaction with migrants and the adaptative capabilities of migrants in interacting with their host community are important social factors that influence integration policy (Karpova and Vorona 2014).

The composition of the environment where the migrants find themselves helps to shape their perspective about the local people and also influences their attitudes towards them. According to Hum and Simpson, the integration of migrants into the economy of the country allows them to enjoy a measure of living relatively equivalent to the native-born (Hum and Simpson 2004). One of the major ways to determine the level of migrants' social-economic integration in the host country is the labor market. Waldinger puts it that socio-economic integration is the impact the immigrants exercise in the labor market of the host country (Waldinger 1982). International Labor Organization explains that the labor market could be measured in terms of its employability (Castillo 2011).

Social-economic integration is the integration of migrants into the labor market of the country and the level of economic mobility that the migrants enjoy in the labor market (Entzinger and Biezeveld 2003). Economic mobility in the labor market enables labor migrants with the opportunity to change one place of employment for another (Long and Ferrie 2006). The number of opportunities opened to the migrants in the labor market also determines the level of economic mobility. The well-being of the migrants is equally of importance to the host country and the level at which migrants benefit from having a relatively equal income, social security, social policy and welfare in the state determines their social-economic integration. The challenges faced by migrants in Russia is the absence of a common integration strategy of migration policy (Karpova and Vorona 2014).

### **Nexus Between Integration and Coping Strategies**

Labor migration from developing countries is viewed as an important means of livelihood where migrants have the potential of improving their economic status in order to provide for their families, well above what is attainable in their own country. At the same time, migration

policies in destination countries varies and the implementation of such policies also differ across different countries. Although labor migration from Africa continue to increase, Russia is still not considered a final destination (PEW 2019). Migrants are most likely to consider migrating to countries where they could easily interact with the local population and have well implemented integration migration policies. The challenges faced by migrants in Russia is connected with their integration which exposes them to a new social risk in the labor market, housing market and also make them socially vulnerable (Karpova and Vorona 2014).

Migrant adaptative process varies but encompasses different types of behavioral application to their social and economic environments. Living in a difficult situation, the adaptative strategies of migrants is considered an attempt to circumvent the limiting circumstances in their host country (Kwok-bun and Plüss 2013). Such coping mechanism is clung to in order to endure a situation of despair. Coping is a conscious effort used to prevent or mitigate the effect of threat, harm, and loss, or to reduce the distress that is often connected with such situations (Carver 2013). Coping is inextricably associated with adverse situations where migrant's needs are not met. Migrants develop coping strategies both in societies with well implemented integration policies and societies with partial to zero integration policies.

An integrated migrant is a person who has developed a higher congruence between his present self and his desired self (Sollarova and Sollár 2016). Before migrants can attain the state of being integrated, they cope with the circumstance, first, by evaluating the extent to which their present situation is challenging, and an assessment of the internal and external resources available to deal with the situation (“Coping - IResearchNet” 2016). For many African labor migrants, they rely on support from their ethnic community and their self-developed skills prior to migration as available tools to deal with their present situation (Madiukova and Persidskaia, n.d.). Relying on their personal skills is important because despite possessing a tertiary or higher degree, African migrants are being stereotyped as low-skilled migrants and are thus pushed to a lower status (Hajro et al. 2019). After giving an appraisal of their current situation, strategizing coping behavior follows this evaluation. The last part of coping process is a reappraisal of their coping strategies to determine the extent to which the coping behavior had the desired effect (“Coping - IResearchNet” 2016).

## **Theoretical Framework**

This research uses theories in migration and integration spheres such as **communicative integration** (Diaz 1993) which is significant to understand the problems of interaction that migrants and in the dissertation, African migrants, experience within the social structure of the host society. Diaz defines communicative integration as a process that allows migrants to participate in the communicative structure of the host society (Diaz 1993). This theory fits into this dissertation because it reveals the communication mechanism employed by African migrants, which allows them to interact within the social and economic arenas in Moscow.

The dissertation is also premised on the **theory of segmented labor market**, which argues the disparity in wages, income distribution, discrimination and unemployment as a major market policy that affects migrants' integration in their host society (Leontaridi 1998). According to Michael Piore and Berger Suzanne, the segmented labor theory is anchored on three major grounds as it relates to international migration; namely: uneven distribution of resources that extends to the labor force in industrial society; demand for cheap, flexible and dispensable labor; and unwillingness to raise labor wages (Piore 1979). The labor market of industrial society is divided into two different categories. The first is the primary sector which is capital intensive offers stable and skilled jobs with good reward packages and provides development opportunities while the secondary sector is labor-intensive with unstable jobs, low-skilled and offers low remuneration. In his argument, Massey pointed the dichotomy of the capital and labor market as an offshoot of the capitalist market which has further pushed migrants to the labor-intensive market in the host community (Massey 2001). The segmented labor market theory is useful to this study in showing the experiences of African migrants in search of employment opportunities and also reveals some organizational practices that put a peg on the rank they can attain in the organization's hierarchy.

The dissertation also uses the **theory of ethnic entrepreneurship** to explain the interactive components that migrant entrepreneurs use facilitate their economic integration within the host society. Aldrich Howard and Roger Waldinger postulate that these interactive components are necessary to understand how ethnic businesses develop (Waldinger et al. 1991). The components are accessed to opportunities, ethnic characteristics and emergent strategies. Understanding these components gives the understanding of how migrants create a niche within their ethnic communities. The first component depicts the market situations

under which African migrants create a niche that is designed to satisfy the ethnic community's needs (Waldinger et al. 1991). Ethnic businesses are often in small-scale activities, mostly producing ethnic consumer products which allow them to share similar characteristics and support needs (Maurice Khosa and Kalitanyi 2016). The second component is the group characteristics which are manifested in two dimensions: predisposing factors and resource mobilization (Waldinger et al. 1991). The predisposing factors are the pre-migration skills and goals that an individual or group has which allows them to determine their migration strategies such as selective migration, culture, and aspiration levels (Ngota, Rajkaran, and Mang'unyi 2019). Other factors that also influence migratory decisions which could aid or constrain resource mobilization include ethnic, social networks, charisma and government policies (Ngota, Rajkaran, and Mang'unyi 2019). The preferred destination countries for Nigerian migrants are the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Western Europe (PEW 2019). The last component is the emergence of ethnic strategies which describes the interaction of access to opportunities and ethnic characteristics as the foundation on which ethnic strategies are developed that allow adaptation to their environments (Waldinger et al. 1991). The strength of social capital within the ethnic enclaves is significant in creating a niche for migrant entrepreneurs in the host economy.

Ethnic entrepreneurship is 'a set of connections and regular patterns of interaction among people sharing common national background or migration experiences' (Waldinger et al. 1991). Russia is ethnically diverse but the migration has, however, increased the diversity across both ethnic and racial lines (Pakulski and Markowski 2014; Czaika and Haas 2014). The census in 2010 shows that foreign-born population in Russia accounted for 8% of the total population (OECD 2019, 201). African migrant population is infinitesimal compared migrants from the former Soviet states such as Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan who occupy 22%, 26% and 10% respectively of the migrant population in Russia (OECD 2019; Lazareva 2015). Therefore, this theory is important to understand the challenges faced by the least represented migrant group and strategies that they employ to cope within the economic landscape of Moscow.

## **Methodology**

The method used for this research is a qualitative method which is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and can be sometimes counter-disciplinary approach because it cuts across

the different disciplines such as the humanities, social and physical sciences (Denzin and Lincoln 1995). Based on the logical, empirical science paradigm, also known as the Galilean tradition (Ritchie and Spencer 2002), allows me to attain an insider's view based on the experience shared by the African migrants giving me the opportunity to interpret their background vis-à-vis their experience. With the scant of research on African migrants in Russia, this research tradition allows me to have a unique opinion of my research intended group using interviews.

For this research, 32 interviews were conducted and analyzed. Table 1 shows their distribution by country of origin. The respondents were drawn from 3 different countries. The language barrier was one of the constraints of having more participants in the interview. In terms of language diversity across sub-Saharan African countries, the lingua francas include English, French, and Portuguese. However, for this research, the use of African is used interchangeably with sub-Saharan African. Owing to my inability to speak Russian, I conducted the interviews with respondents using the English language. Due to the vast nature of the Russian geographical space, the scope of the research is limited to African migrants in Moscow.

The respondents selected had been in Russia for at least three years and the study is limited to sub-Saharan African migrants participating in the Russian economy regardless of the legal status. The snowball method was used to recruit the interviewees who participated in the research. These were not student migrants, who are the majority of African migrants in Russia, and who have some benefits that are provided for them, such as the provision of social card which subsidizes goods and services across the city of Moscow. Their universities also ease the process of getting immigration services and accommodation. Economic migrants do not have the same privileges as student migrants. They are more easily susceptible to social and administrative flaws than academic migrants, which makes the study more interesting. These criteria, however, made it difficult to have a good sample of respondents, because there are more African students in Russia and labor migrants.

At the time the interviews were conducted, the participants had been living in Russia for an average of 18 years, with the shortest being 3 years and the longest being 39 years. The average age of the respondents was 41, the youngest was 27 and the oldest was 60. Among the 7 females who participated in the research, 3 are married to men from their country while the others are not married. There were 25 males among the participants and at



the time of the interview, 12 are married to either Russian (6) or their own nationality (6), while the others are either not married, divorced or separated. Two of the respondents were unemployed at the time of the interview. Among those who actively participate in the economy, 21 are employed in different sectors. They include lecturers, lawyers, drivers, sales assistants, IT experts, artists, and teachers. Five of the participants who put their skills into use to create a means of living which includes real estate agents, caterers, and hairstylists. There were 4 business owners among the participants, who are either owners of carbonated beverage distribution outlets, business consulting companies or restaurants. In total, 30 of the interviewees were economically engaged. The participants who migrated to Russia initially for the purpose of study have a good understanding of the Russian language. Among the 21 participants who arrived in Russia for the purpose of study, 3 did not learn the language in a language school.

The interviews traced the demographic information about the participants, travel, history, social and economic participation; and what they envisioned regarding their continued domicile in Russia. The interview guide was semi-structured. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim with the respondents' consent. The anonymity of the respondents is ensured and pseudo names are used in the article. During the interviews, they were asked about the length of time they were unemployed after the completion of their studies or migration to Russia. All the interviewees were asked how they would describe living in Russia and their impression of it. The respondents were also asked about the process of finding accommodation and how they relate with their neighbours. During the interview, special attention was paid to their experiences within the social and economic domains in Moscow.

**Table 1. Attributes of interviewees (N = 32)**

Gender	Male (N = 25)	Female (N = 7)		
Year of arrival	3 years (N = 4)	More than 3 years (N = 28)		
Russian language acquisition	Studied in a language school (N = 20)	Self-studied (N=12)		
Purpose of coming to Russia	Study (N = 21)	Work (N = 9)	Family reunion (N = 2)	
Nationality	Nigeria (N=25)	Ghana (N = 6)	Senegal (N = 1)	

Education	High school (N=3)	College (N = 3)	Bachelor (N = 9)	Postgraduate (N=17)
Marital status	Shingle (N = 12)	Married to a native (N = 9)	Married to Russian (N = 6)	Separated/Divorced (N = 5)
Employment status	Employed (N=21)	Self-employed (N = 5)	Business owner (N = 4)	Unemployed (N=2)

The dissertation is also based on field notes from informal conversations. I visited religious centers, community organization meetings and events; birthdays and other celebrations such as child naming ceremonies. I employed the use of informal conversations to mitigate the challenge of getting more respondents and also because it is tacit and allowed my interlocutors to express freely (Thomson and Trigwell 2018). It also allows me to unlock some opportunities that I had hitherto overlooked or not considered (Swain and Spire 2020). While in the field, I took notes using a phone application to type and keep my findings. I began analyzing the data from the field by writing notes-on-notes then creating analytic memos (Lofland 1995). Using this method enabled me to test my explanation and also guided me in the modification of my interview questions (Phillippi and Lauderdale 2018). Most of my data are from detailed field notes of Nigerian and Ghanaian migrants. The conversations were specific and directly aimed at revealing their personal experiences. I cannot be emphatic on the number of informal conversations I had due to the nature of the places and the numbers present, the numbers from the interviews and field notes are not a fair representation of the presence of Africans within the Russian space.

To understand fully the dynamics of the African's socio-economic integration in questions, it would be necessary to conduct a comprehensive ethnographic study among the host society. However, I wish to place my emphasis on the experience of sub-African migrants in post-Soviet Russia as well as to explore the impacts of those experiences in shaping their opinion about their host society. Considering this fact, this research is constrained to limited interviews because of the criteria the respondents should possess which included being economic migrants and length of stay in Russia; and limited to Moscow due to the vast nature of the Russian territory, access to funds and language limitations. The legal status of the respondents was not considered which allowed to engage African migrants in informal conversation since I observed that they will not permit me to interview them for fear of government agencies.

**Contribution to the discussion of the problem in existing literature and statements to be defended:**

1. The research shows the interaction pattern of African migrants living in Moscow in the context of sociability. Building on the information given by the respondents, the interviewees were classified into three categories based on the length of stay of the respondents, their mode of academic program (either Russian or English taught) and reason for coming to Russia. This classification allows the understanding of the role played by duration, length and changing situation within the host community as catalysts to migrants' sociability. The author's perspective is based on the communicative integration theory which allows the understanding of the communication patterns of the African migrants in Moscow.
2. Hitherto, scarcely had any study in the literature ever explicitly investigated the challenges that African migrant experience in the housing market. This is gap filling research that reveals their coping strategies in the housing market in Moscow. Unlike the Soviet period where the majority of Africans are students who lived in university dormitories, the post-Soviet era witnessed a transformation in the housing system in Russia from a state-controlled housing scheme to private ownership of the apartment. This research focuses on African migrants living in Moscow revealing the discrimination that they are subjected to and the strategies that they employ to mitigate the difficulties that they experience in accessing the housing market in Moscow.
3. While studies on African owned businesses in Moscow exists, most have not considered such as a coping strategy. The author uses two theoretical backgrounds to explain the integration of African labor migrants into the economic arena in Moscow. Applying both the use of interviews and informal conversation, the author uses the experiences of these migrants in a context-specific study to examine their challenges and strategies. The analysis of their experiences, social and structural hurdles that push many of these migrants into the labor-intensive section of the labor market. The author also shows that becoming an entrepreneur, particularly designed towards their ethnic community is an important strategy that African migrants in Moscow use to penetrate the labor market

## Main Results of the Research

1. Building on the analysis from the primary data of sub-Saharan African migrants living in Moscow, it can be concluded that there is a variation in language acquisition between the Soviet times and Russian Federation which is significant in the social inclusion of the African migrants in Russia (Ager and Strang 2008). It is the primary tool for social bonding between or among individuals. Communicating in the language of the host society is an effective integration strategy that cannot be undermined by the migrant community in their daily interaction. Firstly, the author identifies factors that impede communicative integration of African migrants. It is their affinity to their community. The African community is closely knitted, thereby strengthening the relationship and interaction which they have, but limiting their interaction with their host community (Ngota, Rajkaran, and Mang'anyi 2019). Another reason is that most of them consider their stay in Russia will be for a short period and as such, did not show interest to learn the language and also did not try to interact with the local community. Lastly, the expensive nature of Moscow and the need to support their families back home require African migrants to engage in multiple economic activities, thereby limiting their participation in convivial activities. For some of them, their inability to interact in Russian limited cordial relationship with their colleagues at workplace, making it difficult for them to socialize. Their inability to socialize also influenced their perception of the country, pushing many of these migrants to find solace in their ethnic enclaves.

The study also discovered a category of people who could not acquire the knowledge of the language due to mode of education and understanding that they are staying in Russia for a short period. One of the respondents in this category stated that:

*I believe if I speak and understand the language, I can relate with the students more. Not being able to speak is a form of barrier. And of course, one of the reasons they don't come to me is because maybe I don't understand Russian (male, aged 31, Ghanaian).*

Transition to a capitalist economy comes with changes in policies. In the Soviet era, African students are expected to undergo one-year mandatory language program (Oni 2020). The Soviet government had a system that facilitated communicative integration of these African students. But, in the post-Soviet Russia, there is a change in the education system that allows some universities to admit students into English-medium programs or Russian-taught programs. In the English-medium programs students are not compelled to go through

a mandatory language program on arrival. The quotation above shows the dissatisfaction of a former student who studied in English-medium program and like many African migrants, he views his stay in Russia temporal and really did not have a need to learn the language.

Secondly, the author identifies two means of language acquisition among the African migrants' community in Moscow: taught and self-taught. Having no language link with Russia, learning Russian is paramount for African migrants, particularly economic migrants. One of the respondents who came for economic reason stated that:

*I learned the language via YouTube and like people say, on the street. However, with the nature of my business, the target is Africans but, I still meet with some Russians because, at the point of clearing my goods, I communicate in Russian. What helps me most of the time is using a translation app (male, aged 38, Nigerian).*

Russia has no 'working' integration policy that will cater to the needs of the migrants, particularly, regarding language acquisition (Mukomel 2013). The research also reveals that African migrants engage in self-teaching to improve their communicative skills and also use translation mobile application where they could not cope properly with the language. Another point from the quote above is that many African businesses is aimed towards the African community, which aligns them more to their ethnic nationals. However, at the point to collecting their goods from Russian custom agents at the airport, their language skill is put to test. In the words of another respondents:

*Whenever I had to enter some official places here, I go there together with someone who is very fluent in Russian and can relate with the officials better than I do. (female, aged 36, Nigerian)*

In accessing official places in Moscow, some of the respondents are accompanied by members of their community who has a good understanding of Russian. I recently found out that within the Yoruba ethnic community, there are Russian language classes for new arrivals. Also, some religious organizations organize free Russian class for African migrants. On the other side of this group of migrants are those arriving Russia for the purpose of family reunification. For this group, their spouses enrolled them in a language school. For these group of migrants, their spouses studied in Russia and have been living there for a long period.

2. The rate of discrimination many African migrants faced in Moscow on the subject of the housing market is clear on the description many apartment owners write on their adverts. The results of interviews of African migrants trying to find accommodation in Moscow allowed me to present the challenges experienced by the African migrants and how they cope with such difficulties (Oni 2022). Using the respondents' lenses, the author describes who a foreigner is in Russia. according to one of the respondents,

*The only foreigner in Russia is the black man and I will tell you why. Whenever you see a European on the street, it is difficult for you to determine where he is from. Same goes for American and Asian but a black man is already conspicuous. (56, male, Nigeria)*

Noteworthy here is the definition of a foreigner within the Russian social space. The respondent is categorical about who a foreigner is, among the different migrant communities in Russia. The physical features of African migrants easily set them apart from other migrants. The nature of the description on apartment adverts often makes the African migrants think that they are targeted by the apartment owners. For example, inscriptions such as "Slavs only" is a common occurrence on many online platforms, such as Yandex, Cian, Avito, The Locals, Gdeetodom, and Kvatirant (Oni 2022). This open display of discrimination is channeled towards people of non-Slavic descent but for African migrants, the situation is more dire. As one Nigerian (male, aged 56) migrant puts it, "*It will take the double of the efforts of an African to get accommodation compared to the effort of a European*". Coupled with the racial bias that many African suffer in Moscow, having a signed rental contract is another challenge they experience. In cases where contracts are signed, landlords are unwilling to assist in applying for migrant's registration slip, thereby making access to good paying jobs difficult. As one respondent shared,

*Some landlords do not give a contract, and in such cases, it is difficult for one to fight one's case. For employment, as foreigners, you will need a registration which is issued by the Ministry of Immigration with the submission of application by the landlord, and in a case where a contract is not signed, it will be difficult to get such. (Nigerian, aged 35)*

This policy requiring migrants to apply for registration from their place of residence has limited the chances of many African migrants to get an apartment and put black migrants at their landlords' mercy. It has also limited the chances of African migrants to be formally employed in Russia because the law does not allow companies to employ migrants without

complete documents (Dianova 2015). Faced with difficulties to access housing, the African migrants rely on their social networks, first to get information on available apartment and secondly, they share apartment to reduce the burden of searching for an apartment and also minimize the weight of paying for an expensive apartment solely.

The population of African migrants is small, which makes them rely on their social networks when searching for accommodation. In the words of one respondent,

*When I was trying to move to Moscow, a friend helped me to get in contact with someone who placed an announcement on Facebook that he needed a roommate. I spoke with the person, and we shared the payment of the flat. We were three living together in the apartment, and we divided the money equally among ourselves. (Nigerian, male, aged 36)*

In the above quotation, African migrants circumvent the hurdle of signing contract in the without possessing the required documents is sharing the apartment with someone who has the complete documents and already gotten the apartment but want to share the rental cost. Another method of bypassing the constraints experienced by Nigerian migrants seeking housing is to use a person from a different racial origin. As one respondent stated, *“It is not easy to secure a place without the influence of a white person”* (Nigerian, male, aged 41). Having someone of a different ethnic origin as a proxy to get an apartment is common among those with Russian spouses.

3. Using two theoretical frameworks and the narratives of West African migrants are significant in understanding: firstly, a segmented labor market which are the labor and capital-intensive markets; the push and pull factors to either side of the dichotomy. Secondly, ethnic entrepreneurship as a catalyst to cope with the challenges experienced in the labor market. The discussion with African migrants regarding their access to employment opportunities revealed a trend that started with a post-Soviet Russia. searching for employment in Russia for African migrants is plagued with many challenges. In his words, one of my respondents who has lived in Moscow for over 20 years, said:

*“I have entered a lot of offices since I have been here and whenever I hear “молодой человек” (young man), I know that the next thing I hear is “Ты не иди сюда”. He would not even ask me where I am going or what I am here to do, he will just look at me and say: you are not coming in here.” (Nigerian, aged 45, male).*

Of course, this is not to presume that this is the overview of the Russians, however, it indicates exclusion from access to social or economic possibilities. The attitudes of the Russians he encountered portrays him as an intruder.

The difficulty experienced by African migrants in navigating the economic landscape in Russia has pushed them to participate in the labor-intensive market not because they do not possess the required academic qualification but because of the state policy which does not allow them to get employment without a complete documentation such as migrant registration slip, proof of the invitation, and valid visa. Some of them are economically active in selling goods on the street, distributing fliers or shop assistants. One of my respondents who arrived in 2017 has an informal employment in one of the biggest supermarket outlets in Moscow and for him, it has been a difficult experience so far. He said:

*“The supervisor in charge of our team at the supermarket where I worked made me work more and eventually did not pay me my money. After several request, he did not until I reported to the one that he reports to. Even after that, I still did not get my full money. I had to stop working there because I can’t just continue in that place. It’s very frustrating” (Ghanaian, male, aged 28).*

This sentiment was also shared by other respondents who faced economic exploitation from their employers. This is often the situation for labor migrants who do not understand Russian and stereotype towards educated migrants from Africa. They often work in the informal sector, where the lack of legal protection and insufficient information about their rights have make them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse from recruiters, employers, and authorities. However, a small proportion who are employed as lecturers in Russian universities and managers in business organizations have lived over two decades in Russia and are mostly married to Russians. Teaching English is the common profession that many of these migrants find easily.

Despite the different social and economic challenges that African migrants face in Russia, almost all the interviewees reported on how they try to cope living in such situations. The eco-socio-psychological form of discrimination which many of the respondents experienced could be difficult to manage but in the words of one respondent, *“at first, I used to get a little bit upset when I hear such, but I am no longer upset. As a told you, I treat it with a smile”* (aged 45, male, Nigerian). The "thick skin" approach is a powerful strategy used by these migrants to adapt to their various places of work. This approach allows them



to resist negative comments against them without reacting with any form of animosity. Another coping strategy is creating a niche within the host community's economic frame is important for many African migrants to escape the labor-intensive market where they suffer exploitation and meagre payment. Many of these migrants are entrepreneurs within their countrymen. They provide homemade ready-to-eat foods, snacks, hairdressing, tailoring and so on within their community. For some of them, finding an opportunity within their countrymen is important to be economically productive in Moscow.

## **Conclusion**

Though African migration to Russia started in the Soviet era, it is still a relatively new phenomenon compared to other climes like the USA, UK, France, Germany, Canada and some Western countries. The gradual growth in African migration to Russia is evident in the number of African present on the street of Moscow in particular. However, the African communities in Russia have over the years, experience hostility from some members of their host community because of their belief in racial difference (Shakhbazyan 2010). Such unfriendliness experienced by some section of their host has made them to be closely knitted which allows them to share a common struggle. As shown by the statistics, there is a large number of African migrants leaving Russia despite the increase in the number of those coming in (ROSSTAT 2020). However, the dearth in context-based study of these groups of migrant is limited in academic work which could be as a result of their infinitesimal population. A study of the socio-economic integration of those who have managed to live in Russia is pertinent in understanding the challenges they face and how they cope with such challenges.

First, the study on the sociability of these migrants in the Russian society shows that their inability to communicate in the language tends to isolate themselves from interacting with their host society. Another important factor is that African migrants do not identify with the host community because of the idea that their stay in Russia is for a short period. Another barrier to their communicative integration is that they are more knitted to their ethnic enclaves, thereby limiting their social interaction with the host community. In addition, the psychological impact of past experiences of racial profiling experienced by many persons of color has also contributed to their reluctance to identify with their host community. In order to conform to the society, some of them engage in self-taught language activity to improve

their communicative skills; use social networks who serve as interpreter when visiting official places; ethnic community and religious organizations organize free language training for members of their organization.

Second, access to housing is difficult for African migrants because of the ethnic preference that landlords display, which reveals the discrimination that African migrants are exposed in their search for housing. Marrying a Russian partner is one way to mitigate the challenges posed by such ethnic preference, as is using a person with a different ethnic background as a proxy to avoid direct contact with apartment owners or relying on migrants' social networks for available spaces to live. Russian apartments are quite expensive and as a result of low wages among Nigerian migrants, sharing apartments is also prevalent.

Another important finding of this research is the transformation of national communities from being a 'safe haven' against attackers to a place where African migrants create social capital and ethnic ties which help to further their integration process. Some of the respondents were able to find space within their national and ethnic communities where they have been able to create a niche and mitigate the social and economic challenges that they face in the larger society. Among all the various factors that galvanize the integration process of migrants in their destination countries which includes academic and professional background, language skills, financial capability, host state's migration policy and particularly, acceptance and recognition of the host society, it is important to note that findingspace within one's national and ethnic group fosters comfort and support for migrants which is a pertinent factor that aids their socio-economic integration process.

It is not enough to modify migration policies to increase migrant flow. Formulating a proper and working integration policy framework that will facilitate the integration process of migrants is important. Creating clear laws regarding the rights of migrants in the social and economic spheres of the country. Increase orientation among the local society that will ensure the recognition and acceptance of migrants of different racial origin in the country.

Though this study has contributed to topics on African migration, particularly in Russia, there is still a lot of areas that this research did not explore such as their access to health and education for African migrants' children. However, a broader examination of African migrants in other cities in Russia is important to get a holistic understanding of African migration to their country. After which proposing an integrative concept for these migrants

would be another promising step in line with the understanding of the integration process of African migrants in Russia.

## **Publications**

List of author's publications, which reflect the main scientific results of the thesis:

1. One I. O., "The Sociability of West African Migrants among Russians in Moscow," *JSPS*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 143–156, Mar. 2020, doi: 10.17323/727-0634-2020-18-1-143-156.
2. One I. O., "IMR Country Report – Nigerian Migration to Russia: Accommodation and Discrimination in a Post-Soviet Society," *International Migration Review*, p. 01979183221095838, Apr. 2022, doi: 10.1177/01979183221095838.
3. One I. O., "Labor Market Integration of Nigerian Migrants in Moscow, Russia", in: *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Filosofiya, sotsiologiya, politologiya – Tomsk State University Journal of Philosophy, Sociology and Political Science – 2022. (in print)*

The results of this thesis research were assessed in research seminars at the institute of the International Laboratory for Social Inclusion Research, HSE. The results of this work were presented in two April International conferences organized by the HSE in 2019 and 2020, at the 8th Global Social Sciences Graduate Student e-Conference, 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2021 (Hong Kong), at the International Migration Conference "Border Thinking" in July 2021 (Klagenfurt). Lastly, in October 2021, I participated at the migration conference at the HSE, organized by the Institute of Social Policy where I presented the results of this research.

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