



Migration profile

Nigeria

A. Executive Summary

The Federal Republic of Nigeria, located on the western coast of Africa, was a former British colony from the 19th century until it declared its independence in 1960. From 1967 to 1970, it suffered a civil war due to the independence declaration of the Biafra region. After a number of military dictatorships and civilian governments, in 1999 Nigeria finally carried out presidential elections.ⁱ

Migration has been a significant element in Nigerian history. In fact, all of the major ethnic groups living in the country believe their settlement was established because of their ancestors' decision to migrate there. Later on, at the beginning of the 20th century, after the Europeans arrived in Africa, thousands of Nigerians started moving abroad to the Ivory Coast, Mali, Ghana, Sudan, and Togo in search of job opportunities.ⁱⁱ Even though Nigeria is an important immigrant destination, it is mainly an emigrant country.

As of 2020, there were 1,308,568 migrants recorded in the country, mostly coming from Benin, Ghana, Mali, Togo, and the Niger Republic.ⁱⁱⁱ The migrant stock has always been small, but it has been gradually growing through the decades.^{iv} Return migration is another important phenomenon in the country, and returnees usually face difficulties in integrating into Nigeria.^v The country has also been experiencing large-scale rural-to-urban migration, which is affecting national agriculture and increasing poverty in rural areas.^{vi} Furthermore, in 2022 the country hosted 82,773 persons with refugee status and 1529 asylum seekers. Most of them were originally from Cameroon.^{vii}

Nigeria has been suffering the consequences of conflicts, violence and climate change, which explains the 3,098,404 internally displaced persons recorded in 2022.^{viii} ix This year also, 400,633 Nigerians crossed the border and were recognised as refugees.^x Their main destinations were Niger, Cameroon, and Chad.^{xi}

In 2021 the Nigerian macroeconomic stability weakened, amidst declining oil production, a costly petrol subsidy which is consuming a large share of gross oil revenues, exchange rate distortions, and high inflation. The economic downturn is leaving millions of Nigerians in poverty. Growth is driven mostly by the services, trade, and manufacturing sectors. Moreover, the country faces massive development challenges, like its dependence on oil for exports and revenues, governance issues, insecurity, and natural disasters. Especially in the northern areas of the country, floods and heat stress have become more severe and frequent. Climate change has contributed to a decline in per-capita food production.^{xii} In 2021 GDP amounted to US\$ 440,833,583,990, with an annual growth rate of 3.6% compared to -1.8% in

2020. The inflation rate was 17% of its GDP. Moreover, foreign direct investment represented 0.8% of its GDP.^{xiii}

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Nigeria is a Western African country located on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, bordering the Atlantic Ocean to the south, Benin to the west, Niger and Chad to the north, and Cameroon to the east.^{xiv} The country has a wide-ranging geography, from arid to humid climates.^{xv} It is administratively divided into 36 Federated States and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.^{xvi}

It has an area of 923,768 sq. km^{xvii} and a population of 222,599,961 (the largest in Africa).^{xviii} Its capital city is Abuja.^{xix} English is the official language^{xx}, but there are over 50 languages and 150 dialects also being used^{xxi}, of which the most common are Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo.^{xxii} Concerning religion, the population is divided into 50% Christians (mainly located in the centre and south) and Muslims (mostly Sunni and located in the south). Nevertheless, there are still people practising traditional indigenous beliefs.^{xxiii xxiv xxv} Nigeria has over 200 ethnic groups: Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba are the three largest ones.^{xxvi}

II. International and Internal Migration

As of 2020, 1,308,568 migrants were living in the territory of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (0.63% of the country's population). 713,678 (54.54% of the stock) were male, and 594,890 (45.46% of the stock) were female. Their main countries of origin were Benin (377,169 people, 28.82% of the migrant stock), Ghana (238,284 people, 18.21% of the stock), Mali (172,481 people, 13.18% of the stock), Togo (158,262 people, 12.09% of the stock), and the Niger Republic (120,797 people, 9.23% of the stock). Most of the immigrants, then, included people coming from fellow West African states.^{xxvii}

In the last few decades, immigration has always been a small phenomenon, but it is gradually growing. In 1990, there were 456,621 foreigners (0.48% of the country's population of the time); in 2005 they were 969,174 (0.69% of the country's population of the time), while in 2020 they amounted to 1,308,568.^{xxviii} However, that has not always been the case. During the initial years of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), especially since the introduction of free movement in 1979, Nigeria (already the largest African economy) received massive contingents of migrants coming from other member states. Nonetheless, the political party shifted, leading to a less positive perception of migration. This ended up in a mass expulsion of up to 2.5 million ECOWAS migrants in 1983, reaching then the fairly reduced migrant stock figure for 1990.^{xxix}

Nowadays, the movement of workers among ECOWAS nations is on its way to getting normalised again, especially among neighbouring countries like Nigeria, Togo, and Ghana. Most workers circulating between Nigeria and the other two states are medium- or low-skilled people and are employed in physically demanding sectors such as agriculture and construction. They do not usually have any trouble making a living, as demand is high. Nevertheless, they are usually underpaid and/or unable to use their professional skills because Nigeria does not recognise competences and formation obtained abroad. Different institutions are working to solve these inadequacies.^{xxx} Young Ghanaese workers in Nigerian agriculture, in particular, are reported to have endured extenuating labour conditions, usually

receiving no money for their work. They are only provided food and basic accommodation during their employment period, lasting sometimes up to a year. Then, when they cover their contract and have to go back to Ghana, they receive something useful for them, like a motorbike.^{xxxix}

Another important phenomenon is return migration. Nigerian citizens who were residing in other (mostly European, but also African) countries are now planning to return to and settle in Nigeria. Returnees face a lot of hardships in reintegrating into the Nigerian economy and even finding a job. Their acceptance into their communities is also challenging, especially for people who are not wealthy and successful, as they are expected to be after living and working in Europe for quite some time.^{xxxix}

Regarding internal migration, the Federal Republic of Nigeria has long been experiencing large-scale rural-to-urban migration, even if there is still a very significant share of the population living in rural areas. Young people leave rural areas attracted by white-collar job opportunities in big cities. This factor negatively affects national agriculture and increases poverty in rural areas, forcing large groups of Nigerian youth to relocate into urban settings.^{xxxix}

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

In 2022, the estimated net migration rate in Nigeria was -0.21 migrant(s)/1,000 population.^{xxxix} Despite the importance of migration for the country, the government still lacks services or programs for Nigerian emigrants, as well as an official and current database on migration.^{xxxix} UNDESA estimated Nigerian international emigrants to be 1,256,114 in 2015 and 1,438,331 in 2019, thus suggesting an increase in the emigration trend.^{xxxix} According to IOM, emigration more than doubled between 1990 and 2013 (from 465,932 to 1,030,322). Most Nigerian migrants reside in the USA (309,699), the UK (203,980), Cameroon (148,076), and Niger (130,982).^{xxxix}

In 2017, the Nigerian government introduced the Immigration Regulation in order to counter and reduce illegal immigration, as well as irregular emigration, preventing Nigerians from dying in the desert or at seas while attempting to reach other countries.^{xxxix} Despite the high risks and failure of migrants in travelling to Europe by crossing the sea or the desert, the number of migrants keeps rising.^{xxxix}

Nigeria faces problems of brain drain.^{xl} An Afrobarometer poll from 2018 found that one in three Nigerians wanted to move outside the country, especially younger and more educated males. They mainly search for employment opportunities within or outside the continent (some of them would like to move to the Middle East and the USA, and others to go to Europe, America, and Asia).^{xli} The main push factors for Nigerian emigration are the socio-economic conditions in the country, coupled with unemployment rates.^{xlii} 51% of Nigerian migrants have tertiary education.^{xliii} Of the 72,000 doctors registered with the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN), more than half practice outside the country. Furthermore, UNESCO estimated that in 2017 there were 95,600 Nigerian students living abroad.^{xliii}

Nigeria's large diaspora in the West (mainly the United States and the United Kingdom) is crucial for the country's future development.^{xliii} According to the World Bank, in 2021 Nigeria received close to \$19.5 billion in remittances.^{xliii} It received the largest inflow of remittances in Sub-Saharan Africa, with 65% of its total and 2% of the global inflow. Moreover, the diaspora

has promoted trade and foreign direct investment, as well as professional formation and skills. They usually keep in touch with their country and are interested in making contributions on behalf of its development.^{xlvi}

IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced Persons)

In 2022, 82,773 persons with refugee status and 1,529 asylum seekers were registered in Nigeria.^{xlviii} They mainly came from Cameroon (94.62%) and, to a lesser extent, from Niger (1.74%) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (0.80%).^{xliv} They flee violence and conflict in their countries of origin.¹ It should be noted that 6,829 of these people reside in urban areas of Nigeria, including Lagos, Ijebu, Abuja, and Janus.^{li}

The Nigerian law recognises refugee and asylum seeker status, and the government has established a Refugee Protection System.^{lii} For decades, Nigeria has been considered a generous host country for asylum seekers and refugees. In general terms, refugees have freedom of movement in the country, although at times this may be limited by the violent attacks occurring because of conflicts.^{liii} They have access to the labour market, health insurance, and refugee children also attend local schools where they receive a quality education.^{liv} However, some refugees need help to obtain work and have access to basic health care services even after receiving legal documentation. As a matter of fact, community members and local officials are sometimes unaware of their legal rights or status, making it difficult for them to move freely, obtain work, or access health care.^{lv}

Furthermore, Nigeria is still suffering a complex crisis determined by factors such as socio-cultural tensions that have led to a division between northern and southern Nigeria. Economic factors such as unemployment, high inflation, and poverty also generate insecurity throughout the country. Furthermore, environmental factors trigger conflicts due to climate change and increased competition for scarce land.^{lvi} In this regard, a total of 3,098,404 internally displaced persons were recorded in 2022,^{lvii} and 375,552 of them were directly caused by violence and conflict, while 24,366 were affected by climate disasters, especially floods.^{lviii} The long-standing violence between Fulani herdsman and Hausa farmers in the north-western states of Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara has become more frequent. Rural robberies and criminal violence are rising in all the northern states of Nigeria.^{lix} This is causing large-scale displacements, and people are exposed to great dangers as they move. Civilians suffer extortion, sexual violence, kidnappings, attacks, or violence resulting in death.^{lx} Insecurity has determined the suspension of several humanitarian activities in Borno's Damasak and Dikwa areas.^{lxi}

Finally, in 2022, 400,633 Nigerians crossed borders and were recognised as refugees.^{lxii} As of March 31, 2023, the number of Nigerian refugees living in other countries stood at 336,862.^{lxiii} The leading destination countries were Niger, Cameroon, and Chad.^{lxiv}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Nigeria is Tier 2 in the U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report since it does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but it is making significant efforts to do so. Traffickers recruit victims from rural areas, especially from southern regions, for

exploitation in commercial sex and forced labour in domestic work in cities like Abeokuta, Calabar, Ibadan, Kaduna, Kano, Lagos, and Port Harcourt. Traffickers exploit victims in sex trafficking, as well as in forced and bonded labour in street vending, domestic service, artisanal mining, stone quarrying, agriculture, textile manufacturing, begging, and in the tie-dye sector in the northwest and southwest parts of the country. Irregular migrants, internally displaced persons, and people from rural communities are the most vulnerable to human trafficking. There are reports attesting that teachers in Quranic schools coerce students to beg and subject them to sexual slavery. Traffickers also sell children from the “baby factories” industry and later exploit them in forced labour and sex trafficking. Ports and waterways around Calabar remain transit points for children subjected to forced labour in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon.^{lxv}

Agricultural farms in rural Nigeria force Togolese to work in the palm wine production. Nigerian traffickers compelled Cameroonian child refugees, displaced by Cameroon’s Anglophone crisis and staying in camps in Nigeria, to work in forced labour in domestic service and, in some cases, in sex trafficking. Authorities also identified Nigerian trafficking victims in countries of Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. Nigerian women and girls are subject to sexual exploitation in France, Italy, Spain, and Austria. According to reports, 80% of women in Spain’s unlicensed brothels are victims of sex trafficking. Other IDPs, aid workers, government officials, and security forces have committed sexual exploitation in government-run IDP camps, informal camps, and local communities, including places around Maiduguri, the Borno State capital. Boko Haram and ISIS-WA continued their practice of forcibly recruiting, abducting and using child soldiers as young as 12 years old as cooks, spies, messengers, bodyguards, armed combatants, as well as suicide bombers in attacks in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad.^{lxvi}

In 2021, the government initiated 852 investigations, including 323 of them for sex trafficking, 168 for labour trafficking, and 361 for unspecified cases. It also continued investigating 663 cases initiated in previous reporting periods. This year, it initiated 30 prosecutions, including 14 for sex trafficking, three for labour trafficking, and 13 for unspecified cases. The government secured 13 convictions, seven for sex trafficking and six unspecified, compared with convicting 36 individuals the previous year. It also investigated four officials for involvement in sex trafficking cases of IDPs.^{lxvii}

The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) had 10 zonal commands and each operated a victim shelter, which had a total capacity of 334 victims. NAPTIP shelters offered six weeks of initial care, although officials often allowed victims to stay longer if they desired to do so. The government provided access to legal, medical, and psychological services, as well as vocational training, financial empowerment, family reunification, and business management skills to victims. NAPTIP also conducted awareness-raising campaigns in border communities, schools and religious organisations. However, there were problems of corruption and officials’ complicity in trafficking cases. The Ministry of Defense did not finalise its handover protocol to refer child soldiers to care for the seventh consecutive year.^{lxviii}

VI. National Legal Framework

Citizenship in Nigeria is regulated by the 1999 Constitution.^{lxix} There has been no implemented legislation since the 1960 and 1961 Nigerian Citizenship Acts that were repealed

in 1974. The 2015 Immigration Act defines the conditions of entry, residence, and departure for both Nigerian citizens and foreign nationals. This Act sets out the provisions for matters relating to immigration, passports, visas, resident permits, work permits, and the prohibition of smuggling of migrants into and from Nigeria, and for the protection of and provision of remedies and assistance to objects of smuggling of migrants offences in Nigeria.^{lxx} This Act carries out in the Federal Republic of Nigeria the provisions of the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.^{lxxi} Nigeria finally issued the 2017 Immigration Regulations, the biggest overhaul in 50 years to the country's immigration rules. The regulations provide a legal framework for implementing the 2015 Immigration Act.^{lxxii}

The Labour Act protects the rights of foreign labour migrants working in Nigeria, and the Child Rights Act defends the rights of children by prohibiting child trafficking and labour.^{lxxiii} The Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act, as amended in 2015, criminalised sex and labour trafficking.^{lxxiv} Nigeria ratified the 1949 Migration for Employment Convention and the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.^{lxxv}

Nigeria ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, as well as the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Nigeria has successfully implemented international and African refugee conventions into the National Commission for Refugees Act (NCFR). The NCFR Act provides the legal and administrative framework for refugee management. It also sets out guidelines for the application and determination of refugee status in Nigeria.^{lxxvi}

Nigeria acceded to the 1954 Convention Relating to Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness in 2011; and to the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention). Nigeria is also a member of ECOWAS, a union that enshrined the freedom of movement in its 1979 Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence and Establishment.^{lxxvii}

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) is the government agency that has been charged with the responsibility of migration management in Nigeria. NIS registers expatriates for naturalisation, monitors borders, and controls documents. Within NIS, the Migration Directorate controls regular and irregular migration. The Visa and Management Directorate is responsible for the issue of visas, temporary and resident visas. The Border Management Directorate controls the land, aerial and marine patrol and provides border services.^{lxxviii}

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs regulates migration movements in and out of the country, while the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity manages labour policy for immigrants and is responsible for creating employment agreements with other countries.^{lxxix}

The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, created by the 2003 Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, as well as the Nigeria Police Force, are responsible for the protection of all persons against human

trafficking.¹ The Nigerian-United Kingdom Joint Border Task Force carries out several international counter-trafficking operations focused on disrupting, identifying, apprehending, and prosecuting members of organised crime groups within Nigeria and abroad.²

The Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development coordinates all humanitarian affairs in Nigeria. The National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons is an agency of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which deals with the framework and policy to protect and manage refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons. The National Population Commission and the National Bureau of Statistics collect information on migration statistics.³

International Organisations

UNHCR cooperates with the Nigerian authorities to provide legal assistance, issuance of identity cards, provision of shelter, non-food items such as blankets, livelihood assistance, psycho-social support, registration and voluntary repatriation. UNHCR registration experts are actively engaged in registering refugees, especially Cameroonians in Benue, Cross River, and Taraba States, as well as asylum seekers in the Cross River state. UNHCR supports local authorities in issuing refugee ID cards which give them freedom of movement across Nigeria and access to health facilities and schools alongside their Nigerian neighbours. UNHCR addresses the shelter needs of IDPs in North-East Nigeria as well as the country's MiddleBelt, but is also active in the South where Cameroonian refugees have found safety, including in UNHCR-built settlements on land made available by the government.⁴

IOM provides life-saving shelter and non-food items, and is the coordinator and camp management in the refugee camps in Nigeria. It is responsible for water, sanitation and hygiene, medical health and psychosocial support assistance to crisis-affected populations in the northeast. IOM is also responsible for the management and operation of humanitarian hubs in Borno. The agency works on assisted voluntary return and reintegration, labour migration and diaspora policy formulation, migration health, and migrant assistance and protection. IOM provides tools, such as data collection systems, and trains officials to improve border management in Nigeria in keeping with ECOWAS' commitment to migrants' rights and the free movement of citizens in the region.⁵ With IOM's support, the government wrote a new Labour Migration Policy for the country that was only completed in 2010. The policy was then approved in October 2014. It "aims to promote good governance of labour migration on development while mitigating its adverse impact".⁶

NGOs and Other Organisations

The most important international NGOs involved in helping refugees, asylum seekers, and forcibly displaced populations are present in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. They are focused mostly on protecting the rights and well-being of Nigerians victims affected by the

¹ NAPTIP, 2023

² U.S. Department of State, 2022

³ Ibid.

⁴ UNHCR, 2023

⁵ ECOWAS, 2022

⁶ IOM, 2023

ongoing armed conflict in the northeastern part of the country and internally displaced by it. That includes the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), which runs a very ambitious and diverse program in Nigeria. Among its many responsibilities, the organisation offers legal aid, information and counselling in law and access to rights-related matters; working to improve access to quality education by internally displaced children and adults; providing adequate food, financial assistance through cash grants for small and micro-businesses; supporting displaced populations' access to shelter and settlement; or promoting water, sanitation, and hygiene. The operation that NRC runs in North East Nigeria is a large, robustly financed one. According to their reports, there were different types of assistance provided to 269,010 people in 2021, and 318,716 in 2022.⁷

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is also active in the North East Nigerian territory. It has been working in the northeastern provinces of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe. DRC provides life-saving assistance and protection to vulnerable, conflict-affected populations, including internally displaced populations, returnees, and host communities, helping them with different programmes and providing them with a wide range of different rights and needs. DRC's core sectors of action in North East Nigeria include financial aid for economic recovery, humanitarian disarmament and peacebuilding, provision of adequate shelter and support in resettlement processes, nutrition and food security, and promotion of water, sanitation, and hygiene.⁸

Another very similar organisation is the International Rescue Committee (IRC). It started working in Nigeria in 2012 in order to assist people internally displaced by massive floods in the country. It was in 2014 that IRC first moved into the North East, specifically in the city of Yola, to support victims affected by the conflict. Since 2019 they have expanded through the North East. Now they focus on providing support for displaced people who fled their homes due to violent conflicts in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, who are now trying to rebuild their lives. Specific lines of intervention include: providing classes for displaced children to advance their reading and maths skills, and organising safe spaces where children can play and regain a sense of a normal childhood; providing programs for women and children who have suffered from violence and abuse; and programmes oriented at nurturing the host communities, in matters of health equipment, malnutrition, water sanitation, etc.⁹

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria has several departments and committees handling various issues, including the Migrants and Nomads department, which deals with migration and refugee matters.¹⁰ The Catholic Bishops' Conference is part of the International Catholic Migration Commission, by which it has appealed to the UN rights council and civil authorities to work for the preservation of the rights of all Nigerians who tragically lost their lives and property as they are displaced by violence in many parts of the country.¹¹

⁷ Norwegian Refugee Council

⁸ DRC

⁹ International Rescue Committee, 2021

¹⁰ Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria

¹¹ Merlo, 2022

Letters in Nigeria, as an agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, undertakes initiatives through projects, outreach, training, and seminars.¹² Its priority areas are emergency response and humanitarian services (caring for internally displaced persons and refugees), health services and HIV/AIDS, including assistance to orphans and vulnerable children, agriculture and support to vulnerable families, and striving to provide food security. Other issues it addresses are related to human trafficking and forced migration, including services to returnees, widows, and unemployed youth in hard-to-reach communities in Nigeria and abroad in solidarity and institutional development and capacity building.¹³

Caritas is part of COATNET - Christian Organisations against Trafficking in Human Beings Network - that works across borders, raising awareness on human trafficking and the importance of helping victims. COATNET fights the root causes of human trafficking, such as poverty and lack of opportunities, while advocating for laws to protect victims, punish perpetrators and ensure adequate working conditions.¹⁴ In this regard, Caritas Internationalis is responsible for coordinating COATNET.¹⁵

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Catholic Sisters in Nigeria provide shelter and care for trafficked women (children, youth, women) and work with people displaced by violence. The sisters are also involved in conflict resolution to alleviate inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions in Nigeria, collaborating with other NGOs to prevent transmittable diseases.¹⁶ Since 2015, their congregation has been collaborating with the Nigerian Conference of Women Religious.¹⁷

The Nigerian Conference of Women Religious (NCWR) is involved in the fight against human trafficking through various projects such as the National Renewal Centre (NRC), which offers seminars and workshops to trafficked persons to give them a new chance and help them to integrate; the Women's Dignity Support Committee which educates young people and warns them of the dangers abroad.¹⁸

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Louis, in collaboration with the Order of Malta, opened the "Bakhita Empowerment" Centre in Lagos to protect and rehabilitate young women, victims of prostitution and human trafficking, once they return to Nigeria. In this centre, the sisters provide assistance, counselling and vocational training to help trafficking survivors to reintegrate into society.^{19 20}

April 2023

¹² Caritas Nigeria

¹³ Caritas

¹⁴ Caritas, 2016

¹⁵ Caritas

¹⁶ Centre for Religion and Civic Culture University of Southern California, 2019

¹⁷ Cirello Thornsberry, 2020

¹⁸ Nigeria Conference of Women Religious

¹⁹ Sovereign Order of Malta, 2019

²⁰ Associated Press, 2015

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D. Endnotes

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