

The integration of refugees at
German higher education institutions
Findings from higher education programmes for refugees

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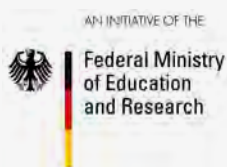
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For better readability, the male form is used throughout the text. The term “refugee” is not used in the legal sense in this publication, but as a generic term to represent all individuals who have fled their home countries, provided that no further differentiation is made according to residence status.

No guarantee can be assumed for the correctness and completeness of the information.

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1. Introduction

Education is one of the most important keys to successful integration. This much-invoked phrase is once again being repeatedly emphasised, and rightly so, in light of the over 1.2 million refugees who have come to Germany since 2015. However, when we think about how education contributes to the integration of refugees, the focus often tends to be on early childhood and school education, or vocational training. In the past, far less attention has been paid to higher education, which opens doors to a highly qualified academic pursuit.

Since summer 2015, the view of German higher education institutions and their activities for refugees has changed significantly. This is in no small part due to the exceptional commitment shown by the higher education institutions in this area. With a great deal of voluntary effort from their employees, higher education institutions have set up new German courses, taster programmes and mentoring activities for refugees, as well as numerous other formats. And in doing so, they have also responded to a need that has rapidly become apparent: the strong interest in studying that is being shown by many refugees, who have arrived in Germany with a high level of education and who want to further develop their skills and capabilities and continue their education at a German higher education institution.

It has been possible to consolidate the activities of the higher education institutions in many locations and establish professional structures thanks to financial contributions from the federal and state governments.¹ In this context, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) has been responsible for implementing a large package of coordinated measures funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) since November 2015. The package supports German higher education institutions with various programmes and will provide total funding of 100 million euros until 2019.²

1 This introduction was produced as part of another publication, see Maschke/Riehle: 'Integration von geflüchteten Menschen ins Hochschulstudium: Erfahrungen aus den DAAD-Programmen', in: Asylsuchende und Flüchtlinge in Deutschland: Erfassung und Entwicklung von Qualifikationen für die Arbeitsmarktintegration, 2017.

2 See the joint press release from the BMBF and the DAAD dated 13 November 2015. Available online at: <https://www.daad.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/de/39606-fluechtligen-den-zugang-zum-studium-ermoeglichen/?t=fluechtlinge>.

In implementing the package of measures, the DAAD regularly collects data on the individual projects for the integration of refugees that have been launched at higher education institutions. This data is analysed in conjunction with the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW) and in future will be linked to the research project “WeGe – Refugees on their way into German higher education”, which was launched in April 2017. Joint analyses of the status and development of the measures for integrating refugees at higher education institutions in Germany are to be published regularly as an information series.

This first documentation is based on data that was collected between January and December 2016 as part of the DAAD programme “Integra – Integrating Refugees in Degree Programmes”. It provides an overview of statistical analyses of the free assessment procedure for refugees offered by uni-assist in the period between March 2016 and June 2017. For the first time, it presents evidence-based findings on the target group that consists of refugees qualified to study and refugees interested in studying. These findings provide an important basis for close monitoring of the programmes and the (further) development of targeted offerings aimed at preparing refugees for university studies.



2. Data sources and participating organisations

German Academic Exchange Service

The German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, DAAD) is the largest organisation in the world supporting international academic exchange. In addition to awarding scholarships to students and researchers, it promotes international cooperation between higher education institutions, enhances the internationalisation of higher education institutions in Germany and provides its expertise for academic collaborations. One of its most important areas of responsibility is the integration and support of foreign students in Germany. Since the end of 2015, the DAAD has been helping higher education institutions integrate academically qualified refugees. This support is provided as part of a second package of measures from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) which facilitates access to higher education for refugees. The measures range from an initial assessment of skills and qualifications (by means of the TestAS academic aptitude test, the onSET language placement test and the free assessment procedure provided by uni-assist e.V., the university application service for international students) to ensuring academic aptitude through study preparation measures (Integra programme) and, ultimately, integration into higher education institutions and degree programmes with support from student initiatives (Welcome programme). The programmes are accompanied by regular monitoring, which enables data to be collected and initial findings to be provided on the target group.

German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies

The German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW GmbH) carries out application-oriented empirical research in the field of the higher education and science system. It is a partner and service provider for the world of science and scientific policy. The data and analyses produced by the DZHW support policymakers, higher education institutions and educational management in shaping higher education in Germany and Europe.

It provides important information for comprehensive, sustainable and evidence-based higher educational and educational policy. The DZHW is conducting the research project “WeGe – Refugees on their way into German higher education” using funding from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

For the first time, this project is investigating the conditions that are necessary for effective access to higher education for prospective students with a refugee background who are interested in studying in Germany. The study focuses on the interrelation of the refugees' individual prerequisites and learning activities on the one hand, and on the general framework of preparatory activities and social circumstances on the other. One of this project's work packages is dedicated to processing and analysing the corresponding data for the development of study preparation activities and the university application process for refugees.

uni-assist e.V.

The core task of the University Application Service for International Students (uni-assist e.V.) is the evaluation of international school and university certificates. For a processing fee, uni-assist examines whether school/university certificates acquired abroad qualify the applicant in principle for admission to university studies in Germany, i.e. whether the applicant holds a qualification for admission to higher education (Hochschulzugangsberechtigung, HZB). If required, uni-assist can assess further criteria on behalf of higher education institutions, e.g. proof of language skills or the provision of other relevant application documents. Uni-assist carries out a formal examination of the documentation; an assessment of the content and admission to study programmes is undertaken by the higher education institutions. 182 German higher education institutions are members of uni-assist. Since March 2016, funding provided by the BMBF has enabled refugees to apply to up to three higher education institutions per semester free of charge via uni-assist.



3. The academic preparation of refugees at higher education institutions and preparatory colleges as part of the Integra programme

3.1 Integra – Integrating Refugees in Degree Programmes

The programme “Integra – Integrating Refugees in Degree Programmes” is part of a comprehensive package of measures launched by the BMBF and the DAAD at the end of 2015 in response to the high number of refugees in Germany. The aim of the programme is to give refugees – irrespective of their residence status – the opportunity to prepare for university study in Germany in order to help them begin a programme as quickly as possible. The higher education institutions and preparatory course providers (Studienkollegs) have the important task of advising prospective students with refugee backgrounds and preparing them for university studies both in terms of language and subject matter. The Integra programme helps the institutions set up or expand their range of language and special courses, which are delivered as preparatory courses or as courses that run alongside degree programmes. Integra also supports the expansion of the necessary advisory structures.

Anyone with a foreign school-leaving certificate who wants to study in Germany needs to have a qualification for admission to higher education, i.e. the certificate must be recognised as equivalent to the German secondary school-leaving qualification, the Abitur. Leaving certificates are assessed differently depending on the educational system of a particular country.

The necessary requirements for access to higher education are based on the assessments of the Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB).

A distinction is made between a direct and an indirect qualification for admission to higher education. With the first, direct access to higher education is possible; with the second, it is usually only possible to study in Germany after attending preparatory courses at a preparatory college (Studienkolleg). The preparatory courses consist of language courses and subject-focused courses.³ They prepare students for the Feststellungsprüfung (FSP), an assessment test to determine the eligibility of foreign applicants for studies at German higher education institutions. Passing the test entitles the individual to be admitted to academic studies in Germany. In the Integra programme, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) provides funding to preparatory colleges via the DAAD to enable them to deliver additional courses for refugees.

Besides the preparatory colleges, higher education institutions also receive money under the Integra programme for the development and delivery of language and specialised preparatory courses. Even if a certificate obtained in an individual’s home country entitles him or her to direct admission to a degree course in Germany, the educational path of many refugees has often been seriously interrupted as a result of their journey to flee their home country, which sometimes takes months or years. Due to the unplanned escape to an uncertain destination, very few refugees have detailed knowledge of the German higher education system, let alone German language skills at an academic level.

³ The preparatory colleges at universities offer the following subject-focused courses as preparation for degree programmes: M-course for medical, biological and pharmaceutical degrees; T-course for mathematical, scientific and technical degrees; W-course for business, economics and social science degrees; G-course for humanities degrees and German Studies; S-course for language studies. The preparatory colleges at universities of applied sciences offer the following subject-focused courses as preparation for degree programmes: TI-course for technical and engineering degrees; WW-course for economics and business degrees; GD-course for art and design degrees; SW-course for social science degrees.

That is why preparatory language courses at the higher education institutions, especially when combined with specialised courses, are a fundamental requirement for successful admission to, or the continuation of, a degree programme. They also make integration easier at the higher education institution.

The verification of certificates also demands a great deal of time and staff resources from the higher education institutions, which is also partially covered by Integra funding.

In 2016, a total of **172 institutions**, 135 higher education institutions (universities and universities of applied sciences) and 37 preparatory colleges (Studienkollegs), from all federal states were supported under the Integra programme. **6,806 refugees** participated in the language and special courses at the higher education institutions and preparatory colleges in 2016.

Based on current information, 128 higher education institutions and 39 preparatory colleges will be supported in 2017/18. Even though the total number of institutions has remained almost the same at 167, the volume of applications for the higher education institutions has increased strongly for the years 2017/18. It can be assumed that the need for study preparation measures at higher education institutions is set to increase even further in the coming years.⁴

Integra data

The present findings on preparation for academic studies and access to higher education for refugees are based on statistical data from 2016 which the DAAD has collected as part of the Integra programme. The higher education institutions supported under the programme are obliged to provide information to the DAAD annually in the form of a proof of use report explaining how the funds have been used and setting out the content-related activities of the courses and measures. Using the content-related information in the report, the DAAD is able to check whether actual implementation corresponds to the original planning and approval. This information includes, for example, details of participant numbers in the language courses, the language level attained by participants, the need for advisory services and the type of courses offered. The higher education institutions are also asked to provide further general information on course participants such as age, educational background, country of origin, etc.

It should be noted that the reports do not allow any statements to be made about refugees at German higher education institutions as a whole. Information on the 6,806 participants in Integra courses in 2016, which are likely to constitute the majority of refugees taking part in preparatory measures for university study, serves as the basis of the present analysis.⁵

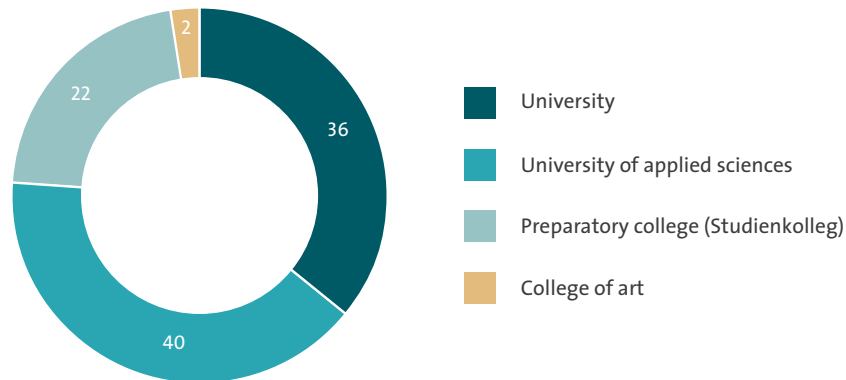
4 Over 10,000 participants are expected to attend Integra-funded courses in 2017.

5 See German Rectors' Conference press release dated 31 March 2017. According to the 157 higher education institutions that responded to the HRK survey, in the 2016/17 winter semester around 5,700 refugees were registered for language and special courses that prepared them directly for study. Available online at: https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2015/2015_12_03-Hochschulzugang-ohne-Nachweis-der-Hochschulzugangsberechtigung_ENGLISCH.pdf

3.2 Participants by institution and type of higher education institution

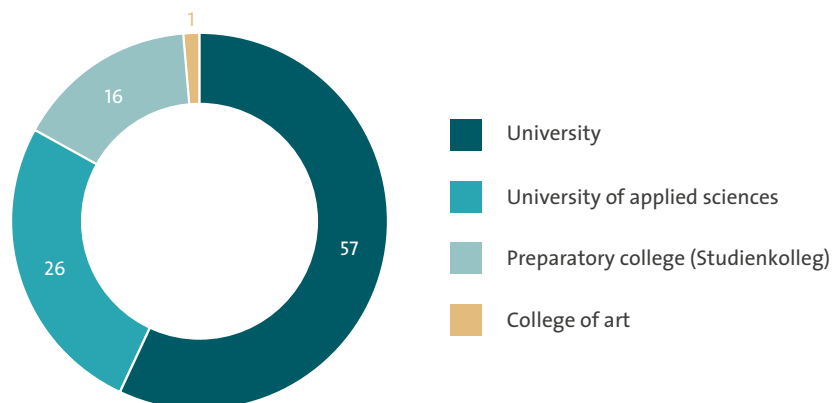
Of the 135 higher education institutions supported in 2016, 69 were universities of applied sciences, 62 were universities and 4 were colleges of art. In addition, 37 preparatory colleges (Studienkollegs) took part in the programme. In total, 6,806 participants attended subject-specific and language preparatory courses, which were facilitated by Integra.

Fig. 1 **Integra projects by type of institution 2016**
in %



1,051 participants of the Integra courses (16 %) attended a preparatory college in 2016; 5,755 refugees took part in a course at an institution of higher education (Fig. 2). The largest group of participants comes from Syria (see section 3.5). As prospective students who are refugees from Syria usually have a qualification for direct admission to higher education, they meet the prerequisite for admission to a degree programme and do not have to attend a preparatory college.⁶

Fig. 2 **Integra course participants by type of institution 2016**
in %



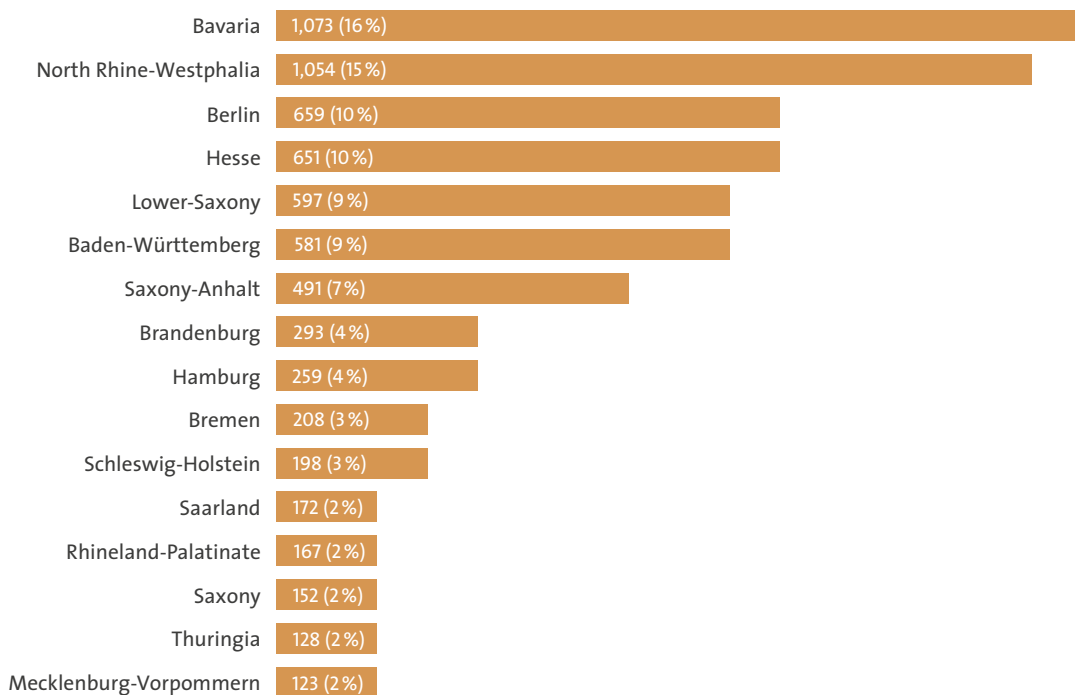
The large number of universities of applied sciences taking part in the programme demonstrates their exceptional commitment (Fig. 1). Compared to universities, they have far less structural capacity in terms of staff, rooms, range of courses etc. and students with refugee backgrounds are integrated within what is usually a much smaller administrative system at the institution. Large language centres are located at the universities, which enables a much wider range of different language courses to be provided there and this is reflected in the distribution of refugees: 57 % attended a course at a university, 26 % at a university of applied sciences (Fig. 2).

⁶ Providing an overall grade of at least 70 % of the maximum number of points was achieved in the Syrian secondary school-leaving examination.

3.3 Participants by federal state

Most refugees attended Integra courses at higher education institutions and preparatory colleges in Bavaria (16 %) and North Rhine-Westphalia (15 %). Both of these federal states are large non-city states with many higher education institutions. However, following in third place is Berlin, a small federal state, with 10 % of all course participants (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 Integra course participants by German federal state 2016



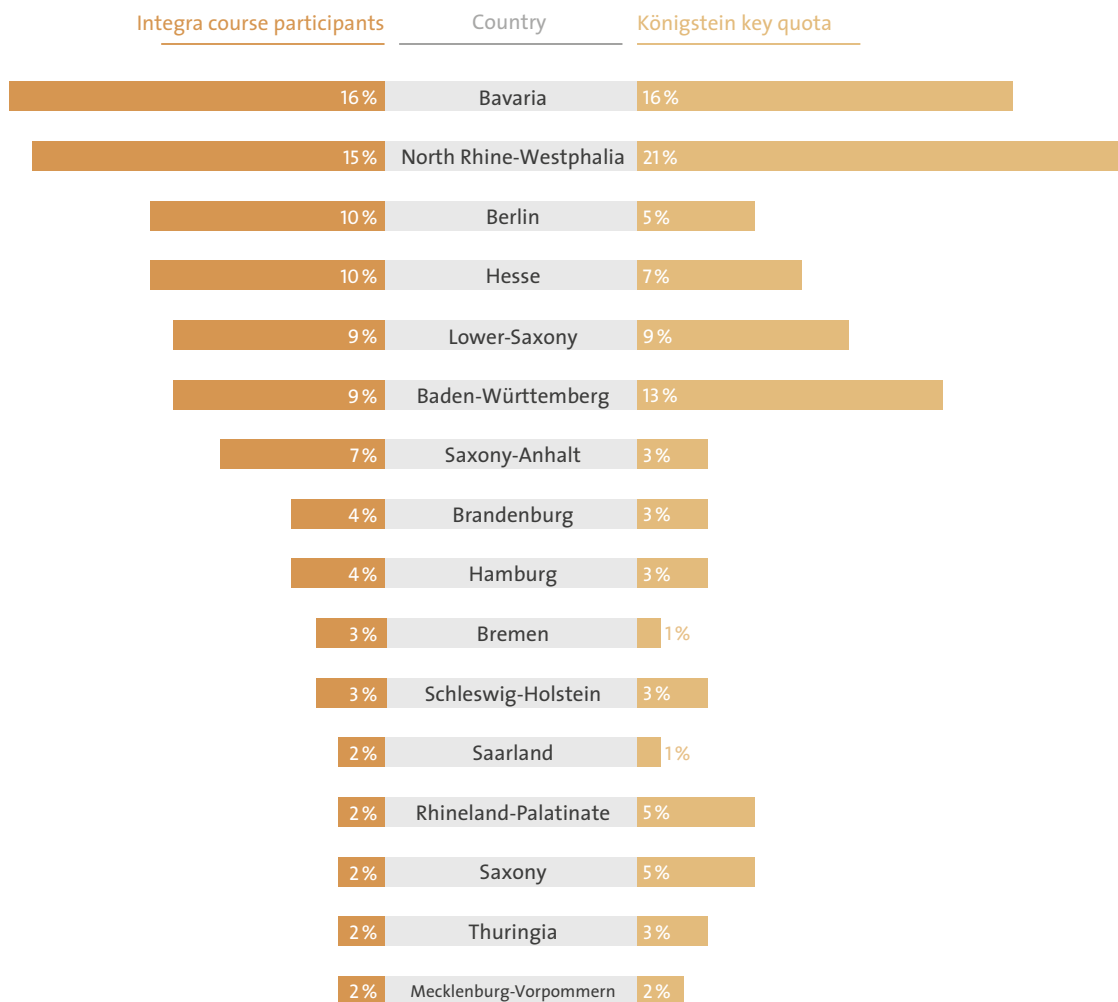
It would be reasonable to assume that most refugees attend a higher education institution or preparatory college in the federal state to which they were admitted based on the Königstein key⁷ quota system and that the proportion of Integra course participants in the individual federal state corresponds to the specified Königstein key percentage. However, this is the case for only half of the federal states (Fig. 4): in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Thuringia, Saarland, Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Brandenburg, Lower Saxony and Bavaria, the figures differ only slightly.

But some federal states have significantly more Integra course participants in relation to the number of refugees in the federal state overall. In Bremen, the number of Integra course participants is more than three times higher, while in Saxony-Anhalt and Berlin the numbers are more than double and approximately double.

Other federal states have significantly fewer course participants compared to their share according to the Königstein key. The proportion in Saxony is one and a half times smaller, in Rhineland-Palatinate it is almost half, and in North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg the figure is one and a half times smaller.

7 The “Königstein key” determines how many asylum seekers each federal state is required to take in. It is based on tax revenue (weighted at 2/3) and the number of inhabitants (weighted at 1/3). The quota is recalculated annually. In 2015, the highest quota of asylum seekers was allocated to North Rhine-Westphalia and the lowest quota to Bremen. Available online at: <http://www.bamf.de/DE/Fluechtlingsschutz/AblaufAsylv/Erstverteilung/erstverteilung-node.html>.

Fig. 4 Königstein key quotas⁸ and Integra course participants as a percentage for each federal state



There is no conclusive explanation as to how this varying distribution has come about, but the following assumptions can be made. On the one hand, differences can be identified in the efforts to reach out to refugees and attract them to courses at the higher education institutions, thus resulting in variances in the different federal states. In some cases, there are more information events or the university employees provide information directly at reception facilities to make refugees aware of the courses on offer.⁹

On the other hand, it can be assumed that refugees – similar to many other international students – are guided by the experiences of their compatriots and seek out particular networks and thus certain cities.¹⁰ Also, some federal state governments have set up their own programmes to prepare refugees for academic studies, which is why the higher education institutions and preparatory colleges there may make fewer applications for DAAD funding.

⁸ See footnote 7, p. 13

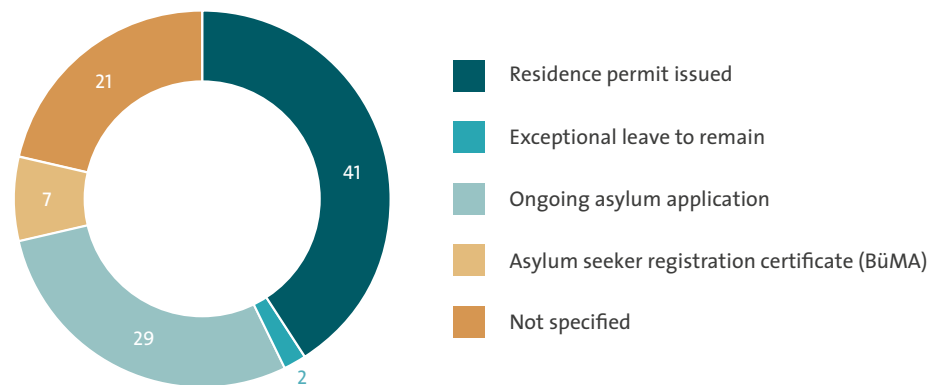
⁹ An example: As part of the IN-Touch programme, Bremen's state higher education institutions have provided dedicated services for refugees at an early stage. In the joint project, the institutions actively contact refugees, advise them on study opportunities and enable them to take part in courses. More information available online at: <https://blogs.uni-bremen.de/intouch/about/>.

¹⁰ Cf. Luft, Stefan: Staat und Migration. Zur Steuerbarkeit von Zuwanderung und Integration. Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2009.

3.4 Participants by residence status

Higher education legislation permits refugees to take up a course of study regardless of their asylum or residence status in Germany. In this respect, there are no specific aspects regarding admission to higher education. However, like other foreign students, refugees also need to fulfil the formal requirements for admission to a degree programme at a German institution of higher education.¹¹ Likewise, refugees may participate in courses funded under the Integra programme irrespective of their residence status.

Fig. 5 **Integra course participants by residence status 2016**
in %



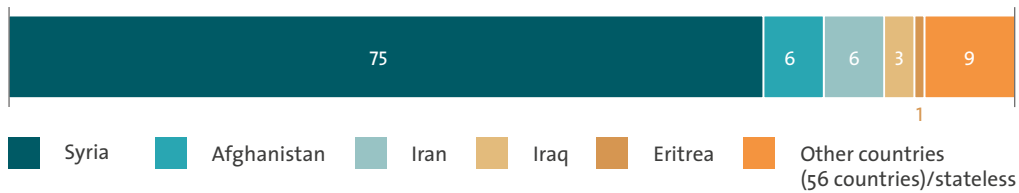
As the asylum process can take several months, the aim is to give refugees the opportunity to prepare for, or begin, a degree programme in the meantime, without any further delay. The figures from 2016 show that this option actually benefits a large group: over one third of the Integra course participants were involved in the ongoing asylum process (29 %) or had only been able to register as an asylum seeker so far (7 %) and were already able to attend courses and thus work towards getting a place on a degree course (Fig. 5) thanks to the programme, which does not take residence status into account. 41 % of course participants already have a residence permit, i.e. are recognised as entitled to asylum or as a refugee, or are eligible for subsidiary protection.

¹¹ Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (ed.): Hochschulzugang und Studium von Flüchtlingen. Eine Handreichung für Hochschulen und Studentenwerke, October 2017.
Available online at: https://www.daad.de/medien/der-daad/handreichung_hochschulzugang_gefl%C3%BChtete.pdf.

3.5 Participants by country of origin

The participants of the Integra courses come from 61 countries of origin. Syria is by far the most common country of origin (75 %), followed by Afghanistan, Iran (both 6 %) and Iraq (3 %) (Fig. 6). Looking at the bigger picture, Germany's asylum application figures for 2016 also show that the majority of refugees come from Syria. Of the 722,370 initial applications for asylum in 2016, 37 % were submitted by persons from Syria.¹²

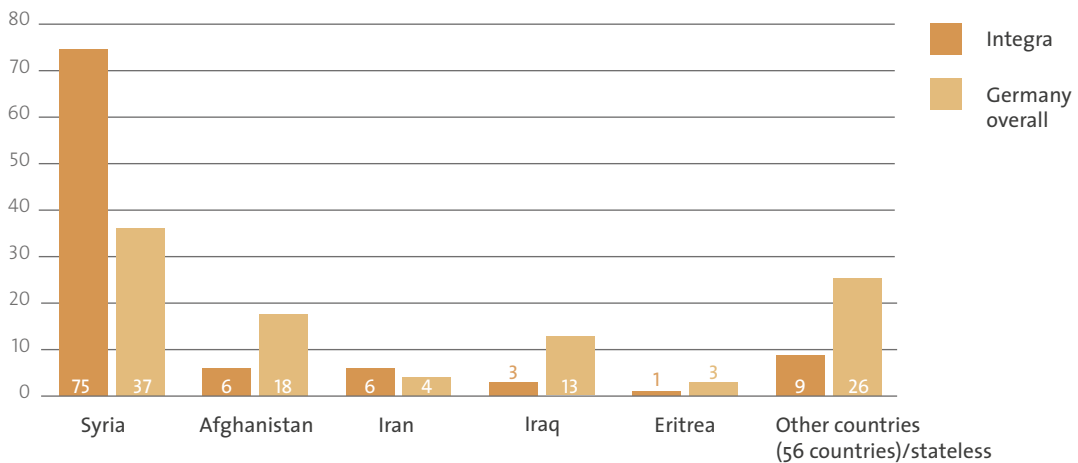
Fig. 6 Integra course participants by country of origin 2016 in %



The proportion of Integra course participants from Syria is twice as high. The proportion of Iranian Integra course participants is also nearly 50 % higher than the proportion of Iranian asylum seekers overall (Fig. 7). Individuals coming to Germany as asylum seekers from Syria and Iran have a relatively high level of education.¹³

Most of the refugees come from Arabic and Persian-speaking countries. This makes the provision of advice much easier for the higher education institutions because if information materials, advisory services and websites are translated into Arabic, they can reach the majority of prospective refugee students.

Fig. 7 Integra course participants and initial applications by asylum seekers in Germany overall by country of origin 2016¹⁴ in %



12 Federal Office for Migration and Refugees: Asylgeschäftsstatistik für den Monat Dezember 2016, p. 2. Available online at: http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Downloads/Infothek/Statistik/Asyl/201612-statistik-anlage-asyl-geschaeftsbericht.pdf?__blob=publicationFile.

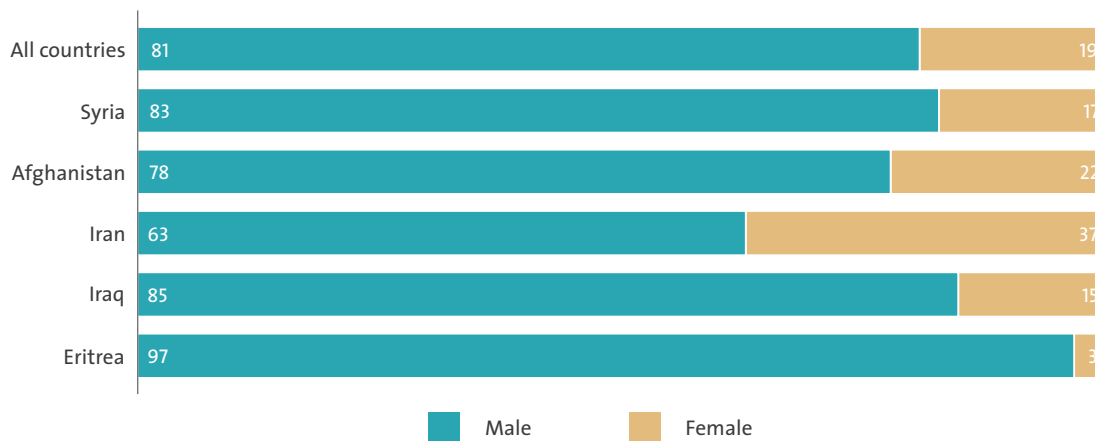
13 Brücker, H. et al. (eds.): IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Befragung von Geflüchteten 2016: Studiendesign, Feldergebnisse sowie Analysen zu schulischer wie beruflicher Qualifikation, Sprachkenntnissen sowie kognitiven Potenzialen, 2017, p. 25. Available online at: https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.563710.de/diwkompakt_2017-123.pdf.

14 Percentages may not total 100 % due to rounding.

3.6 Participants by gender, age and previous education

A clear majority (81 %) of all Integra course participants are men. However, the proportion of men varies by different country of origin. Of the Syrian course participants, 83 % are male. The highest proportion of men is recorded for the Eritrean participants (97 %) and the lowest for the Iranian participants (63 %) (Fig. 8). The proportion of female first-time asylum applicants from Iran is average (33 %); however, refugees from Iran as a whole have the highest level of education among the major countries of origin. The proportion of individuals with experience of higher education is even greater among women than men.¹⁵

Fig. 8 Integra course participants by country of origin and gender 2016 in %



The noticeably low proportion of women participating in preparatory measures for university study can be explained by the following factors: generally, only a third of first-time asylum applications were submitted by women in 2016. In the age group of 18–29 year olds, which contains the majority of refugees qualified to study (see Fig. 9), the proportion is even lower (26 %).¹⁶ Surveys of adult first-time asylum seekers in 2016 show that female refugees have a lower level of education than men.¹⁷ In addition, many higher education institutions report that although women who would be qualified for university studies do make use of advisory services, ultimately they do not attend a course due to childcare commitments.

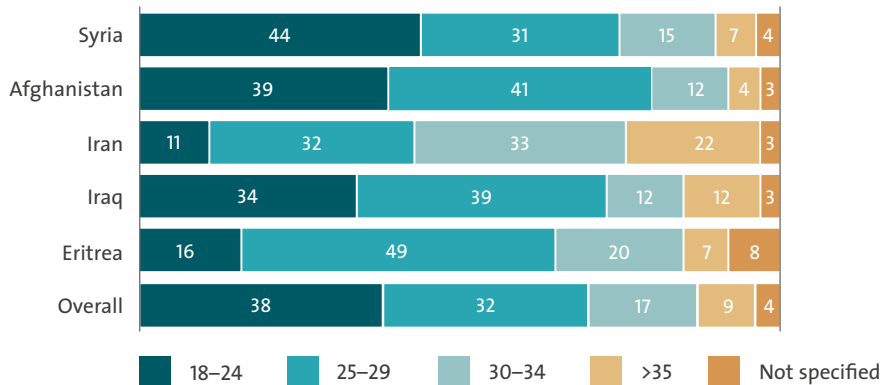
The average age of Integra course participants is 27 years old. There is little difference between men and women in terms of age. However, it is striking that a significant number of participants (26 %, or just over a quarter) are already over 30 years old (Fig. 9). Other needs and also other opportunities may be linked to this target group. In this context, other living circumstances (which, for example, make childcare services necessary) and other prerequisites (such as the expansion of wider existing knowledge and experience) play a role.

15 Federal Office for Migration and Refugees: BAMF-Kurzanalyse. Volljährige Asylwerberinnen in Deutschland im Jahr 2016: Sozialstruktur, Qualifikationsniveau und Berufstätigkeit, 2017, p. 12. Available online at: http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Kurzanalysen/kurzanalyse8_sozial-komponenten-gesamt2016.pdf?__blob=publicationFile.

16 Federal Office for Migration and Refugees: Aktuelle Zahlen zu Asyl. Edition: Dezember 2016, p. 7. Available online at: http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Downloads/Infothek/Statistik/Asyl/aktuelle-zahlen-zu-asyl-dezember-2016.pdf?__blob=publicationFile.

17 See footnote 15.

Fig. 9 **Integra course participants by age group and country of origin 2016¹⁸**
in %

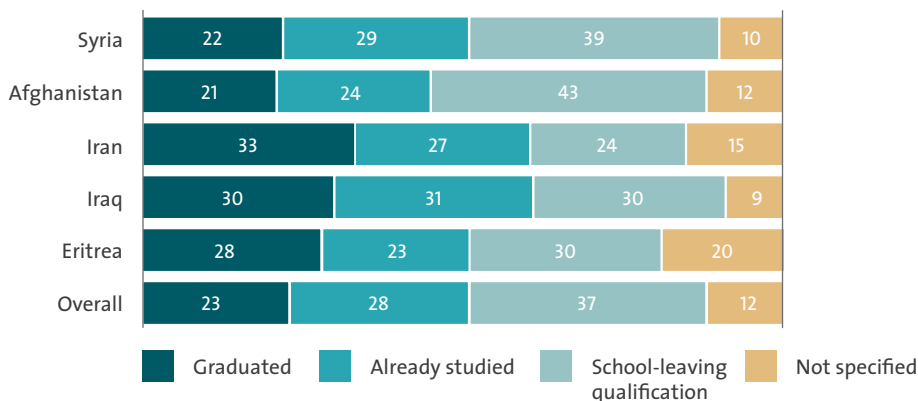


A comparison with the age of German students, which is 24.7 years on average, is only possible to a limited extent. It must be taken into account that the refugees participating in Integra courses are mostly only at the stage of preparing for academic studies and are not yet enrolled in a regular course of study, as is the case for the comparable German students. The older age of the students with refugee backgrounds on the Integra courses can be explained by the length of their migration journey, which may have taken months or years in some cases, and which has forced them to interrupt their studies. Furthermore, the data on educational level – as set out below – shows that the majority of the participants were already studying at the time they had to flee, or had obtained a first degree.¹⁹

When comparing the different countries of origin with each other in terms of age groups, no relevant differences can be established (Fig. 9). A slight shift can be observed only in the case of Iran: over 50 % of the participants are older than 30.

Half of the Integra course participants have already had experience of higher education in their home country: 28 % have already studied, and 23 % can provide evidence of completing a first degree. 37 % of refugees have a school-leaving certificate entitling them to take part in preparatory measures for university study (Fig. 10). No relevant differences are apparent between men and women with regard to previous education.

Fig. 10 **Integra course participants by type of previous education and country of origin 2016²⁰**
in %



18 Percentages may not total 100 % due to rounding.

19 “35 % of the adult refugees in the country of origin had already finished secondary school, 18 % then went on to university. One third are aiming to obtain a degree in Germany”: Brücker, H. et al. (eds.): IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Befragung von Geflüchteten 2016: Studiendesign, Feldergebnisse sowie Analysen zu schulischer wie beruflicher Qualifikation, Sprachkenntnissen sowie kognitiven Potenzialen, 2017. Available online at: https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.563710.de/diwkompakt_2017-123.pdf.

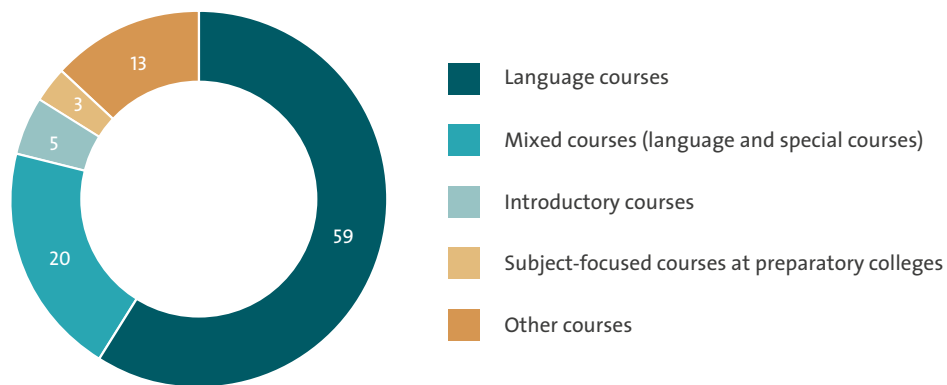
20 Percentages may not total 100 % due to rounding.

Looking at the previous education of the Integra course participants, certain differences can be observed between the five major countries of origin. Between 45 % (Afghanistan) and 61 % (Iraq) of the course participants have already studied or have achieved a first degree (Fig. 10).

3.7 Type of course

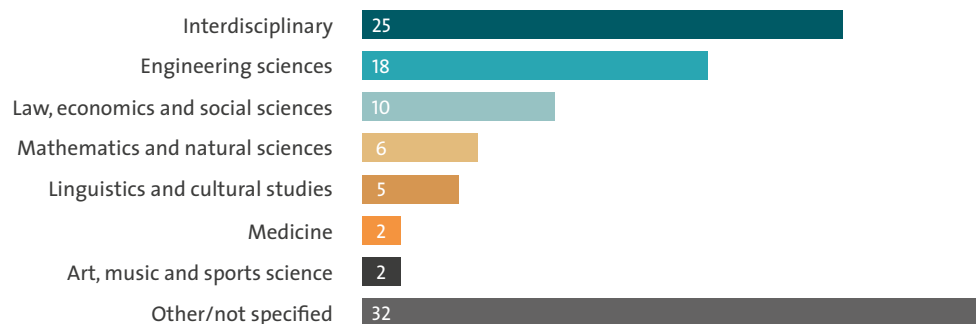
An analysis of data on the type of courses attended provides insights into the further educational needs that exist among prospective students with a refugee background. The majority of the refugees attend language courses in the first instance. 59 % of the participants completed one or more language courses in 2016, and a further 20 % completed a “mixed course” consisting of coordinated language and special courses (Fig. 11). This shows that language acquisition is the first and most important step on the way to beginning a degree programme, but is also the biggest hurdle.

Fig. 11 Integra course participants by type of course 2016²¹ in %



In the subject-oriented courses, the main focus is on interdisciplinary subject matter (25 %).²² Where there is a specific, subject-related connection, the focus is on engineering content (18 %), followed by law, economics and social sciences (10 %) and maths and natural sciences (6 %) (Fig. 12). The preference for engineering and science subjects is also reflected in uni-assist’s applicant data (see Fig. 20).

Fig. 12 Integra introductory courses by subject group 2016 in %



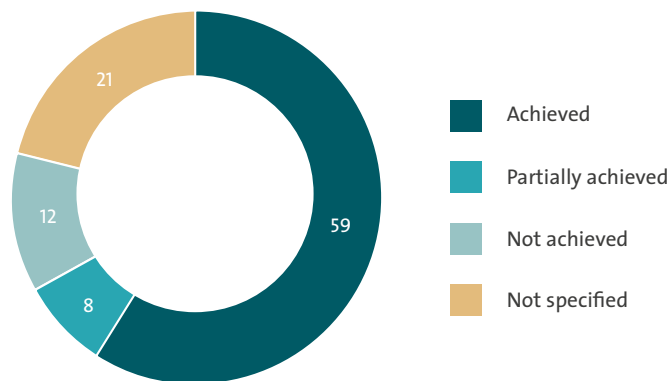
21 Includes multiple answers. The “Other courses” category includes courses such as intercultural training, courses on academic writing, etc.

22 Interdisciplinary courses are those courses offered by higher education institutions which cannot be uniquely assigned to one subject category as they touch on several subjects and/or combine offerings.

3.8 Achievement of course objectives

More than 700 courses have been set up under the Integra programme. Just under 70 % of participants have achieved or partially achieved the aim of the respective course (Fig. 13). For 12 % of the courses, the aim was not achieved. In 21 % of the courses, no final evaluation of the success of the course could be made at the time the reports were produced because the relevant examinations and their results were still pending.

Fig. 13 **Integra courses (participants) by degree of target achievement**
in %



An observation of the language levels attained by the course participants at the time of reporting shows that almost 50 % are at level B1 or B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Fig. 14). This means that almost one in two is an independent user.²³ 10 % of participants have already reached language level C1 and thus meet the language requirement for admission to higher education studies in Germany. Because many refugees had not yet taken a final language test at the time of the assessment, it was not possible to make a statement about the language level attained in 20 % of cases.

Fig. 14 **Integra course participants by language level achieved 2016**²⁴
in %



²³ Language level A1/A2 corresponds to elementary language use, B1/B2 to independent language use and C1/C2 to competent language use.

²⁴ Includes multiple answers as participants attended several consecutive courses in some cases. The data set for "Not specified" (20 %) contains a mixture of all levels, resulting from the fact that, in these cases, no examination results had been provided by the higher education institutions at the time of reporting.

However, the figures only represent a snapshot, as the refugees had completed courses of varying lengths at the time of the report: some were attending the second or third consecutive German course, while others had only just begun. In addition, some had already attended an integration course, which also mostly consists of language teaching up to level B1, and others had not. Nevertheless, the figures give an indication of how language acquisition is currently developing in the courses at higher education institutions, and suggest that the majority of refugees taking part in preparatory courses in 2016 are at a linguistic level that will enable them to begin a university degree in 2017. It is becoming apparent that higher education preparation measures – particularly achieving a level of German that enables admission to higher education – takes a considerable amount of time that cannot be underestimated.

3.9 Demand situation and advisory services

In 2016, around 45,600 advisory meetings took place at higher education institutions and preparatory colleges under the Integra programme.²⁵ The recipients of the advice were mainly refugees, but supervisors, social services staff and voluntary workers also sought advice from higher education institutions and preparatory colleges. The high level of demand exceeded the capacity of the institutions to a certain extent. This is because the individuals seeking advice need support for more than just issues that are comparable to those of other foreign students. In addition to aspects like choosing the right degree programme, they also need help with matters relating to asylum, questions about financing during the preparatory stage and during the programme itself, assistance with their living situation and so on.

Demand was high not only in terms of the advice needed, however. Over 60 % of higher education institutions also report that demand for the new courses for refugees has been unexpectedly strong and it has thus been necessary to provide extensive resources for the selection of participants and for logistical planning. 16 % of the higher education institutions indicated that they had realistically estimated the number of expected participants in advance. Only 7 % had fewer participants than expected. The extremely high demand was confirmed when the new tendering round for the programme was launched at the end of 2016. The higher education institutions applied for much larger amounts of funding than in the previous year and justified this by citing the increasing numbers of participants being admitted onto the courses.

The fact that ultimately only a small proportion of the people who sought advice also took part in the courses offered by the higher education institutions and preparatory colleges may be because more refugees with less prior knowledge visit the advisory offices than international students without a refugee background, who have more time to prepare in advance for their study visit to Germany and therefore contact the higher education institutions in a more targeted manner. At the time they are given advice, many refugees do not yet know whether their certificates qualify them for admission to a degree programme, how the German higher education system works or what they could study. Therefore many of them initially seek advice, but then do not apply directly to the higher education institution for a degree programme or attend a preparatory course.

²⁵ This figure is based on estimations of advisory services by the higher education institutions in 2016. As some individuals potentially visited the advice centres several times, multiple counting is possible.

3.10 Problems and issues

Refugees also visited the advice centres at higher education institutions and preparatory colleges with questions that extend far beyond the usual concerns of international students. Thus the amount of time needed for advisory meetings was often much greater than originally anticipated and resulted in bottlenecks in staff resources.

The issues most frequently raised were as follows:

- | Possible means of financing studies, particularly in the event of a BAföG (financial assistance) application being rejected due to a change of subject, age, etc.
- | Financial problems related to covering travel costs to the particular course location:
This applies in particular to course participants in rural areas who have a long journey to the course location.
- | Questions relating to the application procedure:
In this context, questions mainly concern the admission requirements at higher education institutions/ preparatory colleges or the application procedure via uni-assist. In particular, the completion of complex forms is also cited as problematic.
- | The recognition of certificates and transfer of credits from the home country.
- | Questions on the asylum process, residence status and legal issues.
- | Coordination with job centres, social services offices and other authorities.
- | Validity of language certificates:
Discrepancies are frequently observed between the language level certified by external language course providers and participants' actual language level when enrolling on a course, which may reflect the diverse quality of language courses outside the Integra programme. In many cases, this leads to frustration among the refugees as they are downgraded to a lower course level.

4. Applications from refugees to German higher education institutions: uni-assist

uni-assist data

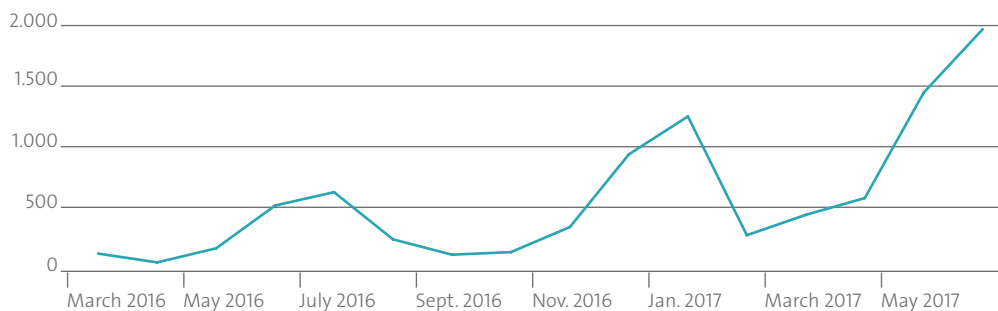
Applying to higher education institutions free of charge via uni-assist is a two-step process. First of all, refugees apply for cost exemption. Proof of refugee status and a TestAS certificate or a certificate for a completed (course) guidance session from a uni-assist member university must be presented. The second step involves applying for specific degree programmes or preparatory courses (course choices) at up to three member universities. Several course choices may therefore relate to one applicant. Unless otherwise stated, these statistics include each applicant for whom at least one course choice was processed in the period since the free assessment procedure for refugee applicants was introduced (03/2016–06/2017), as well as each course choice that was processed.

The statistics only refer to applicants whose applications for cost exemption were approved. Regular applicants (i.e. those who are part of the procedure for which costs are paid) from the countries of the Middle East and North Africa may include other persons who have fled to Germany. Either they do not meet the admission requirements listed above or, for other reasons, are not applying as part of the free assessment procedure.

4.1 Number of applicants

Up to the end of June 2017, approx. 8,000 individuals with a refugee background had submitted one or more student applications via uni-assist (Fig. 15). While applicant numbers were low at the beginning of the project, there was a sharp increase for the summer semester 2017 and an even greater rise for the winter semester 2017/18.

Fig. 15 Applicants in uni-assist's free assessment procedure: trend since March 2016²⁶



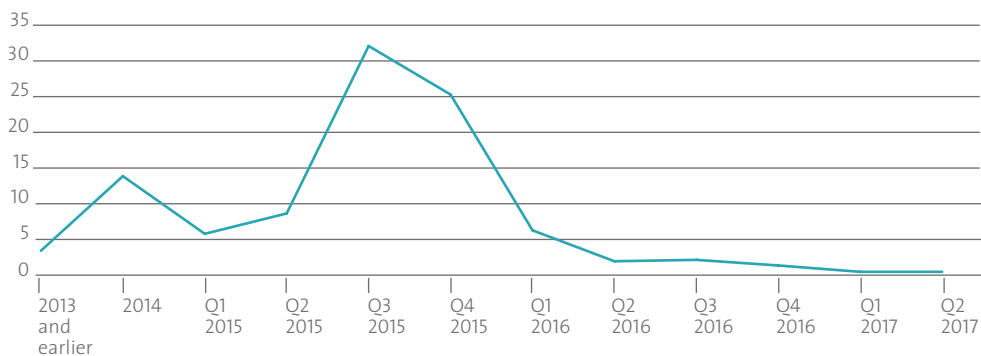
²⁶ Due to multiple counting, monthly figures cannot be added up to produce an overall figure.

The increase can be attributed to a number of factors: the increasing awareness of the procedure, improved access to language and preparatory courses, the increasing commitment of higher education institutions to advisory services and preparatory activities, and the shrinking number of pending asylum procedures²⁷. As a rule, far more degree programmes start in the winter semester for first semester students; the application deadline for international applicants is 15 July in most cases. Applications from 5,640 applicants were assessed during the corresponding period.

4.2 Time of application

The time of application via uni-assist gives an indication of how long it takes until people who have fled to Germany have the opportunity, or the right framework is in place, to focus on continuing their education and can take practical measures towards doing so. As part of the application for cost exemption, refugees are therefore requested to state how long they have already been in Germany. The provision of this information is voluntary. 5,093 people have provided this information (Fig. 16).

Fig. 16 Applicants in the free assessment procedure: time of entry to Germany 2016/17 in %



Almost 90 % of applicants taking part in the free assessment procedure came to Germany in 2015 or earlier, with the majority in the second half of 2015. For these applicants, there is thus a period of at least one to one and a half years between entering the country and applying for a degree programme/preparatory measures.

In addition to completing the asylum procedure, refugees frequently have to attend an integration course first of all in order to reach a level of competence in German upon which language training at a university can build.

The analysis of the language proficiency certificates provided²⁸ further indicates that the language level required for academic studies has not yet been achieved in the case of most applicants. This makes it all the more important to offer targeted advice at an early stage and target group-oriented training for refugees who are qualified for academic studies.

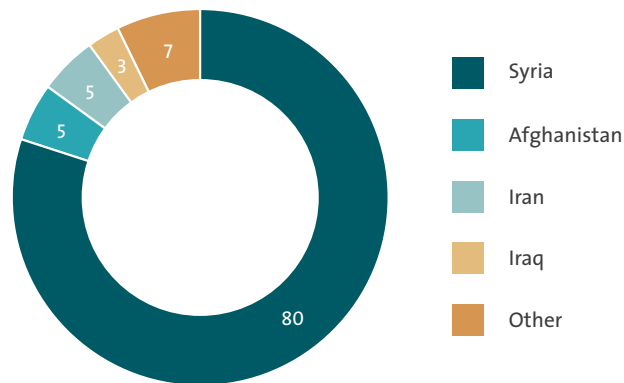
²⁷ The analysis of residence status shows that significantly more individuals have applied whose asylum procedure is complete.

²⁸ Information on proof of language proficiency is not an application requirement for all higher education institutions. Therefore it is not submitted by all applicants and the analysis can only reflect a general trend. In addition, the language level for admission to higher education is not clearly defined, but can vary by higher education institution and degree programme.

4.3 Country of origin and gender

The applicants to uni-assist come from 47 different countries of origin. Here too, Syria was by far the most common country of origin for most applicants (80%), followed by Afghanistan and Iran (both 5%) and Iraq (3%) (Fig. 17). That Syria is the main country of origin of prospective refugee students and refugees qualified to study is thus demonstrated even more clearly for uni-assist than for the Integra programme.

Fig. 17 Refugee applicants by country of origin 2016/17 in %

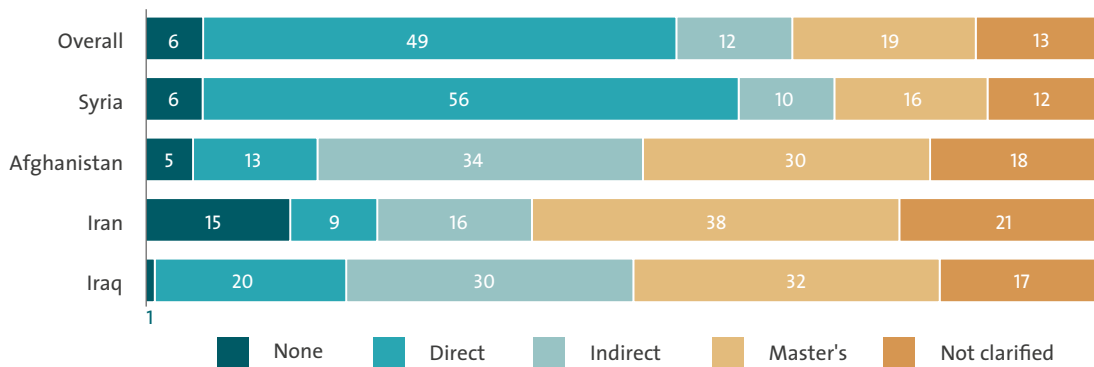


The vast majority of applicants with a refugee background are male (83%). This ratio can also be found in the individual main countries of origin – what is striking, however, is the high proportion of female applicants from Iran (38%), comparable with data from the Integra programme (see Fig. 8).

4.4 Previous education and admission to higher education

Of the applicants participating in uni-assist’s free assessment procedure, 60% are entitled to begin a first degree course at a German higher education institution; a further 19% could begin a postgraduate course (Master’s) (Fig. 18). Only a small proportion of applicants are not entitled to study. It is evident that the applicants are on the whole very realistic about their options for admission to higher education, or have been advised in a target-oriented manner.

Fig. 18 Refugee applicants by type of qualification for admission to higher education 2016/17²⁹ in %



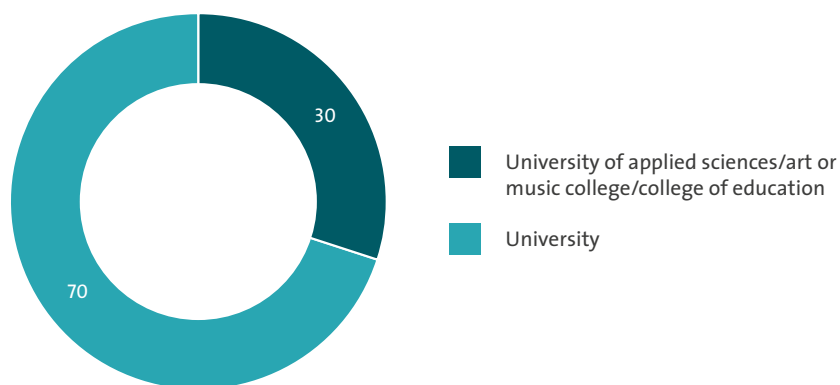
²⁹ Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

A comparison of countries reveals very clear differences which can be explained primarily by the ZAB assessment criteria (see section 3.1). Syrian secondary school leavers generally have a qualification that gives them direct access to higher education. Prospective students from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq usually need to complete a preparatory course. However, the applicants in the free assessment procedure are much more likely to have completed a first degree (in their home country) and are therefore entitled to study for a Master's degree. The high number of unclarified cases also shows that the evaluation of certificates is far less clear-cut than in the case of Syrian applicants.

4.5 Type of higher education institution and course choices

In the free assessment procedure, applicants can apply to up to three higher education institutions; the number of course choices is not restricted. Although nearly two thirds of applicants (also) apply to a university of applied sciences, only 30 % of the course choices related to this type of higher education institution. 70 % of the course choices assessed related to universities (Fig. 19).

Fig. 19 Refugee applicants by type of higher education institution 2016/17 in %



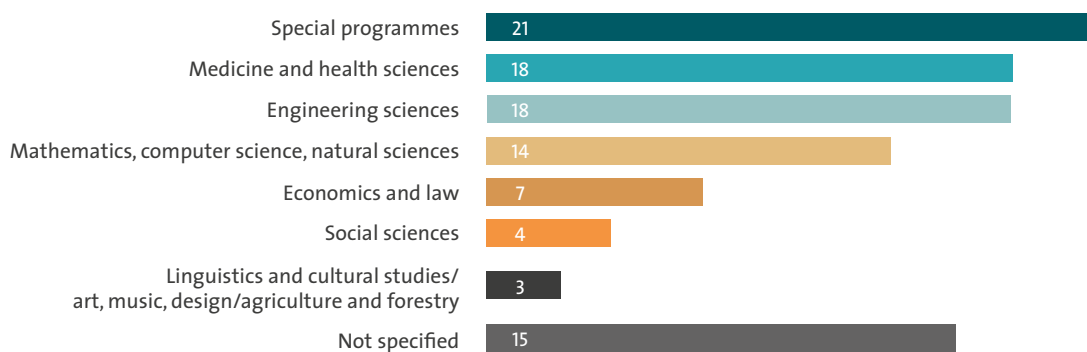
By the end of June 2017, a total of 10,818 course choices of refugees had been processed. There are clear preferences in the choice of subjects for the degree programmes. Around 20 % related to special programmes – mostly German courses or preparation programmes – as preparation for academic studies.

Special programmes

The application to uni-assist usually relates to a specific degree programme, e.g. Bachelor's in Business Informatics at higher education institution A. However, for some higher education institutions, uni-assist only undertakes the check of the qualification for admission to higher education – the application itself is then made directly to the higher education institution. Higher education institutions can also have the qualification for admission to higher education checked via uni-assist for applicants with a refugee background. In this way, they ensure that the candidates are allowed to commence academic studies following a preparatory language course or introductory course (as part of Integra). In the uni-assist application portal, higher education institutions can set up a course offer for these measures, which are known as special programmes, and have the qualification for admission to higher education (and other criteria, if necessary) checked. Flexible deadlines and application requirements can be defined which are coordinated with the higher education institution's individual course offering. Refugees can make targeted applications here.

For the specific applications, interest frequently focuses on science and engineering subjects, similar to the Integra course participants. The higher education institutions thus have the correct emphasis here in terms of academic preparation with their range of courses (see Fig. 12), though degrees in medicine and health sciences are slightly ahead (Fig. 20). However, due to fixed quotas for foreign students (who obtained their qualification for admission to higher education abroad) from outside the EU and EEA states (usually 5 %), only a limited number of study places are available, and refugees are competing with applicants from all over the world. Law, social sciences and the humanities attract far fewer applicants. Refugees share their preference for engineering subjects with regular international students. In 2016, 38 % of foreign students were intending to graduate in this field.³⁰

Fig. 20 Course choices by subject group 2016/17³¹
in %



If the check of a course choice is successful – i.e. if all the formal requirements stipulated by a higher education institution for the respective course are met – the application is forwarded to the higher education institution for an assessment of the content and a decision on admission. As part of the free assessment procedure, 66 % of applications were subsequently forwarded to the respective higher education institutions.³² For data protection reasons, uni-assist cannot collect data on whether an applicant was accepted onto a degree programme by a higher education institution. Nor can it report on whether the applicant actually took up the study place. When applying to study a particular subject, it is also possible that preparatory measures such as German courses may be stipulated for enrolment on the programme.

³⁰ German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)/German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW) (eds.): *Wissenschaft Weltoffen 2017, 2017*, p. 48. Available online at: http://www.wissenschaftweltoffen.de/publikation/wiwe_2017_verlinkt.pdf.

³¹ Not specified: assignment is not possible. Either the (voluntary) information on the subject group was not provided by the higher education institution, or it related to applications for a Studienkolleg preparatory course, interdisciplinary courses or a formal preliminary assessment of the qualification for admission to higher education.

³² This corresponds to the forwarding rate for foreign applicants via uni-assist in the regular procedure. See footnote 30.



5. Summary

The high number of refugees participating in the Integra programme and the corresponding applications submitted to uni-assist not only attest to refugees' strong interest in completing a degree in Germany, but also to the correspondence between the need for support and the range of preparatory courses. In 2016 alone, over 6,800 refugees took part in preparatory courses for a degree programme under the Integra programme. This substantial number is exceeded by the number of those refugees who took up the offer of advice on their further educational options at the higher education institutions. Even though not everyone who expresses an interest will proceed to a higher education institution, the unceasing demand for educational and course guidance demonstrates very effectively that preparing refugees for degree programmes is not a short-term social requirement, but will be a longer term process.

Likewise, the refugees' interest in the Integra programme proves that targeted preparation of this kind is an essential prerequisite for successful admission to higher education. This is particularly true regarding language preparation; this is the area with the greatest room for improvement. Accordingly, the majority of participants in the Integra programme also took part in language courses or mixed courses consisting of language courses and special courses. Just under 70 % of participants achieved the course aim in its entirety or in part. During 2016, most of these participants in language preparation courses reached an intermediate level of German, which is not yet sufficient for admission to higher education. The acquisition of the necessary language skills for admission to higher education is thus proving to be a lengthy process for many refugees. It must therefore be concluded that for the majority of the Integra participants in 2016, entry to a degree programme will not be possible until winter semester 2017/18 or later. On the basis of this experience, it can be assumed that a range of language courses accompanying main degree programmes may also prove necessary for them after they have commenced their studies.

No less relevant for the preparatory process is the teaching of subject-specific knowledge. Even though the proportion of introductory courses in 2016 is still less than the proportion of language courses, there are clear signs that they are becoming ever more important. On the one hand, prospective refugee students are faced with making a transition to an academic system in which learning conditions and requirements are different from those they are familiar with in their home country. On the other hand, the experience of fleeing their homes and the length of the asylum process may mean that they no longer possess certain skills and knowledge to the extent that is required.

The vast majority of prospective refugee students come from Syria, where they have already obtained school-leaving certificates qualifying them for admission to higher education. Quite a few of the Syrian refugees, and also refugees from other countries, even have experience of higher education already.

These are undoubtedly very favourable prerequisites for commencing and successfully pursuing a degree programme.

The high proportion of refugees with higher education experience who are taking part in preparatory measures under the Integra programme also explains the relatively high average age – 27 years old – of the prospective refugee students; a quarter are aged 30 or older. For these older applicants especially, coordinated support measures such as child-care may be important, both at the study preparation stage and also during the degree programme itself.

The refugees' academic interest is focused primarily on engineering and natural science subjects and on medicine. This interest is combined with a further need both for information and advice on study options and on the range of subjects at German higher education institutions, and also on the existing complex application procedure.

The prospective refugee students are clearly willing to tackle the challenges associated with studying for degree in Germany. They are preparing for academic studies with great commitment.

