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18TH – 19TH JUNE 2019
BERLIN



“INCLUSION OF QUALIFIED REFUGEES IN GERMAN UNIVERSITIES” – CONTRIBUTION BY BERND FISCHER, DEPUTY HEAD OF DIVISION “EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA, INTERNATIONALIZATION”

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you and thanks to the Foreign Office, UNHCR and DAAD for convening this important conference.

Lunch break is close and while I do like to wish your body and mind some refreshment I would also like to draw your attention to the “Marketplace” poster session going on in parallel. Some 30 institutions from all over the world will present their projects. You will find out that there are ambitious and inspiring initiatives in a number of Middle Eastern and African countries, in Pakistan or Latin America, some of them initiated and funded by committed local students and communities, others sponsored by donations from Northern America and Europe or global players such as UNHCR. I find them very impressive and I congratulate all organisations involved. There are also posters of initiatives in European countries such as Belgium, Ireland and UK. Some months ago, the European Commission also published a remarkable report “Integrating Asylum Seekers and Refugees into Higher Education in Europe” comparing national policies and measures of 38 European countries.

On behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research – BMBF – I would like to take the opportunity to spotlight briefly what our ministry has done in order to support the integration of refugees into the German Higher Education system.

The German higher education system is fairly international: currently 370,000 foreign students plus German students with a migratory background altogether account for 26% of all university students in Germany, upward tendency. So, when those talented refugees arrived they were also another interesting target group – despite the many practical challenges.

Some socio-demographic aspects of refugees in Germany: around two thirds are male. 43 % of all refugees are aged 18 to 34 (716,515; 31.12.2017), that is the relevant phase for higher education. As for their educational background, more than one third of all adult refugees have a higher education entrance qualification of their country of origin. 18 % of adult refugees had attended university studies before. And 11 % of adult refugees held at least a first academic degree. Apparently, there were a lot of talented and highly motivated young men and women coming to Germany. I agree to UNHCR’s analysis that talented refugees with the capacity of taking up a study programme are a relevant group.



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In 2015, I was working on international academic exchange issues when news spread that many refugees were fairly well-educated. I then became member of a newly established Coordination Unit for Refugee Policy in charge of rolling out the Ministry's measures related to refugee integration and was asked to propose a package of measures for paving the way of talented refugees into German higher education.

The BMBF set up measures in various fields of education in late 2015:

- Funding research projects to enhance our knowledge on integration and migration;
- Initiatives to promote basic language and reading skills;
- Assessment of practical skills and access to vocational training;
- Integration at higher education institutions.

The measures were adopted by the Minister and equipped with generous budgets attributed by the German parliament rapidly. More specifically in the field of higher education, the already mentioned 100 Mill. Euro package of measures was implemented by the DAAD.

Referring to the appeals of Ms. Dawood and Professor von Blumenthal this morning - to continue funding in that area - I can say that BMBF is currently negotiating within the German Government and with the German Parliament on extending the measures beyond 2019, and I am optimistic.

The DAAD package includes:

- Online orientation and counselling of refugees looking for opportunities in higher education;
- Assessing their university entry qualifications and language proficiency including setting up recognition process in case of missing certificates which includes individual aptitude tests as an efficient alternative to the Refugee Qualification Passport;
- Linguistic and subject-related bridging courses for asylum seekers and accepted refugees (Integra programme);
- On-campus inclusion by voluntary students' initiatives (Welcome programme);
- Training of university staff by the International DAAD Academy and
- Online information for participating universities and the public.



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And there are accompanying measures:

- There are no tuition fees - analogously to German and other international students.
- Accepted refugees are eligible to the federal student grant program (BAföG), student loans programs (Studienkredit) as well as grant programmes of political or religious foundations.
- And we are also funding of the German start-up Kiron Open Higher Education which offers free online prep courses and study programmes for refugees irrespective of refugee status or place of residence. The idea is that they may acquire credit points that will be recognised once they enrol at one of their partner universities.

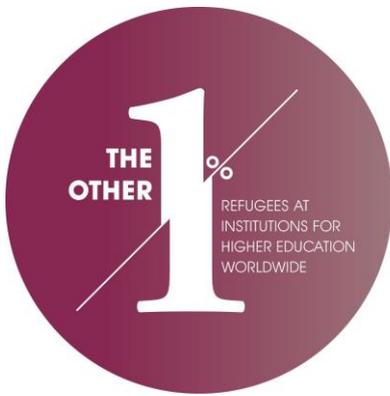
Important to note:

- No discount is given on pre-qualification of refugees compared to other international students.
- Concerning residency and asylum law: In Germany refugees may take up studies or prep courses irrespective of their refugee status or their country of origin.
- Access is solely dependent on pre-qualification and German language level (usually C1). University entry is regulated by the Länder while individual access is ultimately decided by the universities.

Since 2016, the DAAD programmes have been running quite successfully, with more than 10,000 refugees taking part in bridging courses at more than 160 universities and Studienkollegs in Germany every year, the share of women stagnating around 20%, however. And the federal programme is complemented by a few regional programmes which offer additional places and stipends.

We saw, however, that the refugees need further support during their studies in order to prevent drop-out. So, accompanying German classes and methodological courses have been funded meanwhile and universities have introduced workshops to provide information and orientation on the postgraduate labour market.

Since 2017, the BMBF has also funded the annual „Welcome Awards” to 3 outstanding student-led initiatives, such as a Refugee Law Clinic, German-Arab conversation classes, a standard-setting buddy programme or the planning and construction of a meeting centre jointly by architectural students and refugees.



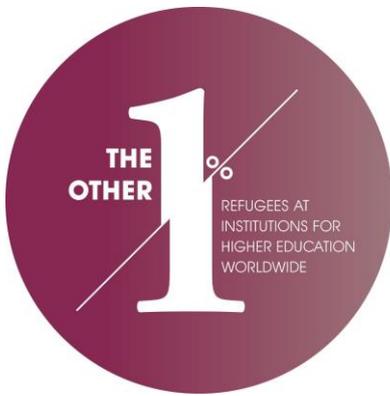
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The BMBF measures address 3 main policy areas:

1. humanitarian: Bringing refugees into higher education as quickly as possible in order to make use of their high motivation from the beginning and in order to prevent frustration and trauma break-outs by empowering them to pursue a new positive goal.
2. economic: Due to a growing scarcity of highly-skilled workers, Germany has been eager to attract and retain international students. There has been a high request for STEM studies by refugees. Integrating refugees into German higher education may be good for our economy and will reduce dependency of the refugees and their families on social security.
3. political: With our package of measures we also pursue general goals in higher education policy:
 - Internationalisation of universities: the cultural background, but also the experience of flight and refuge, can offer new perspectives on research and teaching. The gained know-how in offering bridging courses and counselling refugee students could be transferred to other groups of international students.
 - Internationalization at home: Currently, around one third of German students go abroad during their studies. This is quite good in international comparison, but we think for Germany as an export-oriented nation in a globalised world, but also in an increasingly diverse country, more young professional need international and intercultural experience. Imagine the school teacher profession, just as an example. Students who do not have the means or motivation to go abroad themselves at least have the opportunity to acquire some experience on campus.
 - Early practical experience and service-learning: Student-led initiatives gain practical experience, maybe even in their future field of profession: so-called refugee law clinics have been founded throughout Germany by law students who consult refugees on asylum or social security law, prospective teacher students give German or Maths classes to refugee children and adults, students of architecture planned and built a meeting centre together with engineering students and refugees, sponsored by large building companies. I imagine that participating students will look back on such endeavours as one of their most holistic and fruitful learning experiences during their university studies. At the best, those projects will enrich the curricula which should respond to more diverse classrooms and new societal challenges.
 - Last but not least, universities have taken over responsibility for the society they exist in. We call it the Third Mission besides research and teaching. In some regions the universities are the spider in the net of civil engagement for refugees. They have reflected migration and flight on an evidence-driven, scientific, but also on a personal base, and are enabled to inform the public and add facts to the sometimes heated public debate.



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We are grateful to the thousands of volunteers and around 200 participating universities. We have also experienced that many participating refugees later become volunteers themselves because they feel empowered and want to give back to German society and to their fellow refugees.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The overall outcomes of the package of measures have been promising so far: According to the German Rectors' Conference at least 10,000 refugees enrolled in BA or MA programmes from late 2015 until late 2018 and we expect thousands more to come in the near future. However, please bear in mind that due to strict privacy requirements there are only rough estimates about refugees at German universities. According to the German Statistical Office, in summer 2018 there were even more than 25,000 university students enrolled from 8 main countries in crisis – not all of them being refugees of course, but there are refugee students from many other countries, too.

So then: how is Germany doing concerning „The Other 1 Percent“?

First of all, I think the situation in host countries may be very diverse. There are countries where refugee families have been living long time, sometimes for generations. Children ran through the host country's school system, know the language and culture. By contrast, Germany has experienced large numbers of refugees arriving just recently, amongst them many young adults with foreign educational certificates and very little knowledge about Germany, the German language, let alone the German educational system. They need to learn German first – usually on C1 level – and have their foreign higher education entrance certificate recognised before they can enrol in a study programme. That means a time lag of around 2 years. So, refugees will be significantly older before they enter university compared to host countries where refugees have run through the national school system. The average age of participants at the beginning of our university prep courses for refugees is 28. So, instead of UNHCR's age range of 18 to 28, it might be more appropriate to take an age range of 18 to 34 years as a basis like the European Commission does, for example.

Now let's have a look on the most recent data available: In 2018, around 500,000 refugees aged 18 to 28 lived in Germany. In this age group, between 2 and 5 % were studying at a German university. Disclaimer: this is a very rough estimation and no scientific evidence!

Considering the only recent arrival of adult refugees, I think this does not look bad. But we are striving to do even more. Every month, around 10,000 refugees are still arriving and many of them continue to have a high educational background. We can also see that a considerable number of refugees from earlier cohorts are just arriving at the universities now after their asylum process was finally settled or after they had worked or followed vocational training and saw that they want to achieve even more.

With the help of DAAD, hundreds of German universities and thousands of volunteering students we are trying our best to equip them with the best academic knowledge in order to enable them to rebuild their countries of origin once they return or to contribute to our country's wealth while they stay. Apart from our humanitarian responsibility, this might be a win-win-situation.



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If you want to know more about these programmes please check out the poster on „DAAD’s Higher Education Programmes for Refugees in Germany“ at the Marketplace or DAAD’s latest monitoring report on the refugee programmes. I will be happy to answer your questions, too, during lunch break or later at the parallel World Cafés.

Thank you for your attention.