

Press Release

Joint press release with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF)

Facilitating access to education for refugees

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Bonn, 13/11/2015. Education is central to successful integration. More than half of the refugees currently arriving in Germany are under the age of 25, i.e. an age at which education is needed. In order to facilitate access to higher education for those wishing to study and possessing adequate qualifications, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) will support universities with targeted measures in the next years and help to promote the integration of refugees in this way. Approximately €100 million are available for this purpose in the coming years, with €27 million earmarked for projects in 2016.

The package of measures comprises three components that form the basis for ensuring successful access to higher education:

- Recognising competences and potentials
- Ensuring ability to commence academic study: language instruction and subject-specific preparation
- Supporting integration at higher education institutions

“Education is the key to the integration of refugees, particularly those with long-term prospects in Germany. The universities play a significant role in this, not least because of their years of experience in dealing with international students. We already have suitable tools for coping with language-related challenges or differing qualifications as well as for good counselling of international students. We can now build on this infrastructure for the integration of refugees into universities. The German state provides the universities with targeted support in this respect. We want to facilitate access to higher education for those wanting to and able to study – also for the benefit of Germany,” said Federal Education Minister Johanna Wanka during the presentation of a package of measures at the Technische Universität Berlin on Friday. Like many other universities in Germany, the TU Berlin is offering refugees special studying opportunities.

The package of measures was developed in collaboration with the world’s largest academic exchange organisation, the DAAD, which will now also cooperate with the universities in the implementation phase. “German universities are centres of internationality and stand for an actively practised welcoming culture. They assume an important role model function in the integration of refugees. If we wish to offer talented young people a perspective in Germany through academic success, we must support the universities and be able to perceive the challenges as an opportunity. An opportunity for the internationalisation of our universities and an opportunity for our society,” said DAAD President Margret Wintermantel.

Please direct any questions to:

Anke Sobieraj
Head of Press Relations
DAAD - German Academic
Exchange Service
Tel.: +49 (0)228 882-644
presse@daad.de

The measures in detail:

Component 1: Recognising competences and qualifications

Refugees who may be qualified for university studies come with a wide range of language skills and abilities. Determining precisely what these competences are, whether they qualify for academic study and where support is necessary makes integration into regular study programmes easier and contributes to academic success. This is achieved through targeted preliminary counselling and diagnostic testing procedures.

- Accelerating the university admissions procedure: Refugees must receive comprehensive and timely counselling to allow quick completion of the admissions procedure required for German universities, when assessment is positive. The capacities of the University Application Service for International Students (uni-assist e. V.) are therefore expanded and guidelines specifying when the German state can assume the fees for refugees are defined.
- Determining the ability of refugee candidates to commence academic study: The Test for Academic Studies (TestAS) funded by the BMBF can be used to determine the fundamental academic aptitude of prospective international students. Some helpful adaptations in this regard include translation of the test into other languages (e.g. Arabic, Dari), refund of test fees, development of additional test items and support of flexible test procedures at central German university locations.
- Assessing subject-specific language proficiency: Most refugees will need to complete a language course before beginning their studies. Established language tests such as OnDaF (German) and onSET (English) can be used to assess language proficiency and ensure correct placement in preparatory language courses. The federal government assumes the cost of relevant fees.

Component 2: Ensuring ability to commence academic study: language instruction and subject-specific preparation

- More places at preparatory colleges: Preparatory colleges and comparable institutions at German universities prepare young adults from abroad lacking a qualification for direct admission to higher education to commence studies at a German university. Participants learn specialised terminology and fundamental subject-specific knowledge, as well as developing individual learning strategies and social skills. The federal government will finance approximately 2,400 additional places at preparatory colleges and comparable institutions every year for the next four years – amounting to about 10,000 additional places in total.

Component 3: Supporting integration at higher education institutions

- Supporting student initiatives: Many students are already involved in helping to improve the integration of refugees at German universities. With their commitment, they contribute to the refugees' academic success and social integration. Refugee law clinics have been set up at a number of universities for example, and language instruction projects are being offered by trainee teachers or students taking a degree in German. The federal government funds such projects and at the same time honours the efforts made by the students. Students working at university welcome centres may for instance be offered employment contracts or the cost of materials may be paid for.
- New information services: The new website "Information for Refugees" at www.study-in.de/information-for-refugees/ is aimed at refugees who have

arrived in Germany and now wish to begin or continue their studies. The website has been translated into Arabic, Dari, Pashtu and Urdu, and provides users with an overview of key topics related to university studies in Germany, including a step-by-step guide with information on qualifications for admission to higher education, funding opportunities or language courses. The capacities of the DAAD information centre are also in the process of expansion.

- **BAföG for refugees:** Individuals whose continued residence is tolerated and holders of specific humanitarian residence permits are no longer required to wait four years before they are entitled to BAföG, but can now apply for support after only 15 months. This reduction in the waiting period was originally planned to come into effect on 1 August 2016 within the scope of the BAföG reform. The start date has however been brought forward to 1 January 2016. Recognised refugees who are currently studying are therefore able to apply for BAföG immediately. Support of individuals entitled to BAföG is statutory, which means that funding for this is not included in the above-mentioned resources for the new package of measures.

The BMBF already presented a new package of measures for refugees in September. This aimed to address issues including the acquisition of German language skills and access to vocational training. With the new measures for easier access to education, the federal government is complementing its overall efforts to integrate refugees through education.

CONTACT:

Pressestelle BMBF: Tel. 030 / 1857-5050, presse@bmbf.bund.de