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2021

DZHW German Centre for
Higher Education Research and Science Studies

This is an excerpt from the publication

“Wissenschaft weltoffen 2021”

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.

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How has the international mobility of German students changed since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic? We have reached the point where it is possible to begin to answer this question, although only with reference to temporary study-related visits abroad (*credit mobility*). As in Germany, the key host countries for German students generally publish their respective student statistics roughly a year after the period under consideration. At the time of going to press, of the ten key host countries for German students (see Fig C1.3 on p. 63), data on the 2020/21 winter semester were only available for Switzerland. The example of Switzerland, however, shows that it can by no means be taken for granted that there was a general reduction in the numbers of German students (intending to graduate) in the host countries concerned because of the Covid-19 pandemic. 12,566 German students were enrolled at Swiss universities in the 2020/21 winter semester, an increase of over 400 students (around 4%) compared to the previous year. It should be assumed that the changes in degree-related student mobility for German students will vary greatly from host country to host country. However, it will not be until the next edition of *Wissenschaft weltoffen* that reliable conclusions can be drawn on this.

As has already been mentioned, the situation is different for temporary study-related visits abroad by German students. For an initial assessment of how their numbers have changed since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, we can draw not only on Erasmus data but also on the results of the DAAD's two Covid-19 surveys of the International Offices at German universities. We also have the findings from a student survey conducted as part of the DAAD's survey "Benchmark Internationale Hochschule" (BintHo).²

If we consider how the numbers of Erasmus visits by students from Germany have changed between 2019 and 2020, it emerges that the number of standard¹ or fully in-person visits decreased from around 41,000 in 2019 to only around 21,000 in 2020, a fall of around 50%. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that Erasmus visits are distributed very unevenly over the course of a year, with substantially more visits beginning in the second half of the year. As is clear from Fig. CS1, the decline in Erasmus mobility was particularly steep in the latter half of the year. Between January and June 2020, the number of standard Erasmus visits that were begun fell by 34% compared to the previous year. However, visits beginning between July and

December fell by 57%. Data on Erasmus visits are also already available for the first five months of 2021. Comparing the first five months of 2019 (before the pandemic began) with the first five months of 2021 shows a 35% decline in standard Erasmus visits. This puts the number of Erasmus visits in the first five months of 2021 (around 8,100) slightly below the same period in 2020, (around 8,400).

If the two types of Erasmus visits are considered separately, it emerges that both study visits and placements dropped by 50% for the whole of 2020, compared to 2019. However, a closer

examination of the trends in these two cases reveals that the reduction in placements due to Covid-19 was spread much more evenly across the year than for study visits. While placement visits fell by almost equal amounts in each half of the year (-51% and -48% respectively), the 59% reduction in study visits in the second half of the year (July

to December) was more than twice as high as the 25% decline in the first half of the year (January to July). The reason for this may

“ In 2019, around 41,000 regular Erasmus visits were undertaken and not curtailed. In 2020, around 21,000 regular stays were realised.

* Footnotes

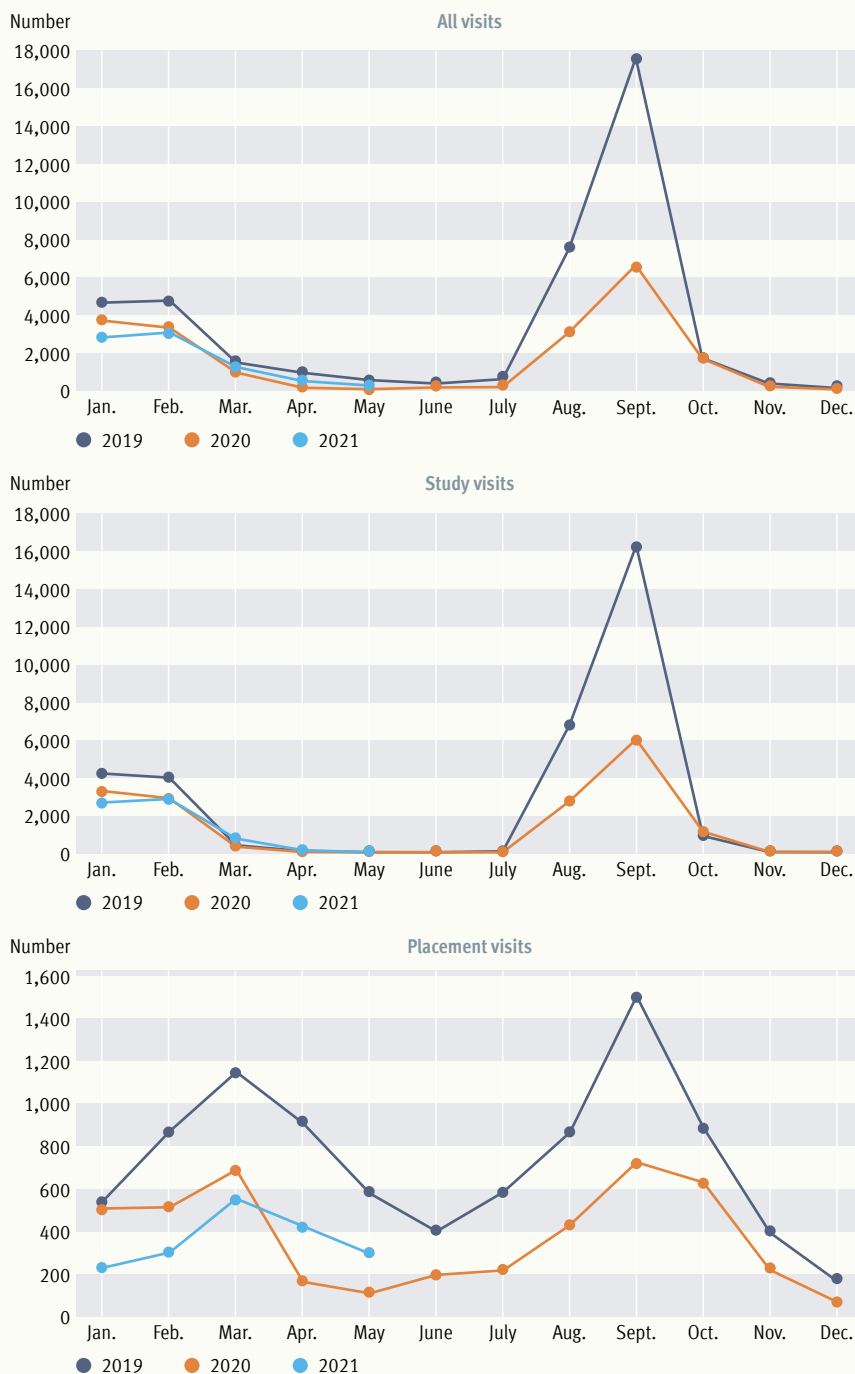
- 1 Unlike in official Erasmus statistics, standard Erasmus visits are here considered only to be those visits that were undertaken wholly in-person within the host country. From June 2020 onwards, official Erasmus statistics also record visits undertaken in hybrid form (i.e. a combination of physical and virtual) as standard visits.
- 2 See Info box on the BintHo project on page 74 and www.daad.de/bintho (only available in German).
- 3 The timing of the planned visit was not surveyed, making an evaluation of this kind impossible.
- 4 The results of the DAAD's two Covid-19 surveys (see DAAD 2020b, 2021) may be found on the DAAD's website at www.daad.de/analysen-studien (also only available in German).
- 5 Because Erasmus statistics only distinguish between standard, virtual, hybrid, curtailed and cancelled visits from July 2020 onwards, data with this degree of specificity are not available for the first half of 2020.
- 6 Assessments by heads of International Offices surveyed.
- 7 Deviations from 100% are due to rounding.
- 8 Survey period: April/May 2020.
- 9 Survey period: February 2021.

be that many partner universities abroad increasingly limited Erasmus exchanges in the second half of the year. As was the case at universities in Germany, the majority of these universities suspended in-person visits and teaching due to Covid-19 in the second half of 2020. By contrast, completion rates of Erasmus placement visits were affected to similar extents in both halves of the year. Compared to 2019, there was a 25% fall in study visits and a 56% fall in placement visits in the first five months of 2021. Here, too, there were only slight changes in comparison to the first half of 2020.

“ Travel restrictions and health concerns associated with the Covid-19 pandemic were among the key obstacles to mobility identified by students surveyed in the 2020/21 winter semester.

Since July 2020, Erasmus statistics have also included two new categories of visits that could not be completed in-person, as had previously been the standard for such visits, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The first category includes those visits that were undertaken fully or partly digitally (with the participant based at home or in the host country). The second category includes those visits that had to be abandoned, shortened, which could not take place at all or which had to be postponed. Using these data makes it possible to analyse the effect of Covid-19 on Erasmus mobility with greater precision. According to this analysis, over 20,000 standard visits took place between July 2020 and May 2021, despite the Covid-19 pandemic. They account for

CS1 Number of standard Erasmus visits undertaken by students from Germany, by type of visit and starting month, between January 2019 and May 2021¹



Source: DAAD, Erasmus statistics; DAAD calculations

55% of the visits granted during this period. Around 15,000 (41%) of the visits approved during this period could not take place, or had to be curtailed or abandoned. Almost 900 visits (1.5%) were undertaken in purely digital form – in other words, without physically visiting the host country. Around 500 cases took a hybrid form, partly digitally (based in the home or host country) and partly in person at the host institution abroad.

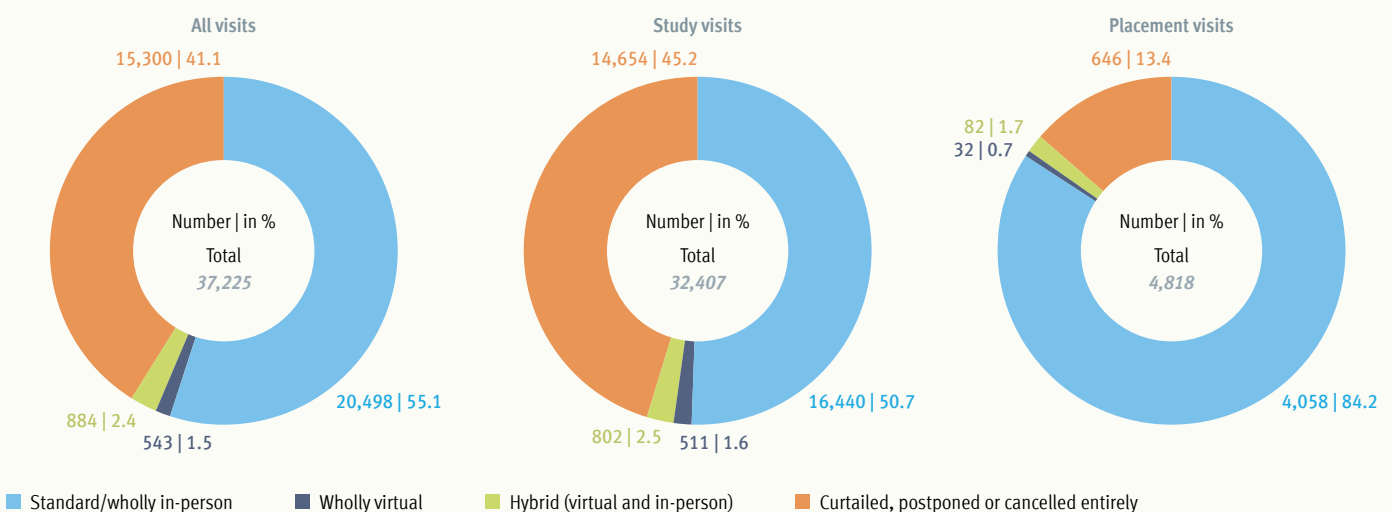
Significant differences can also be observed between placement and study visits. Over half (51%) of the study visits granted were completed in regular form, whereas the respective percentage of placement visits came to well over three quarters (84%). Placement visits in purely digital form were also much less common than purely virtual study visits (0.7% vs 1.6%), and visits in hybrid form were also more common among study visits than for placements (2.5% vs 1.7%). It appears that relatively short-term restrictions on Erasmus visits were more common at partner universities than at firms offering placements. Correspondingly, placement visits

have proved to be less contingent on the short-term fluctuations in the Covid-19 pandemic than study visits.

The findings of the DAAD's BinHo survey, carried out in the 2020/21 winter semester with almost 120,000 respondents at 74 German universities, also convey the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on student international mobility (see also Fig. C2.17 on p. 77). Those respondents who had planned a visit abroad but were not able to undertake it for some reason were asked to choose up to three reasons that were the main causes of the failure of their visit. 29% of students in this group indicated that travel restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic were some of the key obstacles, while 21% stated health concerns associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. It should be noted that these percentages would probably be much higher if the survey only included respondents who had planned a visit for 2020 or 2021.³

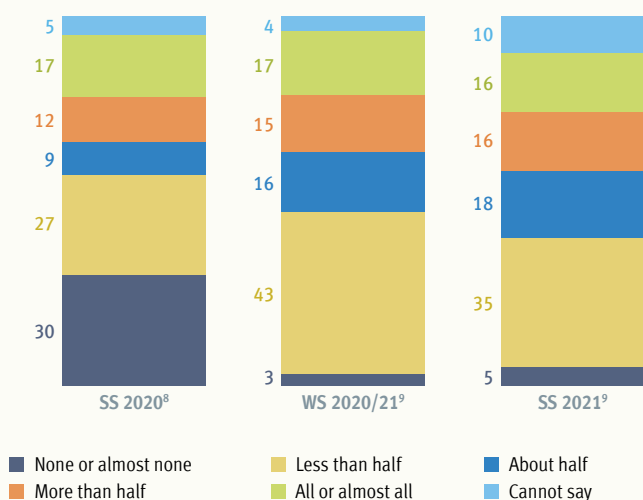
“ 43% of the heads of International Offices surveyed in February 2021 predicted that students' levels of interest in study-related visits abroad would increase in the 2020/21 winter semester, while only 15% expected levels of interest to fall further.

CS2 Standard and non-standard Erasmus visits completed by students from Germany, by type of visit, beginning between July 2020 and May 2021^{1,5}



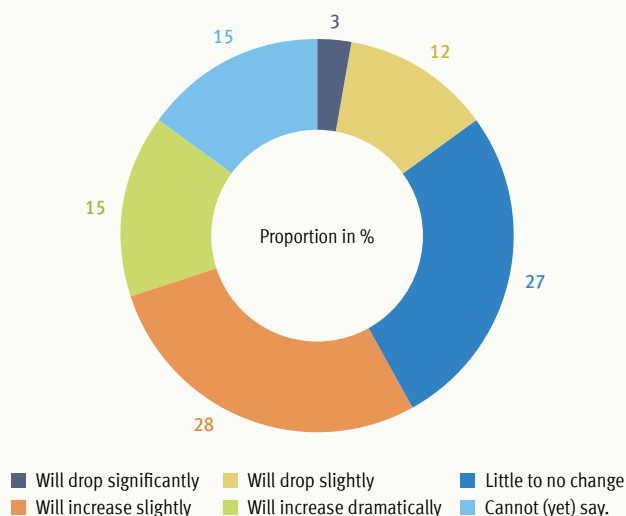
Source: DAAD, Erasmus statistics; DAAD calculations

CS3 Estimated proportion of students in Germany who cancelled or postponed a study-related visit abroad due to the Covid-19 pandemic in the 2020/21 winter semester^{4, 6, 7}



Sources: DAAD, Covid-19 Surveys of heads of International Offices 2020, 2021

CS4 Forecast changes of interest among students in Germany regarding study-related visits abroad in the 2021/22 winter semester, compared to the 2020/21 winter semester^{4, 6, 9}



Sources: DAAD, Covid-19 Surveys of heads of International Offices 2020, 2021

Finally, the DAAD's Covid-19 surveys of heads of International Offices (IOs) at German universities in the 2020 summer semester and 2020/21 winter semester offer a further perspective.⁴ Over 170 of the 268 member universities of the HRK [German Rectors Conference], participated – that is, more than two thirds of the total. According to the first survey in April and May 2020 (i.e. the start of the summer semester), 38% of IO heads reported that, at their university, at least half of students had to cancel their planned visits

abroad in the summer semester due to the pandemic. This rose to 48% in the second survey with reference to the 2020/21 winter semester and to 50% with regard to the 2021 summer semester. Nevertheless, the respondents seemed much more optimistic about the 2021/22 winter semester. 43% predicted that students' levels of interest in study-related visits abroad would increase compared to the previous winter semester, while only 15% expected further declines in levels of interest.