

Higher education programme for refugees: The future after flight



Exchanging experiences and discussing best practice examples: At the meeting of project leaders in Bonn, the Syrian student Qassem Alhomayyar talked about how he got a place at university

The DAAD has been supporting universities with the integration of refugee students by means of several programmes for one year now. The feedback reported by project leaders in a first review in Bonn is very positive.

His wishes for the future? Qassem Alhomayyar from Syria thinks briefly before he responds. "To see my family again," the student enrolled at the University of Cologne says, "and to finish my degree, to do a doctorate in biology – and improve my German a little bit more." This is received with joviality and applause by the 260 persons taking part in the conference of project leaders of higher education programmes for refugees, hosted by the DAAD in Bonn on 17 November 2016. They are familiar with the trials and tribulations as well as the ambitions of many of the refugee students, an increasing number of which are finding their way to the universities of Germany over the past year. They know how fast many of them learn German – like Qassem Alhomayyar from scratch to level B2 in less than a year, with the C1 test around the corner. Yet they are also aware of the everyday challenges involved in gaining refugees like Qassem Alhomayyar as students and accompanying them all the way to their final degree.

"We faced an enormous challenge over a year ago," said DAAD Secretary-General Dr Dorothea Rüländ at the opening of the conference entitled "Flight and Academic Study – a Review".

over one million people fled to Germany in 2015. The universities were one of the first organisations to help the refugees with initiatives. I would like to thank you for this today.” The response by the DAAD was also prompt: funds from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF) were combined in the “Welcome” and “Integra” programmes to support refugees eligible to study and promote their integration at university. These programmes are supplemented by the assumption of costs incurred on the way to university, such as for the academic aptitude test TestAS, the language placement test onSET and the university application procedure uni-assist. Several thousands of refugees have been able to benefit from the programmes already. “I am very pleased that the BMBF has extended the Welcome and Integra programmes until 2018,” said Dorothea Rüland in Bonn. This could serve to “stabilise structures”.

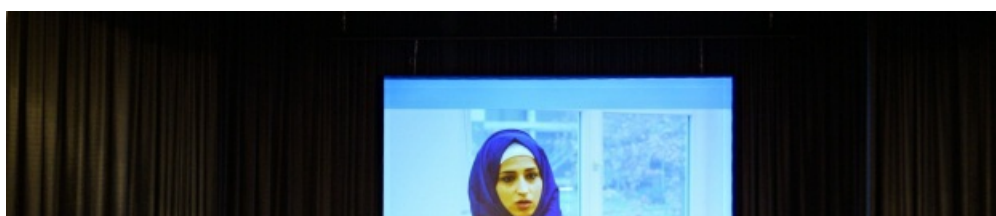


DAAD Secretary-General Dorothea Rüland praised the commitment of the universities

The programmes are complemented by initiatives in the regions of the conflict, such as the qualification programme “HOPES” supported by the European Union as well as scholarship and transnational education programmes. The conference in Bonn was also an opportunity for representatives of higher education institutions and preparatory colleges to discuss best practice examples, to network and talk about difficulties and challenges faced.

“An enormous potential”

“You have done an excellent job and achieved something truly worthwhile,” complimented Thomas Rachel, Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister of Education and Research. “This is a demonstration of the cosmopolitan nature of universities.” He illustrated the fact that the ones to leave a country first are often its intellectuals by means of the example of the German economist and social philosopher Wilhelm Röpke, who fought the national socialists and then had to flee from Germany. “It is an enormous potential. We should make the most of it for the benefit of these people. But also for the benefit of our country as a place of knowledge and innovation.” Rachel also emphasised that it was imperative for all citizens to take a “definitive and unambiguous” stand against extreme right wing movements. “We have to make it clear that many refugees come with a very good education in order to make general opinions in Germany more differentiated.” The BMBF is providing EUR 100 million until 2019 for refugees eligible to study.





Refugees reported how they profit from the Integra and Welcome programmes in two short films

An overview of the success of the DAAD measures was given by Dr Anette Pieper, Director of the Projects Department at the DAAD, and Katharina Riehle, Head of the Higher Education Programmes for Refugees Division at the DAAD. The Integra programme supports over 170 higher education institutions and preparatory colleges, with almost 4,000 applications from refugees in twelve months. The Welcome programme supports 449 initiatives and 731 student assistants at over 160 universities. "In contrast to other international students, prospective refugee students had significantly less opportunities to find out about the German higher education system and the available subjects," said Katharina Riehle. That's why they need extra help. Just how much they benefit from this was clearly evident in two short films documenting the experiences of refugees at the universities: "I'm not scared to enter the university building any more," said a young Afghani student for example. Others expressed their gratitude for being given the chance to learn German so fast. "The huge commitment of the universities and students to develop programmes has really impressed and encouraged us," said Anette Pieper. And Katharina Riehle added: "It was amazing how quickly the measures were implemented and established."

Joint Guide for Access to University and Academic Study for Refugees (Gemeinsame Handreichung für den Hochschulzugang)

A [joint guide called "Access to University and Academic Study for Refugees" \(gemeinsame Handreichung „Hochschulzugang und Studium von Flüchtlingen“\)](#) (pdf, 1.4 MB) [\[/medien/der-daad/handreichung_hochschulzugang_gefl%C3%BChtete.pdf\]](#) (available in German only) was recently published by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Kultusministerkonferenz, KMK), German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), German National Association for Student Affairs (Deutsches Studentenwerk, DSW) and German Rectors' Conference (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz, HRK). This aims to provide higher education institutions and preparatory colleges with specific support for the integration of refugees at universities. People working at universities and associations for student affairs can expect to find answers on important issues such as the specific asylum and residence legislation governing refugees wanting to take up studies, relevant aspects for admission and enrolment of refugees as well as the scholarship programmes and assistance available to refugees. The extent to which project leaders deal with such questions became clearly evident in Bonn. In six parallel workshops, participants discussed "Flight and Trauma", "Intercultural Integration" and "Special Requirements of Integration of Female Students with Refugee Background". The Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Magdeburg, Professor Franziska Scheffler, and the Vice President for Teaching at the University of Applied Sciences HWT Berlin, Professor Birgit Müller, reported their experiences from practice in concise presentations.





Lively discussion: Many of the 260 participants contributed actively to the debates

The interesting programme in Bonn was supplemented by a panel discussion dedicated to future requirements and tasks of successful academic integration. Panellists included Nikolas Kretzschmar, Head of the Division for Fundamental Matters Related to Integration in the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF), MinDirig Peter Greisler, Head of the Subdirector General for Universities at the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), Dr Susanne Preuschoff, Head of the Department of International Students at the University of Cologne, Ralf Schäfer, Coordinator of Integration Point Bonn, Nicole Grimm, Coordinator of LINKplus Integration Courses at Lübeck University of Applied Sciences, and Dr Christian Thimme, Head of Project Policies and Internationalisation of Higher Education in Germany at the DAAD. As emphasised by Nikolas Kretzschmar of the BAMF, it is very difficult to estimate how many refugees actually fulfil the prerequisites for academic study. According to current figures, about a third of all the refugees from Syria who came to Germany in 2015 and 2016 had a university entrance qualification, while a fifth already studied at a university. Peter Greisler of the BMBF encouraged the participants to keep up their commitment: “We should make use of the spirit and the drive that has developed in the past months to push ahead,” he said. And he gave them a tip, which the participants implemented enthusiastically: “Talk to each other, network, take advantage of this opportunity.”

Sarah Kanning (22 November 2016)

MORE INFORMATION

[Refugees at universities – Programmes and measures \(Flüchtlinge an Hochschulen – Programme & Maßnahmen\) \[https://www.daad.de/der-daad/fluechtlinge/en/\]](https://www.daad.de/der-daad/fluechtlinge/en/)

[Funding programme: \(Förderprogramm:\) “Welcome – Students Helping Refugees” \(„Welcome – Studierende engagieren sich für Flüchtlinge“\) \[https://www2.daad.de/der-daad/daad-aktuell/de/42993-welcome--studierende-engagieren-sich-fuer-fluechtlinge-willkommen-an-den-hochschulen/\]](https://www2.daad.de/der-daad/daad-aktuell/de/42993-welcome--studierende-engagieren-sich-fuer-fluechtlinge-willkommen-an-den-hochschulen/)

[Funding programme: \(Förderprogramm:\) “Integrating Refugees in Degree Programmes” \(Integra\) \(Integration von Flüchtlingen ins Fachstudium \(Integra\)\) \[https://www.daad.de/de/infos-services-fuer-hochschulen/weiterfuehrende-infos-zu-daad-foerderprogrammen/integra/\]](https://www.daad.de/de/infos-services-fuer-hochschulen/weiterfuehrende-infos-zu-daad-foerderprogrammen/integra/)

[Refugees at universities: \(Flüchtlinge an Hochschulen:\) How the DAAD is helping \(So engagiert sich der DAAD\) \[https://www.daad.de/de/infos-services-fuer-hochschulen/expertise-zu-themen-laendern-regionen/fluechtlinge-an-hochschulen/so-engagiert-sich-der-daad/\]](https://www.daad.de/de/infos-services-fuer-hochschulen/expertise-zu-themen-laendern-regionen/fluechtlinge-an-hochschulen/so-engagiert-sich-der-daad/)

