



Ties and Powers that Bind

What demographics and social networks mean for immigrants' decisions to stay in Ghana

Based on the published study by Elijah Yendaw (2024), Journal of Identity and Migration Studies, 18(2), 59-76

WHY THIS MATTERS

Migration policy in Ghana needs to distinguish between people who plan to remain and those who expect to return home. Yet policy and research on South-South migration have paid limited attention to immigrants' intended duration of stay. Yendaw's study addresses this gap among West African itinerant immigrant retailers in Accra, showing that stay intentions are shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by family and friendship networks.

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intended a temporary stay

KEY MESSAGES

- Most respondents intended to stay temporarily: 85.6% compared with 14.4% who preferred permanent residence.
- Family and friendship networks mattered. Interviewees described return plans and stay decisions as being discussed with, and influenced by, relatives and friends.
- Gender, marital status, country of origin and duration of stay were statistically related to stay intentions; age and education were not significant predictors in the main model.
- The quantitative and qualitative evidence on duration of stay did not point in the same direction, signalling that length of residence alone should not be treated as a simple proxy for settlement intention.

STUDY AT A GLANCE

Design: Cross-sectional mixed methods

Survey: 779 usable responses

Interviews: 9 immigrant key informants

Population: West African itinerant immigrant retailers in Accra, resident for at least six months

Sites: 9 Accra neighbourhoods

Analysis: Descriptive statistics, binary logistic regression and thematic analysis

SCOPE NOTE

The evidence comes from itinerant immigrant retailers in Accra. The study calls for nationwide research before broader conclusions are drawn about immigrants across Ghana.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

Stay intention	85.6% of respondents preferred temporary residence; 14.4% preferred permanent residence.
Social networks	Qualitative interviews showed that family ties and friendships shaped plans to return or remain, often through advice and prior family discussions.
Socio-demographics	Gender, marital status and country of origin were significant in the main regression model. Respondents from Niger and Mali showed particularly high odds of temporary residence relative to the reference category.
Duration of stay	Quantitative analysis found duration of stay statistically significant, but interviews with some longer-term residents pointed toward permanent settlement. The paper explicitly reports this divergence.

FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION

POLICY IMPLICATION

A migration management system that treats all immigrants as if they have the same settlement horizon can miss important differences. This study shows that temporary residence is dominant among the surveyed group, while social networks and selected socio-demographic characteristics help shape whether migrants envisage returning home or remaining in Ghana. Policy therefore needs to combine effective registration and monitoring of temporary residents with purposeful integration of those seeking permanent residence.

PRIORITY POLICY ACTIONS

- 1 Create a detailed register of temporary immigrant residents.** The study recommends a nationwide register to support identification, dialogue and monitoring of temporary residents, particularly in the context of regional insecurity.
- 2 Make immigrants' economic participation mutually beneficial.** Ghana Immigration Service, Ghana Investment Promotion Centre and the Accra Metropolitan Assembly should develop an appropriate framework that brings relevant immigrant business activities into the country's tax net.
- 3 Support the integration of immigrants seeking permanent residence.** The government should consider measures that help permanent residents integrate so Ghana can benefit from their skills and economic activities.
- 4 Build social networks and socio-demographics into migration policy design.** Family ties, friendships, gender, country of origin, marital status and duration of stay should not be excluded from migration-management interventions because the study shows that these factors are connected to stay intentions.
- 5 Extend the evidence base beyond Accra.** Undertake nationwide research on immigrants' stay intentions to inform policy with evidence that captures other locations and migrant groups.

WHO SHOULD ACT

Ghana Immigration Service	Ghana Investment Promotion Centre	Metropolitan / municipal authorities
Lead registration, identification, dialogue and monitoring of temporary immigrant residents.	Contribute to the policy framework for mutually beneficial economic participation and formalization.	Work with national agencies and immigrant communities on local registration, engagement and economic integration.

CALL TO ACTION

Move from generic immigrant management to stay-intention-sensitive policy: register temporary residents, engage the social networks that influence migration decisions, and support the integration and productive contribution of immigrants who intend to remain in Ghana.

SOURCE

Yendaw, E. (2024). Ties and Powers that Bind: Demographics, Social Networks and Immigrants' Decisions to Stay in Ghana. *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*, 18(2), 59-76.

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