



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

Strengthening equal opportunities and diversity in DAAD projects

Examples from Practice



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Introduction

Equal opportunity and diversity are crucial for a democratic, open society, as well as democratic and open science. To ensure that all talented people can contribute with their diverse experiences and perspectives, it is important to comprehensively strengthen equal opportunity and diversity, in both higher education and research and international academic exchange. Improved access to international education and research experiences for diverse target groups enriches the dialogue between people from different countries and cultures as it adds further dimensions and at the same time promotes the diversity of future interculturally competent specialists and managers.

As different characteristics can still limit participation in international academic mobility, DAAD would like to support previously underrepresented groups even more specifically than before in line with its *diversity agenda*. Characteristics can overlap (intersectionality) and change over the course of an individual's educational biography. The DAAD's diversity agenda

focuses on the following characteristics in particular:

- ◆ Gender
- ◆ Family history of migration (especially for funding recipients from Germany)
- ◆ Family educational background (first generation students)
- ◆ Health conditions (people with disabilities or chronic illnesses)
- ◆ Social security aspects (especially single-parents and academic staff, including teachers and researchers, with children)
- ◆ Financial constraints

With the following explanations and practical examples, DAAD would like to encourage international higher education projects to consider promoting equal opportunity and diversity with the respective project partners right from the beginning to enable greater participation for all. In this sense, this paper intends to be food for thought for project planning that is sensitive to the need for diversity and to respectively support universities in the application process.



Increasing equal opportunity and diversity for grantees

In order to further increase equal opportunity and diversity, DAAD is initially focusing on the characteristics referred to in the introduction: People (groups) who have historically been underrepresented in funding programmes due to these characteristics should be more effectively addressed and supported. Depending on the project, however, not all of these characteristics are equally relevant. There may also be other characteristics, such as religious or ethnic identity, that are relevant in the context of a project. To ensure targeted and needs-based support, the international project team must decide which of the afore mentioned aspects are essential for the project, which target groups are underrepresented, and who should be targeted in particular.

Once the relevant groups have been identified, this should be considered at all stages of planning and pursuing the project, ranging from the phase of preparing and publishing the call for application to awarding scholarships and supporting the recipients. The following suggestions are meant to provide a couple examples of good practices from DAAD funded projects.

Addressing underrepresented target groups

The first fundamental step in motivating the desired target group(s) to apply is appropriate communication via the call for application. The call should be designed to actively reach out to different target groups, be it in wording, visual language or the descriptions of funding opportunities. Also important is the decision as to where and how to provide information about the scholarship programme. The target group(s) should not be addressed by name only, but reached in a way which raises the likelihood of following engagement. A series of aspects can be helpful:

- ◆ Which channels (social media, radio, etc.) will be used to ensure the call for applications reaches the desired target groups?
- ◆ Are the documents designed as user-friendly and readable on all devices, including smartphones and tablets? Are the required forms accessible and easy to complete on all devices?
- ◆ Is the call accessible for people with impairments?
- ◆ Should underrepresented groups be explicitly invited to apply?

The answers can vary greatly, depending on the programme's design and context.





Practical example: Diversity approach

Publishing calls for applications on special academic platforms or university websites, a common and proven practice in Germany, is not always a suitable means of reaching the largest possible group of people in countries in the Global South. In addition to technical barriers, such as the limited reach or functionality of the websites in question, there are often social, symbolic and cultural hurdles that make it difficult for potentially interested parties to access information and thus limit the pool of applicants.

The Research Training Group "Performing Sustainability. Cultures and Development in West Africa" is one of seven SDG Research Training Groups funded within the DAAD programme of the same name. This initiative by the universities of Maiduguri (Nigeria), Cape Coast (Ghana) and Hildesheim explicitly encourages women and individuals from underrepresented groups to apply with diversity-sensitive projects related to culture and sustainability in its calls for applications for PhD and master's scholarships. At the suggestion of the two international partner universities, the project managers opted for a coordinated two-stage approach to reach out to the desired target groups: Firstly, the call for applications was disseminated via various channels, e.g. social media (WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram), radio, inter-university networks (including the Vice-President platform) and typical notice boards; in a second step, virtual preparation workshops were offered for the actual application.

These measures ensured that the admission requirements were made transparent and all interested parties were optimally prepared for the application process.

The experience with the implemented process so far has been consistently positive. "The use of various channels has led to a snowball effect in the recruitment of applicants", explains Lea Frauenknecht, one of the project coordinators. "For example, we were able to record higher numbers of applicants than in an earlier application rounds". At the same time, the workshops resulted in significantly better applications, "as the applicants were able to adapt their documents to the requirements and minimize redundancies based on the information provided", adds Frauenknecht.

The measure at a glance

Project

SDG Graduate School "Performing Sustainability"

Website

<https://www.uni-hildesheim.de/sustainability/>

Contact

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Selection procedure

When it comes to the selection procedure, a university must decide, depending on the context and the target groups concerned, whether it wants to focus on either avoiding unconscious discrimination in a procedure or use *affirmative action*. The latter takes into account aspects such as the social environment and the personal situation of the applicants in addition to the quality of academic achievements and extracurricular commitment.

If, on the other hand, certain groups of people are to receive targeted support because they are currently underrepresented, special funding or quotas can be put in place for these groups. In this case, demographic factors are added to the selection criteria in order to include socio-economic disadvantages or other individual challenging conditions, for example.

The best route for your project must be decided on a case-by-case basis.

One way to counteract unconscious bias in the selection process is to anonymise the application documents. Name, gender, nationality, photo and age are removed so that the selection committee in such a "blind" process can focus exclusively on competences and ignore all other factors.



Practical example: Diversity characteristics as criteria in the application process

How can the proportion of underrepresented groups in the academic world be increased without major bureaucratic effort for applicants and project administrators? This was the challenge taken up by those responsible for TRAJECTS, one of the four Global Centres for Climate and Environment funded since May 2021. It sought to give a diverse group of people the opportunity to participate in an international project and thus gain new, different perspectives.

Outcome: During the application process, e.g. for PhD and master's scholarships or participation in training courses and academies, applicants can provide information on their financial situation and self-assess aspects such as gender, ethnicity or region. This information is then assessed by using a points system. Those who belong to a structurally disadvantaged group will be allocated more points in the selection process.

Practical knowledge (as an individual case for the TRAJECTS programme: changes in land use in coal mining regions) is given equal consideration in the selection process. It is therefore possible - and common practice in the project - to fund research stays with TRAJECTS partners, even if applicants do not meet general requirements such as having a master's degree or advanced English language skills.

Experience with this approach has been universally positive. "So far, the information on region of origin etc. has always been confirmed when asked for", explains Paola Yanguas Parra from the National Contact Point Germany and TRAJECTS European hub at TU Berlin. Perhaps even more importantly, the explicit weighting of applicants' backgrounds in the evaluation system can help to supplement more traditional criteria such as academic success. "The self-imposed target that at least 30 per cent of our beneficiaries be from at least one underrepresented group has been achieved. In fact, it's more than half, and a high percentage of them fall into two or more categories".

The measure at a glance

Project

Transnational Centre for Just Transitions in Energy, Climate and Sustainability (TRAJECTS)

Website

<https://trajects.org>

Contact

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Appointment of selection committees

Experience shows that diverse selection committees assess applications differently. Anyone who knows from their own experience how CVs are influenced by particular characteristics is aware of the potential of applicants who may not submit the most formally convincing documents or applications. Depending on the diversity characteristic that is to be given greater consideration, it is therefore helpful to take this into account when the committee is composed. To enquire beforehand whether the committee's members have made respective experiences leading to more openness to these types of applicants, can be an asset, too.

Support services for disadvantaged groups

In recent years, DAAD has further expanded its range of services for funded universities in order to address the additional financial needs of scholarship holders with special requirements. In 2019, for example, measures were established to enable people with disabilities or chronic illnesses to access equal opportunities to study abroad or in Germany through special financial bonuses. In 2024, financial top ups for families were also introduced for certain programmes awarding long-term scholarships. The corresponding information is part of the respective calls for applications.

Involving people with relevant experience

Involving current or former scholarship holders with relevant backgrounds has also proven to be a good way of advising and supporting applicants and funding recipients. Due to their personal experience, they have special insights that allow them to draw attention to further challenges or encourage and inspire applicants.



Practical example: Promoting the mobility of people with impairments

In order to increase equal opportunities for project funding for both German and international people with disabilities or chronic illnesses (including grantees and project staff), DAAD has been able to cover additional expenses (e.g. local travel, accommodation, medical care, tailor-made didactic material) related to a stay in Germany or abroad since 2019. The prerequisite for this is participation in mobility activities as part of project funding and a degree of disability (GdB) of at least 50 (for international students a medical certificate attesting to a corresponding disability/restriction) or a chronic illness.

Linda Hemmetzberger from the University of Hamburg has benefited from this opportunity. In 2022, the deaf marine biology student received a grant for interpreting services, among other things, for a six-month stay at a research institute in Japan. The funding was provided by the Universität Hamburg as part of the DAAD PROMOS programme. "The application was very simple, the process was easy to follow overall", Linda Hemmetzberger remembers. "I only had to fill out and upload a few documents, and I got answers to any open questions quickly. DAAD's calculation of the budget was particularly helpful".

Sophie Raatz from Department 5 - International Affairs at the Universität Hamburg also stressed the impact of "the good and detailed support" provided by the DAAD, "because applying for the special funding was not routine for us and therefore required a little more time." Raatz is convinced that this effort "was worth it, however, as the student was able to successfully complete her stay abroad". She also emphasizes that "this 'case' raised awareness of the issue of equal opportunity in our team and broadened our experience in working with students".

In Raatz's view, this instrument is "a great option that universities should utilize to promote equal opportunities". The University of Hamburg is already active in this regard. For example, attention is drawn to this at informational events, concise information on stays abroad with sign language interpreters is offered on the website and the documents provided are largely accessible.

The measure at a glance

Project

PROMOS scholarship programme at the University of Hamburg

Website

<https://www.daad.de/de/der-daad/mobilitaet-mit-behinderung/>

Contact

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Practical example: Support for grantees with spouses and children

In the case of a scholarship with a long-term compulsory research stay abroad, the question of further financial support generally arises for scholarship holders with spouses and children in order to avoid to be separated from their families for a longer period of time. The four Global Centres for Climate and Environment funded by the DAAD have been providing such financial family benefits since 2021, and they have been included on a larger scale in other DAAD programmes since 2024. The centres were able to provide grants for accompanying children and partners if required.

The project managers at the SAGE regional centre, which is coordinated by the University of Tübingen, decided to take this step as they support many scholarship holders with families and therefore very much welcomed the opportunity for additional support.

Several grantees - both women and men - have already taken advantage of this financial aid to come to Germany with their families. "We have made a contribution to creating better conditions for the people we support without too much bureaucracy and with few financial resources", explains Nora Ateia, coordinator of the SAGE Centre in Tübingen. "This can be seen as a contribution to greater fairness with direct positive effects on the well-being of the researchers. It takes a burden off their shoulders. They can focus on their project. And this ultimately benefits our programme as a whole".

The measure at a glance

Project

Regional Centre for Sustainable Adaptation to Global Change in the Middle East (SAGE)

Website

<https://uni-tuebingen.de/en/.../sage/>

Contact

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Equal opportunity and diversity as a cross-cutting topic in research and teaching

The topic of "equal opportunity and diversity" is attracting more and more attention in research and teaching. For example, its relevance is made clear to new groups of people by addressing the topic in university courses. There are also many opportunities to take up the issue in DAAD-funded projects.

It can be integrated into events through additional presentations or panels, for example. There is also space to raise awareness of diversity when preparing grantees for their stay abroad. When creating or developing curricula, a separate module can be considered in appropriate subject-related contexts, e.g. on diversity research, diversity management or inclusion in teaching.

In addition, recognized experts in the field can be involved with their assessment and, if necessary, their recommendations. Finally, it can be helpful to look at existing research projects, teaching curricula, events, etc. at other institutions and get in touch with those in charge. By sharing experiences, challenges and risks can be recognized and considered more quickly in order to reduce existing hurdles and simplify necessary processes.



Practical example: A module on diversity management

Since 2020, the "Diversity Management" module has been available for deans from Africa and Southeast Asia as part of an advanced training programme in the field of higher education management that is offered jointly by the Osnabrück University of Applied Sciences and the Centre for Higher Education Development. The course is part of the DIES programme (Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies), which is jointly coordinated by DAAD and the German Rectors' Conference. The half-day "Diversity Management" module flanks the central modules on topics such as "Finance Management" and "Change Management". It has been offered online since the beginning of the corona pandemic, as has another part of the IDC. The declared aim is to familiarize participants with a topic that they do not always have access to, to provide information on this topic they may not consider to be directly relevant for their work, and to shed light on it from different perspectives. The course organizers therefore rely on various elements and diverse (including interactive) formats: short videos to prepare participants, lectures on theoretical aspects and practical questions, thematically structured breakout sessions for small groups (including presentation of results and discussion) and case studies from universities. The course is supported by lecturers from local universities.

"The feedback from the participants shows that they are made aware of the topic, that we spark their interest and encourage them to think about it", explains Dr Kai Handel, Programme Director of the DIES International Deans' Course Africa/Southeast Asia. "The programme thus fulfils its purpose. It broadens horizons" - and that doesn't just apply to the course participants, according to Handel. "Our view of diversity has also benefited from the reactions to our actions as well as the contributions and discussions. They made us realize once again what we already knew: any understanding of diversity and the resulting challenges is culturally specific, meaning that Eurocentric approaches cannot simply be transferred".

The measure at a glance Project

**DIES International Deans' Course
(Africa and Southeast Asia)**

Website

<https://www.international-deans-course.org/home>

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Integrating equal opportunity and diversity structurally into internationalization projects

In recent years, numerous universities have formulated strategic goals on cross-cutting topics such as "sustainability", "digitalization" and "internationalization" and published them in strategy papers. They are faced with the increasingly challenging task of linking and reconciling these goals - including the design and implementation of internationalization projects. Ideally, these

are integrated into the project as early as the project design phase starts. In addition to the International Office, it has proven to be worth to involve further stakeholders such as the Equal Opportunities Office or the Diversity Office in order to benefit from their perspectives, expertise and access to various target groups.



Practical example: An internationalization strategy for the future

Increasing the university's level of internationalization, enabling disadvantaged groups among students and staff to participate better in internationalization activities, establishing measures for ecologically sustainable mobility, and expanding the internationalization skills of university staff - these were the four goals that Augsburg University of Applied Sciences wanted to achieve with its DAAD funded project "HSA_international 2.0" (HAW.International programme). In the project, the relevant cross-cutting topics of "internationalization", "sustainability", "digitalization" and, last but not least, "diversity and inclusion" were to be strategically interlinked.

The project team based in the International Office was responsible for the entire process, involving stakeholders such as the international faculty coordinators and the university's management level and offering university employees the opportunity to engage in intensive dialogue and actively participate in the strategy process through regularly organized workshops.

Among other things, the strategy envisaged focusing more on short formats for mobility, partly in combination with virtual elements, and creating extended digital information and support services. To this end, a separate office was created to advise interested students and support teaching staff in developing and offering compact courses. The university also provided additional

scholarships for students to attend summer or winter schools.

The increased interest in the short and blended formats and their increased utilization indicate that the measures are working. "This can be seen in the number of applications for the Summer and Winter School scholarship and the number of participants at the offered informational events", explains Moritz Muth, the project coordinator. The programme primarily reaches people who otherwise would not have gained any experience abroad. "Members of our teaching staff are also requesting advice on hybrid programmes and summer schools more frequently".

The forthcoming aim now is to anchor the initiated process even more sustainably on a social, ecological and structural level. This is to be done in the follow-up project "HSA-sustaIN", which is also funded by DAAD. Among other aspects, the focus here will lie on addressing students who are sometimes difficult to reach and/or from previously less mobile subject areas.

The measure at a glance

Project

HSA_international 2.0

Website

<https://www.tha.de/International/International-Office/hsa-international-2.0.html>

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