

A new aspect of internationalization? Specific challenges and support structures for refugees on their way to German higher education

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Abstract

Education is a crucial topic for asylum seekers and refugees: Many of them have high educational aspirations and the level of education determines their chances of integration and success in the host country. Supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the German Academic Exchange Service, universities, universities of applied sciences and preparatory colleges started programs to assist refugees and asylum seekers on their way to and through higher education. Based on a system theoretical intersectional perspective, his article will work out what first contacts for refugees, members of the international offices and a vice-president of internationalization at 5 German higher education institutions identify as specific challenges for refugees and asylum seekers on their way to German higher education. Then, it comparatively introduces the support structures those 5 German HEI have implemented. It recommends supporting HEIs financially to help them institutionalize their support-structures and working towards a framing of refugees as potentially highly performing international students and a positive enrichment of a diverse and international HEI.

Key Words

Refugees, asylum seekers, access to higher education, internationalization, higher education, intersectionality

1 Introduction

In 2015 and 2016, the number of asylum applications spiked in some European countries. With the increased numbers the question of how to integrate refugees and asylum seekers into higher education institutions (HEIs) became more and more relevant. Many of them have high educational aspirations (Brücker et al. 2016) and their level of education determines their chances of integration and success in the host country (Fortin et al. 2016). Supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), universities, universities of applied sciences and preparatory colleges started programs to assist refugees on their way to and through higher education (Fourier et al. 2017).

Based on a system theoretical intersectional perspective, this article will work out what first contacts for refugees, members of the international offices and a vice-president at 5 German HEIs of internationalization identify as specific challenges for refugees and asylum seekers¹ on their way to German higher education and then focus on how German HEIs support them. Concluding, it will be argued to back up HEIs financially in order to encourage and help the process of institutionalizing supporting structures; and also to target more networking and exchange of information between the HEI. The article argues for an understanding of refugee students as internationals, as an addition to the HEIs and societies diversity and as potential highly skilled students.

2 Access to higher education for international students, asylum seekers and refugees in Germany

Regardless of their residential status, refugees can apply to any higher education institution; as long as they fulfil the general criteria for international applicants they will be treated as international students (Study In n.y.a). Mostly that means to hold a university entrance qualification and speak the required language, which in the vast majority of German Bachelor programs is German, on a C1 level. Study preparation and access to higher education in Germany are central issues for international students: 32% of them come to Germany with a high school diploma, while 21% had previously studied abroad, but had not completed their studies (Apolinarski and Poskowsky 2013, p. 4). International diplomas need to go through a process of recognition before being acknowledged as university entrance qualifications in Germany. The German Act of Recognition, however, is not applicable to school certificates obtained in non-EU countries (Anerkennung in Deutschland n.y.). Therefore, the matriculation offices or international offices of higher education institutions take decision on the eligibility.

Preparatory courses are a crucial part for access to higher education. Prospective international, refugee and asylum seeking students with secondary diplomas that are not recognized as university entrance qualification in Germany have to take an assessment test (*'Feststellungsprüfung'*). They can enrol in either private or public² preparatory colleges (*'Studienkollegs'*) to study for this test (Studienkollegs.de n.y.). The two-semester courses cover terminology and basic knowledge in the desired academic field. In 2012, 18% of all international students had to visit a preparatory college (Apolinarski and Poskowsky 2013, p. 5).

While technically refugees are treated like all international (prospective) students during their application and enrolment, during the phase of study preparations they receive special support in order to deal with their specific situation. For example, the entrance criteria for the preparatory colleges already include advanced knowledge of the German language. Therefore, special classes prepare refugees for the entrance test in order to enrol in the preparatory courses that lead to the

¹ While it will generally be referred to refugees in this text, technically, some of the prospective students are also asylum-seekers, which means they do not have received a refugee status yet (see Columbia n.y.).

² Cost and availability of preparatory colleges depend on the German state and the individual college.

assessment test (Studienkolleg Hannover n.y.). Additionally, HEIs started offering courses, for example language and maths classes, to support prospective refugee students on their way to higher education (Beigang and von Blumenthal 2016). Therefore, preparatory colleges and preparatory courses can be seen as important institutions for the internationalization of German HEI.

3 Challenges and support for refugees and asylum seekers at German HEIs

In order to work out specific challenges for refugees on their way to higher education, and to compare the support and integration programs at different HEIs, I conducted 8 expert interviews (Kruse 2015, p. 166 et seq.; Bogner et al. 2002) at 5 HEIs in 4 German states (*'Bundesländer'*). My interview-partners were first contacts for refugees, members of international offices, one head of an international office and one vice-president for internationalization. The sample consists of members of five HEIs, two universities of applied sciences and three universities, in 4 different German states and regions. The HEIs have been sampled based on a regional cluster to cover different areas in Germany and on their support for refugees (existing support and special programs). An additional criterion was to include a university of excellence³. I analysed the interviews and the mission statements for internationalization as well as the information for refugees offered by the universities' website with content analysis (Mayring 2010). In the following, an overview of the specific challenges for refugees the interview-partners described will be given, followed by short descriptions of the sampled HEIs and their support for refugees.

3.1 Specific challenges on the way to higher education for refugees and asylum seekers: an intersectional approach

The situation of refugees can be understood as an intersection of various influencing factors of marginalization. This means, that those factors don't simply coexist or add up, but interdepend and influence each other. They cannot be understood independently, but have to be considered within their interdependence (see Müller 2011, p. 305). Instead of focussing on set factors like race, class and gender, as it is often done in intersectional approaches (see Müller 2011, pp. 302ff.; Weinbach 2008), I focus on the factors influencing refugees' integration into HEIs that members of HEI describe from their perspective⁴. By doing this, I follow Weinbach's (2008) System Theory approach to Intersectionality. The factors highlighted here are those influencing the inclusion into the HEI as an organization, and cannot be understood as a holistic representation of challenges refugees face within the host society. Some of those factors also apply for national or international students with no background of forced migration, and the specific combination depends on the individual situation. It can be assumed that some issues are amplified and others added by the specific situation of refugees. Also, their impact differs. While language and entrance qualification influence the access to higher education directly, others can be crucial hindrances for learning conditions and the general possibility of remaining in higher education.

Prospective international students face a variety of challenges in Germany. It can be assumed that to some extent refugees face similar difficulties as all international students, amplified by and in addition to hindrances arising from their specific situation. In addition to entrance qualification (Brücker et al. 2016, p. 5) and language, literature on the situation of international students in German identifies

³ The excellence initiative is a program by German's federal and state's governments to fund and support outstanding programs and institutions at selected universities. In intervals of 7 years, universities have to apply with proposed excellence clusters. Each time, 11 universities will be selected to be of excellence and receive the funding (see BMBF n.y.).

⁴ This paper is based on the perspective of members of German HEIs. For an advanced understanding of the situation and needs of refugees, their perspective must be considered. Studies as the WeGe-project (www.wege.dzhw.eu) are working at this task. It can be assumed and some studies show that refugees will have different perspectives on some of those aspects, or even add completely others (see Stevenson and Willot 2007). Harris and Marlowe indicate that staff members do not always "recognise important factors contributing to" (ibid. 2011: 190) refugee students' performance. Examples are aspects of age (Schammann and Younso 2016, p. 28) and gender (Hobsig 2004), who have only been mentioned briefly in the interviews this paper is based on.

several issues, for example the study culture, finances (Schammann and Younso 2016, pp. 12-13), social isolation, information and support (Ebert and Heublein, 2017; Levantino 2016, p. 90), gaps in the educational biography (Ebert and Heublein 2017, p. 32) and residential status as possible central challenges for access to and success in higher education in Germany (Apolinarski and Poskowsky 2013; Morris-Lange 2017). Trauma (Joyce et al. 2010) and residence obligations for asylum seekers are examples for additional hindrances for (prospective) students with a background of forced migration. Throughout the interviews, several challenges for prospective refugee and asylum seeking students were described by HEIs members. In the following, I will give an overview of those challenges, which are closely connected and interdependent.

Language

'It stands and falls with German language training and finances' (Interview international office member, University E, translated by JB)

Speaking German is a crucial skill and a requirement to apply for German higher education and for entering the preparatory colleges. Preparatory colleges usually require German on at least a B1 level; HEIs often require a C1 level for inscription and also B1 for preparatory classes. More than one third of all international students state their German is bad (Morris-Lange 2017, p. 21; Apolinarski and Poskowsky 2013, p. 48). A total of 54% of international students state to have acquired first language skills before coming to Germany. Refugees seem to start with less previous experience. In a study of the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) with 4500 refugees in Germany, 90% stated to not have had any knowledge of German when entering the country (Brücker et al. 2016, p. 7); there is no statistical information on the selective group of those who plan on studying, but according to the interviews, the level of refugees' German language skills is regularly very low in the beginning. The missing language skills of prospective refugee students in comparison with other foreign students are explained by some interview-partners with the unpredicted nature of their stay in Germany. Since they mostly did not plan to study in Germany, they did not prepare the stay with language classes.

Another issue is the diverse quality of language classes offered for refugees. Not all of them are accepted by the universities, so it has to be certain classes, who on the other hand are not always accepted by the job centres or the immigration office. This points out another issue: Refugees have to generally consider rules, requirements and restrictions of several institutions connected to their financial situation and their residential status.

A multitude of bureaucratic requirements

The life of asylum seekers is highly regulated in Germany. Benefits, accommodation and integration support like language classes or integration courses are connected with official requirements they have to meet. They differ locally by land and on the municipal level and partly depend directly on the person responsible. Schammann shows exemplarily, how the Asylbewerberleistungsgesetzes (AsylbLG), the law that regulates social benefits for refugees in Germany, depends on the interpretation of local officials (Schammann 2015, pp. 168 et seq.) and Täubig argues, that the highly regulated and repressive everyday living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees are designed to inhibit quick integration rather than to support it (Täubig 2009). The complication of access to higher education can be one example for that. Especially during study preparations, different and even contradicting regulations and unclear responsibilities can lead to difficulties for prospective refugee students. For example, meeting the requirements for social benefit can contradict or prevent the visit of preparatory classes. A member of the international office at university E describes a case, when several members of a family had to drop out study preparations in order to take part in a job-creation program:

'I experienced it once with a whole family that somebody really worked against it. So he, I fought a long time for him to be allowed to take the German class, and fought long for the wife to also be allowed to take the German class. They all had to stop, because the job-centre or the consultant did completely

not support it. It simply could not be. They absolutely had to take part in a job-creation program.' (Interview international office member, University E, translated by JB)

Finances

Depending on the level of income in the country of origin, the family background and potential scholarships, finances can be a serious difficulty for international students, despite the comparatively low study costs in Germany (Morris-Lange 2017: 23). For asylum seekers and refugees, finances can be a crucial hindrance. Especially during the preparatory classes, they depend on benefits under the Asylum-seekers Benefit Act or Unemployment Benefit II (ALG II) (Study In, n.y.b). Depending on the length of their stay and their residential status, refugees can be supported by student loans granted under Germany's Federal Education Assistance Act (BAföG) while studying, which in one interview is described as an advantage of refugees in comparison to international students. The application requires a confirmation of admission to a HEI and can be a high bureaucratic obstacle even for national students (Morris-Lange 2017, p. 12; also see Schammann and Younso 2016, pp. 12-13). Even though a lot of the programs universities offer for refugees are for free or financially supported, especially the time of study preparations is precarious up to impossible; while official responsibilities for financial support are unclear.

,The BAföG-office says, it is the job-centres responsibility to pay during the hold-up time, and the job-centre says, nah, we don't, because it is supposed to be supported by BaföG.' (Interview international office member, University E, translated by JB).

Entrance Qualification and missing documents

While 32% of refugees hold a secondary school degree with a university entrance qualification, which according to the IAB are in most cases likely to be acknowledged as such (Brücker et al. 2016, p. 5), as for all prospective international students the non-recognition of foreign degrees can be a serious obstacle. In 2012, 18% of all international students had to visit a preparatory college, because their qualification was not recognized as university entrance qualification (Apolinarski and Poskowsky 2013, p. 5). For refugees, there are some additional hindrances to be considered, an example for some cases is incomplete paperwork due to the circumstances of migration. A special case are students from Eritrea, where a lot of people go to school, but only get a certificate after finishing their military service (ibid., p. 6). In case a certificate or diploma is missing, the residential status becomes important. Based on a decision of the German ministers of Education and the Arts, refugees can be given several options to still apply for higher education in case their documents are missing due to the circumstances of forced migration. The possibilities range from suitability tests to declaration on oath and vary not only in between German states, but also single universities (Study In n.y.c). Also, especially in areas of armed conflict, a lot of refugees dropped out of school without finishing it.

Gap in educational biography

Another challenge for refugees is the gap in their educational biography. It can be assumed that it took them some time to arrive in Germany, and then it takes time to meet the criteria for applying and enrolling at HEIs. At the time they are able to start preparatory colleges or apply for higher education, they might have been outside educational institutions for years. That adds up to cultural differences of learning and language barriers. Because of the time needed for study-preparation, the interview-partners argue that the numbers of applicants with a background of forced migration will increase heavily soon, since the people that arrived in 2015 and 2016 will soon meet the formal criteria and language proficiency to enrol.

Study culture

Studies show that typical elements of higher education differ internationally. According to the members of the HEI, mode of discussion, self-discipline etc. can be issues for international students

and refugees who have been socialized in different learning environments. Getting accustomed to a new study culture can take time and hard work, especially after some time completely outside of educational institutions (Morris Lange 2017, p. 22). When asked for specific challenges for refugees that want to access higher education, five of the eight interview-partners described teaching and learning styles and different organisation structures of HEIs as crucial issues.

„That group work is rather unknown. That 'chalk and talk' teaching is preferred.’ (Interview first contact, University D, translated by JB)

As a solution, they proposed social integration and intense counselling.

Social Isolation

Many international students state that they would like to have contact with national students but find it difficult (Apolinarski and Poskowsky 2013, p. 48). Since their support networks are mostly abroad, they need that contact for personal reasons, but most likely also to help them get along in German higher education institutions (Morris-Lange 2017, p. 25). One interview-partner also mentioned this network when it comes to getting internship-positions. Throughout the interview, contact to peers is argued to be an important factor for social integration and therefore academic integration in Germany.

„Actually the biggest win is that they finally meet Germans at the same age. Which is great and to me an example of really successful integration, because at some point this, this factor, is somebody a refugee or not, it does not matter at some point, because it is simply, yes, contact to peers.’ (Interview first contact, UAS B, translated by JB)

Based on this, the interview-partners argue to teach international students with and without a background of forced migration together as soon as possible and quickly integrate refugees in regular classes.

Information

The availability and utilisation of consultation and support vary in connection to the local network and available information. As the first contacts describe it, for many refugees, personal interactions seem to be more important than information on the websites (see Baker et al. 2017).

„They generally look for information. So the self-information is not very strong. Many want information from face to face interaction, instead of looking it up at the internet first, as I would do it.’ (Interview first contact University D, translated by JB)

Generally, international students make use of information centres more often than national students (Ebert and Heublein 2016). For refugees, counselling is especially important and also difficult because of the already mentioned involvement of many actors and regulations: “The plurality of actors involved and complexity of legislation furthermore make it difficult for refugees to quickly get the information they require, and to understand it correctly” (Levantino 2016, p. 90). Especially during the interview with first contacts, the need of valid information was constantly emphasized and it was criticised that information gained via a personal network can be misleading, but also that incorrect information was given to the refugees from other institutions.

„Many refugees that come to me daily have been given wrong information. [...] For example from friends, acquaintances, the job-centre.’ (Interview first contact UAS A, translated by JB)

Residential status

More than two third of international students come from countries outside the European Union and need a residence permit in order to stay in Germany which needs to be renewed frequently. Academic success and finances have an impact on the renewal process. Even for successful students, this process can mean a lot of stress and put additional pressure on them and their studies (Morris-Lange 2017, p. 24). Nonetheless, the specific situation of refugees generally seems to be more insecure. Processing times in the Asylum procedure can be months, but also last over a year (Brands and Morris-Lange, 2016) and it is unclear if study success influences the procedure at all. Long waiting periods accompanied by the fear of deportation can cause high “psychological cost of uncertainty awaiting the outcome of the recognition process” (Levantino 2016, p. 90).

Residence obligation and infrastructure

The (in)ability to choose their place of living and their freedom of movement inside the country can be an important factor for refugees. Especially during the first months, they are under residence obligations, and not able to choose their place of living. Even after that, preparatory classes are only available at certain locations, so if refugees are able to participate depends on where and how well connected they live. In relation to the cooperation with other relevant institutions, as the job-centres, one interview-partner mentions that it was much easier to work with the one in the university's city than with job-centres in the region. Two interview-partners mentioned the financing of public transportation tickets as a crucial hindrance for some prospective students.

„But it is very difficult that the refugees pay for the ticket to the free language class themselves. Not all of them can do that.” (Interview first contact UAS A, translated by JB)

Trauma and psychological stress

Having to flee a conflict zone, potentially leaving family and friends behind, living in a new country under restricted conditions and never knowing how long one is able to stay- all interview-partners mention the insecure living conditions and past and present trauma as a huge challenge for refugees; they are at least a constant distraction, up to a major influence on productivity and aspirations. Most HEIs do not offer specific psychological counselling for traumatized people. While on the one hand refugees can use the general psychological counselling HEIs offer, the vice-president for internationalization at UAS A refers to the responsibility of the whole society, which points at the fact that the integration of refugees into higher education does not only depend on the support they receive from preparatory colleges and HEIs.

„When he have many traumatized people in the country, then it is actually a task of the country to take care of it. And I do think it has to be taken care of, but I don't know if it is the university's task” [Interview vice-president for internationalization, UAS A, translated by JB]

Absence

Three interview-partners describe absence from preparatory classes as a central issue. They explain it with other responsibilities within the multitude of bureaucratic requirements, family issues, a lack of motivation caused by trauma, the need to work due to financial issues and religious reasons for absence during Ramadan. This shows how challenges on several levels manifest as an influence on study success.

„If a family member is doing badly, they sometimes stay at home. Because at this moment one has to take care of the family, not of the German class” (Interview first contact, University D, translated by JB)

3.2 Support structures at German HEI

In order to help refugees to deal with the previously described challenges, the different HEIs in the sample institutionalized different support structures and offers. Hereafter, the HEIs will be shortly described and an overview of their support for refugees will be given.

University of Applied Sciences (UAS) A is focused on the combination of theory and praxis with praxis-oriented teaching and on internationally oriented research. Internationalization is a crucial part in the UAS mission statement and broadly promoted in order to support students' career opportunities and extend research possibilities in a globalized world and market. Therefore, the position of a vice-president for internationalization has newly been implemented and online-courses, international study-programs, exchange programs, partnerships and international research cooperation are maintained and extended. The UAS A is well appointed with funds and staff: While the Universities of Applied Sciences A and B have about the same number of students, there are 532 enrolled students per person working at the international office, 182 less than at UAS B.

Within the international office, a position for the counselling of refugees has been established in November 2016. Since there is no nearby preparatory college available, the UAS offers a three stages study preparations program, including counselling, language classes and academic preparation. The program is supported by local companies, who offer funding. Further offerings are social events, (already existing) international study programs in English and online-classes. The information on the website is addressed to prospective refugee students. While there is broad support and even funding offered, the online information for refugees is only available in German. This HEI is the only one in the sample that offers applying refugees to benefit them by raising their entrance qualification grades during the application process.

University of Applied Sciences B is practice-oriented and works closely together with relevant companies. In the University of Applied Science's Profile, student mobility is described as a crucial part in supporting the career opportunities for local students. The international office mostly focuses on student mobility, mainly via exchange programs and international study programs. There are 714 enrolled students per person working at the international office. A position of a vice-president for internationalization and a mission statement for internationalization have not been established yet, but within the international office, there is a department for the support of the internationalization process and of social inclusion for international students.

Within this department, the engagement for refugees is coordinated. This was initially done within the regular working hours and partly as voluntary work. Starting with September 2017, a 20% position for the consultation of refugees was established. Even though there was no institutionalized position to do it, due to a lot of voluntary activities the University of Applied Sciences B started a supporting program in 2015. The three stages program includes counselling, language and academic courses and support for social integration. The University of Applied Sciences B has its own preparatory college. In addition to this and in cooperation with the local university, audits, trips and other social events, access to the library and Wi-Fi and information on studying and applying are offered. Detailed information and related links are provided on the website in German and English. They are addressed to prospective refugee students and to already enrolled students who want to support refugees. Special about this HEI is a program that allows enrolled students to do an intercultural training and collect credit in exchange for their support of refugees. In an interview, the first contact for refugees explained, that this way the voluntary engagement should be acknowledged and maintained after the topic is not present in the media anymore.

University C is a university of excellence with a profile of high quality research and a strong orientation towards internationalization and diversity. The mission statement for internationalization includes the mobility of students and academic staff, as well as research-cooperation and the internationalization of teaching, including international study-programs. It explicitly emphasises on service for all

international incomings beyond academic questions, and a comprehensive approach. Internationalization is meant to attract the best researchers and students and not only understood as the international office's task, but as a mission of every university institution. Per person working at the international office, the university has 571 enrolled students.

The support for refugees is located at the university's centre for diversity, where a 50% position has been established as a first contact and counsellor for refugees. This allocation is different to the other HEIs, where it is mostly located within the international office. It can be explained with a focus on the special needs on refugees and also with a generally stronger involvement of the centre for diversity with international students. Information for refugees on the website are available in German and mostly also in English; they address prospective students as well as academics with a background of forced migration. Most information is about the universities counselling and support offers and on criteria to apply and enrol. Support programs for refugees at university C include language classes, audits, infrastructure (access to premises, the library and wifi), a buddy-program and students initiatives like a refugee law clinic. The first contact for refugees explains in the interview, that most of the service for refugee and asylum seeking prospective students is included in services that already existed and are now extended. Newly implanted offers are the counselling service and language classes. They started in 2015. A special offer that is embedded in already existing institutional structures is psychological counselling for people with trauma.

University D is one of the leading Technical Universities in Germany. Within its extensive internationalization mission statement, the focus is on student mobility and exchange, additional points are networking, research cooperation, researcher's mobility and the support of a north-south dialogue. Cooperation and aims to win new international students are targeted at certain areas. The head of the international office explains this regional focus with historically grown structures. Within the sample, the international office has about half the staff compared to University E, and also less international office employees but more than double as many students as University C. There are 1627 enrolled students for every person working at the international office.

Within the international office, a 50% position has been established to counsel refugees and administrate special offers for them. The university's homepage offers information for prospective students, mostly on entrance criteria, preparatory courses and colleges, relevant institutions and offers at the university and finances. For researchers with a refugee background, contact information is given in order to support connection and access to the university. All information is given in English. In addition to academic and language preparation and the regular offers of the international office and student counselling, a buddy program and students volunteer projects offer social inclusion and a refugee law clinic.

University E is the biggest university in the sample; it is almost two and a half times as large as University C. While it does have a strong focus on internationalization in its mission statement, no position of a vice-president for internationalization has been established yet. Internationalization includes research cooperation, student and staff mobility and international study programs and is strongly seen in connection with a globalized market. Per person working at the international office, there are 982 enrolled students.

Within the international office, a 50% position for the counselling and the coordination of support-offerings for refugees has been established in April 2017. Before that, it was done in addition to the regular work by another member of the international office. The person the university lists as a first contact for refugees is a volunteering emeritus professor, who also offers counselling for refugees. The university's homepage offers detailed information on formal criteria for applying and enrolling, missing documents, language classes and preparatory courses for prospective refugee students and academics with a background of forced migration in German and English; central information is also available in

Arabic, Sorani and Kurmanji. Compared to most other HEIs, the extensive information available on the website for refugee and asylum seeking academics is remarkable. The university supports refugees with German classes, audits, counselling and library-access and offers cooperation and networking for academics with a refugee background.

All HEIs in the sample did not have special offers for refugees before 2015, which shows how closely the HEIs are connected to the topics of society. It can be understood as part of their *'Reflexivität'* (reflexivity) (Weinbach 2008, p. 183), which means that HEIs as organisations reflect on their environment and try to find ways to include refugees in their system of higher education. Many of them describe helping to integrate and educate refugees as one of their contributions to society, while also they expect support and integration programs from society, the government and other actors. How far they can support refugees depends on the financial background and also on previously existing structures. For example, the only university in the sample that offers special counselling for traumatized people did already work on that topic before. For some questions, the HEI's international office and counselling staff is just not qualified, so other structures are necessary.

'Of course sometimes people come, who are in the middle of legal actions because [...] they got a negative notification. Then we say, okay, there is a refugee law clinic or a lawyer must be asked, but we can't do this, also counsel on legal questions of asylum' (Interview first contact University C, translated by JB)

After 2015, even HEIs with small international offices set up broad support structures. A lot of them started out as volunteer work and then were institutionalized; at UAS B even the students support initiatives became a part of the 'Studium Generale' and can be rewarded with credit points. When the interviews took place, all of them either already have established or were establishing part-time positions for people in charge of counselling refugees and administrate supportive structures and courses. This is made possible by the 'Integra'-program of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. In most interviews, money was emphasized as a crucial factor in order to be able to guarantee the support. While generally the first contacts for refugees maintained connections to other people in similar positions, the need for a network to exchange ideas and experiences was mentioned several times.

4 Conclusion

Within their mission statements on internationalization, most HEIs focus on student mobility, more or less in accordance with academic staff's mobility and academic exchange. Different actors at the HEIs work at different aspects of the process of internationalization: academic exchange and international research projects are usually in the area of responsibility of individual academics or departments, students mobility and service for internationals is a huge part of the international offices work, while presidents and vice-presidents for internationalization focus on strategic cooperation and transfer of organizational structures. The support-offerings for refugees are usually also facilitated by many institutions throughout the HEIS, such as language centres, student counselling, centres for diversity and student initiatives.

While refugees are initially understood as prospective students with special needs, most interview-partners mention their social and academic inclusion and eventually the transformation to the status of (regular) international students as the most important concerns. Several challenges to refugees' inclusion in the HEI are emphasized by the HEI actors, and for some of them solutions are proposed. The integration of refugees into higher education is seen as a chance for them to improve their living conditions and help a quicker integration. Generally, all interview-partners assume that the number of refugees applying for higher education will keep rising.

The similar challenges that are described from the experience of different actors at 5 HEIs in 4 different German states suggest that structural support for refugees on their way to higher education is necessary; so are efforts to help social integration. The aim should be to minimize disadvantages. While the different challenges should be understood as interdependent intersections, their exact occurrence and impact depends largely on the individual situation. They cannot be addressed together by just one institution, but rather depend on the support by several actors and institutions. This includes several parts of the HEI, but also actors and institutions outside of higher education. Since language skills and entrance qualification are the most direct influence on compatibility with the HEI, all sampled HEI offer courses in this context. Within their path dependency of already existing structures, they organize additional offers to meet other challenges. In order to include refugees, as many of the named factors as possible should be addressed by HEI and surrounding organizations.

The internationalization of higher education is usually focused on program- and network-based partnerships and mobility and aims at winning high-income, highly trained students from specific areas. Since it often is a process that is pushed by and takes place within international competition, it seems obstructive to focus on refugees as people with special needs. They should rather be framed as a potential enrichment of a diverse and international HEI, but also as potential highly educated international students. Structures that are implemented to support them can be seen as a positive influence on the entire organization, since the supportive structure might also be of use for other students on a long term (see Schammann and Younso 2016, p. 46).

As a bottom line, the following points should be taken into consideration for higher education policy:

- The HEIs support of refugees depends on funding. Since finances are important to refugees as well as universities, the institutionalisation of supportive structures like counselling and special offers for refugees as well as the funding of refugees costs of living should be supported as much as possible.
- Most HEIs started their programs with volunteer work based on a try and error strategy. A strong network and guidelines concerning regulations and demands of other institutions can be a lot of help for them.
- While the HEI do an important job for integrating refugees, they cannot do it on their own. Integration and information for refugees should be treated as general tasks of the whole society. HEIs and actors outside of higher education should be encouraged to network and cooperate as much as possible.
- The information on the possibilities of studies for refugees should be pointed out to other relevant actors active in counselling refugees.
- Diversity and internationalization should be framed as positive factors within a globalized world and refugees should be seen as prospective highly capable students instead of exclusively focussing on their special needs.

5 References

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