

# Morocco's Contribution to the Consolidation of Intra-African Migration: An Analysis through the Prism of Gabonese and Cameroonian Student Migration Flows in the City of Fez

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This article brings further light on the enhancement of intra-African migration, which hardly makes the subject of in-depth research, besides irregular migration to Europe. This study highlights Morocco's involvement in the consolidation of migratory processes of African students from the perspective of Africans Cameroonian and Gabonese students in the city of Fez. Semi-structured interviews revealed mixed opinions regarding their integration in the host country, both in the university environment and in their living place. The study finds that Fez is an ideal place to study even as one student community (Gabonese) benefits from all the facilities to the detriment of the other (Cameroonian), in relation to the agreements pre-established by their governments, which will lead to an imbalance in the integration relationship, and which gave rise to a comparison between the two student communities. This analysis led to questions about the involvement of the home states but also about the reactions of the host country to this policy of the Kingdom to attract more of the students to study in Fez. This study aligns with contemporary studies on international migration, constitutes a perspective for the expansion of legal migration channels and an invitation for the African Union to promote 'intra-African' migration.

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## INTRODUCTION

Morocco's return to the African Union (AU) in 2017 has redefined the face of African multilateralism. For long, the Kingdom remained in the background in the formulation of African policies, but it is now going to reappropriate African social life and participate naturally in its transformation and socio-economic development. As a result, Moroccan-African cooperation improved the Kingdom's political position on the continent (Barre 1996) and Morocco is now a major actor in African migration policy. Despite its low score in the African regional migration index on free movement,<sup>1</sup> Morocco participates massively in strengthening migration within the African continent. It is through the impulsion of His Majesty King Mohammed VI that the kingdom is assuming the responsibility of African leader on migration issues.<sup>2</sup> As Mr. Nasser Bourita said during the 35th ordinary session of the AU summit, three Africans out of four moves within African borders, to neighbouring countries, whereas only one African envisage going to Europe, where most of the debate on African migration takes place.<sup>3</sup> This confirms the density of intra-African migration (Tametong and Oyono 2022, 35).

Since 2000, the Moroccan government's policy for African students has welcomed about 15,000 students, including 7,000 scholarship holders, which aims to make Morocco an African regional hub for university studies (Dkhissi et al. 2012, 84). Morocco is consid-

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.integrate-africa.org/fr/classements/dimensions/libre-circulation-des-personnes/>.

<sup>2</sup> Upon its reintegration into the African Union in 2017, Morocco was designated as the spokesperson for migration issues in Africa, and the kingdom will officially present the African migration agenda at the 30th African Union summit in 2018.

<sup>3</sup> The Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Living Abroad, Mr. Nasser Bourita, represented the Sovereign of Morocco at the 35th Ordinary Session of the Summit of the Pan-African Organization and recalled the predominance of intra-African migration.



ered welcoming and has welcomes thousands of African students (Crétois 2020; Mahamadou Laouali and Meyer 2012), most of whom come from sub-Saharan Africa (Nzamba 2015). As Mr Chakib Mounsiif said in his remarks: 'Today, much more than before, Morocco is increasingly a preferred destination for students from sub-Saharan Africa'.<sup>4</sup> The report for the 2019–2020 academic year from the Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation and the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation (AMCI) estimates that there are 14,500 foreign students in Moroccan public higher education universities, including 12,500 students from 47 African countries.<sup>5</sup> It is difficult nowadays for this agency to provide the exact number of African students enrolled in private universities. Nevertheless, for the academic year 2020–2021, the Kingdom was not able to welcome new sub-Saharan students, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Created in 1986, AMCI encourages African mobility through studies in Morocco. Within this proportion of students, there is a very large number coming from Central Africa. Minister Younes Sekkouri visited this region on 17 and 18 November 2022,<sup>6</sup> with a priority given to Gabon and Cameroon, he declared: 'Review the excellent relations between the Moroccan people and these two countries. There exists a close academic cooperation between Morocco and Gabon<sup>7</sup> but also between Morocco and Cameroon.'<sup>8</sup> This is the reason why we are analysing the mi-

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Mr Chakib Mounsiif, advisor to the President of the Euromed University of Fez, in charge of communication and partnership with Africa, conducted on 13 February 2023.

<sup>5</sup> AMCI awards a number of Moroccan scholarships to international higher education students. In the 2019/2020 academic year, more than 12,000 international students have received scholarships from the Kingdom of Morocco through AMCI, and 85% of AMCI scholarship students are African.

<sup>6</sup> The Minister Younes Sekkouri in charge of economic inclusion, small business, employment and skills of Morocco toured Africa on 17, 18, and 19 November 2022 to deliver messages from the King of Morocco to the leaders of specific Central African countries such as Gabon, Cameroon and the DRC.

<sup>7</sup> Trade relations between Morocco and Gabon are governed by a trade agreement signed in Rabat on 6 November 1974.

<sup>8</sup> Morocco-Cameroon Trade Agreement signed in Marrakech on 15 April 1987.

[4] gratory flows of students to Morocco from these two countries belonging to the same geographical area. In the past, foreign students only attended Moroccan public universities on the basis of agreements and scholarship programmes, but Gabonese and Cameroonian students can now enrol in private universities. Moreover, beyond the academic framework, Morocco is currently the leading African investor in the Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States (CEMAC) (Fihri 2014).

As a result of this perceptible cooperation, the migration of Africans in general from south of the Sahara to Morocco remains marked by prejudices and preconceptions. In its foreign policy, for African countries, Morocco contributes significantly to the expansion of intra-African academic migration. This is characterised by a regional and continental movement of 'African students' to Africa, further strengthening and maintaining intra-African migration. African student immigration to Morocco brings a positive wind to the intra-African migration (Abourabi 2022; US Department of State 2022) The United Nations defines a long-term migrant as a person who leaves their country of origin to settle in another for a period of at least one year (Tarran 2017, 12). It is through this definition that it is important to characterise students coming from Gabon and Cameroon to Morocco, but also the analysis of this article is done through the term migratory flow which characterises the movement of people between the place of origin (Gabon and Cameroon) and the place of destination (Morocco-Fez) (De Hass and Frankema 2022, 13).

There are about 3000 Gabonese students in Morocco, representing the largest community of students in Sub-Saharan Africa. Meanwhile, the president of the Association of Cameroonian Students in Morocco (CASAM)<sup>9</sup> reports that there are approximately 300 Cameroonian students with scholarships, and 150 students in private universities in Morocco. To allow Cameroonian students to migrate, Morocco through the Ministry of Higher Education of

<sup>9</sup> Interview with the president of Cameroonian students' association in Morocco, December 2022.



Cameroon, has for years been launching a call for applications for scholarships. Gabon, for its part, has developed a strategy between the Gabonese National Scholarship Agency (ANBG) and smart Africa consulting for the supervision of scholarship students in Morocco. For the year 2022–2023, 50 Cameroonian students benefited from this intra-African academic cooperation; while for the neighbouring country there were 150 new scholarship holders. This inequality of figures also allowed to insist on the comparison of intra-African academic migration conventions that Morocco develops with each of these two neighbouring countries taken individually, which each have a different cooperation approach with the Cherifian kingdom.

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Very often concentrated and accustomed to the main Moroccan cities of Casablanca and Rabat, there are nowadays a large number of Gabonese and Cameroonian students in the spiritual and cultural city of Fez, regardless of whether they are scholarship holders or not. The choice of this city is therefore strategic, as were some researchers who studied the migration flows of sub-Saharan migrants in this area in the past (Ennaji et al. 2021, 2). In 2021, nearly 400 Gabonese students were counted in Fez according to the census sheet of the secretary of the Gabonese Union of Morocco (UGM)<sup>10</sup> and nearly 35 Cameroonian students, according to the representative of Cameroonian students in Fez.<sup>11</sup>

Although the scientific literature is not sufficiently referenced on the issue of African student immigration to Morocco (Berriane 2012, 2), it is considered a non-negligible part in the study of intra-African migration. It is not a question of aggregating irregular and regular migrants in Fez as in previous migration studies (Ennaji et al. 2021). This analysis provides a new perspective on student immigration in Morocco.

The aim is to renew the study of migration by focusing on neglected subjects, such as student migration, while formulating new

<sup>10</sup> Interview with the secretary of the Gabonese union, Fez section, in December 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with the president of the Cameroonian student's section in Fez in December 2022.

and original questions in relation to existing studies on African student migration. In addition, the objective is to highlight the major role of Morocco in the promotion of intra-continental migration.

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#### THEORETICAL APPROACH

It seems appropriate to adopt an endogenous African reflection on migration, with reference to the theory of the *démarginalisation*,<sup>12</sup> which is linked to the need to reflect African ideas (Pondi 2011) while mobilising the issue of intercultural difference (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1997; Lewis 2006) which will allow us to understand the social phenomena that link Cameroonian and Gabonese students in Morocco (Morrisette, Guignon, and Demazière 2011, 4). This will lead to the overcoming of national cultural specificities in order to integrate inter-cultural competence in the context of 'expatriation' (Wiseman and Koester 1993). This sociologically inspired study highlights the so-called universal values and the way in which the main actor (Morocco) and the protagonists benefiting from the policy (the Gabonese and Cameroonian students) behave with regard to the contrasting nature of the society (macrosocial level) and the interactions between the different nationalities (microsocial level) (Frame 2019). Very often, immigrant easily resists integration operated by the host society (Reitz 2002). The first step consists of highlighting the cultural differences and to see to what extent they can be managed. It is therefore a normative approach to interculturality, which will help to identify the affective, behavioural and cognitive qualities (Ang and Earley 2003) that will help students to become more 'effective' in international communication and management. At the same time, it will challenge the governance model of study migration, both at national and regional levels through the African Union. The starting point of this study is the observation that, most researchers focus mostly on irregular migration to

<sup>12</sup> *La démarginalisation* is a theory of international relations developed by Jean-Emmanuel Pondi in a book entitled *Repenser le développement à partir de l'Afrique* (2001); he notes the marginalization of African ideas, to ultimately find African solutions to African problems.



TABLE 1 Gender of Interviewed Cameroonian and Gabonese Students

Country	Male	Female	Total
Cameroon	9	2	11
Gabon	23	10	33

[7]

Europe (de Haas and Frankema 2022, 4) and the attempts to reconstruct the long-term models of African intra-continental migration remain inadequate (p. 8), neglecting the positive aspect of South-South African migration (Guillmoto and Sandron 2003; UNCTAD 2018). Previously, a large proportion of students from sub-Saharan Africa had a tendency to pursue their studies on the old continent, but this seems to have changed. Morocco's excellent academic performance in Africa attracts many students from sub-Saharan Africa. This study takes into account both political and sociological considerations.

#### METHODOLOGY

To achieve these results, we proceeded with a methodological triangulation, through an ethnographic approach that combined observatory sessions and forty open-ended questionnaires, addressed to both Cameroonian and Gabonese students. Thirty-three interviews were conducted with the Gabonese students as opposed to only eleven for Cameroonian students who were very reluctant and difficult to approach. Similarly, a series of 10 semi-structured interviews were administered; 5 to Gabonese students, 3 from private universities in Fez and 2 from the public university of Fez. We proceeded in the same way for Cameroonian students. In order to guarantee the anonymity of the interviewees, we preferred to use the gender variable in the form of a pie chart to represent the protagonists. These different interviews were conducted face-to-face in month of December 2022 and an online questionnaire was administered between December 2022 and January 2023. The overall aim is to mobilise a comparative method to analyse the different socio-political considerations and views of the actors involved in the study.

We also categorised the students interviewed according to whether

TABLE 2 Categorisation of Interviewed Cameroonian and Gabonese Students

Category	Cameroon	Gabon
Home country scholars	2	21
Home and host country scholars	4	1
Host country scholars	3	1
Non-scholarship holders	2	10
Total	11	33

[8]

they were scholarship holders or not, and used the life story approach with one Cameroonian and one Gabonese student.

It should be noted that students who had spent less than six months in Fez were not included in the questionnaire, even though they were asked for their opinion on their situation as new students. Finally, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the person in charge of development, communication and partnership in Africa at the Euromed University of Fez, the secretary general of the Gabonese Union of Morocco, Fez section, the national president of students and trainees in Morocco, and the representative of Cameroonian students, Fez section. These interviews took place from December 2022 to February 2023, in person and online. Despite a sometimes-difficult cultural adaptation, Gabonese and Cameroonian students in Morocco and a very pronounced presence of sub-Saharan Africans who have set foot on Moroccan soil in an uncontrolled manner, including few from Gabon, but several Cameroonians. The Kingdom, through its African policy, continues to play its role in intra-African academic cooperation and wishes to position itself as the main actor of the African ERASMUS.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike Gabonese students who benefit from a bilateral agreement<sup>14</sup> on free movement between Morocco and Gabon, Cameroonian students are obliged to obtain a visa before their arrival in Mo-

<sup>13</sup> Erasmus (European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) is a programme for the exchange of students and teachers between European universities, colleges and institutions worldwide. The programme is part of the European Higher Education Region. Implementing a similar programme in Africa remains difficult.

<sup>14</sup> Agreement on the abolition of visas for nationals of both countries (Gabon-Morocco) signed in September 2013 in Rabat.





rocco. It is therefore through the presence of students from these two neighbouring Central African countries that we analyse Morocco's contribution to the process of accentuating and effectively implementing intra-African migration. This study highlight on the implication of Morocco's attractiveness as a hub for intra-African neo-migration (1), and will be based on the dichotomy of migration paths between Gabonese and Cameroonian students in Morocco (2). This comparison will lead to the impact of intra-African migration from Morocco, perceived by Gabonese and Cameroonian students in the city of Fez (3), which will underline the need for the establishment of an extended intra-African student network in Africa, based on Morocco's academic exchanges with the countries of the continent (4).

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#### MOROCCO'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE RETHINKING OF INTRA-AFRICAN MIGRATION

The gap between migrating for studies in other parts of the world and African migration remains deep, and this gap must be bridged and caught up by increasingly conducting studies on intra-African migration (de Haas and Frankema 2022, 4). It is in this perspective that this study is placed in the continuity of interpretative approaches to intra-African migration, by analysing Morocco's participation in the realisation of African migration, under the prism of the migration of students from Gabon and Cameroon, and mainly to the city of Fez. Morocco has become in few years a reference for students from Francophone Africa, it has gradually switched from being a country of emigration to a country of destination (IOM 2017, 1; Alioua, Ferrié, and Reifeld 2017). The students are attracted to the fields like engineering, medicine, and more recently, artificial intelligence. The partnerships that some Moroccan schools have established with French and American schools, as well as the excellent rankings of Moroccan universities in Africa in terms of academic performance, further contribute to their interest in Morocco.<sup>15</sup> As King Mohammed VI emphasised in 2015, 'Morocco will always be a

<sup>15</sup> Euromed university of Fez attracts students from sub-saharan Africa with one of the training courses in digital engineering and artificial intelligence.

welcoming place for its guests who come there legally.’ It is within this framework of legality that our study is simply positioned, relating to the regulatory migration of the category of ‘students migrants’ as Johara Berriane call them, migrants among others (Berriane 2009). In order to be in line with international and regional migratory agreements, Morocco has put in place and strengthened existing legal frameworks on migration to facilitate the hosting of students from abroad, including Gabonese and Cameroonian students. It should be recalled that Morocco has long prioritised the aspect of bilateral relations in its foreign policy, especially for the period 1999–2015 (Harastani Madani 2020, 16). This aspect of cooperation was marked by the signing of a free movement agreement with Gabon, but not with Cameroon. Although the Kingdom of Morocco is not a signatory to African conventions on migration, such as the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence and the Right of Establishment, and is to date the only African country that is not a party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, it does make a significant contribution to maintaining and enhancing intra-African migration. The country continues to develop a set of internal regulations to direct and diversify the internal composition of migration, which constitutes its migration policy (de Haas and Vezzoli 2011; Czaika and de Hass 2013). It also relies on Law No. 02-03 (on the entry and stay of foreigners, irregular emigration and immigration) (BORM No. 5162, 11/11/2003), as well as the 2013 migration policy, which regularised a good number of irregular migrants, among whom were former students. According to the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, the presence of foreign students in Morocco is guaranteed by the Kingdom’s Constitution, the Royal High Guidelines, the Framework Law No. 51.17 relative to the system of education, teaching, training and scientific research, the Government Programme 2016–2021 as well as the Ministry’s Action Plan for the years 2017–2022. In terms of access to public education at the university level, migrants with a residence permit have the same status as Moroccan citizens (IOM 2019). Today, the mobility of African students is increasing in Morocco (Marichalar, Piron, and Tétard 2022), Gabonese and Cameroo-



nian students are boosting the number of foreign students in Morocco every year. In Morocco, the increase in mobility of students is particularly strong for those coming from Gabon (Marichalar, Piron, and Tétard 2022, 14).

So far, they have not been granted any official scientific literature, although their presence in Morocco is not insignificant. The city of Fez is currently the third largest university city in the Kingdom with nearly 15 higher education institutions offering approximately 230 study programmes. This diversity of programmes attracts Cameroonian and Gabonese students, especially in the private sector, as the public university Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah only accepts students with scholarships, and the number of places is very often mentioned. Morocco, unlike other countries of the continent, integrates African students as a non-negligible variant in the accentuation and promotion of intra-African migration of the continent. This is a way of adding positivity to the speech on African migration that remains tainted by Eurocentric perceptions (Mvogo 2022). In this spirit and to further attract Cameroonian and Gabonese students to study in Morocco and especially in the city of Fez, private higher educational institutions are travelling to these central African countries, and to present their schools, but also the main programs and the numerous advantages of studying in the cultural city of Fez. For example, the Euromed University of Fez and the private university of Fez, never miss an opportunity to make themselves known, whether in Gabon or Cameroon, during study salons organised by France (SEF). 'I got to know the Euromed University of Fez after the announcement of the Baccalaureate results, during a study salon in Libreville in 2021,' says a young Gabonese student, now in his second year of political science in the named institution. In addition, the Kingdom of Morocco enjoys a certain political and economic stability, and the city of Fez in particular is known for its cultural attractiveness and its calm to study in all serenity. 'A friend with whom i was in contact praised the city of Fez both for its sustainable environment for studies and that before the fact that it is difficult to be distracted' says another young Gabonese student. Fez has the merit of being a university city that contributes to the blos-

[11]

[12] soming of both Gabonese and Cameroonian students, but also of other sub-Saharan African student communities. It is therefore a more or less advanced contribution to the intensification of intra-African migration from these two categories of student nationalities to Fez that Morocco has included in the objectives to be achieved by the African Union, confirming the need to take advantage of intra-African migration (Union africaine 2017). Fez participates in the diversification of the presence of students in Morocco and allows for a mosaic of students from sub-Saharan Africa where we find Gabonese, Cameroonians, Senegalese, but also Malians (Nian-dou 2016). Even though it is true that Morocco, through the diversification and spread of foreign students from Black Africa on its territory, participates to the growth of South-South migration, there is sometimes a difference in the modes of arrival, treatment and integration in the host city for these students from Central Africa. The following paragraphs provide an insight into the sociological characteristics of Gabonese and Cameroonian student-migrants.

#### DICHOTOMOUS MIGRATORY PATHWAY BETWEEN GABONESE AND CAMEROONIAN STUDENTS

The city of Fez has become in some few years a coveted space for students coming from Gabon, as well as those coming from Cameroon. Their presence can be explained by the new changes in the Moroccan higher education and the diversification of programs offered, as well as the numerous advantages of studying in Morocco (Nian-dou 2015). But what is striking is that unlike Cameroonian students, who are few in number in the private universities of Fez, Gabonese students form a very large community within these private universities. The Euromed University of Fez has about 200 Gabonese students, which constitutes the largest community of sub-Saharan African students in the school, followed by Senegalese and Ivorians. In the same school in 2018, there was only one Cameroonian, this figure has changed significantly in 2021 with the arrival of four new PhD students, and in 2023 there are about 9 Cameroonian students at the Euromed University of Fez. The other Cameroonian students are concentrated in the main public university of the city, Sidi Mohamed ben Abdellah. How this disparity in figures can be understood,



when Morocco is resolutely committed to welcoming foreign students, mainly those from the same continent.

*The Intra-Africanity of Academic Links between Gabon and Morocco*

[13]

The continuous increase in the number of Gabonese students in Morocco in general and in Fez in particular is due first of all to the historical and secular links that exist between the two nations, as well as from the special and privileged cooperation existing between Gabon and Morocco. These Gabonese students benefit from the free movement agreement signed between the two countries (\*\*Bill No. 17-14), which provide a free entry into the Moroccan territory for a period of 90 days before taking the decision to settle in Morocco (Nguema 2015). This facilitates their immigration to the Kingdom, unlike Cameroonian students, who fall under the Moroccan category of facilitating entry, stay and establishment (Nguema 2015). Moreover, the concretisation of these friendly relations will be operationalized with the increase of Moroccan scholarships offered to Gabonese students from 130 in 2016 to 150 since 2020. This makes Morocco the first destination for Gabonese students ('Le Maroc est la première destination des étudiants gabonais' 2020). In addition, the higher education institutes of the city of Fez travel to recruit Gabonese students, and present all the diversity of existing programs, and the advantages of settling in Fez. There is therefore a partnership between ANBG, Smart Africa, and the universities of Fez, which facilitates their arrival in Morocco. This is why these Gabonese students of Fez, of Euromed University, of the private university of Fez or SUP 'Management of Fez benefit from a certain flexibility in terms of administrative procedures and registration.

*The Proportion of Intra-African Migration of Cameroonian Students in Fez*

It should be noted that, Cameroonian students in Fez are part of the representative minority of sub-Saharan African student communities settled in this city. Indeed, Morocco and Cameroon do not have an agreement on the freedom of movement for their citizens, despite the excellent diplomatic relations existing between the two

[14] countries since 1965. Even from a multilateral point of view, the two countries are not signatories to the African protocol on free movement, signed by Gabon but not ratified. As a result, Cameroonian students, unlike Gabonese students, sometimes face long procedures, which goes beyond their expected date of arrival in Morocco, while others arrive months after the start of the academic year. For Cameroonian students interviewed in Fez, those in the public universities, who receive scholarships from both the Cameroonian government and AMCI, benefit from some of the same administrative and registration facilities as their Gabonese classmates. In previous years, for student from private university, he was asked by the embassy to provide the homologation recognising of his school by the Kingdom of Morocco.<sup>16</sup> This delayed his arrival in Morocco, and several other students were in the same situation.

PERCEPTION OF THE GABONESE  
AND CAMEROONIAN STUDENT PRESENCE  
IN THE CITY OF FEZ

It is worth mentioning, after the involvement of the state actors in the smooth running and conduct of intra-African migration, particularly that which concerns academic migration, the effects on the main recipients of this student migration policy. It is necessary to recipients impression of Gabonese and Cameroonian students in Fez and to question the system of reactions of both the country of origin and the host country in which these international students are immersed, in order to bring out the meanings that foreign students attribute to their surrounding environment.

*Socio-Cultural Interactions of Gabonese and Cameroonian  
Students in the City of Fez: The Point of View of the Beneficiaries  
of the Intra-African Migration Policy*

Far from their land of origin, these Central African students sometimes suffer from what can be described as homesickness. How-

<sup>16</sup> Interview with a former Cameroonian student of the Euromed University of Fez, January 2023.



TABLE 3 Response of Cameroonian and Gabonese Students in Fez on the Involvement of Their Universities in Their Socio-Cultural Development

Country	Yes	No
Cameroon ( <i>n</i> = 11)	45.5	54.5
Gabon ( <i>n</i> = 33)	72.7	27.3

[15]

NOTES In percent.

ever, what we found through the interviews is the continuity of cultural exchanges between these students both in Fez and in their country of origin. Most of them still feel linked to their homeland through the presence of associations regrouping their community of origin. This is why Morocco remains open to sharing and discovering other cultures, to facilitate the integration of these Cameroonian and Gabonese students, but also for all other international student communities. ‘At the beginning, I was a bit lost, I didn’t find myself at all, but as time went by, I managed to get used to it and above all I discovered a new culture,’ says a Gabonese student. Cameroonian students in Fez meet at least once a month to share memories of their country through their main association (CASAM) and organise a so-called integration day when new students arrive in the city, as does the Gabonese student community. 63.6% of the Gabonese students interviewed reassured us that their current universities participate a lot in the propagation and promotion of their culture by ‘organising meetings with other students, where we often have rather rich conversations during which each one promotes his mother country,’<sup>17</sup> but also by ‘exchanges, of ethnic performances during certain activities.’<sup>18</sup> On the Cameroonian side, opinions on the propagation of their culture were mixed, as 54.5% of Cameroonian students interviewed said that their current universities support them in promoting their culture, compared to 45.5% who said the opposite.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with a former Gabonese Supmanagment student, January 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with a former Cameroonian student of the Euromed University of Fez, January 2023.

[16] These students give different meanings to the social environment around them. However, the living quarters of these students are very often located not far from the universities they attend. For those in the universities of the new city,<sup>19</sup> including the public university, they have chosen to live in the Atlas district, for those who sometimes do not want to live in the university residences. It was found that most of the students interviewed prefer to live with their compatriots. A minority have national students as roommates. Even if everything is done so that ‘the student does not feel out of place,’ as Mr Monsif reminded us, it is still true that they encounter difficulties in their social development. But these difficulties often come from the environment in which the student lives, or even just the difficulty of adapting to the climate, because both the Cameroonian and the Gabonese students are familiar with an equatorial climate, as this Gabonese student explained: ‘We have difficulty adapting to seasonal variations, as Africans from below the Sahara region.’ Although 36%<sup>20</sup> of the Moroccan population is currently French-speaking, most of the students interviewed reported difficulties in understanding the territory’s main language. Even though there are centres in the university dedicated to learn the local language, the space of study does not allow students to attend these courses regularly. Intra-African migration from the academic perspective of Gabonese and Cameroonian students must include the authorities of the countries of origin of these students. However, when asked about the implication of the home countries’ officials in the resolution of the difficulties encountered in the host country, on both sides it has appeared from both sides that given that Morocco makes great effort for an effective integration of foreign students, the countries of origin facilitate the arrival of Cameroonian and Gabonese scholars in Morocco. Both categories of students do not really feel the implication of their countries of origin. As demonstrated in table 4, when asked whether Gabonese and Cameroonian students in the

<sup>19</sup> The new city is the name given to the new constructions of the city of Fez, very different from the old city.

<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.francophonie.org/maroc-974>.





TABLE 4 Response of Cameroonian and Gabonese Students in Fez on the Involvement of Their Country of Origin in Solving Their Difficulties

Country	Yes	No	Sometimes	Sometimes
Cameroon ( <i>n</i> = 11)	9.1	72.7	9.1	9.1
Gabon ( <i>n</i> = 33)	18.2	48.5	27.3	5.4

[17]

NOTES In percent.

city of Fez feel that their country of origin is involved in solving their difficulties, especially regarding administrative matters, the two categories of students are not quite favorable to this question.

This is typical, considering that students are apparently not accountable to their home countries, but students on scholarship in their country of origin face difficulties, especially with regard to the payment of their scholarships. An observation made in November 2022, revealed that Gabonese students in Morocco in general and those in the city of Fez in particular have complained about the delay in the payment of their scholarships, creating a petition to claim their right.<sup>21</sup> Some of the students interviewed spoke of their feeling of abandonment by their home countries. A similar situation concerning Cameroonian students in Morocco happened in 2020. When interviewed in 2017, the head of the diplomatic corps in Morocco, the Cameroonian ambassador to the Kingdom of Morocco, said: 'We are trying to solve their problems within the limits of our means' ('Etudes au Maroc' 2017) The month of January 2023 marked another significant cultural links between Morocco and Cameroon. The king of a Cameroonian community called 'Bamoun' was invited to the international conference of the academy of the Kingdom of Morocco,<sup>22</sup> scheduled to take place in Rabat, he was keen to visit the

<sup>21</sup> See [https://www.thepetitionsite.com/en-gb/379/905/507/obtenir-le-paiement-imm%C3%A9diat-des-bourses-qui-nont-pas-%C3%A9t%C3%A9-pay%C3%A9s-depuis-4-mois-pour-tous/?taf\\_id=71809188&cid=fb\\_na](https://www.thepetitionsite.com/en-gb/379/905/507/obtenir-le-paiement-imm%C3%A9diat-des-bourses-qui-nont-pas-%C3%A9t%C3%A9-pay%C3%A9s-depuis-4-mois-pour-tous/?taf_id=71809188&cid=fb_na).

<sup>22</sup> The Royal Academy of Morocco organised an international colloquium from 18 to 20 January 2023 under the theme: 'The invention of writing and the state of the narrative in African languages' and the Sultan King of Bamoun, SM Nabil Mbombo Njoya of Cameroon, was the guest of honour at this prestigious event.

[18] spiritual city of the Kingdom and was welcomed by the Cameroonian student community of Fez, proudly showing a part of the Cameroonian culture to the citizens of Fez who were present, and to some of their Moroccan classmates who assisted. But the relationship with the city of Fez is completely different in the diplomatic context. The Gabonese ambassador of Gabon to the Kingdom of Morocco visited the Euro-Mediterranean University of Fez in January 2021, and was very proud of the quality of education that Gabonese students receive. This university has recently been reflecting the ‘intra-African’ cooperation between Morocco and Gabon. These consolidating elements of intra-African migration allow us to understand the link between studies and culture, especially in an effect of disparity that will bring the community of origin and the host community closer together. Since moving can cause a clash of civilisations (Huntington 1996). In this case, what does the host community do?

*The Moroccan Response System for the Effective Integration of Gabonese and Cameroonian Students in the City of Fez*

In recent years, migration pathways have shifted to people’s strategies to achieve their ambitions in a context of disparity or variance (de Haas and Frankema 2022, 12). Most newly arrived students in Fez project themselves in this perspective. They have to rely on the commitment of the local authorities to facilitate their arrival, their establishment and their integration, so that they can eventually have professional goals in Morocco. The proportion of students interviewed who had completed their studies expressed the fact that it was difficult to find a job in the city of Fez and that they wished to move to other Moroccan cities. With regard to this, the advisor to the president of the Euromed University of Fez mentioned that ‘progressively, mechanisms are being put in place for the socio-professional and socio-economic development of international students,’ which is currently marked by the creation of start-ups and companies by former foreign students in Morocco. The motivations for departures not clearly stated, it sometimes happens that these international students have doubts about their post-study period in Morocco. The purpose of intra-African migration should be benefi-



TABLE 5 Response of Cameroonian and Gabonese Students in Fez on Their Professional Goals in Morocco

Country	Yes	No	Maybe
Cameroon ( <i>n</i> = 11)	9.1	36.4	54.5
Gabon ( <i>n</i> = 33)	15.2	45.5	39.4

[19]

NOTES In percent.

cial to both the host country and the home countries. But in the context of an African country, can we talk about brain drain? Not really, because it is considered a win-win act, by staying in Morocco, they participate in the economic development and the socio-economic development of their family from a distance. Moreover, they develop SME economic activities in their countries of origin. As far as these scholars from the two Central African countries covered by this study decide to live in Morocco for their social and professional well-being. This is probably due to the positive working environment. When asked whether these students had professional goals in Morocco, here are the responses gathered from the Cameroonian and the Gabonese side (table 5).

By looking more closely at the facilitation of the arrival of Gabonese students in Fez, a lot of work is conducted from the country of origin, particularly through the participation of public higher schools in the study salons. Out of three Moroccan schools present in these study salons, two are from the city of Fez, among which the Euromed University of Fez. According to Mr. Chakib Mounsiif, the Gabonese students of this university form the largest community of foreign students, divided between the first and second cycles. And these students benefit from their government's policy of sponsorship of their studies, and the partnership established between the two entities, namely ANBG and the Euromed University of Fez, which allows students to benefit from both free accommodations within the university, as well as preferential rates. And he underlined that 'the majority of Gabonese students met during these study salons opt for the UEMF (Euro-Mediterranean University of Fez) as their first choice.' It is a very different migratory pathway for Cameroonian students. Most of them are enrolled in the main pub-

TABLE 6 Elements That Encouraged Cameroonian and Gabonese Students to Study in the City of Fez

Element	Cameroon		Gabon	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
[20] Smart Africa	–	–	3	9.1
Internet	1	9.1	2	6.1
Study education fair	0	0.0	6	18.2
Home country scholarship program	3	28.3	8	24.2
Home country government	3	28.3	4	12.1
Friends	2	18.2	5	15.2
Family	2	18.2	5	15.2

lic university of Fez, as they benefit from the scholarship agreement between the AMCI and the Cameroonian government, and the city of Fez is imposed on them by the territorial distribution provided for scholarship holders on their arrival in Morocco, as the table 6 shows.

Cameroonian students who come to study in Morocco prefer big cities like Casablanca and Rabat, while most of those who are in Fez are there because of their governments of origin. The Euromed University of Fez has only eleven Cameroonian students currently enrolled in undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate programs. The four PhD students encountered benefit from the Moroccan Scholarships for African Youth (MSFAY) academic program launched in 2021 by the King of Morocco to truly expand Moroccan intra-African academic diplomacy. However, the advisor to the president of UEMF reported that he has received nearly 4000 applications from Cameroonian baccalaureate students for the 2022–2023 academic year, but they did not complete the registration process because they thought they could benefit from the scholarships. In reality, there is not yet a cooperation agreement between Cameroon and the UEMF, knowing that this country has a lot of potential and that the diversity of programs offered by this school could be to the advantage of these future Cameroonian students in Fez. The socio-cultural development of Gabonese and Cameroonian students is strongly encouraged in their respective universities as mentioned



above. As an illustration, the creation of clubs within the university institutes such as the Afro dance club of the UEMF managed by a Gabonese student who 'finds a way to promote and teach others the dance steps and music of her country.'<sup>23</sup> Moreover, this university is the very symbol of interculturalism with the presence of around forty nationalities coming from all over the world, as this Gabonese student so clearly stated, 'I in my class, I meet students from different origins, which means that by being in Morocco, I communicate with other continents.'<sup>24</sup> [21]

The university in Fez is also at the heart of the integration of the Gabonese students, and for two years consecutively, the UEMF has held an integration day for the Gabonese student community. It is therefore clearly the Moroccan soft power (Iraqi 2019), which could also give a whole new look to African migration on the continent and inspire the necessity to establish a global student migration policy for all African countries.

TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN EXTENDED  
'INTRA-AFRICADEMIC' NETWORK FROM MOROCCO

Following the example of Morocco, and its specific city of Fez, which welcomes Gabonese and Cameroonian students, but also a number of other African students, other countries should more or less copy this model of migratory cooperation. The kingdom does not restrain from conveying a welcoming image towards other African countries, through the implementation of African cooperation policies such as the one concerning the academic aspect (Abourabi 2022, 18). This tends to legitimate the presence of these foreign students on the Moroccan territory (Abourabi 2022). In fact, there is no regulatory text on students' migration in the world and in Africa. It is possible in some countries that these students are not included in the category of migrants (Tarran 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Interview with a Gabonese student at the Euromed University in Fez, January 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with a Gabonese student from the Euromed University in Fez, January 2023.

[22] Nevertheless, this is an area of regular African migration that has received little attention but has positive effects for the home and the host countries. The specific case of Gabonese and Cameroonian students living in the city of Fez has made it possible to identify the need to copy models of South-South cooperation, to integrate them into the process of African regional integration, or to reshape this cooperation, this time taking into account sociological considerations. The model of cooperation based on studies that unites Morocco with Cameroon and Gabon through AMCI and any other participating body such as the ANGB, should be able to inspire the African Union to rely more on the promotion of study-based migration policies. This will facilitate part of the free movement of people in Africa. In addition, it could be a corridor for intra-African trade.

The city of Fez could inspire more than one African city to adopt the same approaches to attract students from Africa. There is in fact a need to diversify the establishment of foreign students in a country, and this is the case in Morocco. Most of the students interviewed had never heard of this city before their arrival, and they also noted that after their arrival the positive advantages of studying in Fez, the ideal setting for their studies, and the university infrastructure, which is similar to that of the major occidental universities, were evident. Sub-Saharan African students living in other cities in Morocco said that students in Fez are very studious. Even if in comparison to Gabonese students in Fez, the penetration ratio of Cameroonian students in the same city remains low, one should not neglect the contribution they have to the participation of student activities in Fez. But much remains to be done as in the past when there was a significant number of Cameroonian students in Fez, as indicated by Mr. Mounsif, also former president of the High School of Commerce (HEC) of Cameroon, which had to close. The positive factors linked to the installation of Gabonese and Cameroonian students in Fez must be part of the African co-development initiative. The students trained are a potential workforce for the future. Very often the country of origin relies on the expertise that the student would have acquired for the development of the country. But



very often Morocco offers opportunities for these students at the end of their studies, this is why some of the students in the survey above gave a mixed response for their professional settlements, as they sometimes have positive testimonies from former students who have successfully settled in Morocco. Although it sometimes happens that some of them find themselves in irregular situations at the end of their studies, not being able to renew their visa. The African Union should certainly, like Morocco, establish a framework for the promotion of 'intra-African' migration, which would allow these young Africans to share the experiences of other countries and to become aware of the immense potential that can be found in another city other than the capital of the country they are studying in, in order to pursue their international studies, in an African context.

[23]

#### CONCLUSION

Morocco, through the presence of Gabonese and Cameroonian students in the city of Fez, contributes to the intensification of intra-African migration. This study is a contribution to fill an important gap in the study of international migration, particularly that related to the African continent. Moreover, it has highlight on the biased perceptions of cooperation between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Migration for Studies plays an important role in consolidating this relationship, and Morocco relies more on its political stability to attract more students from Africa, particularly those from Gabon and Cameroon. The city of Fez, with its spiritual and cultural side, no longer attracts only tourists, but also students. The different sociological experiences of the Gabonese and Cameroonian students have made it possible to highlight the pathways of their journey, from departure, to arrival, through settling and integration. The universities of the city of Fez also play a significant role in the social and academic development of these students, as well as the community associations. This view of African migration should stimulate an initiative of the continental organisation to expand and promote 'intra-African' migration. Already the creation of legal migration for studies, by facilitating visa procedures, because there is reason to

[24] note the disparity between a Gabonese and Cameroonian student. Cooperation in academic exchanges should not only concern the movement of students from sub-Saharan Africa to Morocco, but in both directions. Currently, Morocco in its African foreign policy encourages African nationals to settle in Morocco as part of a 'win-win' cooperation, such as the Fez smart factory (FSF) initiative, hosted at the UEMF, which encourages young foreigners, especially Africans, to create innovative businesses. Just as it encourages its nationals to go and invest and get to know sub-Saharan Africa. Despite the difficulties encountered by these students, most of them are satisfied with the study programs in the various universities of the city of Fez. Could Cameroon not be inspired by Gabon's academic policy of supporting its students by offering them scholarships in private universities in Morocco? And also while waiting for the effective implementation of the protocol on free movement in Africa, to sign a bilateral agreement to facilitate the entry of Cameroonian students in Morocco, and finally, the possibility of establishing a triangular cooperation between the three countries in the academic field.

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## Morocco's Contribution to the Consolidation of Intra-African Migration

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