



**THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**TÜRKİYE AS A TRANSIT COUNTRY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FROM
THE MANO RIVER UNION COUNTRIES**

MASTER'S THESIS

KARAMO FARUK KONNEH

MIGRATION STUDIES

JULY 2024



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**THESIS'S SUPERVISOR
PROF. DR. SUTAY YAVUZ**

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PLAGIARISM

I have acquired and presented all the information in this paper per academic regulations and ethical principles. In compliance with the rules, I have properly cited and attributed all external sources and findings in this work. I affirm that this thesis adheres to the writing guidelines set forth by the Graduate School “Institute of Social Sciences” at the Social Sciences University of Ankara.

Name and Surname: Karamo Faruk Konneh

Signature:

[Handwritten signature in light gray]

PREFACE

Migration has been a long-lasting characteristic of human civilization, influenced by economic, social, political, and environmental variables. In recent decades, significant transformations have occurred in the worldwide migration scenario, leading to the development of diverse movement patterns across various areas and continents. An important aspect to consider is the transit of West African legal migrants through Türkiye, which is a complex and diverse phenomena that necessitates thorough investigation.

This prelude introduces a comprehensive study that aims to understand the dynamics, challenges, and opportunities associated with West African legal migrants transiting through Türkiye. Türkiye, situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, has become a pivotal transit point for migrants, including West Africans, seeking to reach different destinations in Europe and other parts of the world. An in-depth analysis is necessary to fully understand the causes of this migration, the routes used by migrants, the challenges they experience, and the impact on both migrants and the communities they settle in.

This study utilizes qualitative research methods of data collection (interviews and participant observations), analysis and fieldwork to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic matter. The goal of this study is to investigate whether international students from West Africa use Türkiye as a transit country. The study will examine their objectives, obstacles, coping techniques, and the beneficial influence they exert. By carefully examining their stories and personal experiences, the goal of the study is to enhance their voices and support laws and actions that uphold their rights, dignity, and overall welfare.

To address the primary research question, we employed a combination of qualitative interviews and thematic analysis. Our goal was to investigate the reasons behind the significant influx of West African students to Türkiye and whether those students are using Türkiye as a transit country to reach Europe, the USA, the UK, Canada, or other Western countries.

By correlating the students' reasons for coming to Türkiye with their future aspirations and perceived obstacles, the study confirmed that while Türkiye serves as an attractive destination for initial higher education, it is commonly seen as a transit point rather than a permanent destination. This addressed the primary research question by highlighting both the pull factors attracting students to Türkiye and the push factors leading them to seek opportunities in Western countries.

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I am deeply thankful and full of appreciation towards the all-powerful deity for granting me the strength, wisdom, knowledge, and determination necessary to effectively complete my dissertation. I wish to convey my profound appreciation to my family and friends, both domestically and internationally, for their constant love, unconditional support, prayers, and encouragement in my pursuit of greater achievements.

A special appreciation to my big brother Layee Konneh for his financial and spiritual support. Thanks to all my siblings, this study wouldn't have been possible without your support and care. Thank you, guys, for always being there for me.

I wish to convey my utmost appreciation to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Sutay Yavuz, for his exceptional professionalism, unwavering faith, and unwavering confidence in my capacity to successfully complete my dissertation.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the members of my thesis jury, Prof. Dr. Zahide Erdoğan, and Dr. Sakın Özışık, for their valuable time, insightful comments, and constructive feedback during my thesis defense. Their guidance has significantly improved the quality of my work, and I am deeply appreciative of their contributions.”

DEDICATION

I dedicate this master's thesis to my late parents (Falikou and Hadja Madusu Konneh).

"To my dearest mother,

With deep appreciation for your steadfast support, limitless motivation, and profound affection that have influenced every aspect of my path. Although you are physically absent, your essence perpetually directs and motivates me. This thesis is dedicated to you as a monument to the principles you imbued in me and the aspirations you consistently thought I could accomplish. We truly mourn your absence, yet your enduring impact persists in every utterance and achievement.

With eternal gratitude and love,

Your son,
Karamo Faruk Konneh."

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki Batı Afrikalı öğrencilerin niyetlerini ve gelecek planlarını araştırıyor ve özellikle ülkeyi Avrupa ve ABD'ye doğru bir basamak olarak algılayıp algılamadıklarını araştırıyor. Çalışma, Afrikalı öğrencilerin Türkiye'de yüksek öğrenim görme kararlarını etkileyen faktörleri, mezuniyet sonrası kariyer hedeflerini ve Erasmus+ ve ABD Work and Travel gibi değişim programlarına ilişkin görüşlerini araştırıyor. Derinlemesine görüşmeler aracılığıyla bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki eğitim kalitesi, istihdam fırsatları ve sosyo-politik entegrasyon da dahil olmak üzere bu öğrencilerin kararlarını etkileyen faktörlerin karmaşık bir etkileşimini ortaya koymaktadır.

Bulgular, birçok Afrikalı öğrencinin Türkiye'de sunulan eğitim olanaklarına ve burslara değer vermesine rağmen, sosyal ve politik olarak Türk kültürüne asimile olma konusunda sıklıkla önemli zorluklarla karşılaştıklarını göstermektedir. Bulgular aynı zamanda sınırlı kariyer fırsatlarının ve algılanan önyargının, Türkiye'den Batı ülkelerine daha fazla göç etme veya kendi ülkelerine geri dönme düşüncelerini etkilediğini ortaya koyuyor. Bu eğilim, yabancı öğrenciler için Türkiye'deki eğitim ortamı ile daha geniş sosyo-ekonomik bağlam arasındaki önemli eşitsizliği vurgulamaktadır.

Teorik olarak bu çalışma, uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği ve onların göç seçimlerini etkileyen faktörler hakkındaki anlayışımızı geliştirmektedir. Uluslararası öğrencilerin deneyimlerine ilişkin bütünsel bir anlayışa sahip olmak için hem eğitimsel hem de sosyo-politik yönleri analiz etmenin önemini vurgulamaktadır. Aslında sonuçlar, daha uyarlanabilir burs programları, güçlü kariyer hizmetleri ve sosyal ve politik entegrasyonu geliştirmeye odaklanan faaliyetler gibi gelişmiş destek sistemlerine ihtiyaç olduğunu göstermektedir.

Politika önerileri, ayrışma karşıtı yasaların uygulanmasını, uluslararası öğrenciler için idari prosedürlerin kolaylaştırılmasını ve sürekli yardım sunmak için güçlü mezunlar ağlarının oluşturulmasını kapsamaktadır. Türkiye, bu spesifik alanlara odaklanarak uluslararası yetenekleri elde tutma yeteneğini geliştirebilir ve bu öğrencilerin yaptığı eğitim yatırımlarının hem bireylere hem de ev sahibi ülkeye uzun vadeli faydalar sağlamasını sağlayabilir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Transit göç, Türkiye, Eğitim, Entegrasyon, Batı Afrika.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intentions and future plans of West African students in Türkiye, specifically exploring whether they perceive the country as a stepping-stone towards Europe, and the USA. The study investigates the factors that influence African students' decisions to pursue higher education in Türkiye, their career goals after graduation, and their opinions on exchange programs such as Erasmus+ and USA Work and Travel. Through in-depth interviews, the study reveals a complex interplay of factors influencing these students' decisions, including the quality of education, employment opportunities, and socio-political integration in Türkiye.

The findings suggest that although several African students value the educational possibilities and scholarships offered in Türkiye, they frequently encounter significant challenges in adapting or integrating socially and politically into Turkish culture. Restricted career opportunities and perceived bias influence their contemplation of further migration from Türkiye to Western countries or return to their native countries. This trend highlights a significant disparity between the educational setting and the wider socio-economic context in Türkiye for foreign students.

In theory, the study enhances our comprehension of international student mobility and the factors that impact their migration choices. It emphasizes the significance of analyzing both the educational and socio-political aspects in order to have a holistic understanding of the experiences of international students. Essentially, the results indicate that there is a requirement for improved support systems, such as more adaptable scholarship programs, strong career services, and activities focused on enhancing social and political integration.

Policy recommendations encompass the enforcement of anti-segregation laws, streamlining administrative procedures for international students, and cultivating robust alumni networks to offer continuous assistance. By focusing on these specific areas, Türkiye can improve its ability to retain international talent and ensure that the educational investments made by these students result in long-term benefits for both individuals and the host country.

Keywords: Transit Migration, Integration, Türkiye, West Africa, Education.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Anadolu Agency
AFAD	Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency
AFP	France Corporative News Agency
AK – PARTY	Justice and development party
AU	Africa Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
DEIK	Turkish Foreign Economic Relations Board
DGMM	Directorate of General Migration Management, Republic of Türkiye
Diyanet	Presidency of Religious Affairs
EU	European Union
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
IOM	International Organization of Migration
ISM	International Student Mobility
IsDB	Islamic Development Bank
MRU	Mano River Union
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
TİKA	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
Türk Stat	Turkish Statistical Institute
TMF	Turkish Maarif Foundation
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
YÖK	Council of Higher Education
YTB	Presidency for Türks Abroad and Related Communities.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the 1990s, the concept of "transit migration" began to appear in public policy discussions. Africa is frequently portrayed as a continent characterized by large-scale migration and relocation as a result of poverty, violence, conflict, and economic hardship (Kohnert, 2007, Flahaux, & De Hass, 2016). Türkiye-Africa Bilateral trade and diplomatic relations have significantly increased the mobility of African migrants to Türkiye since the late 1990s (Kalehsar O.S., 2020; Ünveren, 2021; Özkan et al., 2010). Türkiye maintains economic and trade ties with the West African regional organization "Economic Community of West African States" (ECOWAS) and the sub-regional organization "Mano River Union" (MRU).

Researchers such as Ahmet İçduygu (2010), Nicolas (2013), and Nando Sigona (2017) term Türkiye as a transit country. Ahmet İçduygu and Deniz Sert (2014) reported that, since the early 1980s, Türkiye has emerged as a significant pathway for transit migration flows in the southeastern region of Europe. Individuals hailing from various regions in Asia and Africa had been using the Turkish peninsula as a means to connect with Europe in search of better living conditions. Over the past decade, it has become a permanent part of this migration system, suggesting a "new deal" that researchers should investigate.

The term 'international' within International Student Mobility (ISM) is complex and varies across different contexts. Brooks and Waters (2022) argue that 'international' is often associated with Western-centric perspectives, primarily focusing on Anglophone countries in the Global North. This narrow interpretation fails to encompass the diverse geographies and experiences of international students from non-Western countries. The authors call for a broader understanding that includes multiple geographies and acknowledges the dynamic nature of international mobility (Brooks & Waters, 2022).

In 2023 alone, there was a substantial rise in irregular migration in Europe, with a total of around 380,000 individuals. Experts anticipate that this trend will persist as a significant concern in 2024. Indeed, African nationalities accounted for about 50% of the total growth in 2023 (Deniz, 2024). The West African countries most involved in illegal migration to Europe include Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Mali (Adepoju, 2016; Flahaux & De Haas, 2016). These countries are significant sources of irregular migrants who transit through North Africa, particularly Libya, in their attempt to reach Europe.

According to the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) 2023 data, 62 percent of irregular migrants' arrivals in Europe came from Tunisia. Libya followed with 33 percent. The Republic of Türkiye accounted for 5 percent, and Algeria, Lebanon, and Cyprus each accounted for 1 percent. The data further revealed that the most common nationalities recorded were Guinea (12%), Tunisia (11%), and Côte d'Ivoire (10%) (IOM, 2023).

The Mano River Union (MRU) is an intergovernmental organization with the primary objective of promoting economic integration and collaboration among its member nations in West Africa. The constituent nations of the Mano River Union comprise Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The MRU was established on October 3, 1973, by Liberia and Sierra Leone. Guinea became a member in 1980, while Côte d'Ivoire joined in 2008.

The Mano River, situated in the uplands of Guinea and serving as a boundary between Liberia and Sierra Leone, provided the inspiration for the name of the union (Nelson, 2003). The main objective of the MRU is to promote economic cooperation and advancement among member states. The objective is to streamline commerce, financial ventures, and the mobility of individuals inside the union. The MRU prioritizes regional peace and security, infrastructure development, and environmental conservation (MRU, 2014).

The below figure illustrates the map of the Mano River Union member countries in the sub-region of the African continent.



Figure 1. Map of the Mano River Union Countries (Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire/Ivory Coast).

According to Şimşek, most migrant workers in Türkiye are reportedly fleeing war and oppression, while those from West Africa come for education and economic opportunities (Şimşek, 2019). A diverse range of African migrants can be identified in Türkiye, encompassing several categories, including students, expatriates, and individuals seeking asylum. Each category fell under a distinct framework and fulfilled distinct objectives. Şimşek highlighted that, as of 2017, based on the data provided by the Türkiye government, it is estimated that approximately 1.5 million African immigrants currently reside in Türkiye (Şimşek, 2019).

The phenomenon of African migrants using Türkiye as a steppingstone to reach Europe has been well documented in various studies and reports. This migration route is driven by several factors, including economic opportunities, political instability in home countries, and Türkiye's geographical position (Nicolas, 2013; İçduygu, A., & Aksel, D., 2021; Pusch, Barbara, 2016; IOM, 2020; BBC, 2020; Al-Jazeera, 2019).

Nicolas (2013) and Şimşek (2009) report that in the last decade, African immigrants came to Türkiye, intending to use the country as a steppingstone to travel to Europe. However, most of them found themselves stuck in Istanbul due to tighter immigration rules in both Türkiye and the EU (Nicolas, 2013).

Şaul Mahir (2017) depicts the migration of the later African group as middle-class white-collar workers and urban traders seeking economic advancement. Africans inhabit all Türkiye provinces. Many Africans settle in Istanbul and Ankara, major cities. The desire for educational facilities, career opportunities, and economic advantages in these cities drives this choice (Şimşek, 2019).

The study focuses primarily on West African students in Türkiye, particularly those from the Mano River Union countries. Türkiye has economic and business cooperation, as well as an education agreement with MRU member countries. The Turkish government annually offers scholarships to African students through YTB, Diyanet, and IsDB. Each year, the number of scholarships awarded to African students varies depending on the Turkish government's educational priorities and the number of qualifying applicants (Epanang, 2022; YTB, 2021).

Historical bonds, geopolitical objectives, and collaborative initiatives have influenced the academic and educational connections between Türkiye and Europe. These relationships have developed throughout the years, shaped by Türkiye's desire to integrate more closely with European institutions and the wider European educational and research community (European Commission, 2021; Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020; Yunus Emre Institute, 2022).

The academic and educational relations between Türkiye and Europe are robust, driven by mutual interests in student mobility, research collaboration, cultural exchange, Erasmus+ programs, higher education corporations, and research and innovation collaboration. Through its Erasmus+ programs, the European Union (EU) provides both domestic and international students enrolled in higher education with the opportunity to participate in internships and study abroad in Europe for a semester or a year. Despite political challenges, these relations continue to grow, contributing to a deeper integration of Türkiye into the European educational landscape (Erasmus Youth Academy during the year 2021; European Higher Education, 2020).

The United States General Consulate in Türkiye provides opportunities for a significant number of international students studying Türkiye to experience the diverse and unique culture of the United States as well as work experience every year through its summer program "Work and Travel" (US General Consulate in Türkiye, 2019).

The main goal of this study is to investigate the possibility that West African students studying in Türkiye are using Türkiye as a transit country to get to Europe, the USA, Canada, or other western countries. As a case study, this research targets international students from the Mano River Union countries studying in Türkiye.

This thesis consists of five major parts. The first part examines the introduction, hypothesis, and conceptual framework of the study or justification, outlining the study's aims and objectives and emphasizing both the descriptive and exploratory stages of the research.

The second part of this thesis provides an analytical background and review of relevant literature, highlighting key issues to understand migration, its adaptability, and transit migration trends and patterns. The literature review discusses Türkiye's rise and services in Africa, its relationships with West African countries, including the Mano River Union, its scholarships for African students, its presence of Africans, its role as a transit country, and international student exchange programs like Erasmus+ and USA work and travel programs.

The third part describes the study's research methodology, which includes the methodological consideration, the study population, the research questions, data collection and techniques, the study challenges, the sample, and the ethical consideration. This part further discusses the qualitative research method and the specificity of the research, including in-depth interviews with students from Mano River Union member countries, to emphasize the significance of the variables under consideration.

The fourth section, which serves as the thesis's backbone, presents the fieldwork findings. This section contributes to the body of literature with comprehensive primary data obtained through in-depth interviews with 20 students from the MRU member countries who are studying in both Ankara and Istanbul, respectively, and who have completed at least 2 years of their studies. The research findings focus on the reasons why a significant number of African students prefer Türkiye over Western countries, as well as their unique life experiences, integration processes, and intentions about whether or not they intend to return to their home country, relocate to another country, or remain in Türkiye after completing their education. Most importantly, the notion of Africans using Türkiye as a steppingstone is discussed in this section, which is the primary purpose of this research.

The fifth and final section presents the conclusion, discusses the hypothesis, the theoretical implications and practical application of the findings, potential policy changes, the study limitations, suggestions for future research, and policy recommendations. The policy recommendations propose alternative solutions to the difficulties encountered by African students in Türkiye to facilitate their future adaptation.

1.1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study has the following main purposes:

1. The goal is to understand the motivating factors that lead West African students to come to Türkiye for study.
2. The study aims to investigate the challenges of adaptation and integration for West African students in Türkiye.
3. To investigate the speculation that African students are using Türkiye as a steppingstone to get to Europe, the United States, Canada, and other western countries, and to ascertain if West African students in Türkiye prefer to stay in Türkiye, return to their home country, or consider moving to another country during or after completing their study.

My ontology is that African students come to Türkiye because of its favorable geographical location and flexibility in providing scholarships and educational opportunities. Due to the lack of social and political integration in Turkish society, African migrants either return to their home countries or relocate to Western countries.

1.2. BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Despite lacking a canonical definition, the term "transit migration" typically refers to the temporary stay migrants have in one or more countries before moving on to a new destination. Transit migrants, as defined by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Geneva, are those who temporarily reside in a foreign country while actively seeking permanent migration (OHCHR, 2015).

According to many researchers, including Frank Düvell, there is no universally accepted definition of transit migration among institutions and NGOs (Düvell, 2005). In 1993, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe defined transit migration as the act of moving to one country with the intention of eventually migrating to another country as the final destination (UNECE, 1993). Düvell et al. (2014) define transit migrants as those who enter a country to leave for another country. In this context, the definitions of "transit migrant" and "transit migration" downplay their artificial origins and political motivations (Collyer & De Haas, 2012).

As immigration rose to the status of a securitized issue in Europe, international organizations and European agencies began to adopt the term "transit migrants" (Bermejo, 2009; Bigo, 2002: 63). In the aforementioned context, researchers refer to transit migrants as irregular migrants. This framing reduces transit migrants to criminals or irregular migrants who are allegedly navigating to enter Western European territories.

In their compilation book "Transit Migration to Europe" (Al-Sharmani, 55–78; Alioua, 79–98; Mainwaring, 99–124; Ivakhnyuk, 127–52, 2014), including institutional discourse, they assume transit migrants' target is always Europe. They claim that countries that share land and sea borders with Europe are considered transit countries through the Balkan countries, the Maghreb countries, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt.

İçduygu et al. (2014) claim that Türkiye has emerged as a significant path for so-called transit migration flows in southeast Europe since the early 1980s. According to Fait (2010), African immigrants in Türkiye use the country as a steppingstone to Europe in order to find better living conditions. The researchers' references and analysis demonstrate that transit countries and migration are political tools to further Europe's security goals. Transit migrants legitimize European immigration, asylum, and refugee policies.

The externalization process renders Europe borderless, enabling migration control policies to commence prior to the EU border. This study intends to argue that the dimension and paradigm of “transit migration” are not only limited to irregular migrants but rather regular migrants such as labor migrants, students, ex-pats, refugees under temporary protection, and asylum seekers can all fall under the transit migration category.

Having examined transit migration as a political strategy, we will now focus on the conceptual challenges linked to it as a scientific subject. Düvell notes that transit definitions prioritize purpose, raising the question of how to assess this intention (Düvell, 2005).

Researchers such as De Haas (2007), Van Hear (2014), Carling, Jørgen, and Kerilyn (2017) explored the concept of “transit migration” in their respective studies by asking the following relevant questions: “Should the individual have been able to save money to continue their travel to another country? Does “real” transit need to take place, or can it also be a state of mind? Given the various social and political contexts in which migrants find themselves, as well as their own personal experiences, how can a focus on purpose explain their ever-changing motivations?”

In response to the above questions, these scholars critically examine the concept of transit migration by exploring the financial capabilities of migrants, the psychological aspects of transit as a state of mind, and the dynamic nature of migrants' motivations influenced by social and political contexts and personal experiences. Their research provides a thorough understanding of the intricate nature of migration, emphasizing the importance of considering both tangible and intangible variables in migration studies.

Migration occurs for a wide range of possible reasons. Scholars like Bigo (2002), Düvell & Collyer (2010), and De Clerck (2013) have highlighted the inadequate contextual and chronological orientation of institutional language. The institution's terminology, while emphasizing the individual's desire to move “as quickly as possible,” fails to provide specific details about this process.

The difference between immigrants who embark on a journey and those who temporarily settle down lies in their duration. It is possible that some individuals considered themselves to be traveling through one country en route to another, but they ultimately chose to remain in that country. Possible conclusion: crossing the border is too dangerous. Alternatively, they might be content with their current host country (Collyer and De Haas (2012).

Collyer and De Hass define transit migration as a sequential process that involves specific starting and ending points, resulting in the transformation of the transit space into a passageway. This occurs due to the establishment of specific starting and ending places. Collyer and De Haas (2012) perceive this form of migration as fragmented or disjointed.

Transit migration is a continuous phenomenon. Papadopoulou's research suggests that intentions are a crucial aspect of migration, but other factors, such as the first-receiving nation's structural environment and the networks of available migrants, also influence the process. She views transit migration as a dynamic process rather than a fixed condition, characterizing it as an uncertain form of residency that may result in further movement. The term "transit migration" denotes the intermediate phase between the act of migrating and the establishment of permanent settlement (Aspasia Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008; Aspasia Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2004: 167).

The inclusion of irregular migrants, asylum applicants, and refugees (awaiting resettlement) in the category of "transit migrants" presents an additional challenge. Analytical challenges arise from the notion of transit migration, which artificially isolates the intentions and opportunities of individuals without considering the fluid and constantly changing nature of migratory movements. Using the term "transit country" further complicates understanding the concept.

The following categories of foreign migrants are listed: The classification of foreign migrants is based on the proposal of the 2000 World Migration Report (IOM 1999, 2000), as illustrated by Harttgen and Klasen in 2009.

Table 1: Classification of Migration

VOLUNTARY MIGRANTS	FORCED MIGRANTS
Labor migrants	Refugees
Family reunification	Asylum seekers
Foreign students	Environmental migrants
Expat Migrants	Human Trafficking
Irregular/illegal/undocumented migrants	Displaced persons
Legal/irregular/documented migrants	Human smuggling

Source: Based on the categorization of international migrants proposed by the 2000 World Migration Report (IOM 1999, 2000).

We can also divide the migrants into two primary groups: those who are permanently in a foreign country and those who are there temporarily. Migrants who seek to make a new country their permanent home typically have plans to settle down permanently and may even apply for citizenship in the host country.

Migrants who are only planning to stay for a short period have specific goals in mind for their stay, such as finishing a particular course of study, fulfilling the terms of a job contract, or participating in a certain work season. Both “temporary” and “permanent migrants” have a substantial effect on the economies and communities of the countries to which they move, as well as the countries of their origin (OECD, 2007).

The transit concept's "temporality" presents a conceptual challenge due to its dynamic nature. Transit migration should have a specific duration, and there should be a clear distinction between when the transit period ends and the start of a settlement process. Transits can take a significant amount of time, with waiting times ranging from a few weeks to several months and even, in rare instances, years. Additionally, the distinction between migrants who require international protection (such as refugees and minors) and those migrating for economic reasons is not well established.

In response to the increasing intensity of flows and the variety of migrant routes leading to Europe, think tanks, European institutions, and various international organizations and institutions put the concept of "transit migration" on the forefront in the 1990s. It was the internationalization and externalization of European Union migration policy, along with stricter border controls and more laws that restricted movement, that led to the creation of a new "geography of migration" (Collyer, Düvell, and de Haas, 2012).

These causes led to the emergence of this new "geography of migration." As a result, the concept of "transit migration" came into being as a vague, politicized, and Eurocentric term (Düvell, 2010). This label assumed that all migrants living on the "periphery" of Europe were sympathetic to European ideals. This study aims to challenge the notion that every immigrant residing in Europe's periphery is sympathetic to or intends to only migrate to Europe.¹

¹ Türkiye has recently emerged as an important player in migratory movements due to its geopolitical location and proximity to not only the European Union (EU), but also the Middle East and Africa (Elitok and Straubhaar, 2010).

According to Düvell (2010), the term "transit migration" does not have a singular and universally acknowledged category or definition in the fields of international law and politics, as well as sociological and anthropological research." This remains the case despite the publication of a wealth of empirical and theoretical literature since then, which has enhanced our understanding of the phenomenon. On the other hand, there are other authors (Eleonora, 2011; de Haas, 2007) who contend that the idea does not have a precise and consistent definition. Instead, they contend that the author typically does not explicitly state the assumptions that form its foundation.

Furthermore, significant definitional and measurement constraints impede research on the topic. The term transit migration is not a status; rather, it is a process. It is a term that affects both irregular and regular migrants, voluntary and forced migrants, workers, students, and so on (Papadopoulou, 2008). Transits can occur in several settings, for a variety of reasons and goals, and with a variety of objectives, all of which can result in a range of consequences that are frequently unforeseen. It is not always the case that migration is a step-by-step process; rather, as evidenced by the fluidity and changeability of migrant initiatives and objectives, immigration is not necessarily a linear procedure. Initial plans can have significant impacts, and revisions or reinterpretations can occur at various stages of the trajectory (Schapendonk, 2011).

All these factors show that transit is an extremely malleable concept, and as a result, it is a challenging sociological object to define, operationalize, and empirically capture. Furthermore, a variety of biases present in transit are impacted by highly politicized discourse. Despite this, further research into the transit phenomenon is necessary due to the inherent complexity of the topic. It is a significant new phenomenon in a world where everything is shifting and changing rapidly.

Even though researchers, institutions, and NGOs have yet to agree on a single, common, and appropriate definition of transit migration, the study of this phenomenon has helped to bring into question the greater problem of migrants' movement and demonstrate its complexity. In this situation, the fact that transit migration is what it is has made it easier to talk about more important issues, such as the problems with focusing on separate "types" of migration in policy, the growing impact of policy on migration outcomes and migrant classifications, and the effect of policy categories on studying, talking about, and understanding migration.

As evidenced by the variety of “transit migration” definitions and their theoretical concepts, there is no concise definition of transit migration. In this study, I define "transit migration" as the temporary stay of migrants in one or more countries with the purpose of eventually reaching their ultimate destination. This definition aligns with the interpretation provided by Aspasia Papadopoulous (2004) and Hein De Haas (2007).

My working definition is vital to my study because I am studying a group of students who might be moving to other countries after their studies in Türkiye. As discussed above, many researchers consider or interpret transit migrants as irregular immigrants who are forcing their way out to Europe. This study begs to defy this notion, as we will be arguing that regular immigrants are also part of transit discussions.

1.3. JUSTIFICATION

For the following reasons, this study aims to make a special, timely, and valuable contribution to the literature:

1. It focuses on an understudied subject. While there are many studies on different immigrant groups, mostly refugees, there are very few studies on African migrants, particularly transit migrants.
2. It is important to study transit migrants because it is one of the most trending issues in human mobility and lacks sufficient literature.
3. In terms of immigration, Türkiye is evolving into a highly diverse country, so it is necessary to produce more information and knowledge about immigrant groups, including transit migrants, their adaptation processes, and challenges.
4. Prior migration theories relied on static, dichotomous categorizations. The vast majority of studies have assumed that transit migration is a) a journey from a country "A" to "B"; b) directed to only Europe (displaying an extreme Eurocentric bias); c) indefinite; and d) that transit migrants are irregular migrants. Therefore, this study posits that transit migrants not only target Europe but also consider other Western countries like the USA and Canada. The study also argues that transit migrants are not only irregular migrants; regular migrants, such as students and labor migrants, are also heavily involved.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a detailed yet selective review of the literature on migration studies and the phenomenon of transit migration underlying the study. This literature review focuses on a sample group of research with a deductive technique.

Summary

Turkish-Africa Relations in the Past: Understanding Türkiye-Africa relations' evolution and current dynamics requires studying their past relations. This historical context is necessary to understand how past events have shaped Türkiye-African political, economic, and cultural relations.

Rising of Türkiye's Presence in Africa: Analyzing Türkiye's growing presence in Africa shows its strategic importance and influence. This modern focus highlights Türkiye's diplomatic, economic, and development efforts in Africa.

The Relation of Türkiye and Mano River Union: Türkiye's relations with the Mano River Union reveal its regional engagement strategies. Understanding these bilateral and multilateral relationships is essential for assessing Türkiye's geopolitical and economic effects in Africa.

Available Scholarships for African Students in Türkiye: The YTB, Diyanet, and IsDB scholarships for African students are examples of Türkiye's educational diplomacy and soft power. Türkiye's scholarship programs demonstrate its commitment to educational exchanges and long-term relationships with Africa.

Africans in Türkiye: Discussing Africans' experiences and contributions shows how African migrants integrate socially and culturally. The African diaspora and the host country share benefits and challenges, making this topic crucial for understanding the study group's social and political integration.

Türkiye: The Hub of International Mobility: Türkiye's role as a student mobility destination emphasizes its educational importance. The student mobility highlights Türkiye's efforts to attract international students, as well as its effects on cultural exchange and academic collaboration.

Transit Migration from Türkiye to EU Countries: Examining Türkiye's role as a transit country is essential for understanding the broader migration patterns and policies that affect migrants using Türkiye as a steppingstone to get to their final destinations. The research aims of transit migration and immigrant entrepreneurship directly relate to this topic.

Erasmus+ and Work & Travel Programs: Examining initiatives like Erasmus and Work & Travel showcases the prospects for global mobility and cultural interchange that are accessible to students in Türkiye. These programs are crucial for comprehending the broader framework of global education and movement in which immigrant entrepreneurship occurs.

2.1.1. TÜRKİYE-AFRICA RELATIONS

During the Ottoman Empire, Türkiye had a long-standing history in Africa. We can divide the relations between Türkiye and Africa into three distinct periods: the historical period, which dates back to the time of the Ottoman Empire (c. 1453–1923), the Türkiye Republican Era (1923–2004), and the Modern Türkiye from early 2000 till present day (Yaşar Yücel and Ali Sevim, 1990).

During the historical period, which dates back to the Ottoman Empire (c. 1453–1923), there were major relationships formed between the empire and the African continent. The Ottomans first settled in modern-day North Africa, and then they expanded southward along the shores of the Mediterranean and Red Seas, eventually reaching the Sahel region. Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Eritrea were all under Ottoman rule for 400 years. Throughout that time, the empire established five distinct administrations (Masters, 2009).

1912 was the year that the Ottoman army retreated from Europe, which made it possible for European colonial powers to take control of the strongholds that were located on the continent. In accordance with the findings of Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters (2009), a significant number of researchers have yet to investigate the substantial historical impact that the Ottomans have had on Africa.

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire. During Türkiye's first republican era, her entire focus was on Western countries. From the Republic of Türkiye's founding in 1923 to 1998, the second cycle of relations took place. During this period, Türkiye's diplomatic efforts were primarily focused on the Africa Opening Plan. However, the country made little to no progress in its relationships with the African continent throughout this period.

At the beginning of the year 2000, the Justice and Democracy Party (AKP) assumed power, marking the beginning of the third and most current cycle of relations between Türkiye and Africa. Since the start of the year 2000, there has been a significant increase in the level of interest in Africa, as well as the level of relations with the continent (Özkan and Akgün, 2010).²

To deepen Türkiye's connections to the continent, the Turkish government declared 2005 "the Year of Africa" and launched a campaign of "reaching out to Africa." Since then, Türkiye has made diplomatic overtures across the continent, as it views its ties to Africa as strategically important. Türkiye's connections with the African continent have improved through the opening of new diplomatic missions (Özkan & Akgün, 2010). According to the Türkiye Foreign Affairs Ministry, Türkiye now has 43 active embassies, a significant increase from the 12 it had twenty years ago. Türkiye ranks fourth in Africa, behind the United States, China, and France (Türkiye Ministry Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Furthermore, we can divide Türkiye's new foreign policy toward Africa into two distinct stages. As part of the first stage of its plan to get more involved in African affairs, the Turkish government started putting policies in place in 2005. The Turkish government labels these policies as the "African Initiative." In the second stage, from 2014 to 2018, the country implemented its Africa Partnership Policies to enhance its institutions and partnerships in Africa (Türkiye Ministry of Trade, 2018).

Consequently, Africa is becoming increasingly visible in Türkiye, and significant numbers of African businesspeople, students, tourists, and immigrants are descending upon the country. Currently, the Somalis, Sudanese, Senegalese, Nigerians, Ghanaians, DR Congo, Guineans, Ivorians, and people from the Maghreb countries are more noticeable in the major cities of Türkiye (Şimşek, 2019).

Moreover, the Türkiye Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that African countries have demonstrated their gratitude for Türkiye's commitment to the continent by increasing their embassies in Ankara from 10 to 38 at the beginning of 2008. (Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). Serhat projected the number of African embassies to reach forty in the next few years. This demonstrates that Türkiye-Africa ties should be considered from multiple perspectives (Serhat Orakçi, 2020).

² NERGİZ ÖZKURAL KÖROĞLU, HAMOON KHELGHAT-DOOST, editors, Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: Opportunities.

The Council of Higher Education of Türkiye website provided the following statistics: According to the statistics, in 2023, Guinea had the highest number of active students among the rest of the MRU member countries. There was a total of 712 Guinean students, with 123 being female and 589 being male. Following closely behind was Ivory Coast, which had a total of 674 students, with 215 being female and 459 being males. In comparison, Liberia had a total of 117 students, with 24 females and 93 males. Sierra Leone had a total of 214 students, with 54 female and 160 males. The solid educational links that exist between Türkiye and MRU member countries are highlighted by the international students representing the MRU countries in Türkiye (YÖK, 2023).

2.1.2. RISING OF TÜRKİYE’S PRESENCE IN AFRICA

The fundamental sign of Türkiye's African strategy is the reciprocal contact that has developed over the past decades. Africans are receiving more attention in Türkiye as Türkiye's recognition in Africa grows. As Africa's emergence accelerates, we must also acknowledge the reality of Türkiye's rise in Africa. Even though there are other nations, such as France, China, the United States, and England, with whom Türkiye competes in commerce and business, there is now a very active and robust connection between Türkiye and the countries of Africa in diplomatic and economic matters (Dipama, S., & Parlar, E., 2023).

In recent years, Türkiye has become a more prominent player on the African continent, and for the past 15 years, the continent has held a special place in Türkiye's forceful and multifaceted foreign policy. This position has been preserved. The Turkish government has set its sights on bolstering its position on the African continent and its sub-region, West Africa, through increased diplomatic relations, trade, military cooperation, security, health, education, and investment, as well as the implementation of "soft power" tools like the country's rich cultural heritage, history, and language (Ünveren, 2021).

The African Union (AU) granted Türkiye observer status in 2005. After two years, Türkiye became an AU strategic partner in 2008, and Istanbul hosted the first Türkiye-Africa summit. The conference emphasized "Solidarity, cooperation, and a shared future." Türkiye and its African partners have also agreed to implement an action plan based on mutual respect, fairness, and advantages (Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

In 2014, Malabo, the capital of Equatorial Guinea, hosted the second summit between African countries and Türkiye. The meeting adhered to the follow-up procedure of the Istanbul Declaration, which requires a summit and ministerial review conferences every three years. The participants of the summit in Malabo agreed on a plan to implement its first strategy together between 2015 and 2019 (Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

Over the past 15 years, Turkish President Erdoğan has traveled around Africa on many occasions, visiting thirty out of fifty-four African countries, including the troubled nation of Somalia. This is generally believed to be a record for a leader who is not from Africa. The pandemic COVID-19 paused President Erdoğan's tour in Africa. He resumed his tour of Africa in October 2021, starting in Angola, proceeding to Togo, and concluding in Nigeria (Asya Akca, 2019).

The Turkish foreign aid programs in Africa, which include both humanitarian relief actions and development support, are one of the most critical elements of Türkiye's soft power policy in Africa (Çevik, 2019: 61). At present, TİKA has 22 coordination offices in various countries across the African continent, and it is executing hundreds of projects in a variety of settings. One of the operations that it has undertaken in Africa is the establishment of more than one hundred water wells across the continent. Additionally, TİKA maintains coordinating offices in 22 different countries on the continent. These organizations financially support schools, madrasas, hospitals, and clinics of varying sizes (TİKA, 2021; Özkan, 2014; Sıradağ, 2022).

Education is one of Türkiye's most important factors in supporting the growth of African youth. The Turkish Foreign Ministry reported that the government runs 175 educational institutions across 26 African countries. These institutions include the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), the Yunus Emre Institute (YEI), the Turkish Maarif Foundation (TMF), the Turkish Religious Foundation (DIYANET), the Anadolu Agency (AA), the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), and Turkish Airlines (THY) (Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

In recent years, Türkiye has boosted the number of scholarship possibilities available to African students, allowing them to get a free higher education. According to publicly available data, the Turkish government has provided roughly 15,000 students from African countries with full scholarships since 1992.

Students from African countries often choose to attend universities in Türkiye rather than study in one of the many European countries that provide higher education. The Presidency for Türks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) provided information indicating that Turkish scholarship programs benefited a total of 5259 African students between 2010 and 2019, with 1147 African students receiving scholarships in 2019. In a similar vein, the Yunus Emre Institute (YEI) in Türkiye operates 10 cultural centers around the continent. These centers provide cultural exchange programs and language learning classes (YTB, 2020).

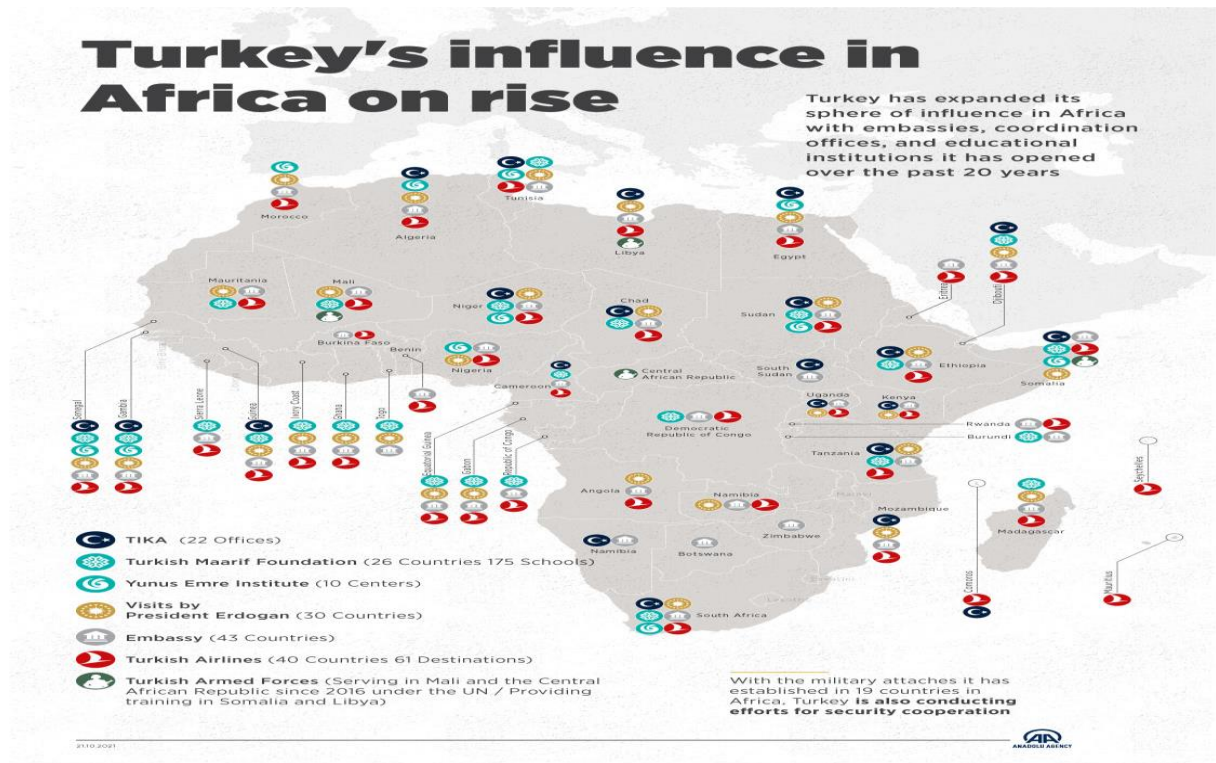


Figure 2.1: Anadolu Agency, 2021 (Türkiye influence in Africa on rise).

2.2. THE RELATIONS OF TÜRKİYE AND MANO RIVER UNION COUNTRIES

This study, which focuses on African students from the Mano River Union countries studying in Türkiye as international students, underscores the significance of comprehending the diplomatic and economic ties between these countries and Türkiye. By highlighting Türkiye's relations with the Mano River Union countries, we can discover how educational mobility, economics, and bilateral trade are happening between Türkiye and those countries. Apart from the direct connection between Türkiye and Mano River Union countries, Türkiye has a strong connection with them through the African Union (AU) and the sub-regional organization, the Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS) (Siradağ & Abdurrahim, 2020).

2.2.1. GUINEA–TÜRKİYE RELATIONS

The two countries established embassies in 2013. On March 3, 2016, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, president of the Republic of Türkiye, visited Guinea. His visit was historic, according to the Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as he became the first Turkish president to ever visit Guinea-Conakry. In 2016, President Alpha Condé of the Republic of Guinea officially visited Türkiye. While in Istanbul on April 28th, 2017, President Condé met with President Erdogan and attended the Türkiye-Africa first Agriculture Business Forum in his capacity as Chairman of the African Union (AU).

Moreover, in 2018, he visited Türkiye for the 13th OIC Islamic Summit between April 14 and 15, held in Istanbul. Following that, on October 20th, he visited Istanbul for the D-8 Summit, and on December 13th, he was there for the “OIC Islamic Summit.” (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

The Joint Economic Commission (JEC) held its inaugural meeting in Conakry from June 12 to 14, 2002, and its second meeting in Ankara from April 16 to 18, 2013, under the terms of the Trade, Economic, and Technical Cooperation Agreement signed in 1997. Conakry, Guinea, was the site of the 2019 JEC's third meeting on November 26 and 27 (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).³

The student’s mobility from Guinea to Türkiye is a crucial component of the educational and cultural collaborations enabled by international cooperation and scholarship programs. Türkiye, with its strategic objective of strengthening educational connections and soft power in Africa, provides a wide range of scholarships through programs such as the Türkiye Scholarships program.

The educational mobility programs have a positive impact on both the individual students and the overall educational and diplomatic links between Guinea and Türkiye. They strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation (TİKA, 2022).

³ Türkiye is a secular nation that physically connects Europe and Asia and sits above Africa. Historically, it has followed a foreign policy focused on the West. To accomplish this, Türkiye uses its 252 diplomatic and consular posts worldwide, which makes up the third largest diplomatic network. Since 1985, Guinea's foreign relations with Türkiye, as well as those with its West African neighbors, have improved steadily.

TİKA has been active in Guinea, supporting educational infrastructure projects, such as building and renovating schools, providing educational materials, and training teachers (TİKA, 2022).⁴ The government of Türkiye, through institutions such as YTB, Diyanet, and YEI, offers scholarships to Guinean students to study in Türkiye. These scholarships cover tuition, accommodation, and living expenses, promoting higher education opportunities for Guinean students (YTB, 2021; Turkish Ministry of foreign Affairs, 2022).

The Language and Cultural Exchange Program extends the relationship between Guinea and Türkiye. The Yunus Emre Institute provides scholarships to Guinean students and professionals to come to Türkiye and learn Turkish language and culture (YTB, 2021).

2.2.2. IVORY COAST–TÜRKİYE RELATIONS

In 1964, Türkiye and the Côte d'Ivoire established diplomatic ties. Türkiye maintained a diplomatic mission in Dakar, Senegal, from 1964 until 2009, when its accreditation to Ivory Coast expired. On November 15, 2009, the Turkish Embassy opened in Abidjan, and in February 2013, the first Ivorian Embassy since Ouattara's ascension to power established itself in Ankara (Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

On February 28 and 29, 2016, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited the Ivory Coast as part of an official mission led by the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. The visit resulted in the signing of nine formal contracts between Türkiye and the Ivory Coast on topics as diverse as education, security, the economy, technology, and development (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Alassane Ouattara's election as president eased Ivory Coast's political atmosphere, and high-level officials from both nations visited each other to celebrate the peace. The visits of H.E. Charles Koffi Diby, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Ivory Coast, on December 15–16, 2014, and H.E. Alassane Ouattara, President, on March 25–28, 2015, strengthened bilateral relations.

⁴ Türkiye is offering development aid to Guinea in different sectors through the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA). TİKA maintains a coordination office in Conakry. Currently, the Turkish Maarif Foundation operates five schools in Guinea (Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

The Türkiye government officially declared 2005 the "Year of Africa," during which Türkiye and Ivory Coast signed two agreements: the Agreement on Trade and the Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation. And these agreements form the legal basis for the commercial and economic connections between Türkiye and Ivory Coast. According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ivory Coast is one of Türkiye's top six commercial partners in all of Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as its most important partner in the French-speaking section of the continent (Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

Recently, Ivory Coast and Türkiye have deepened their educational ties, complementing their growing diplomatic and commercial ties. Through its various educational programs, the Turkish government has been offering scholarships to Ivorian students. The Türkiye Scholarships program, run by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), covers tuition, housing, and daily expenses for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students (YTB, 2023).

This program attracts an increasing number of Ivorian students seeking high-quality education in various disciplines such as engineering, medical, social sciences, and humanities. In addition, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) has contributed to the enhancement of educational infrastructure in Ivory Coast through the provision of resources and training, aimed at enhancing local educational standards (TİKA, 2022).

2.2.3. LIBERIA–TÜRKİYE RELATIONS

Liberia is one of the few African countries that does not have a direct diplomatic relationship with Türkiye. The two countries have yet to establish an embassy or general consulate in their respective countries. However, Liberia has officially accredited the Turkish Embassy in Accra, Ghana, since 2013. On the other hand, Türkiye has accredited the Liberian Embassy in Brussels.

In May 2014, under the reign of H.E. Madame Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Liberia, Augustine Kpehe Nagfuan, visited Türkiye. It was the first time a Liberian Foreign Minister had ever been to Türkiye. On this trip, the two respective Ministers of Foreign Affairs signed a memorandum of understanding for collaboration and diplomacy between the two countries, which included an abolishment of visa requirements for diplomatic passport holders of the two countries (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

In 2018, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, visited Liberia for the first time. Former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Vice President Joseph Boakai welcomed Minister Çavuşoğlu, and he met with former Foreign Minister Marjon Kamara (Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).

In March 2022, the former president of the Republic of Liberia, H.E. George M. Weah, attended the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Antalya, Türkiye. President George Weah of Liberia met with his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to discuss strengthening bilateral ties and promoting international stability. They also discussed the establishment of embassies in each other's nations, which would facilitate closer links in the fields of infrastructure building, trade, and international cooperation (Front-Page Africa, 2022).

Despite the lack of direct diplomacy between the two countries, the Liberia-Türkiye relationship is strong in terms of education, trade, and mining. The Turkish MNG Gold Liberia, in collaboration with the British company AVESORO, is the largest gold mining company in Liberia. Since 2015, MNG Gold Liberia has been operating in two major Liberian counties (MNG Gold Liberia, 2022). According to MNG Gold Liberia's official website, the company employs more than 1000 Liberians at its various mining sites, and over 500 Turkish workers work for the company as ex-pats. Since 2018, the company has reported spending over 200 million USD and making four acquisitions (MNG Gold Liberia, 2022).

To improve academic opportunities and strengthen bilateral connections, Liberia and Türkiye have taken many initiatives. The Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) is providing scholarships to Liberian students to study Islamic theology at the various Turkish universities. The Diyanet also recruits Liberian students from secondary level and provides scholarships to continue their studies in Türkiye (Türkiye Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

The YTB administers the Türkiye Scholarships program, which offers Liberian students tens of scholarships every year to pursue undergraduate, graduate, and doctorate studies in Türkiye in different fields of study such as medicine, nursing, engineering, and social sciences. These scholarships provide financial support for tuition, accommodation, and daily expenses, enabling numerous Liberians to pursue high-quality education. The enrollment of Liberian students in Turkish universities has been steadily increasing, leading to academic and professional growth and fostering cultural exchange between the two countries (YTB, 2021).

2.2.4. SIERRA LEONE–TÜRKİYE RELATIONS

Türkiye and Sierra Leone relations started in 1971. Since April 2012, Türkiye has been an active participant in the Sierra Leone configuration of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission. The Turkish Embassy in Freetown opened its doors and started conducting business on February 1, 2018, marking the beginning of the new era between the two countries. At the start of 2020, Ankara established an official diplomatic mission for Sierra Leone. (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).⁵

Between the 9th and 11th of May in 2017, Ernest Bai Koroma, who had previously served as President of Sierra Leone, paid a state visit to Türkiye. This was the very first trip of its kind ever made by a Sierra Leonean president to Türkiye. The Ministries of Foreign Affairs, energy, finance, natural resources, education, youth and sports, information, and communication were all there to accompany former President Koroma (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

As a result of a wide range of bilateral initiatives and scholarship programs, the educational partnership between Sierra Leone and Türkiye has undergone significant expansion in recent years. The YTB offers the Türkiye Bursları Scholarships to Sierra Leonean students. These scholarships are available for undergraduate, graduate, and doctorate studies in a range of professions, including medicine, engineering, and social sciences. There are hundreds of students from Sierra Leone benefiting from the YTB and Diyanet scholarships in Türkiye (YTB, 2020).

These scholarships provide tuition fees, accommodation, and living expenses, thereby making higher education in Türkiye more accessible and appealing to Sierra Leonean students. This initiative has enabled an increasing number of Sierra Leonean students to pursue higher education in Türkiye, thereby promoting academic development, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding between the two nations (YTB, 2020).

⁵ Sierra Leone and Türkiye have had historically strained relations until recently. Türkiye condemned Sierra Leone during the rule of Foday Sankoh, a Sierra Leonean who had received military training in Libya, due to the systematic transformation of youngsters into killers and their coerced participation in ritual cannibalism. This gruesome practice involved the amputation of limbs from innocent victims. In addition, Foday Sankoh had been providing discounted diamonds to al Qaeda, an organization listed as a terrorist group by Türkiye, for the purpose of reselling them in Europe. Although safety was restored after a long period of time, Türkiye still remained involved in the 6,000-member United Nations peacekeeping force. "Relations between Türkiye and Sierra Leone". Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye.

In addition to offering scholarships, Sierra Leone is benefiting from Türkiye's aid in the form of development assistance in a variety of spheres, thanks to the TİKA (TİKA, 2020). TİKA has actively participated in educational initiatives in Sierra Leone, which involve supplying educational resources, aiding for infrastructure, and conducting training programs for instructors. These projects aim to improve the quality of education in Sierra Leone and strengthen the educational system's capabilities (2020).

Moreover, Türkiye's cultural outreach activities, frequently carried out via the YEI, have a vital role in promoting cultural interactions. The activities offered by the Yunus Emre Institute in 2023 consist of language training, cultural events, and academic workshops. These programs have the objective of fostering mutual understanding and cooperation between the people of Sierra Leone and Türkiye (Yunus Emre Institute, 2023).

Türkiye's endeavors are a component of its comprehensive plan to enhance its influence in Africa, by emphasizing educational prospects and cultural interactions as fundamental elements of its diplomatic contacts with African countries, including Sierra Leone.

2.3. AVAILABLE SCHOLARSHIPS FOR AFRICAN STUDENTS IN TÜRKİYE: YTB, DIYANET, and IsDB

The Turkish government provides multiple scholarships to African students through its institutions and organizations such as the "Presidency for Türks Abroad and Related Communities" (Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı YTB), "The Presidency of Religious Affairs" (Diyanet), and its cooperation ally the "Islamic Development Bank" (IsDB). To better understand the flow of African students to Türkiye and the scholarship opportunities offered by the Turkish government and its allies, we must use a deductive method. We understand that the scholarships benefit one-third of the African students in Türkiye (YTB, 2023).

Türkiye has made significant strides in bolstering educational opportunities for African students through scholarship programs administered by the YTB and the Diyanet. These scholarships are part of Türkiye's broader educational diplomacy efforts aimed at strengthening international ties and promoting cultural exchange. The YTB scholarships cater to students across all levels of higher education and include comprehensive benefits like tuition fees, accommodation, health insurance, and a monthly stipend (YTB, 2024).

2.3.1. TÜRKİYE BURSLARI (YTB) FOR AFRICAN STUDENTS

Several different categories comprise Türkiye's assistance for the growth of African youth, with education being one of the most important. Through the state-run Maarif Foundation, Türkiye is in charge of 175 educational institutions spread across 26 African nations. In recent years, Türkiye has boosted the number of scholarship possibilities available to African students, allowing them to receive a free higher education (YTB, 2021).

Since 1992, the Turkish government has given approximately 15,000 fully funded scholarships to African international students. These figures are derived from publicly available sources (Serhat Orakçi, 2022).

Students from African countries often choose to attend universities in Türkiye rather than study in one of the many European countries that provide higher education. The YTB reported that between 2010 and 2019, Turkish scholarship programs benefited a total of 5,259 students from African nations, with 1147 more African students receiving scholarships in 2019 (YTB-Africa, 2020).

Türkiye has greatly increased its scholarship chances for African students in recent years, as part of its wider educational cooperation efforts with the continent. The number of African students pursuing education in Türkiye has significantly increased, as the Turkish government has granted 14,000 scholarships to African students. Türkiye's policy includes using education as a crucial component of its diplomatic engagement with Africa. The goal is to establish a network of future leaders who will play a role in improving cooperation between countries and fostering mutual understanding across societies (YTB, 2023).

The Türkiye Scholarships program is a comprehensive initiative by the Turkish government to foster international educational exchanges across the globe, including the Mano River Union (MRU) countries. This program is strategically designed to strengthen relations through educational and cultural exchanges, reflecting Türkiye's commitment to enhancing its diplomatic and cultural ties with Africa (TİKA, 2021). The YTB continues its cooperation with African countries through academic and scientific studies, media education, youth empowerment, and cultural mobility programs (YTB, 2022).

2.3.2. DIYANET SCHOLARSHIPS FOR AFRICAN STUDENTS

In line with Türkiye's policy of opening up to Africa over the past few years, the Presidency of Religious Affairs is showcasing Türkiye's rich history and culture, strengthening social and cultural ties with African countries, and sharing Türkiye's unique religious knowledge and experience with people of the same faith (Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

The state and business entities in Türkiye began making strides to improve connections with African countries following the declaration of 2005 as the “Year of Africa.” For this reason, the Presidency of Religious Affairs is making steady contributions in African countries, including the MRU member countries, by providing hundreds of scholarships and training African Muslim leaders (Diyanet, 2021).

Services provided by Türkiye for African nations include organizing sacrifices (Qurban), distributing of food during Ramadan (via Iftar programs), building water wells and foundation fountains, constructing orphanages, mosques, and health centers, and teaching the Qur'an. Education services are a cornerstone of the Presidency's work with African nations (Diyanet, 2021).

Diyanet's International Imam Hatip High School and Theology programs are prominent initiatives that target students from Muslim communities around the world, including those from West African countries. These programs offer comprehensive scholarships that cover tuition, accommodation, health insurance, and a monthly stipend, ensuring that students can pursue their education without financial burden. Additionally, Diyanet emphasizes the training of students to contribute to religious education and services in their home countries, aligning with broader goals of fostering intercultural and religious understanding (Diyanet, 2021).

The Türkiye Diyanet Foundation (TDV) helps hundreds of African students with funding from the Education Ministry and Religious Affairs Presidency. Secondary school scholarship awardees attend seven schools in Istanbul, Kayseri, Konya, Bursa, and Sivas. The initiative aims to teach Muslims about their faith and develop experts from all branches of Islam to assist their communities. In 2022–2023, the organization reported 2,887 students from 110 countries, including West Africa (Diyanet 2021). Students range from secondary to PhD and are multinational (Diyanet 2021).

2.3.3. ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK (IsDB) SCHOLARSHIPS

The initiatives are crucial components of the Islamic Bank's development activities, which have been in existence since 1983 to facilitate the transfer of technology and information among its member states and Muslim communities in non-member nations. The program aims to draw in talented male and female students and provide them with essential skills, with a specific focus on sustainability sciences (IsDB, 2020).

The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), in partnership with YTB, provides lucrative scholarships to IsDB member countries worldwide, including those in Africa, to study at top universities in Türkiye. The program aims to help promising students from IsDB member countries and Muslim communities in non-member countries pursue full-time study for undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees, empower communities, and assist them in achieving their national and global development plans, including the SDGs (IsDB, 2020).

Top-ranked universities in Türkiye grant admission to outstanding candidates every year under the YTB and IsDB scholarships. The scholarship covers and provides tuition, a living stipend, accommodation, health insurance, and a round-trip airline ticket. IsDB sponsors and manages scholarship programs as part of its efforts to strengthen the human resources of its member nations and Muslim populations in non-member countries (YTB, 2021).

The IsDB provides different scholarships to professionals and students, including undergraduates, masters, doctoral, and postdoctoral programs; the IsDB-ISFD for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) for least developed countries; and the IsDB-The World Academy of Science—Joint Program for Capacity Building and Technology Transfer (TWAS). According to the IsDB website, the IsDB Scholarship Program is not only a scholarship program in the traditional sense of giving direct financial support to deserving students. In addition, it is a tool for enhancing the socioeconomic situations of member states and Muslim populations (IsDB, 2021).

The scholarship serves as both an interest-free loan (Qard-Hasan) to the students and a gift to the communities or countries they belong to (IsDB, 2021). One of the purposes of this thesis is to shed light on the contributions of those scholarships offered to African students, which substantially influence the influx of Africans to Türkiye.

2.4. AFRICANS IN TÜRKİYE

The African community in Türkiye has had significant growth as a result of immigration since the late 1990s (Tolay, 2012). There is no tangible source that gives the exact number of Africans in Türkiye. The migration pattern of the latter group is characterized as a phenomenon involving individuals from the middle class, including students, white-collar workers, and urban traders, who seek to enhance their economic circumstances (Şimşek, 2019).

The overall African population in Türkiye is diverse, with individuals from various African countries contributing to the country's multicultural landscape. The exact numbers are difficult to pinpoint, but the trend indicates a growing presence of Africans in Türkiye due to increased educational and economic opportunities. Countries such as Somalia, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Tchad populations are most noticeable in Türkiye. Reports indicate that the majority of Africans in Türkiye are students, highlighting the robust educational connections between the country and the African continent (Türkiye Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2021; Stancy, 2023). Şimşek reported that other Africans are involved in trade, entrepreneurship, and working in textile factories and industries (Şimşek, 2019).

Six years ago, a survey done by Şimşek indicated that the majority of Africans in Türkiye reside in Istanbul, specifically in the neighborhoods of Tarlabası, Dolapdere, Kumkapı, Yenikapı, and Kurtuluş, known for their significant African population. The estimates for the African population residing in Istanbul range from 50,000 to 200,000. Ankara is home to a significant African minority, particularly the Somali population (Şimşek, 2019).

Şaul reported that between 1990 and 2010, the majority of African immigrants initially came to Türkiye intending to continue their journey into Europe; however, as a direct result of the tightening of immigration policies in both Türkiye and the EU, the majority of immigrants now migrate to Türkiye to permanently settle there. The majority of people who immigrate from Eastern Africa are considered refugees and asylum seekers, such as Somalis, Eritreans, and Sudanese, while the immigrant populations from Northern, Western, Central Africa, and Southern Africa are mostly coming for education, business, and economic reasons (Şaul, 2014).

Moreover, in migratory disputes about Turkish-African ties, İçduygu claimed that some Africans view Türkiye as their primary goal, while others view it as a transit zone to their eventual destinations in Europe (İçduygu & Aksel, 2012).

In terms of migration management, Yüksek and Brewer describe Türkiye's position in the European migration system as "transit zones" or "buffer zones." They further claimed that Türkiye's geographical location makes it one of the world's most important transit hubs for migrant networks moving from Asia and Africa to Europe (Yüksek, Brewer, 2011).

Numerous earlier studies have shown that tens of thousands of African migrants from various countries enter Türkiye through regular or irregular routes. Some are "transit migrants who diverted to Türkiye while attempting to enter EU countries." The desire to become European citizens and benefit from a socioeconomically superior life in Europe generally motivates Africans' transit migration from Türkiye to the EU (Yüksek & Brewer, 2011).

Economic concerns appear to influence African migration, as the majority of these migrants aspire to live comfortable lives. It is believed that a significant portion of African migrants who were unable to get to Europe and remained in Türkiye are working in the informal sector. They run their own restaurants, coffee shops, and barbershops, and some work at textile factories without any social security. Some are also involved in informal trade or are self-employed, buying "suitcases, clothes, cargo businesses, watches, etc." (İçduygu et al., 2014).

Another source of income for African migrants is purchasing textile items from Türkiye and reselling them in the streets of Istanbul or exporting them to their home countries for the highest benefits. In addition to making a living, they use their restaurants and coffee shops to provide spaces where they may retain their social networks and cultural customs (Bilgehan, Z., 2018, Şimsek & Sayman, 2009).

Özdil divided African migrants in Türkiye into two categories. He reported that most African migrants came for education and economic reasons from West African countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea, and Central African countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon. Refugees and asylum seekers came from East African countries like Somalia, Rwanda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia (Özdil, 2008).

Access to a quality education is one of the major reasons for the influx of Africans in Türkiye. Even without financial aid, African students in Türkiye pay much less for education than European students. At the same time, many African students studying in Türkiye are receiving financial aid from the Turkish Government Scholarship (YTB) and relevant Turkish institutions (YTB, 2020).

Türkiye is a popular educational destination because of its African Opening Policy. Recently, Türkiye has boosted international student scholarships, notably for African students. Most Turkish universities accept international students for various fields of study without requiring entrance tests like TOEFL and IELTS. Some Turkish universities also accept international students from English-speaking countries or students whose previous educations were in English. Foreign scholarship applications peaked at 165,000 in 2022 (Stancey, 2023). Baydemir (2020) reported 4,532 African students in Türkiye in 2013 and 11.378 in 2018.

The Council of Higher Education in Türkiye (YÖK) signed ministerial memoranda of understanding for higher education cooperation with 22 African countries. According to YÖK (2023), these agreements enable academic activities such as student and teaching staff exchange programs and joint initiatives between African and Turkish institutions. Close to 20% of African students in Türkiye are postgraduates (Stancey, 2023).



Figure 2.2: The PIE (Institutions in Türkiye with 6,000+ international students).

To sum up, this thesis exclusively focuses on the specific demographic of West African students who are pursuing their studies in Türkiye. The existing literature explores various frameworks and concepts within the realm of migration studies. However, there is a lack of a concise trajectory for transit migration among African international students in Türkiye, which I intend to discover in this study.

In this particular investigation, the study focus will be on regular migrants originating from the Mano River Union countries, namely Guinea, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. It is worth noting that Türkiye currently hosts a large population of African students. The MRU international students in Türkiye are growing. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge its presence and recognize its significance for scholarly investigation.

The numerical value continues to increase annually. Therefore, it would be beneficial to conduct a study on the migration trends of this population to Türkiye, their adaptation to the Turkish culture, and their future migration paths. In summary, the primary goal of this thesis is to ascertain whether individuals are in transit, using Türkiye as an intermediary point to reach Europe or other destinations such as the United States, the UK or Canada.

2.1. THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY IN THE WORLD AND TÜRKİYE

International student mobility has become a significant phenomenon in the global education landscape. Various factors, including economic, social, and political dynamics, influence the movement of students across borders for educational purposes. This review examines the global trends in international student mobility, with a specific focus on Türkiye's role as both a sender and receiver of international students.

International student mobility is defined as the practice of attending a higher education institution in a foreign country (OECD, 2023). One may list some of the advantages that this mobility affords to students, such as the opportunity to acquire a higher-quality education and to educate, discover, and involve themselves in a variety of cultures. On the other hand, states have developed laws in this area due to a number of causes, including the economic benefits of student mobility, the possibility for students to act as "natural ambassadors" for their host countries, and the need for competent labor in the host countries.

The International Organization for Migration (2023) and the Migration Data Portal (2023) estimate the global population of international students to be over 6.4 million as of the 2023-2024 academic year. The data has stayed stable compared to the previous year, suggesting a continuing demand for foreign education despite global obstacles. The main countries that attract these students are the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and Canada, which together accommodate a substantial share of the global student population.

According to the IOM (2023) and MDP (2023) reports, the United States will remain the top destination for international students during the academic year 2023-2024, hosting around 950,000 students. The United Kingdom has nearly 601,000, followed by Australia with about 378,000, Germany with over 376,000, and Canada with nearly 318,000 international students. International students prefer these countries due to their high-quality education systems, diverse cultural environments, and extensive academic opportunities (International Organization for Migration, 2023; Migration Data Portal, 2023).

ISM is characterized by hierarchical and stratified spaces, influenced by social class and family background. Brooks and Waters (2022) discuss how students from affluent backgrounds often have more opportunities to study abroad, creating a stratified space within the ISM landscape. This stratification is also evident in the labor market outcomes, where degrees from certain countries are more valued than others, perpetuating existing social inequalities.

The majority of international students worldwide come from Asia, particularly China and India. In 2023, over 1 million students came from China, making it the largest source of international students. India was the second-largest source, with around 508,000 students. Other significant contributors included Vietnam, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan, with a notable number coming from neighboring Balkan countries such as Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia, which are increasingly pursuing education in Western Europe and the United States, each sending around 100,000 students (OECD, 2023).

The motivations behind International Student Mobility (ISM) are driven by both push and pull factors. Push factors include economic and political instability in home countries, while pull factors involve the quality of education and better living standards abroad (Li & Bray, 2007). Moreover, the aspirations for acquiring international experience and the prestige associated with foreign degrees are significant motivators (Wells, 2012; de Wit et al., 2020; Marginson, 2018).

Wells (2014), de Wit et al. (2020), and Marginson (2018) emphasize that the desire for better educational opportunities, enhanced career prospects, and personal development often drives students. Many students from West African countries, driven by the desire for quality education and better career prospects, choose to study abroad. Scholarship programs and bilateral agreements between West African countries and their Western counterparts also facilitate this trend (OECD, 2023).

Furthermore, in 2023, sub-Saharan Africa shows significant outbound mobility, with over 430,000 students studying abroad. Nigeria is the primary sender, with about 72,000 students, followed by Cameroon with 27,000, and Zimbabwe with 19,000. Popular destinations for African students include France, Germany, Canada, the United States, and Türkiye. (ICEF Monitor, 2023; Campus France, 2023).

Various factors, such as social integration, academic challenges, and cultural adaptation, shape the experiences of international students. Many students face difficulties in integrating into the host society, often feeling isolated and 'othered' due to their international status. Fincher and Shaw (2009) emphasize that housing international students in separate accommodations frequently reinforces their sense of otherness. Furthermore, differential treatment, such as higher tuition fees for international students, exacerbates this sense of inequality (Plamper & Jauhiainen, 2021).

The impacts of ISM extend beyond individual benefits, influencing broader socio-economic and cultural dynamics. Many labor markets view international education as a valuable commodity that enhances students' career prospects (Brooks & Waters, 2022). However, different employment sectors and countries value international degrees differently. Additionally, ISM contributes to the formation of transnational identities, with students often developing a sense of belonging to multiple cultures (Gargano, 2009).

Industrialized countries such as the USA, UK, France, and Germany have been working in the ISM field for so many decades. Türkiye's involvement in international student mobility has evolved significantly over the years. Historically, Türkiye has been a sender country, with many Turkish students pursuing education abroad. However, in the last two decades, Türkiye has positioned itself as an attractive destination for international students (Kondakci, 2011; YTB, 2020; OECD, 2023).

Türkiye has experienced a substantial rise in its population of international students. As of the 2023-2024 academic year, there are 336.366 international students in Türkiye, according to the YÖK data (YÖK, 2023). Türkiye has implemented various policies to attract international students, including scholarships, English-taught programs, and partnerships with foreign universities (Özoğlu, Gür, & Coşkun, 2015). The establishment of the Türkiye Scholarships program in 2012 has been a pivotal initiative, offering comprehensive financial support to international students (Turkish Council of Higher Education, 2020).

The demographic profile of international students in Türkiye is diverse, with significant numbers coming from Balkan, Middle Eastern, African, and Central Asian countries (Altbach & Reisberg, 2013). The cultural and geographical proximity, along with historical ties, play a crucial role in attracting students from these regions. Despite the growth, Türkiye faces challenges in its internationalization efforts. Issues such as language barriers, integration difficulties, and bureaucratic hurdles need to be addressed to enhance the international student experience (Yıldırım & Doğan, 2020). However, the potential for growth remains high, given Türkiye's strategic location and the increasing quality of its higher education institutions, as well as the government's prestigious scholarships offering to international students (Gür, 2019).

African students in Türkiye provide an interesting case study in which to investigate their mobility, especially in the current context of an increasingly open and diverse Turkish foreign policy and the strengthening of Türkiye's relations with Africa. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate whether students from West Africa who move to Türkiye for education do so because of the educational opportunities available to them, or if they are taking advantage of the opportunity to travel abroad to Western countries.⁶ Below is the graph of the number of international students in Türkiye from 2013 to 2021.

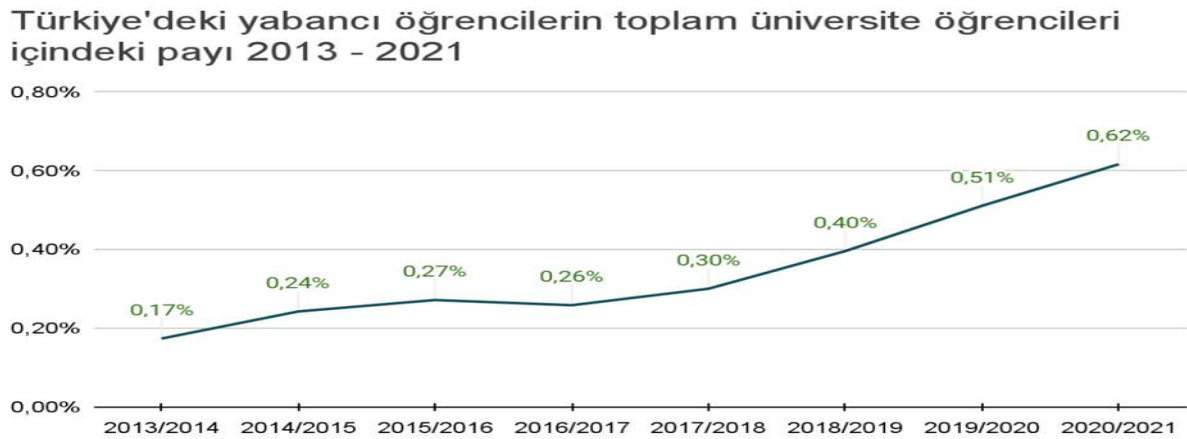


Figure 2.3: YÖK statistics (2021).

⁶ Türkiye along with the USA, Germany, France, England, and Canada have the highest number of international students across the globe. Student migration is increasing at a quicker rate than total migration on a global scale (King et al., 2010). International students are individuals who are not citizens of the country in which they are studying (OECD, 2022). Globally, the number of mobile tertiary level students, also known as post-secondary students, rose from 107,000 in 1950 (Barnett & Wu, 1995) to 1.6 million in 2000 (Project Atlas, 2020).

2.II. TRANSIT MIGRATION FROM TÜRKİYE TO EU COUNTRIES

Beginning in the early 1980s, Türkiye has become a significant route for migratory flows in the southeast of Europe, known as transit migration flows. With the hope of finding better living conditions in Western and Northern Europe, immigrants from Africa and Asia have begun to use the Turkish peninsula as a bridge to travel to those regions (Düvell, 2006).

The Eastern Mediterranean route refers to irregular arrivals in Greece, Cyprus, and Bulgaria. A significant number of irregular migrants and refugees seeking shelter from the Syrian civil war and African countries arrived in Europe every year. In March 2016, EU and Turkish leaders agreed to tackle irregular migration in light of the massive number of migrants traveling through Türkiye. The statement sets out a number of principles. The EU remains committed to the implementation of the statement and continues to support Syrian refugees and other irregular immigrants through the facility for refugees in Türkiye (IOM, 2023).

The number of transit migrations from Türkiye to Europe is unknown, as there are no public figures or data available for "irregular transit migration." Given the ambiguity surrounding this phenomenon, we anticipate the outcome. According to Frontex's data, there were 52,232 irregular transit migrants in the Türkiye-Greece border and the Western Balkan, both of which lead to Western and Northern Europe (Frontex, 2023).

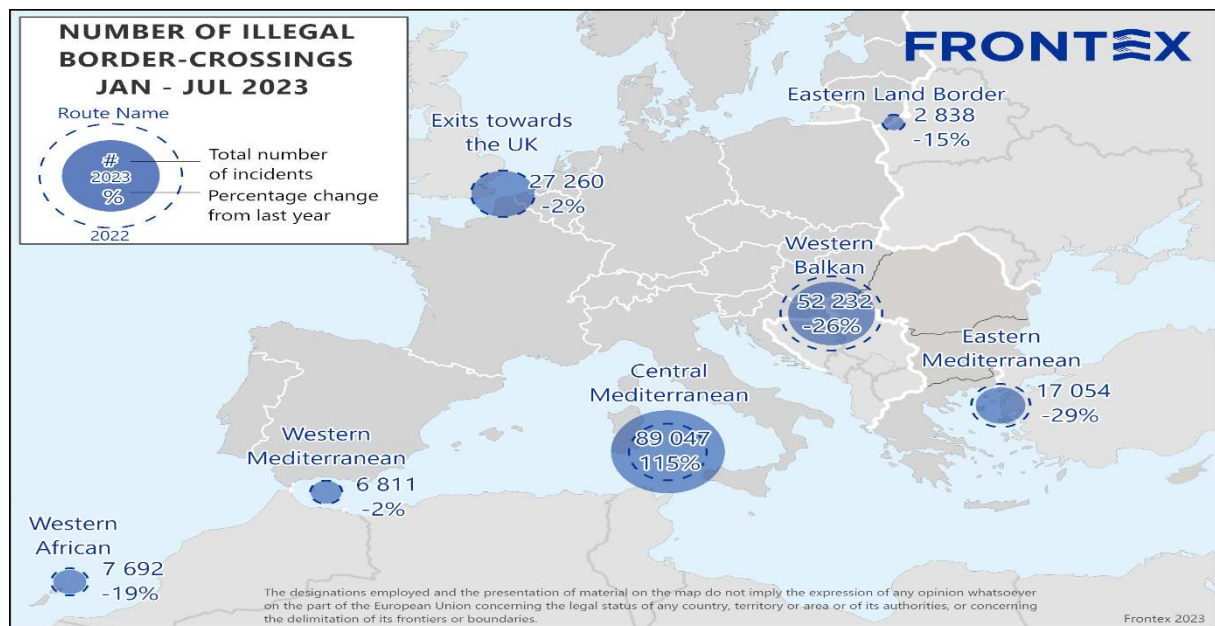


Figure 2.4: Number of irregular border-crossings. Jan – Jul 2023 (Frontex, 2023)

The issue of irregular transit migration is receiving increasing attention from the media in Türkiye, with a particular emphasis on the misfortunes of those irregular migrants who attempt to cross the Aegean Sea between Türkiye and Greece. This attention is also coming from policymakers and government officials who are under constant pressure from the European Union to put a stop to the tide of irregular migration, as well as from non-governmental organizations and international organizations that are concerned about the humanitarian and human rights aspects of the problem (Kirişçi 2008).

The International Organization for Migration reported that Türkiye has historically been a country of origin, transit, and destination for migrants (IOM, 2021). Nevertheless, some scholars and researchers, such as Düvell (2010), İçduygu et al. (2014), and Fait Nicolas (2012), emphasize Türkiye as a transit hub for migrants. Due to the high number of immigrants in Türkiye and the irregular migrants crossing the Türkiye-Greece border, it has become increasingly common to define Türkiye as a transit country (EU Council, 2023).

Emigration, immigration, and transit are all common in Türkiye. Despite their dominance in various eras, these three phenomena have never been missing from Türkiye's dynamic mobility environment. Türkiye and the EU are implementing reforms to align Türkiye's migration and refugee policies with the Schengen acquis, including a liberal visa regime for "high-risk" countries. These countries include numerous African states, whose nationalities rank highly among irregular migrants and asylum seekers in the EU (UN-DESA, 2019).

The migration system and mobility towards Europe have changed since the EU secured its borders and increased the requirements for Schengen visas. Furthermore, internal factors in sub-Saharan Africa's countries, such as political and economic instability as well as a decline in purchasing power, have made it difficult to conceptualize the migration system using immigration and emigration theories (Bredeloup ve Pliez, 2005).

Whether they are from academia, the media, or nongovernmental organizations (NGO), those who oppose this new migratory system frequently use the terms "Fortress Europe" or "El Dorado." These terms signify EU periphery nations. Consequently, people perceive several countries as "transitional zones," where migrants either find themselves temporarily stranded or use the country as a steppingstone to Europe (Nicolas, 2010).

To avoid the stereotypical pairing of immigration and emigration, which Franck Düvell called the "blurred and politicized" elements, several academics have studied immigrants who "stayed" in countries between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. Historically and currently, people primarily view Türkiye as a transit country (Düvell, 2010: 415). We will try to understand why Africans from the Mano River Union countries migrate to Türkiye even though it is a remote location for those routes.

Türkiye places asylum seekers and refugees in "satellite cities," where they have limited access to social support and face the risk of losing their status if they relocate. This motivates immigrants to seek refuge in Europe, where conditions are higher (UNHCR, 2019; Asylum Information Database, 2024).

Furthermore, Türkiye's immigration policy makes it nearly impossible for a foreigner to become a Turkish citizen. There are several ways to become a Turkish citizen, but the easiest is to marry a Turkish citizen and fully implement the settlement law (Kan Kanunu; Law No. 5543, articles 5-7, 14).

In theory, certain individuals can obtain a work permit under specific conditions, but in reality, there are numerous challenges, such as obtaining a residence permit and finding a sponsor (Alp, 2004; Law on Work Permits of Foreigners, Law No. 4817) (Nicolas, 2010).

Çetin et al., reported that for several decades, Türkiye has served as a crucial transit point for those seeking to reach Europe. However, the ongoing catastrophe in Syria has significantly contributed to the growth and intensification of the human smuggling industry. We've talked about how the changes in Türkiye's asylum and migration policies make it complicated to see Türkiye as a transit country. Furthermore, a new foreign policy towards Africa entails a diverse range of migrations that the term "transit country" cannot encompass (Çetin et al. 2018).

According to the data from the Bureau for Foreigners, Borders, and Asylum, which is part of the Directorate of General Security within the Ministry of Interior. In 2024, Türkiye apprehended approximately 104,346 irregular migrants.

The graph below illustrates the number of irregular migrants captured in Türkiye from 2005 to 2024. The data shows a fluctuating trend, with significant peaks in 2019, where the number reached 454,662, and again in 2022 with 285,027 captures. After 2019, the numbers decreased but remained relatively high, peaking again in 2022.

As of July 18, 2024, the number of captured irregular migrants is recorded at 117,794, with a total of 104,346 cleared of repetition for the year 2024. The graph highlights the dynamic nature of migration trends in Türkiye over nearly two decades.

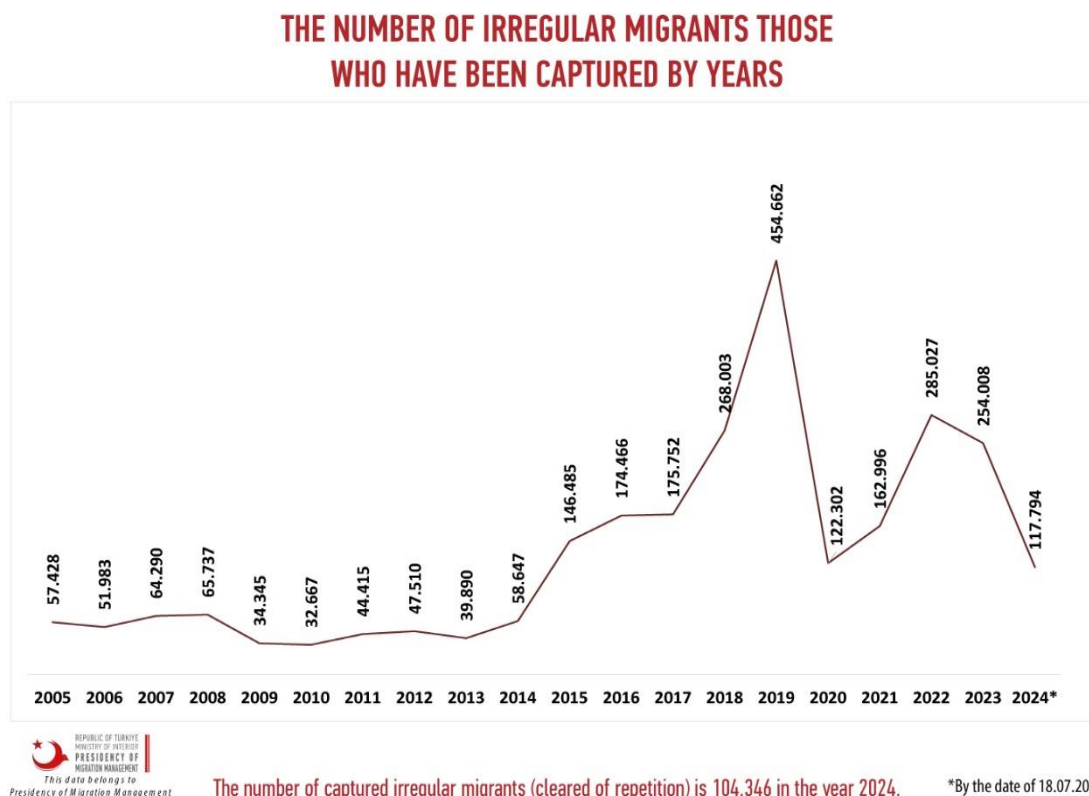


Figure 2.5: The number of irregular Migrants in Türkiye (Türkiye Ministry of Interior, 2024).

2.III. ERASMUS+ AND WORK & TRAVEL PROGRAMS

We must first gain an understanding of the mobility of the "Erasmus+ Exchange Programs," which enable Turkish and international students studying in Türkiye to travel for a semester or two and/or an internship. International students pursuing higher education in Türkiye can participate in the USA "Work and Travel Program" to experience American culture and gain work experience in the United States during the summer (EU, 2021; US, 2020).

Identifying the programs those African students are effectively involved in to migrate to the Western world is important to clarify the explanation and understand the subject-specific group deeply. Migration studies discuss this topic, allowing for a wide range of interpretations. In fact, there is a lack of accurate information about the number of African students using these schemes in Türkiye. Understanding this mobility is crucial, as it enables us to explore the idea that African students are utilizing this route or mobility to reach their desired country.

2.III.1. ERASMUS+ PROGRAMS

Erasmus+ is the EU's educational, training, youth, and sports program for the 2014–2020-time frame. Erasmus+ finances academic mobility and collaboration initiatives that engage partners from both "program countries" and "partner countries" worldwide. 28 EU Member States and six other European countries made up the 34 program countries in 2019. The EU's cooperation policy with partner countries and areas closely corresponds to the activities facilitated by Erasmus+ (Erasmus, 2019).

The Turkish National Agency reports that Türkiye has participated in European Community initiatives since 2004, which aim to improve collaboration between EU member states and candidate countries in a number of policy-related areas. Citizens of member and candidate nations, corporations, NGOs, and national authorities can participate in a variety of community projects. Erasmus was part of the Lifelong Learning Program from 2004 to 2013. In 2014, the EU merged its education, training, youth, and sports programs under Erasmus+ (EU, TNA, 2018).

Erasmus+ is the EU's most popular education and training program. It allows over 180,000 students to study and work abroad, promoting European higher education collaboration. It served students, academics, and businesspeople looking for international teaching or training. Erasmus improved young people's professions and personal lives. Erasmus+ offers grants to facilitate student exchanges among higher education institutions in Europe (Erudera, 2022).

The grant levels for the 2023–2024 academic year are contingent upon the living costs of the destination country. For instance, Erasmus University Rotterdam (2024) reports that students heading to countries with higher living costs, like France and Germany, receive €540 per month, while those heading to countries with medium or lower living costs, like Spain and Türkiye, receive €480 per month.

Erasmus+ helped nearly 46,000 EU students and professionals in Türkiye. Poland, the Netherlands, and France sent the most students, followed by Germany. Every year, Germany receives the highest number of Erasmus students from Türkiye. Poland placed second, Italy third, and Spain fourth. Türkiye has mostly accepted its role in transnational education movements. These are achievable because of Bologna and European education and training policies (Aba, 2014; Kaya, 2015; Yildirim & İlin, 2017; Yılmaz Fındık, 2016).

According to recent reports from Info Migrants (2022) and Erudera (2022), Türkiye university students and professors are using Erasmus to seek refuge in EU countries. A rise in students seeking asylum in Europe has prompted the Türkiye Ministry of Education to warn regional education directors. The government discourages accepting applicants unlikely to return (Erudera, 2022).

As African international students in Turkish higher education are also benefiting from the Erasmus+ program, this study intends to investigate the above-mentioned assertion in the case of African students and discover if African students from MRU countries are also following the same by abandoning their school and seeking asylum while on Erasmus in Europe. This study aims to establish the necessity of these claims and determine whether students from West Africa have the inclination to follow similar patterns.

2.III.2. SUMMER WORK AND TRAVEL PROGRAMS

The USA Summer Work and Travel program is a cultural exchange initiative that allows university students from Türkiye, and other countries, to work and travel in the United States during their summer break. The program is a part of the J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor Program, designed to promote mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries through educational and cultural exchange (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

Through its "Summer Work and Travel Program," the USA government offers full-time students enrolled in post-secondary approved academic institutions abroad the chance to visit the US and share their cultures and viewpoints with Americans through temporary employment and travel opportunities (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

Students from industrialized and developing nations visit the US through the "Summer Work and Travel Program." International college students can work and live in the US during summer break. This allows students to learn about US culture, people, and lifestyle. Students in post-secondary programs outside the US who have completed at least one semester are eligible for the program (US Embassy and Consulate in Türkiye, 2022).

In addition, the program requires students to have a job lined up before entering the United States unless they come from a nation that provides visa exemptions (US Embassy and Consulate in Türkiye, 2022). This thesis aims to investigate if African students in Türkiye are using this mobility for further or permanent migration.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This methodology chapter focuses on the techniques of data collection, the sample, the research questions, the study design, the obstacles, and the fieldwork. This thesis employed a qualitative research approach to gather the necessary data and findings. An explanation of the research limitation follows. We do not intend to generalize the results from qualitative research in any way. However, the research's acquired findings hold significance as they offer a fresh viewpoint on the subject.

3.1. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The methodological approaches in International Student Mobility (ISM) research are diverse, spanning various disciplines such as migration studies, education, sociology, and geography. Wells (2012) emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary research to capture the complexity of ISM. The use of qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and ethnographic studies, provides rich insights into the lived experiences of international students. Quantitative methods, including large-scale surveys and statistical analyses, are essential for understanding broader patterns and trends in student mobility.

Researchers have the option of employing either a quantitative or qualitative methodology when researching transit migration. In order to get a clear understanding of the West African international students' transit migration, I utilized qualitative research methodologies. Academics use qualitative techniques to understand people's perspectives and look into how they organize and value their daily or real-life experiences. Qualitative techniques, as stated by Berg and Lune (2012), give researchers the ability to observe, investigate, and comprehend the manner in which individuals acquire knowledge and perceive their own identities as well as the identities of others.

Silverman (2014) provides a definition of qualitative research as a form of inquiry that entails the utilization of verbal descriptions to examine and understand real-life events (p. 4). The method of "describing phenomena in context" entails the use of theoretically founded concepts to elucidate the significance of verbal descriptions to understand the lived experiences of humans (Silverman, 2014).

In contrast to quantitative research methods, Van den Hoonaard (2011) emphasizes the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research, asserting that qualitative research methods have a unique strength in allowing the individuals under study to determine what is crucial and significant in their own experiences. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as an approach that aims to understand the firsthand experiences of people within their real environments. It focuses on exploring both commonplace and challenging occurrences and interpretations in people's lives.

The qualitative research approach is significant in my research because it facilitates the interpretation of participants' perspectives and enhances my understanding of the study. It allows for the modification of research questions as the study progresses and assists in assigning significance to the lived experiences of the individuals under investigation (Van den Hoonaard, 2011). Hence, in order to comprehend the transit migration of Africans, it was crucial to ascertain the interpretations they attribute to their mobility and the subsequent impact of these interpretations on their transition mobility.

Moreover, while previous research has explored the transit migration of African immigrants in Türkiye and the associated difficulties they face (Fait N. 2013, Şimşek, Doğuş, 2019), there remains a dearth of scholarly inquiry specifically focusing on African legal or regular immigrants, especially students who carry the largest portion of African immigrants in Türkiye. This study aims to provide insight into the endeavors of African international students in Türkiye from the transit migration perspective, employing a qualitative methodology to explore their migration intentions and patterns.

3.2. THE STUDY POPULATION

The operational definition of the study population is the target population (Henry, 1990; Bickman & Rog, 1998). Researchers are not always able to conduct research on the entire target population. Nevertheless, they exclusively concentrate on the examination of a subset of the population, specifically those who meet the study's eligibility criteria.

The study population represents a subset of the target population, from which we actually select the sample. It has a wider scope than the concept of a sample frame. This study focuses on African foreign students from West Africa, particularly the Mano River Union countries of "Ivory Coast, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone."

According to the official website of YÖK, there were approximately 1,717 international students from the MRU countries studying in Türkiye during the academic year 2022-2023. For logistical and analytical reasons, I chose 20 people who have lived in Türkiye for at least two years and are studying and living in Istanbul and Ankara.

It was logistically impossible to identify and reach all MRU students in Türkiye. Istanbul and Ankara, Türkiye's two major cities, were my choices. Statistically, those two cities are the country's most populous and commercial. Both cities are home to the most universities and students. Therefore, I use purposeful sampling to recruit research participants.

Understanding the selection process for students from MRU member countries for this study is crucial. This study examined the international students from MRU member countries, considering the following factors:

1. Türkiye has a significant number of international students from MRU member countries like Ivory Coast and Guinea, as well as some regional countries like Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Tchad, and Congo.
2. Some researchers have conducted studies (for example, Awumbila et al. (2014), Adepoju (2004), Smith (2011), and Bredeloup, Sylvie, and Olivier Pliez (2005) on the populations of sub-regional countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal, but few or none have focused on the populations of MRU members. Therefore, it is necessary to study this group of people.

According to Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, as of 2021, there are about 100,000 Africans living in Türkiye, with approximately 70 percent of them residing in Istanbul (Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). According to the data from the Turkish Council of Higher Education, during the 2022-2023 academic year, there were approximately 61,000 international students from Africa, including the MRU member countries (YÖK, 2023).

The international students from the MRU member countries make significant contributions to the diverse and colorful international student communities in Türkiye. The diverse and high numbers of international student communities in Türkiye are making the higher educational institutions in the country more appealing to African students. In the 2023-2024 academic year, there were 1,717 registered students from MRU countries. Guinea has the highest number (712), followed by Ivory Coast (674), Sierra Leone (214), and Liberia (117).

Table 3.1: The number of registered students from MRU member countries in the academic year 2022-2023.

Country	Female	Male	Total
Ivory Coast	215	459	674
Guinea	123	589	712
Liberia	24	93	117
Sierra Leone	54	160	214

Source: Derived from YÖK Website (accessed in October 2023).⁷

3.3. DATA COLLECTIONS AND TECHNIQUES

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether or not African students studying in Türkiye aim to use Türkiye as a steppingstone to reach western countries. I collected and analyzed primary data. I conducted a total of twenty in-depth interviews in order to collect vital information regarding the current status and future plans of students from West African countries studying in Türkiye. This method was essential for the research because it provided a micro-perspective of the subject matter. Berg and Lune (2012) highlight the significance of conducting interviews as a beneficial method for gaining an understanding of the value that individuals ascribe to the activities or plans, they engage in on a daily basis.

The term "interview" can simply be defined as an information-gathering conversation that requires both the interviewer's questioning and the interviewee's careful listening. Berg and Lune (2012) and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) assert that an effective interviewing process emphasizes the importance of collaboration between the interviewer and the interviewee to jointly develop useful knowledge. Interviews can be structured or standardized, semi-structured or semi-standardized, unstructured or unstandardized, or any combination of these three possibilities. Researchers also employ several methods to conduct interviews, including individual face-to-face or group interviews, as well as questionnaires provided through mail, self-administration, or over the phone (Frey & Fontana, 1994; Roulston, 2010).

⁷ According to data for the 2022-2023 academic year, there are 6,950,142 students and 184,566 academic staff in 208 higher education institutions. <https://www.yok.gov.tr/en/Sayfalar/news/2023/new-statistics-in-higher-education.aspx>.

Purposeful sampling is a commonly employed strategy in qualitative research to locate and choose examples that provide valuable information while optimizing the use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This involves the process of identifying and choosing individuals or organizations who possess extensive knowledge or expertise in a certain phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) emphasize that, apart from knowledge and experience, it is crucial to be available and eager to participate, as well as to possess the ability to communicate experiences and viewpoints in a clear, expressive, and reflective manner.

Regardless of whether the methodology is quantitative or qualitative, Morse and Niehaus (2009) note that sampling methods strive to optimize efficiency and validity. However, it is important that the sample process aligns with the goals and underlying assumptions of the chosen approach. Qualitative approaches primarily focus on achieving a comprehensive understanding of a subject, whereas quantitative methods primarily focus on obtaining a broad understanding of a subject (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative techniques prioritize saturation, which involves sampling until no new substantial information is gained, in order to achieve a full understanding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In quantitative approaches, the primary focus is on generalizability, ensuring that the collected information is representative of the community.

To get a clear understanding of the assumption that Africans are using Türkiye as a transit point, I randomly selected five students from each MRU member country for an in-depth interview. There was a total of 20 respondents from four countries (Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Sierra Leone). Due to the diversity of my respondents, I conducted the interviews in Turkish, French, and English.

The duration of each interview averaged 45 minutes. We conducted the interviews at various locations such as respondents' houses, school campuses, and coffee shops. These were the environments in which interviewees felt more comfortable. I conducted sixteen of the twenty interviews in person and completed four over the phone because they were unavailable for a face-to-face meeting.

3.4. THE STUDY CHALLENGES

Several challenges and limitations confront this study. There are only a few studies that have examined this subject's nature and extent. The existing pertinent research mostly focuses on Syrian refugees, Afghans, and Somali migrants. Obtaining sufficient literature on the subject of transit migration in relation to Africans proved to be highly challenging.

Most of the information gathered about Africans in Türkiye is from news agencies such as TRT News and Anadolu Agency, as well as the Turkish government and its organization websites such as YTB, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Maarif Foundation, and so on. Obtaining additional academic work on this topic proved to be quite challenging.

Most of the studies on Africans are based on irregular migration. One of the major challenges I faced during the study was recruiting participants. Despite being a West African myself and having a large social network in the African community in Türkiye, it was still challenging to recruit 20 respondents, especially the respondents from Istanbul, because of their busy schedules. Based on the nature of my research topic, I needed students from MRU member countries who have at least spent two years in Türkiye.

We conducted the interviews between March 2023 and December 2023. The interview took longer than expected due to two major reasons. The first reason was that my respondents were in both Ankara and the metropolitan city of Istanbul. I had to travel to Istanbul to conduct interviews with eight of my respondents. I had 12 participants in Ankara and 8 in Istanbul. I chose Ankara and Istanbul because they have a diverse population, with the largest number of West African international students.

Another challenge was the request from four previous respondents to withdraw from the study due to personal reasons. They stated that they were not comfortable with the research topic. As a result, I had to replace those four participants, which took a total of another three months, and by then I was outside of Türkiye. Finding a replacement for those four participants posed a significant challenge. Due to personal and participant difficulties, we conducted some interviews online. Notwithstanding these obstacles, this study is a scientific undertaking and can serve as a paradigm for the advancement of academic research on a comparable topic.

3.1. THE STUDY GROUP

When I embarked on the journey of writing my thesis on the experiences of African students using Türkiye as a steppingstone in their academic and professional trajectories, a critical aspect that demanded thorough consideration was the selection of research participants. Given my extensive involvement with African communities in Türkiye, I was acutely aware of the potential for biases and the need for methodological rigor in choosing a diverse and representative sample.

Over the years, I have cultivated strong relationships with African international students from various backgrounds and countries. My engagement in multiple leadership roles within the international student community from 2017 to 2021 has been instrumental in building these connections. Notably, I served as the President of the African Student Union in Bolu and the President of the International Student Association in Bolu from 2019 to 2021. Additionally, I held the position of Coordinator for the Federation of International Students in Türkiye and represented the Bolu region at the International Students Parliament in Türkiye. These roles, coupled with my participation in numerous student conferences and events, provided me with a broad network within the international student community in Türkiye.

Given this extensive network, I recognized the potential challenge of ensuring that my research sample was not unduly influenced by prior interactions or preconceived notions. To maintain the integrity and objectivity of my research, I exercised deliberate care in the selection of my participants. My primary objective was to engage a diverse group of individuals who could provide fresh perspectives, distinct from those I had previously encountered. This required me to consciously avoid including African students with whom I had prior conversations about their aspirations, opinions on Türkiye, or views on Western countries, as my familiarity with their viewpoints could inadvertently skew the research findings.

Instead, I sought out participants with whom I had no prior personal connection or contact. This approach allowed me to gather a wide range of insights and experiences, ensuring that the data collected was both novel and reflective of the broader population of African students in Türkiye. By prioritizing diversity and unfamiliarity in my participant selection, I aimed to minimize bias and enhance the validity of my research, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the role of Türkiye as a transit country for African students.

Moreover, selection of research participants was a critical component of my thesis. By carefully choosing individuals with whom I had limited or no prior interaction, I ensured that the study remained objective and that the findings were both credible and representative of the broader experiences of African students in Türkiye.

When recruiting participants for qualitative research, researchers use various sample methods. Sample methods can be used in qualitative dissertations alone or together (Berg & Lune, 2012). My participants were chosen via non-probability deliberate sampling. Taherdoost (2016) says this method is used in qualitative and case study research. This thesis study matches the technique in theme and content. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. Snowball sampling is used to find rare and difficult research features (Research Methodology, 2020).

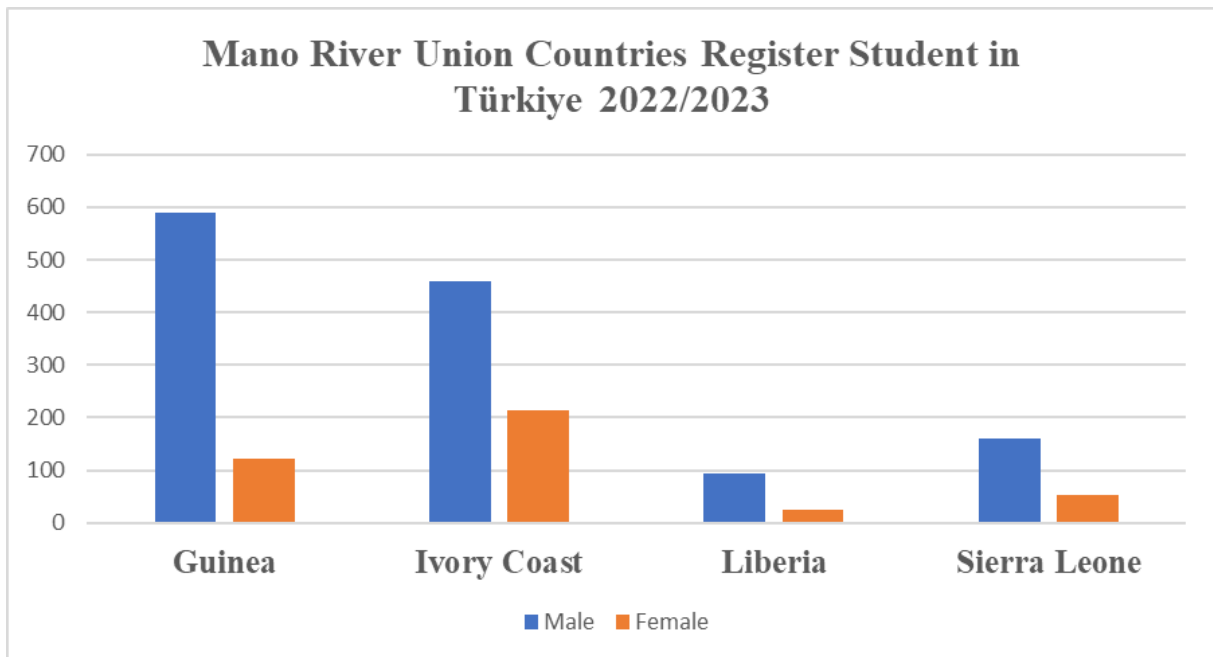
Social scientists use this method in sociology, political science, anthropology, and human geography (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). When examining hidden or hard-to-reach communities, researchers prefer this sample method. The study included only MRU member country regular migrants. It was crucial to target active international higher education students. Alternative names for snowball sampling include "the chain method" and "chain referral". Using convenience sampling, the researcher approaches people they know to see whether anyone else fits the study's eligibility requirements (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljane, 2017).

I developed participant recruitment criteria to overcome a snowball approach drawback. The requirements are gender, age, and education. Males and girls 18 and older with varied educational backgrounds participated. I tried my hardest to diversify the data for greatest volatility. International students from Mano River Union countries studying in Türkiye were all participants. The participants had different migration, educational, professional, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The study had 20 participants—12 men and 8 women. Most pupils were male, with women in the minority. This shows a gender gap among MRU international students.

My initial plan was to balance the gender equation among the participants. However, some female participants were reluctant to participate in interviews, and male participants often suggested other male participants, leading to a limited representation of women in the study. Unfortunately, I was unable to achieve the desired number of female participants. Additionally, the African international male students in Türkiye outnumber the female students.

Considering the statistics from the Turkish Council of Higher Education, we observe that there is a big gap in the gender equation. The gender imbalance among the African international students in Türkiye shows that there is a need for girls' empowerment in the educational sector. The number of male students consistently exceeds the number of female students. It is of the utmost importance to make the elimination of this gender gap a top priority in order to encourage greater inclusivity in educational opportunities across the sub-region.

Figure 3: Gender Discrepancy among Students from the Mano River Union Countries in 2022-2023 academic year.



Source: Data collected from YÖK website.

Furthermore, we established the participants' level of education and the duration of their stay in Türkiye as recruitment criteria. Through deliberate recruitment efforts, I was able to get volunteers from the undergraduate, graduate, and PhD levels.

I chose students who had lived in Türkiye for a period of at least two years or more, considering their level of integration and their potential for moving to another country. Students enrolled in their department for two years or more are eligible to apply for and benefit from the Erasmus+ programs, as well as the work and travel programs.

Table 3.2. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Guinea					
Participants	Gender	Age	Length of Stay in Türkiye	Field of Study	Level of Education
R-1	Male	27	5yrs	Medicine	Bachelor's degree
R-2	Female	23	4yrs	Public Administration	Bachelor's degree
R-3	Male	28	9yrs	Economy	Master's degree
R-4	Female	26	5yrs	International Relation	Master's degree
R-5	Male	29	7yrs	Theology	Master's degree
Ivory Coast (Cote D'Ivoire)					
R-6	Male	23	4yrs	Communication	Bachelor's degree
R-7	Female	20	3yrs	Business Management	Bachelor's degree
R-8	Female	25	4yrs	Physics	Bachelor's degree
R-9	Male	29	7yrs	Chemistry	Master's degree
R-10	Male	28	6yrs	Mechanical Engineer	Master's degree
Liberia					
R-11	Male	30	3yrs	International Relation	Master's degree
R-12	Female	26	5yrs	Nursing	Bachelor's degree
R-13	Female	25	5yrs	Biology	Bachelor's degree
R-14	Male	30	9yrs	Political Science	PhD' degree
R-15	Male	27	6yrs	International Relation	Master's degree
Sierra Leone					
R-16	Male	28	7yrs	Business	Master's degree
R-17	Male	27	3yrs	Peace and Conflict Resolution	Master's degree
R-18	Male	31	9yrs	International Relation	PhD's degree
R-19	Female	24	4yrs	Sociology	Bachelor's degree
R-20	Female	25	5yrs	Business Management	Bachelor's degree

All of the individuals involved are students. The participants have excellent levels of education from a holistic perspective. According to Table 3.2, around 10 participants had been in Türkiye for a period of 2 to 5 years, and another 10 participants had stayed for a period of 5 to 10 years. The age range of the respondents is 20 to 31 years old. The respondents had an average age of 25 years. Approximately seven participants fell within the age range of 20 to 25 years, whereas thirteen participants fell within the age range of 25 to 31 years. In terms of educational attainment, there were approximately 10 respondents who were pursuing undergraduate degrees, 8 who were pursuing master's degrees, and 2 who were pursuing PhDs.

3.II. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Given that interviewing research involves humans, we need to address several ethical considerations. We must address ethical concerns during the data collection phase of the study to safeguard the rights of both the researcher and the respondents (Roulston, 2010).

Qualitative researchers encounter ethical challenges, including the need to uphold privacy, foster genuine and transparent relationships, and prevent misrepresentations arising from the close contact and intimacy they have with participants in qualitative studies (Van den Hoonaard and Willy C., 2000).

If researchers are faced with conflicting issues and must decide between different methodological procedures, they may encounter ethically problematic situations. When such situations arise, it is certain that there will be arguments among many entities involved, including participants, researchers, researchers' discipline, the funding agency, and society. During the process of doing qualitative research, it is imperative to consider significant ethical considerations, including the preservation of anonymity, confidentiality, and obtaining informed consent (Jones, 1995; Hoeyer et al., 2005, Orb et al., 2001).

I successfully completed the application process and acquired the Research Ethics (RE) certificate from Ankara Social Sciences University. According to the Social Sciences University of Ankara's policy, before carrying out any research, it is mandatory to obtain the university ethics committee certificate.

Informed consent is widely acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of ethics across several research disciplines. Prior determination of the specific data to be collected and the intended utilization of this data is imperative for qualitative researchers. The idea of informed consent underscores the researcher's duty to provide participants with comprehensive information about different parts of the research using language that is easily understandable. The researcher is required to provide clear explanations regarding the study's nature, the possible involvement of participants, the researcher's identity and funding source, the research purpose, and the dissemination and utilization of the findings (Hoeyer et al.; Orb et al., 2001).

I make sure to transmit an informed consent letter via email to my participants prior to the interview. Before each interview, I personally introduce myself and create a cordial rapport with the respondents. I also offered a succinct summary of the study's goals and the potential risks and advantages. Subsequently, I presented them with the participant consent form and asked for their signature before the interview. Prior to the interview, I asked each participant about their desire to have their participation recorded on an audiotape. In addition, I offered them the opportunity to choose not to participate before, during, and after the interview without facing any negative consequences.

Before I began conducting interviews with my participants, I tried to develop a connection with them in order to provide a sense of security and confidence throughout the process. To achieve this, it was necessary to engage in conversations with them about their country of origin, their process of adaptation into Turkish society, and their perspectives on Europe, the United States of America, and Canada. During the entire initial contact period, I was able to successfully build a connection with my participants during the entirety of the initial contact period, thereby ensuring the confidentiality of their data and protecting it from unauthorized access.

The study also used pseudonyms R-1 through R-20 for the participants. In order to maintain participant privacy, each participant had the freedom to choose any pseudonym they wanted. I ensured the anonymity and security of the data by storing it on a password-protected laptop. This safeguarded the data from unauthorized access or dissemination. In order to prevent other people from gaining access to the printed transcription copies, I keep them in my room alone.

CHAPTER IV

THE FINDING AND ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

The section contains the findings collected from the participants. To better understand the transit migration of West African international students in Türkiye, the findings are categorized into four primary sections. The first section examines the factors that influence West African students' decisions to study in Türkiye. The second section examines into the integration of West African students into Turkish society. The subsequent section investigates the prospects, benefits, and adaptation challenges of the students in Türkiye. The final section explores their prospects and future intentions regarding their migration dilemma: whether to remain in Türkiye, return to their country of origin, or consider relocating to another country after completing their studies.

4.1. MOTIVATING FACTORS INFLUENCING THE WEST AFRICAN STUDENTS' DECISION TO STUDY IN TÜRKİYE

To understand the motivating factors for the West African students coming to Türkiye, I asked the respondents the following questions: *“How did you know about Türkiye? What motivated you to come to Türkiye for study?”* The participants' responses to these questions were complex and diverse, with each individual providing a different perspective. Nevertheless, the participants commonly mentioned several factors that influenced their decision, including educational opportunities (such as scholarships), affordability (considering the cost of living and low tuition fees), cultural and historical attractions (due to the region's rich history and culture), and strategic location (being situated between two continents; Asia and Europe).

4.1.1. *Scholarship opportunities*

Türkiye provides numerous scholarship options for African international students who wish to further their studies in the country. The Turkish government, in collaboration with multiple Turkish universities and institutions, primarily offers these scholarships through its Türkiye Scholarships program. Below, we will provide a comprehensive analysis of these options. Students from West Africa may be influenced by a number of reasons while deciding to study in Türkiye. Scholarship and educational opportunities are two typical impacts; however, these can be complex and unique to each person.

Education Quality: Türkiye's reputation for offering high-quality education is expanding, as evidenced by the international recognition of a number of its universities. Since many Türkiye institutions provide English-language programs, makes it accessible for international students, including those from West Africa.

“I knew Türkiye through a friend who benefited from the Turkish government scholarship. He spoke highly of Türkiye, and through my research, I realized that Türkiye is one of the most powerful countries regarding development and educational opportunities. Based on these factors, I chose Türkiye even though I was not granted the scholarship.” (R-10).

“I attended a Turkish high school in my country (Guinea). At the end of every academic year, they select the top students for higher education to study in Türkiye. I was one of the top students in my class and after I completed secondary school, I was granted a scholarship to study civil engineer at the university of Ankara.” (R-15).

“I received a scholarship from Diyanet for Imam Hatip High School in Kayseri, which provided a good starting point for my academic journey. I then got the YTB scholarship for my bachelor's degree program in theology at the University of Istanbul. I am grateful to the Turkish government, as my family and I were unable to cover the school fees and other expenses.” (R-5).

Focusing on their own experiences and the options that were accessible to them, the respondents shed light on the elements that influenced their decisions to study in Türkiye. The respondent's assessment of Türkiye's progress, educational accomplishments, scholarship chances, and the influence of a friend's excellent experience are all elements to consider. All of these factors, including past experiences, suggestions, academic considerations, and potential funding sources, contribute to the complex decision-making process.

The Türkiye Scholarships Program, also known as Türkiye Burslari (YTB), is a state-funded project with the objective of promoting international collaboration and advancing higher education in Türkiye. The institution provides a variety of scholarships at the undergraduate, master's, and Ph.D. levels to students from around the globe, including Africa.

The scholarships include the complete payment of tuition fees, offer a monthly allowance, provide housing for students in both private and government dormitories, offer health insurance coverage, and include a complimentary one-year Turkish language course. The Türkiye Burslari (YTB) offers a diverse array of programs encompassing arts, humanities, science, engineering, and social sciences at both government and private institutions.

Several renowned universities in Türkiye, such as Koç University, Sabancı University, and Bilkent University, provide distinctive and targeted scholarships to overseas students, including those from Africa. These universities provide scholarships for both undergraduate and graduate studies. Scholarships encompass the entire or a portion of the tuition fees and offer supplementary advantages to exceptional students, such as accommodations and daily expenditures (Sabancı; Koç, Bilkent, 2023).

The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) provides supplementary scholarships and funding options exclusively for international students pursuing research-based programs. These awards are intended for graduate students and postdoctoral researchers. The benefits encompass monthly stipends and travel grants (TÜBİTAK, 2023).

The EU-led Erasmus+ Program allows non-EU students, particularly African students in Türkiye, to study in Europe for a semester or years. European culture is diverse and unique, and this program lets overseas students' study in Europe. The program offers regular school year education and an internship program for graduate and post-graduate students in Türkiye. Exchange students receive scholarships for travel, living, and tuition (Erasmus+, 2021).

A government entity, "Yunus Emre Institute," provides opportunities to international students, including teachers and professors. Foreign students can learn the Turkish language with the Yunus Emre Institute scholarship. Türkiye's "Human Aid Foundation," "Federation of International Student Associations in Türkiye" (UDEF), and "All African Friends Association" (TADD) offer scholarships to international students. African students in Türkiye are the target audience for this scholarship. Program qualifications may include academic achievement or financial necessity (HH & UDEF, 2023; TADD, 2024). These scholarship schemes make Türkiye an interesting option for African students seeking high-quality higher education in a diverse and culturally engaging environment.

4.1.2. Accommodation and Tuition Affordability

The cost of living in Türkiye is frequently lower than that of many Western nations, making it an appealing choice for many international students, including students from West Africa. Turkish universities provide competitive tuition fees and offer scholarship options, thereby attracting a significant number of international students, particularly those from impoverished countries.

Due to the affordability of accommodations and tuition, students from third world and underdeveloped countries prefer Türkiye for a quality education. Many of those students come to Türkiye for higher education, even if they don't obtain a scholarship. Despite the fact that many students benefit from a variety of scholarships, there are also hundreds and thousands of international students studying in Türkiye at their own expense.

"I think Türkiye is more convenient in terms of tuition fees compared to some European countries and other Western countries. During my search for a reputable university abroad to pursue my master's program, I discovered tuition rates that were astoundingly affordable. Türkiye is a developed country with a quality education that is ridiculously cheap. If you come from a low-budget family and are considering studying abroad, Türkiye is the best place." (R-20).

"Life and education are very affordable in Türkiye as compared to other developed countries. It is an easy decision to make when you are considering studying abroad with minimal funds. It is an advantage to get a scholarship, but even without scholarships, you can definitely afford school fees here in Türkiye." (R-14).

"My parents wanted to support me to advance my education in France, but after thorough research on life expenditures and school fees, we realized that Türkiye is more ideal for me than France. Life and education in France are far more expensive than in Türkiye. Türkiye offers a high-quality education at a lower cost, so it was easy for me to choose Türkiye." (R-9)

The respondents offer a comprehensive depiction of the significant impact that affordability, specifically in relation to tuition fees and the general cost of living, has on the decision-making process for pursuing studies in Türkiye.

The prevailing topic among the research participants is the focus on Türkiye as a financially advantageous option for education, especially for students hailing from economically constrained households. The individuals accounted for not only the tuition costs but also the total cost of living, showcasing a sensible and pragmatic approach to decision-making. Price appears to be a critical factor in choosing Türkiye as a study destination over other potentially expensive study destinations.

Many African students find studying in Türkiye appealing because of the comparatively inexpensive tuition costs and cost of living, as well as the wide range of accommodation options available. Public colleges in Türkiye typically offer more affordable tuition costs in comparison to private ones. The annual tuition prices for undergraduate programs vary from \$200 to \$1,500, while for graduate degrees, the charges range from \$300 to \$3,000. Private institutions generally impose higher tuition prices. Nevertheless, they frequently offer generous scholarships and financial assistance (Balan, 2022).

One of the main reasons why African students pick Türkiye colleges is because they offer convenient and cost-effective housing options. Several universities in Türkiye offer housing options for their students. University dorms offer the most cost-effective housing alternative, with monthly expenses ranging from \$30 to \$150. Standard dormitory amenities encompass fundamental furniture, communal or individualized accommodations, internet connectivity, and shared kitchen or eating areas. KYK Dormitories are overseen by the Turkish Higher Education Credit and Hostels Institution and provide a range of facilities (YÖK, 2023).

The data highlighted that African students in Türkiye have access to cost-effective rental apartments. Adaptability offers more confidentiality and autonomy. Students frequently opt to share apartments as a means of minimizing expenses. Frequently visited districts in Istanbul Students often favor areas such as Kadıköy, Esenyurt, and Beşiktaş. Ankara, Çankaya, and Kızılay are centrally located districts that offer a plethora of rental possibilities specifically catered to students.

Türkiye has a relatively inexpensive cost of living in comparison to most Western countries. The normal monthly expenses for an international student, which encompass lodging, food, transportation, and personal expenses, often fall within the range of \$300 to \$500 (Balan, 2022).

4.1.3. Cultural and historical attractions

Türkiye has a diverse cultural heritage as well as a rich history, which can be intriguing to students interested in experiencing different cultures and historical places. Türkiye's unique and diverse culture plays a vital role in attracting international students, in addition to providing students with exceptional possibilities to learn about and experience a variety of cultures.

West African students are progressively selecting Türkiye as a destination for studying, not only due to its scholastic prospects but also because of its abundant cultural and historical allurements.

Below is an in-depth analysis of the reasons why West African students find Türkiye culture and history attractive:

“Türkiye is a historical country, and I believe its rich culture attracts many of us to study here. I wanted to experience the unique Turkish culture. My friends who came here before me talked a lot about the Turkish culture, beautiful weather, and extracurricular activities for international students, which empowered me to come here to study.” (R-3).

“After reading about the Ottoman Empire during my secondary school years, I developed a deep curiosity and obsession with Türkiye. Before coming for a study, I started watching Turkish series and even learned some basic Turkish words.” (R-6).

“In 2016, a group of Turkish people came to my country (Ivory Coast). They organized a program in a Turkish high school and invited other local schools, including my school. During that program, I fell in love with the Turkish language and its food. From that day on, I decided that I was going to pursue my higher education in Türkiye.” (R-11).

The respondents emphasize the impact of cultural and historical elements, along with personal experiences, in attracting students to pursue studies in Türkiye. These elements contribute to a longing for a distinctive and intellectually stimulating educational experience that goes beyond academic issues.

Moreover, there is a prevalent theme of intense fascination with Turkish culture, history, and way of life. The inclusion of cultural and personal experiences greatly influences the decision-making process, emphasizing the significance of a comprehensive and fulfilling educational journey that extends beyond academic endeavors. Türkiye attracts students not only for its academic opportunities, but also for the opportunity to immerse themselves in a distinctive cultural environment. Türkiye is a melting pot of cultures, connecting the continents of Europe and Asia. This fusion of Western and Eastern influences provides a distinctive cultural encounter.

Türkiye hosts numerous cultural events, including the Istanbul Film Festival, the International Antalya Sand Sculpture Festival, and the Cappadocia Hot Air Balloon Festival. These festivals offer valuable experiences for international students, including West African students.

4.1.4. Strategic location

Türkiye being strategically located between Europe and Asia, tends to attract immigrants and international students across the globe. The individuals are aware of the geographical benefits that come with attending school in Türkiye. People regard Türkiye's position as a bridge between Europe and Asia as advantageous, not only for its own merits but also for the diplomatic and educational relations it maintains with the EU and other industrialized countries.

“Studying in Türkiye offers numerous advantages due to its geographical location. I chose Türkiye for my studies not only because of its cheap tuition but also because of its favorable location. Türkiye has a lot of diplomatic and educational relations with the EU and other developed countries. So, as an international student in Türkiye, it is a privilege to benefit from some of those programs.” (R-16).

“I purposely came to study in Türkiye so I could experience some of the international student exchange programs, such as Erasmus and other cultural exchange programs, as well as meet and build relationships with people from different backgrounds.” (R19).

“Getting a scholarship to study in Türkiye was one of my major goals. On the other hand, one of my goals was to study in Istanbul, visit some historical sites, experience the city's vibrant and intercultural activities, and student exchange programs.” (R-12).

The respondents highlight a number of factors that extend beyond academic concerns. A few examples of these qualities are the advantages that Türkiye's geographical location, cultural diversity, and historical attractions offer. One of the goals that West African students have is to gain a well-rounded educational experience that includes the opportunity to learn about a wide range of cultures, locations, and historical landmarks.

Türkiye being at the intersection of Europe and Asia, serves as a convenient hub for immigrants and students who wish to visit both regions. Because of this, students have the opportunity to gain knowledge about a wider range of historical periods and cultural traditions. They also learn about and experience the cultures of their fellow students, who come from Europe and Asia.

4.2. INTEGRATION OF THE WEST AFRICAN STUDENTS INTO TURKISH SOCIETY

A few questions were posed to the respondents regarding their integration into Turkish society, their adaptability, and their job experience in Türkiye as international students. The purpose of these questions was to gain a better understanding of the integration dynamics that are present among West African students in Türkiye.

The participants were asked the following questions: *How have you adapted to the local culture and customs? What aspects of Türkiye's culture did you find most surprising? Have you experienced any cultural misunderstandings? How did you handle them? Do you feel integrated into Turkish society in terms of language and culture?*” In general, the participants express hospitality with the Turkish people. On the other hand, they express the difficulty of the Turkish language and their frustration with not getting student jobs or employment.

4.2.1. Cultural Integration

The process of cultural integration is an essential component of the journey of a foreign student, and Türkiye offers a conducive environment for students from West Africa to adjust to and thrive in. This process of integration is made easier by a number of factors, including the presence of common cultural characteristics, advantageous university environments, community networks, and initiatives carried out by the government.

Prior to proceeding, it is imperative that we grasp the essence of cultural integration. According to Kessler (2023), the term "cultural integration" refers to the process by which individuals from one culture adopt the essential characteristics of another culture while simultaneously maintaining their own cultural identity. Instead of completely rejecting the new culture or giving up their own culture, they combine the two cultures into a single tradition. They accomplish this by incorporating aspects of their culture into their communities through the mediums of cuisine, language, music, artistic manifestations, attitudes, and traditional rituals.

In addition to this, they adapt to the local norms and ways of socializing, as well as incorporate pieces of their new culture into their lives here. Changes in culture can be seen on the streets and campuses of prominent cities like Istanbul, Ankara, and Antalya, among others.

In their responses, twelve individuals highlighted the cultural commonalities that exist between their nations and Türkiye. According to the respondents, there are parallels in their values, beliefs, and attitudes. Some examples of cultural norms are respect for guests, religious rituals, and hospitality.

“The Turkish people are very kind and hospitable. They love foreigners, especially Africans. Hospitality and kindness are very significant for Turkish people. They treat their neighbors with respect and harmony. They always want us to learn Turkish so we can communicate with them better. I believe our cultural integration is evident.” (R-13).

“When it comes to hospitality, I think Turkish people are the best. The only thing I know about them is that they rarely give you cash, but whether you are hungry or not, they always want to spoil your belly with food. And I love the way they respect their elders, which is exactly the same norm we have in my country. I believe this respect stems from Islamic teachings.” (R-2).

“Although some of them are racist and call us names like Zinci and Siyahi, I believe the majority of them are nice people. They love it when you speak their language or sing a Turkish song. I enjoy attending their weddings and cultural events. The only thing I dislike about them is that they get angry easily.” (R-8).

Except for those whose language of study is Turkish, the other respondents whose language of study is English unanimously expressed that it is sometimes difficult to have conversations with local people due to language barriers. Due to the lack of job opportunities for students in Türkiye, international students may consider moving to Europe or other countries such as the USA and Canada, where they have the opportunity to work off campus and make ends meet (Smith, J. A. 2011; Berry, 2006).

The respondents present several different points of view regarding individuals' encounters and experiences with Turkish people. These perspectives highlight themes such as respect for elders, cultural integration, hospitality, and the difficulties that may arise from xenophobia or even potential racism.

Factors that promote cultural integration include cultural commonalities, shared values, and religious rituals. Both Turkish and West African cultures prioritize close-knit family relationships, warm hospitality, and respect for elderly people. These shared values contribute to a sense of familiarity and comfort for West African students in Türkiye.

A significant proportion of West African students adhere to the Islamic faith, which aligns with the predominant religion and cultural background of the Turkish community, thereby creating a sense of familiarity. Individuals have convenient access to mosques and are able to extensively partake in Islamic customs such as observing Ramadan and celebrating Eid.

University support systems, such as orientation programs and international offices, aid African students' adaptation and integration. Several Turkish colleges and universities offer orientation programs specifically designed for international students, including those from West Africa. These seminars familiarize students with Turkish culture, fundamental aspects of the language, and available resources on campus. Universities generally maintain foreign student offices that offer continuous assistance, coordinate cultural activities, and promote social inclusion.

Community networks, such as African Student Associations, and cultural activities are significant contributors. Several colleges facilitate African student associations, which serve as a forum for cultural interchange, reciprocal assistance, and social engagement. These associations frequently coordinate events that commemorate African culture, promoting a feeling of camaraderie among students.

Several institutions commemorate cultural festivals and events such as African Cultural Day, where they exhibit traditional music, dancing, cuisine, and costume. These events serve the purpose of enabling African students to both showcase their culture to others and preserve their connection to their origin.

Practical considerations about integration encompass housing options such as university dormitories and shared apartments. Residing in university dormitories facilitates the integration of international students, including those from West Africa, by offering a communal living setting that enables them to engage with students from other cultural backgrounds. Certain students prefer shared apartments, since they provide a higher level of privacy while still allowing for the formation of tight-knit communities with other international students.

Everyday activities and interpersonal communication, including the exchange of cultural practices, food, and culinary traditions, play a crucial role in the process of international students' integration into Turkish environments. West African students have direct knowledge of Turkish culture through their daily encounters with Turkish students and active participation in local activities and traditions.

Despite its distinctiveness, Turkish cuisine's wide range of flavors and abundance of ingredients make it highly appealing to several West African students. International food markets and African restaurants, located in major cities like Istanbul and Ankara, accommodate the tastes and dietary preferences of some African individuals.

In summary, the participants highlight a variety of experiences, ranging from perspectives that are overwhelmingly positive regarding Turkish hospitality and cultural integration to mixed opinions that encompass both positive and negative features. There are some respondents who realize the obstacles that may arise, such as the possibility of racism and the perception of a tendency toward anger. However, there are also other respondents who value cultural commonalities, religious practices, and beneficial relationships. These many points of view highlight how important it is to acknowledge that individual experiences might differ and that contacts with the local community make a substantial contribution to the overall experience of studying abroad.

4.2.2. *Language barriers*

The findings of the research conducted by Wiltschko (2022) and Kempson et al. (2016) indicate that language is a complex system that encompasses thoughts, values, feelings, and perceptions. Furthermore, they explained that language serves as a representation of the relationship between a group's ethnicity and its social identity.

Language and culture have a significant relationship, which is critical for both cultural integration and adapting to a new environment. According to Beaven and Spencer-Oatey (2016), language is a key component of the process of cultural learning and adaptation in a society. The results of their research support this belief. Those who are moving to a new country frequently confront the task of overcoming a language barrier. This is a commonly encountered obstacle.

According to the findings of Kempson et al. (2016), individuals are subjected to an increasing level of pressure to adjust to the new realities of life in the host nation. This pressure is a direct result of the language that is implemented in that country.

It was reported by the individuals who took part in this research that the language barrier in Türkiye was the first and most challenging issue that they had to deal with due to the cultural differences that existed between them.

“The ability to acquire and speak a language is necessary in order to swiftly adjust to any new society in which your culture and language are different from those of the country in which you are now living. I think the Turkish people hold their language in high esteem; even if they can speak English, they will still speak Turkish, even if you don’t understand. As a result, they make it really tough for us, the foreigners, especially when you are new to the country.” (R-1)

“Due to the language barrier, it was challenging for me to speak with the people in my community when I first arrived. After I studied the Turkish at my university’s Turkish language center (Tömer), I gradually became able to converse with and comprehend the language, but due to the complexity of the language, I continue to find it difficult, and I am not yet as fluent as I want to be.” (R-6).

Despite the fact that Turkish universities provide Turkish language courses, some foreign students still struggle with the language.

“I have been a student in Türkiye for almost 9 years, and unfortunately, I can’t speak Turkish fluently. I am a PhD candidate, and from my undergraduate years up to my PhD, all of my study has been in full English. My university is fully English, and I only took Turkish 1 and 2 during my undergraduate study, which wasn’t enough to fully understand Turkish. I think that affected my ability to learn the Turkish language. There are many foreign students out there like me, especially those whose language of study is English or who are attending universities that are fully English.” (R-11).

“I love the Turkish language; it is very sweet when you are fluent in it. It was very easy for me to learn because I knew both Arabic and French before coming to Türkiye. I think that helps facilitate my academic journey and get me along with the Turkish people.” (R-16).

The participants provided insights into the difficulties and significance of acquiring language skills while studying in Türkiye, especially for those whose main language of instruction at their various institutions is not Turkish.

The respondents, both individually and collectively, underscore the significance of language in their educational journey in Türkiye, which affected some of their integration into Turkish society and their interactions with the local people. Despite some West African students finding it difficult with the language, a lot of them understand and are very fluent, especially those pursuing their degree in Turkish.

The difficulties presented by the Turkish language, whether perceived or actual, might impact newcomers' ability to communicate and adapt. The second response indicates a proactive attitude toward overcoming language hurdles through attempts to learn Turkish. Furthermore, the third response highlights that students enrolled in English-language programs often face limited exposure to Turkish, potentially impeding their language proficiency even after an extended period in the country, while the fourth respondent expresses his love for the Turkish language. To improve the entire experience that foreign students have in Türkiye, these findings highlight the significance of language help and integration programs for foreign students.

4.2.3. *Migration and Social Network*

The intricate and ever-changing social and migration network of West African international students in Türkiye is shaped by a multitude of elements, such as historical connections, educational prospects, socio-economic circumstances, and cultural interactions.

In order to get a deeper comprehension of immigrant adaptation, it is crucial to familiarize ourselves with their social and migratory network structures, since these factors have significant importance in the field of migration studies.

Migration studies define social networks as "influential patterns" that guide migrants in their choice of resettlement areas. In other words, individuals opt to settle in locations where they have social networks that they feel connected to or that have a significant impact on their decisions (Brigitte Suter, 2017).

A major network can be precisely characterized as a "social network," primarily focused on people who share the same community origin. The respondents have affiliations with some campus and community-based organizations and student associations in Türkiye founded by their own kinsmen from their country of origin.

“Being an Ivorian student in Türkiye, my experience has been highly transforming, both in terms of academics and personal growth. The Türkiye Scholarships Program played a crucial role in influencing my choice to pursue my studies here. The provision of financial assistance and housing arrangements has alleviated my concerns regarding living costs, enabling me to concentrate on my academic pursuits. Initially, the Turkish language sessions posed a significant challenge, but they have proven important in facilitating my integration and adaptation into the local community.” (R-17).

“The experience I have had as a student from Guinea in Türkiye has been exceptionally distinctive. I was attracted to Türkiye due to its burgeoning reputation in the field of education and the extensive scholarships available. The Guinean Students Association has played a fundamental role in shaping my social life. They coordinate a diverse range of activities aimed at facilitating the management of homesickness and cultural disparities.” (R-15).

The accounts provided by the respondents emphasize the substantial influence of the Türkiye Scholarships Program and the available supportive community structures for international students. The Ivorian student highlights the profound impact of his academic and personal development, mostly due to the financial and housing assistance offered by the scholarship program. This assistance has mitigated financial burdens, enabling him to concentrate more on his academic pursuits.

Moreover, despite his initial linguistic challenges with Turkish language, these sessions have finally been advantageous for his integration into the local community. This feature highlights the program's holistic approach, which not only focuses on academic requirements but also promotes cultural integration.

Conversely, the experience of the student from Guinea brings to light the growing recognition that Türkiye is receiving in the sphere of education as well as the necessity of social support systems for international students.

According to Massey et al. (1993), migrant or social networks are interpersonal connections that link migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in both their home and destination places through familial, friendly, and communal relationships. They enhance the probability of international migration by reducing the expenses and hazards associated with it while simultaneously boosting the anticipated net gains from migrating. Network connections serve as a type of social capital that individuals might utilize to enter other realms.

According to Şanlı (2018), immigrant social networks develop their own distinct social cultures and effectively address many geographical and social challenges, including finding housing, gaining acceptance within their network, securing job, accessing education, and maintaining good health.

The support provided by social networks plays a pivotal role for many West African immigrants in determining their settlement locations. These networks often serve as a vital resource for navigating the complexities of relocating to a new country, particularly in regions where language, culture, and local customs may differ significantly from their home countries. For many immigrants, connections within established communities or student organizations can be the deciding factor in where they choose to live, as these networks offer both emotional support and practical assistance during the transition process.

Several respondents in my research highlighted their active participation in community and student-oriented groups such as UDEF (Federation of International Student Associations) and Ilimhane. These organizations are instrumental in helping students meet their essential needs, such as housing, legal assistance, and language support. Furthermore, they play a crucial role in providing valuable recommendations for internships and employment opportunities across various institutions and firms. Through these networks, students and immigrants can access a wealth of resources that facilitate their integration into the host society, while also offering opportunities for professional development and social engagement.

“The Sierra Leone Students Association in Türkiye has been the most important component of my stay in Türkiye. This group has been a crucial source of support, providing a feeling of belonging and assistance. We facilitate cultural activities, coordinate study groups, and aid new students during their initial adjustment period. In addition, the African Students Association has offered chances to connect with students from many African nations, enhancing my network and cultural encounters.” (R-14).

“My fellow Liberians have been incredibly helpful to me, and the Turkish people are generally welcoming. Through my university's social clubs, I've made quite a few local friends. These associations have played a vit al role in facilitating my adjustment to Turkish culture and language. Nevertheless, it might be challenging at times. The language barrier is a substantial obstacle, particularly in comprehending lectures and engaging in class discussions. The Turkish language lessons are beneficial, yet achieving proficiency requires a significant investment of time and work.” (R-7).

The response from the Sierra Leonean and Liberian students in Türkiye highlights the crucial significance of student clubs and social networks in their adjustment and overall encounter. The Sierra Leone Students Association has played a crucial role in offering a feeling of inclusion and assistance to Sierra Leonean students. This Association not only organizes cultural activities and study groups, but also provides support to new students throughout their early time of transition.

This study found that a strong social network of friends, family, coworkers, familiar acquaintances, and other personal contacts helps West African students in Türkiye be happier, more prosperous, and more successful in their personal and academic lives. They also appreciate their relationships with Africans and Turkish donors and humanitarian organizations.

4.3. THE INTENTION AND FUTURE PLANS FOR FURTHER MIGRATION

Researchers such as Suter (2012), Fait (2023), and Mahir (2017) claim that the African immigrants in Türkiye are using the country as a stepping-stone to Europe. Most of those researchers focus on irregular African immigrants. This study's aim is to determine or discover whether West African students in Türkiye have intentions of using Türkiye as a stepping-stone to Europe, the USA, and Canada, as some researchers have widely claimed.

In order to understand and determine whether the African students anticipate using Türkiye as a stepping-stone, I asked the participants several questions. *“After your studies, would you like to settle in Türkiye, move to another country, or go back to your home country?”* *If you were granted a student exchange program like Erasmus+ to Europe or worked and traveled to the USA, would you return to Türkiye to continue your studies?* These questions entail their plans for further migration, their post-program plans, and their opinions about student exchange programs like Erasmus, USA student work, and travel programs. The objective is to ascertain whether they intend to abandon their education in Türkiye if granted the Erasmus opportunity or a visit to the USA or Canada during their studies.

A multifaceted approach is necessary to comprehend the intentions of African students in Türkiye, particularly their future migration plans, post-program aspirations, and perspectives on student exchange programs.

4.3.1. *Considering Education and Career Opportunities in Another Country*

The West African students who are pursuing their studies in Türkiye often contemplate their future prospects for education and profession, both within and beyond the borders of Türkiye. This consideration involves evaluating the possible advantages and challenges of various pathways.

“I came to Türkiye to pursue my engineering degree. Although the education I am receiving here is of high quality, I am constantly contemplating my future plans. I am particularly interested in the prospect of relocating to Germany or France after completing my education because of the better job opportunities in my field. Regrettably, the Turks do not offer ample chances for foreigners.” (R-4)

The respondent above reflects a prevalent sentiment among international students studying in Türkiye. The interviewee praises Türkiye's education but worries about career prospects. The interviewee expresses concern about the perceived absence of professional career opportunities for foreigners.

“My goal is to finish school here in Türkiye and maybe consider moving to another country because Türkiye doesn't give opportunities to foreigners, and because of the corruption and nepotism in my country, I don't think going back is a solution.” (R-8).

"I'm currently studying international relations, and I'm open to opportunities everywhere." However, my ultimate objective is to get employment with international organizations, and I would like to do it either in Europe or in Africa.” (R-10).

The responses from the research participants indicate a mutual apprehension about the limited professional prospects available to foreigners in the country, despite the excellent education they are receiving. The initial student, who is currently obtaining a degree in engineering, is already considering future plans that entail moving to either Germany or Canada. The decision stemmed from the more favorable employment opportunities in these countries. This is a practical strategy for ensuring a prosperous job after graduation and emphasizes a perceived disparity between the educational and professional environments in Türkiye for foreign students.

Similarly, the second student articulates a desire to complete their degree in Türkiye but is also contemplating relocating to another country. The combination of restricted prospects for foreigners in Türkiye and the prevalence of corruption and nepotism in their home country significantly impacts this decision, rendering the prospect of returning home unappealing.

Additionally, a quarter of the respondents highlight a notable obstacle, such as the lack of opportunities in Türkiye and the appalling situations in their home countries: although Türkiye may provide a strong educational setting, it seems to lack sufficient post-graduation prospects for foreign or graduate students. The current circumstances compel students to search for more favorable opportunities in other places, which highlights the larger concerns regarding employment rules and inclusivity in the Turkish job market for international graduates.

4.3.2. Consider Staying in Türkiye

A substantial influx of West African students comes to Türkiye to pursue higher education. The findings of this research show that while some students are willing to seek education and career opportunities outside of Türkiye after their first degree, others may consider continuing to pursue advanced degrees (master's, PhD) in Türkiye if they find the academic environment conducive and opportunities favorable, such as employment and scholarships.

Students who plan to stay in Türkiye anticipate finding suitable employment opportunities or continuing their academic journey, as Türkiye's growing economy and strategic location can appeal to those looking to establish careers in business, engineering, or technology sectors.

"I am currently pursuing a degree in business management and my intention is to remain in Türkiye after completing my studies, provided that I am able to secure a promising employment opportunity." The Turkish market is seeing significant growth, presenting numerous lucrative opportunities." (R-2).

"Upon completing my master's degree in economics, my intention is to pursue a PhD in Türkiye. This decision is primarily driven by the availability of generous scholarships that would ensure both my financial stability and educational advancement. Therefore, Türkiye currently holds the highest priority for my doctoral studies." (I3).

"I am currently pursuing a degree in computer science, and I am eager to begin my professional journey in Türkiye's thriving technology sector. However, I anticipate challenges due to the limited job prospects in Türkiye. Nonetheless, I remain optimistic and look forward to seeing how things unfold." (R-16).

The participants showed a mixture of optimism and cautious anticipation over their future professional aspirations when it comes to deciding whether to stay in Türkiye, return to their home countries, or move to another country. However, one third of the participants preferred to stay in Türkiye and continue their studies, especially the master students, as evidenced by their responses.

The student of business management has shown a strong desire to remain in Türkiye after graduation. This desire is motivated by the potential expansion in the Turkish market as well as the profitable chances that it presents. This viewpoint highlights a positive stance on the possibility for professional achievement within the increasing business sector in Türkiye, provided that one is able to secure a job that is acceptable for them.

The student of economics, on the other hand, is dedicated to achieving academic success and has the intention of pursuing a doctoral degree in Türkiye due to the availability of large scholarships that ensure financial security. It is clear that this choice demonstrates a high degree of confidence in the capacity of the Turkish educational system to support advanced courses and give the appropriate amounts of financial assistance.

The student of computer science is excited to enter Türkiye's rapidly developing technology sector; but he is also afraid of the potential difficulties that could arise due to the restricted work opportunities available. In spite of this, the student continues to have a positive outlook on the future, which indicates that they have a balanced perspective that accepts the possibility of challenges while yet keeping hope for favorable outcomes. These responses, when taken as a whole, demonstrate a sophisticated awareness of the educational and professional scene in Türkiye, which is marked by opportunities as well as problems for international students.

International students who choose to remain in Türkiye after completing their studies often express a blend of optimism and caution about their future prospects. Many are drawn to Türkiye's growing economy and the potential for professional growth, particularly in fields such as technology, business, and education. These students appreciate the opportunities that Türkiye offers, including its strategic location, diverse culture, and relatively lower cost of living compared to other Western countries. Additionally, some are motivated by the desire to further their education, taking advantage of Türkiye's expanding range of advanced degree programs and the financial incentives such as scholarships that make continued study more accessible.

However, the decision to stay in Türkiye is not without its challenges. International students often cite difficulties in navigating the local job market, particularly due to language barriers and the sometimes-limited availability of work opportunities that align with their qualifications.

4.3.3. Consider Returning to the Home Country

Some of the participants highlighted their preference for returning to their home countries after their studies. As previously mentioned, nearly all of the participants acknowledged the challenges of returning to their home countries due to the scarcity of opportunities and the prevalence of nepotism. However, some respondents expressed a preference to return home, despite the potential challenges they might encounter. These students hope to have the opportunity to contribute to their home countries. Factors such as the job market and entrepreneurial opportunities motivate them to consider going back home.

Students can assess their countries' job markets to determine if their academic field has good prospects. In Ivory Coast, healthcare, engineering, and technology may offer better job prospects. These countries are growing economically and executing development efforts; thus, some participants have secured work in these fields.

Several West African countries, such as Ivory Coast, Guinea, Nigeria, and Senegal, are actively cultivating entrepreneurial ecosystems, creating a favorable environment for graduates to come back and establish their own enterprises. This is especially pertinent for domains such as technology, agriculture, and business administration.

Among the total of 20 participants, only 3 students explicitly expressed their desire to go back to their home country and actively contribute to the advancement of their country's economy, healthcare industry, and technology.

"My aim is to apply my agricultural education to enhance farming practices in Guinea after I finish my studies. Türkiye offers good technical training, so I think I can go back home and apply those technical skills and knowledge that I am learning." (R-10).

"Upon completion of my medical degree, I aspire to return to Ivory Coast with the intention of pursuing a career in the healthcare sector." The acquisition of knowledge and experience in this environment is of utmost importance for my future endeavors." (R-1).

"I'm currently studying business management; my main ambition is to finish my studies, go back to Sierra Leone, and open my own proper enterprise." (R-9).

It is evident from the responses of participants that they have the purpose of utilizing their education to contribute to their home countries. This demonstrates a feeling of responsibility and a desire to improve the conditions in their own countries.

The student who is concentrating on agricultural education has the objective of enhancing farming methods in Guinea, with a particular emphasis on the crucial technical instruction that was gained in Türkiye. In this response, a practical approach to implementing learnt abilities in a real-world situation is demonstrated. This demonstrates the belief that education in Türkiye gives the necessary tools to have a substantial difference in the agricultural sector of their native country.

It is also important to note that the medical student intends to return to Liberia to pursue a profession in the healthcare industry. This highlights the significance of the knowledge and experience that they have obtained in Türkiye for their future ambitions. Through the utilization of the medical knowledge and practical experience gained in other Türkiye, this approach demonstrates a commitment to enhancing the quality of healthcare in Liberia.

Another student from Sierra Leone who is studying business management has a similar goal in mind, and that is to establish a legitimate firm when they get back to their home country. This aspiration highlights an entrepreneurial spirit and a desire to contribute to the economic growth of Sierra Leone by using the ideas of business that were acquired in Türkiye. These comments, when taken as a whole, demonstrate a shared aspiration among the students to make use of the knowledge they have received in Türkiye to contribute to the growth and advancement of their individual home countries.

International students who decide to return to their home countries after completing their studies in Türkiye often do so with a sense of purpose and determination. Many view their education in Türkiye as a valuable experience that has equipped them with new skills, knowledge, and perspectives that they are eager to apply in their home countries. They often express a desire to contribute to the development of their countries, bringing back not only academic qualifications but also a broader understanding of different cultures and ways of thinking. These students are typically motivated by a strong sense of duty to use their education to make a positive impact in their communities, whether through professional work, entrepreneurship, or furthering social and economic development.

4.3.4. In Decision-Making (Do not know what to do next)

For West African students in Türkiye who are uncertain about their future after finishing their studies, they might investigate several factors and approaches. These students frequently encounter ambiguity on whether to continue their studies, start their professional careers, or go back to their countries of origin.

"I am currently undecided. Right now, my aim is to successfully finish my education and thereafter assess my alternatives. The outcome will be contingent upon the availability of opportunities." (R-2).

"All my options are overwhelming me. My time in Türkiye studying international relations has been amazing, but now I'm at a crossroads. On one hand, I'm considering a master's degree in Türkiye or another country. Going back to Sierra Leone is another option. I have a variety of government and non-government opportunities to apply my skills. However, the employment market and whether I can find a position that matches my career ambitions worry me. I'm talking to mentors and attending university career counseling about all these alternatives. I want to decide shortly whether that matches my long-term ambitions." (R-5).

The above responses collectively represent a period of considerable ambiguity and careful consideration experienced by students approaching the conclusion of their education in Türkiye. The initial person adopts a neutral position, prioritizing the completion of her studies before considering future prospects depending on their availability. The latter signifies a multitude of choices and apprehensions over the alignment of future prospects with career aspirations.

"As I near graduation in computer engineering, I'm at a crossroads. My education and experience in Türkiye have been invaluable, but now I must determine what to do next. I'm thinking of getting a master's degree in artificial intelligence or cybersecurity. Türkiye has great programs, and I've been looking at German and UK universities. Immediate employment is another enticing possibility. I also consider returning to Liberia." (R-20).

A few participants in the study indicate a prevailing sense of uncertainty and the necessity of assessing various choices for their post-graduation plans. The initial student is currently indecisive, prioritizing the completion of her studies before making any judgements. The individual emphasizes that the availability of possibilities will determine her future choices. She emphasizes a pragmatic approach that guides decisions based on the job market and personal objectives. This statement demonstrates a prudent yet adaptable approach, acknowledging the significance of assessing immediate options post-graduation.

As seen in the other two participant responses above, they express similar opinions but offer more elaborate explanations of their cognitive processes. The student from Sierra Leone, pursuing a degree in international affairs, expresses feeling overwhelmed by the wide range of options available. The individuals are considering pursuing additional education in Türkiye or overseas, as well as exploring potential career prospects in both governmental and non-governmental sectors in their home country. Their preoccupation with securing employment that is in line with their professional aspirations is apparent, and they are actively seeking guidance from mentors and career counseling programs. This response emphasizes the intricacy of their decision-making process and the significance of ensuring that their choices are in line with their long-term objectives. In conclusion, the students demonstrate a profound contemplation of their future trajectories, shaped by their educational experiences in Türkiye and elsewhere.

International students facing the dilemma of what to do next after their studies in Türkiye often find themselves in a complex and uncertain situation. Torn between staying in Türkiye, seeking further migration to Western countries, or returning to their home countries, they weigh the pros and cons of each option. Staying in Türkiye offers familiarity and the possibility of leveraging their local networks, but language barriers and limited job opportunities might pose challenges. The allure of migrating to Western countries is strong, driven by the prospect of better career opportunities and a potentially higher standard of living, yet this path comes with its own uncertainties, such as visa challenges and the need to adapt to new environments. Returning home is often seen as a way to give back to their communities and apply their knowledge where it is most needed but concerns about job prospects and re-adapting to local conditions may cause hesitation. In this state of indecision, these students often feel the weight of making a choice that will significantly shape their future, leading them to carefully consider their personal and professional goals, as well as the potential long-term impacts of each option.

4.3.1. Opinions on the Student Exchange Programs (Erasmus+ and the USA Work & Travel Programs)

To investigate the transit intentions of West African students studying in Türkiye, I posed the following question to them: "Would you return to Türkiye if granted the Erasmus+ program or the summer work and travel program in the USA?"

The responses prioritized their studies in Türkiye, claiming that they would return to continue their studies. However, a few made an exception, stating that they might stay and never return if they had a good professional career opportunity or, alternatively, scholarships.

Academic, professional, and personal aspects influence the diverse aspirations of African students in Türkiye for their future. Their perception of the advantages in terms of education quality, career opportunities, and financial rewards largely influences their choices to participate in exchange programs like Erasmus or work and travel in the USA.

The majority of participants in this study claim that they will return to Türkiye and complete their studies even if granted an Erasmus+ scholarship or USA summer work and travel programs and internships. Notwithstanding the alternatives available to them, many students give priority to their studies in Türkiye.

"The Erasmus program provides an excellent opportunity to learn about other European colleges and cultures. If I get the opportunity, I will seize it with both hands. However, following my stint in Europe, I will return to Türkiye to complete my studies."
(R-18)

"Erasmus is appealing to me because it offers the opportunity to establish connections with fellow students throughout Europe, which is crucial for my professional development." Nevertheless, I would not discard my studies here in Türkiye as I have made significant progress, and it is imperative for me to obtain that degree." **(R-15).**

The responses underscore the significant allure of the Erasmus program for international students in Türkiye, underlining its contribution to enriching educational and cultural experiences. Both respondents express great enthusiasm for the opportunities that Erasmus offers, particularly the chance to experience European cultures and professional networking.

They consider these experiences to be essential for their career advancement. Notwithstanding this passion, there is a certain dedication to going back to Türkiye in order to finish their studies. This devotion highlights the value they attach to completing their degrees in Türkiye, recognizing the substantial advancements they have achieved and the imperative of acquiring their qualifications. The comments indicate a well-balanced strategy in utilizing overseas chances while remaining committed to their academic objectives in Türkiye.

"Erasmus is highly appealing due to its top-notch education and the opportunity for me as an engineering student to immerse myself in a dynamic European engineering industry." However, I cannot forgo my studies here in Türkiye because they are meticulously structured. Nevertheless, a short-term Erasmus exchange program could be advantageous without causing any disruption to my main academic pursuits in Türkiye." (R-11).

All of the responses from students who are thinking about participating in the Erasmus program indicate that they have a great desire to broaden their scholastic and cultural horizons by taking advantage of this opportunity to exchange with students from Europe. Every student recognizes the relevance of the Erasmus program because it provides them with the opportunity to form international relationships and exposure to a variety of educational systems, both of which are essential for their professional development.

As an illustration, the first student is enthusiastic about participating in the Erasmus program in order to gain knowledge about the educational institutions and cultures of Europe; nonetheless, they underline their dedication to returning to Türkiye in order to finish their studies. This demonstrates a planned approach to utilizing the Erasmus program as a supplementary augmentation to their primary education in Türkiye.

Similar to the first and second students, the second and third students recognize the appeal of Erasmus for its potential to facilitate networking and its high-quality education, particularly in relation to their professional development. The second student underlines the significance of continuing their academic advancement in Türkiye, emphasizing that it is essential for them to finish their degree in Türkiye. Despite the fact that the third student, who is a student of engineering, considers the Erasmus program to be a useful opportunity to obtain insights into the engineering business in Europe, they stress the significance of preserving the structured character of their education in Türkiye.

As a result of their wish to incorporate international experiences without interfering with their core academic responsibilities, they advise that participating in a short-term Erasmus exchange could be advantageous. These replies, taken as a whole, demonstrate a balanced perspective in which the students respect the additional chances that Erasmus provides while yet maintaining a firm determination to complete their studies in Türkiye.

The USA Work and Travel Program is a well-regarded program that allows students from other countries to fully immerse themselves in the culture of the United States. The U.S.A's summer work and travel program offers students who are studying abroad the opportunity to gain professional and cultural experiences.

This program is appealing to students because it provides them with the opportunity to gain actual work experience throughout the summer. They can offer an insight into the work culture of the U.S and potentially pave the way for longer-term opportunities that lead to increased connectivity. Living in the U.S.A offers two benefits: personal development and a broader perspective on the world.

"When it comes to acquiring work experience, the USA Work and Travel program is beneficial; nevertheless, I am more interested in participating in academic exchanges. On the other hand, if I receive a direct offer to work with international organizations or an advanced degree that is a perfect match for my professional ambitions while I am participating in the summer work and travel program, then I will prefer to remain." (R-17)

"While the USA work and travel program is intriguing, it doesn't directly align with my field of study. If the opportunity exists, I will consider the program, but I will return to Türkiye and complete my studies." (R-19).

"The USA Work and Travel program provides an excellent opportunity to obtain international experience while also making connections in the United States, which is exactly what I'm looking for. I would weigh my options carefully. If the USA program provided a direct road to internships or positions at top tech companies, I might consider it. Otherwise, I'd rather finish my degree here and then move." (R-13).

Those students who are thinking or considering participating in the work and travel program in the U.S.A have submitted responses that shed light on a nuanced perspective that strikes a balance between the desire to obtain experience working in international jobs and the drive to complete their studies in Türkiye. The first student places a larger priority on participation in academic exchanges, despite the fact that he values the opportunity to get job experience that the USA program gives. He will be participating in the program.

The students have expressed that they are willing to consider the idea of remaining in the U.S.A if they are presented with a direct offer from foreign organizations or if they are able to get an advanced degree that is in line with their desired career path. The students have demonstrated that they have a strategic mindset by offering this response. They have shown that they are willing to take advantage of opportunities that will directly contribute to the advancement of their career goals.

On the other hand, despite the fact that they are aware of the attractiveness of the USA Work and Travel program, a number of students have voiced a strong preference for completing their education in Türkiye. The individual who is the second response in the previous sentence considers the program to be fascinating and highlights her ambition to go back to Türkiye in order to finish her degree.

Obtaining international experience and making connections in the U.S.A is something that the third respondent sees as a valuable opportunity provided by the program. There were several students who claimed that they would only consider remaining in the U.S.A if the experiences they gained via their job and travel led to significant employment opportunities or internships.

In general, these statements reflect a thoughtful approach in which the students evaluate the advantages of acquiring international job experience against the significance of completing their academic degrees in Türkiye. The fact that the students have a well-rounded perspective on the educational and professional development paths that they are following is demonstrated by this.

4.4. Factors leading to potential migration.

This is a crucial part of the study, as it determines the factors that are leading the West African students to leave Türkiye and seek further migration. The future aspirations of West African students in Türkiye might exhibit significant variation, and it is crucial to acknowledge the diversity of individual objectives and ambitions. While several West African students in Türkiye may perceive their stay as transitory or transitional, others may harbor enduring aspirations or intents to create a permanent presence in the country.

The respondents identified several determining factors, including employment challenges, legal and administrative factors, and housing and social services challenges. The participants also highlighted factors such as professional career advancement, full integration, and permanent and possibly citizenship in Western countries, which the Turkish government is reluctant to provide for foreigners.

4.4.1. Employment challenges

The intention of every international student is to complete their studies and have a great career. Some West African students might perceive their academic journey in Türkiye as a transitory phase, a phenomenon commonly known as "transit migration." Generally, this term signifies that a person perceives their present whereabouts as a transitional phase leading to a more enduring final destination.

African students in Türkiye may have unique experiences compared to other international students due to their diverse identities. The African students encountered a variety of societal, emotional, psychological, and academic obstacles. The experiences of African students are shaped by assumptions and preconceptions based on their race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and background (Musizvingoza, 2020).

“As foreigners, one of the challenges we face in Türkiye is having a professional job. Even if you complete your studies, it is not easy to get a job. Sometimes, private entities hire qualified foreign graduates, a rare occurrence due to stringent government regulations. The process is often quite complex.” (R-4).

The response illuminates the substantial obstacles that foreign graduates face in obtaining professional employment in Türkiye. Foreign students encounter challenges in the job market, predominantly as a result of restrictive government regulations that restrict their employment prospects, despite having completed their studies. The employment process for foreigners is characterized by its complexity and difficulty, as evidenced by the rarity of private companies that engage qualified foreign graduates. Despite their qualifications, international talent may be discouraged from truly contributing to the economy due to the systemic barriers that foreign professionals must overcome, which are indicative of broader issues regarding policy and integration within the Turkish job market.

“Securing a job here in Türkiye is like a taboo. Most of us here in Istanbul work in factories, such as textiles, enterprises, and other manufacturing companies. Sometimes, they will look at you and say, Yabancılar almıyoruz. This means we don't accept foreigners. It is heartbreaking.” (R-7).

“In Türkiye, even PhD holders are struggling to get a job. I know many people have master's degrees and PhDs, but they are working underground jobs and online marketing to make ends meet. Most of us go to marketplaces such as Beyazıt, Eminönü, and Grand Bazar on a daily basis to render services for foreigners and tourists.” (R-9).

The response from the participants emphasizes the considerable obstacles they face in obtaining professional work, exemplifying the wider problem of labor market inclusivity for foreigners. The initial student acknowledges the challenge of securing a professional job despite completing their studies, comparing this predicament to rigorous government restrictions and a convoluted recruiting procedure.

The scarcity of private organizations recruiting highly skilled foreign graduates underscores the structural obstacles that impede the transition from school to employment for international students in Türkiye. This circumstance indicates a disparity between the educational practices of the country that entice international students and its labor market laws that limit their job prospects. The participants emphasize the difficult challenges that international graduate students in Türkiye encounter.

The R-7 student explains that a significant number of individuals end up employed in low-skilled or precarious jobs within factories, encountering direct refusal with statements such as "Yabancılar almıyoruz," which translates to "we do not accept foreigners." This rejection not only curtails their employment opportunities but also impacts their sense of inclusion and vocational self-perception.

The R-9 student highlights the fact that individuals with advanced degrees, such as master's and PhDs, face difficulties in securing suitable employment and frequently turn to informal or lower-skilled occupations for their survival.

This encompasses activities such as participating in markets or conducting online marketing, highlighting a notable underutilization of their expertise and credentials. These combined experiences illustrate a difficult climate for foreign graduates in Türkiye, where systemic and societal obstacles greatly hinder their professional integration and career progression.

4.4.2. Legal and administrative factors

Some international students are able to obtain jobs and permits to remain permanently in Türkiye. As a result, some students may be considering relocating to a different country for an extended period of time. The decision to settle down in a foreign nation for an extended period of time may be motivated by a number of factors, including the desire to experience a different way of life, the pursuit of better professional possibilities, or even familial considerations.

In accordance with the Turkish Law 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (YUKK), which was approved by the President on April 10, 2013, and Law No. 28615, which was published in the Official Gazette on April 11, 2013, non-Turkish students who want to stay in Türkiye longer than their student visa allows (more than 30 to 90 days) can apply for a student residence permit.

According to the Turkish immigration law, foreign students can apply for a short-term postgraduate resident permit. This permit can either be valid for a period of six months or up to one year. In many cases, foreign students are expected to leave the country after their studies. On the other hand, international students who are still continuing their education can apply for an extension of their student permit.

The student or study permit can renew 60 days in advance before its expiration date, along with giving documentation of continue education (Göç İdaresi, 2023). The student's express difficulty in obtaining a postgraduate short-term resident permit due to bureaucratic reasons. They illuminate this notion based on the experiences of their fellow students who have completed their studies in Türkiye.

"Türkiye is a nice country, and we love to be here, but unfortunately, they don't give you a permanent residence permit even if you spend 10 years in the country. I know friends who studied in countries like France, the USA, and Canada. They have a good job, and after graduation, they obtain permanent residency. Some even have citizenship after five years. Imagine that I have been in this country for nine years, and renewing my student permit is even more difficult." (R-6).

"Unfortunately, it is difficult to set a long-term goal in Türkiye due to its policy toward foreigners. The good part is that we can earn our degree here with ease in terms of tuition and flexibility, but to secure a good job and settle down, you need to have strong connections. Either you have the financial resources to start your own business or secure a job in the private sector, both of which can be challenging to obtain." (R-8).

"There are so many obstacles for us foreign students in Türkiye; one is the language barrier, two is a lack of connections, and three is discrimination. I believe Türkiye is a great country, but they are not ready to fully integrate foreigners into their society, just like Westerners do. They compete with those countries in terms of economic, technological, and human resources, but they are very conservative, making it difficult for us foreigners to settle down here after our studies." (R-11).

"We came to this country because of its flexibility with tuition and scholarship opportunities. The only options available to us are to either earn our degree and relocate to a country such as the USA, Canada, or Europe or to return to our home country, as the Turkish government is making life increasingly challenging for us. The Turkish government has closed numerous neighbourhoods and communities, further exacerbating the situation by denying us the ability to settle. I see this as legal discrimination that aims to prevent us from applying for a residence permit and expel us from the country." (R-13).

The participants collectively highlight significant obstacles and frustrations in obtaining permanent residency and achieving professional integration. The initial response highlights the challenge of acquiring a permanent residence permit despite residing in the country for an extended period. He compares his situation to the more hospitable policies of countries such as France, the USA, and Canada, where graduates frequently have the opportunity to obtain permanent residency or citizenship within a few years.

This comparison highlights the feelings of alienation and administrative barriers that foreign students encounter in Türkiye, which have an impact on their future goals and feelings of safety and put them in a transition phase of migration.

The following responses further explore the underlying structural problems that impede the ability of international students to adapt and integrate into Türkiye. The second student emphasizes the difficulty of establishing long-term goals in light of policies that hinder the ability to obtain stable employment and build a solid foundation without substantial financial means or influential connections.

The third student identifies several obstacles, including the language barrier, limited social networks, and prejudice. Almost all of the participants unanimously agreed and emphasized that Türkiye's conservative position contradicts its aspirations to rival Western nations. Many view this conservatism as a significant barrier to the full integration of foreigners into Turkish society.

Finally, the R-13 student emphasizes the limited opportunities available after graduation, stating that increasingly strict regulations, such as restricting them from renting and settling in certain neighborhoods and communities, force many people to move abroad or return home. Students view this as a challenge, which further complicates the process of settling in Türkiye. The respondents consider Türkiye as a country that offers flexible tuition and scholarships for international students yet challenges their adaptation, integration, and professional success.

As of June 1, 2023, Türkiye had reduced its foreigner quota from 25% to 20% (Simply TR/Göç idaresi, 2023). As a result, this policy can push foreigners, including West African internationals post-graduate students who are looking for employment and career advancement, to stay in the country illegally and have an alternative to moving to another country.

4.4.3. Challenges of Housing and Social Services

The challenges of finding accommodation and social service are two of the factors making it difficult for African students in Türkiye. African students often face racial prejudice when seeking accommodation. Landlords may refuse to rent to them based on their race, which can severely limit their housing options.

Despite the dormitory facilities provided by both government and private institutions, some international students still struggle to find a space in the school dorm, especially those who are not receiving any scholarships. Some landlords may demand higher rent or additional deposits from African students compared to their local or non-African peers.

The segregation practice puts an additional financial strain on these students and discourages them from staying after their studies. The participant asserted that the attitudes of some Turkish individuals towards them, along with the new measures and restrictions imposed by the government on foreigners, are significantly hindering their progress.

“The new measures implemented by the government are causing significant instability within the country. Foreigners, particularly Africans, find it challenging to secure a rental house. Inflation has led to a significant increase in rent. The government's restriction on closing some neighborhoods and communities makes it even harder for us. We don't have any choice but to leave for another country or return home.” (R-12).

“These days, Turkish people rarely rent their houses to Africans. Before they grant you a house, they require you to bring a trusted Turkish person as a guarantor. Housing discrimination is severely affecting us, and I believe this serves as a signal that we are no longer necessary. This is detrimental to the Turkish economy, as our taxes and school fees significantly contribute to its growth.” (R-16)

African students in Türkiye often face significant challenges related to housing and social services, reflecting broader issues of challenges and exclusion. When it comes to securing accommodation, many African students report encountering biased treatment from landlords and real estate agents, who may be reluctant to rent to them based on their race or nationality. These challenges can take various forms, including exorbitant rental prices, outright refusal to rent, or the provision of substandard housing that falls short of what Turkish students and students from other regions receive.

The lack of legal protections or enforcement against such segregation practices exacerbates the situation, leaving African students with limited and often unsatisfactory housing options.

“Unfortunately, there is a high level of bureaucratic discrimination and segregation by some locals when it comes to rent, businesses, and banking. I think those students who are on government scholarships are very relaxed, as they don’t encounter any rent or health insurance issues. As private students, we are currently facing significant challenges. We only rely on some humanitarian organizations to assist us.” (R-19).

“I think they're literally kicking us out of their country because things are getting tougher every day. We are facing numerous challenges such as rent, school fees, discrimination, and ikamet issues. When looking for a house, some landlords will say, "Zincilere vermiyoruz," which means we don't give houses to niggers or black people, which is really disheartening.” (R-3).

The replies collectively illuminate the complexities and challenges Africans, particularly private students, face in Türkiye. African students face significant challenges in housing, business, employment, and bureaucratic processes. The participants emphasize the increasing difficulties and prejudice they encounter, namely regarding accommodation and overall living standards.

An analysis of the repercussions of recent acts taken by the government, which have led to instability and made it more difficult to find rental lodgings, is performed by the first student. The rising inflation in the country as a result of COVID-19 has led to an increase in rental prices, and the restrictions that have been put on certain neighborhoods have further worsened the difficulties that immigrants, particularly Africans, experience when it comes to acquiring accommodation.

As a result of the current circumstances, a great number of people are being forced to consider leaving Türkiye and moving to other countries or going back to their home countries. This is a manifestation of a sense of inhospitality and the growing impracticality of remaining in the country.

The second response provides a more in-depth analysis of housing challenges, specifically highlighting the growing reluctance of Turkish landlords to rent to Africans unless they had a reliable Turkish guarantor. This segregation behavior not only obstructs the students' housing opportunities but also communicates a broader cultural message of their lack of inclusion. The student highlights the adverse economic consequences this has on Türkiye, as foreign students make substantial contributions through taxes and school fees. This viewpoint highlights the conflict between the economic advantages that foreigners bring and the increasing social and institutional obstacles they encounter.

International students face widespread segregation and administrative barriers, as revealed by the third and fourth responses. The third student brings to light instances of workplace prejudice that have occurred in a variety of fields, including banking, enterprises, and various housing situations. The author draws attention to the gap between students receiving government scholarships, who face relatively fewer hurdles, and private students, who face difficulties and are dependent on humanitarian organizations for support.

The fourth response portrays the sensation of being forcibly removed from the country, together with the daily challenges that are associated with the costs of housing, the costs of schooling, and prejudice. The fact that landlords use language that is disrespectful highlights the racial bias that is a contributing factor to the emotional and practical difficulties that these students are experiencing. Taking all of these responses into consideration, they paint a bleak picture of the increasing difficulties and institutional bias that international students in Türkiye are encountering, which is prompting many of them to question their chances of being successful in the country.

A final point to consider is that African students in Türkiye face a significant challenge in housing and social services. To find a solution to this problem, it is necessary for colleges, government agencies, and organizations representing civil society to get together and work together in order to create an environment that is more encouraging and comprehensive. The implementation of anti-segregation laws, the promotion of diversity, and the establishment of extensive support networks are all viable options for improving the educational experiences of African students in Türkiye.

CHAPTER V.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a concise overview of the main discoveries made in this thesis, highlights the advancements it brings to the current body of literature and theoretical frameworks, the implications of the study, the hypothesis and recommendation, and proposes suggestions and possibilities for further research.

5.1. Discussion

This thesis provides a comprehensive examination of the role of Türkiye as a transit country for West African immigrants, particularly students from Mano River Union (MRU) countries (Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Sierra Leone). Through qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews and participant observation, the study highlights the multifaceted experiences of these students, their motivations for choosing Türkiye, and their subsequent migratory intentions.

The dynamic nature of transit migration presents considerable difficulties in establishing its specific time and geographical limits, as well as classifying migrants according to their intents and circumstances. Notwithstanding these difficulties, studying transit migration is critical because of its increasing significance in the current context of human movement. This study enhances comprehension of transit migration dynamics and their consequences for migrants and host societies by challenging existing migration typologies and policy frameworks.

The findings of this study are categorized into four segments: the first segment explores the reasons why West African international students choose Türkiye for their studies; the second segment explores their integration processes, experiences, and challenges in Türkiye; the third segment focuses on factors that may lead to potential or further migration; and the final segment focuses on their intentions and future plans.

Many complex elements influence West African students' decisions to study in Türkiye. Outstanding scholarship options, low tuition and living costs, rich cultural and historical heritage, and an ideal location make Türkiye stand out. All the above factors are part of the driving forces of the African students towards Türkiye.

One of the primary motivating factors for West African students is the availability of extensive scholarship programs. Türkiye offers a diverse range of scholarships through programs such as the Türkiye Scholarships Program (YTB) and the collaborative Islamic Development Bank Scholarships (IsDB), which include tuition fees, monthly stipends, accommodation, health insurance, and even a one-year Turkish language study.

In addition, several Turkish universities, such as Koç University, Sabancı University, and Bilkent University, as well as governmental organizations like TÜBİTAK and Diyanet, offer scholarships and research funds. These financial subsidies are essential for several students who would otherwise be incapable of affording an overseas education. The scholarships not only reduce the financial strain for international students but also boost the attractiveness of Türkiye as a viable location for higher education.

The findings indicate that the favorable affordability of both tuition and living expenses draws West African students to Türkiye. Türkiye has affordable tuition fees compared to other Western countries, making it a compelling choice for students with limited financial resources. Public universities generally have cheaper tuition prices, although private institutions frequently provide significant scholarships to help cover expenses.

The overall cost of living, which includes expenses such as housing, meals, and transportation, is relatively affordable, allowing students to support themselves without significant financial burden. Türkiye's combination of affordable tuition, excellent education, and convenient living conditions makes it a top choice for international students.

Türkiye's cultural and historical assets add to its appeal. The nation's abundant legacy and dynamic cultural environment create a captivating setting for scholarly endeavors. Türkiye attracts students not only for its scholastic prospects, but also for the chance to fully engage with its distinctive cultural environment.

The historical landmarks, such as the Hagia Sophia and Topkapı Palace, in addition to the country's varied gastronomic and artistic customs, provide a comprehensive educational encounter that goes beyond the confines of the classroom. The cultural immersion experience greatly influences many students, fostering their general development and enhancing their worldwide encounters. Moreover, Türkiye's advantageous geographical position, which serves as a bridge between Europe and Asia, provides extra benefits for international students.

The strategic location of this Türkiye enables a wide range of cultural interactions and allows students to participate in programs such as Erasmus, which enhance their exposure to various cultures and academic settings in Europe. The close geographical proximity to Europe and the strong diplomatic connections with the European Union and other advanced countries create opportunities for academic partnerships, internships, and possible employment prospects. This strategic advantage not only improves the academic experience but also expands the students' perspectives, making Türkiye a compelling and strategic option for higher education.

Ultimately, a combination of factors like scholarship opportunities, tuition affordability, cultural richness, and strategic geographical benefits influence West African students' decision to study in Türkiye. These qualities collectively make a strong argument for Türkiye as a place that provides not just high-quality education but also a nurturing and friendly atmosphere for international students. Türkiye is enhancing its appeal to students from West Africa and other regions by comprehending and utilizing these reasons.

The second phase of this thesis focuses on the integration aspect of West African students into Türkiye society. Cultural commonalities and differences, linguistic difficulties, and social networks vary and impact the integration of West African students into Turkish society. Both Turkish and West African traditions firmly ingrain shared values, such as hospitality, respect for elders, and religious practices, which greatly aid cultural adaptation.

Respondents emphasized the Turkish people's warmth and compassion, citing cultural similarities that contribute to a sense of familiarity and comfort. Turkish universities and community networks play an important role in facilitating this integration, with orientation programs and student groups serving as forums for cultural exchange and social participation. Despite some limitations, these efforts together help to create a friendly environment for West African students.

The findings indicate that some West African students still encounter significant language challenges. The intricacy of the Turkish language for African students, especially those whose language of instruction is English, causes them to struggle with the Turkish language, which restricts their capacity to fully engage with the local community and affects their integration.

The influence of language and the art on African students is substantial. Several Turkish colleges provide language classes specifically designed for overseas students, facilitating their integration into the local culture. Students get the opportunity to delve into traditional Turkish skills such as ebru (marbling), calligraphy, and carpet weaving, which enrich their cultural comprehension and admiration.

Türkiye offers a magnificent array of culinary diversity. The Turkish cuisine is widely recognized for its diverse range of dishes and rich flavors. Students indulge in a wide range of delicious cuisine, including kebabs, the Turkish famous soup çorba, baklava, and various street delicacies, which offer them a diverse and flavorful gastronomic experience. International students can enjoy a distinctive gastronomic experience with the combination of Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and Mediterranean cuisines.

The cultural emphasis on speaking Turkish exacerbated the challenge, making daily interactions difficult for people who are not fluent in the language. Some students have been able to overcome these difficulties through concentrated language study, while others continue to struggle, emphasizing the need for stronger language support networks. These students' diverse experiences demonstrate the importance of language in their entire integration and adaptation processes.

Migration and social networks significantly influence the experiences of West African students in Türkiye. Initiatives such as the Türkiye Scholarships Program offer crucial monetary and accommodation assistance, mitigating a portion of the economic burdens experienced by foreign students.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that international student organizations and associations in Türkiye provide essential social assistance, helping students deal with feelings of homesickness and navigate cultural disparities. These groups serve to not only enable cultural events and provide academic support, but also to foster connections among students who share similar backgrounds, boosting their overall sense of belonging and well-being. Common cultural values and community support create an inclusive environment, but language still hinders integration. The students' experiences include both the pros and cons of living and learning abroad.

In order to improve the overall experience of West African students in Türkiye, it is crucial to more efficiently tackle these linguistic hurdles and further increase the support systems offered by universities and student unions. These efforts will help ensure that international students are able to actively participate and make valuable contributions to society.

As the main objective of this thesis is to discover if African students are using Türkiye as a steppingstone to get to western countries through student exchange programs such as Erasmus and USA Work and Travel, the findings reveal the complex and diverse aspirations of the research participants.

The findings indicate that while some students perceive Türkiye as a steppingstone due to limited professional opportunities for foreigners, others consider staying in Türkiye for further education or career prospects, hoping for favorable conditions. Due to the limited job opportunities for foreigners, some students view staying in Türkiye as a transitional stage. The complex situation highlights the various motivations shaped by education level, professional prospects, and socio-economic conditions in both their home countries and Türkiye.

A significant number of students acknowledge the exceptional standard of education in Türkiye, but express doubts about staying in Türkiye and securing suitable employment post-graduation. About one-four of the participants expressed their eagerness to go to countries such as Germany, France, the USA, or Canada in search of improved employment possibilities. On the other hand, some students consider returning to their country in search of jobs, and a few others consider pursuing further education in Türkiye, provided they receive scholarships, and the academic options align with their goals. This discrepancy highlights a divergence between educational and career prospects for foreign students in Türkiye.

Conversely, participants who exhibit a profound inclination to remain in Türkiye given certain circumstances acknowledge the opportunities presented by Türkiye's expanding economy and the scholarships that are available to them. These scholarships can help them achieve their academic and career goals. Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of limited employment opportunities for foreigners moderates the optimism, necessitating a prudent yet optimistic outlook regarding their future in Türkiye. This emphasizes the delicate balance between being hopeful about the potential of Türkiye and being realistic about the difficulties it faces.

A smaller yet noteworthy cohort of students plans to return to their respective countries of origin after their studies with the aim of actively participating in the advancement of their countries' economic and social spheres. The aspiration to utilize their gained knowledge and abilities to enhance sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, and entrepreneurship in their respective home countries motivates these students. Although they acknowledge the difficulties posed by corruption and limited prospects in their own country, they demonstrate a profound sense of duty and confidence in their ability to create significant and positive change. This viewpoint demonstrates a dedication to utilizing their education in Türkiye to improve their respective countries, indicating a combination of personal drive and selflessness.

5.2. Conclusion

In our research, we discovered that the idea of Türkiye as a "transit country" is based on linear conceptions of the migration process that differ from individual personal goals. The participants shed light on how the migration journey frequently consists of various stages, both intended and unintended, and various statuses, characterized by shifting motivations and changing opportunities.

The participants mentioned that they chose to study in Türkiye due to the high standard of education, the scholarship opportunities, and the favorable geographical location of the country. A significant number of students recognized that Türkiye's close proximity to Europe and its renowned reputation for providing ample scholarships made it a highly appealing option for them. For example, the research students praised the exceptional standard of education in disciplines such as engineering, natural science, and social sciences courses. Additionally, they highlighted the financial assistance they received, which covered both their living expenses and tuition fees. The combination of these factors significantly influences the perceived ease and usefulness of studying in Türkiye, affirming that geographic and economic factors are crucial in determining their choice of destination.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that although these characteristics have great importance, they are not the exclusive determinants for selecting Türkiye. The decision is complex, encompassing factors such as cultural immersion, professional prospects, and individual growth. Thus, it is crucial to comprehend the idea within a wider framework of interconnected motivations, despite its receiving support.

The findings strongly corroborate the notion that foreign graduates are not socially and politically integrated into Turkish society. Participants expressed notable challenges in integration into Turkish society, encompassing both social and political aspects. They voiced apprehensions about the restricted professional prospects available to immigrants and perceived the labor sector as lacking inclusivity. Furthermore, social integration emerged as a persistent concern, as numerous students reported feelings of isolation or encountering challenges such as housing and social services.

Obstacles such as social professional career challenges, lack of opportunity, and segregation had a significant impact on the participants' future aspirations, leading many of them to contemplate relocating to Western countries or returning home. They believed that in these places, they would have improved prospects or be able to make a meaningful contribution despite the difficulties they faced.

For instance, students emphasized that although they received a high-quality education, they encountered a barrier to advancement in the Turkish labor market, which prompted them to pursue possibilities in more inclusive and diverse settings such as France, Germany, Canada, or the USA. Additionally, some individuals highlighted the challenges presented by corruption and nepotism in their countries of origin, which further compounded their deliberation regarding whether to return home.

Nevertheless, the findings also provide a subtle and detailed portrayal. Although numerous students have difficulties with integration, a portion of them have shown a willingness to remain in Türkiye provided they are able to obtain appropriate work or pursue further academic options. This implies that although there are notable challenges with integration, they can be overcome by some students. The students' experiences and replies demonstrate a range of results, which are affected by their personal resilience, individual objectives, and the specific opportunities they come across in Türkiye.

In conclusion, the results affirm the hypothesis while also emphasizing the intricate nature of the students' experiences and choices. Türkiye's good geographical location and educational opportunities attract African students. However, the lack of social and political integration significantly hinders their long-term aspirations, frequently prompting them to seek better opportunities elsewhere. As a result, it places them on the transit migration concept and plan.

The theoretical implications of findings enhance the overall discussion on migration and education by emphasizing the intricate motivations and experiences of African students in Türkiye. This study emphasizes the significance of incorporating socio-cultural and economic aspects to comprehend migration patterns.

The study demonstrates that students' decisions regarding migration are influenced by a combination of educational options, financial factors, and social integration experiences. This challenges the oversimplified push-pull conceptions of migration. Moreover, it enhances the existing body of knowledge on transnationalism by illustrating how educational migration can be a component of broader migratory patterns, where students perceive Türkiye as an intermediate stage rather than an ultimate goal.

The practical applications of the study's findings emphasize the necessity for universities and educational institutions in Türkiye to provide more extensive support networks for international students. This encompasses not just academic assistance, but also many services that promote social adaptation, such as language classes, cultural exchange initiatives, and social platforms that connect international students with local communities. To bridge the gap between education and work possibilities faced by many international students, it is imperative to customize career services in order to align them more effectively with job opportunities in Türkiye. These measures can aid in the retention of skilled individuals and mitigate the inclination of students to perceive Türkiye merely as a transit point.

Overall, the results of this study have important consequences for theory, practice, and policy. The statement emphasizes the importance of developing a more sophisticated comprehension of the international student movement that extends beyond economic factors to encompass educational, social, and geopolitical aspects. Implementing pragmatic strategies to strengthen the support infrastructure for international students, with policy reforms that facilitate adaptation, integration, and job prospects, will assist Türkiye in retaining the skilled individuals it recruits and transforming educational migration into permanent residency. These actions are essential for transforming Türkiye from merely a transit point into a viable and appealing destination for international students and professionals.

5.3. The study limitations

This study provides useful insights into West African students' goals and future plans in Türkiye, but its limitations must be acknowledged to properly contextualize the findings. Sample size and demographics are major constraints. The study included a small number of West African students, which may not adequately represent the diversity of experiences and intentions among African students in Türkiye. The study's reliance on self-reported interview data may introduce biases such as social desirability bias, causing participants to give expected replies instead of their genuine intentions.

In addition, the study lacks a thorough examination of the wider socio-political environment in Türkiye, which encompasses the unique regulations that influence international students, the economic situation, and the repercussions of global occurrences like the COVID-19 pandemic. While these factors may have had a substantial impact on students' decisions and experiences, they were not the main focus of the research.

Despite these limitations, the study provides significant initial observations and emphasizes the necessity for further comprehensive and varied research. Future research should strive to incorporate larger and more diverse samples, utilize longitudinal designs, and consider a wider array of external factors in order to offer a more thorough comprehension of the experiences and intents of African students in Türkiye. By accepting these limitations, we can gain a deeper understanding of the study's results and recognize the importance of conducting more research in this crucial field.

5.4. Suggestion on future research

Future research should explore deeper into several areas to address the gaps and limitations identified in this study. These factors include longitudinal studies, comparative analysis, quantitative research, integration experiences, and policy impact assessments.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the migration patterns and career trajectories of West African students following their studies in Türkiye, it is crucial to perform longitudinal studies. These studies would provide extensive data on the students' movements to Western countries and the influence of their Turkish education on their professional paths.

Additionally, a comparative analysis should be conducted between West African students in Türkiye and those in other non-Western countries to determine whether the phenomenon of students using a transit country is unique to Türkiye or part of a broader trend among students in similar geographical and socioeconomic contexts. Integrating qualitative findings with quantitative research is necessary to statistically confirm observed trends. Conducting surveys with a larger participant base could accurately measure the percentage of students who use Türkiye as a transit point and identify the specific factors influencing their decision-making process.

Moreover, it is important to investigate the distinct obstacles African students in Türkiye face regarding social and political integration, such as adaptations, cultural adjustment, and support mechanisms. A deeper understanding of these challenges can provide valuable insights for developing policies to enhance integration. We should conduct a policy impact assessment to assess the effectiveness of current Turkish policies, such as scholarship programs, job placement services, and post-graduation visa policies, in attracting and retaining international students. This assessment could help refine strategies to enhance Türkiye's appeal as a desirable long-term destination. Finally, examining the perspectives of Turkish institutions, employers, and local communities on the presence of African students in Türkiye is essential to uncover potential systemic prejudices or deficiencies in support that may influence students' decisions to remain or depart.

The purpose of these suggestions is to develop a more sophisticated comprehension of the educational and migratory dynamics concerning West African students in Türkiye, with the ultimate goal of formulating more efficient educational policies and integration strategies.

Finally, future research could assess the impact of Türkiye's educational policies on attracting and retaining African students. This could include an evaluation of scholarship programs, language barriers, and the availability of support services that address the unique needs of African students.

5.1. Recommendations

The study's findings suggest several recommendations for organizations, institutions, and policymakers to better support African students in Türkiye and enhance their integration and educational experiences:

To support African students more effectively, organizations and educational institutions should focus on enhancing scholarship programs by expanding their accessibility and adaptability. Scholarships that cover both tuition and living expenses can alleviate financial burdens, allowing students to concentrate fully on their academic pursuits. Additionally, institutions should implement initiatives aimed at fostering the social and political integration of African students, such as cultural exchange programs, language instruction, and platforms for engagement between international and domestic students. Universities and institutions should also offer comprehensive career counseling and support services specifically tailored for foreign students, providing information on employment opportunities, internships, work permits in Türkiye, and organizing networking events with potential employers.

Furthermore, policymakers need to enforce and strengthen anti-segregation laws to ensure a welcoming and inclusive environment for international students. Clear protocols for reporting and addressing instances of segregation should be developed. Educational institutions should also improve academic support by offering supplementary services such as tutoring, mentorship programs, and workshops designed to enhance academic skills, which can help students adapt to the educational system and achieve academic success.

Simplifying administrative procedures related to study permits, residency permits, and work authorizations can reduce bureaucratic hurdles and stress for international students. Providing clear and easily accessible information on these processes is essential. Establishing strong alumni networks for international students can provide ongoing support and opportunities beyond graduation, allowing alumni to share their experiences and offer guidance to current students, fostering a sense of community and connection.

Finally, educational institutions and policymakers should implement regular evaluations of the needs and experiences of international students through surveys and feedback mechanisms. This continuous assessment can help identify emerging issues and allow for the customization of support services to better meet students' needs.

CHAPTER VI

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CHAPTER VII

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Invitation to participate in the research project



**Graduate School of Social Sciences
Master of Science in Migration Studies**

PARTICIPANTS WANTED

Title of the research project: TÜRKİYE AS A TRANSIT COUNTRY FOR AFRICAN MIGRANTS: A CASE STUDY OF MANO RIVER UNION COUNTRIES.

Invitation to participate in research project

Goal of the project: The primary goal of this study is to understand why a significant number of West African students choose Türkiye for studies, as well as to investigate and comprehend the speculation that these students are using Türkiye as a transit country to reach Europe, the USA, Canada, or other Western countries. The study also aims to explore the types of migration patterns that West African students are employing or attempting to migrate to other countries. We will use the study's results to formulate recommendations for policymakers, service providers, and community organizations on how to enhance the integration of foreign students in Türkiye, particularly those from the Mano River Union countries (Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Sierra Leone). Your unique perspectives and experiences would be invaluable in helping us better understand the socio-economic adaptation of the West African students and the accusation against them of using Türkiye as a transit point to reach their final destination.

To participate (inclusion and exclusion criteria):

- **You have to:**
 - The participant must be a West African from one of the Mano River Union countries (Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, or Sierra Leone).
 - The participant must be based in Ankara or Istanbul.
 - The participant must be an active student.
 - The participant must be an undergraduate, master, or PhD student.
 - The participant must have spent at least 2 years in Türkiye
 - The Participant must be at least 18 years of age or older.

Nature of your participation:

- The participant must agree to join the project voluntarily.
- The participant must consent to the interview.
- The participant must accept and sign the consent form before the interview.
- The interview will take place face to face or online based on his/her convenience.

Duration of your participation:

The interview will last for at least 45 minutes.

Place:

The interview will take place at the participant's house, workplace, or any other convenient place for the participant.

The Research Ethics Committee of the Ankara Social Sciences University approved the research project (project number: 94735)

For any questions about the research project or to express your interest in participating, contact the researcher or research director using the contact details below.

Research Team**Research Director:**

Name & Surname: Prof. Dr. Sutay YAVUZ
Faculty: Graduate School of Social Sciences
Department: Migration Studies
University: Ankara Social Sciences University

Student:

Name & Surname: Karamo Faruk Konneh
Status: Master's Candidate
Faculty: Graduate School of Social Sciences
Department: Migration Studies
University: Ankara Social Sciences University

APPENDIX B: ARAŞTIRMA GÖNÜLLÜ KATILIM FORMU (TÜRKÇE)

Bu çalışma, Göç Çalışmasıyla başlıklı bir araştırma çalışması olup Türkiye'deki Batı Afrikalı öğrencileri incelemeyi amacıyla yüksek lisans tezini için hazırlanmıştır. Amaç, Batı Afrikalı öğrencilerin Türkiye'ye transit ülke olarak kullanma niyetinde olup olmadıklarını ortaya çıkarmaktır. Çalışma, Karamo Faruk Konneh tarafından yürütülmekte ve sonuçları ile Afrikalı öğrenciler, elverişli coğrafi konumu ve eğitim olanakları sağlamadaki esnekliği nedeniyle Türkiye'ye geliyor. Afrikalı öğrenciler için Avrupa, ABD, ve Kanada hedef olarak kavramsallaştırılıyor. Afrikalı göçmenler sosyal ve politik olarak Türk toplumuna entegre olmadığı için Batılı ülkelere yönelmesine nedeni oluyor.

- Bu çalışmaya katılımınız gönüllülük esasına dayanmaktadır.
- Çalışmanın amacı doğrultusunda, yapılarak sizden veriler toplanacaktır.
- İsmınızı yazmak ya da kimliğinizi açığa çıkaracak bir bilgi vermek zorunda değilsiniz/araştırmada katılımcıların isimleri gizli tutulacaktır.
- Araştırma kapsamında toplanan veriler, sadece bilimsel amaçlar doğrultusunda kullanılacak, araştırmanın amacı dışında ya da bir başka araştırmada kullanılmayacak ve gerekmesi halinde, sizin (yazılı) izniniz olmadan başkalarıyla paylaşılmayacaktır.
- İstemeniz halinde sizden toplanan verileri inceleme hakkınız bulunmaktadır.
- Sizden toplanan veriler bilgisayar güçlü bir parolaya sahip bir bilgisayarda saklanır ve yöntemi ile korunacak ve araştırma bitiminde arşivlenecek veya imha edilecektir.
- Veri toplama sürecinde sizi rahatsız edecek herhangi bir soru veya talep olmayacaktır. Ancak katılımınız sırasında herhangi bir sebepten rahatsızlık duymanız durumunda istediğiniz zaman çalışmadan ayrılabilirsiniz. Çalışma yayınlanmadan önce çalışmadan çekilmek istemeniz halinde sizden toplanan verileri imha edeceğiz.

Gönüllü katılım formunu okumak ve değerlendirmek üzere ayırdığınız zaman için teşekkür ederim. Çalışma hakkındaki sorularınızı Ankara Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesinin Göç Çalışması bölümüne ve ya araştırmacıya ulaşabilirsiniz.

Araştırmacının :

Adı, Soyadı:

Adres : Ankara

Cep Tel :

Mail adresi:

Bu çalışmaya tamamen kendi rızamla, istediğim takdirde çalışmadan ayrılabilceğimi bilerek verdiğim bilgilerin bilimsel amaçlarla kullanılmasını kabul ediyorum.

(Lütfen bu formu doldurup imzaladıktan sonra veri toplayan kişiye veriniz.)

Katılımcının :

Adı, Soyadı :

İmza :

Tarih :

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION FORM (ENGLISH).

This research study is prepared for my master's thesis, "TÜRKİYE AS A TRANSIT COUNTRY FOR AFRICAN MIGRANTS: A CASE STUDY OF MANO RIVER UNION COUNTRIES," with the goal of examining West African students in Türkiye. The aim is to reveal whether West African students intend to use Türkiye as a transit country. The researcher's name is Karamo Faruk Konneh. The hypothesis of the study is that African students come to Türkiye due to its favorable geographical location and flexibility in providing educational opportunities. African students conceptualize Europe, the USA, and Canada as their destinations. African immigrants turn to Western countries due to the lack of social and political integration in Turkish society.

- Your participation in this study is voluntary.
- Data will be collected from you in line with the purpose of the study.
- You are not required to write your name or provide any information that would reveal your identity; the research participants' names will remain confidential.
- The data collected within the scope of the research will be used only for scientific purposes, will not be used for purposes other than the research or in any other research, and if necessary, will not be shared with others without your (written) permission.
- You have the right to review the data collected from you, if you wish.
- The data collected from you will be stored and protected on a computer with a strong password and will be archived or destroyed at the end of the research.
- There will be no questions or requests that may cause you discomfort during the data collection process. However, if you feel uncomfortable for any reason during your participation, you will be able to leave the study at any time. If you desire to be removed from the study before its publication data collected from you will be destroyed.

Thank you for taking the time to read and evaluate the volunteer participation form. If you have questions about the study, you can contact the Migration Studies department of Ankara Social Sciences University or the researcher.

Researcher:

Name, Surname:

Address: Ankara

Mobile Phone:

Email-address:

I agree that the information I have provided to this study, with my own consent and that I can withdraw from the study if I wish, will be used for scientific purposes.

(Please fill out and sign this form and give it to the data collector.)

Participant:

Name and surname:

Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRES

1. What is your name? (Anonymous; example respondent 1, 2, 3 etc.)
2. How old are you?
3. What is your nationality?
4. What is your sex/gender?
5. What is your level of education?
6. What is your field of study?

I. Reasons for Moving to Türkiye

1. How did you know about Türkiye?
2. What motivated you to move to Türkiye to study?
3. How long have you been in Türkiye?
4. Are you enrolling as a private student or a recipient of a scholarship?

II. Experience in Türkiye

5. How have you adapted to the local culture and customs?
6. What aspects of Türkiye's culture did you find most surprising?
7. Have you experienced any cultural misunderstandings? How did you handle them?

III. Intention, preference, and plan to migrate.

8. Do you plan to leave Türkiye? If so, at what point in time are you planning to do so?
9. If you were granted any student exchange program like Erasmus+ to Europe or worked and traveled to the USA, would you return to Türkiye to continue your studies?

IV. Future plans after studies

10. After your studies, would you like to settle in Türkiye, move to another country, or go back to your home country?
11. If you consider moving to another country, how do you intend to do that?
12. What is your plan after your studies?