

Supporting Scholars in Exile: Towards Long-Term Career Path Solutions

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Introduction

The growing numbers of displaced scholars coming to Germany is part of the internationalization of higher education, which itself is a global process. There are special funds to support exiled scholars allocated by institutions and their related programs such as the Phillip Schwartz Initiative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH-PSI), Einstein Foundation, the Volkswagen Foundation, and Academy in Exile as well as the regional governments of Germany; however, these stipends are limited to two to three years, and thus offer only short-term solutions. The scholars are expected to return to their home countries after a few years or to find their place in the competitive and rather closed

German academic job market. However, it is not reasonable to assume that these scholars can simply return to their home countries after having settled in Germany. The reasons for their exile, such as civil wars or political prosecution, are not likely to disappear in a few years. Nor is it reasonable to expect fast integration into the German academic job market, given the disadvantages that many such scholars have (with insufficient German skills often the most obvious barrier). Therefore, just like any other immigrant who has been subject to forced displacement, exiled scholars need support in adapting to living and working conditions in Germany.

This policy brief underscores the importance of reforming fellowship programs and higher education institutions (HEIs) in provision of such support. It suggests that:

- 1) Exiled scholars need to be considered by funding institutions and the hosting HEIs as highly qualified new settlers rather than temporary post-docs who will return to their home countries after a few years. They need more comprehensive support than that offered by stipends or short-term grants. Existing policies and mechanisms must be improved to support these scholars' transition to living and working in Germany. As a concrete add-on, institutional support should be provided through regular employment contracts with social rights and benefits rather than short-term stipends that exclude all these benefits.
- 2) Most exiled scholars do not speak German before settling in Germany. Since learning German at an institutionally acceptable level takes intensive time and effort, the duration of support programs must be planned accordingly, adding on at least an extra year for language learning and cultural as well as practical adaptation. Host HEIs should take the lead in offering intensive German courses specifically designed for exiled academics through their language centers. While postdoctoral research in most fields in Germany is conducted in English, the working (administrative) language at HEIs is unequivocally German. Thus, knowledge of German is essential to build a long-term research career in the country.
- 3) Building long-term career solutions for exiled scholars should not depend on host professors and academic mentors alone. Specific structures within universities such as the Equal Opportunity/Gender Equality Offices, International/Welcome Offices and Equality Commissions (*Gleichstellungskommissionen*) should be mobilized to target the inclusion of exiled scholars in the universities. These offices should work in coordination with each other, adopting participatory decision-making principles and representative mechanisms in order to channel the needs of diverse disadvantaged groups into specific policies. Such a concept would not only support exiled scholars in the difficulties they face in adapting to living and working conditions in Germany, but also serve to create a diverse, inclusive, and welcoming culture in German higher education.

Support Programs for Exiled Scholars

In the last decade, Germany has been one of the most responsive countries in Europe in supporting politically displaced scholars. To date, a large number of fellowships have been provided with close connections to well-established network organizations such as Scholars at Risk and the Scholar Rescue Fund. The most prominent is the Philipp Schwartz Initiative (PSI), established by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH) in 2016.

The support mechanisms offered to exiled scholars are quite diverse. Below is a table providing a non-exhaustive taxonomy of this support based on the sources of funding. The support structure includes Germany-wide fellowship programs funded by the federal government, fellowships funded by regional governments (*Länder*), foundation-funded support, thematic programs providing residential scholarships, transnational mentoring, training programs, alliances, and “bottom-up” initiatives led by scholars.

These programs provide essential opportunities for exiled scholars to continue their academic activities. However, especially those programs providing scholarships are mostly designed to be temporary solutions. They operate under the assumption that exiled scholars need assistance for relatively short transition periods and will quickly integrate into “normal” academic life in Germany or eventually return to their countries of origin. Even though most of these scholars may not have had the intention to settle down in Germany, in the end many of them do. People who have been displaced for socio-political reasons do not choose to do so at an ideal stage in their lives. Although some exiled scholars are young and without children, some are older and have accompanying dependents, while others may have health problems. Hence, their life conditions may not allow them to engage in full-time work, settle down, and start a new life in another country all at once. Besides, most do not speak German. Adapting to living in a new country as a family requires time and energy. Learning a new language also takes time away from work. Furthermore, exiled scholars and their families often lack the support networks available to economic immigrants as their mobility is not a planned or coordinated process. Hence, short-term stipends with no prospects for extension, no time to learn the language, and no social benefits attached to them fail to acknowledge the real situation of exiled scholars, who require more substantial and longer-term support.

It has recently been announced that current and upcoming PSI fellows at the AvH Foundation and at-risk scholars supported by the Einstein Foundation may now have regular work contracts with their host institutions instead of stipends (which excluded social rights and benefits). This is a very welcome step that can help with the longer-term integration of these scholars into the labor market in particular and into society in general. This new mechanism could facilitate social security, residential status, and career development prospects for the exiled scholars. Thus, hosting institutions must put these newly created opportunities in practice so that exiled researchers can have the same social rights and benefits as their colleagues in German academia.

Improving Existing Support at German HEIs

Why is it beneficial for HEIs in Germany to include exiled scholars and make use of their diverse training, experiences, and skills? Today, universities that embrace “diversity discourse” and implement it in practice are attracting the best brains from different parts of the globe and creating a more conducive working environment to innovation. Such an environment can also lead to more inclusive, peaceful, and democratic societies that value fairness and justice. Thus, if a culture of anti-discrimination, inclusion, and diversity can be established at HEIs, its effects would go beyond the universities and form a dialogical culture in the whole country.

This policy brief stresses the importance of the three building blocks put forward by the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (FADA) in 2020, based on the General Equal Treatment Act (*Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz – AGG*). The document, entitled *Building Blocks for Systematic Protection against Discrimination at Universities*¹ is crucial for the inclusion of exiled scholars in German HEIs, and thus for protection of academic freedom and sustaining a modern, diverse culture. The first of these building blocks suggests conducting research on the extent of discrimination, inclusion, and diversity at universities. This will help assess the current situation through collecting smart data, identifying discrimination risks, enabling monitoring, making discrimination visible, and raising awareness of the issue. It would also lead the way to public discussions on the inclusion of differently positioned people, the disabled, older age groups, LGBTQI+, refugees and exiles as well as people with different ethnic, social, and/or migratory backgrounds. Although diversity and anti-discrimination objectives and measures have been on the agenda for a while, it is still not clear for all involved actors what diversity really means and which groups are affected most by discrimination at the university. Research and public discussion would overcome this problem. The study “Experiences of International Students and Students with a ‘Migration Background’” conducted at Technische Hochschule Mittelhessen (THM) may serve as an example. It investigated the experiences of international THM students and THM students with a “migration background” in their university life, whether they experienced discrimination and racism, how they dealt with these experiences, and provided recommendations for action.² The questionnaire of the study has been published and can be adapted by other universities to target other groups such as exiled scholars.

1 *Bausteine für einen systematischen Diskriminierungsschutz an Hochschulen*. Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, 2020, https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/publikationen/Expertisen/bausteine_f_e_systematischen_diskrimschutz_an_hochschulen.html. Accessed May 25, 2021.

2 *Bausteine*, 14–15.

A Taxonomy of Support Programs for Exiled Scholars Active in Germany

Name of Organization	Description	Type of Support
Philipp Schwartz Initiative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH-PSI)	Provides universities and research institutions in Germany with the means to host at-risk foreign researchers for a period of 24 months on a fully funded research fellowship. An extension is possible under a co-financing model.	Germany-wide fellowship program funded by the Federal Foreign Office. Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for host institutions and researchers • Information, advice & referrals • Training/career development opportunities • Mentoring and networking opportunities for researchers at risk. • Auxiliary funds for host institutions to help establish long-term support structures and fund individual career development activities
State of Bremen Scholarship Program (similar programs exist in other German states, e.g. Baden-Württemberg, Hamburg and Hessen)	The Senator for Science, Health, and Consumer Protection of the State of Bremen supports PhD and postdoctoral candidates whose scientific work in their home country is endangered due to persecution and threats.	Fellowships funded by regional governments. Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for teaching and research by exiled scholars • Training/career development opportunities
Academy in Exile	Offers scholars who are threatened in their home countries because of their academic or civic engagement for human rights, peace and democracy, the opportunity to resume their research abroad.	Thematic program in the form of residential fellowships with diverse funding sources. (the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, the Volkswagen Foundation, IIE-SRF, the Freudenberg Foundation, and the Andrew Mellon Foundation). Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for researchers • Support in research and teaching • Networking and training opportunities
The Einstein Foundation	Two special programs (Einstein Junior Scholars and Einstein Guest Researchers) enable researchers and scientists who are experiencing constraints in their work around the world to come to Berlin for two years to pursue their research without undue restrictions or threats.	Fellowships supported by the foundation with funds from the State of Berlin. Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for researchers • Research support • Networking opportunities • Individual career development opportunities
Academics in Solidarity	Peer-mentoring program, administered by Freie Universität Berlin, that connects exiled researchers and established scholars in Germany, Lebanon, and Jordan.	Transnational network and mentoring program, funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer-mentoring • Research and career support through training • Networking opportunities • Small grants for research activities
Inspireurope	Alliance of ten European partner organizations, coordinated by Scholars at Risk Europe at Maynooth University, Ireland, and aiming at creating a long-term, cross-sectoral, Europe-wide support structure for researchers at risk.	Transnational cooperation between European and national initiatives in support of researchers at risk, funded under the European Commission's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination of efforts between national and European support mechanisms for at-risk scholars • Analysis of existing support and development of policy recommendations • Training and guidance for researchers at risk, host institutions and further stakeholders • Outreach, networking and awareness-raising
Off-University	Established by exiled researchers and their supporter colleagues in Germany. It creates new strategies to uphold and sustain academic life and knowledge threatened by anti-democratic and authoritarian regimes.	Bottom-up initiative founded by exiled scholars in Germany, funded by Rosa Luxembourg Foundation and Open Society Foundation, as well as from AvH-PSI stipendiats' lump-sum budgets for tandem teaching with dismissed scholars. Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online teaching opportunities • Tandem courses • Exchange of experiences and collaborative research

As mentioned above, exiled scholars experience unique problems due to their forced displacement. Thus, their support needs are different than most other groups at universities, including people who grew up in Germany but come from a migration background. Detailed research conducted by universities would reveal the needs of exiled scholars and bring to light the difficulties they experience in their adaptation to and inclusion in the university and working life in particular and to society in general. In fact, each group of people affected by discrimination and exclusion has unique problems and needs. These need to be addressed by developing measures that are specific to the needs of that particular group. Rather than collating all the tasks under the rubric of “diversity management” and trying to address all dimensions of diversity such as age, disability, chronic illness, gender, religion, ethnic and social background at the same time, the Diversity Strategy document of Technische Universität Berlin³ prioritizes countering only one or two dimensions of discrimination in a specific time period. During that time period, all work and effort is focused on that particular dimension. Exiled scholars could be considered as a particular group affected by discrimination and exclusion in different ways than the groups mentioned above. They have their specific problems and needs, and therefore this special focus can find its unique place in the strategy documents of universities.

The second building block in the FADA document suggests bringing together all actors and offices at a university who are active in the context of anti-discrimination and support for excluded groups. There are multiple measures and offices in universities to support diversity and prevent discrimination; however, these measures are often unaligned. The uncoordinated structure and lack of exchange between various existing services at the university are challenging for exiled scholars, who need support in different areas ranging from residence permits, childcare arrangements, and language learning to mentor support and career advice. Currently, international offices of the universities provide support services for exiled scholars, but in most cases their capacities to respond to varying needs are limited. Thus, services of other existing structures must be available to support these scholars. Other groups that are affected by discrimination and exclusion would also benefit from a coordination of efforts, as stated in the FADA document. As a case in point, the “Equal Treatment and Non-discrimination Round Table” at RWTH Aachen University (Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule Aachen) is an example of good practice for an effective coordination and network structure promoting diversity within a university. It includes, among others, the equal opportunities office, international office, family services, the staff council for academics, and social advising. The advising services and the tasks of each body are defined clearly in a document compiled by the Equal Opportunity Office in May, 2020. However, the outcomes of their work have not been published.⁴

Furthermore, building a close relationship between university equality commissions and equal opportunities offices in charge of preventing discrimination and enhancing diversity at the university is especially important because the former is a representative structure that consists of junior and senior faculty, temporary researchers/lecturers, administrative staff, and students. It is also advisable to include a representative of exiled scholars in university equality commissions. Equality commissions act as clearance agencies for equal opportunities offices, receive complaints and suggestions from the university community, and propose intra-university policies for equity and decent working conditions. Relationships between administrative offices and representative structures are always crucial for better monitoring and implementation of the adapted policies. A good example is the Gender Equality and Diversity Action Plan of the Goethe University, Frankfurt for the 2019–2024 period.⁵ The action plan brings together all previous initiatives on gender equality and diversity policies, stressing the benefits of diversity-sensitive policies in creating a decent work environment for all. Furthermore, it clearly emphasizes that new measures should be developed through a participatory process, with inclusion especially of the affected parties, in the planning and implementation of policies. Coordination of the targeted themes in the strategy document and their implementation by respective structures in the university are also stressed, as in TU Berlin’s strategy document mentioned above.

The third building block suggested by the FADA document *Building Blocks for Systematic Protection against Discrimination at Universities* is to develop affirmative action policies to attain equal opportunities for all at universities.⁶ Each university can examine individually, based on the university-specific situation and diversity, where disadvantages exist for certain students or employees and how these can be compensated. A good example is the goal of the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences at Technische Hochschule Köln to create an inclusive faculty. For this purpose, an “Action Guide for an Inclusive Faculty” has been developed, which reflects on how the university can change with regard to inclusion, the needs of different groups, and what measures are necessary. In a lateral approach, the categories of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, educational responsibility, caregiving responsibility, impairment, nationality, migration background, and religious belief are considered.⁷ The mentoring program for at-risk scholars at University of Cologne and the larger North-Rhine Westphalia area is also a related good example, which other host institutions could take as a model. Due to

3 Diversity Strategy—Equal Opportunities at Technische Universität Berlin. Technische Universität Berlin, https://www.static.tu.berlin/fileadmin/www/10000000/Arbeiten/Wichtige_Dokumente/Diversity_Strategy_TU_Berlin.pdf. Accessed Apr. 1, 2021.

4 “Equal Treatment and Non-discrimination Round Table”. RWTH Aachen University, <https://www.rwth-aachen.de/go/id/enu/lidx/1>. Accessed Apr. 1, 2021.

5 Goethe-Universität Chancen= Zentralen Aktionsplan Chancengleichheit der Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main 2019-2024. Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main, https://www.uni-frankfurt.de/77244552/Aktionsplan_Chancengleichheit_Goethe_Universitat_2019_2024.pdf. Accessed Apr. 4, 2021.

6 Bausteine, 32.

7 Werner, Melanie, et al. Fachhochschule Köln Fakultät für Angewandte Sozialwissenschaften Aktionsleitfaden für eine inklusive Fakultät, https://www.th-koeln.de/mam/downloads/deutsch/hochschule/fakultaeten/f01/aktionsleitfaden_f%C3%BCR_eine_inklusive_fakult%C3%A4t.pdf. Accessed May 25, 2021.

a lack of funding, it had to be put on hold in 2019, but the career development schemes and individual mentoring opportunities have been helpful for exiled researchers in the

area. Such regional collaborations are promising in terms of meeting the needs of researchers as well as creating dialogue and social and research networking among them.

Recommendations

- The contract-based employment options in host institutions announced by the AvH-PSI as well as the Einstein Foundation are good alternatives to stipends as they include social rights and benefits for exiled scholars. Universities must make sure that these new opportunities are explicitly offered to exiled scholars who could benefit from this recently announced policy.
- Exiled scholars need at least one year dedicated to language learning and adapting to life in Germany. Funding and hosting institutions need to take this into account while arranging their support plans.
- Inclusion of each specific group in the HEIs, be it women, older people, persons with disabilities, non-hegemonic sexual orientation, persons with different ethnic, social and/or migratory backgrounds, or exiled scholars, requires special sets of programs and policies tailored to the needs of each particular group. As in the case of exiled scholars, measures to support them and sustain their inclusion in the universities should be formulated and implemented in accordance with their specific needs, and this can only be done through detailed research. University administrators should consider exiled scholars as one of the specific groups to be included in their diversity, non-discrimination, and equal opportunities action plans.
- There is need for better coordination and information exchange between the different actors and offices at universities that work to combat discrimination and exclusion and provide services to enhance diversity and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. The support services of international offices, equal opportunities offices, family services, staff councils, and social advising units could be better coordinated and integrated. Not only exiled scholars, but every disadvantaged group would benefit from such a practice, which would improve the reach and effectiveness of services provided.
- Affirmative action policies would improve favorable representation of diverse groups including exiled scholars. Participation of a diverse group of people representing each disadvantaged group in equality commissions would be a best practice with potential benefits for the university as an institution, open the way for democratic decision-making in higher education, and contribute to a more inclusive German society.

This policy brief presents opinions of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the views of Academics in Solidarity, Freie Universität Berlin or the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

About the project

Academics in Solidarity is a mentoring program that connects exiled researchers and established scholars in Germany, Lebanon and Jordan. It seeks to create a transnational network of solidarity, strengthen the value of cross-cultural research cooperation and open up new perspectives for displaced scholars within the academic environment of the host countries.

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