Between 2002 and 2016, the number of first residence permits being issued to students increased to reach 70,430 in 2016. These foreign students largely come from Africa and Asia and the proportion of women within this population has grown.

Student pathways have changed over time. Students who have arrived more recently tend to leave again sooner or remain for less time on a student status than those who arrived at the start of the 2000s. Those who remain in the country and change status increasingly turn towards residence permits for remunerated activities rather than for family reasons.

An increase in the number of foreign nationals entering as students

The number of first residence permits issued to foreign nationals from outside the European Economic Area and Switzerland coming to study in France increased from 55,000 in 2002 to more than 70,000 in 2016, the highest recorded level. (Figure 1). The reduction which can be seen up to 2006 is largely explained by the exit from the scope of the study of the 12 countries which entered the European Union in 2004 and 2007. From 2007 onwards, an upward trend can be observed.

Simultaneously, of all residence permits issued for the first time, the proportion of ‘student’ residence permits issued to third country nationals decreased between 2002 and 2006 (from 30% to 24%), then increased until 2011 to reach 33%. This percentage dropped once more in 2012 and then stabilised around 30%.

Four in every ten students are from Africa and one in three from Asia

The African continent represents the largest proportion of people coming to study in France, i.e. four foreign students in every ten. The most represented nationalities are Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia [1]. Asia is the continent which sends the second largest number of students to France. The proportion of students from Asia was the same in 2002 and 2015 (i.e., a third), but this increased slightly in 2007-2008. A significant number of these students are Chinese (more than four in ten Asian students).
An increasing number of students from Latin America and the Caribbean came to France until 2010, rising from 8% to 13% before stabilising. The proportion of students from North America increased between 2002 and 2011 (from 6% to 10%) then gradually decreased to 5% in 2015.

The proportion of women increased between 2002 and 2012 (from 46% to 54%) then gradually decreased to 52% in 2015. With the exception of students from Latin America, within which the proportion of women decreased slightly over the period, the proportion of women increased for all origins. Female students from Africa remain in a minority, regardless of the year of their arrival, but their proportion also increased over the period, from 34% to 42%.

**Decrease in the number of students remaining on a student status**

Students who arrived recently in France remain on a student status for a shorter period than those who arrived between five and ten years previously (Figure 2). Before 2010, nearly 60% of students were still in education one year after their arrival. For more recent cohorts, the proportion of foreign nationals still on a student status after one year is around 55%. This gap continues for the following years of study. No longer holding a ‘student’ residence permit may reflect an “exit” by the cohort (essentially leaving the territory) or renewal of a permit for another reason (family, employment, other reason) [2].

**Increasingly early exits from the country**

The main reason for foreign students no longer holding a residence permit is that they have left the country. Other than leaving the country, the other reasons for lack of a permit are the naturalisation or death of the individual, two phenomena which are rare in students: acquisition of French nationality rarely takes place in the first years of life in France and students are little affected by mortality.

The proportion of foreign students leaving the country one year after their arrival is increasing (Figure 3): from an average of 37% before 2010, it reached nearly 41% between 2010 and 2015, peaking at 43% for cohorts in 2010 and 2011 (temporary impact of the circular of 31 May 2011). This gap was echoed in exits in the following years. It took four years before more than half of the students in the 2002 cohort left France. For student cohorts between 2005 and 2009, three years sufficed. For more recent cohorts, more than half left two years after receiving their first permit.

**A drop in changes of status into family reasons and a rise in changes to remunerated activities**

Foreign nationals holding a ‘student’ residence permit may request a residence permit for family reasons, for example following marriage. The number of ‘student’ residence permits which were changed to residence permits for family reasons reaches its highest level after six years in France (Figure 4), and then stabilises. The change to a residence permit for family reasons is, however, less and less frequent.

Fewer ‘student’ residence permits are changed to residence permits for remunerated activities than for family reasons (Figure 5). However, it is becoming more common. For example, after two years, 7% of foreign nationals who arrived on a ‘student’ residence permit in 2013 held a residence permit for remunerated activities. This was only 2% for the 2002 cohort. The proportion of foreign students holding a residence permit for remunerated activities is highest (around 10%) after five or six years living in France.

**Shorter duration of student status regardless of origin**

The behaviour of students differs according to geographic origin. Between 2002 and 2014, students from Asia and South America tended to stay for shorter periods on a ‘student’ residence permit. This is also the case for African students, but only from the second year onwards. Indeed, the proportion of those renewing their ‘student’ residence permit during the first year is relatively stable, regardless of their year of arrival. It should be noted that students from North America have, in contrast, a tendency to remain longer and longer in France.

African students take the longest time to leave. After one year, only 20% have left France and it takes six years for half of them to no longer hold a residence permit. Students from Asia and Central America leave more frequently, respectively 40% and 60% after one year, and this accelerates over time. Regarding North America, these students are the least likely to renew their residence permit after one year in France.

African students are the most likely to change their permit to a residence permit for family reasons compared to those from other continents, but this behaviour tends to decrease over time. After six years, 23% of those who entered in 2002 have a resi-
Students from Central America and Asia display, to a lesser degree, the same behaviour. Very few students from North America apply for a residence permit for this reason.

Reading: 57% of foreign nationals entering France on a ‘student’ residence permit in 2014 still hold a residence permit for the same reason one year later.

Reading: 39% of foreign nationals entering France on a ‘student’ residence permit in 2014 no longer hold a residence permit one year later (largely due to having left the country).

Reading: 1% of foreign nationals entering France on a ‘student’ residence permit in 2014 held a residence permit for family reasons one year later.

Reading: 3% of foreign nationals entering France on a ‘student’ residence permit in 2014 held a residence permit for remunerated activities one year later.

Scope: third country nationals in France (mainland and overseas departments)
Source: AGDREF – DSED
The number of students being issued with residence permits for remunerated activities has increased, regardless of continent. Barely 1% of African students who arrived in 2002 held a residence permit for remunerated activities one year after their studies; in 2014, this figure was nearly 5%. This gap accelerates with the number of years of study in France. Students from Asia and Latin America have the same profile as African students, but in smaller proportions. Fewer than 2% of students from North America have received a residence permit for remunerated activities.

Students leaving more rapidly
Male and female foreign students behave similarly over time, with a massive reduction in the number holding a ‘student’ residence permit after one year, a tendency which has accelerated in recent years. However, women hold ‘student’ residence permits for a shorter period than men (around seven points less for the first two years of study). This rapid exit from the ‘student’ residence permit for women is explained by a more rapid exit from the country. Regardless of the year in which they were issued their residence permit, the proportion of women who leave the country is higher, and this phenomenon has increased slightly in more recent years.

Simultaneously, while the proportion of female students obtaining a residence permit for family reasons drops over time, it remains higher than that of male students. This gap tends to reduce with the cohorts. The change in status to a residence permit for remunerated activities is increasingly common for both sexes, although the proportion of women receiving such a residence permit is lower than that of men.

Clear change in behaviour of foreign students over time
The behaviour of foreign students has changed since the start of the 2000s: earlier exits from the country, a drop in changes of status to a residence permit for family reasons and a rise in changes in status for remunerated activities. Does this simply reflect a change in behaviour of foreign students, or are there changes in the composition by origin or sex of students over this time?

To answer this question, the observed behaviour (by sex and by origin) of students entering in 2012 were applied to the cohort entering in 2002. It is then observed that for identical sex and origin structures, the results are close to those observed in 2012. There is, therefore, no structural effect and, as may be expected due to low demographic changes, it is changes in the behaviour of foreign students which explain these phenomena rather than changes in the composition of this group by origin and sex.

Source used
AGDREF, the Application Informatique de Gestion des Dossiers des Ressortissants Étrangers en France (software application for managing data on foreign nationals in France) enables managers in both Prefectures and central government to manage and consult, depending on their level of authorisation, individual records on foreign nationals in France.

AGDREF is primarily used as a tool for producing residence permits, rather than as a real tool for managing and monitoring events relating to the residence of foreign nationals in France. The tool was supplemented in 2001 with a derived database designed to produce statistics on legal immigration.

The first residence permits were residence permits issued for the first time to a foreign national with validity beginning between 1 January and 31 December of the given year. At the time of publication, data from 2016 reflect estimates produced by reason for issuing the permit. Distribution by sex and origin is only identified for definitive data (2002 to 2015).

The stock of foreign nationals corresponds to the number of foreign nationals holding a permit or valid document on 31 December of year n.

To find out more