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Labour market insertion of African graduates: The experience of Erasmus Mundus

State of play report



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ABBREVIATIONS

AASU	All-African Students Union
ASAF	African Students and Alumni Forum
AU	African Union
BI	Business Intelligence
CCD-STeDe	Erasmus Mundus Joint Master on Climate Change and Diversity: Sustainable Territorial Development
CV	Curriculum Vitae
EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
EM	Erasmus Mundus
EMA	Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association
EMMIR	Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations
EMJMD	Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree
EMJM	Erasmus Mundus Joint Master
EMSI	Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative
ESCO	European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations
EU	European Union
GeoTec	Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Geospatial Technologies
GPA	Grade Point Averages
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LIVE	Erasmus Mundus Master in Leading International Vaccinology Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SMACCs	Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Smart Cities and Communities
VET	Vocational Education and Training
USA	United States of America

GLOSSARY

African Region: In accordance with the regional groupings of third countries not associated to the Programme defined in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide, the Africa region includes the following countries and territories:

- *Region 9 Sub-Saharan Africa:* Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Congo - Democratic Republic of the, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.
- Additionally, this report also includes some countries from *Region 3 South-Mediterranean Countries*, specifically Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Alumna/us: A former student who has completed their studies in a specific programme or at a particular university.

Associated Partner: Entities from the public or private sector that contribute to the implementation of specific project tasks or activities and support the promotion and sustainability of the project. They are, however, not considered beneficiaries for contractual management purposes and do not receive any funding from the Programme as part of the project. As such, they are not entitled to charge costs or claim contributions.

Beneficiary: When a project is awarded an Erasmus+ grant, the applicant organisation becomes a beneficiary by signing a contract with the National or Executive Agency that has selected the project. If the application was made on behalf of other participating organisations, the partners may become co-beneficiaries of the grant.

Competence: As defined by the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), competence refers to an individual's capacity to independently and autonomously apply their knowledge and skills in response to new situations and unforeseen challenges. It involves not only the ability to utilise existing expertise but also the adaptability to handle complex, dynamic contexts.

Employability: The combination of job-specific skills, soft skills, knowledge, and personal attributes that enable individuals to secure employment, succeed in their roles, and advance their careers.

Graduate: An individual who has completed their studies and obtained a degree or diploma from a university. The term applies to those who have transitioned from student life to the professional world or further academic pursuits.

Labour Market Insertion: The process through which individuals enter and become integrated into the workforce, whether through traditional employment, self-employment, or entrepreneurship.

Scholarship: A contribution towards the costs incurred by beneficiary students for full-time enrolment in an Erasmus Mundus Master's programme. This may be awarded to the highest-ranked students globally, fully covering their participation costs and providing support for travel, visa, and living allowance expenses throughout the duration of the Master's programme.

Skill: As defined by ESCO, skill typically refers to the ability to effectively use specific methods, techniques, or instruments within a particular context to accomplish a defined task.

Student: An individual who is currently enrolled in a college or university and is actively engaged in learning and academic activities. The term refers to someone who is in the process of completing their education, typically involved in coursework, exams, and other academic responsibilities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, the European Commission has made sustained efforts and allocated substantial budgetary resources to strengthen **international cooperation** in educational development, both within and beyond the European Union (EU) (Chelapi-Den Hamer, 2024). One of the most prominent initiatives is the **Erasmus Mundus (EM) Action**, launched in 2004 to foster excellence and the internationalisation of higher education institutions on a global scale through Master's-level study programmes. By offering students access to high-quality education in an international environment, these programmes seek to strengthen their global competitiveness and career prospects. One of the key expected impacts is to provide students with essential **competences** to enhance their employability and facilitate their insertion into the labour market (European Commission, 2024).

In this context, this report defines '**labour market insertion**' as the process through which individuals enter and become integrated into the workforce, whether through traditional employment, self-employment, or entrepreneurship. This transition is facilitated by individuals' level of employability, which includes a combination of job-specific skills, soft skills, knowledge, and personal attributes that enable them to secure employment, succeed in their roles, and advance their careers (Eurofound, 2019; Mgaiwa, 2021). As employability is a dynamic concept, higher education institutions must continuously refine their programmes to equip students with the evolving competences demanded by the labour market and society at large (Mansingh & Reddy, 2021).

Africa is one of the geographical focus areas¹ for the international dimension of Erasmus+. However, **African participation** in EM Master's programmes is observed to be lower compared to other regions. This involvement has primarily occurred through two main channels: scholarships for African students and institutional partnerships with African organisations. Since 2015, approximately 2,830 African students have enrolled in EM Master's programmes with scholarship support, while around 400 have participated without this financial aid. Of those receiving scholarships, 30% are funded by external action funds, representing one in three African scholarship holders. Additionally, African institutions have mainly participated as associated partners in EM consortia, with around 178 institutions involved under this framework. In contrast, a much smaller number of African institutions have taken part as beneficiaries in EM projects. Given these numbers, efforts from EM consortia are essential to ensure that the competences and opportunities offered through the programmes effectively support the **labour market insertion of African students**.

To better understand these challenges and opportunities, this state-of-play report delves into the current global employability and labour market prospects for African EM graduates. Specifically, it examines their performance within EM programmes, their transition into the labour market after graduation, and their career development as EM alumni. The aim is to provide context and support expert-level discussions among participants during the regional seminar '**Labour market insertion of African graduates: The experience of Erasmus Mundus**', to be held in a hybrid format in Nairobi on 2nd and 3rd April 2025. During the event, participants will be encouraged to share good practices for enhancing the labour market insertion of African EM graduates, discuss effective methods for tracking and measuring this integration, explore strategies for better aligning Erasmus Mundus with local and regional labour market needs, and highlight partnerships with industry and civil society within EM consortia.

¹ Refer to the Glossary attached to this report to view the list of African countries considered in the present analysis.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Approach

The first step in preparing this state-of-play report involved conducting **desk research** to collect background information on the current state of higher education in Africa and Euro-African collaboration in the sector, with a specific focus on Erasmus Mundus. Given the limited availability of relevant literature on the subject, exploratory interviews were also conducted to gain deeper insights into the career prospects and labour market insertion of African EM graduates.

Three **semi-structured interviews** were conducted with an African **alumnus** and two African **students** of EM Master's programmes. Additionally, a fourth semi-structured interview was conducted with an active member of the Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association (EMA) to collect additional input from a broader perspective. The interviewee, Reagan Chidhakwa², is an alumnus of the Erasmus Mundus Master in Leading International Vaccinology Education (LIVE) and serves as the Zimbabwe Country Representative in EMA. To ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, a coding system has been implemented throughout the report, assigning a unique code to each interview: IA, IB, IC, and ID.

The selection criteria for these interviews were defined to ensure gender balance³, geographical representation within the region⁴, and diversity of programmes. Both alumni and current students were targeted to provide a comprehensive perspective on career prospects, labour market insertion, and outcomes during and after the programme. Alumni offered a more distant viewpoint, sharing insights from a career development perspective, while current students discussed their career prospects and the more recent measures implemented by their programme.

Additionally, a **focus group** was conducted with coordinators from **seven EM consortia** that maintain partnerships with organisations in Africa and/or award substantial numbers of scholarships to African students. This consultation aimed to gather information on the measures implemented by EM consortia to ensure the performance of non-EU students, facilitate their entry into the labour market, and support their career development.

Findings from the desk research, interviews and focus group were consolidated into a **survey** targeting EM students and alumni from Africa. The survey aimed to quantify and expand upon the findings from the qualitative research, providing numerical data to support and contextualise the insights gathered. The survey was open for over three weeks in December 2024, resulting in a total of 56 responses, **48 of which were valid**. A balanced response rate was achieved, with 48% of participants being current EM students and 52% being EM alumni. Respondents represented a total of **16 African countries**⁵ and were enrolled in EM programmes across **16 different academic disciplines**⁶. All data collected through these activities were then integrated and analysed to incorporate the findings into the topics under research.

This document is organised into **six chapters**. After the introduction and methodology, Chapter 3 provides an overview of the African higher education sector and its role within the EM Action. Chapter 4 examines the academic and social integration of African students in EM Master's programmes and its impact on their academic performance. *'Towards Better Integration in the Labour Market'* explores the

² LIVE (last accessed February 2025): <https://masterlive-vaccinology.eu/>.

³ Gender balance was achieved by selecting two male and two female participants for the interviews.

⁴ Four different African countries were represented: Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

⁵ Namely; Algeria, Benin, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Morocco, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe.

⁶ Namely; Agriculture, Art, Chemistry, Economic Sciences, Education, Environmental & Geosciences, History, Information Science & Engineering, Information Technology, Life Sciences, Literature, Medical Sciences, Physics, Political Sciences, and Social Sciences & Humanities.

challenges African EM graduates face when entering the job market and how the programmes can help address these barriers. The final chapter highlights key trends in the professional careers of African EM graduates. A summary table presenting the identified student support and career-oriented measures implemented by EM consortia is provided in the Annex.

2.2. Limitations of the study

Given the limited number of interviewees and survey responses collected from African EM alumni and students, this report aims to be **exploratory**, rather than representative. Additionally, due to the international nature of EM Master's programmes, the report addresses the labour market **at a global scale**, rather than focusing on the African and/or European markets.

The findings should therefore be viewed as a preliminary basis for further exploration. The intention is to provide a foundation for discussions during the seminar, where **additional perspectives and insights** from African employers and other relevant industry stakeholders, will complement and enrich the conclusions presented in this report. These perspectives will be incorporated into the event's proceedings.

Lastly, as emphasised by some focus group participants, it is important to note that Africa is a vast continent with significant regional, cultural, and political diversity. These differences influence the analysis of career prospects and labour market insertion for African EM graduates, as the challenges they encounter in entering the job market, and the solutions to address them, may vary from one country to another.

3. CONTEXT

This chapter reviews the current state of higher education in Africa, its alignment with the region's labour market needs, and the evolution of international collaboration within the region. It also provides key data on the participation of African institutions and students in Erasmus Mundus.

3.1. Understanding the African higher education landscape

Higher education is a key driver of social, industrial, and economic development. Access to quality education is crucial for shaping informed citizens and fostering social cohesion (Chelpi-Den Hamer, 2024). National higher education systems, particularly higher education institutions, serve as catalysts for social transformation by equipping individuals with the knowledge and competences necessary to make a positive societal impact. However, for higher education to effectively contribute to economic development, it must **align with labour market demands** to facilitate graduates' successful integration. Achieving this requires the active involvement of all stakeholders, including universities and industry representatives (Guàrdia, et al., 2021).

Today, the African higher education landscape faces an ongoing **skills mismatch**. While many young Africans hold formal qualifications, there is growing concern among employers and workers about the alignment between graduates' competences and the region's job market demands (Guàrdia et al., 2021; International Labour Organisation, 2019). This gap is reflected in high youth unemployment rates (Fields et al., 2021), further raising questions about the work readiness of African graduates.

More specifically, while employers in Africa are generally satisfied with the disciplinary knowledge of African graduates, they perceive significant gaps in **advanced information and communication technology (ICT) skills** (British Council, 2014; International Labour Organisation, 2019). This is why

leaders in the region are investing considerable efforts into promoting a digitally-skilled workforce capable of participating in the digital economy and adapting to a fast-changing society (DG EAC, 2024).

Beyond technical skills, employers in Africa also emphasise the importance of **interpersonal competences**. Transferable competences (British Council, 2014) together with soft skills ((African Development Bank, 2024), personal qualities (Chweu, Schultz, & Jordaan, 2023), and key interpersonal skills such as trust, communication and relationship-building remain in high demand for African graduates entering the region's workforce (Guàrdia et al., 2021).

The situation underscores the need to enhance skills training within African universities to better equip students with both field-specific and soft skills valued by employers. To address this, universities could integrate relevant competences into their curricula and **strengthen labour market insertion strategies** and industry connections (Guàrdia et al., 2021). Such an approach could improve African graduates' employability and facilitate their insertion into the region's workforce, while better aligning employers' expectations and labour market needs with graduates' professional aspirations.

Efforts to promote job creation, strengthen human capital, and enhance higher education programmes to provide market-relevant competences are already underway in some African regions (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). To support this vision of an **industry-driven education system**, the African Union (AU) has set a 2063 target, with one of its key goals being the creation of a well-educated society and a competences revolution underpinned by science, technology, and innovation (Mgaiwa, 2021).

While the value of market-driven tertiary education for economic growth, employability and innovation is increasingly recognised, many African countries face **budget constraints** amid **rapidly growing populations**. This presents challenges in developing high-quality, market-aligned education in the region. As a result, African tertiary education may struggle to fully accommodate the increasing rates of secondary school completion while ensuring high-quality education (Guàrdia et al., 2021), raising concerns about the successful integration of African graduates into their labour market (British Council, 2014).

3.2. Initiatives and programmes supporting Africa-EU cooperation in higher education

In the international context, strengthened **cooperation between Africa and Europe** can drive significant progress in developing high-quality tertiary education in both regions. International financial collaboration can boost investment in education, job competences, and inclusive employment, improving job prospects for the growing youth population (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, 2024). Additionally, the exchange of knowledge, technology, and expertise across regions can help higher education institutions enhance the quality of education, labour market alignment and graduates' employability.

Over the past decades, **numerous European projects and programmes** have been launched to foster collaboration with African higher education. EU-Africa cooperation focuses on promoting demand-driven education tailored to the needs of local and regional labour markets (EU; OACPS, 2021). This collaboration is mainly implemented through initiatives such as the **Erasmus+ Programme**⁷ or **Intra-Africa Mobility**⁸, which seek to improve mutual understanding and promote excellence (Chelipi-Den Hamer, 2024). They achieve this by sharing best practices, facilitating mobility and training

⁷ DG EAC, Erasmus+ Programme (last accessed February 2025): <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>.

⁸ EACEA, Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme (last accessed February 2025): https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/grants/2021-2027/intra-africa-academic-mobility-scheme_en.

opportunities for students and academics, supporting research and innovation, and connecting young people to employment prospects.

To ensure sustainability and foster a long-term, prosperous partnership in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and AU Agenda 2063, substantial investments have been dedicated to the education sector (European Council; Africa Union, 2022). Among these, the **Global Gateway Africa** – Europe Investment Package stands out, financing international cooperation to support transformational projects in priority areas such as digital transition, decent job creation, and education and training. Notably, initiatives like the Erasmus+ Programme, Intra-Africa Mobility, and Youth Mobility for Africa⁹ operate collaboratively within its scope to provide market-relevant education and training, facilitating the successful integration of graduates into the labour market while meeting emerging needs for Africa’s economic and social transformation (European Commission, 2025).

In this context, the Erasmus+ budget allocated to Africa was increased to around **EUR 800 million** between 2021 and 2027, supporting student and staff mobilities, virtual exchanges, and capacity-building for actors in higher education and vocational education and training (VET). This financial framework also includes the **Erasmus Mundus Action**, which provides access to high-quality higher education and offers full scholarships to students. The impact of EM Master’s programmes on African graduates and their integration in the international labour market will be examined in the following sections.

3.3. Africa within Erasmus Mundus

As shown in *Figure 1*, **18 higher education institutions** from **12 different African countries** have participated as **beneficiaries**¹⁰ in at least one EM-funded project¹¹ from 2014 to 2024.

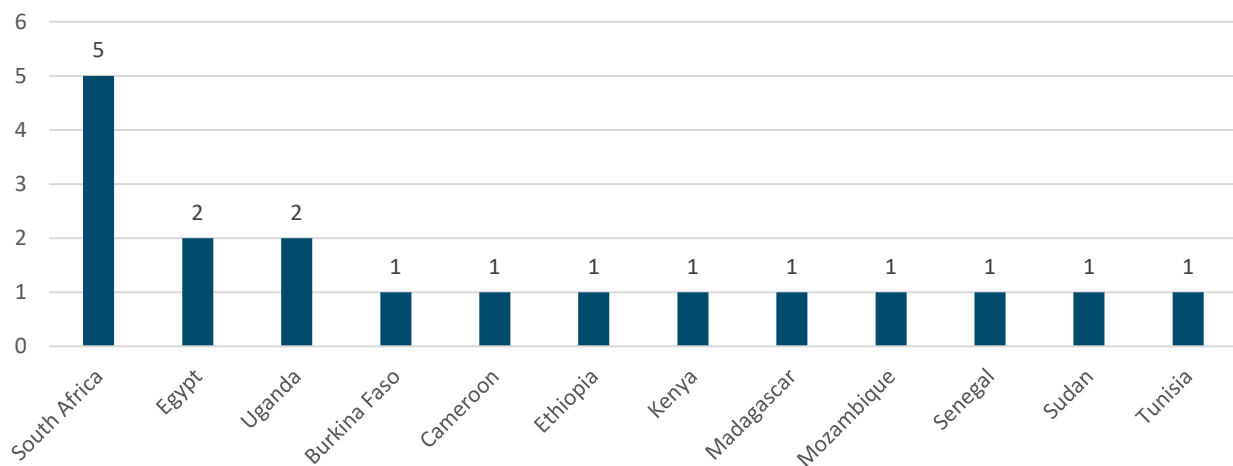


Figure 1. African institutions participating as beneficiaries in EM-funded projects between 2014-2024 (n=18)
 Source: EACEA, Database (Extracted March 2025)

South Africa stands out as the most represented African nation, with five higher education institutions benefiting from at least one EM grant. Egypt and Uganda follow with two institutions having participated as beneficiaries of an EM-funded project. Finally, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar,

⁹ DG INTPA, Youth Mobility for Africa (last accessed February 2025): https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/youth-mobility-africa_en.

¹⁰ Refer to the Glossary attached to this report for the definition of what constitutes a ‘beneficiary’ in the Erasmus+ Programme.

¹¹ ‘EM-funded project’ refers here to any project financed under the Erasmus Mundus Action since 2014, including Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMDs) and Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM).

Mozambique, Senegal, Sudan, and Tunisia are equally represented, each with one higher education institution being beneficiary in at least one EM Master's programme.

However, a much higher number of African organisations have been involved in the EM Action as associated partners¹². Between 2014 and 2024, **around 178 organisations from 32 African nations** have been engaged in this role in at least one EM-funded project.

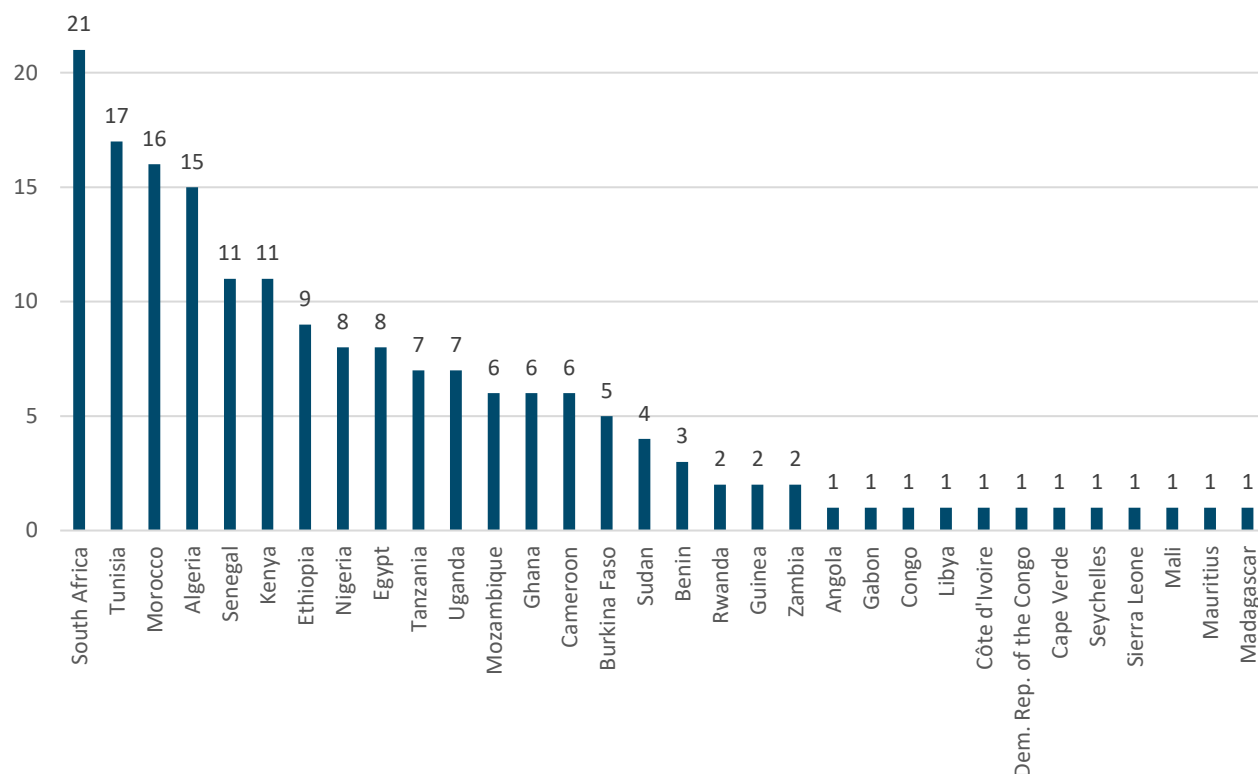


Figure 2. African organisations participating as associated partners in EM-funded projects between 2014-2024 (n=178)
Source: EACEA, Database (Extracted March 2025)

As illustrated in Figure 2, South Africa remains the leading country in terms of African institutions involved in EM Master's programmes as associated partners, accounting for 12%. Tunisia follows closely, representing 10% of all African associated partners. Morocco (9%), Algeria (8%), Senegal (6%), and Kenya (6%) also have a noteworthy number of institutions participating as associated partners in the EM Action.

Moreover, between 2015 and 2024, approximately **2,830 African students** from **45 different African countries** participated in EM Master's programmes **holding a full scholarship**¹³, as depicted in Figure 3 below.

During this period, 25% of African EM scholarship-holders came from Nigeria, making it the primary country of origin. Egypt and Ethiopia come in second and third positions, with 14% and 13%, respectively. Additionally, Ghana (10%), Morocco (4%), Kenya (4%), Algeria (3%), South Africa (3%), Uganda (3%), Cameroon (3%), Tunisia (3%), and Zimbabwe (2.4%) each account for more than 2% of the total number of African EM scholarship-holders.

¹² Refer to the Glossary attached to this report for the definition of what constitutes an 'associated partner' in the Erasmus+ Programme.

¹³ Refer to the Glossary attached to this report for the definition of what constitutes a 'scholarship' in the Erasmus+ Programme.

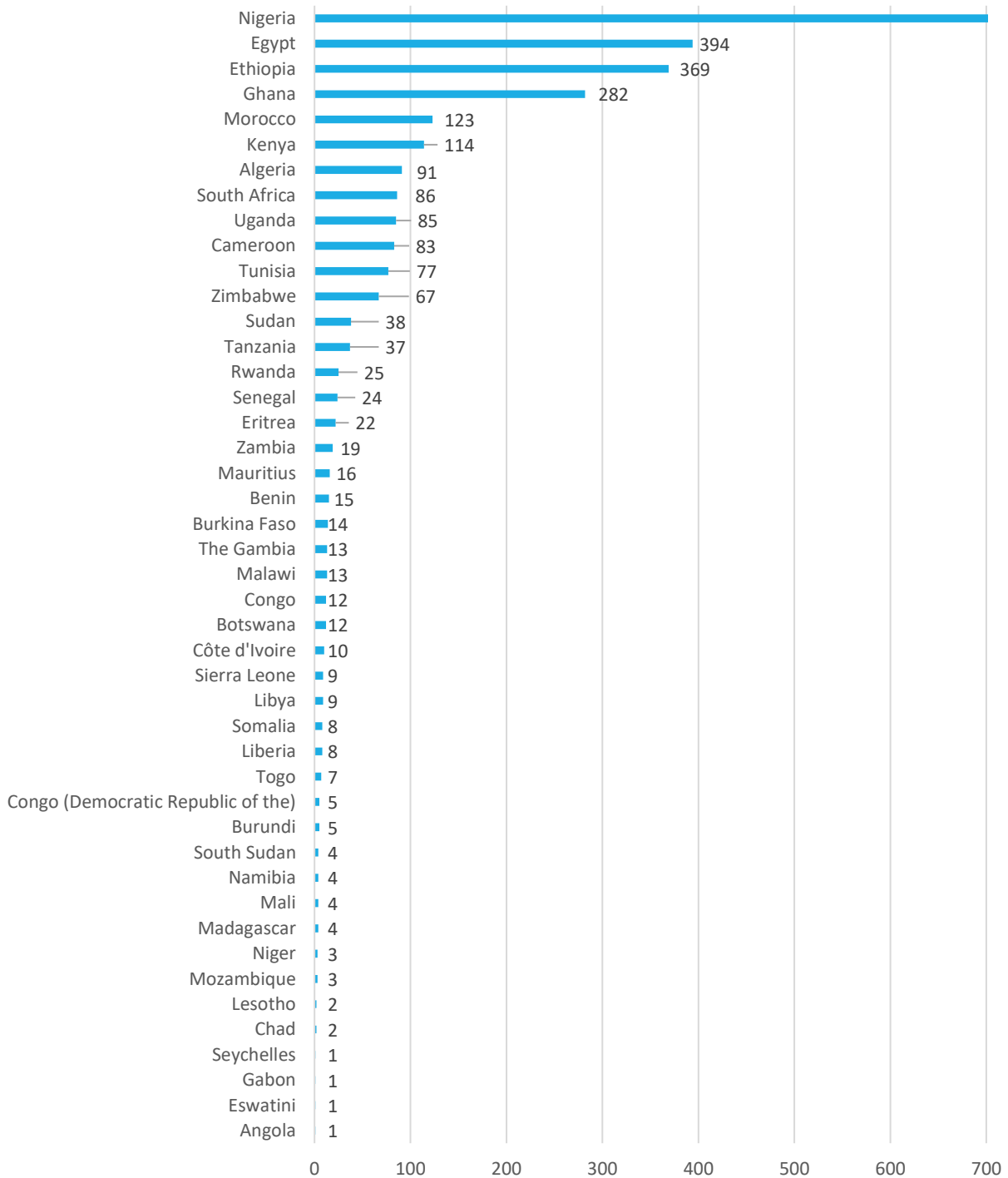


Figure 3. Number of EM scholarship holders per African country between 2015-2024 (n=2,830)
Source: EACEA, Database (Extracted March 2025)

In addition, during the same period, around **400 African students** from **40 different African countries** participated in EM Master’s programmes **without receiving an EM scholarship**, as shown in *Figure 4* below.

Once again, Nigeria represented the largest share of African EM students, this time in the category of non-scholarship holders, accounting for 26%. Egypt and Ghana also held prominent positions with 13% and 12%, respectively. Other countries with notable representation include Cameroon (7%), Kenya (6%), Ethiopia (6%), Morocco (5%), South Africa (4%), Algeria (3%), Uganda (3%), and Tunisia (2%). The remaining countries, as depicted in *Figure 4*, each account for less than 2% of the total number of African EM non-scholarship students.

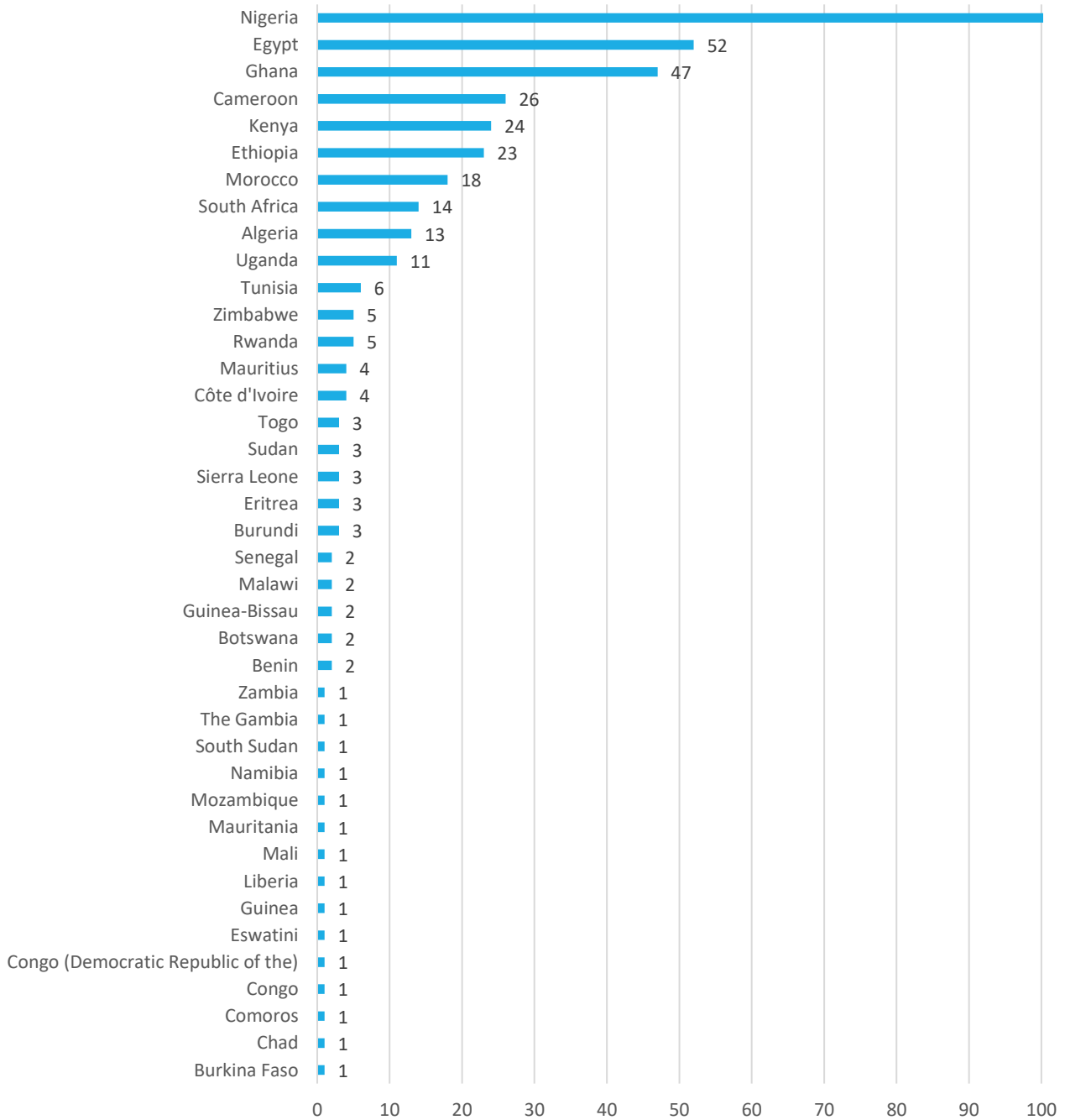


Figure 4. Number of EM non-scholarship holders per African country between 2015-2024 (n=400)
 Source: EACEA, Database (Extracted March 2025)

4. PERFORMANCE OF AFRICAN STUDENTS IN ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTER'S PROGRAMMES

A supportive academic and social environment is widely recognised as a key factor in fostering student success. Research suggests that students who experience strong academic and social support are more likely to perform well in their studies, which in turn enhances their employability prospects (Tinto, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Academic success is not solely determined by individual effort but is also shaped by external conditions, such as teaching methodologies, assessment structures, institutional support, and peer networks. Similarly, social integration – including a sense of belonging, cross-cultural interactions, and access to support services – plays a crucial role in students' overall well-being and capacity to thrive in diverse learning environments (Tinto & Pusser, 2006; Crawford, et al., 2023).

In the context of Erasmus Mundus, where students frequently move between institutions and countries, academic and social integration can be particularly challenging, although most students seem to end up managing them effectively. This chapter explores the academic and social performance of African students in EM Master's programmes, examining how these factors influence their overall experience and long-term career prospects. By identifying key challenges and opportunities within EM programmes, the chapter highlights the importance of structured support mechanisms implemented by EM consortia to maximise African students' success and facilitate their insertion into the international labour market.

4.1. Academic and social performance of African students in Erasmus Mundus Master's programmes

As part of the survey, participants were asked to select all perceived academic and social challenges encountered during their integration and adaptation process in their respective EM programmes from a predefined list.

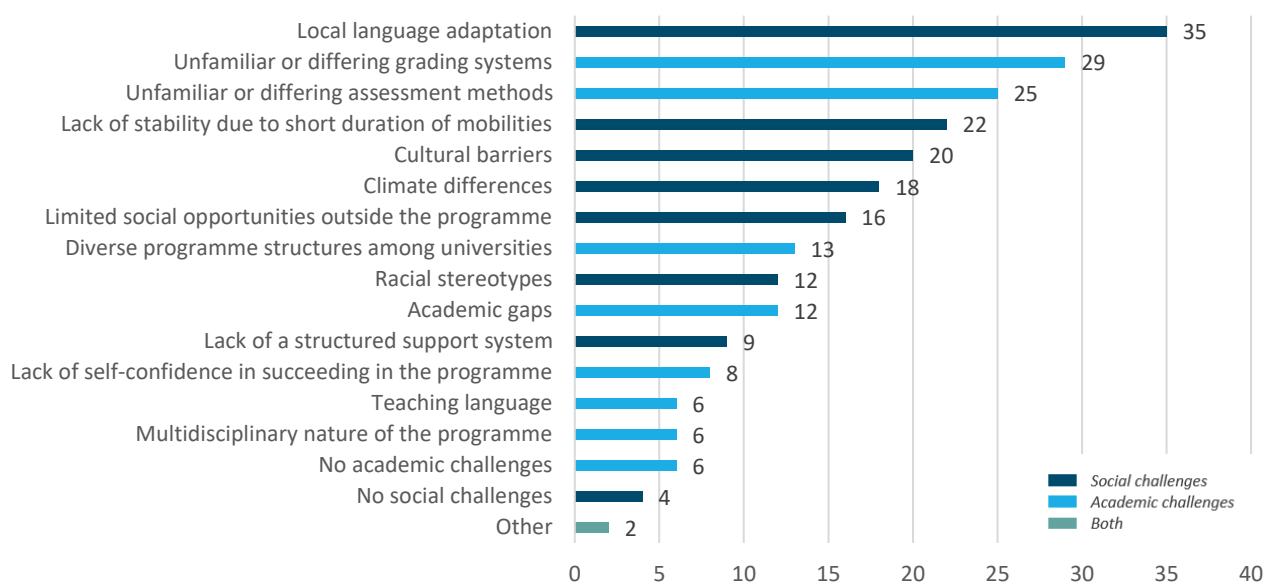


Figure 5. Academic and social challenges encountered during EM programmes (n=48)
 Source: NTT DATA, Survey 'Labour Market Insertion of African EM Graduates' (December 2024)

As illustrated in *Figure 5*, no single academic or social challenge was unanimously selected by participants, signalling variation in their experiences.

The most significant academic challenge reported was **unfamiliarity with or differences in grading systems**, selected by 60% of participants. This was followed by **unfamiliarity with or differences in assessment methods**, which was highlighted by over half (52%) of survey respondents. One interviewed alumnus elaborated on these challenges, explaining that the structure and assessment systems in their Master's programme **differed from those in their home country**. For example, while multiple-choice tests are common in their country, open-ended exams are the standard for most examinations in the Master's programme. This required them to undergo an adaptation period during their EM experience. They also noted that, at their former university, exams for all modules were taken at the end of the semester during a designated period, necessitating preparation for all module exams simultaneously. In contrast, during their EM Master's programme, exams were conducted immediately after each module concluded. This variation in assessment formats and schedules presented a challenge and required them to develop new competences to navigate the differing exam patterns effectively (IA).

These structures and assessment methods seem to not only differ from those in African students' home countries but also **across the universities** attended during the programme. One interviewed student highlighted these differences, noting they made academic adaptation at each destination particularly challenging (ID). Another alumnus shared that, although sufficient time was allocated to manage each course effectively – including attending classes, reviewing materials, and preparing for final exams – they found it challenging to adapt to the diverse institutional and academic cultures of each destination (IB). In line with these comments, 27% of survey participants identified 'diverse programme structures among universities' as a challenge.

Similarly, 25% of survey respondents reported experiencing an 'academic gap', and 17% cited a lack of self-confidence in succeeding in the programme as an academic challenge. In addition, 'teaching language' and the 'multidisciplinary nature of the programme' were each selected by 13% of survey respondents, indicating that while these factors had an impact on some, they were not widely experienced. Interestingly, 13% of participants reported encountering no academic challenges during their EM experience. This sentiment was echoed by interviewees, who, while acknowledging the aforementioned challenges, downplayed their impact, noting that ultimately they were able to navigate these difficulties with the **support provided by their teachers and lecturers**.

From a social perspective, *Figure 5* shows that **adaptation to the local language** of each programme destination emerged as the most commonly reported social challenge, with 73% of survey respondents selecting it.

The second most reported social challenge, selected by 45% of participants, was the '**lack of stability** due to the short duration of multiple mobilities'. One interviewed student, in particular, highlighted the difficulty of integrating into a new culture when the mobilities are so brief. They stated, '*The transient nature of the programme, with stays of only a few months in each location, made it difficult to integrate into local cultures and learn new languages, which can impact students' mental health and well-being*' (IC). Another interviewee also reflected on this key aspect of Erasmus Mundus, noting that the more they moved, the easier the adaptation process became. Over time, they learned to adjust more quickly and started to enjoy their stays and the programme itself (ID).

Tightly linked to the language barrier is the **cultural** one, chosen by 42% of survey respondents. One interviewed student elaborated on these cultural barriers, highlighting difficulties in grasping nuances in communication and navigating differing social norms, as well as adjusting to a colder climate and a different food culture (IC).

Moreover, one-third of surveyed students and alumni identified '**limited social opportunities** outside of the programme' as a social challenge. One interviewed student, for instance, shared that while integration within the classroom environment was smooth, they encountered difficulties adapting socially outside of their courses. This was largely due to their first destination being a small town in Austria. The town's limited size offered few opportunities to meet people who could help them navigate cultural barriers or build friendships, which led to feelings of isolation (IC). This concern aligns with findings from the African Students and Alumni Forum (ASAF) Impact Survey, which revealed that 40% of African alumni in Europe struggled to connect with local people and/or form local friendships during their study mobility¹⁴ (Unger & Dau, 2024).

However, while this challenge may have existed outside classrooms, it is important to emphasise that many respondents praised the social opportunities created within their EM cohort, which led to the formation of close relationships. One interviewed alumnus specifically highlighted the **strong sense of community** within the programme, stating:

The programme brought together a very diverse group of students from countries such as the United States of America (USA), Brazil, India, Uganda, and France. Together, we formed a supportive network, sharing information and helping each other overcome challenges. My social integration process was quite smooth and deeply enriching, thanks to the support received from professors, host universities, and peers (IB).

Moreover, perhaps linked to the challenges of befriending locals, one quarter of survey respondents reported experiencing **racial stereotypes** during their EM experience. This was echoed by the two interviewed students, who revealed to have encountered occasional racism, an issue that persisted across the different European destinations of their programme (IC & ID).

Lastly, only 19% of surveyed students and alumni reported a **lack of a structured support system** to assist them throughout the programme. One African EM alumnus, in particular, expressed disappointment with the mental health support available, describing their experience as particularly difficult. They recounted struggling to balance academic performance with personal distress after war broke out in their home country. They felt that limited institutional support added to the challenge, particularly as they navigated concerns about their future beyond the programme.

In summary, these academic and social challenges do not appear to directly harm African students' performance during their EM programme. In fact, during the focus group, EM consortia unanimously agreed that there were **no differences in performance between African EM students and their peers** from other regions. On the contrary, they observed that African students sometimes outperform students from other regions. They, nevertheless, emphasised that all students, regardless of their background, successfully complete the programmes.

It is, however, important to note that these challenges do have the potential to impact African students' EM experience, as they closely affect **mental health**. As such, these issues should be carefully considered by consortia when designing their programmes to ensure they do not hinder **students' academic success** and, consequently, **future career prospects**. It is essential for them to provide robust support services to facilitate the smooth integration and adaptation of non-EU students into their programmes.

¹⁴ The ASAF 2023 survey received 1,911 valid responses from students and staff from across Africa who have studied or participated in exchange programmes in Europe or other African countries over the past 10 years, typically within the framework of an EU-funded initiative, including the Erasmus Mundus Action.

4.2. Support services to enhance African students' performance in Erasmus Mundus Master's programmes

After identifying the perceived academic and social challenges encountered during their EM Master's, participants were asked to indicate, from a predefined list, which **support services** were available to assist them in navigating the programme.

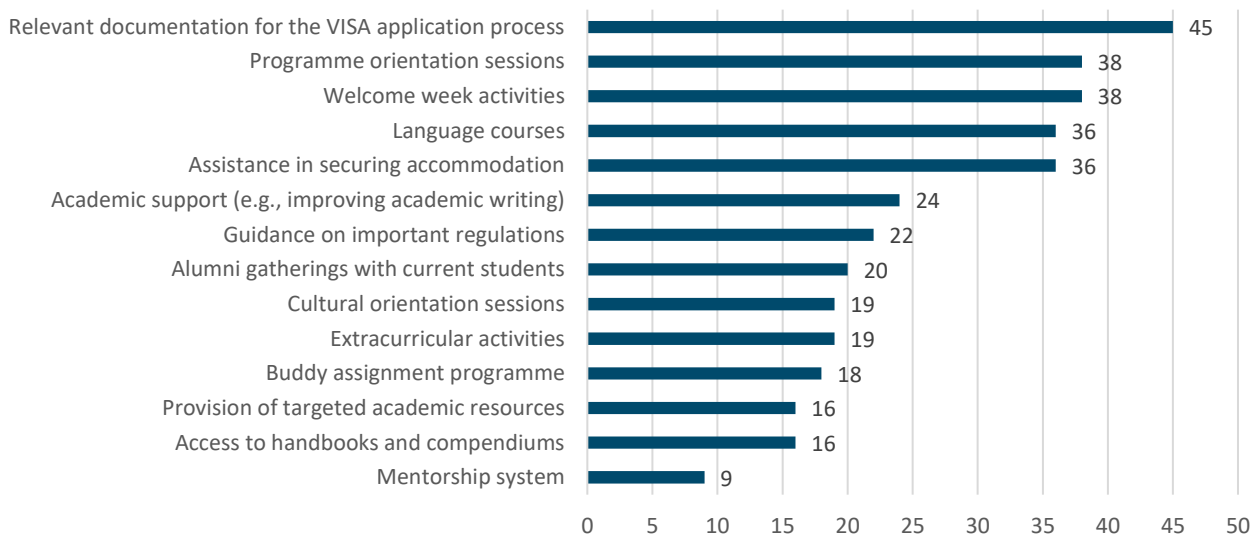


Figure 6. Support services offered by EM consortia to enhance students' performance (n = 48)
 Source: NTT DATA, Survey 'Labour Market Insertion of African EM Graduates' (December 2024)

As illustrated in *Figure 6*, all listed services seem to be implemented by EM consortia, though not uniformly. Notably, no respondent selected the option 'none', indicating that support measures were indeed in place. The most commonly implemented one among EM consortia was the **provision of relevant documentation for the VISA application process**, such as admission letters, selected by 94% of participants.

In addition, support such as programme orientation sessions, welcome week activities, language support, and assistance in securing accommodation appears to be commonly provided by EM consortia, with 70–75% of survey respondents reporting access to such services. One interviewee described how their programme organised a **welcome week** in France, lasting four to five days at the start of the courses. This event aimed to help students integrate into the programme by providing detailed information and addressing questions about its overall structure, assessment systems, and teaching methodologies. Upon arriving in Barcelona, Spain, students then attended one or two **orientation days**, which introduced them to Barcelona's academic system and provided practical information on navigating the city, including transportation options (IA).

Similarly, one of the EM consortia participating in the focus group described establishing **student representatives** who play a key role in directly supporting incoming international students. This includes organising **workshops with specialists**, allowing students to discuss and address issues affecting their adaptation, such as gender-related concerns or integration into EU life. The programme also hosts a **welcome week** where students can connect with others from similar backgrounds. This opportunity enables them to share initial experiences, tackle adaptation challenges collectively, and find common ground in cultural barriers, such as dietary preferences. These efforts aim to foster an environment where students feel understood and supported, particularly through peer connections with those facing similar circumstances (Focus Group, 2024).

Regarding **housing**, an interviewed participant noted that one of the programme's university offered its own accommodation facilities. The International Office allowed students to book housing in advance, ensuring reservations were secured before arrival. Special arrangements were made for Erasmus students, who were housed alongside Master's and Doctor of Philosophy's (PhD) students in a dedicated section, simplifying their overall experience (IA). However, another interviewee reported that the level of accommodation support varied by university. In France and Germany, for instance, staff from their programme ensured that all students had access to housing, whereas in Spain, students had to secure their own accommodations, as university-provided options were not always affordable (ID).

Moreover, half of survey respondents reported receiving **academic support**, such as assistance in improving academic writing. In addition, findings show that 33–40% had varied access to guidance on important regulations, alumni gatherings, cultural orientation sessions, extracurricular activities, a buddy system, targeted academic resources, and access to handbooks and compendiums. While these measures are valuable in facilitating both academic and social integration, their availability appears inconsistent across consortia and institutions.

Buddy systems, in particular, were cited by all African interviewees, which proved highly beneficial in navigating logistical and cultural challenges. This support helped reduce stress and focus more on the studies. The value of **handbooks and compendiums** was also highlighted. One participant, in particular, mentioned receiving a handbook before arriving in Europe and ahead of each mobility phase, offering cultural orientation and preparation for each new destination. Additionally, another interviewee described a compendium provided by one of the universities – a collection of reading materials structured hierarchically to help students develop a comprehensive understanding of the entire field in a gradual and systematic manner (IB).

Mentorship was the least commonly reported support measure, with only 19% of respondents indicating access to such a system. However, qualitative findings suggest that where mentorship existed, it had a meaningful impact. One African student described a supportive mentorship framework in their programme, where professors and staff maintained an approachable relationship with students. However, they also noted that adapting to this dynamic required time, as such close academic relationships were uncommon in their home country (ID). This insight underscores the importance of not only providing mentorship opportunities but also ensuring students from diverse backgrounds can effectively engage with and benefit from them.

When asked about additional support measures that could have enhanced their experience before and during their EM programme, survey respondents identified several key areas for improvement. One concern was the need for **better integration of services with host universities**. Respondents felt that their programme was somewhat isolated from the broader university community, leading to missed opportunities to engage in locally-organised activities and events.

Additionally, many survey participants emphasised the importance of **structured mentorship and mental health** support, particularly in light of the challenges involved in adapting to new academic and cultural environments. A respondent observed, *'I think mentorship measures should be put in place, and follow-ups on student integration and well-being should be considered, beyond just the academic rigour of the programme'*. Another explained: *'Implementing mentorship and counselling services is crucial, as adapting to a new environment can significantly impact mental well-being. Providing adequate support, which is often lacking, would help African students adjust more effectively and maintain good mental health'*.

These perspectives underscore the need for universities to establish formal mentorship programmes and accessible mental health resources tailored to the needs of international students. For instance, one EM consortium participating in the focus group shared that their programme provides **psycho-social**

support by offering students access to psychologists, with up to four consultations per semester to help manage challenges such as cultural differences and adaptation stress (Focus Group, 2024).

In conclusion, the challenges African students face during their EM Master's – ranging from unfamiliar assessment methods to cultural adaptation – do not seem to hinder their success in the programme. Instead, as explored in the next chapter, the experience of overcoming these challenges usually serve as catalysts for growth, fostering resilience and adaptability – highly sought-after attributes in today's global job market. The support services provided by EM consortia play a key role in easing this transition, though inconsistencies remain. Strengthening mentorship, mental health resources, and integration efforts would better equip African students to navigate these challenges, ensuring both **academic success and strong career prospects**.

5. TOWARDS BETTER INTEGRATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

This chapter aims to understand how smoothly and successfully African EM graduates transition into the global labour market after completing their programme. It seeks to identify the key factors of EM Master's programmes that influence their labour market insertion and the main challenges they encounter in the process, as well as to explore effective career-oriented measures EM consortia could implement to enhance African graduates' experience.

5.1. Key factors influencing Erasmus Mundus graduates' labour market insertion

To maximise the impact of EM Master's programmes on the professional trajectories of African students, it is essential to understand the aspects of these courses that most effectively enhance their employability and insertion in the global labour market.

Large-scale studies on the African context reveal that participation in EM Master's programmes **improves career opportunities**, with 72% of African students reporting securing significantly or somewhat better job prospects compared to those who did not participate in similar mobility schemes (Unger & Dau, 2024). While this trend is also observed among graduates from other regions, such as Asia and non-EU European countries, it seems to be particularly pronounced for African and Latin American students (Jühlke et al., 2024). These findings underscore the transformative impact of EM programmes in shaping career outcomes.

One key strength of EM Master's programmes lies in their ability to foster **intercultural understanding, attitudes towards inclusion, and multidisciplinary exposure**, attributes highly valued by employers in general (Mansingh & Reddy, 2021). Our survey results indicate that 90% of participants acknowledge the benefits of engaging with peers from diverse cultural and academic backgrounds, which enhances their **ability to adapt to different environments**. Similarly, 77% of respondents emphasised the advantages of studying in multiple destinations, as this experience cultivates **flexibility and adaptability**. However, as discussed in section 4.1, the short-term mobility inherent in Erasmus Mundus can also present social challenges due to the lack of stability. Nonetheless, overcoming these difficulties and successfully navigating diverse cultural and professional settings is recognised as a competitive advantage in the international labour market. Additionally, the ability to quickly adapt to different contexts not only strengthens students' capacity to work in international environments but also fosters multilingual proficiency (Ordorica, 2024) – an increasingly sought-after competence in today's global job market (IB).

Beyond adaptability, the **acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge** is crucial in shaping long-term career success. 79% of survey participants believe that the competences gained during their programme are instrumental in achieving their professional goals. Supporting this, broader studies indicate that over half of EM African alumni believe they would not have secured their current jobs without the competences acquired during their programme, a finding that remains consistent across cohorts (Unger & Dau, 2024). However, as pointed out later in section 6.2., certain competences are still not sufficiently developed during these programmes to fully meet labour market expectations. This underscores the need for some EM Master's programmes to refine the skills and knowledge they offer in order to maximise their impact in facilitating students' integration into the international workforce.

The **multidisciplinary nature of EM programmes** also plays a notable role in expanding career prospects. While only a small number of survey respondents identified it as an academic challenge, as mentioned in section 4.1., 79% highlighted that exposure to related disciplines broadens their expertise and opens doors to a wider range of job opportunities. This suggests that students generally view the interdisciplinary approach of Erasmus Mundus as an advantage rather than a difficulty. Ultimately, by equipping African graduates with broader knowledge and expertise, EM Master's programmes enhance their competitiveness in an evolving global job market.

Finally, **professional networks and industry connections** established during the programme also contribute to career development, although only 42% of respondents explicitly reported this advantage. This may be linked to the limited integration of career-related measures involving industry stakeholders in some EM Master's programmes (refer to section 5.3), as well as the short duration of Erasmus Mundus mobility. Short-term programmes are less likely to offer the same level of networking advantages as longer study periods abroad. Longer stays tend to facilitate stronger industry connections, which can be instrumental in securing employment. Furthermore, these professional ties tend to be most effective when African graduates seek employment in the country where they completed their studies (Unger & Dau, 2024).

In essence, EM Master's programmes enhance employability and labour market insertion by equipping African students with **global exposure, interdisciplinary knowledge, key professional competences, and industry connections**. While these factors influence career outcomes to varying extents, their combined effect reinforces the programmes' role in fostering successful career developments.

5.2. Labour market integration of African Erasmus Mundus graduates

While certain aspects of EM Master's programmes support the labour market integration of African EM graduates, concerns remain regarding the **availability of practical experience and connections with potential employers**. When limited, these factors can hinder their successful entry into the global job market. Although this situation has significantly improved across cohorts due to career-oriented measures being increasingly implemented by EM consortia, challenges persist (Jühlke et al., 2024).

As part of the survey, African EM students and alumni were asked to select all perceived challenges hindering their successful integration into the global labour market from a predefined list. While the responses from students and alumni follow a similar pattern, slight differences can be observed in *Figure 7*.

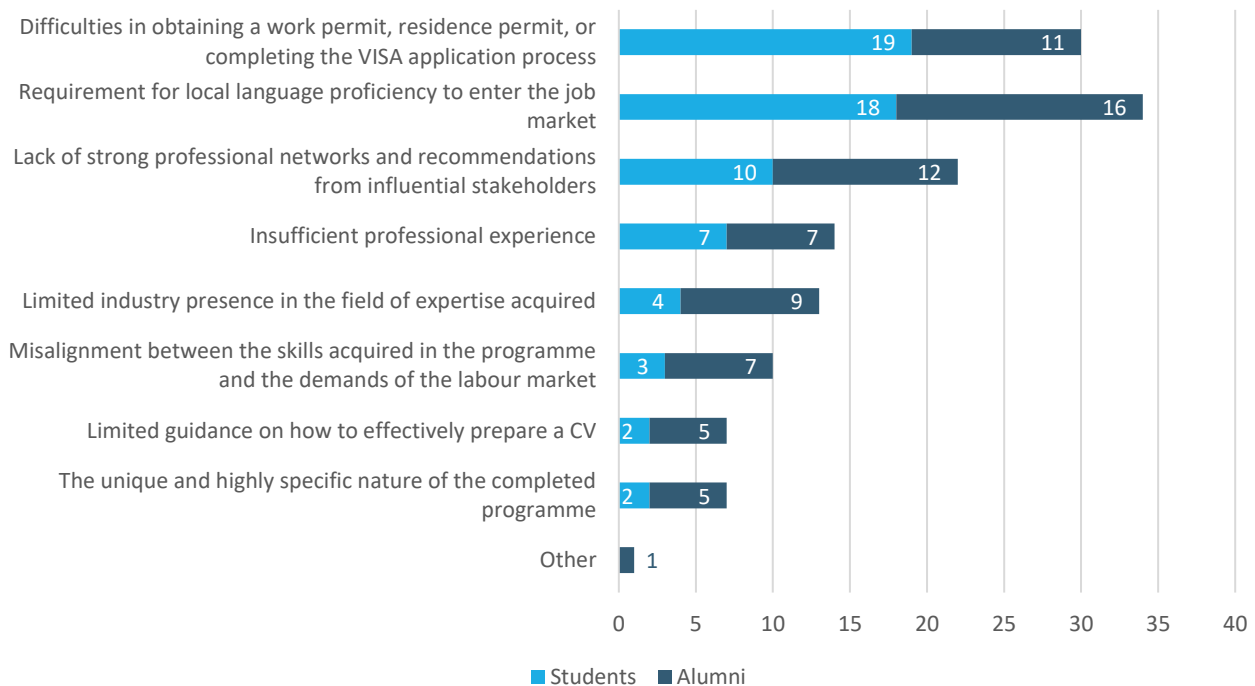


Figure 7. Challenges in entering the labour market as perceived by EM African students (n = 23) and alumni (n = 25)
Source: NTT DATA, Survey 'Labour Market Insertion of African EM Graduates' (December 2024)

Both targeted groups identified the same three challenges as the most prominent when entering the labour market. However, the frequency with which these challenges were selected varied between the groups.

The majority (83%) of African EM students who responded to the survey reported **administrative difficulties** – such as obtaining a work permit, residence permit, or completing visa processes – and **local language proficiency** (78%) as the two most expected challenges when transitioning to a local job market. Following these, 43% identified the **lack of strong professional networks and recommendations from influential stakeholders** as the third most likely challenge they expect to face upon entering the workforce.

While African students' expectations on these issues show some consensus, alumni experiences appear more varied. Local language proficiency was the most frequently cited challenge, with 64% of surveyed alumni identifying it. A lack of strong professional networks and recommendations from influential stakeholders (48%), as well as difficulties with administrative processes (44%) were the second and third most common challenges African alumni faced when entering the labour market.

Regarding the administrative obstacles, one interviewed alumnus specifically highlighted the significant burden these place on non-EU workers seeking employment in Europe: *'The need for these permits disadvantages non-EU workers during job selection processes, as it increases administrative burdens and extends processing times.'*(IA). Findings from the ASAF Impact Survey echoed this concern, suggesting that bureaucratic barriers may not only hinder African alumni's ability to secure employment but also limit their opportunities to pursue further studies in both Africa and Europe (Unger & Dau, 2024). Similarly, the EMA Graduate Impact Survey¹⁵ supports these findings, indicating that visa and work

¹⁵ The annual EMA Graduate Impact Survey 2023 was conducted from 12 July to 17 August 2023, receiving a total of 3,396 valid responses from EM alumni of various nationalities and at different post-graduation stages across three cohorts: 2012/13, 2017/18, and 2021/22.

permit issues were the second most frequently cited reason for an unsuccessful job search – particularly among graduates seeking employment within the EU compared to those elsewhere (Jühlke et al., 2024).

Moreover, approximately 30% of African EM students and 30% of alumni cited **insufficient professional experience** among recent graduates as a factor hindering their job prospects when entering the market, signalling the need for more practical experiences to be embedded in EM programmes, such as internships, industry collaborations, or hands-on projects.

Limited industry presence in their field of acquired expertise was selected by 17% of African students and 36% of alumni participating in the survey. Similarly, 17% of students and 28% of alumni identified a **misalignment between the competences acquired in the programme and the demands of the global labour market** as a challenge they either anticipate or encountered when integrating into the workforce. The differences in response rates between groups suggest that these challenges tend to be felt once entering the labour market, rather than being a significant concern during the programme.

The **unique and specific nature of the completed programme**, along with **limited guidance on how to prepare a curriculum vitae (CV)**, were not widely identified challenges, indicating that while they affected some individuals, they were neither widely anticipated nor commonly experienced. Regarding CV preparation, EM consortia in the focus group noted that some African students struggle to **effectively present themselves** and accurately showcase their qualifications in their master's application. This impacts programme selection processes, potentially creating a perception of lower-quality African candidates. As one participant emphasised: *'This does not mean African candidates are unqualified but rather that their applications often fail to fully reflect their qualifications.'* (Focus Group, 2024). A similar challenge could arise in employment selection, underscoring the importance of providing CV preparation support at the programme level.

Lastly, only one alumni selected the 'other' option, specifying that they did not experience any challenges integrating into the global labour market after graduation.

In summary, whether anticipated or experienced, findings present various obstacles African EM graduates may encounter when transitioning to the global labour market. Career-oriented measures are therefore needed to address these challenges and ensure their smoother integration into the international workforce.

5.3. Career-oriented measures to enhance labour market insertion

To enhance the labour market insertion of African EM graduates, various career-oriented measures are implemented across different EM Master's programmes. According to programme coordinators in the focus group, these measures are available to all students, without distinction between African EM students and those from other non-EU regions. Rather than targeting specific regions, they aim to develop the **international profile of students** from Europe and beyond (Focus Group, 2024).

Surveyed participants were asked to select from a pre-defined list the career-oriented measures implemented in their EM Master's programme.

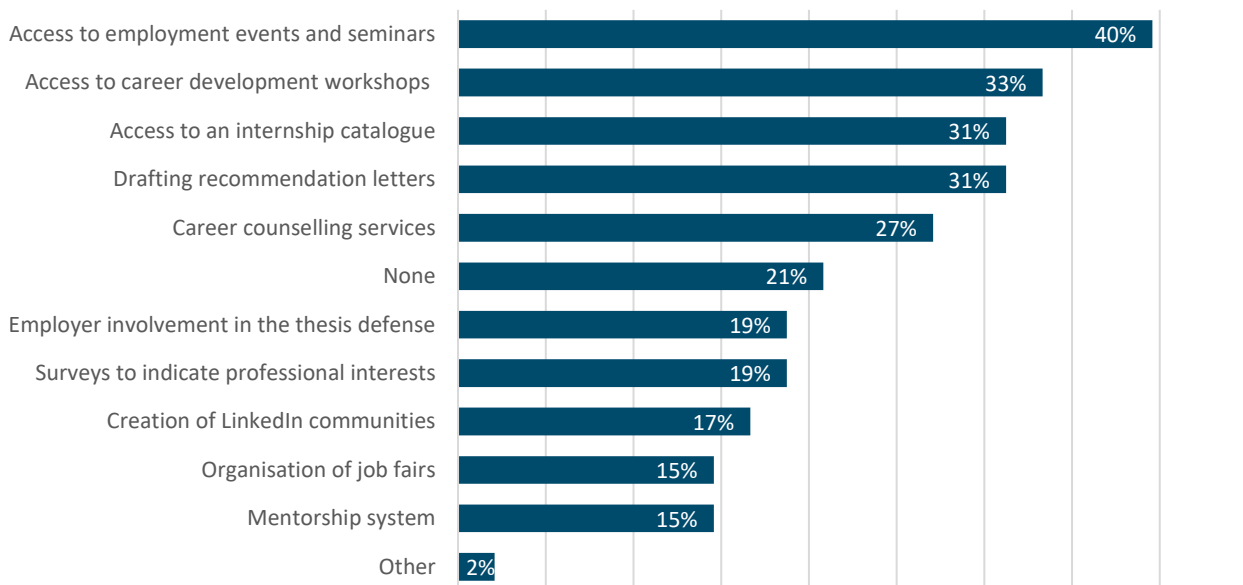


Figure 8. Career-oriented measures offered by EM programmes (n = 48)
 Source: NTT DATA, Survey 'Labour Market Insertion of African EM Graduates' (December 2024)

As shown in *Figure 8*, none of the career-oriented measures were selected by more than half of the respondents, indicating **variations in their availability** across EM consortia. While some incorporate these measures into their labour market insertion strategies, they are **not consistently implemented**. Notably, one-fifth of respondents appear to believe they have no access to such measures at all.

40% of survey participants reported that their EM programme offered **opportunities to attend various employment events and seminars**, making these the most common career-oriented measure provided by EM consortia – though still not widely available. Interviews echoed this relatively low percentage, with one interviewed student stating: *'The programme does not actively promote professional connections between students and major companies in the sector. This limits opportunities for students to identify potential employers and build industry networks.'*(ID).

These events can play a crucial role in students' education, equipping them with job-related competences through informal interactions with employers (Chweu et al., 2023). To ensure their effectiveness and career orientation, it is essential to involve international, regional and local **employers, industry professionals, and companies**, creating valuable networking opportunities for students during their studies. Examples shared in the focus group include Summer Schools and periodic in-person career events with local associated partners, where application processes and career prospects are discussed (Focus Group, 2024). One interviewed alumnus specifically noted that students in their programme had access to **end-of-course seminars** where alumni and industry professionals shared their post-graduation experiences and career journeys (IA).

The second most frequently identified measure was **access to career development workshops** (33%) during the programme, such as CV preparation workshops. Notably, around 70% of survey respondents selecting this measure were current African EM students, suggesting that such sessions have become more widely available in the more recent EM cohorts. Expanding these career development workshops to include topics such as interviews preparation (British Council, 2014) and motivational techniques (IA) could enhance students' success in job selection processes and provide valuable support to EM alumni as they progress in their careers.

In line with these implemented measures, one survey participant suggested **sponsoring students** to attend European workshops and seminars, ensuring they have the financial support to gain valuable practical competences relevant to the European work environment.

Moreover, **assistance with obtaining recommendation letters** required for application processes, such as visa applications, which helps foreign graduates meet legal requirements when accessing a local labour market, was selected by 31% of survey participants. This relatively low percentage echoes the fact that it was the second most reported challenge by surveyed African EM students and alumni.

An equal percentage of respondents noted **access to an internship catalogue**, which offers a range of suitable internships, research opportunities, and company placements. These opportunities enable students to gain valuable work experience before or immediately after graduation, helping them acquire discipline-specific knowledge and relevant workplace skills. Internships serve as a stepping stone, assisting graduates in taking their first steps into the labour market (Chweu et al., 2023). However, some of the internships offered are unpaid and do not guarantee future employment. As a result, one of the interviewed students preferred to seek internships independently in pursuit of better financial conditions and improved future prospects (IC).

In this regard, survey respondents emphasised the need to **expand the variety of organisations** involved as **associated partners** in the programmes and encourage them to recruit directly from the pool of EM graduates, thereby increasing internship opportunities. Participants also noted that internship catalogues primarily offer placements in the European labour market, with limited proposals in Africa. In fact, only 13% of participants who selected this measure reported that it included opportunities in both Europe and Africa. Expanding the offer of internships in the African market could not only enhance African EM graduates' global job prospects, but also support those wishing to return to their home countries.

Building on this, one of the interviewed students expressed concern that, despite the programme's international label, they were surprised by its Eurocentric nature. They emphasised that to ensure the **international suitability** of African EM graduates for global job placements, the programme's international perspective should be reinforced. They stated: *'More diverse perspectives should be introduced to reinforce its international nature, which could positively influence students' global job prospects.'*(IC).

Additionally, just over one-fourth of respondents (27%) reported having access to **career counselling services**. This relatively low percentage aligns with findings from the report *'Planning and delivering jointness in Erasmus Mundus Master's programmes'*, which highlights the limited availability of joint career orientation services offered by EM consortia (Fernández-Figares & Garre, 2024). Such services are crucial, as they provide students with access to experienced professionals who can offer tailored guidance on transforming academic knowledge into practical skills (ID). However, as one survey participant noted, it is essential to ensure that counsellors possess the necessary competence and expertise to provide meaningful and effective guidance to students and alumni.

Furthermore, survey findings show that 17-19% of respondents had access to **surveys** to indicate their professional interests, that employers were involved in their **thesis defence** and that they benefited from access to **LinkedIn communities**. The involvement of employers in students' thesis defences, as well as the creation of LinkedIn communities, were specifically mentioned by EM consortia during the focus group. They argued that these measures facilitate access to additional internship opportunities by connecting students with alumni and employers across the field (Focus Group, 2024).

Lastly, 15% of survey participants indicated their programmes provide them with **mentorship programmes and job fairs**.

Beyond the career-oriented measures implemented across different programmes, only 16% of surveyed EM alumni reported receiving **post-graduation support**. Alumni emphasised the importance of continuous guidance after programme completion, especially for those seeking opportunities outside their home country. As one survey participant highlighted:

It would have been great to have more assistance in finding internships and jobs after the programme to facilitate a smoother transition into the workforce. Support in securing jobs and research opportunities can be a significant relief for international students looking to reside in their host or mobility countries.

While a range of career-oriented measures have been implemented across EM Master's programmes, their availability remains inconsistent. Interviews suggest that while some programme staff offer informal support, structured formal career support systems are limited within EM Master's programmes. Similarly, the EM Joint Master Graduate Impact Survey conducted by EMA in 2023 found that African students and alumni continue to call for more comprehensive career guidance and labour market entry support, beginning from the start of the course (Jühlke et al., 2024). An interviewed EM alumnus emphasised the importance of **early career support**, stating: *'Discussions about employment should begin at the very start of the course, giving students enough time to master the language and job-related skills, as well as understand national regulations, which are fundamental for full integration into the local market.'*(IB).

5.4. Defining an Erasmus Mundus Labour Market Insertion Strategy

Findings from the previous section suggest that most career-oriented measures implemented by EM consortia are designed broadly for all students, irrespective of their background, or primarily aligned with the labour markets of mobility destinations, which are predominantly in Europe. A **more tailored and strategic approach** may be more appropriate, ensuring that career support is not only generalised but also considers the specific markets where students are likely to seek employment. A **multi-level approach, incorporating international, regional, and local labour markets**, could help address this issue.

Building on this approach, ensuring the successful labour market insertion of (African)¹⁶ EM graduates requires aligning their expertise with existing market positions. This alignment should be established early in the programme design phase through thorough **demand market assessments** and **close collaboration with industry stakeholders**. By incorporating insights from different labour markets, EM Master's programmes can provide students with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in diverse employment contexts, enhancing their value to employers, optimising their job prospects, and enabling them to contribute effectively to both the market and society at large (Mansingh & Reddy, 2021).

Given the rapidly **evolving nature of the job market**, it is necessary to maintain regular interactions with industry stakeholders and implement robust quality assurance systems (Mgaiwa, 2021). These measures will ensure that programmes remain **relevant to employers** and aligned with market demands **over time at different levels**, whether globally, regionally, or locally.

To achieve this, several methods have been designed and implemented in certain EM Master's projects to ensure the competences students acquire during the programme meet the specific needs of diverse labour markets and employers. An EM consortium¹⁷, for instance, **conducted a survey targeting 1.000**

¹⁶ Since this exercise encompasses international, regional, and local markets, it is relevant to all EM graduates, not only those from Africa.

¹⁷ Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Geospatial Technologies (GeoTec): <https://mastergeotech.info/>.

employers across industries, regions, academia, and governments during the project's design phase, with the aim of understanding their expectations regarding graduates (Focus Group, 2024).

Additionally, to meet the accreditation requirements of certain Member States, which mandate periodic engagement with labour market representatives, one EM consortium¹⁸ established permanent **consultation tables** comprising organisations and stakeholders, including companies, local authorities, and NGOs **from various countries**. These groups support programme staff in understanding current job market needs and demands, ensuring the alignment of curricula with student preparation. This ongoing interaction with stakeholders also helps identify the most suitable positions and internships for students (Focus Group, 2024).

Similarly, another EM Master's programme¹⁹ recently underwent a re-accreditation process, involving **discussions with labour market representatives**, including employers, internship providers, and alumni. The objective was to understand the reasons stakeholders hire programme graduates, identify the competitive advantages they offer, and gather insights into alumni experiences post-graduation (Focus Group, 2024).

Once EM Master's programmes have implemented these methods and gained a clear understanding of labour market demands, highlighting the specific competences required, the insights gathered from the market analysis must **shape the programme's curriculum** (Mgaiwa, 2021). Regularly repeating these exercises will ensure the curriculum remains responsive to shifts in market needs at international, regional, and local levels.

Once market needs are identified and the industry's perspective is integrated into the curriculum, a **clear career prospect description** should be developed. This description would outline the types of activities and roles that graduates could pursue in different labour markets, helping students identify accessible job opportunities and understand their potential professional journey. This approach would ensure students adopt a market-oriented mindset from the start of their studies, thereby enhancing their labour market insertion (IB).

Subsequently, engaging industry representatives as lecturers in courses and implementing **skills enhancement programmes** for the identified competences can play a crucial role in ensuring the acquisition of valuable skills throughout the EM programme (British Council, 2014). Furthermore, promoting interactions with (African) EM alumni already active in the labour market from the beginning of the programme could provide a valuable opportunity to ensure alignment with different market expectations.

Lastly, more active and engaging **social media channels** from the programme can increase the visibility of (African) EM graduates and further enhance their labour market insertion. Sharing students' projects, achievements, and research contributions can showcase the added value of EM graduates to industry stakeholders. Moreover, digital platforms and websites of participating universities, such as the web-based gradlink²⁰ developed by the University of the West of England, can connect students with employers across various labour markets and further enhance their integration into the workforce (British Council, 2014).

¹⁸ Erasmus Mundus Joint Master on Climate Change and Diversity: Sustainable Territorial Development (CCD-STeDe): <https://ccd-stede.eu/>.

¹⁹ Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations (EMMIR): <https://www.emmir.org/>.

²⁰ University of the West of England, gradlink (Last accessed February 2025): <https://www.gradlinkuk.com/>.

6. CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN ERASMUS MUNDUS GRADUATES

Once we have understood how EM Master's programmes contribute to African graduates' labour market insertion, the challenges these face when entering the workforce, as well as the existing measures established by EM consortia to support this transition, we can explore how these factors shape their career plans, destinations, competences alignment, and role as alumni after graduation.

6.1. Post-graduation career trajectories

6.1.1. Short-term career plans

As part of the survey, African EM students were asked to share the career plans they intend to pursue upon completing their EM programme, while alumni reflected on the first steps they took after graduation. Responses were similar across both groups, though slight differences were observed.

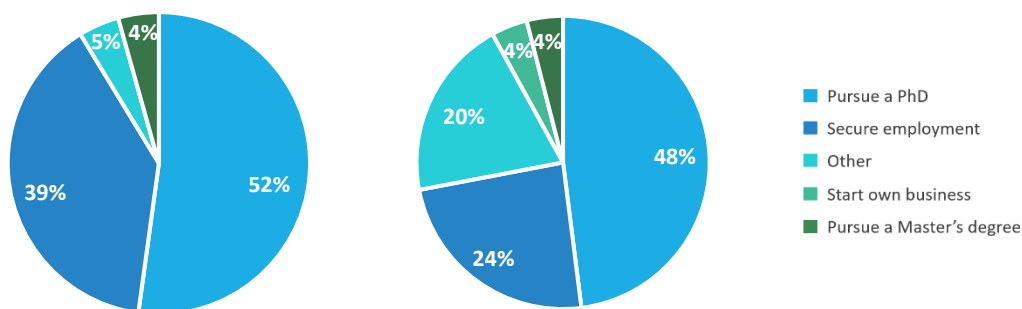


Figure 9. Post-graduation plans of African EM students (n=23; Left) and alumni (n=25; Right)
 Source: NTT DATA, Survey 'Labour Market Insertion of African EM Graduates' (December 2024)

The majority of survey participants indicated that **pursuing a PhD** was their preferred option upon completing their EM programme, with 52% of African students planning to pursue one and 48% of alumni having followed this path after graduation. This trend was particularly notable among those studying Environmental and Geosciences, as well as Information Science and Engineering.

While the reasons for entering the labour market by starting their academic career might vary, it could be linked to the perception that pursuing a PhD improves long-term employability and job prospects, facilitating the achievement of their professional goals. For instance, one survey respondent noted that prioritising an academic career after completing the programme would lay the groundwork for reaching long-term professional objectives in their home country, stating: *'I felt that by completing a PhD, I would be more marketable and in a better position to contribute meaningfully to development and education when I return home'*.

Entering the international labour market by securing employment is the second most selected option for both groups, with 39% of African students and 24% of alumni choosing starting their industry career right after graduation.

While only 5% of African students expressed **uncertainty** about their potential professional career, African alumni showed a greater level of diversification in their first steps after graduation, with 4% **starting their own business**. Notably, 20% of alumni selected 'other', with two main trends emerging: securing a postgraduate internship, and experiencing unemployment due to difficulties in finding a job

that matched their knowledge and skills. This finding echoes EMA Graduate Impact Survey, according to which African and Latin American alumni experience lower overall success in securing a job post-graduation compared to their peers from other regions. Similarly, graduates from Africa and the Middle East/Central Asia experience lower employment rates compared to the overall average (Jühlke et al., 2024).

Finally, the least selected option for both students and alumni was **pursuing another Master’s degree** after completing their EM programme, with 4% from each group choosing this option. This could suggest that participants feel they have already gained sufficient academic grounding through their EM programme, and are therefore more inclined to pursue more specialised or advanced opportunities rather than obtaining further studies.

6.1.2. Preferred destinations

To explore where African EM students would like to take their initial steps in their professional journey after graduation and where alumni actually started theirs, the survey asked participants to indicate their preferred destinations. Key insights are highlighted in *Figure 10*.

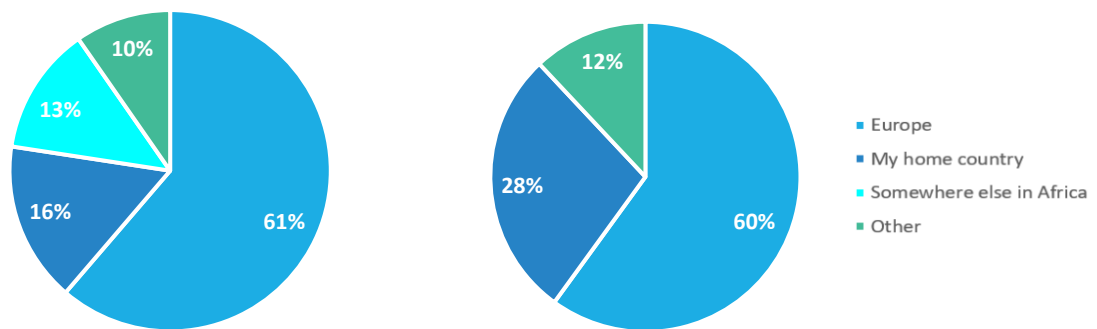


Figure 10. Preferred destinations of African EM students (n = 23; Left) and alumni (n = 25; Right)
Source: NTT DATA, Survey 'Labour Market Insertion of African EM Graduates' (December 2024)

The majority of African EM students and alumni (around 60% each) selected Europe as their destination for continuing their professional careers after graduation. This trend has been growing in recent years, marking a shift from previous patterns in which most non-EU students intended to return to their home countries (Focus Group, 2024). Given the strong influence of study mobility on job search location, as highlighted by the ASAF Impact Survey, it follows logically that Europe is the preferred immediate destination for African mobility students (Unger & Dau, 2024). Among the 60% of African alumni selecting this option, 40% plan to return to their home country, 53% remain undecided, and only 7% intend to stay in Europe long-term.

Survey respondents outlined several reasons for choosing Europe as their first destination after graduation. Some believe that the region offers ample opportunities to **deepen their expertise**, equipping them with the competences needed for their long-term academic and professional growth. As one interviewed student explained: *'My preference is to complete my training and acquire all relevant knowledge and skills in Europe before ultimately returning to Africa to build my professional career.'*(ID). Other survey participants view the European labour market as a key enabler of their professional goals, highlighting its **high-quality services and infrastructure**, as well as the strong **likelihood of securing jobs** that align with their aspirations.

Additionally, survey respondents cited **entrepreneurial opportunities** and more favourable **working conditions** as important factors influencing their preference for Europe. The prospect of gaining experience in a culture different from their own, while challenging as discussed in Chapter 4, was also highly valued when entering the labour market. Exposure to **diverse systems** and work dynamics was perceived as a competitive advantage in their future careers. Lastly, the presence of **larger multinational companies** in Europe was another influencing factor, with many believing that working within this marketplace could allow them to make a greater global impact. In short, Europe appears to be an attractive option for early career stages; however, as reflected in the survey results, long-term intentions to remain in the region are less certain.

Moreover, starting their professional career in **Africa** was also considered as an option. However, while 28% of alumni returned to their home country immediately after graduation, only 16% of current students expressed the same inclination. In addition, 13% of students are exploring career opportunities elsewhere in Africa, whereas no alumni reported choosing another African country as their destination after graduation.

Both interviewed and survey participants cited social and professional factors as key reasons for pursuing their careers in Africa after graduation. The primary motivation was social, with many intending to **apply the competences gained** during their EM programme to address the specific needs of their home countries. Their goal is to drive positive change, strengthen the labour market, and build their careers locally. This was reflected in the statements of the two interviewed students – one noting, *‘I am keen on contributing to positive change in my home country’*(ID), and the other expressing *‘My desire is to share my knowledge and make an impact in my field of expertise in my home country’*(IC). Family and personal reasons also played a role in respondents’ decision. Additionally, some participants mentioned the **challenges of securing employment** in foreign labour markets as an influencing factor.

Finally, difficulties in securing employment in both the European and African labour markets, along with the desire to explore different cultures and countries, led some participants to consider **alternative destinations** including USA, Australia and Canada.

6.2. Alignment with labour market demands

Ensuring alignment between the skills and knowledge provided by higher education institutions and the actual demands of the global labour market is fundamental to enhancing the employability of African EM graduates and maximising the impact of EM Master’s programmes on their professional trajectories.

This section examines the extent to which African EM graduates perceive their acquired competences as meeting employers’ expectations upon entering the international labour market. We distinguished between **vertical** and **horizontal alignments** to provide a more nuanced analysis.

6.2.1. Vertical match and skill gaps

The **vertical match** refers to the alignment between a graduate’s level of education and the qualifications requirements of their job. A vertical match occurs when graduates are neither overqualified nor underqualified, but instead possess the appropriate skills and knowledge for their professional role (Unger & Dau, 2024). This concept is particularly relevant for assessing how well EM Master’s programmes prepare African graduates for the labour market.

To evaluate this alignment, African EM students were asked to assess their perceived readiness to enter the job market upon graduation, while EM alumni reflected on how well their competences matched real-world employer expectations. *Figure 11* illustrates the findings:

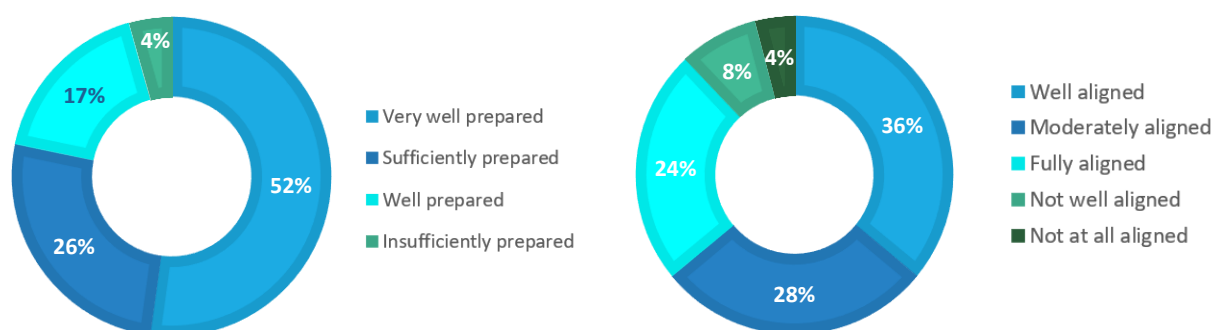


Figure 11 Perceived work readiness by students (n=23; Left) and alumni (n=25; Right)
Source: NTT DATA, Survey 'Labour Market Insertion of African EM Graduates' (December 2024)

A majority of African EM students feel **confident** about their labour market readiness: 52% consider themselves very well prepared, and 17% feel prepared. Additionally, 26% believe their competences are just sufficient to meet employers' expectations, while only 4% feel insufficiently prepared.

However, **perceptions shift once graduates enter the workforce**. Among African EM alumni, only 24% believe their competences are fully aligned with employer demands, while 36% consider them well aligned, and 28% feel only moderately aligned. Notably, 12% of alumni perceive a clear mismatch between their acquired competences and global labour market requirements.

These findings suggest that while EM programmes provide students with a robust **combination of soft and technical skills**, gaps remain in ensuring a perfect match with employer expectations. Soft skills, such as project management, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and research, are widely transferable across disciplines and recognised as strengths of EM graduates (IA; IB; Jühlke et al., 2024). However, there are gaps in job-oriented and practical competences. While theoretical knowledge is well covered, some African EM graduates find that hands-on experience with industry-specific tools and methodologies is lacking. Several survey respondents emphasised the need for **greater integration of practical training into EM curricula**.

Employers across the globe increasingly seek candidates with strong **digital and technical skills**, yet findings highlight **deficiencies in ICT proficiency, programming, and business intelligence (BI) tools** – areas that are becoming critical in many sectors. Strengthening these competencies is particularly relevant for African graduates, as digital innovation is a key driver of job creation and economic development in the region (Guàrdia et al., 2021).

Finally, another notable gap is the lack of **entrepreneurial skills training**, with many African EM graduates reporting limited improvement in their entrepreneurial competences (Jühlke et al., 2024). Strengthening this area within EM programmes could better equip graduates to create job opportunities, particularly in contexts where formal employment is limited.

6.2.2. Horizontal match and disciplines impact

The **horizontal match** refers to the alignment between a graduate's field of study and the expertise required for their job. It occurs when graduates secure employment that directly relates to their academic background and requires subject-specific knowledge (Unger & Dau, 2024). Understanding this alignment is key to assessing how well EM Master's programmes prepare African graduates for careers that reflect their chosen disciplines.

Figure 12 illustrates the academic disciplines pursued by African EM students and alumni participating in the survey. The majority of respondents are enrolled in **Environmental and Geosciences** (33%), **Information Sciences and Engineering** (29%), and **Social Sciences and Humanities** (21%). These results align with broader studies, which rank these academic disciplines among the most common disciplines among African EM alumni (EACEA, 2021). In contrast, fewer participants reported studying Economic Sciences (2%) and Chemistry (2%).

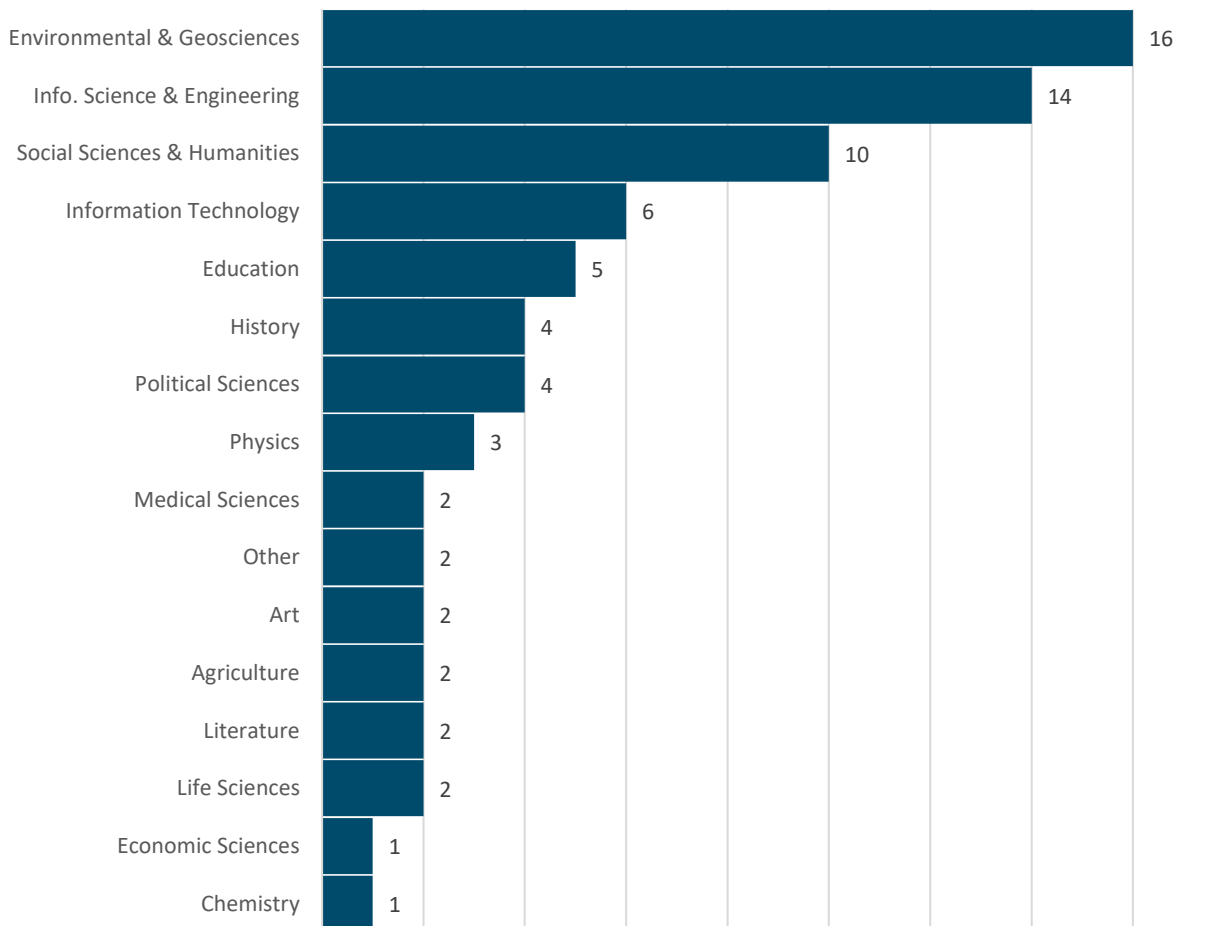


Figure 12. Disciplines of study of survey participants (n=48)
 Source: NTT DATA, Survey 'Labour Market Insertion of African EM Graduates' (December 2024)

The level of confidence in career prospects and alignment with employer demands often depends on the field of study (Guàrdia et al., 2021). To assess this, participants were asked to evaluate the **impact of their academic discipline** on their career prospects.

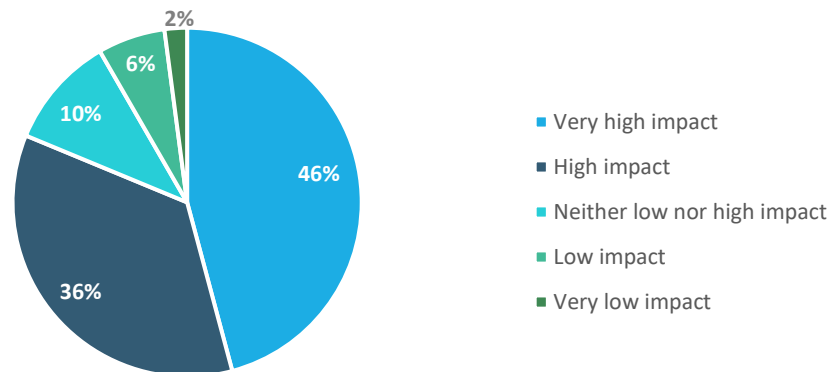


Figure 13. Perceived impact academic disciplines have on labour market prospects (n = 48)
Source: NTT DATA, Survey 'Labour Market Insertion of African EM Graduates' (December 2024)

Over 80% of respondents believe their chosen academic discipline **influences their job prospects**, with 46% rating the impact as very high and 36% as high. Many participants noted that a Master's degree is increasingly becoming a minimum requirement for higher-level roles, and completing an internationally recognised and highly specialised programme like Erasmus Mundus is perceived as a key competitive advantage in the international market.

In line with the findings presented in section 5.1. *Key factors influencing Erasmus Mundus graduates' labour market insertion*, some surveyed African EM students and alumni valued the **interdisciplinary approach** of their programmes, stating that exposure to multiple fields broadens their career opportunities and enhances their ability to contribute effectively to the job market. This suggests that a **balance between specialisation and multidisciplinary learning** can strengthen employability. In addition, participants indicated that the impact of their chosen academic discipline on job prospects also depended on other factors such as labour market conditions (home country vs. European market) and their level of professional experience at the time of graduation.

On the other hand, 10% of respondents rated their discipline as having a **neutral impact** on employability, often citing the lack of clearly defined specialisation paths in their programme. Some felt that their curriculum covered a broad field of expertise without sufficient depth in a single area. 8% reported a **low (6%) or very low (2%) impact** of their academic background on their employability. Their responses often attributed their struggles to misalignment with global labour market needs or a lack of practical and professional training within their programme. Some only secured satisfying jobs after gaining internship experience or transitioning into related fields.

Furthermore, to determine which disciplines offer the best career prospects, African EM alumni were asked to indicate their **final field of employment**. The findings reveal that the most frequently studied disciplines also corresponded to common fields of employment. Conversely, disciplines such as History, Political Sciences, Physics, Art, Literature and Chemistry appear to be less prominent.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the **limited number of survey responses** may not fully reflect broader trends observed in larger studies covering a wider range of EM programmes and Afro-European initiatives. While both sources indicate that most African graduates with study mobility experience secure jobs related to their field of study, overall success rates may vary. Notably, both the survey and broader studies consistently show that graduates in **Information Technology** often achieve a strong horizontal match, whereas those in **Art** frequently struggle to find jobs aligned with their academic background (Unger & Dau, 2024).

Some discrepancies also emerge. The survey results suggest that a high percentage of African EM graduates in Information Science and Engineering secure jobs within their field, yet larger studies highlight a significant horizontal mismatch in this discipline. A similar **divergence** appears in Environmental and Geosciences, where the survey respondents report a lower mismatch rate than what is observed in broader research findings (Unger & Dau, 2024). These variations underscore the need for further research to refine our understanding of horizontal alignment across different academic disciplines.

In conclusion, findings suggest a generally positive **vertical match**, with many African EM graduates seemingly feeling well-prepared for the job market, though some skill gaps – particularly in practical and ICT-related competencies – persist. The **horizontal match** varies by discipline, with fields like Information Technology showing strong alignment, while others, such as Art and Humanities, experience greater mismatches. Addressing these gaps through enhanced job-oriented training and balanced interdisciplinary learning could improve both alignments, ultimately strengthening African EM graduates' employability.

6.3. Erasmus Mundus graduate monitoring and alumni engagement

Evaluating the interactions between African EM graduates and the programme post-graduation, alongside their involvement in alumni associations, can help consortia identify good practices to better guide and support African EM students in their career development.

6.3.1. Graduates monitoring

Establishing adequate monitoring systems for EM graduates post-graduation allows programme coordinators to evaluate the final alignment between the education provided and the actual demands of the labour market. It also helps assess the effectiveness of labour market insertion strategies implemented throughout the programme, ensuring continuous improvement (Guàrdia et al., 2021).

EM coordinators participating in the focus group stated that the **monitoring systems** in place are **consistent across regions**, tracking all graduates in a standardised manner (Focus Group, 2024).

To gain deeper insights into these measures and the programme's role in alumni career development, the survey investigated the extent to which African EM graduates remain in contact with their EM programmes. The results indicate that **68% of participants have been tracked post-graduation**, while 32% reported no communication with their programme. Notably, among those who experienced a lack of monitoring, **88% expressed that they missed having follow-up interactions**.

Additionally, the main **communication channels and monitoring tools** used to track African EM graduates post-graduation have been identified and presented in *Figure 14*.

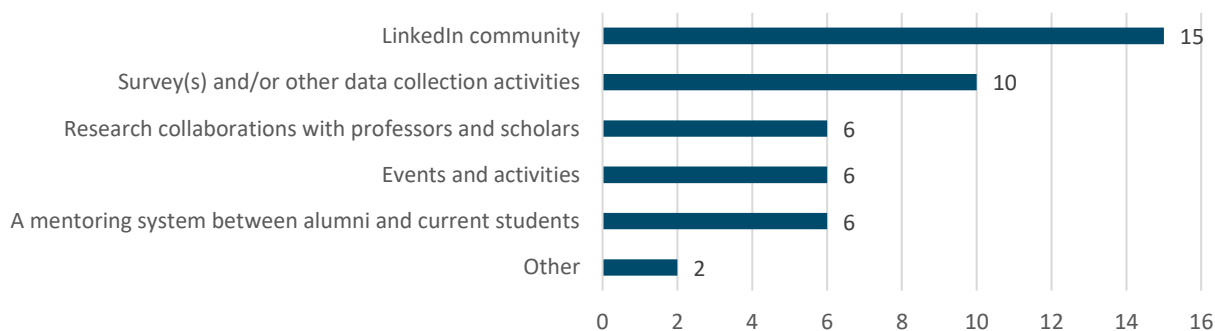


Figure 14. Communication channels and monitoring tools used to track graduates (n = 25)

Source: NTT DATA, Survey 'Labour Market Insertion of African EM Graduates' (December 2024)

Result suggest that EM programmes most frequently track African EM graduates' professional careers through **LinkedIn communities**, which facilitate continuous engagement with graduates and alumni.

Additionally, 40% of surveyed alumni reported participating in **surveys and data collection activities** conducted by their EM programmes to explore their professional status and assess satisfaction levels upon entering the international labour market. Some programmes integrate these surveys into the Student Agreement as a requirement to ensure high levels of participation across graduates. As one EM coordinator²¹ noted, this often results in significant response rates, typically between 70-80% (Focus Group, 2024).

Moreover, 24% of African EM alumni indicated their involvement in **mentoring systems** that connect EM alumni with current students. An equal percentage mentioned participating in structured and/or informal **events and activities** with the alumni community, as well as in **collaborative research projects** with professors from universities involved in their EM programme.

Informal communication channels and volunteering programmes were also mentioned as alternative means of keeping alumni connected with institutions involved in the EM programme. Finally, some programme coordinators highlighted the implementation of **annual tracer studies** to analyse trends in graduates' professional trajectories, providing valuable insights into career patterns across different cohorts (Focus Group, 2024).

6.3.2. Engagement in alumni associations

Alumni associations play a crucial role in enhancing labour market insertion and supporting alumni throughout their careers (Mansingh & Reddy, 2021).

Among the surveyed participants, 48% are already **members of at least one alumni association**, while 50% are not members. Notably, 75% of those not yet members plan to join one in the short term. The remaining 2% were uncertain about their membership status and are considering confirming it soon.

For African EM alumni, various alumni associations serve as key support networks. The majority of respondents (78%) are either members of or intend to join the **Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association (EMA)**. Following closely, 52% of participants are involved in or plan to join the **African Students and Alumni Forum (ASAF)**.

In addition, some EM programmes have their own **dedicated alumni organisations**, with 33% of surveyed alumni and students reporting current or potential membership in these programme-specific associations. Lastly, the **All-African Students Union (AASU)** represents a noteworthy portion (21%) of participants.

Although most respondents are in or plan to join an alumni association, the **level of engagement post-graduation varies** significantly among surveyed African EM alumni, as reflected in *Figure 15*.

²¹ Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Smart Cities and Communities (SMACCs): <https://www.smaccs.eu/>.

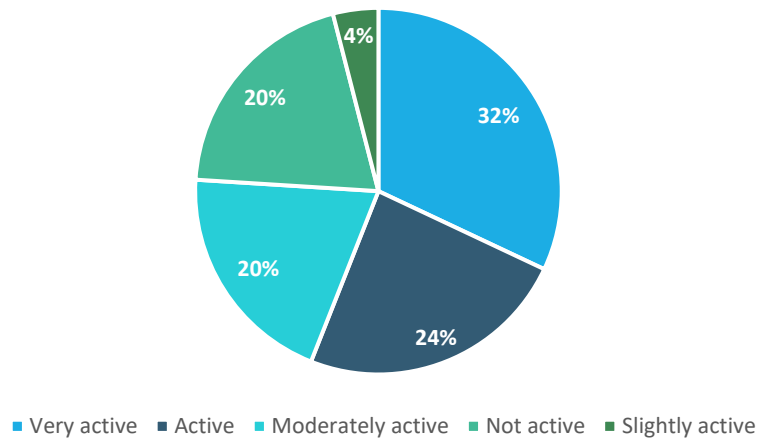


Figure 15. Alumni's level of engagement post-graduation (n = 25)
 Source: NTT DATA, Survey 'Labour Market Insertion of African EM Graduates' (December 2024)

Overall, **more than half of the surveyed alumni are actively involved** in alumni associations, with 32% being very active and 24% active. Additionally, 24% reported some level of involvement, while 20% are not active at all. Notably, within EMA, African EM alumni reported higher levels of engagement compared to their counterparts from other regions (Jühlke et al., 2024).

When asked about the perceived impact of their membership on their professional development, results reveal a clear trend. Highly engaged alumni generally agreed that their involvement in alumni associations had a (very) high impact on their careers. Conversely, those with little or no engagement perceived the association's influence on their professional journey to be significantly lower. This suggests that **the greater the involvement** in an alumni association, **the higher the perceived impact** on professional development.

This positive impact of alumni association membership was most evident in **networking opportunities** and **skills development**. Graduates gained valuable soft skills such as leadership, project management, data analysis, organisational, and collaboration skills (IA). Moreover, these associations also provide access to **valuable resources and information**, such as CV preparation materials (ID).

7. CONCLUSION

This report examines the journey of African EM students, from their experience in the programmes to their entry into the labour market and career development. It aims to highlight good practices and provide recommendations to enhance and support their successful integration in the global labour market.

During the initial stage of their journey, interviewed and surveyed African EM students encounter certain academic and social challenges. However, these do not seem to hinder their academic success, which remains a key factor in their employability and smooth transition into the labour market. Effective and appropriate support – particularly in mentorship and mental health – can help African EM students maintain strong performance and overall well-being, preventing disruptions to their academic journey and future prospects.

After graduation, African EM students face several challenges when transitioning to the workforce, particularly administrative hurdles, the need for local language proficiency, and limited access to strong professional networks. While EM consortia establish various career-oriented measures without differentiating between students' background, their implementation remains inconsistent across programmes. Ensuring a smoother transition for non-EU students into the labour market requires **more comprehensive career guidance and support** from the start of the programme, alongside **closer and more consistent collaboration with industry stakeholders** in both programme design and quality assessment. Adopting a **multi-level approach that incorporates international, regional, and local labour markets** would help align the curriculum with the specific demands of the job markets where students are likely to seek employment. This would enable African EM graduates develop the relevant competences required for their professional success.

Post-graduation trends indicate that African EM graduates often prioritise entering the labour market upon completion of the EM Master's programme, frequently pursuing an academic career by enrolling in PhD studies, with only a small percentage considering entrepreneurial pathways. This inclination sometimes influences their choice of post-graduation destination, as they select countries based on perceived academic opportunities. In addition, while certain aspects of EM programmes – such as global exposure, interdisciplinary knowledge, key professional competences, and industry connections – highly influence labour market insertion of African graduates, greater efforts are needed to strengthen market alignment in terms of disciplines and skills acquired. Findings highlight persistent skills gaps among EM African graduates in ICT, practical and entrepreneurial competences, as well as significant horizontal mismatches in specific disciplines, which should be addressed to enhance their employability.

Overall, improving the labour market insertion of African EM graduates requires greater engagement of African stakeholders and stronger labour market insertion strategies. Two complementary approaches are recommended in this report: **aligning the EM Master's programme with labour market demands** and **implementing effective career-oriented measures and support**. The first equips African EM students with relevant competences, positioning them as valuable assets in the job market, while the second offers guidance and networking opportunities to help students overcome challenges and successfully progress towards their professional goals. By combining and enhancing these approaches, and implementing the best practices presented in this report, African EM graduates can be empowered to thrive in the global workforce and make a lasting impact on their communities and beyond.

This report serves as the foundation for the seminar discussions and will be further enriched by the seminar proceedings, where additional insights, including valuable perspectives from industry stakeholders, will be explored to deepen the analysis and refine the recommendations presented.

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ANNEX




Annex I – Overview of student support measures

Based on the findings of the report, key student support measures and services have been identified for implementation before, during, and after the programme. These are summarised in the table below. Although these measures have been identified within the context of this report, which focuses on the African context, these recommendations can serve as valuable inspiration for all EM consortia.

These measures can be introduced at either the institutional or consortium level; however, it is essential that **all Erasmus Mundus students have access to them** regardless of their destination.

Phase	Student support measure/service	Goal
Before the programme or destination	Clearly outline career prospects on the programme's website	
	Provide support during the visa application process	
	Assist EM students in securing accommodation	
	Offer guidance on important regulations	
	Develop comprehensive handbooks or compendiums	
Upon arrival	Organise 'Welcome Week' activities	
	Establish a 'buddy' system with local students or previous EM cohorts	
	Arrange programme and cultural orientation sessions	
	Provide targeted academic resources	
During the programme	Set up language courses	
	Offer academic support, such as improving academic writing	
	Organise alumni gatherings with current students	
	Implement a structured mentorship system	
	Establish a structured counselling and mental health support system	
	Organise extracurricular and social activities, including engagement with local students	
	Provide students with access to employment events, seminars, and job fairs	
	Offer career development workshops, including CV and job application preparation	
	Develop a catalogue of internships, research opportunities, and company placements	
	Establish a career counselling service	
	Involve employers in EM thesis defences	
	Conduct surveys to assess students' professional interests	
After graduation	Draft recommendation letters for students	
	Create a LinkedIn community for programme graduates, alumni and relevant employers	
	Launch periodic surveys or other data collection activities to track graduates and alumni	
	Foster research collaborations with professors and scholars	
	Organise regular alumni events and activities	

LEGEND

 Programme integration  Labour market insertion  Career Development