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## **Western African Student Migration: A Response to the Globalisation of Knowledge**

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## Western African Student Migration: A Response to the Globalisation of Knowledge

- 1 Images of shipwrecked migrants off the small Italian island of Lampedusa were broadcast all over the world in October 2013. Apart from their direct emotional impact, these images also reinforced the prevailing narrative maintained by the media and politicians: that of an African continent mired in poverty, instability, and armed conflict. This narrative, reflected in the comments of observers who were both fascinated and horrified by the unfolding drama, has become deeply ingrained in the minds of Europeans. From the perspective of those living north of the Mediterranean, these migrants must be utterly desperate to embark on such a perilous journey, which only a few daring reporters are willing to share.
- 2 While more and more resources are being directed towards curbing apparently poverty-driven migration, European countries are vying with one another for the best brains to tackle the problems of an ageing population and the future needs of a globalised labour market. This strategy includes, or even hinges upon, attracting the world's best researchers to the European Higher Education Area. However, it largely disregards Africa, despite close geographic and economic ties, and the continent's young population, markedly increasing school attendance rates, and similar education systems, which are largely modelled on those of former colonial powers. The European Union's mobility partnerships — or 'migration partnerships' as they are referred to in Switzerland — are more concerned with matters of return and cooperation in the countries of the South than they are with developing educational or employment prospects for young people from 'partner countries'. When decision-makers mention shortages of qualified workers in IT, engineering, or even health care, their gaze usually turns to Asia or North America as potential sources of skilled workers.
- 3 Grants and other programmes facilitating mobility in globalised higher education are mostly directed at the major emerging countries, which present significant economic growth prospects. African student mobility, in contrast, is mostly associated with poverty-driven migration. Student migration to former colonial countries, and later to North America, has nevertheless been commonplace ever since African nations gained their independence. Many of the parents and teachers of today's African students were educated in Britain, France, Germany, or Switzerland. The available data from some African countries show that university students are more likely to emigrate on a temporary basis than their less well-educated compatriots. Even prior to the introduction of the Bologna process in Europe, and subsequently in Africa, international mobility ratios<sup>1</sup> for African students were among the highest in the world. And yet, this group remains one of the least studied categories of migrants (Piguet, 2013b).
- 4 Given the above, it would be interesting to know how young university students from sub-Saharan Africa feel about mobility issues and how they view their futures in terms of education and employment. These questions are at the heart of a study conducted among several thousand students in West Africa on behalf of the Swiss Network for International Studies (SNIS). The main aim of the study was to understand how the migration option — whether temporary or long-term — forms part of the life plan of individuals and families and how those wishing to emigrate differ from those who do not intend to leave their own countries. In order to achieve this objective, the following research questions were addressed:
  - Which socio-demographic, economic, biographical, and geographical factors play a role in students' aspirations to migrate? What factors discourage mobility?
  - What is the geographical distribution of the destinations considered? What reasoning can be derived from this geographical distribution?

- More generally, what lessons may be retained for development, education, and migration policies in both the South and the North?

5 The question of why people choose to migrate and how they migrate has been of concern to social scientists for over a century. The determinant factors include geography, psychology, economics, sociology, anthropology, and demographics. As Babacar Ndione explains (2007, 326),

It is now acknowledged that a prospective migrant's willingness and ability to migrate abroad depend on their personality and socioeconomic trajectory, their domestic and community environment, the flows of information to which they are exposed, migration networks and the political and economic context of the receiving country.

6 In the present study, we focus on the initial stages of migration, namely the forming of an intention to migrate and the initial steps that follow. Our hypotheses are based on a pluralist model that aggregates migration flows at the macro level and considers decision-making theories centred on the immediate surroundings and motivations of individuals (Piguet, 2013a).

7 Our system of hypotheses was partly inspired by the work of Gordon De Jong (2000), who analysed the determinant factors of decisions for or against migration, as well as the factors allowing migration to take place. De Jong highlighted five significant factors that came out of the literature: (1) transnational networks, (2) values and concrete expectations of migration, (3) family norms, (4) gender roles, and (5) satisfaction with living conditions. Also taken into account were direct opportunities and constraints, which are viewed as facilitating or discouraging factors rather than catalysts per se: financial means, prior experience of migration, professional contacts, etc. In order to complete and adapt this list to the specific situation of students, we have identified the following groups of determinant factors, which combine three analytical dimensions relating to students' individual situations, social dynamics (e.g. the role of families), and the political and sociocultural contexts of the countries concerned:<sup>2</sup>

1. Educational context (discipline studied, level of attainment, satisfaction, etc.).
2. Social, demographic, and psychological factors (gender, age, childhood home).
3. Family context (civil status, siblings, family background).
4. Transnational networks and connections (friends and family abroad, experience of migration).
5. Social and cultural context (country, religion, ethnic group).
6. Political context (perception of institutions, gender equality).
7. Economic and material factors (resources, confidence in economic prospects).
8. Quality of life (housing, environment, health-care system).

8 It goes without saying that these dimensions must be considered as interacting with one another, rather than being mutually exclusive.

9 This study is mainly interested in students' intentions, aspirations, and motivations in their decisions on whether to stay or go. It also takes into account the preliminary steps taken towards the implementation of migration plans, such as information gathering. It has not sought to establish, however, whether the person actually migrated at a later time. Here, the intention to migrate is considered separately from the act of doing so, which depends on specific opportunities to put plans into action and, especially in the case of young students, on the family's decision to support an individual's plans. However, several research studies show, as far as migration is concerned, that people's intentions and actions are frequently linked and respond to similar explanatory factors (Lu, 1999; Dalen et al., 2005).

10 The research plan was based on both a quantitative and qualitative approach to students from three West African universities, in Côte d'Ivoire (Abidjan), Niger (Niamey), and Senegal (Saint-Louis). These three contexts, despite differences between the countries, have many points in common. The research consisted of three successive empirical stages:

- A series of exploratory, semi-structured interviews with students and specialists in the three cities. This enabled an almost identical semi-standardised questionnaire to be developed for all three case studies.
- A questionnaire survey among more than 4,000 students. Respondents were selected on a random basis from various faculties on the three campuses.
- Around 50 semi-structured follow-up interviews with students to elaborate on specific survey results.

11 The exploratory interviews were thematic (attitudes to migration, local opportunities and alternatives, knowledge of various destinations, etc.), methodological (expected progression of survey), and organisational (local partners, authorisations, selection of locations, etc.). These questions were discussed with 18 experts — researchers, university staff, and representatives of the relevant authorities, NGOs, and international organisations — and with 29 students. Conducted by Swiss and/or local staff from October to December 2008, these interviews also shed light on the situation of each university and on the numbers of people who were studying there or who had emigrated, as well as on the characteristics of students. A series of exchange workshops and on-site work assignments allowed a common approach to be developed while taking specific local factors into account.

12 The quantitative data were gathered between 20 April and 15 May 2009, in direct collaboration between the project managers at the universities of Neuchâtel and Lausanne (Switzerland) and the research teams at the three West African universities. Despite a number of setbacks including a strike at Gaston Berger University, Saint-Louis, all the surveys were carried out in favourable conditions and drew considerable interest from respondents. This undoubtedly helped to increase the reliability of responses. There were relatively few refusals to participate — the response rate was 90 per cent in Niger and Senegal, and 47 per cent in Côte d’Ivoire.<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking, the profile of students who responded to the questionnaire matched that of the student population as a whole in terms of age, gender, and faculties or branches of study, etc.<sup>4</sup> In Saint-Louis, a small minority of students expressed concern regarding the anonymity of the results, but the follow-up interviews and discussions with students show that, on the whole, they had responded sincerely and the results were highly reliable.

13 The results were taken from a total of 4,106 valid questionnaires.<sup>5</sup> In order to gauge the individual impact of the various explanatory factors identified in our system of hypotheses, we used logistic regressions to explain a binary variable, ‘migration intention’, which is defined below. This is a multivariate analysis because it simultaneously considers all potential explanatory variables. For example, it allows us to determine, *ceteris paribus* (i.e. same gender, same age, etc.), whether people who judge their financial means to be insufficient express a stronger intention to leave their country. It also allows us to determine the extent to which financial considerations play a role in shaping migration intention.<sup>6</sup>

14 Once questionnaire responses had been fully analysed, a total of 47 follow-up interviews were held with students of various disciplines to discuss the results. Conducted between February and July 2010, this third stage of the study allowed the quantitative results to be elaborated further and helped to clarify uncertainties. Although carried out slightly differently in each context, the interviews mainly focussed on interpreting and verifying the available data with the help of students who were already far advanced in their studies in various disciplines and who were familiar with the situation at the university.

15 In the following paragraphs, we will briefly set out the contexts of the universities in the three countries studied (2). We will then cover the indicators used to analyse migration intentions and the main relevant results (3). The various explanatory factors behind these intentions and the choice of destinations will be discussed after this (4) before giving an assessment of the policy implications of our findings (5).

16 Although this research consists of three case studies, the aim is not to compare the countries concerned to each other. Most of the analysis relating to individual decision-making processes and attitudes towards migration apply to all those interviewed. However, specific features of the university settings in the three countries should be noted to better understand the situations and university careers of the students.

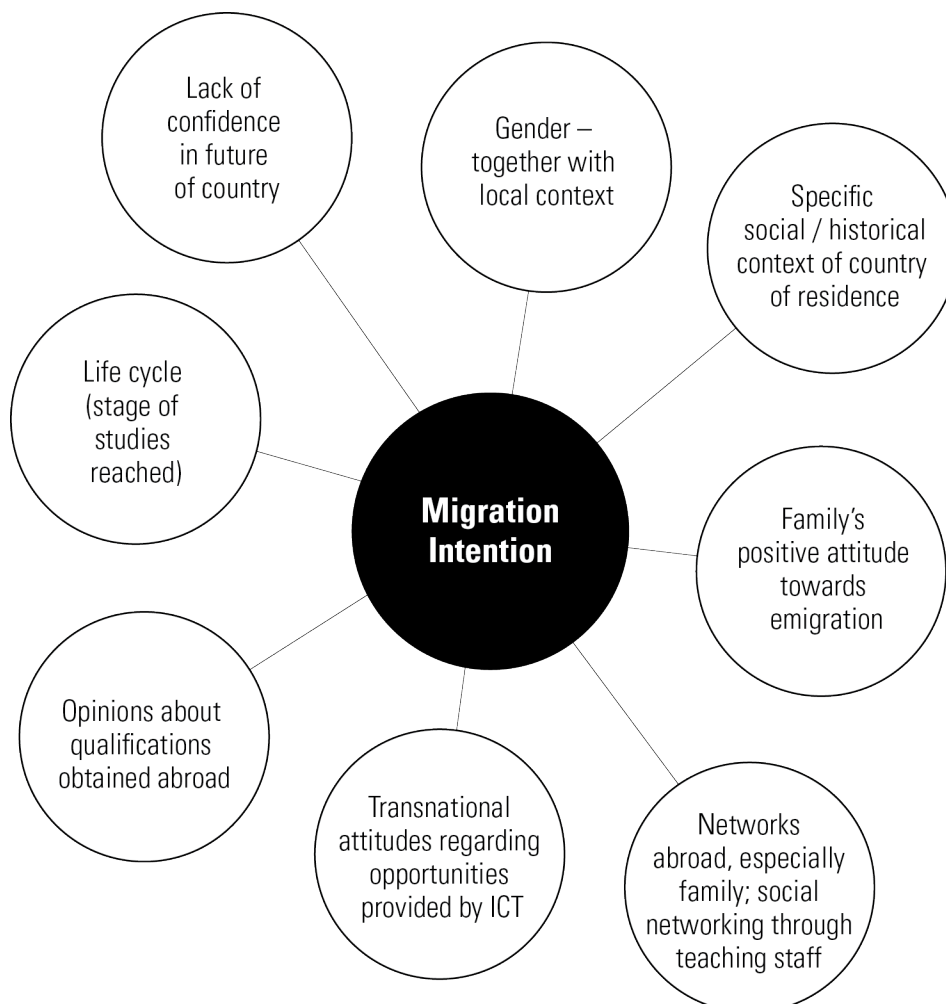
- 17 With around 54,000 students, the Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny (formerly the University of Cocody-Abidjan) is by far the largest of the three universities. Its student numbers have steadily increased, which presents challenges in terms of infrastructure and quality of teaching. Many students perceive it to be the ‘university for the poor’, since there are several private universities in Côte d’Ivoire that attract students who are able to pay their high registration fees. Foreigners and inhabitants of the north of the country are underrepresented in the student body for both political and economic reasons. It should also be noted that the deterioration in the political and economic situation in Côte d’Ivoire from 2002 onwards had repercussions in the university sector. University dormitories are full, which obliges many students to live in other parts of Abidjan. Only a small minority of those who enrol receive a state grant and when the survey was conducted fewer than half the students interviewed (44 per cent) said they were satisfied with the quality of teaching (compared with around 66 per cent in Niger and Senegal).
- 18 In Niger, few disciplines are taught in private universities, and Abdou Moumouni University in Niamey is the only public university in the country. It has 10,000 students, and enjoys a good reputation. Around a quarter of these students receive grants. Like in Abidjan, university accommodation is completely full, which forces some students to live on the outskirts of Niamey. Ranked as the world’s poorest country in the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Niger has the lowest higher education attendance rates for the continent after Malawi (Findlay et al., 2012; Mounkaila et al., 2009). Unlike at the two other universities considered in this study, it is not possible to obtain a PhD or doctorate in Niger for most disciplines; students are therefore forced to go abroad to complete their education (Tabapssi, 2010).
- 19 With its 5,000 students, Gaston Berger University, Saint-Louis, Senegal, is considered one of the best in the country. Senegal has long played a pioneering role in establishing higher education in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa. It also has several private universities, but Gaston Berger University holds second place after Dakar’s Cheikh Anta Diop University in several international ranking lists. Since it was founded in 1990, Gaston Berger has operated a selective quota system, limiting entry to the best students in the country, many of whom benefit from a state grant (Goudiaby, 2009).
- 20 Student assessments of their own financial means tally with the economic situation of their respective universities and, more generally, their countries of residence. These indicators are less favourable for students from Côte d’Ivoire compared with those from Niger and even worse compared with those from Senegal.<sup>7</sup> The crisis that struck Côte d’Ivoire in 2009 should be borne in mind in this regard. Despite local conditions, the economic situation of students should not be conflated with that of other groups within the population. In the three countries studied, university students tend to be from a relatively privileged fringe of society, often from families within the political, economic, or intellectual elite of the middle classes.
- 21 Most students have a relatively damning opinion of study conditions in terms of resources (computers, textbooks, rooms, etc.) and, to some extent, the quality of teaching. These assessments are hardly surprising given the deterioration in the university situation as documented by specialists in the field (Khelfaoui, 2009), who also highlight significant political interference in academic affairs. This interference was bemoaned in comments from several students, many of whom, particularly in Côte d’Ivoire, have had whole years written off (‘blank years’) because of strikes or political developments.
- 22 Even if opinions differ between campuses, with students from Niger tending to be less critical, one is left with an image of general dissatisfaction with study conditions. To what extent can this be linked to the migration intentions of individuals? Do other factors come into play? It is precisely these questions that lie at the heart of our research.
- Note: Students answered the following question — ‘Has your family encouraged or urged you to live or study abroad?’ Those respondents who had not raised the matter with their families (30 per cent) were not included.
- Source: authors.
- 23 The importance of the family’s role in the various types of migration and its impact at different stages of the migration process have been confirmed by many empirical and theoretical studies (De Jong, 2000; Harbinson, 1981; Palloni et al., 2001), including those in the new economics

of migration (NEM) field. Among those students who had spoken with their families about the possibility of living abroad, 44 per cent were encouraged to do so, and a similar number reported that their family had left them free to choose. Only a small minority (5 per cent) had been dissuaded. However, Nigerien families, and in general the families of female students in all three countries, were more likely to have mixed views. This favourable inclination towards mobility is reinforced by the social prestige that university study abroad brings not only to the students themselves, but to their extended families as mentioned in qualitative interviews. Whereas the symbolic distinction of this sort of international experience is not unique to the African context, it is particularly significant with regard to upward social mobility in developing countries (Pinto, 2013).

24 Despite the numerous arguments in favour of migration, there is a fringe group comprising around one-fifth of the students interviewed who said that they were resolutely opposed to going abroad, with neither the inclination nor any plans to go away — and who had not taken any steps in this regard. Multivariate analysis shows that the likelihood of falling into this group increases if one is: a woman, older, has children, has confidence in the future of the country, and is satisfied with the resources available at the home university. A discouraging attitude on the part of family members is also influential in this regard.

25 These initial results allow us to construct a general outline of the factors that contribute to the migration intentions of students (Figure 9.3). They also reveal the coherent, considered nature of attitudes to migration and how they are affected by the level of satisfaction with the university and political climate. We will revisit these themes in the next section.

**Figure 9.3 — General explanatory framework of students' migration intentions**



Source: authors.

Source: authors.

- 26 Taking a closer look, student comments contain no shortage of arguments in favour of migration, mainly to the countries of the North. Aside from the more extensive educational opportunities, a large majority of respondents to the questionnaire felt that the quality of teaching was better outside their own countries, that a higher value was placed on competences, and also that those who have lived abroad receive more recognition once they return. Above all, most students (almost 80 per cent of respondents) consider that qualifications acquired abroad offer a distinct advantage both in terms of employment in the local labour market and for an academic career. This conviction is clearly confirmed by the relevant literature (Pinto, 2013; Prinz, 2006). The personal interviews also show that the marked interest in going to North America can be explained by a positive perception of an English-language education — English tends to be considered more as an opportunity than as a barrier — due to the simpler enrolment formalities and a less restrictive policy towards migrants than is considered to be the case in France and elsewhere in Europe.
- 27 Against this backdrop, investing in one's education abroad may be seen by potential migrants as a means of using the symbolic prestige of their course of study and the resultant degree to gain upward social mobility after completion of their studies (Waters, 2006). Thus, a class of local, foreign-educated elite develops in the country of origin. This is true for the public sector in particular, a throwback to the colonial period when native executives were educated in the *Grandes Écoles* of metropolitan France. In the private sector, these elites can contribute to the emergence of a transnational capitalist class (Findlay et al., 2012). Beyond considerations directly relating to the value of an academic degree, many students believe that the conditions for studying abroad, particularly in the countries of the North, are more satisfactory: better quality, delivery, and structure of teaching, and more advanced technologies. Students also feel that there are fewer 'disruptions', political interference, or 'deceit' within universities outside their home country. These considerations are certainly not without merit, given the shortage of resources and the lack of autonomy among the universities analysed. Following various structural adjustments, African higher education entered a critical phase in the 1980s. The problem of inadequate means, infrastructure, and human resources has grown even more acute now that African universities have to contend with burgeoning student populations resulting from demographic changes and rising school enrolment rates — albeit modest by international standards (Khelifaoui, 2009).
- 28 This starting position places African universities at a clear disadvantage in the globalised higher education market, which forms part of the global drive to recruit the best talents. Attendance at a university that is highly regarded in international rankings, along with transnational mobility, can confer a certain prestige to any student, irrespective of his or her country of residence. For students of West Africa, there is a further distinction, given the unequal progression of higher education institutions in developing countries compared to those in industrialised countries. This hiatus effectively encourages South-North — or North-North — mobility, which is hardly favourable for the development of African universities, cut off as they are from other social spaces and from the economic world, and being subject to political interference. The *Times Higher Education World University Rankings* only included two African universities, both in South Africa, among the world's top 300 universities in 2012. According to Hocine Khelifaoui (2009), the reforms stemming from the Bologna process, which are essentially tailored to the needs of the European Union, only reinforce this unequal development. It is therefore hardly surprising that the reasons for the departure of staff and students — whether temporary or long term — are far from purely economic. It also explains why the rate of mobility abroad remains high, despite the admission restrictions put in place by countries of the North.
- 29 One of the main findings from our research is that education-driven migration offers considerable potential for the furthering of development aims. The evidence suggests that people are highly motivated to acquire the best possible education and training. This will continue to fuel transnational mobility in sub-Saharan Africa provided that it is not constrained by 'migration fears'. Obtaining a foreign qualification is certainly a strategy for acquiring symbolic capital. At the same time, it can also contribute to upward social mobility, which

helps countries of origin by way of knowledge transfer. Our results show that, on the whole, migration intentions continue to be temporary as long as institutions remain stable and at least a minimum level of personal development is assured. This observation puts fears of a brain drain into perspective and makes the suggestion of a true circulation of competences more plausible.

30 These observations should prompt a shift in political focus away from purely migration-based considerations towards more general objectives of cooperation and development. They also raise the issue of African participation in the new European and global geography of education (Charlier and Croché, 2009). They argue in favour of greater coherence between policy sectors in both the North and South in order, for example, to tackle the paradox of restrictive entry policies for African students on the one hand and efforts by development agencies to foster access to higher education in the South on the other; a stance that Switzerland has started to adopt with its 'whole-of-government' approach to dialogue on migration and development. Promoting the voluntary mobility of African students and, more generally, working together to improve university courses is a positive way of reconciling migration and development objectives. The students whom we encountered were highly in favour of cooperation programmes to improve education in their countries of origin and offer opportunities to pursue additional studies abroad. Such programmes could potentially be included in mobility or migration partnerships. Despite their stated intentions, such partnerships have thus far failed to include this dimension to any meaningful extent, as immigration issues are always given priority over development issues in policy agendas.

31 A quick interpretation of our results could be that a dichotomy exists between African migrants who risk their lives to cross the Mediterranean and the students who agreed to take part in our survey. Apart from a potential desire to leave their continent, these two categories of people seem to have very little in common, as illustrated by the answer that students gave to the question of whether they would be prepared to migrate illegally: only 6 per cent of the students said that they would. The unpredictable actions of young, irregular migrants seem to be diametrically opposed to the reasoned career plans made by university students. While there certainly are differences between these two categories of potential migrants (e.g. different profiles, socioeconomic background, and resources at their disposal, and risk-taking capacity), the sociological reality of irregular migration may not be as clear-cut as humanitarian and security rhetoric would have us believe. These young Africans, who make sporadic appearances in the media, are motivated by a profound desire to do something with their lives, to seek opportunities and to make a name for themselves. This desire is at least as strong as their wish to flee conflicts or poverty. In this, the aspirations of irregular migrants do not seem so different from those of students. However, it is the students that are more likely to migrate to Europe (MAFE Project, 2013). Studies that have closely examined the lives of irregular migrants, rather than limiting themselves to a few quotes from survivors, lend credence to the idea that most of them, far from being naive or ill informed, also make highly conscious decisions within the realm of what is possible for them. They do so even if they lack sufficient means or transnational networks to implement their plans legally (Alpes, 2012; Bredeloup and Pliez, 2006; Bredeloup, 2013).

32 These observations also allow us to re-examine another dichotomy, this time engendered by the specialist literature that all too often considers student mobility as fundamentally distinct from other forms of migration and as only responding to the imperatives of education and careers. This production-centred, 'non-family' vision is called into question by our results and by other recent research (Geddie, 2013; King and Raghuram, 2013), which underscores the importance of the role of the family, of transnational networks, and of partners in education-driven migration. It is therefore necessary to develop current theories further in order to better understand student mobility and certainly all forms of migration within the context of globalisation.

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## Notes

- 1 International mobility ratio: the number of students enrolled abroad compared with those studying at higher education institutions in their own countries.
- 2 The latter aspect has been investigated in national studies, although space constraints have made it impossible to discuss it in this article. Cf. *Leave or stay? Migration in the life plans of students in West Africa (2011): Report on Côte d'Ivoire* by Raffaele Poli and Désiré Nassa; *Report on Niger* by Patrick Gilliard and Amadou Oumarou; *Report on Senegal* by Jérôme Chenal and Yves Pedrazzini, <http://www.migration-population.ch/sfm/publications> (accessed on 19 May 2014).
- 3 This difference may be explained by campus configurations. In Côte d'Ivoire, due to the size of the university, questionnaires were distributed at the front entrance of the campus, where there was a large flow of students. Many students chose not to respond due to a lack of time. In Senegal, where questionnaires were distributed at on-campus dormitories and where respondents were given the option of returning the questionnaire to interviewers on the following day, most students agreed to respond.
- 4 Just over a quarter of the respondents were female. While this matches the proportion of enrolments in Niger, female students were overrepresented among respondents in Senegal (38 per cent) and slightly underrepresented in Côte d'Ivoire. At each university, the distribution of studies represented by respondents was relatively close to the actual distribution of studies for the student body as a whole, reflecting a very wide range of disciplines — leaving medicine aside as it is only taught in Niamey. Most students held upper-secondary level qualifications (38 per cent) or a Bachelor's degree (52 per cent); only 10 per cent had a Master's degree. More Senegalese students (20 per cent) had already attained a Master's degree. Although the sample was widely representative of the student body, it seemed to contain a bias towards those in the early stages of their studies, which may be explained by their greater availability or presence on campus when the questionnaire was being distributed.
- 5 The largest sample, with 1,757 questionnaires, was from the biggest of the universities, the Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny in Abidjan. This was followed by the sample from the Abdou Moumouni University in Niamey (1,501 questionnaires), and the sample from the Gaston Berger University of Saint-Louis (848 questionnaires).
- 6 The coefficients for the different models used were explained in detail in the working paper that followed the study (Piguet, 2013b, 19–20).

7 Means at one's disposal (average), perception, and development of financial situation over previous five years.

8 An information search of this sort might at first appear trivial, but the interviews put this into perspective: making the effort to carry out such a search already implies an intention to leave. First, students do not necessarily know how to get the information or what site to consult; second, reliable Internet access is far from guaranteed for all.

9 The decision to simplify the analysis by considering a binary choice was reinforced by results obtained from alternative models using either other binary re-coding or ordered multivariate variables (multinomial logistic regression). The gain in goodness of fit turned out to be negative or marginal, and the list of significantly correlated independent variables was shown to be relatively stable between models.

10 This opportunity to study abroad exists thanks to agreements signed within the framework of dynamic partnerships with organisations in countries such as France, the United States, Canada, and Japan.

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Denise Efionayi and Etienne Piguet, « Western African Student Migration: A Response to the Globalisation of Knowledge », *International Development Policy | Revue internationale de politique de développement* [Online], 5 | 2014, Online since 18 November 2014, connection on 27 November 2015. URL : <http://poldev.revues.org/1789> ; DOI : 10.4000/poldev.1789

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## Abstracts

While European countries have devoted considerable resources to efforts to block the flow of irregular migration, they have at the same time been vying with one another to attract the best minds and solve the problem of demographic ageing. How do African students navigate through such contradictory policies? This chapter discusses the plans for international migration as expressed by university students from three West African countries (Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Niger). Based in particular on a questionnaire distributed to around 4,000 students, the study identifies a series of factors contributing to students' intention to migrate: family networks abroad, level of educational attainment, lack of confidence in their country's future, supportive attitude of family members, etc. Contrary to the widespread assumptions expressed in the media and in policy debates in industrialised countries, 'migration intentions' appear to be carefully pondered and proactive in nature, rather than impulsive headlong rushes. Students are relatively well informed, and their intentions to undertake what is mostly temporary migration are based on a weighing of their interests in terms of education and professional experience. This article therefore calls for improved coordination of mobility and development policies to unlock the potential of migration while satisfying the thirst for knowledge identified in the three countries concerned.

## La migration des étudiants ouest-africains : une réponse à la mondialisation du savoir

Tandis que l'Europe mobilise des moyens considérables pour stopper l'immigration irrégulière, une compétition entre Etats se met en place pour attirer les meilleurs cerveaux et faire face au vieillissement démographique. Comment les étudiants africains se positionnent-ils face à ces politiques contradictoires ? Cet article porte sur les projets migratoires internationaux formulés par les étudiants universitaires de trois pays d'Afrique de l'Ouest (Sénégal, Côte d'Ivoire et Niger). Basée notamment sur un questionnaire auprès de 4000 étudiants, l'étude isole une série de facteurs qui contribuent à susciter des intentions de départ : les réseaux familiaux à l'étranger, le degré d'avancement des études, le manque de confiance dans le futur du pays, l'attitude favorable de la famille, etc. Contrairement à une image répandue dans les médias et les débats politiques des pays industrialisés, les intentions migratoires n'ont rien d'une fuite en avant mais apparaissent réfléchies et proactives. Les étudiants sont relativement bien informés et leurs intentions, visant pour la plupart une migration temporaire, reposent sur une pesée d'intérêts concernant leur formation et leur expérience professionnelle. L'article plaide en conséquence pour une meilleure articulation des politiques de mobilité et de développement, susceptible de valoriser le potentiel migratoire et la soif de connaissance identifiés dans les trois pays étudiés.

## La emigración de los estudiantes de África Occidental: una respuesta frente a la globalización del conocimiento

Mientras Europa invierte grandes recursos para parar el flujo de la inmigración ilegal, los Estados compiten entre sí para atraer a los mejores talentos y resolver así el problema del envejecimiento de la población. ¿Cómo afrontan los estudiantes africanos estas políticas contradictorias? Este capítulo aborda los planes de emigración internacional de estudiantes universitarios de tres países de África Occidental (Senegal, Costa de Marfil y Níger). El estudio, basado en un cuestionario distribuido a unos 4 000 estudiantes, identifica una serie de factores que llevan a los estudiantes a querer emigrar: las redes familiares en el extranjero, el nivel educativo alcanzado, la falta de confianza en el futuro de sus países, el apoyo de los familiares, etc. Contrariamente a los supuestos generalmente aceptados en los medios de comunicación y en los debates políticos de los países industrializados, más que decisiones impulsivas, las intenciones migratorias son de naturaleza proactiva y fruto de una meditada reflexión. Los estudiantes están relativamente bien informados y sus intenciones migratorias, en la mayoría de los casos, temporales, están basadas en la ponderación de sus intereses en términos de educación y experiencia profesional. Este artículo aboga por tanto por una mejor coordinación de las políticas de movilidad y desarrollo para liberar el potencial de la emigración y satisfacer al mismo tiempo la sed de conocimientos detectada en los tres países estudiados.

### *Index terms*

**Mots-clés géographiques** : Afrique subsaharienne, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Sénégal

**Mots-clés thématiques** : diaspora, éducation, enseignement supérieur, jeunesse, migration | mobilité, politiques de migration

**Thematic keywords** : diaspora, education, higher education, migration policies, skilled migration, youth

**Geographic keywords** : Africa Sub-Saharan, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Senegal, Europe Western and Central

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