

Germany: Policies for Internationalization

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In recent years, Germany has become the fourth in top international destinations for study abroad in the world. The German federal government places emphasis on internationalizing the higher education (HE) landscape and is progressively adopting new policies in order to strengthen it with the support of a range of actors, especially through the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

Higher Education Internationalization in Germany: Foundational Values

German federal policy is built on the value of HE as a public good and traditionally promotes a specific type of internationalization through cooperation, fostering academic freedom, contributing to development, and participating in efforts to solve global problems. The 2017 federal internationalization strategy focused on five targets: strengthening excellence through worldwide cooperation; developing Germany's innovative strength internationally; expanding education and training internationally; shaping the global knowledge society together with emerging and developing countries; and lastly, overcoming global challenges collectively.

In line with these targets, the new DAAD strategy 2025 emphasizes these values by stressing the importance of international mobility exchanges, research networking and collaboration, and taking global responsibility and contributing to development and peace. These ambitious goals are supported with impressive funding for various internationalization projects and activities through the DAAD, the German research foundation (DFG), or the federal ministry, and are implemented by research societies and higher education institutions (HEIs). Funding for international projects increased from EUR 567 million in 2009 to EUR 1.05 billion in 2019.

Following the DAAD's strategy, the German HE and research sector increases its attractiveness by being a largely tuition-free system valuing knowledge exchange. It is committed to the academic success of international students and to increasing the share of foreign academic staff to 15 percent of its academic workforce through advertising academic positions internationally. In recent years, information and marketing campaigns of the DAAD have aimed to promote world-class research, invest in international partnerships through cooperative study programs, and fund German international universities abroad (e.g., in Bahrain, Egypt, and Thailand). The DAAD positions itself as a leader on the discourse on internationalization in HE and research and sees itself as an influential agent in science diplomacy. In 2019, the DAAD had an overall budget of EUR 594 million and gave stipends to 145,659 students, graduates, and faculty, including 60,581 individuals from abroad and 85,078 individuals from Germany. The implementation of these ambitious strategies, however, depends on the HE systems of the 16 states (*Länder*) and the various HEIs.

Measures at the Level of Individual States

Comparing statistics on incoming mobility in Germany by state in the winter semesters of 1998–1999 and 2019–2020, we can observe that overall, the numbers of international students increased in all states. The highest increase happened in former Eastern German states (e.g., in Thuringia from 4 percent to 15 percent, Saxony-Anhalt from 4 percent to 16 percent, and Saxony from 6 percent to 17 percent, while Berlin, the capital of the country, boomed from 13 percent to 22 percent). Further, we can also observe differences in tuition fees. In most of the states, higher education for international students is usually free, but some states have introduced tuition fees, such as Baden-Württemberg, where since the winter semester 2017–2018, non-EU students have been charged

Abstract

Germany has become a top destination for study abroad, owing to its longstanding and specific approach to internationalization through nonprofit orientation and cooperation—a typical soft-power approach. The role of intermediary actors, especially the DAAD, has been crucial in this respect. Supportive measures are promoting internationalization at the federal and state levels. Meanwhile, the recent introduction of tuition fees in the southern states points to a slight distancing from Germany's traditional nonprofit orientation.

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EUR 1,500, or in Bavaria, where fees are charged to students who participate exclusively in study offers at branch campuses located outside the European Union, e.g., study programs at the Technical University of Munich Asia in Singapore. We can also see that different HEIs pursue different strategies when it comes to branch campuses, attracting and recruiting foreign academics, and supporting refugees via state-supported funding initiatives. All these measures point to soft power exercised by the states beyond legal frameworks, which are instruments of hard power.

A closer look at the legislation of all the states allows us to see that internationalization is largely promoted by the state ministries for education through performance agreements with HEIs, while new laws provide general frameworks. For example, in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the new law of 2019 calls for improvement in the quality of HEIs, to make them more attractive to international students and faculty, and according to a new state law in Rhineland-Palatinate enacted in 2020, a Higher Education Forum will be established to strengthen cooperation and exchange between the state and HEIs on internationalization.

Importantly, performance agreements are linked to the funding of HEIs—thus here, concrete incentives are at play. For example, a recent agreement between Hamburg and the Hamburg University of Technology includes a 10 percent incoming and outgoing student quota, while in Bavaria, the Technical University of Munich has agreed to increase the number of North American students by 2022.

Future Perspectives of Internationalization in German Higher Education

The current federal and DAAD strategies, continuous commitment to internationalization through substantial state funding, and the overall increase in the importance of internationalization in all states allows us to assume that the German government, as well as all major stakeholders, are seriously committed to being globally competitive in terms of HE, science, and innovation. Global leadership based on long-standing traditions seems to work through both soft- and hard-power approaches, depending on the policy level. One can observe certain measures promoting internationalization in state HE laws; thus, a hard-power approach through coercion seems to be used to some extent. At the federal level, we observe a range of nonbinding, yet supportive measures to promote internationalization, such as guidelines, strategy papers, and financial policy instruments; thus, a soft-power approach is used at the federal level through agenda setting, benchmarking exercises, and information policy instruments. We also observe that competition seems to drive important changes at the level of the states as well as of the HEIs, such as the introduction of tuition fees or increased assertiveness in attracting international students and scholars, Berlin being a clear leader in this regard.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the development of internationalization is highly uncertain and facing serious challenges. Some countries are refusing entry to foreign nationals, and the DAAD is advising against travel abroad to high-risk areas. Current developments point to the possibility of new measures by policy makers and funding agencies to promote internationalization in the virtual space. At the same time, it is unlikely that Germany's overall approach toward internationalization will change in the near future, as the aims of cooperation, academic freedom, and contribution to global development are anchored in the core value of higher education as a public good. ▲

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