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Keeping the Faith: The Role of Madrassas in Building the British Muslim Identity

Koranic schools, supplementary schools or more commonly referred to in the UK as 'Madrassas', play a significant role in the lives of young Muslim children of different ethnic backgrounds, including Moroccan children. However, these institutions have constantly been placed under huge scrutiny by the British media, who have identified a number of issues within them, from child protection to being a major obstacle for community cohesion and integration. Drawing on extensive fieldwork and desk research, this research presents a typology of Koranic schools across the UK, the challenges they face and the great potential they have to positively influence the lives of Muslim children and society as a whole. This paper has a particular focus on how these institutions, over the past decades, have influenced the lives of Moroccan children and their integration in the UK.

This paper illustrates how, regardless of all the criticism they receive, these institutions, in many ways, act as a non-conflicting cultural space for second- and third-generation Moroccans. They can call on other co-ethnics for educational support and offer a space where children recover a sense of worth and an improved understanding of some of the components of their culture. They also have the potential to positively influence children's development, allow pupils to explore and understand their own identity and strengthen community cohesion.



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Dr Myriam Cherti is a Senior Researcher at COMPAS, Oxford University, and the new PI for the C-MISE. Prior to that, she was Head of Migration Governance, Data, and Research at the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Morocco. Before that, she led the Migration and Development Unit of IOM in the UK. In 2018, she was seconded by IOM to work with the Moroccan government, leading the organisation of the Global Forum for Migration and Development, as well as preparations for the adoption of the Global Compact on Migration. Myriam previously worked as a Senior Researcher at COMPAS, University of Oxford, between 2013 and 2017, when she was co-investigator on a project researching irregular migration and immigration enforcement in the UK.

She has extensive experience and expertise in the fields of irregular migration, migrant integration and reintegration, diaspora policy, and Moroccan migration. Myriam has also worked as a consultant and independent researcher on several European projects on migrant integration. She holds a PhD degree in Migration Studies from the University of Sussex and an MSc in Social Policy from the London School of Economics and Political Sciences.