



DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

Paths to the Future

Successes and Challenges of Refugee
Integration in German Higher Education

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GEFÖRDERT VOM



The DAAD is committed to using language which applies equally to women and men. For reasons of readability, however, it was not possible to consistently use gender-equitable phrasing in this publication.

Paths to the Future

Successes and Challenges of Refugee Integration in German Higher Education

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The illustration enclosed in this publication was created by Christoph J. Kellner (Studio Animanova). Reminiscent of a graphic recording, the work was produced during the DAAD conference “Much Accomplished and Yet at the Beginning?” which took place in Berlin from 14 to 16 March 2018.



Dear Readers,

In spring 2018 the DAAD invited some 400 representatives from German universities, research organisations, foundations and ministries to a conference in Berlin entitled “Much Accomplished and Yet at the Beginning?”. Its purpose was to offer participants the opportunity to discuss the achievements and challenges of refugee integration in German higher education. After three days we concluded that we had indeed accomplished a great deal and were certainly no longer at the beginning but rather in the middle of a long process.

Since launching the “Higher Education Programmes for Refugees” in 2016, financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), we have seen great success on numerous fronts and are now addressing new challenges. In the first year some 6,800 refugees participated in university-preparatory courses offered by the Integra programme. In 2017 that number increased to 10,400 at 166 universities and preparatory colleges throughout Germany. Through the Welcome programme, over 1,000 students

have volunteered their time and energy to help refugees gain orientation at university – dedication that has strongly contributed to their academic orientation.

The first cohorts of the Integra programme have meanwhile achieved the required level of language proficiency and subject-relevant knowledge to enrol in regular degree programmes. This has presented us with new challenges as these students continue to require academic advising and subject-related supervision. In the medium term, easing their transition to the labour market will become a central topic. Consequently, we are committed to addressing these new challenges so that refugee students can make the most of their potential.

I hope you enjoy reading this brochure on “Paths to the Future” which highlights diverse aspects of academic integration of refugees from various perspectives.

Prof. Dr. Margret Wintermantel
President of the German Academic
Exchange Service (DAAD)



These are stories of hope,

stories of young people who have fled their home countries and are now studying in Germany. They seized the chance to develop their talents further. Some 5,200 refugees were enrolled in regular degree programmes in the winter semester 2017/18. This marks a significant increase, and the number is probably much higher as some universities have not yet collected data on refugee status.

Many refugees have a strong academic background. The Socio-Economic Panel, a representative, long-term study, has found that 35 percent of all adult refugees hold a university entrance qualification. Many of them would like to study, and we want to give them the opportunity. We feel it is crucial to integrate well-qualified young people into our internationally active economy and society.

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has created a comprehensive package of funding measures to integrate refugees into professional training and higher education programmes. Integration

takes time, and yet our efforts have already produced results which have gained international attention and recognition. Most of the participants in the Integra courses have achieved their short-term academic goals. The brochure in your hands provides an over-view of what German universities have already accomplished. In view of the experience we have gained, we intend to continue working with the DAAD to build on these achievements.

Integration works best at the personal level. It happens when, for example, students explain to their fellow refugee students what academic life is like at German university, when these refugees actively share their own perspectives and knowledge and form joint learning groups. My heartfelt thanks go to the many student volunteers, language instructors and university staff, without whom such success stories would never have been possible. Last but not least, I would like to thank the DAAD. Together we have demonstrated that when each and every one of us does our best and works with joint purpose, we can overcome tremendous challenges in our country and look to the future full of confidence.

Anja Karliczek

German Federal Minister of Education and Research



“We would like refugees to fully develop their abilities and apply their potential in society. The efforts, which have already produced diverse measures for this special group at numerous universities, are exemplary.”

Dr. Dorothea Rüländ, DAAD Secretary General



“When I first arrived in Germany, the culture opened to me like a book. I was accompanied by so many great people with each new step I took. I learned that if you’re open, the right people will enter your life at exactly the moment you need them.”

Basel Asideh, student, University of Würzburg

PROGRAMMES

“Tutoring means having an open ear for the refugees’ concerns and addressing their needs individually. Both sides benefit from this, and it has made my work so enriching to me.”

Lena Ritzel, 22, Dresden University of Applied Sciences for
Social Work, Education and Nursing



Integration and Innovation

The Integra programme helps refugees integrate faster into German university. Not only does this benefit the refugees, but the universities as well.

Many universities responded quickly to the changing circumstances and developed new programmes.

German universities and preparatory colleges possess decades of experience in preparing international students for the rigours of German higher education. Yet the high number of refugees who sought and were qualified to pursue university study at the end of 2015 presented the universities with a variety of unique challenges.

For this reason, the DAAD created the Integra programme with financing from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The aim of Integra is to help refugees who are interested in pursuing a university degree to gain orientation more quickly and prepare them for university with language courses and subject-specific propaedeutics. In 2016 and 2017, some 12,000 refugees participated in Integra courses which demonstrates how readily these measures were accepted. “The language barrier remains the biggest obstacle, which is why the courses offered by the

preparatory colleges or directly at universities are crucial for providing a path to academic success,” says Katharina Fourier, head of the Department of Higher Education Programmes for Refugees at the DAAD.

More than 166 German universities and preparatory colleges have now joined the Integra programme. There is enormous variety in how the individual measures are designed. In addition to university-preparatory German language courses or supplementary courses for prospective students of engineering subjects, there are also very specialised courses. For example, as part of its Integra propaedeutic programme, the University of Applied Sciences in Darmstadt promotes contact-building between refugees and German students through sports and recreational activities, excursions and German cultural events. At the University of Freiburg, language courses in German and English are supplemented by introductory courses on academic working methods and intercultural training. There are also measures targeted at creative participants; the Hochschule für Bildende Künste (HFBK) in Hamburg offers an Integra seminar that explores traditions of thought in Western art, culture and society. The programme is supplemented by a mentoring system: enrolled art students at the HFBK accompany participants throughout the semester, help them get accustomed to the university, provide insights into everyday academic life, answer concrete study-related questions and acquaint them with the local art scene.

Many of the refugees meet the requirements for admission to a university degree programme.



The experience of the past years has shown that the participating universities have benefited from the Integra programme as well. In the beginning, many universities had to develop or re-organise their course offerings and create corresponding advice and counselling services for these new students. In some cases, this resulted in a veritable boost in innovation at the universities. This motivated many of the project coordinators to make further improvements to their administrative and advising activities. The universities can surely draw on their experience with the Integra projects to design future counselling and supervision services for international students.

Based on feedback from former Integra participants, it appears they not only cultivated relationships with one another during the preparatory phase, but also established active networks with international students, and in some cases, German students.

These contacts – along with a solid foundation of German – gives us hope that they are well on their way to academic success and that the number of students who discontinue their studies can be reduced.

We can already conclude that much has been achieved and accomplished at the universities. All international students stand to benefit from the experience gained from the projects and the newly created infrastructure. And there is great potential in the further development of these new measures. For this reason, everyone involved hopes to continue and secure the progress already achieved with further sustainable measures.

About the programme

“Integration of Refugees in Degree Programmes“ (Integra)

The Integra programme is part of a comprehensive package of measures for which the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has allocated a total of 100 million euros until 2019.

Objective

The programme aims to support universities in their efforts to integrate refugees into university degree programmes. Integra funding helps finance German language instruction

and subject-related courses at preparatory colleges and comparable institutions. The universities are encouraged to offer academically qualified refugees German language instruction and subject-relevant propaedeutic measures. These can serve to prepare students for university, as well as accompany their ongoing studies.

For an overview of Integra and Welcome projects, visit:
<https://www.daad.de/der-daad/fluechtlinge/en/>



A Win for Both Sides

Welcome projects at many universities in Germany are helping refugees become acquainted with academic life. In the following, Dilara Zorlu and Sadejeh Khabaz Ghazian discuss the real-life impact of these projects at the University of Hildesheim.

Valuable experience for both sides – refugees and support staff alike benefit from their collaboration.



DZ: I've been part of the "Welcome Team" here in Hildesheim since summer 2017. I'm German, but I also have an immigrant background through my Turkish parents. When the refugee issue came to a head in Germany, I wanted to get involved and joined the team.



SKG: You helped me apply for a scholarship at the Heinrich Böll Foundation. When I first heard about the Welcome Team two years ago, I met Anna-Maria Pulm, the coordinator, and a few others. And I still stop by to visit on a regular basis.



DZ: Even former participants are very welcome to attend our events. Especially at the beginning, there are numerous obstacles, and this is where we try to offer support. The most important thing is to become familiar with the German university system. To this end, we offer campus tours, for example, or accompany the participants to the BAföG office.



SKG: And your team helped me with my BAföG application. Basically, all the events help you learn a lot about life and work at German universities. For example, we in Iran don't use libraries to study and revise as often as Germans do. It was also good that you introduced us to the Campus Management System. Now I have my own user ID and can choose my own courses. I can also collect credits as a guest student which are required for the application. Now all I need is financial aid through BAföG, that would be great.



DZ: Prospective students can become better acquainted with specific degree programmes by enrolling as guest students. The first steps are very important – forging contacts, seeking advice and sharing information with others. In this regard, we try to help as much as possible. Recently we organised a breakfast only for women. More than 20 female students showed up!

Over 1,000 students actively participate in the Welcome programme.



SKG: I believe these events really help people like me who have come to Germany all by themselves. The Welcome Team regularly organises a bunch of people who all go to the campus parties together. It was so much fun the last time we went.



DZ: These also provide good opportunities for meeting people. The work we do in the Welcome Team is truly a win-win situation, also for me as a staff member. I learn a lot that helps me on both an academic and interpersonal level: having patience and perseverance to overcome difficulties, learning how to deal with agencies

or offices, coming up with good solutions. What I especially like is being able to earn the trust of the participants. Many of them have endured a long and arduous journey. When they tell me about it, I feel truly honoured because it's not easy for them to open up to people.

*A wide range of projects are supported through the **Welcome programme:** buddy programmes and Refugee Law Clinics, architecture and psychological education projects, and much more.*

About the programme “Students Helping Refugees” (Welcome)

Every German state, every major university and numerous universities of applied sciences (some 160) are involved. In the Welcome programme, students everywhere are volunteering their time to help refugees gain a foothold at university. Many tutors are fluent in the refugees’ native languages

which makes it easier to explain degree programmes and disciplines. More than 1,000 students are currently participating in over 600 projects which are helping tens of thousands of refugees. The programme is financed by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).



Dilara Zorlu

Dilara Zorlu was born and raised in Göttingen. Her parents come from Turkey. The 24-year-old student began her bachelor’s programme in social and organisational pedagogy at the University of Hildesheim in the winter semester 2015. In 2017 she has joined the Welcome Team of the International Office.

Sajedeh Khabaz Ghazian

The 34-year-old Iranian academic with a BA in English studies left her home country in 2013 for political reasons. She had to wait for almost three years to receive her residence visa in Germany. She completed several German language courses, including one offered at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Hildesheim. Following two internships and several semesters as a guest student, she hopes to enrol in a teaching degree programme for primary school-level German and English in Hildesheim starting in autumn 2018.



The Path to Higher Education Programmes for Refugees

2016



May 2016

“Creating Perspectives through Education for Refugees”

Event organised by the DAAD and the Permanent Representation of the FRG in Brussels on the integration of refugees in the higher education sector.



August 2016

Publication of the leaflet and flyer “Start into the Future”

The DAAD publicises its programmes through PR activities targeted at refugees, universities and multipliers.



March, April & May 2016

- › Free uni-assist application process for refugees
- › onSET assessment test for refugees
- › First free TestAS testing session for refugees

First phase of the four-phase model.



February 2016

Department P15 – “Higher Education Programmes for Refugees” is established.

Department is expanded throughout the year.

December 2015

Launch of the website “Study-in.de – Information for Refugees”

The “Study in Germany” website is supplemented with information targeted at refugees who are interested in studying in Germany. The page is clicked thousands of times.

November 2015

DAAD and BMBF announce the Higher Education Programmes for Refugees



November 2015

Launch of special International DAAD Academy (IDA) programme for students with a refugee background

November & December 2015

- › 1st call for applications to “Welcome”
- › 1st call for applications to “Integra”

The “Welcome” and “Integra” programmes are established in 2016 and are met with an overwhelmingly positive response; over 200 universities and preparatory colleges receive funding.



October 2016

Publication of "Access to University and Academic Study for Refugees"

BAMF publishes a practical guide on legal matters related to refugees' access to higher education in cooperation with the DAAD, HRK, KMK, DSW and SVR.

October 2016

Second call for applications to "Welcome" and "Integra"

Call for project applications for 2017 and 2018. The number of participating universities remains practically unchanged.



October & November 2016

"Welcome Conference" at eight universities throughout Germany

To promote networking between regional Welcome projects, the DAAD organises a "Welcome Conference" for student support staff at universities in Hamburg, Berlin, Weimar, Munich, Darmstadt, Stuttgart, Trier and Bochum.



November 2016

Conference on "Flight and Study" in Bonn

First nationwide conference on higher education programmes for refugees: some 300 participants take stock of the initial progress.



December 2017

Publication of the study "Integration of Refugees at German Universities"

Together with the DZHW, the DAAD publishes the first fact-based study on academically qualified refugees who are interested in higher education. The study provides an important foundation for improved programme monitoring and the development of target-based services.

2018

September 2018

Conferral of the "Welcome Prize" of 2018 and nationwide conference on student projects at the BMBF in Berlin



March 2018

Conference "Much Accomplished and Yet at the Beginning?" in Berlin

The DAAD invites 400 participants in higher education, politics and at research organisations to discuss the accomplishments, challenges and further development of programmes.

October & November 2017

"Welcome Conference"

Meeting of student project representatives from universities in Würzburg, Lübeck and Cologne.

November 2017

"Federal-State Dialogue"

Federal and state representatives meet to discuss integration of refugees at German universities.

2017

June 2017

„Welcome-Conference“ in Mannheim

July 2017

Conferral of the "Welcome Prize"

The DAAD distinguishes the three most outstanding student-based Welcome projects at the BMBF in Berlin. The projects are presented in video portraits.



Assessing Competence Reliably

The services provided by uni-assist and the scholastic aptitude test TestAS enable refugees to find a study place in Germany more effectively. And that at no charge.

While working as head of the DAAD Information Centres in Erbil and Amman, Nora Sinemillioglu became acquainted with the concerns and hardships of refugees who wish to pursue a university degree. There she met many Syrians who were also interested in studying in Germany. Today Sinemillioglu manages the head office of the “University Application Service for International Students” – or uni-assist, for short. The organisation manages the DAAD-funded project “Free testing procedures for refugees in Germany” which has already received applications from refugees from over 50 countries.

uni-assist e. V. is a non-profit organisation representing over 180 German universities. It is responsible for conducting preliminary assessments of university applications, including those from refugees. In 2017 uni-assist reviewed 280,000 applications from 180 countries and regions around the world.

Using the free online language assessment test onSET for Refugees, administrators can quickly and precisely place candidates in the appropriate language course level.

“It’s not only about fee waivers. We also provide refugees with information they can understand and help them prepare for the admission process at our member universities,” says Sinemillioglu. For example, uni-assist developed a personal questionnaire for refugees who have lost or no longer have the required certificates for admission. “Of course, this information alone doesn’t automatically mean they can gain admission to university,” Sinemillioglu explains, “but it does provide the universities a structured overview, based on which they can evaluate the applicants according to the recommendations of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (KMK).”

The Test for Academic Studies (TestAS) is one of the formats which the KMK recommends

for evaluating foreign university applicants. The test is also free of charge for refugees. Not only is it required if certificates are missing. The results of the TestAS are used when selecting refugees for propaedeutic courses, granting admission to university and selecting candidates for scholarship programmes.

More than 3,500 candidates registered to take the TestAS for refugees in 2017, and testing sessions are offered every month at various locations throughout Germany. “If there is no testing centre in a certain town, we can administer the test ourselves locally,” says Amin Ahmed, who coordinates the project at the Society for Academic Preparation and Test Development (g.a.s.t.) and advises Arabic-speaking participants, among others.

The figures show that the refugees are taking advantage of these services. But they also show that they require additional support to follow their path to higher education. The staff at uni-assist admit that a significant number of applicants does not possess the required language level for university study. “But we also see a steady increase in the percentage of applicants who hold the necessary language certificates,” says Sinemillioglu. “This goes to show how important university-preparatory German courses are.”

Well placed

Universities all over Germany have used uni-assist and TestAS for years – also with respect to offering preparatory courses for refugees. Dr. Susanne Preuschoff from the International Office at the University of Cologne (UzK) explains why universities also benefit from these services.

– *Dr. Preuschoff, in what form do you use the TestAS for Refugees?* We now use TestAS for all non-EU/EEA students. The TestAS result, combined with the grade they earn in our “Studienstart International” (SI) programme, determines the grade for the university entrance qualification. Our student ranking is also based on the TestAS score; the grade they received in their home country is irrelevant for us.

– *What advantages does TestAS offer you and the students?* We feel that the TestAS scores provide a better basis for comparison worldwide than the vastly different grades on school certificates and university entrance exams in different countries. An advantage for students from Arabic-speaking countries is the relatively new TestAS in Arabic.

– *What is the purpose of your “Studienstart International” (SI) programme?* SI represents a structured university entrance phase, offered nowhere else in Germany but at the UzK. We introduced SI in 2009 in response



Applicants who hold a foreign school-leaving certificate and wish to study at one of **uni-assist's 180 member universities** must participate in the application review process at uni-assist.

to the troubling findings on the drop-out rate of international students at German universities. The SI programme has considerably improved the situation. In terms of content, SI helps students to optimise their German language skills and gain academic and intercultural competence.

– *What role does uni-assist play for you?* Uni-assist plays an important role in that they review the candidate's documents and determine grade equivalency prior to the actual application process. They conduct a complete analysis of all the documents for us. After 2015 experts were hired to review Syrian, Iranian and Iraqi documents – something we ourselves were unable to do.

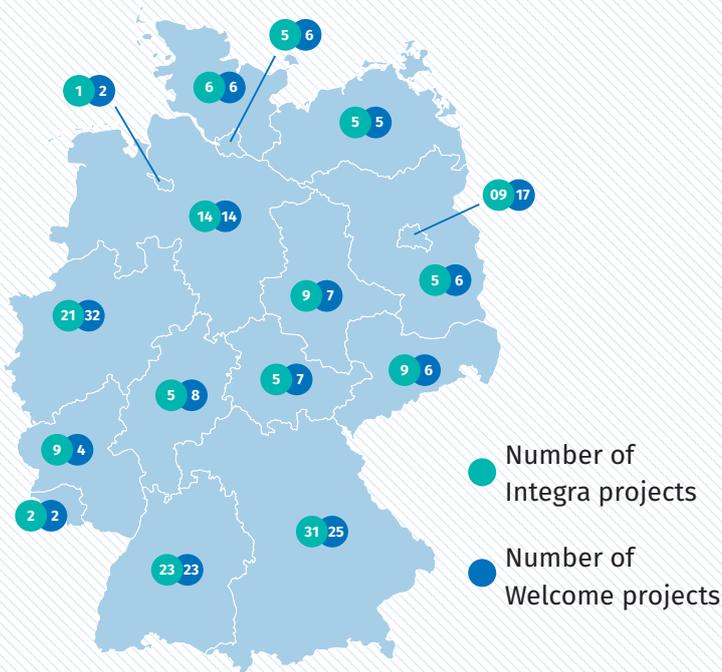
*By taking the **TestAS for Refugees**, applicants can demonstrate their academic aptitude. In some cases, it can serve as the basis for admission. The assessment test offered by g.a.s.t. can be completed in German, English or Arabic.*



Dr. Susanne Preuschoff

Dr. Susanne Preuschoff is head of the “International Students” department at the International Office at the University of Cologne (UzK). Her department is responsible for developing and carrying out university-preparatory programmes for refugees, e.g. Integra, NRWege ins Studium and Welcome.

Facts and Figures



WELCOME programme:
 Student-initiated projects
 have helped more than

**50,000
 refugees.**



Over 10,000

refugees participated in the
 Integra programme in 2017.



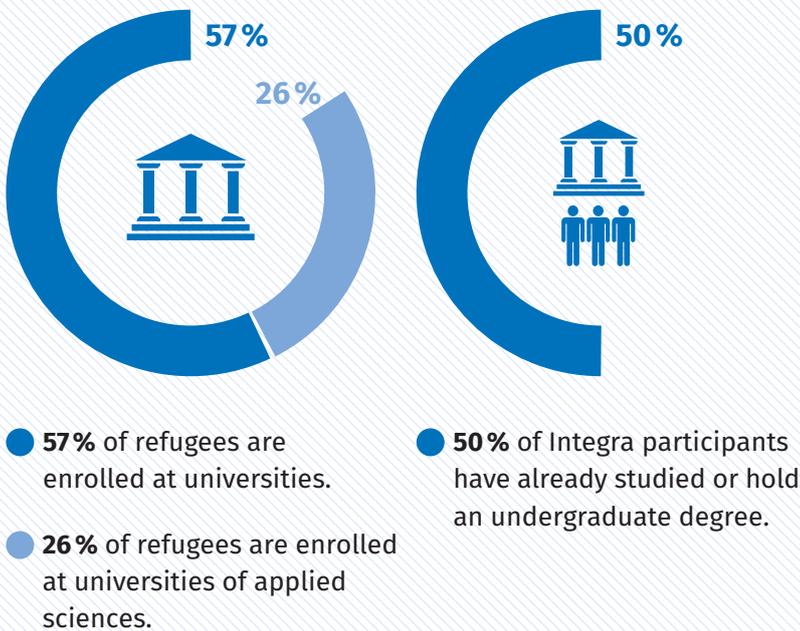
Over 6,000

refugees have taken
 the TestAS.



Over 1,000

student volunteers are involved in
 the Welcome programme in more than
 600 student-run projects.



The majority of refugees tend to choose
STEM subjects.

UNIVERSITIES

“Although it’s sometimes heart-breaking to hear what these people have suffered, it is fulfilling to be an important support that can help them gain a future perspective.”

Raghad Zahra, 20, Anhalt University of Applied Sciences





Nine Paths to Better Integration

To ensure successful integration of refugees in academia, Prof. Dr. Julia von Blumenthal proposes the following nine theses and identifies important fields of action. An overview.

Thesis 1: Perceive refugees as a distinct group

Refugees have specific needs and experience specific forms of exclusion. That is why it is necessary to perceive them as a group in their own right – also as separate from international students. This can be facilitated by collecting current and precise data on refugees at universities, and at some point, discussing an admission quota for refugees.

Thesis 2: Get refugees involved

Refugees rarely have the chance to voice their needs themselves. This poses the risk that policymakers will incorrectly assess their needs and develop unsuitable services. A resource-based approach can allow refugees to play an active role in the process. They should be involved in developing and evaluating support programmes. I also recommend developing formats in which refugee students and researchers work together with other students and researchers.

Thesis 3: Dismantle discrimination

Refugees continue to encounter discrimination at universities on both a structural and

personal level. Universities should try to root out such potential discrimination in their internal processes and, if possible, create independent counselling offices, to which victims of discrimination can turn for assistance.

Thesis 4: Accelerate the admission process

Refugees come to German universities with great hopes and a strong intrinsic motivation. However, the path to gaining admission is usually long and fraught with frustration. This is why it is so important to offer subject-specific and interdisciplinary preparatory programmes which introduce them to the German higher education system – from language courses to preparatory colleges.

Thesis 5: Flexible academic backgrounds

The academic backgrounds of refugees are an inherent part of their history of flight and therefore seldom correspond to the largely formal qualifications expected by the German higher education system and labour market.



Prof. Dr. Julia von Blumenthal

In her current research project, Prof. Dr. Julia von Blumenthal from the Department of Social Sciences at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin investigated the ability of universities to adapt to the growing number of prospective refugee students at the institutional level.

As a result, important skills are left untapped. We could solve this by integrating e-learning courses as a bridge to university, encouraging improved cooperation between universities in recognising academic achievement, offering qualification and certification courses that build on existing skills, and promoting cooperation between job centres and employers.

Thesis 6: Integration as a long-term task

German universities must acknowledge that the integration of refugees and of immigrants in general will remain a central task for the foreseeable future. This is part of the universities' social responsibility. Yet integration is also a core responsibility of teaching, for refugees are part of what is becoming an increasingly diverse student body. What we need is continued financing of additional programmes by the BMBWF, the recognition of this task in the allocation of state financing, and the expansion of successful programmes to include the entire student body.

Thesis 7: Share experience

Like universities in other countries, German universities have gained valuable experience in supporting refugees. It is important to share this experience and spread the word on especially successful programmes. Consequently, existing international university partnerships should be expanded to include the exchange of expertise on refugees, while new collaborations with universities should be initiated.

These 8: Expand research and evaluation

The refugee support programmes were created under enormous time pressure and

on the basis of incomplete data. To ensure their continued success, we need to conduct a systematic evaluation, which should be initiated by the funding providers. It is necessary to safeguard the availability of data on refugees at universities in order to enable longer-term systematic research on their academic progress and success.

These 9: Take advantage of the innovation boost

The acceptance of refugees at universities in Germany has set many processes in motion. This momentum is positive, and universities should see themselves as "integration labs".

For more information on this topic, visit: <https://flucht-forschung-transfer.de/>



Flight and education – At the DAAD conference in Berlin, Prof. Dr. Julia von Blumenthal held an impulse presentation on the German universities' role in integration policy.

Academic Success with the Right Supervision

Examples from practical experience

If there is one thing universities have learned from their experience with the Integra and Welcome programmes, it is that personal, academic and organisational support for refugees are the most important factors for ensuring their academic success.

There are many reasons why international students discontinue their studies – a mosaic of personal, social, organisational and professional factors. Some students have trouble meeting academic standards, while others are overwhelmed by the structure of daily instruction and the selection of courses. Many have trouble following formal requirements, such as attending courses on a regular basis or using the correct layout when writing term papers. In addition to such factors which German students also struggle with, refugees must deal with serious issues which further complicate integration in everyday academic life:

Many factors promote academic success – mentoring and sustainable networking are among the two most important.

the traumatising of war, concerns about their family in crisis areas, and perhaps most importantly, the lack of a personal network which promotes social inclusion and can be helpful in finding internships or accommodation.

All the more important to address such challenges proactively. Over the past years, universities have established a variety of promising support services. Mentoring and buddy programmes offered through the Welcome programme have proven especially effective. At the University of Stuttgart, for example, refugees are personally mentored by higher-semester students who belong to the same degree programme. Joint extracurricular activities promote cohesion and help build a sustainable, personal network. The Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) introduced end-of-semester meetings for refugees. Based on their annual progress meetings with scholarship holders, the International Office arranges personal meetings with refugee students following their first semester. These private, one-on-one sessions enable advisors to intervene at an early stage if necessary and offer personal support. The STEM preparatory colleges in Baden-Württemberg represent another successful model which prepare refugee students for degree programmes specifically in science and engineering disciplines. These colleges build on the participants' secondary-school knowledge and prepare them for the rigours of university study.



Addressing Problems, Building Networks

Three questions for Dr. Dorothea Rüländ,
Secretary General of the DAAD

–What do you think are the most important measures we can take to prevent refugees from discontinuing their studies in the medium term?

Refugees at German universities all have a unique background with often dramatic experiences of flight. At the same time, they comprise a group of highly motivated individuals who are absolutely keen to commence or continue on their academic path. All the more important to correctly assess the knowledge of these prospective students and ensure they receive the necessary support and preparation so that they can successfully study at a German university. And our programmes are designed to do just that. We want to give universities the resources they need to provide refugees with language and subject-relevant knowledge on a sustainable basis, and beyond that, provide ongoing supervision so that they can complete their programmes successfully.

–What advice would you give refugees if they had personal or organisational problems at university? And could you give them ideas on how to build a support network which is apparently essential to completing their studies?

It is very important to address problems and not to retreat into your comfort zone. My advice to all students is: take advantage of the advice services at your university! Regular participation in preparatory language and subject-relevant

courses can also help you gain better orientation at university. The sense of achievement, of being able to speak German better and better, opens the door even wider to this new world. Take advantage of the advice services and the Welcome projects at your university, actively approach German students. The more contact you seek, the faster you will build a network of people who will stand by you and offer support if you have problems.

–If you were given the chance to expand the Welcome and Integra programmes in the future, what new aspects would you emphasise, especially with regard to ensuring academic success?

It would be wonderful if the universities could apply the experience they have gained in preparing refugees for the language and subject-relevant requirements of study to all international students and anchor these structural measures on a sustainable basis. The drop-out rate among international students in bachelor's degree programmes is still relatively high. Many refugees and international students would also like more contact with German students. In this respect, there is still considerable potential for improving accompanying academic advice and supervision services.

“We would like to provide refugees the support they need to successfully complete their studies.”



Dr. Dorothea Rüländ
has served as Secretary
General of the DAAD
since 2010.



Recognising What Is Needed

Universities formulate their needs and define future fields of activity

In just over two years after the Welcome and Integra programmes were established, we are already seeing promising results. Many refugees are now commencing their degree programmes at German universities. This undoubtedly marks an important milestone in the lives of these young people. However, this new situation is not only placing numerous demands on the students, but also on the university structures and programmes which support them.

Targeted and flexible supervision during one's studies benefits all international students.

The integration that begins after arrival and throughout the preparation phase doesn't end on the day of enrolment. Receiving extensive, accompanying support during one's degree programme is centrally important for ensuring academic success. Despite having already studied at university in their home countries, many of these refugee students have difficulties adapting to the learning and teaching culture at German universities; the differences are simply far too great compared to what they know from

home. The same applies to most international students, and to some extent, first-time German students. Additional flexible advice and supervision services are therefore extremely valuable to most international students – and especially to refugees.

In addition to subject-related academic support, psychosocial counselling is extremely important to refugee students. War and violence in their home countries, a dangerous escape often lasting weeks and months, the loss of friends and relatives, and the separation from families are all events which can result in psychological scarring. Oftentimes traumas surface only after the refugees get the feeling that they have truly arrived and begin actively shaping their newly structured lives. But how can we recognise such traumas? How can we help afflicted individuals, what should we pay attention to and what should we avoid? These are the types of questions the support staff at universities are now grappling with.

More and more often they are encountering students who have suffered terrible personal tragedies. As a result, many universities now realise that their support staff require expert training and professional monitoring in counselling refugees.

University representatives and counsellors have also expressed the wish to sit down together after the sometimes turbulent initial phase so that they can share their experience and evaluate how each university proceeded in implementing the Integra and Welcome programmes. All universities stand to benefit from best-practice examples and setting guidelines to standardise successfully implemented measures. This is why many universities welcome such events as the DAAD conference “Much Accomplished and Yet at the Beginning?” which took place in Berlin from 14 to 16 March 2018. The meeting offered them the largest possible forum for engaging in dialogue with policymakers as well. But even smaller formats which take place on a regular basis, such as the working-level coordinators meetings, are regarded as an especially efficient and useful platform for exchanging ideas and information.

For student refugees, earning a university degree represents a major step toward successful integration. Yet their transition into the labour market requires early planning as well, and this is where universities step in as the first place of contact. Some universities have already become active and provide support to refugees in very practical ways. These range from providing contacts to potential employers, organising internships and helping with applications. From the advisors' point of view, these efforts would

strongly benefit from sustainable and financially viable structures at the universities.

There is yet another key area of activity that universities have addressed in recent discourse. Many refugees have already earned a university degree in their home countries and have practical work experience. There are numerous teachers and lawyers, for example, who have come to Germany, but whose qualifications are not recognised. It would make sense to offer this target group post- and advanced continuing education measures to ensure that the existing academic potential does not go untapped, but rather benefits the German labour market.



*In what areas do universities recognise a need for **additional support**?
The conference participants in Berlin discussed the possibilities.*

Let's Stay in Contact

Collaboration and communication with external agents

The integration of refugees requires intensive communication. It begins the day they arrive in Germany. From this moment on, the new arrivals encounter a large number of external agents: institutions and agencies, e.g. the initial reception centres, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), the Job Centre, church groups and welfare organisations, and individuals like social workers and volunteers.

All of these agents could serve as valuable contacts for university staff members who are responsible for advising and supporting refugee students – provided that ample networking and communication exists. One of the workshops at the DAAD conference

“Much Accomplished and Yet at the Beginning?” in Berlin explored various possibilities for making this happen.

The first step toward establishing productive communication is to identify the relevant network partners. This must happen again and again because contacts change as students proceed on their path from preparing and gaining orientation at university to making the transition into the workforce. For example, from the moment the refugees arrive in Germany until they obtain asylum, the social welfare offices are responsible for the refugees' financial security. Then the Job Centre assumes this responsibility from the moment they gain refugee status until enrolment at university. As soon as they commence their studies, the BAföG student financial aid office takes over. During the initial phase of their degree programmes, potential scholarship providers and Student Support Services (Studierendenwerke) play an increasingly important role. And as graduation approaches and the transition to working life lies ahead, agents who can arrange internships and establish contact to potential employers become more important.

Communication and networking are permanent processes – this central premise for successful collaboration might sound simple but is fundamentally crucial! Ideally, university staff should be acquainted with their contact partners and not only engage with them whenever the need arises. However, continuous networking is a time-consuming task, and advisors are



What measures are especially suited for engaging in productive exchange with external agents? This topic was addressed at the DAAD conference in Berlin.



At the conference in Berlin, more than 400 participants discussed relevant developments and possible new measures.

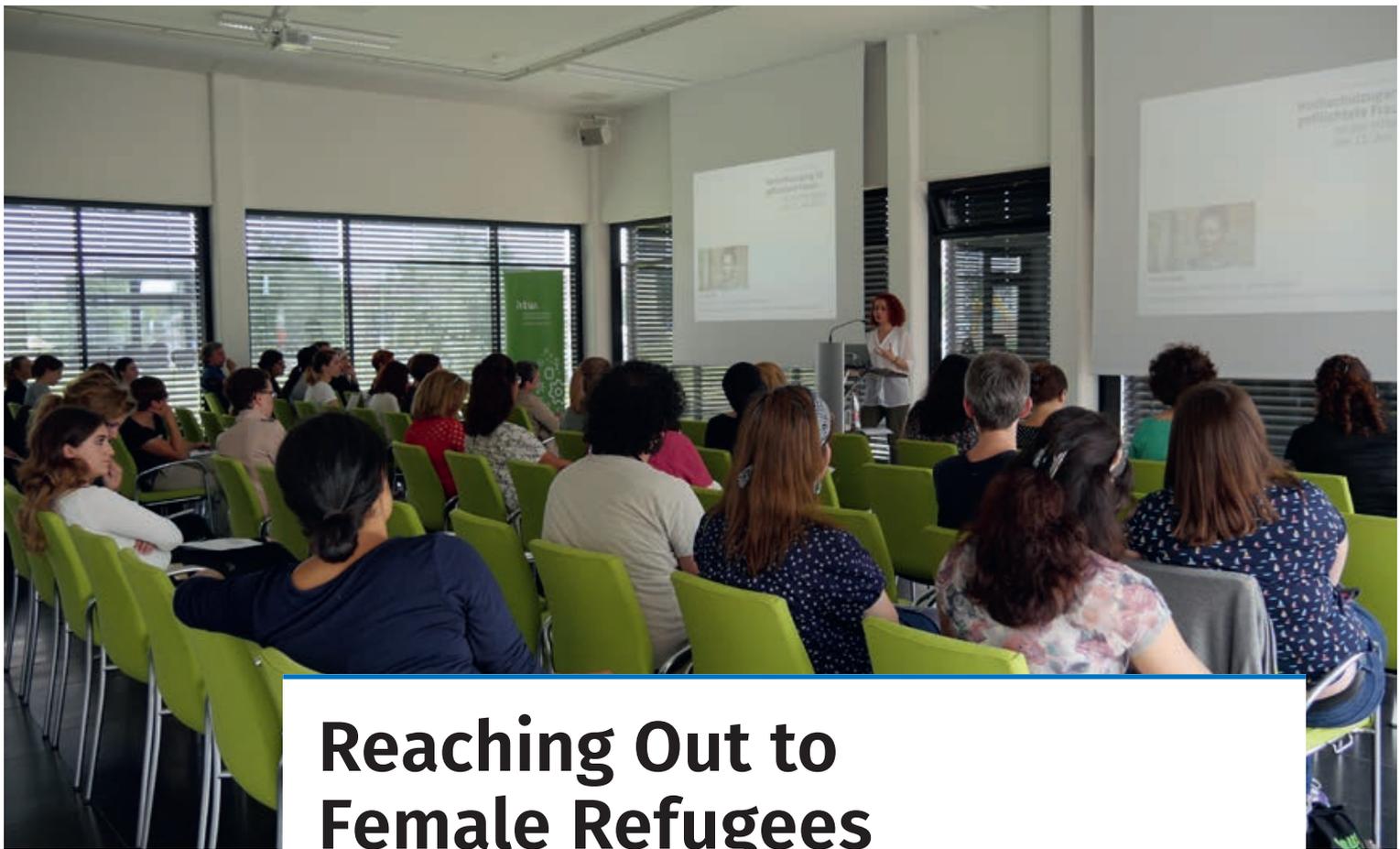
hard-pressed to devote the necessary time to foster these contacts. Communicating with a changing group of contacts on a daily basis is extremely challenging. While some universities cultivate contacts with the Job Centres and work closely with them when tackling certain problems, the collaboration with other partners has proven to be considerably more difficult. Some support staff in Integra and Welcome projects have described how hard it is to find the relevant contact partners – let alone build a trusting relationship.

Support staff should always ask themselves the following questions:

- › Who are our contact partners?
- › How do they view us?
- › What goal do I hope to achieve in communication and networking?
- › How does the partner benefit from collaborating with me?

The last question is especially important, for productive collaboration can only succeed if everyone involved benefits. To prevent frustration, it is crucial that information is reliably shared between the network partners and that all have realistic expectations going forward.

Communication and networking are permanent processes.



Reaching Out to Female Refugees

How universities are supporting female refugees on their path in higher education

The HTW Berlin offers refugees the opportunity to easily obtain free guest student status and take examinations.

Female refugees generally have a harder time getting acclimated to life in Germany than their male compatriots. Participating in the Welcome and Integra programmes offers them the chance to make their academic aspirations a reality.

Female refugees have very individual needs and academic backgrounds. That is why there is a need for academic support and advising services which address various life circumstances. In the DAAD programmes for refugees, female participation still holds significant potential for growth: only 19 percent of all Integra course participants were female in 2017. However, it should be noted that women comprised only one third of all asylum seekers in 2015/16, and their age distribution and academic backgrounds were very different than those of male applicants. Yet offering support

services specifically to women has still paid off as the integration courses and Integra courses at the universities demonstrate. During the first three quarters of 2016, for example, women who took the German test for immigrants were more likely to earn the B1 language certificate, and some universities even reported that the success rate for women was greater overall than that of the male participants. The central question, therefore, is this: how do we reach out to and support more academically interested women so that they can attend a preparatory course and eventually enrol in a university degree programme?

The University of Hamburg has developed a successful model. It features nine elective modules based on the Integra programme, all of which are faculty-oriented in terms of theme. One module is specifically designed

to cater to the needs and interests of female refugees. The module includes a monthly meeting, moderated by student staff and guests from the women's advice centre. The primary purpose of these meetings is to provide the women a safe space and facilitate more intensive exchange. "Most participants are hesitant to ask questions in front of lots of people. We offer them a familiar environment," says Dr. Annika Becker, project consultant of #UHHilft, a programme which offers academic orientation for refugees at the University of Hamburg.

One of the main challenges is to establish contact with female refugees and then later to remain in contact. Numerous universities report that women do indeed take advantage of their counselling services and even sign up for preparatory courses, only to stop attending after a time. But not for lack of interest. One reason for their absence is quite often due to lack of childcare. Some say that they receive no support at home in pursuing their personal career goals. The University of Hamburg supports women who find themselves in such a predicament. "We have a tutor in our Welcome team who comes from a refugee background. Women who don't know how to find their place in the new culture look to her as a role model," Becker explains.

Preparing women for university study is also the job of Maria Anne Schmidt, project coordinator for the Integra programme at the HTW Berlin University of Applied Sciences. The most promising measures are low-threshold programmes which



Razan Zabadneh and her two sons. She is a participant of the university preparatory programme "HTW Integra" in Berlin.

encourage female refugees to make initial contact with the universities. "Regardless of their academic background, they can attend one week of trial courses specifically in science and engineering subjects," Schmidt explains. Another focus is on networking which is something women occasionally struggle with. With female mentors at their side and an initial impression of academic life, the path to higher education becomes much easier for these prospective students.

Refugee women often don't know about the available possibilities for preparing for university. Good academic counselling can help.

REFUGEES

“During my preparation semester, I worked intensively on my learning strategies. Now I know that biotechnology is the perfect major for me and I’ll definitely be able to complete my programme.”

Adela Yaqubi, 25, HAW Hamburg



My Goal – An English Teacher in Berlin

Even during his school years in Damascus, Muhammed Al Zeen knew he wanted to become a teacher. Today he’s enrolled in a teaching degree programme in Berlin and is busy planning his future there. In the following, he tells his story.

I’m 27 years old and come from Damascus. Even as a pupil, I thought the school system in Syria was a disaster because all they had was forward-facing instruction. I would like to help the new generation and that’s why I’ve decided to become an English teacher. I firmly believe that good teachers can help others achieve their goals.

In Damascus, I spent three years at university studying English literature. I only needed two more semesters to earn my bachelor’s degree. But because I didn’t want to fight, I dropped out and left my home country before I could graduate. I’ve been living in Berlin for more than three years and am pursuing my teaching degree in English philology and political science at the Free University (FU) of Berlin.

Fortunately, I was able to get credit for most of my academic work in Syria. I did have to choose a minor, however, and complete the teaching degree modules because in Syria, you only need to major in one subject to become a teacher. Following an intensive German course which the FU offers as part of its “Welcome@ FUBerlin” programme, I took a DSH preparation course at a private language school. The language course at the FU helped me tremendously because you can take it regardless of whether you have a residence permit – and at the time, I didn’t have one yet.

Even though I didn’t study pedagogy in Syria – which comes after you earn your bachelor’s – I’d say that teaching degree programmes in Germany are more demanding than in Syria. I think it would be good if German universities didn’t only offer additional training programmes for prospective teachers from Syria, but for teachers from all over the world. I know many teachers from Syria, Australia and other countries who want to stay in Germany but aren’t allowed to teach because they’re required to study three more years to earn their German teaching certificate. Some of my friends are teachers with ten years of experience, and Germany urgently needs teachers. In my opinion, this is something that ought to change.

My personal goal is to be finished with my programme and teaching internship within five years. I see myself working in Berlin as an English teacher, married with at least one child. Five years is a long time, but my family and friends strongly support me which makes the long waiting period bearable. The most important thing for me right now, though, is to see my family again two months from now – after four long years. I am really looking forward to seeing them again.



Muhammed Al Zeen
fled with his brother to Egypt in 2011, and from there travelled to Istanbul. In summer 2014 he reached Europe via the Balkans and finally arrived in Berlin. Today he studies at the Free University of Berlin and is supported by the “Welcome@ FUBerlin” programme.

The Most Important Thing is My Degree Programme

Amira Zen Al Deen arrived in Germany following her escape from Aleppo in January 2016. Today she is ambitiously working toward her PhD in Leipzig. In the following interview, she talks about her studies and career goals.

The student volunteers of Make it German e.V. provide refugees advice and support at no charge.

— What expectations did you have when you left your homeland? The most important thing for me is my degree programme. Because German universities have a very good reputation, my goal was to continue studying here. I pictured Germany as a progressive country with beautiful nature. Once I arrived I quickly realised that organisational matters often involve a lot of bureaucracy. You have to complete and sign forms for almost everything.

— At the beginning of your stay in Germany you lived in Dessau for a short time. It was there that you decided to study in Leipzig. How did that come about? I collected information online about master's and PhD programmes at various universities. I ended up choosing English studies in Leipzig. The application process wasn't a problem because I had

already earned a bachelor's degree in English and literature, and a master's in education in Aleppo.

After only two months in Germany, I received my letter of admission. At that time, I was attending a German course and I didn't want to drop out. So I started my degree programme in the winter semester – by then I had achieved the B1 language proficiency level in German.

— When you compare studying in Germany with that in your home country, what do you find is different here and what did you find challenging?

The system here is completely different than at home. Here we have presentations and oral and written examinations. In Syria the only testing method is the written kind. What's more, here you're allowed to choose from various modules. I had to get used to having to choose from among so many possibilities. And I learned many things, such as being patient and working in teams.

— If things continue as planned, what are your next steps? Presently I'm receiving financial aid through a scholarship. I'd like to save up some extra money so I can visit my family. That's why I'm looking for a "mini job" (Ed. note: part-time job with earnings totalling no more than 450 euros per month). After graduation, I would like to earn a doctorate here in Leipzig, if possible. I could also study in London for two semesters, but I feel much more at home in Germany.

— Do you already know the topic you would like to devote your dissertation and your future occupation to? My plan is to either investigate migrant integration or conduct a study comparing newly arrived refugees with Germans. The advantage of earning a doctorate in Germany is that I can really

"My wish is to someday become a university lecturer or work at a humanitarian organisation."

concentrate on my research and that the title is highly respected internationally. The important thing now is to find a topic that meets the expectations of the organisation which eventually agrees to support me financially and to convince the selection committee to choose my proposal despite the strong competition. My wish is to someday become a university lecturer myself or work at a humanitarian organisation.”

— *You volunteer your time to help refugees at an organisation and at the University of Leipzig. What kind of work do you do?* I belong to an organisation called “Make It German e. V.” Our team is comprised of some 25 Syrian students who support refugees who have just arrived in Germany and those who plan to come here. To cater to everyone, we publish articles on our website in both Arabic and German. If someone requests advice, we respond within 72 hours on our website. We also organise workshops all over Germany. These mainly focus on topics like preparing for university, the labour market and financial matters. Sometimes we work together with other institutions like the Studentenwerk Leipzig. Here I organise an event series for refugee students, for which I hold presentations on BAföG and my path to university study in Germany, for example.



Active nationwide: Together with other members of the organisation Make it German e. V., Amira Zen Al Deen regularly organises workshops and events for refugees in larger cities around Germany.



Amira Zen Al Deen

After Amira Zen Al Deen arrived in Germany, she lived in Dessau for a short time. At present, she is busy completing her second master's degree programme in English studies. The 27-year old student devotes her time to supporting Syrian refugees through the organisation Make it German e. V., holds presentations around the country and publishes articles.

Well-Prepared for Specialised Study

Just over a year after arriving in Germany, Krikor Ohanian succeeded in enrolling in a medical programme at the University of Lübeck.

Mark Twain once quipped that it would take a talented person thirty years to learn German. For Krikor Ohanian, it was considerably faster. The medical student claims that “German isn’t difficult to learn, you just have to speak it, and then it works” – which he expresses in excellent German. It is worth noting that Krikor is a very talented young man. At home in Syria, he skipped a grade in school, earned his high school diploma with straight As, and started university in Aleppo at the age of 17. Soon thereafter, in 2013, his family had to flee the country. Their first stop on their journey was the Lebanese capital of Beirut. Krikor and his younger brother stayed in Beirut with their mother while their father made his way to Germany.



Krikor Ohanian
from Aleppo, Syria quickly gained admission to German university – not least of all because of intensive language and subject-related preparation offered by the University of Lübeck. The 22-year-old medical student is now involved in a Welcome project, in which he shares his experiences with fellow Arabic-speaking students.

In Lebanon, Krikor Ohanian had to earn money for the family, but also found time to take his first German courses at the Goethe-Institut in Beirut. That provided him with basic German language skills which came in handy when his family joined his father in Bad Oldesloe in Schleswig-Holstein in 2015. There Krikor attended a youth integration course. In addition to improving the participants’ German language skills, the course introduced them to the work world. After completing an internship at the “Lung Clinic” in the nearby town of Grosshansdorf, Krikor decided he would like to study medicine. He participated in a propaedeutic course at the University of Lübeck. “Not only did we take part in an intermediate German

course, but also learned biology, chemistry, mathematics and computer science at the German Abitur level,” he recalls. “I found it relatively easy because I had already learned much of the same material during my school time in Aleppo.”

The subject-related preparation for university study proceeded smoothly and quickly for Krikor Ohanian. “After only a year or so in Germany, I was able to apply for regular admission to the University of Lübeck.” Looking back on the assistance he received with the formalities of enrolment and dealing with various administrative offices, he felt well taken care of by the University of Lübeck.

Krikor Ohanian now spends some of his time advising foreign students in the Welcome project at his university. With Arabic as his native tongue, he primarily serves as a contact and confidant to students from the Arabic world. From his experience as a student advisor, he knows that integration doesn’t happen as smoothly for all refugees as it did for him. In his opinion, the language and preparatory courses for refugees, currently offered at German universities, play a very central role in integration. Such courses go far beyond teaching everyday language. “That is very important because otherwise you’d have no chance of following a lecture. Furthermore, these courses form a bond between the refugees



At the DAAD conference, Krikor Ohanian described his experiences on his path to studying medicine.

and the university. They meet other people who have the same goals. From there, they create ‘learning communities’, the first networks, in which they mutually support each other – that, too, can be extremely helpful later on in one’s studies.” Improvements could be made with helping new students choose a major. Krikor explains that most “newcomers” are not well acquainted with the broad range of available degree programmes and orientate themselves to more conventional subjects. “Sometimes I think that I could have found a programme that matches my interests a little better. But I’m going to see it through to the end, because I know it has big advantages for me. Doctors can work anywhere in the world – and German education has a great reputation abroad.”

Aside from the advantages, he also sees very concrete problems in the area of student financing which affect refugees when they

begin studying. Krikor is familiar with these from personal experience, but also through his counselling work with refugees. “As a student, I no longer receive support from the Job Centre, nor any BAföG for that matter. That’s why I have to do a lot of part-time work during my studies until my application is processed. It’s a difficult situation, and I’m not the only one stuck in it.” In his view, it would be good idea to provide financial aid so that students can better manage this transition and allow them to concentrate fully on their studies.

“I was well-advised and supervised on my way to studying at the University of Lübeck.”

Shaping the Digital World of Tomorrow

Little Bebars babbles happily in the arms of his mother Manar Alabdullah. The young woman began studying computer science at the University of Tübingen in the summer semester of 2017.

— *So cute, your little boy!* Manar Alabdullah (beaming): Yes, Bebars is the first Tübingen-born member of our family. He was born here last year.

— *You yourself come from Syria?* Exactly, I was born and grew up in Damascus. That's where I graduated from high school and studied at university for two semesters until my husband and I left the country in 2014. First, we went to Turkey, and in summer 2015, my husband set out alone to Germany. I was allowed to join him in 2016.

— *Did you study computer science in Damascus?* No. I was studying economics. But even as a child, I was fascinated by mathematics and computers. Computer technology has increasingly penetrated all areas of life. Naturally there are risks to that, but I mainly see the potential to improve people's lives. And I want to shape the digital world of tomorrow. That's why it was my dream to study computer science.

— *Can digital technology help people with integration?* Of course. Apart from communication, just think about the data collected at resident registration offices, schools or universities. In my home country of Syria, these are not uniformly or comprehensively collected, and much of it gets erased or goes missing. With efficient digital data management systems and decentralised storage technology, people would always be able

to prove their identities and qualifications regardless of where they come from.

— *And what about digital learning measures, such as online language courses? Could they be useful for preparing students for university and offering academic advising services?* Definitely. I myself haven't taken advantage of such measures yet, but I'll soon be starting an online English course. And naturally, many students who are new here could also learn German this way. The existing e-learning courses for refugees are fine, but in the end, every student must be disciplined enough to use them. An area that could be improved is the digital presentation and dissemination of information about studying in Germany. Most of the information you currently find online is only available in German. Many refugees who have already commenced their studies share their experience and practical tips with newcomers, for example, in the Welcome programmes. But they always have to tell them the same thing and can only reach a limited number of people. Important information could be presented in a structured and efficient manner by means of a centralised multilingual online platform. This would also allow users to access the information before they arrive in Germany.

— *It's rather rare that young women dream of studying computer science – and yet a higher share of female students in the STEM subjects would be desirable.* I also think it's too bad

Women comprise only one fourth of all beginning students in computer science. Their career prospects in this field are outstanding.

that most students in this field are men. That why I've been encouraging my sister who's taking a C1 course in Munich to also enrol in computer science. Computer science is not only a fascinating subject, the degree programme also offers great career prospects. It's very important to me that I find a good job after graduation and earn my own money.

— *You seem very well-adjusted to university. Was it easy for you?* I was warmly accepted and supported here, that's for sure. I immediately began learning the new language and participated in the Refugee Programme at the university (an introductory course for refugees funded through Integra programme). That was really helpful. In addition to receiving language and subject-related preparation, they also offered a wide range of activities. We met up for Stammtisch events on a regular basis and went on day trips and excursions together. Paired off with German students in the Buddy Programme, we became familiar with student life in Tübingen even before we were students. What I find very different than in Damascus is how much easier it is to study with a little child. In Syria, if you have no relatives to look after your child, you can only start studying when he or she is four years old. Here I was able to take my baby

to classes during the first three months, and since then I take him to a daycare mother. And children who are older than two can be brought to the university's daycare centre.

— *You came to the relatively quiet city of Tübingen from a metropolis with millions of people. Was that something of a culture shock for you?*

No, not really, and I like it here. Living in Tübingen is a little like living in a village, but also a little like a city. For instance, there's no subway like you'd find in larger cities in Germany, but there are more possibilities and variety than in the country. And sometimes, Tübingen even reminds me of Damascus a little.

— *And what do you especially like here?* We live with our child in a peaceful country. Our son will hopefully never have to experience the pain of war. Many other people from Syria haven't been able to take this path.

“We became familiar with student life even before we started studying.”



Manar Alabdullah

came from the Syrian capital of Damascus to Baden-Württemberg via Turkey. The 24-year old studies a future-oriented subject at one of Germany's oldest universities. The young mother hopes to get her younger sister interested in computer science as well.



I Would Like to Do Something for Others

Omar Alroumi from Syria is determined to follow his chosen path: he is studying mechanical engineering at the University of Applied Sciences in Stralsund. On the side, he helps new arrivals take their first steps in Germany.

Omar Alroumi now lives in Western Pomerania. On his first day in Germany after arriving in Munich, he ended up in Horst, a little village between Greifswald and Stralsund. That was the summer of 2015. Omar comes from Syria. He was born in the southern part of the country, and his mother and siblings still live there today. He had been living in Damascus, and until the civil war reached the Syrian metropolis, he steadily pursued his dreams. He studied engineering at the university and was about to start his master's thesis. In addition to his studies, he worked part-time as a mathematics lecturer and in the technical department of the Syrian branch of a well-known Japanese engine manufacturer.

All this he had to leave behind. He set out on his own to the neighbouring country of Lebanon. After about ten months, he followed the example of many other

refugees and started walking across Turkey. He boarded a boat to Greece and from there, followed the so-called "Balkan route" to Germany. After arriving in Horst, Omar lived for a short time in Parchim and Schwerin until he finally reached Stralsund. He feels very much at home in this old commercial Hanseatic city, especially in the summertime. "Then there are many tourists and there's a lot going on in town," he says. It's very quiet in the winter, though. That also has its appeal to the Syrian who is used to the hectic pace of life in Damascus. "There are always people on the street, the shops are open day and night. Here most people go to bed around ten." But for the most part, he has nothing but praise for Germany. As a future engineer, he is fascinated by Germany's industry and modern transport infrastructure. But even more, he appreciates the German way of life. "I love the tolerance and freedom here, not least of all



Omar Alroumi
*was forced to
discontinue his
master's programmes
because of the civil war
in Syria. He resumed
his studies on the coast
of Baltic Sea. His goal:
a doctorate.*

that women and men are treated equally.” What he likes about the university is its international student body. “There are people here from all around the world, this is where positive things from all cultures come together.”

From the very start, he invested enormous energy and dedication to mastering the German language. “I believe if you come here and want to achieve your goals, the most important thing is to study at a Germany university.” In his case, he found his way there thanks to a lucky coincidence. A friendly German family put him in contact with Prof. Dr.-Ing. Wolfgang Schikorr, who advised the young man about the programmes offered at the University of Applied Sciences in Stralsund and showed him how to gain recognition for his prior academic achievement in Syria. “That really helped me a lot,” Omar admits, looking back. In the meantime, he has picked up where he left off in Damascus, studying mechanical engineering in a master’s degree programme. His mentor Professor Schikorr continues to offer him advice: “Mr Alroumi asked me if I could supervise his master’s thesis. I immediately agreed because I expect his thesis to be interesting and ambitious, and I look forward to many new ideas during our meetings together.”

As ambitious as Omar is, he hasn’t forgotten the many people who have accompanied him along the way. As soon as he got settled in his new surroundings and started learning German, he began volunteering at the Stralsund Social Welfare Service (Diakonie). He helps newly arrived refugees take their

first steps in Germany, explains the rather complex processes and inner workings of the German bureaucracy, helps them decipher official letters and accompanies them to various agencies and offices. It was for this dedication that Omar Alroumi received the DAAD Prize in December 2017. “I received lots of help and would like to give something back;” Omar explains, “The DAAD Prize makes me all the more determined to do so.”

“I love the tolerance and freedom in Germany.”



Omar Alroumi received the **DAAD Prize 2017** at the International Christmas Party hosted by the University of Applied Sciences in Stralsund.



Paths to the Future

Rarely has the DAAD launched a funding programme with so many unknown variables. In autumn 2015 the DAAD had to work with hypotheses and vague assumptions about the size of the target group, the refugees' origin and demographic data, their qualifications and certificates, and especially their expectations and life goals. At that time, we simply did not have all the data required for planning such a programme.

Now almost three years later, it appears that most of our assumptions were correct. However, there were three things that surprised us. First, the enormous and sustained social commitment exhibited by students at German universities in this matter. Second, the refugees' resolve in pursuing higher education despite the challenges of gaining recognition for prior academic work, preparing for university and learning the German language. And third, key findings from these programmes which can be used to promote the integration of international students in the future.



Christian Müller
heads the Strategy
Department at the
DAAD. Prior to this, he
worked for the DAAD in
Brazil and headed the
DAAD "Communication
and Marketing" group.

Therefore, the DAAD programmes for refugee students will not be a passing episode. The extraordinary challenge which German society faced in 2015 is already driving changes and creating impulses which

will have a long-lasting impact. With regard to higher education institutions, our programmes have already produced additional German language-learning structures for international students. The digitalisation of academic and information services has seen dynamic growth. And German universities themselves have developed new means to prepare international students for the rigours of study and improve their chances of academic success.

Germany's universities and the society in which they are embedded have assumed great responsibility for students in dire circumstances. Leading nations in science and research are closely watching how new global crises and conflicts are playing out, as well as the solutions we can provide. Germany has chosen to play a role in this, for which it has garnered international praise. It is crucial to note that our support not only benefits the well-being of those who would have had to relinquish their academic pursuits and life goals, but also the future prospects of society – in gaining intellectual diversity, knowledge, creativity and positive impulses which can drive social transformation and renewal.



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