Since 2001, the DAAD has been analysing data on the internationalisation of studies, research and higher education from Germany as well as from particularly relevant countries and regions such as the USA, the United Kingdom or Asia. The current edition presents the most important results and graphics.

These include figures on international students in Germany, data on mobility behaviour, an overview of students’ countries of origin and host countries as well as developments in the field of doctorates. Special data analyses shed light on the status quo and trends at universities and research institutes during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The study integrates international data from OECD and UNESCO as well as national data from the Federal Statistical Office in Germany. In combination with other indicators, it provides a valid basis for long-term analyses.
The development of the number of international students in Germany in 2020

The number of international students in Germany rose from around 319,900 in the 2019/20 winter semester to 324,700 in the 2020/21 winter semester, an increase of 2%. However, this increase does not correspond to an upwards trend in the numbers of international first-year students. In the 2019/20 winter semester, there were still 78,700 such students, but their number had fallen to 63,700 a year later, a decline of 19%.

A similar disparity was already apparent in the 2020 summer semester, the first semester that fell during the Covid-19 pandemic and associated global restrictions on mobility. While 293,300 international students were enrolled at German universities in the 2019 summer semester, their numbers increased by 5,000 (2%) for the 2020 summer semester, reaching 298,100. However, there were pronounced differences between universities and universities of applied sciences. While students enrolled at universities fell by 1% during this period, their number rose by 8% at universities of applied sciences. By contrast, there was a significant decrease in the number of international first-year students, both for universities and universities of applied sciences, dropping 41% between the 2019 and 2020 summer semesters at universities and 6% at universities of applied sciences. The total number of international first-year students fell by a total of 29% to around 22,800 in the 2020 summer semester (from 32,200 the previous year).

The only explanation for the astonishing rise in total international student numbers for the summer and winter semesters, despite the Covid-19 pandemic and a simultaneous decline in numbers of international first-year students, is that more international students in later semesters stayed at university. We can therefore assume that the number of graduates in the 2020 summer semester and 2020/21 winter semester is lower than for the preceding semesters. Major reasons for this could be that the switch to new digital forms of learning in many study programmes caused students to delay graduating from university (Lötz et al 2020) or that students were delaying graduation to avoid having to find employment under pandemic conditions, which have had a considerable economic impact. Furthermore,

Data basis

Official statistics for the 2020 summer semester and 2020/21 winter semester were used to calculate the changes in numbers of international students in Germany in 2020. Robust and definitive data are available for both periods. However, at the time of writing, the latest data for the 2020/21 winter semester, which the Federal Statistical Office published in August 2021, were not yet available in a fully differentiated or itemised form.

To undertake the most detailed analysis possible, this Spotlight includes student data on the summer semesters for the first time. Previous reporting in Wissenschaft weltoffen had chiefly drawn on figures for the winter semesters. Summer and winter semester data were only referred to in order to present numbers for first-year students and graduates. When interpreting the student numbers here, it should be noted that data for the summer and winter semesters cannot be directly related to each other. Due to differences in the number of first-year students and those who have left the university, there are systematic differences in the student figures between the summer and winter semesters. The figures for winter semesters are higher for all student groups than for summer semesters. Hereinafter the data for summer and winter semesters will therefore not be compared with each other, but only within their respective semester groups.
a higher proportion of international students may have progressed immediately from their bachelor’s degrees to master’s programmes than in previous years. This may have been to avoid difficulties in carrying out placements or study visits abroad, or to circumvent current uncertainties in finding the desired employment.

Apparently, the number of students remaining at German universities was so high that it compensated for the not inconsiderable decline in the numbers of international first-year students. Evidently, international students who were already at German universities in the 2019/20 winter semester were able to come to terms with studying under the conditions of a pandemic.
However, the situation was more complicated for international first-year students who were not yet in Germany by the 2020 summer semester or the 2020/21 winter semester. Firstly, the pandemic caused severe restrictions in the issuing of visas and the ability to enter Germany. Secondly, starting a study programme in a hitherto unknown country under pandemic conditions represented a significant challenge. A considerable number of internationally mobile students who were interested in studying in Germany will therefore have postponed starting their study programmes to a later date when conditions at universities return to normal.\(^{3}\)

Another option that was offered to international first-year students in many host countries during the 2020/21 winter semester was to start their study programmes digitally from their home countries. In Germany, too, almost three quarters of universities offered international students a service of this kind in the 2020 summer semester and the 2020/21 winter semester (see DAAD 2021, p. 17). Quite a few international first-year students took advantage of this opportunity. The number of students who reported a semester address in a foreign country rose by 25% from 3,900 in the 2019 summer semester to 4,900 in the 2020 summer semester, representing an increase from 12% to 21% of all international first-year students from one summer semester to the next (albeit among greatly reduced numbers of first-year students). Another consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic appears to be a significant increase in the numbers of international students who are enrolled on distance learning courses, some of which replace regular university courses. They continue to represent a small minority of students but between the 2019 and the 2020 summer semesters, their numbers rose by over half from 1,200 to 1,900 (+58%).

Our analysis of trends in numbers of international students during the summer semesters shows that the decline in international first-year students is primarily a consequence of a fall in the number of international students on temporary study visits. During the 2020 summer semester, 5% more international students were enrolled at a German university with the goal of completing a degree. However, during the same period, the number of visiting and exchange students fell by 38%. This trend can be observed at all types of university, although there was a particularly sharp decline in visiting and exchange students at universities, falling by 41%. This shift is particularly marked among first-year students as the

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**Footnotes**

1. It was therefore not yet possible to draw conclusions about international students on temporary study visits, the type of university or the types of degree that students were working towards.
2. In previous editions of *Wissenschaft weltweit*, the number of first-year students was reported in relation to an academic year (one academic year = summer semester + following winter semester) and the number of graduates in relation to a graduation year (graduation year = winter semester + following summer semester).
3. Many universities in Germany provided similar services to their international first-year students. According to a DAAD survey of international offices in the 2020/21 winter semester, 68% of universities offered their international first-year students the chance to postpone starting their study programmes until the 2021 summer semester (see DAAD 2021, p. 17).
4. Only countries with at least 100 international first-year students in the 2020/21 winter semester (increase) or the 2019/20 winter semester (decrease).
5. Only countries with at least 50 international first-year students on temporary study-related visits in summer semester 2020 (increase) or in summer semester 2019 (decrease).
A rather different picture emerges if we consider only students on temporary study visits at a country-specific level. The data available prevent widening the scope of this analysis beyond the 2020 summer semester but the sharpest declines from the previous summer semester were observed among visiting and exchange students from Singapore (–70%), the US (–64%), Syria (–63%), Canada (–62%) and Israel (–61%). The only increase in students on temporary study visits was for students from Iraq (26%).

With regard to the 2020 summer semester in Germany (the first under pandemic conditions), there was a particularly steep decline in temporary international mobility (credit mobility), while degree-related international mobility (degree mobility) has not (yet) seen any significant losses. The initial reaction of many universities in Germany and abroad to the pandemic was to cancel their exchange programmes, either wholly or in part (see DAAD/DZWH 2020b, p. 36; DAAD 2021, p. 9). It can therefore be assumed that this gap between temporary mobility and degree-related international mobility will have continued in the 2020/21 winter semester (a view supported by the continued increase in the overall numbers of international students against the simultaneous decline in first-year students).