



Africa region

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Student Flows

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outbound trends
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Overall outlook

In brief:

- 1 million students from Sub-Saharan Africa are expected to study internationally.
- France, the UK and the US are the primary destinations for African students.
- High population growth combined with slow university expansion will continue to drive African students abroad.

The number of outbound students from Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to grow by around 5% annually, increasing student numbers to over 1 million by 2030, driven by a rapidly expanding youth population. Over the last 10 years, the number of outbound students from Africa rose steadily, surpassing 800,000 in 2024, reflecting growing demand for international education and limited higher-education capacity across the continent.

Africa has the world’s youngest population, and its 18-25 age group is expected to grow by around 3% annually until 2030, the highest growth rate of any region globally. This is increasing the demand for higher education, fuelling increased outbound student mobility.

Nigeria has consistently sent more students abroad than other African countries, with 2024 sending over 125,000 students. In 2023, the number reached its highest level in a decade at around 140,000, driven by currency devaluation, frequent university strikes, and ongoing security concerns that make foreign education a preferred option despite rising costs for Nigerian students. Countries such as Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, and Cameroon have also shown high outbound mobility.

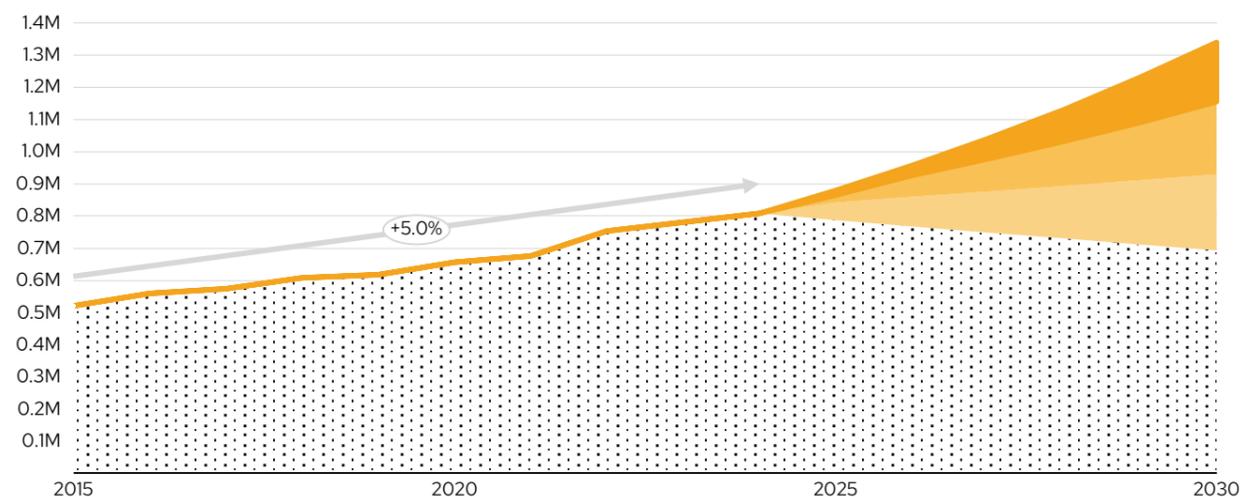
France, China, the UK, and the US are the primary destinations for African students, driven by these countries’ strong educational reputations, the availability of scholarships such as France’s Eiffel Scholarship, expanding Chinese government scholarship programmes, and language compatibility. Students from North African and Francophone African countries primarily choose France as their study destination, while Anglophone students from East and Southern Africa increasingly opt for the UK and the US for their higher education pursuits.

Intra-African mobility is increasing, but remains moderate, with hubs like South Africa, Kenya, and Morocco attracting students due to better rankings, stability, and growing private institutions. Across Africa, intra-regional flows were around 9–12% four years ago but dropped to about 8% in 2024, despite advantages like proximity, affordable tuition, recognised universities, and English-medium instruction. Enrolments have recently fallen due to tighter visa rules and safety concerns.

The future will likely be about balance. While African students will continue pursuing opportunities in the West and Asia, intra-African mobility is expected to grow significantly as costs, visa restrictions, and expanding capacity and quality in regional hubs make closer-to-home options more attractive.

In terms of total outbound students globally, Africa is the fastest-growing region, with a CAGR of 4.2%, and its global share of students abroad is expected to rise from 12% in 2024 to 13% by 2030. This increase stands out given that other major outbound regions, such as South Asia and Europe and Central Asia, are projected to remain relatively stable over the same period. Africa’s growth is driven by rapid youth population expansion, limited domestic university capacity, and rising middle-class demand, all of which continue to push students to seek education overseas.

Figure 1. Total international students outflows from Africa, 2015–2030F



Source: QS Global Student Flows, December 2025

Top destinations

In 2024, over 50% of all international students in France originated from Africa. This share has been rising steadily, supported by strong academic partnerships, affordable tuition and linguistic ties with Francophone and North African countries. Student mobility from Africa to France grew by around 4% between 2022 and 2025. Morocco, Algeria and Senegal are leading these numbers, positioning themselves among France’s top five sources and reflecting long-standing cultural and educational linkages.

Intra-regional mobility in Africa has weakened since 2022, as post-pandemic economic and social uncertainty has prompted more students to look further. The share of African outbound students choosing destinations within the continent has slipped from 10% in 2022 to 8% in 2024. Growth in intra-African enrolment is expected to slow, rising by only about 4% a year over the next five years. The waning share, just 8% of total outbound mobility in 2024, signals a growing preference for study options outside the region, where students believe they can secure better job prospects and stronger research environments.

Morocco is a key intra-regional hub, with enrolments rising at 5% through 2030. Morocco’s appeal is driven by its large scholarship initiatives, bilateral partnerships and cultural ties with other African countries. South Africa, once a leading intra-regional destination, is losing ground. It has long attracted students from across the continent, supported by proximity, cultural ties and comparatively affordable study options, reinforced by Southern African Development Community efforts to align qualifications. Seven of its top ten source countries are African. Yet visa hurdles, safety concerns and intensifying competition are weighing on demand. Inflows are now expected to grow by only about 2% a year over the next five years, pushing South Africa from the seventh to the ninth largest destination.

China is currently the second leading destination for African students, with enrolments increasing at an average of 9% over the past five years, and set to grow at an annual rate of 5% over the next five years. African students comprised nearly 20% of China’s foreign student body. Under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2024, Beijing has pledged scholarships for 60,000 African students over the next three years. China’s increasing investments in higher education and cultural exchange programmes aim to strengthen its long-term influence and foster strategic ties with future African leaders.

The UK is among the top three destinations for African students. While traditionally popular for fields like business and law, African students are increasingly enrolling in programmes in IT, computing, health and medicine. In 2024, students from Africa accounted for 10% of the UK’s international student population, hosting over 80,000 students from the region. Despite being a relatively expensive destination, the UK remains attractive due to its global reputation for universities, strong student support systems and career-oriented pathways. The UK alone accounts for almost half of Nigeria’s outbound student flows. These flows are driven by shared language, expanding institutional partnerships and access to government-funded scholarships such as Chevening and Commonwealth scholarships.

Beyond the main destinations, African student flows to the US and Canada have diverged sharply. Between 2022 and 2023, numbers rose by 17% to the US and 18% to Canada, reflecting strong interest in overseas academic pathways and better labour-market prospects. Yet the trajectory has since split. The US is now the fastest-growing destination, with enrolments set to rise by about 7% a year through 2030, driven largely by students from Nigeria and Ghana. Canada, by contrast, is slipping, with numbers expected to fall by roughly 0.7% a year. Volatility across Anglophone destinations is becoming more common, as tighter visa rules and caps on student intake weigh on demand outside the US.

Figure 2. Africa Student Outflow Growth Outlook.
Lower and Upper 95% Confidence Intervals 2024-2030F



Source: QS Global Student Flows, January 2026

Outbound trends

Top sources

Nigeria, Morocco, and Egypt remain Africa’s top student sources, with Nigeria’s large cohort of around 126,000 students, Morocco’s steadily rising 77,000, and Egypt’s 50,000 contributing to roughly 31% of the continent’s outbound total. Their combined scale and consistent growth show how just a few major senders continue to shape Africa’s overall mobility trends.

Nigeria alone represents 15% of Africa’s outbound volume, with growth fueled by underfunded universities, limited domestic course capacity, and economic instability. Morocco reflects a mature Francophone corridor, supported by ties to France and Belgium, rising middle-class investment, and government-backed pathways. Egypt’s renewed outward mobility is driven by overcrowded universities, oversubscribed STEM and medical programmes, and more affordable destinations like Turkey, Malaysia, and Eastern Europe.

Ghana is emerging as one of Africa’s fastest-growing student sources, with outbound flows expanding at around 10% annually. It is expected to move from the 7th to 5th place by 2030, overtaking Tunisia and Cameroon in the top source African countries. Growth is driven by a rising population and middle class, strong demand for English-taught programmes, recurring teacher and university strikes, and limited domestic capacity in competitive fields. With local universities struggling to meet growing youth demand, more students are seeking stable and high-quality options abroad, positioning Ghana as the continent’s next major growth market.

Africa’s exceptionally high population growth, particularly in Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Congo, Tanzania, and Kenya, continues to widen the gap between demand for university places and the availability of seats. As the number of tertiary-age students rises each year, outward flows are growing because domestic systems struggle to accommodate the increasing youth population. Nigeria and Egypt, two of Africa’s largest source countries for international students, are also among the continent’s fastest-expanding population centres, with Nigeria’s youth population (18-25) expected to grow at 3% and Egypt’s at 2.2% according to the UN. Nigeria’s large and growing youth population continues to place pressure on university access, sustaining steady outbound mobility and helping explain why flows continue to grow at a 3.4% CAGR, while Egypt’s similar demographic momentum, combined with oversubscribed STEM and medical programmes, underpins its 4.1% CAGR and the recent rebound in outbound movement.

The steady growth in student flows, 3.4% for Nigeria, 4.8% for Morocco, and 4.1% for Egypt, reflects these demographic pressures. Even in Morocco, where population growth is slower (1.3% annually over the next 5 years), the continued expansion of the tertiary age cohort supports outward mobility along long-established francophone pathways.

Academic disruptions and political tensions, such as Nigeria’s long ASUU strikes, Cameroon’s Anglophone crisis, causing school closures, and Ethiopia’s university shutdowns due to regional conflicts, interrupt studies and create uncertainty, pushing students to seek more stable and reliable education abroad. Limited availability of competitive programmes (medicine, engineering, IT, aviation, etc.)

means even top students cannot enter their preferred fields at home. This forces many to study abroad, where these programmes are widely available. Language limitations, many African systems teach in local or French-medium languages, while global industries require English. Students, therefore, seek English-taught degrees abroad to improve competitiveness.

Many African governments offer overseas scholarships, often because domestic institutions cannot produce enough specialists in medicine, engineering, oil & gas, or IT. These policies directly incentivise students to leave for countries offering targeted programmes.

What African students want

Top three sources of information African students use

73%

Official university website

60%

General online search

46%

Social media channels

Top three factors African students look to when choosing a university

60%

It is welcoming to international students

56%

It offers scholarships

50%

It offers high-quality teaching

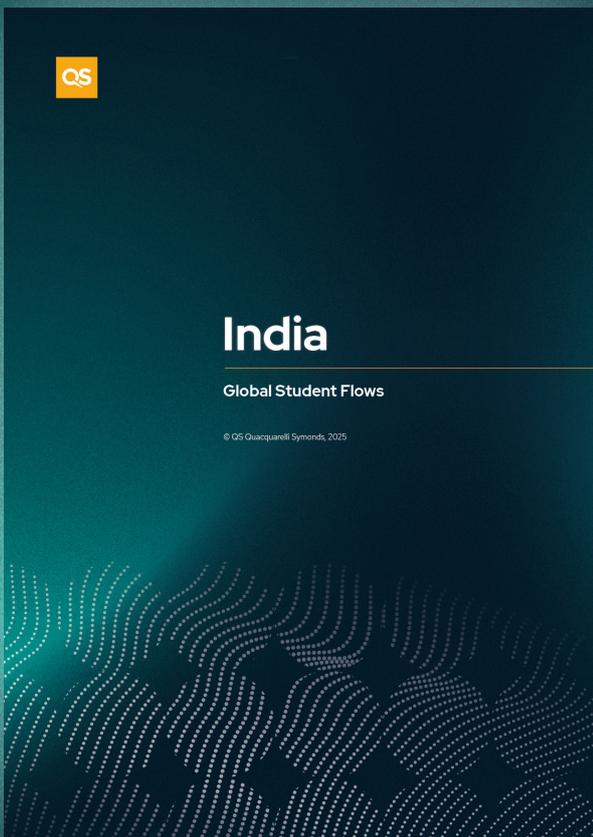
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