

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED GEOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS OF KENYAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Monica Nyamwange, Thomas Owusu, and Philip Thiuri
Department of Environmental Science and Geography
William Paterson University
300 Pompton Road
Wayne, NJ 07470

ABSTRACT: *This study uses data collected in a questionnaire survey to examine the interstate migration and settlement patterns of Kenyan immigrants in the United States. Specifically, it examines the factors influencing their migration as well as their spatial distribution, housing tenure, and the role of social networks in the migration process. Most Kenyan immigrants come to the United States to pursue further education and also to seek economic opportunities. Following their initial settlement, many of them engage in interstate migration mostly due to economic circumstances. There appears to be a trend of moving from the northeast towards southern and midwestern states. Many Kenyan immigrants rent their residences here in the United States. However, many of them either build or plan to build a house back in Kenya. This is because many Kenyans perceive their stay in the United States as temporary and plan to return to their homeland in the future.*

BACKGROUND

U.S. Immigration Trends

From 1850 to 1930, the foreign born population of the United States increased from 2.2 million to 14.2 million, reflecting large scale immigration from Europe during most of this period. As a percentage of the total population, the foreign born population rose from 9.7% in 1850 and fluctuated in the 13% to 15% range from 1860 to 1920, before dropping to 11.6% in 1930 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1999). The highest percentage of foreign born were 14.4% in 1870, 14.8% in 1890 and 14.7% in 1910. From 1930 to 1950, the foreign born population of the U.S. declined from 14.2 million to 10.3 million, or from 11.6% to 6.9% of the total population (Campbell, 1999). These declines reflected the extremely low level of immigration during the 1930s and 1940s. The foreign born population then dropped to 9.6 million in 1970, when it represented a record low of 4.7% of the total population. Immigration had risen during the 1950s and 1960s but was still low by historical standards, and mortality was high during this period among the foreign born population because of its old age structure (reflecting four decades of low immigration).

Since 1970, the foreign born population has increased rapidly due to large-scale immigration, primarily from Latin America and Asia. The foreign born population rose from 9.6 million in 1970 to 14.1 million in 1980, and to 19.8 million in 1990 (Table 1). The estimated foreign born population in 1997 was 25.8 million (Campbell, 1999). As a percentage of the total population, the foreign born population increased from 4.7% in 1970 to 6.2% in 1980, to 7.9% in 1990 and to an estimated 9.7% in 1997 (Campbell, 1999).

Of all the foreign born populations in the United States, the Africans are the least researched. While they constitute a small proportion of the foreign born population, their numbers have been increasing, especially in the last two decades (Table 1). Africans now constitute a significant and noticeable component of the multi-cultural mosaic of the United States, especially in the major metropolitan areas and thus deserve to be studied.

African Migration to the United States: Overview

In the 19th Century, only a few people came from Africa to the United States; on the average, less than 30 per year, according to the United States Immigration records, which, until recently, never recorded the country of origin of immigrants from the African continent (Thernstrom, 1980). By World

Table 1 Region of Birth of the Foreign-Born Population in the U.S.A. (1960-1990)

REGION	1990	1980	1970	1960
Europe	4,350,403 (22.9%)	5,149,572 (39.0%)	5,740 (61.7%)	7,256,311 (75.0%)
Asia	4,979,037 (26.3%)	2,539,771 (19.3%)	824,887 (8.9%)	490,996 (5.1%)
Africa	363,819 (1.9%)	199,723 (1.5%)	80,143 (0.9%)	35,355 (0.4%)
Oceania	104,145 (0.5%)	77,577 (0.6%)	41,258 (0.4%)	34,730 (0.4%)
Latin America	8,407,837 (44.3%)	4,372,487 (33.1%)	1,803,970 (19.4%)	908,309 (9.4%)
North America	753,913 (4.0%)	853,427 (6.5%)	812,421 (8.7%)	952,500 (9.8%)

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999

War I, the average was closer to 1,000 a year; following the war, the number dropped sharply as a result of the restrictive legislation of the 1920s and the Great Depression. The numbers began to rise again after World War II (Thernstrom, 1980).

The largest increase has taken place since the 1970s. Following independence, many African governments encouraged their people to go overseas to pursue further studies. It was hoped that those who went overseas could return to their home countries after completion of studies so as to help in nation building. For instance, the Africa-born population in the U.S. rose from 35,255 in 1960 to 363,819 in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1999).

Immigrants tend to be quite mobile following their initial settlement. This study will examine some aspects of interstate migration of immigrants in the U.S.

Interstate Migration of Immigrants: Literature Review

At the time of arrival, immigrants may settle in communities with existing populations in gateway states and metropolitan areas which aid transition by providing new arrivals with a familiar social, cultural, and economic environment. Over time, however, the distribution of the immigrant population is likely to change. Increased duration gives immigrants an opportunity to increase their human capital, to regularize their migration status, and to strengthen their ties to local communities (Forbes, 1985; Speare

et.al, 1982). The immigrants then begin to be involved in interstate migration.

Research on interstate migration has focused on a variety of aspects. Gurak and Kritz (2000) examined the role of individual human capital, nativity concentration and state economic conditions in shaping interstate migration rates of immigrants. They found that nativity group concentration and state economic context strongly influence interstate migration. The role of economic conditions in the migration process is also examined by Greenwood (1985).

Some research has highlighted the importance of social networks in channeling and sustaining migration flows (Gurak and Caces, 1992; Massey et.al., 1987). New immigrants usually have close social ties to previous immigrants, which shape their destination choices and influence their settlement and integration processes (Portes and Borocz, 1989; Tilly, 1990). Kritz and Nogle (1994) confirm that social networks in immigrant communities would be an important determinant of immigrants' relocation decisions.

Gurak and Kritz (2000) did a study on interstate migration of immigrants in the United States in the 1985-1990 period. They draw their data from 5% - A state files of the 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). They measured interstate migration by a dummy variable set equal to 1 if individuals lived in a different state in 1990 than they did in 1985. Their findings reveal that Africans are the most likely to migrate, while Italians are the least likely to do so (Table 2). In other words,

Africans are more likely to move from their states of initial settlement to others. Unfortunately, the interstate migration patterns of African immigrants have been ignored by researchers. The present study seeks to study the settlement and interstate migration patterns of African immigrants in the U.S. by using Kenyans as a case study.

Kenyan Migration to the United States: An Overview

As with other African groups, the number of Kenyan immigrants who came to the United States was limited until the 1970s. The number of Kenyan immigrants in the United States has shown a tremendous increase, particularly during the last decade. The number of Kenyan immigrants admitted into the U.S. during 1988 was nearly 800, but by 1998 had risen to 1,600 (Figure 1).

The majority of Kenyan immigrants come into the United States in search of education opportunities, particularly at college level. This is a response to limited education opportunities back in Kenya where rapid population growth puts constraints on the provision of education. Other Kenyans come in search of better economic opportunities. This is in response to declining economic conditions in Kenya, especially during the last two decades. Yet another reason for migration into the United States is rooted in problems associated with political unrest in Kenya during the 1990s resulting from the formation of a multi-party political system and the resulting ethnic clashes.

During 1997-1998, the largest numbers of Kenyan immigrants (nearly 1,000) were admitted under the Diversity Program (Figure 2). This was followed by relatives of U.S. citizens.

On the basis of occupation, the majority of

Table 2 Migration of Selected Immigrant Groups (1990)

IMMIGRANTS	% INTERSTATE MIGRATION
Germany	9.7
Italy	4.4
Poland	6.1
United Kingdom	13.0
U.S.S.R.	8.0
Other Europe	7.8
Canada	11.3
Cuba	8.7
Dominican Republic	10.6
Colombia	14.8
El Salvador	6.1
Jamaica	12.0
Mexico	5.0
Other Caribbean	10.9
Other Latin America	10.2
China	11.5
India	16.6
Japan	12.7
Korea	12.1
Philippines	8.3
Vietnam	11.6
Other Asia	13.3
Africa	16.7
Other Foreign Born	9.4

Source: Gurak and Kritz, 2000

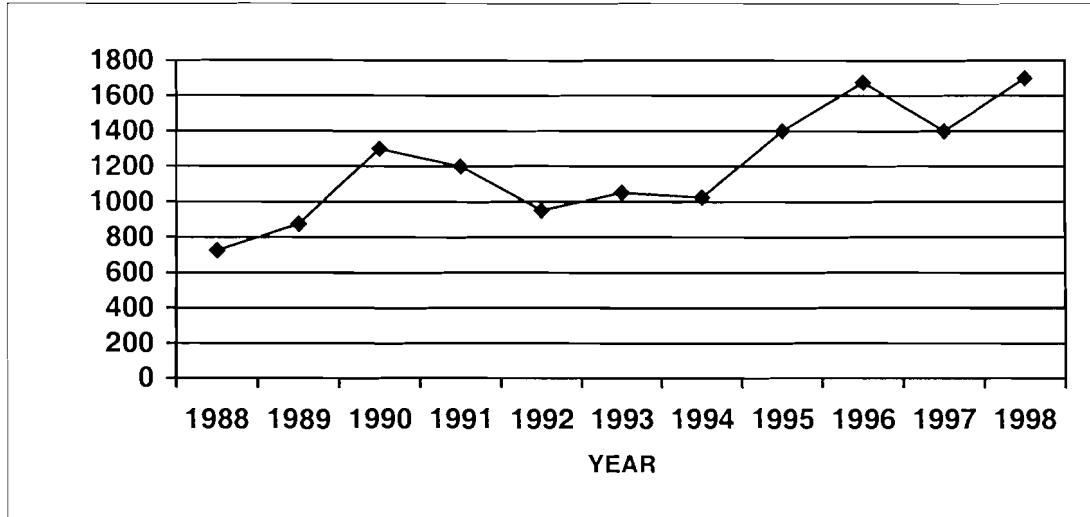


Figure 1 Kenyan Immigrants Admitted into the U.S. During Fiscal Years 1988-1998

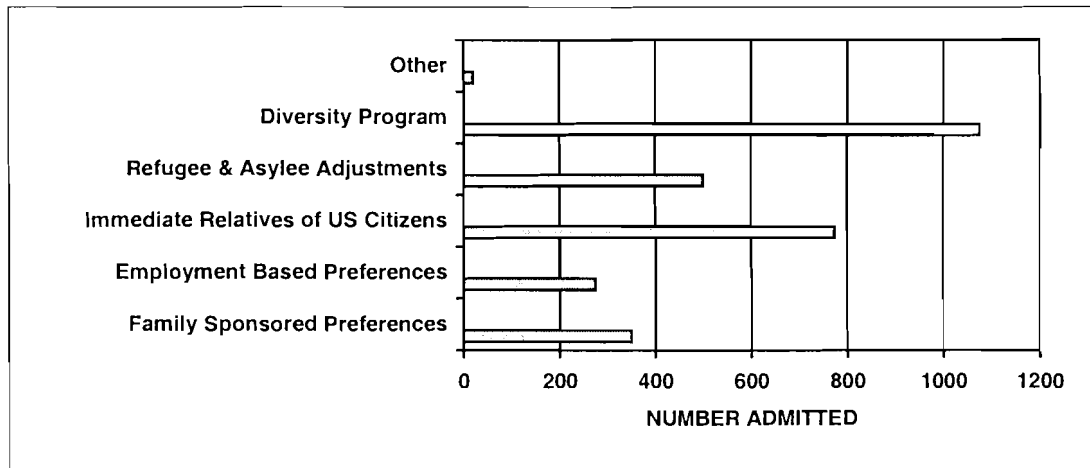


Figure 2 Kenyan Immigrants Admitted into the U.S. by Selected Class of Admission (1997-1998)

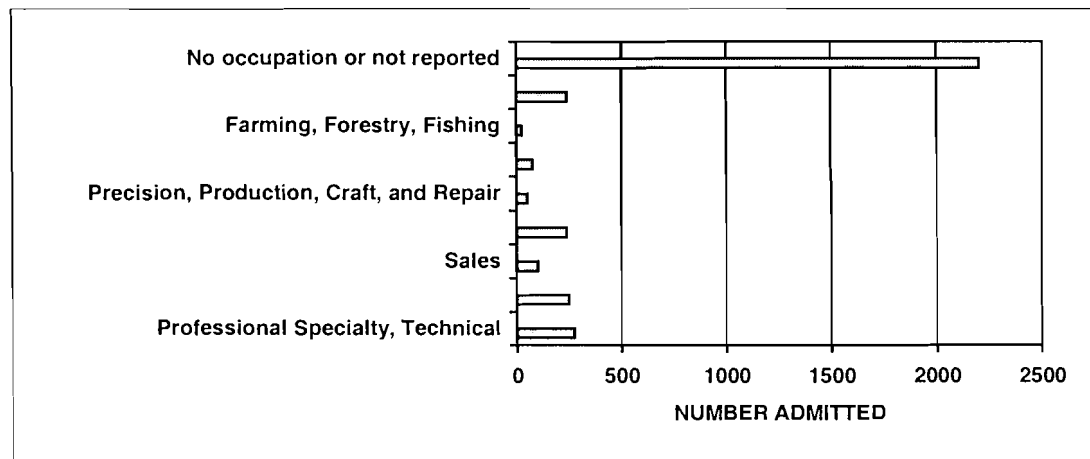


Figure 3 Immigrants Admitted into the U.S. by Major Occupation (Fiscal Years 1997-1998)

Table 3 State of Initial Residence of the Respondents (N=88)

REGION	PERCENT
Northeast	73.9
Midwest	6.8
South	14.8
West	4.5

Source: Author's Survey Data

Table 4 Foreign-Born Population by Section of the United States (1950-1990)

Foreign Born	Northeast		Midwest		South		West	
	Population	%	Population	%	Population	%	Population	%
1990	5,231,024	26.5	2,131,293	10.8	4,582,293	23.2	7,822,706	14.8
1980	4,505,923	32.0	2,114,190	15.0	2,894,757	20.6	4,565,036	10.6
1970	4,119,681	42.8	1,873,561	19.5	1,316,205	13.7	2,309,855	6.6
1960	4,574,743	47.0	2,276,959	23.4	962,920	9.9	1,923,521	6.9
1950	5,287,165	51.1	2,707,390	26.2	767,320	7.1	1,585,520	8.1

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, March 1999

immigrants did not indicate their occupation. The most likely explanation for this is that most Kenyan immigrants are students. Among those who indicated their occupation, the majority was professional or technical experts, followed by executive, administrative and managerial staff (Figure 3).

housing tenure, and the economic and social factors that shape their decisions. The role of social networks in the migration process is also examined.

Objectives of the Study

Using information collected in a questionnaire survey, this paper examines the interstate migration and settlement patterns of Kenyan immigrants in the United States. Specifically, it examines the patterns of migration, individual and contextual factors influencing their migration, and their residential behavior in destination states, including their spatial distribution,

DATA METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were derived from a variety of sources. Immigration data for Kenyan Immigrants were compiled from the statistical tables of the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and those of the United States Bureau of Census. These tables provided information on the occupation, year of admission, class of admission and port of entry of Kenyan immigrants.

Data on migration patterns, factors

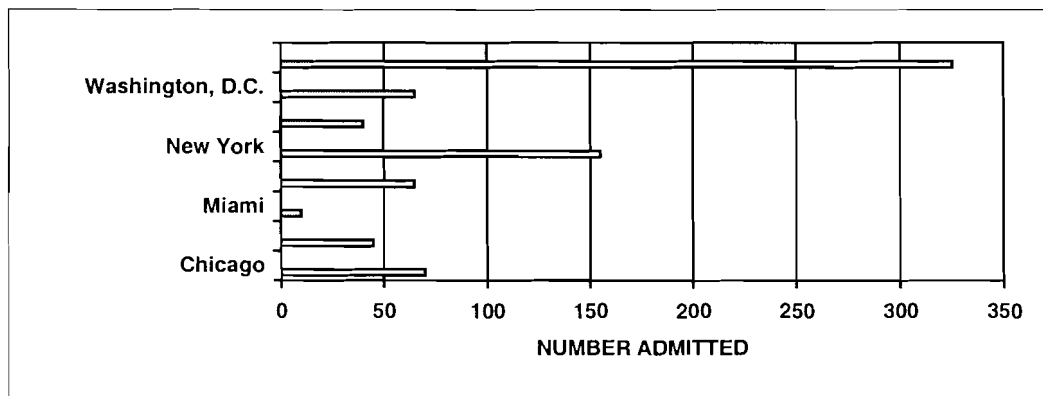


Figure 4 Kenyan Immigrants New Arrivals Admitted by Selected Port of Entry (1997-1998)

influencing migration, residential behavior in destination states and connections/ties retained in Kenya were collected through a questionnaire survey of 88 Kenyan immigrants drawn from the four regions of the United States. The survey method was a random sampling frame.

PATTERNS OF INTERSTATE MIGRATION

Many Kenyans have been involved in interstate migration in recent years. Many of them initially moved into the Northeast as can be inferred from Figure 4, which shows immigrants, by port of entry. The largest number of new arrivals came through New York, followed by Newark and most likely settled in New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts. This is consistent with the results of this study, which found out that 73.9% of the respondents initially settled in the Northeast (Table 3).

The fact that many Kenyan immigrants initially came to the Northeast is not surprising considering that the region was a stepping stone for the majority of immigrants from foreign countries over the years. The South follows the Northeast as region of initial settlement for Kenyan as well as other immigrants (Table 4).

Interstate mobility has been quite high among Kenyan immigrants. For instance, 83% of the respondents stated that they had moved from their

state of initial settlement. While 73.9% of the respondents stated that their state of initial residence was in the Northeast, only 41.3% indicated that their current residence is in the Northeast (Table 5). The difference between initial state of residence and current state of residence could be attributed to interstate migration. A large flow of Kenyans is taking place from the Northeast to the South (mostly Texas and North Carolina) and the Midwest (particularly Minnesota).

Although the Northeast is losing Kenyans to the South and Midwest, there are still some Kenyans who are moving into the Northeast from other regions. For instance, a large number of Kenyans have relocated from New Jersey to Delaware and Massachusetts.

FACTORS INFLUENCING MIGRATION

Reasons for Moving from State of Initial Settlement

The decision to relocate from one state to another is often motivated by a combination of factors. To determine the reasons for relocation, respondents were asked to check the reason(s) that prompted them to leave their initial state of residence. The frequency distribution of responses is presented in Table 6. 68% of the respondents cited "failure to get a job", while 64% cited "high cost of living" as

Table 5 State of Current Residence (N = 88)

REGION	PERCENT
Northeast	41.3
Midwest	29.3
South	20.0
West	9.3

Source: Author's Survey Data

Table 6 Reasons for Moving from State of Initial Residence (N = 88)

REASON	PERCENT
Failure to get a job	68.0
Failure to get a good college	28.0
High cost of living	64.0
Lack of good residential neighborhoods	6.0

Source: Author's Survey Data

Table 7 Reasons for Relocating to Destination State (N = 88)

REASON	PERCENT
Better job opportunities	67.0
Better colleges	17.0
A reasonable cost of living	53.0
Better residential neighborhoods	9.0

Source: Author's Survey Data

Table 8 Most Important Reasons for Moving Into First Neighborhood (N = 88)

REASON	PERCENT
Affordable Rent	80.0
Quiet and clean environment	51.0
Closeness to friends and relatives	14.0
Closeness to job, college, shopping centers	68.0

Source: Author's Survey Data

the major reason for moving from their state of initial residence. It is obvious that since the Northeast has a very large number of immigrants, the demand for jobs and housing is quite high, especially in the New Jersey and New York area. Hence, it is not surprising that many Kenyans try to make their ends meet by moving to other states.

Reasons for Relocating to a Particular State

In terms of choosing a destination state, the cost of living and presence of job opportunities stand out as the most important factors. 67% of the respondents cited better job opportunities, while 53% cited "reasonable cost of living" as reasons for relocating to present state (Table 7).

Residential Behavior in Destination Sites Reasons for moving into first neighborhood

In terms of moving into their first neighborhood in the destination state, low rental accommodation and convenient location to jobs and colleges clearly emerge as important factors (Table 8). 65% of the respondents indicated that they live in apartment buildings. The concentration of Kenyans in apartment buildings clearly reflects their need for low rental housing. Sharing accommodation seems to be a common practice among Kenyans in the United States as a whole. 86.2% of the respondents indicated that they had shared an apartment. Of these, 76.5% had shared with friends. 52.3% indicated that they are currently sharing an apartment with someone. When asked about their preference

for sharing an apartment, 62.5% indicated that they do not prefer to share. This implies that the sharing of an apartment is mainly to reduce the cost of accommodation.

Social Factors

Many of the migrants relied on a network of relatives and friends in the destination areas, who not only provided them with information about economic and social conditions in those states, but also offered various types of assistance to ease their settlements. For instance, 88.1% of the respondents stated that they got assistance with accommodation on arrival from relatives and friends (Table 9). 51.3% of the respondents stated that they were assisted by friends and relatives in getting their first job. As they adjusted to the new community, they were able to switch jobs.

Residential Relocation

55.2% of the respondents stated that they had changed their residence in the destination state, while 43.7% had not. Of those who had changed their residence, 59.3% had done so only once (indicating low mobility). 25.9% had moved twice, while 14.8% had moved more than twice.

It is interesting to note that most of those who have changed residence have done so within the same neighborhood. 73.3% of the respondents stated that they are still living in the same neighborhood. The main reason for doing so is affordable rent, cited by 85% of the respondents (Table 10).

Housing Tenure

The majority of Kenyan immigrants (75%) are renters, while only 25% are homeowners. The causes of this low ownership lie in economic circumstances, personal as well as cultural factors. The majority of Kenyan immigrants are students, and hence, cannot afford to buy homes. 55% of the respondents indicated that they planned to buy homes in the future, probably when their economic circumstances are favorable. Kenyan immigrants have high rates of interstate mobility and probably feel that buying a home could tie them down to a particular state, hence, they prefer to rent. More importantly, most Kenyan immigrants rent their residence because they perceive their residence in the United States as temporary, and hence, do not see the need of buying a home.

Immigrants and Home Ownership in Kenya

Kenyan immigrants are seriously committed to investing in home ownership in Kenya. Among the investment projects commonly considered by respondents, home ownership is the top priority for the overwhelming majority (92%). 29.9% of the respondents indicated that they had already built a home, 17.2% are currently building, while 44.8% planned to build. Only 8% of the respondents indicated that they were not interested in building. The desire to own a house in Kenya is driven by the intention of most immigrants to return to Kenya

permanently in the future. For many Kenyans, migration to the United States and other western countries is primarily a matter of economic expediency; it has been motivated by the need to accumulate capital for investment back home (Owusu, 1998).

The high priority attached to home ownership in Kenya underlines the desire of many of the immigrants to build houses in Kenya during their residence in the United States. Indeed, for many Kenyans, international migration presents the only real opportunity to fulfill their dream of home ownership at home. Ironically, the fulfillment of the dream of home ownership has been made easier by the weakness of the Kenyan currency (the shilling). It may even be argued that the high exchange rate and the persistent decline in the value of the Kenyan currency in relation to the U.S. dollar has provided a strong incentive for many Kenyans to travel to, and work overseas. Thus, while home ownership is beyond the reach of most Kenyans, those living and working in the United States can afford to buy or build expensive homes in Kenya.

The study further found out that nearly 70% of the respondents remit money to Kenya on a regular basis. This high rate of remitting reflects not only the need to provide financial support to relatives and family members back home, but also the need to provide money for various investments, including home ownership, being undertaken by family members and relatives on behalf of the immigrants. In some cases, migrants travel to Kenya to buy the

Table 9 Assistance with Accommodation (N = 88)

INITIAL ACCOMMODATION	PERCENT
Lived with relatives	28.6
Lived with Kenyan friends	29.8
Assisted by relatives	20.2
Assisted by Kenyan friends	9.5
Found it myself	11.9

Source: Author's Survey Data

Table 10 Reasons for Living in Current Neighborhood (N = 88)

REASON	PERCENT
Rent is reasonable	85.0
Neighborhood is quiet and clean	63.0
Neighborhood is close to my job/college	49.0
Close to my family	11.0

Source: Author's Survey Data

land and build a home.

CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on interstate migration and settlement patterns of Kenyan immigrants in the United States. Many Kenyans initially settled in the Northeast region of the United States. From here, many have relocated mostly to Southern states such as Texas and the Midwestern states, particularly Minnesota.

The decision to relocate from one state to another is often motivated by a number of factors. The top two reasons cited by the majority of the respondents were "failure to get a job" and "high cost of living". In terms of choosing a destination state, reasonable cost of living and job opportunities turned out to be major factors in the decision making.

Many of the migrants relied on a network of relatives and friends in the destination areas who not only provided them with information about conditions in those states, but also gave various forms of support necessary for settling in. Sharing accommodation seems to be a common practice among many Kenyans. This is done to reduce the cost of living. The majority of Kenyans rent as opposed to owning homes.

Most Kenyans have maintained ties with their homeland. Many have built a house or intend to do so in the future, have invested in their homeland, and send cash remittances to their families back in Kenya.

The present study has focused on Kenyan immigrants in general. It would be interesting for future research to examine settlement patterns and interstate migration of various ethnic groups and do a comparative analysis to find out if there are any significant differences.

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