

Research Briefing N° 13

Gambian-British and Nigerian-British Children's and Families' Experiences of Migration 'back' to West Africa

This research looks at the factors motivating Gambian-British and Nigerian-British parents to send their children 'back' to West Africa and what this means for parents, children and families on both continents.

Key words: West Africa; Gambian-British; Nigerian-British; migrants



Key findings

- Many Gambian and Nigerian migrants are in the United Kingdom (UK) temporarily or have settled. As a result of the high cost of living, and in order to maximize income for remittances, both parents work full-time and/or are studying.
- Parents' reasons for sending their Gambian-British and Nigerian-British children 'home' included the desire that their children experience West African discipline, religion and education, and to form relationships with extended family and friends. Parents were working long hours in the UK so that even babies and very young children were sent 'home' because of the high economic costs of childcare in the UK.
- Gambian-British and Nigerian-British children who had been 'sent back' to West Africa for care and education stated that they enjoyed having relationships and friendships with their extended family and friends both in England and West Africa. In many cases parents are unable to visit their children while they are in The Gambia, either because of the cost, visa restrictions and / or immigration status. Children have developed relationships and emotional bonds with their parents – of whom they recognise their images and / or their voices – through the use of technology such as Skype through which they attempt to create emotional intimacy.
- The research is significant because it found that very young children are being taken 'back' to The Gambia and Nigeria at the age of six months to three years, until six to nine years of age, and cared for by grandparents, and / or other extended family members.

What we did

The research, conducted between July 2011 and July 2012, focused on: Gambian-British and Nigerian-British children who have 'returned' to The Gambia and Nigeria for care and education; those who have spent time in The Gambia and Nigeria and have returned to the United Kingdom; and parent's decision making about whether to send their children back to The Gambia and Nigeria. The research provided insight into the relations of dependence and responsibility that are established between carers in the country of origin, migrant parents and their children, and how this affects the way in which they maintained connections.

How we did it

- Interviews with the children, mothers, fathers, grandparents and other family members (including those who have responsibility for the children's care and education) were carried out for one year.
- Interviewing took place in England (London, Bristol and Leeds), The Gambia (Banjul, Serrakunda and Brikama) and Nigeria (Lagos).
- Where the children wished to participate in the interview, they were interviewed alongside their family either in England or in West Africa. Specifically the interviews included 8 Nigerian and 6 Gambian UK based parents; 25 children who are presently being cared and educated for in Nigeria and The Gambia while their parents are in the UK; 4 guardians in Nigeria; 6 group interviews with groups of children and families; 3 extensive case studies of transnational families; and 2 UK Nigerian based parents who have considered sending their children to Nigeria but have not done it.
- Field notes on participant observations and informal interviews were kept on all interview locations.

Further information

Conference Paper:

Kea, P. (2013). Labouring for Love: Emotional Intimacy, Technology, and Transnational Caring Practices of Gambian Migrants in Britain. Intimate Migrations Roskilde, Copenhagen, Denmark 12th – 15th April 2013.

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