



Navigating the effect of JAPA on Nigeria's Human Resource Environment

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Table of Contents

General Overview	2
Objectives of the study	5
Problem Statement	6
Analysis of Key Drivers for Talent Migration	8
Impact of Japa on Human Resource Management Activities	11
Recommendations for Employers, Government	13
CIPM's Position	15
Conclusion	16
References	17

General Overview

The phenomenon of “Japa”; a colloquial Nigerian expression derived from Yoruba meaning “to flee quickly” has become a poignant symbol of Nigeria’s contemporary migration wave. As a firmly embedded national lexicon, It represents a growing trend where skilled professionals, especially within the younger demographic, seek opportunities abroad to escape the socio-economic challenges prevalent in the country.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has reported that Nigeria is one of the top ten countries of origin for migrants from sub-Sahara Africa (IOM, World Migration Report, 2024). In particular, the exodus of skilled professionals has become increasingly pronounced. A 2023 report by the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) stated that “Emigration concerns, termed the “Japa syndrome”, result in approximately 150,000 Nigerians leaving annually, leading to potential long-term economic consequences (NESG, 29th NESG Summit Report).

The economic drivers of this exodus are equally stark. Nigeria’s youth unemployment rate was at an all-time high of 6.50% as at Q2, 2024 as reported by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Coupled with an annual inflation rate of 23.71% as at April 2025 –many young Nigerians are disillusioned with prospects of stable employment and career progression at home.

The impact of this migration trend can only be described as a debilitating brain drain in the Nigerian Human Resource environment. The nation has witnessed the massive emigration of highly skilled professionals in critical fields such as healthcare, engineering, information technology, and academia. This has left critical sectors struggling to maintain operational efficiency. Data from the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare showed the trend in migration from the health sector for specific years: 2007 (3,542), 2021 (2,607), 2022 (2,900), and 2024 (3,974), the highest in the two-decade span. Furthermore, UNESCO has consistently identified Nigeria’s teacher- to-student ratio as critically low, occasioned by the flight of educators to more stable economies.

These statistics not only underscore the scale of talent emigration but also illuminate the urgent need for policy interventions aimed at restoring confidence in the Nigerian labour market and enabling the retention of skilled human capital essential for national development.

On the other hand, the phenomenon is not entirely devoid of benefits. Remittances from the diaspora contribute significantly to Nigeria’s economy, bolstering family incomes and national reserves. According to the World Bank

Open Data Report, Nigeria received approximately \$19.5 billion in remittances from its diaspora in 2023. This inflow accounted for about 35% of total remittance inflows into sub-Saharan Africa. These inflows have been pivotal in supporting household incomes, poverty reduction, real estate development, and improved access to education and healthcare. Furthermore, the remittances have also positively impacted Nigeria's foreign exchange reserves providing a stabilizing factor for the naira. The CBN has reported that in 2024, remittances increased by 8.9% to \$20.93 billion which enabled the country to achieve a balance of payments surplus of \$6.83 billion (CBN Press Release, April 9, 2025)

Return migration offers possibilities of knowledge transfer when returnees inject expertise, advanced skills, and innovative best practices into the economy. Nevertheless, the scale of emigration currently outweighs these perceived benefits. This leaves Nigeria with an acute skills gap. Such a gap hinders national development.

In response to the rising talent attrition, employers are forced to review their talent retention strategies. The focus is enhancing total rewards, delineating clear career progression pathways, and improving terms of working conditions to boost employee retention. In addition, companies are becoming more open to adopting flexible work arrangements backed up with policies to mitigate the adverse effects of emigration. One of such examples is the National Talent Export Programme (NATEP), launched by the Nigerian Federal Government in May 2024. The programme aims to position Nigeria as a global centre for talent outsourcing, thus encouraging organisations to adapt to remote and flexible work models.

Furthermore, the policy environment is crucial in shaping this migration dynamic. Despite various government initiatives to reverse the 'Japa' trend, such as youth employment schemes and entrepreneurial funding programmes, their impact remains limited despite persistent systemic issues. There are a few examples to mention. The first is the National Youth Skills Programme (NYSP). This programme was launched with an allocation of ₦110 billion, with an objective to reduce youth unemployment by 20% over five years through skills training and financial support across 11 key sectors. In the same vein, the Nigerian Youth Investment Fund (NYIF) was set up to empower youth-led businesses through grants and mentorship. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of institutional capacity, and limited political inclusivity have hindered the effectiveness of these programmes.

Addressing the root causes of talent emigration requires a multi-stakeholder approach that combines economic reform backed with strong policies, improved governance amongst all key actors, and strategic investment in education and infrastructure. Understanding and addressing the implications of “Japa”; on Nigeria’s human resource environment is vital for sustaining the nation’s socio-economic progress. While talent emigration is not unique to Nigeria, the scale and consequences of this trend in the country requires urgent and targeted interventions to properly situate individuals’ personal and professional aspirations with the country’s development needs.



Objectives of the study

General Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to examine the effects of talent migration, commonly referred to as “Japa”; on Nigeria’s human resource environment, focusing on its implications for HR practices, organisational performance, and the national economy.

Specific objectives

The specific objectives are to:

1. analyse the extent to which talent migration affects human resource practices in Nigerian organisations.
2. examine the impact of talent migration on organisational performance, including productivity, employee morale, and operational efficiency.
3. explore strategies organisations adopt to mitigate the effects of JAPA and enhance talent retention.
4. evaluate the role of government policies in addressing the challenges of JAPA and fostering an environment conducive to talent retention and return migration.
5. provide evidence-based recommendations for improving Nigeria’s human resource environment amidst the ongoing wave of JAPA.



Problem Statement

Nigeria is currently experiencing an unprecedented wave of talent movement, known as “JAPA”; fuelled by socioeconomic issues, political instability, and restricted possibilities for career growth. According to the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), over 4,500 Nigerian professionals departed the country each month in 2022, with the trend continuing in consecutive years. According to a World Bank research, remittances from Nigerians living abroad would exceed \$20.9 billion in 2022, underlining the scope of the movement. While this influx of remittances boosts household earnings and foreign reserves, it comes at a high cost: the loss of skilled human capital.

The impact of this talent exodus is most pronounced in critical sectors such as healthcare, technology, and education. In the healthcare sector, for instance, the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) reported in 2023 that over 40,000 doctors had left the country over the last decade, leaving only 24,000 practising in Nigeria—a ratio far below the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) recommended doctor-to-patient ratio of 1:600. Similarly, the technology sector, which serves as a hub for innovation and digital transformation, has seen an alarming migration of skilled developers, engineers, and IT specialists, many of whom are now driving technological advancements in foreign countries. The education sector is also struggling, with an increasing number of lecturers and researchers seeking better-funded opportunities abroad, leading to a decline in teaching quality and research output in Nigerian universities.

This mass migration has resulted in a critical brain drain, leaving talent gaps undermining organisational productivity and national development. Organisations face challenges such as knowledge loss, reduced operational efficiency, and the cost-intensive recruitment of expatriates or less experienced replacements. These challenges exacerbate the struggles of fragile institutions and businesses, hampering their ability to compete in the global market.

At the national level, talent migration undermines Nigeria’s potential for socio-economic growth, as the departure of skilled professionals reduces the labour market’s productivity and innovation capacity. With limited policies to address the root causes of this migration, Nigeria risks falling further behind in global competitiveness, particularly in sectors essential for its long-term development.

Understanding the scope and significance of this migration is critical for developing ways to reverse the trend, reduce its impact, and foster an atmosphere conducive to talent development and retention. This paper, therefore, tries to analyse these difficulties in depth and provide methods to address the talent crisis that threatens Nigeria's future.



Analysis of Key Drivers for Talent Migration

Talent migration, sometimes known as “Japa”, has become a growing concern in Nigeria due to its multiple drivers. These motivations include economic hardship, professional unhappiness, and the temptation of better prospects elsewhere. This section analyses the key variables influencing this movement.

1. Economic Factors

Economic challenges are a critical force behind talent migration in Nigeria. The persistent rise in inflation has significantly diminished the purchasing power of professionals, making it increasingly difficult to maintain a stable quality of life. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigeria’s inflation rate surged to 24.08% in July 2023 up from 22.79% in June 2023, leading to higher costs for essential goods and services. This financial strain has pushed many skilled professionals to seek opportunities in countries with stable economies and lower inflation rates.

Unemployment is another significant economic factor influencing talent migration. While the NBS reported a revised unemployment rate of **4.1% in Q1 2023**, this figure has been subject to debate due to methodological changes. Independent assessments, such as the KPMG report, estimated Nigeria’s unemployment rate at **33.3% in 2022**, highlighting a dearth of job prospects that has left many Nigerians, particularly the youth, without long-term career paths.

Low earnings across various sectors further exacerbate the problem. For instance, healthcare professionals in Nigeria earn significantly less than their counterparts in more developed countries. According to the Medscape Physician Compensation Report 2022, the average annual salary for physicians in the United States is approximately **\$339,000**, with primary care physicians earning around \$260,000 and specialists earning about \$368,000. In contrast, Nigerian medical doctors earn considerably less, making relocation a viable option for many seeking financial stability and career advancement.

2. Professional Challenges

Professional dissatisfaction is a primary motivator behind the “Japa” phenomena. Many Nigerian professionals confront restricted prospects for career advancement in the local work market. Organisational hierarchies frequently lack clear paths to progress, leaving people feeling frustrated and stagnant. This professional inertia motivates many people to seek structured career development options abroad, where meritocracy and advancement are valued.

Inadequate training and development exacerbate the problem. Many professionals are unprepared for global standards due to a lack of access to sophisticated training and skill-building initiatives, driving them to migrate to nations that provide cutting-edge certifications and professional development programmes. Similarly, unfavourable workplace policies undermine job satisfaction and productivity, such as inadequate benefits, job insecurity, and excessive working hours. Employees in such environments are more likely to pursue employment in countries with more supportive and equitable workplace policies.

3. Global Pull Factors

The increasing demand for skilled labour continues to serve as a strong pull factor for talent emigration in Nigeria as more professionals seek improve socio-economic conditions abroad. Situated in Lee’s 1966 Push-Pull Theory of Migration, the theory posits that migration decisions are influence by multiple factors that repel people from their home country (push) and attract them to another (pull). This trend seems to reflect a logical response to the obvious disparities in career opportunities and quality of life.

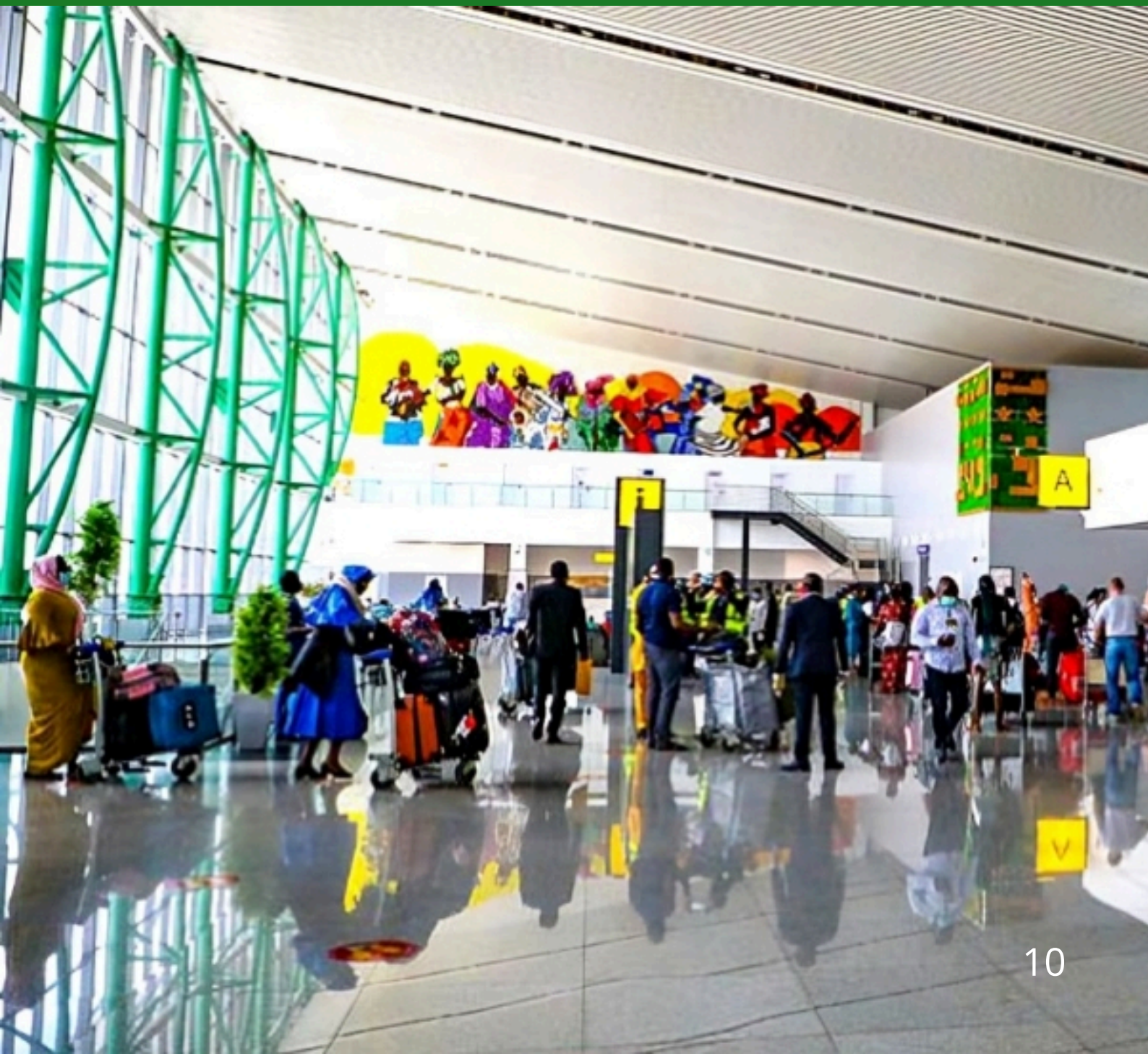
Chief among the pull factors is a significant higher compensation. The remuneration offered in developed economies far outweigh those in Nigeria. Whereas in Nigeria, an IT professional will earn an average of about \$7,000 per annum, their counterparts in UK, Canada, or the United States will earn in the north of \$70,000 annually. This significant income disparity increases the desire for emigration and in addition makes the decision-making an easy one to make.

On the other hand, emigration goes beyond financial compensation to improve standard of living. Whereas access to healthcare, education, infrastructure, and security just to name a few is suboptimal here in Nigeria, such is not the case in other saner and more developed climes. The provision of these amenities creates an enabling environment for people to thrive in their

lives – personal, professional, and social.

Furthermore, the desire for global exposure plays a crucial role in emigration. More Nigerian professionals are attracted to the diverse opportunities for a broader, expansive, and more innovation-driven work culture. A work climate that maximises use of technology for precision and accuracy in work supported best practices. The chance for professional development is higher and thus becomes a preferred destination to nurture career growth.

Summarily, the migration from Nigeria goes beyond a reaction to domestic hardship but also a proactive pursuit of improved economic, professional, and social outcomes. Understanding these dynamics through the theoretical perspectives such as the Push-Pull model provides an important insight into the broader determinants shaping today's human capital mobility patterns.



Impact of Japa on Human Resource Management Activities

The Japa debacle has influenced key human resource (HR) functions across industries, thus compelling HR practitioners to embrace more agile approaches to people management.

1. Recruitment: Emigration has significantly depleted the domestic talent pool across several sectors. The challenge before HR Practitioners is to overcome the difficulties in attracting qualified candidates. HR Practitioners face prolonged vacancy periods and high costs of recruitment. A 2023 survey by Jobberman revealed that 63% of Nigerian employers agreed to having challenges filling their mid-to-senior-level roles owing to emigration.

2. Succession Planning: The increasing departure of high potential employees in the mid-level and top professional categories has disrupted succession programmes leaving gaps in leadership development. There are critical talent losses leading to a weakened institutional memory and continuity of initiatives and credible practices.

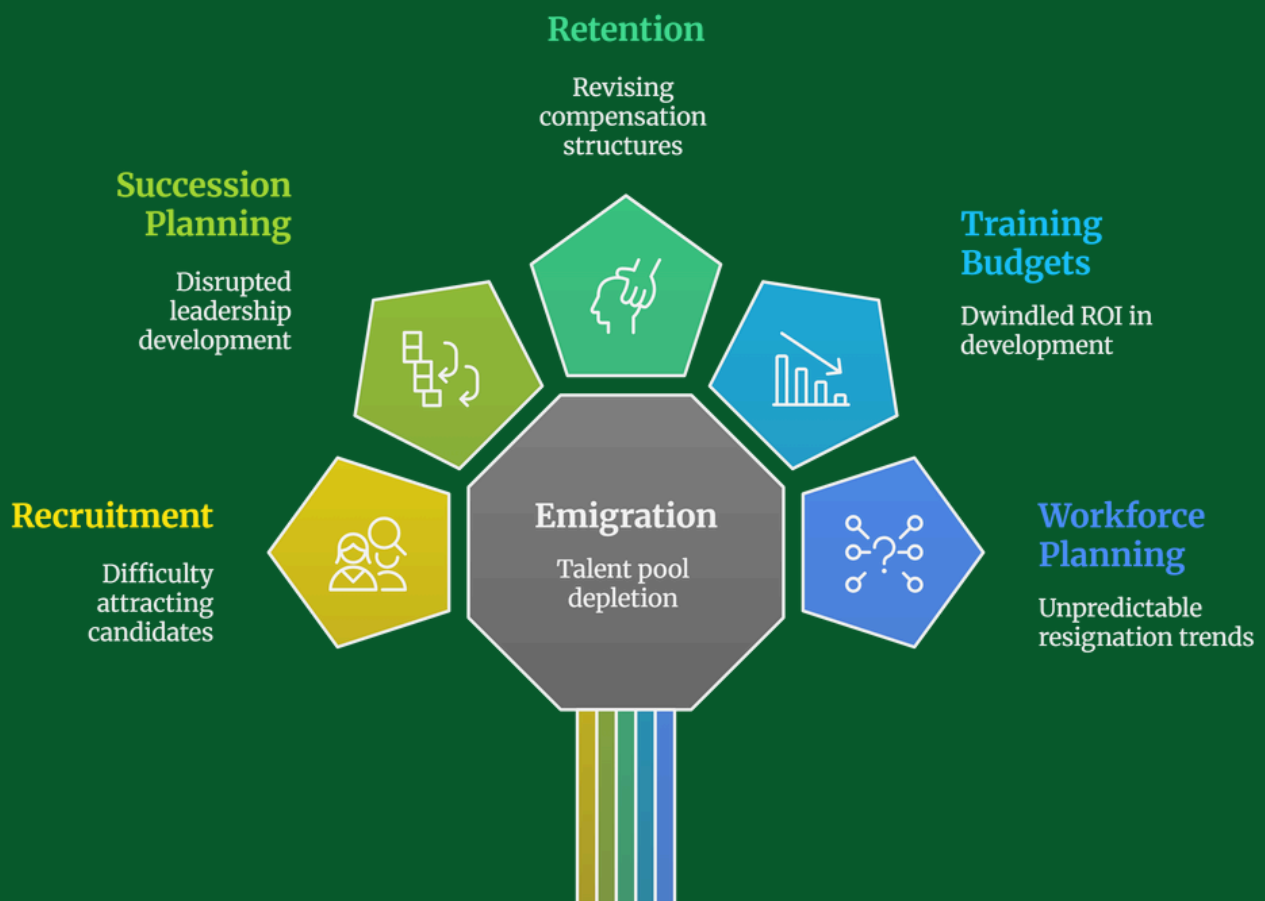
3. Retention: One of the rising strategic imperatives today is talent retention. The CIPM HR Practice Needs Report for 2025 identified this as a top business issue for the year. Many organisations are revising compensation structures and improving working conditions to stem attrition. A good example to cite is the case of MTN Nigeria that launched internal mobility and career development frameworks aimed at boosting employee engagement and loyalty.

4. Training Budgets: Investments in employee development have suffered significantly with increased emigration. The anticipated return on investment (ROI) in learning and development initiatives have dwindled. Organisations have become more creative in their offerings often embracing on-demand learning platforms and tightening eligibility for long-term training sponsorships. We are beginning to see mandatory post-training service bonds to mitigate losses.

5. Workforce Planning: Forecasting demand and supply of talent has become an arduous task for professionals due to the unpredictable resignation trends. The effect of this can be seen in how practitioners now address workforce planning. There is a rising increase in the use of scenario analysis and employee retention risk mapping. Outsourcing of non-core functions has also become prevalent in order to ensure operational resilience.

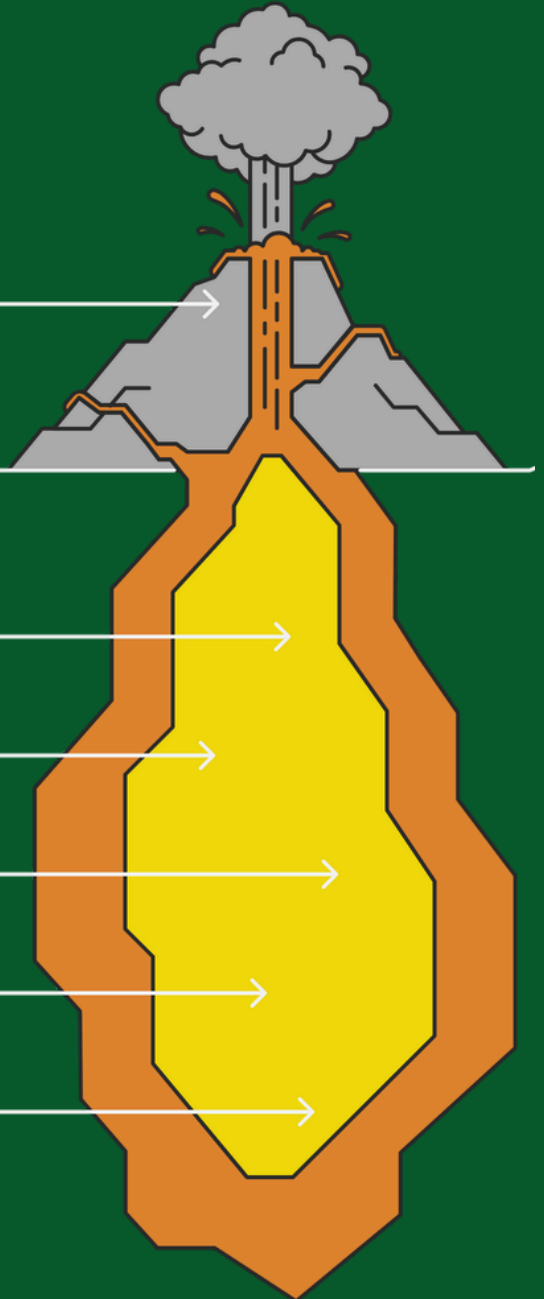
It suffices to say therefore that Japa has compelled HR professionals in Nigeria to recalibrate their approaches—shifting from reactive techniques to proactive management.

HR Practitioners Agile Approach to Japa Wave



Japa Debacle's Impact on HR Functions.

HR Challenges



Talent Depletion



Succession Disruption



Retention Imperatives



Training Budget Cuts



Workforce Planning Difficulty



Recommendations for Employers, Government

The findings of this study on talent migration underscore the need for strategic interventions by employers, the government, and the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria (CIPM). These recommendations are designed to mitigate the impact of talent migration and strengthen the human resource environment in Nigeria.

For Employers

Employers should prioritise the development and implementation of robust retention strategies. These include offering competitive salaries that align with industry standards, introducing flexible work arrangements that promote work-life balance, and creating clear career development pathways to enhance professional growth.

A positive and inclusive workplace culture can significantly improve employee satisfaction and reduce turnover. Employers can build an environment that values diversity, encourages employee engagement, and recognises individual contributions. Such initiatives can foster loyalty and reduce the desire for migration.

For Government

Addressing the macroeconomic factors that drive migration is essential. The government should prioritise economic reforms to curb inflation, reduce unemployment, and improve living standards. A stable and robust economy will reduce migration push factors and encourage professionals to remain in the country. The government should introduce policies and programmes that incentivise professionals to stay in Nigeria or return after migrating. These could include tax breaks for returning professionals, subsidised housing schemes, and grants for entrepreneurial ventures in critical sectors.

For Academia

The academia should lead efforts to upskill HR professionals and employees to adapt to the challenges posed by talent migration. This can include offering advanced training programmes, certifications, and workshops focused on modern HR practices. The academia can participate in collaborative research projects with policy organisations to monitor migration trends, analyse their impacts on the HR environment, and recommend evidence-based solutions. Such research will provide actionable insights to guide policy and practice.

CIPM's Position

The Chartered Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria (CIPM) recognises “Japa” as a valid approach to Nigerian professionals’ socioeconomic challenges. However, it is acknowledged as a substantial barrier to the country’s human resource capability, particularly in sectors important to national growth such as healthcare, education, and technology. The widespread migration of trained professionals has resulted in skills gaps that jeopardise organisational productivity and the country’s competitiveness.

CIPM advocates for a multi-stakeholder strategy to addressing the root causes of talent mobility that includes the government, the corporate sector, and CIPM. Collaboration between these sectors is vital for adopting long-term solutions that improve the working environment for Nigerian professionals. Furthermore, CIPM proposes policy changes to improve working conditions, wages, and professional development opportunities. This includes establishing competitive remuneration packages, enhanced training and development programmes, and supportive workplace policies promoting job satisfaction and career advancement. By addressing these issues, Nigeria can create a more conducive environment for talent retention and reduce migration pressure.

CIPM also emphasises the need for continuous dialogue between all stakeholders to ensure that policies remain responsive to the evolving demands of the job market and global trends. Through this approach, CIPM aims to play a pivotal role in shaping a resilient and adaptable human resource landscape that supports both individual career aspirations and national economic growth.

Conclusion

Japa, or talent migration, is a serious concern for Nigeria's human resource landscape. While it reflects professionals' socioeconomic circumstances, the consequences—such as skill shortages, decreased productivity, and weaker organisational capacity—highlight the critical need for deliberate action.

Addressing migratory reasons demands a diverse strategy. Economic changes that stabilise inflation, reduce unemployment, and provide competitive pay are crucial to mitigating the forces that drive professionals to leave. Furthermore, establishing advantageous workplace policies, cultivating inclusive environments, and giving clear career growth paths are critical for maintaining talent within businesses.

The role of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management (CIPM) in mitigating the effects of talent migration is pivotal. CIPM can improve Nigeria's human resource landscape by pushing programmes to upskill professionals, advocating for policies that encourage talent retention and return, and collaborating on migration trend research.

Ultimately, a collaborative effort between employers, the government, and CIPM is required. These stakeholders must work together to foster an atmosphere in which professionals may thrive, feel respected, and make meaningful contributions to the nation's growth. By doing so, Nigeria may turn the challenges of talent mobility into opportunities for developing a more resilient and competitive workforce.



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About CIPM

The Chartered Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria (CIPM) is the foremost regulatory body for Human Resource Management in Nigeria. Established in 1968 as the Personnel Management Association of Nigeria, it evolved into the Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria in 1973, before being granted a Chartered status by an Act of Parliament (**CAP I15 LFN 2004**).

As the apex HR regulatory body, CIPM is legally empowered to set and uphold professional standards, ensuring that HR practitioners meet the highest levels of knowledge, competence, and ethical practice. Through continuous learning, industry insights and strategic initiatives, we elevate people management, drive organisational excellence, and shape the future of HR in Nigeria.

CIPM remains the only recognised body regulating HR practice in Nigeria, with a commitment to fostering global best practices and empowering professionals to thrive.

