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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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The Covid-19 pandemic presented organisations dedicated to promoting international mobility among academics and researchers with major challenges in 2020. Even if concrete data on changes in the numbers of visits to Germany by international academics and researchers, and by German academics and researchers abroad are not yet available, it can safely be assumed that there will have been substantial changes to levels

“ Constantly changing restrictions to mobility and a lack of certainty around planning represented major challenges for funding organisations in 2020.

of international mobility during this period. Regardless of their size, programme portfolio and the conditions of their funding, the new challenges these organisations faced at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic were all very similar. For instance, restrictions on mobility due to the pandemic caused considerable problems as it was difficult to plan with any confidence. For the organisations, it was a case of observing and evaluating the rapidly evolving conditions of the pandemic and constantly changing legal and regulatory environments, not only within Germany but in dozens of countries of origin and host countries around the world. They then had to draw conclusions about the implications for the mobility of the academics and researchers, and the support they needed. From the perspective of the funding organisations, the following challenges were particularly important in this regard:

- appropriate responses to changing travel and visiting restrictions – from changing procedures around issuing visas to the organisation of quarantine accommodation and Covid-compliant visits, and facilitating childcare despite the closure of daycare facilities and schools;
- organising research when academic institutions and laboratories are closed or access is restricted;
- developing virtual forms of collaboration, including organising online selection conferences;
- dealing with changes to project schedules due mainly to the difficulty of keeping to project goals, but also to delays in the completion of doctoral degrees and risks to career plans;
- organising postponements or curtailments to visits;
- difficulties with planning and administering funding due to visits being postponed and additional requirements;
- substantial reductions in numbers of applicants for mobility funding.

All relevant funding organisations faced similar challenges, yet their responses to the new conditions were very different. Some of the organisations had to reduce the number of visits by academics and researchers they supported, compared to 2019. With regard to supporting visits by academics and researchers in Germany, this problem affected 54% of all funding organisations surveyed. 18% of the institutions reduced the number of visits they funded by more than half. Nevertheless, the proportion of funding organisations surveyed that did not have to make any changes to their planned funding activities (compared to 2019) was surprisingly high, at 41%. These organisations were able to achieve the same or similar levels of funded visits. Indeed, 5% of the institutions were even able to increase the number of visits by international academics and researchers they supported.

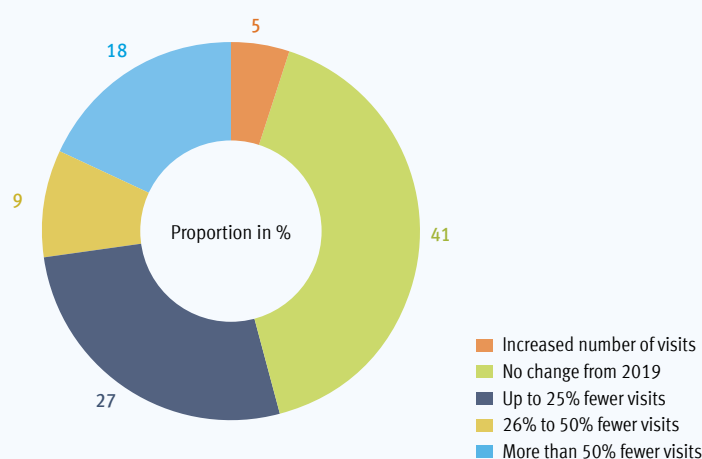
Data basis

The DZHW gathers the data analysed in *Wissenschaft weltoffen* on funding for visits to Germany by international academics and researchers, and for visits by German academics and researchers abroad through annual surveys of the relevant funding organisations. The data are collected between nine and twelve months after the end of the reporting period. In the case of *Wissenschaft weltoffen*, for example, data on funding activities in 2019 were collected in early 2021. At this point, most funding organisations did not have precise funding data for the year that had just ended or the current year. The development of the international mobility of scientists under the pandemic conditions of 2020 is of particular interest to the editors and readers of *Wissenschaft weltoffen*. Therefore, the funding organisations in Germany¹ were asked for initial assessments of the development of their activities in 2020 as part of the regular data collection on funding in 2019. This was not a request for concrete data (not something most funding organisations were in a position to supply), but just for initial estimates. These estimates concern the extent to which mobility funding fell due to Covid-19, as well as curtailments and postponements of visits. The funding organisations were also asked about the particular challenges they faced in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic.

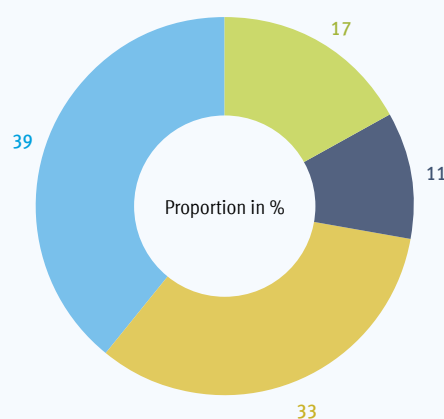
Of the 40 funding organisations to which questions were submitted, 29 (around 73%) were able to provide some level of information about changes to mobility funding during 2020. This response rate is sufficient to permit an initial indication of the trends that developed in 2020.²

ES1 Visits by internationally mobile academics and researchers cancelled due to Covid-19 in 2020 in comparison to 2019, by funding organisations

Organisations funding visits to Germany by international academics and researchers



Organisations funding visits by German academics and researchers abroad



Sources: Responses from funding organisations; DZHW survey

In contrast, funding for visits by German academics and researchers abroad fell much more sharply. 83% of the organisations surveyed indicate reduced funding figures due to the pandemic, including 39% that report a drop in funded stays of over 50%. Only 17% were able to deliver largely unchanged numbers of visits.

Based on information supplied by funding organisations on changes in the numbers of visits, it is now possible to make an initial rough estimate of the quantitative effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the international mobility of academics and researchers in 2020. Where organisations were not yet able to supply information, average values were taken as a basis. This estimate shows that the number of visits funded by German institutions for international academics and researchers in

Germany in 2020 fell by 30% compared to 2019. Around 36,000 visits were funded in 2019 (including those for the Helmholtz Association and the Max Planck Society), while around 25,000 were probably achieved in 2020.

“ The number of funded visits to Germany by international academics and researchers in 2020 was 30% lower than in 2019.

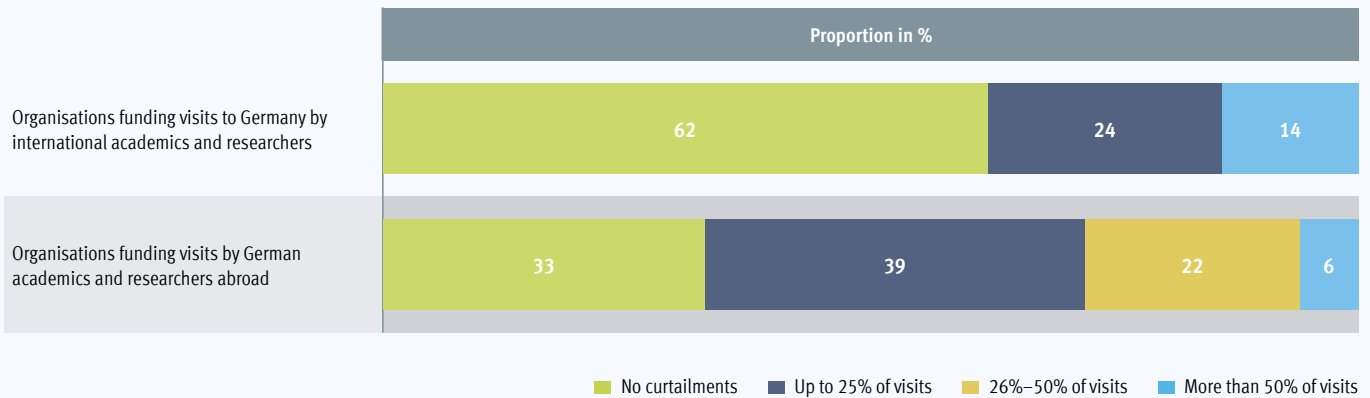
The decline in funding figures is even more pronounced for the stays of German researchers abroad funded by German organisations, falling by around 59% compared to 2019. As a consequence, whereas around 13,000 German academics and researchers were funded for research and teaching visits abroad in 2019, only around 5,000 completed such visits in 2020.

Alongside the reduction in funded visits, another consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic was that some visits were cut short or ended prematurely. Nevertheless, the majority of funding organisations were able to avoid these circumstances with regard

* Footnotes

- 1 A survey of the foreign or international funding organisations was not conducted, due to the different data collection or later reporting dates.
- 2 Of the organisations that fund large numbers of academics and researchers, only the DFG and the Leibniz Association were unable to give any assessment of their funding activities in 2020 at the time of the survey.

ES2 Funded visits by internationally mobile academics and researchers cut short due to Covid-19, by funding organisations, in 2020

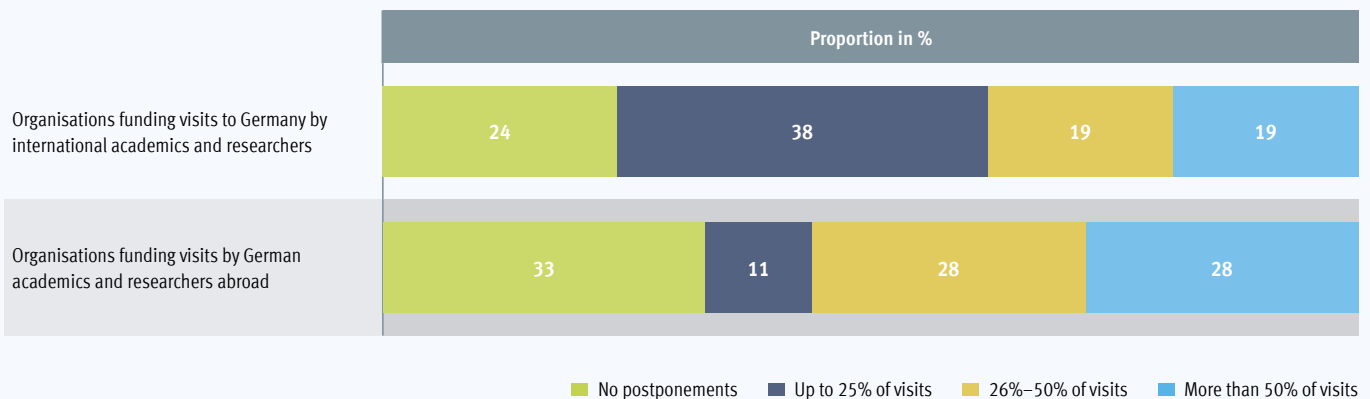


Sources: Responses from funding organisations; DZHW survey

to visits by international academics and researchers in Germany in 2020. Only 38% of the funding organisations concerned indicated that measures of this kind were required. Moreover, only 14% of the institutions surveyed reported that over half of funded visits by international academics and researchers had to be cut short.

However, the situation was markedly different concerning funding for German academics and researchers abroad. Here, 67% of the institutions concerned indicated that funded visits had to be cut short, with 28% of the institutions reporting curtailments to over a quarter of the visits they funded.

ES3 Funded visits by internationally mobile academics and researchers postponed due to Covid-19, by funding organisations, in 2020



Sources: Responses from funding organisations; DZHW survey

Another important option for funding organisations in their response to mobility restrictions due to the pandemic was to postpone funded visits, although the length of such postponements varied greatly. Only a minority of the organisations surveyed did not avail themselves of this option: about a quarter of the institutions that fund visits by international academics and researchers to Germany, and a third of the institutions that fund visits abroad by German academics and researchers. However, while only 38% of the former category of institutions postponed more than a quarter of visits by international academics and researchers, 56% of institutions that fund visits abroad by German academics and researchers undertook such measures.

“ 56% of the organisations that fund visits by German academics and researchers abroad postponed more than a quarter of their funding in 2020.

Taking all these findings together, it is clear that the conditions caused by Covid-19 in 2020 were particularly unfavourable for the funding of visits abroad by German guest researchers. In the case of visits abroad by German academics and researchers, there were substantially more cancellations, curtailments and postponements than for visits to Germany by international academics and researchers. However, this does not come as much of a surprise. By definition, it is easier for funding organisations located in Germany to organise and supervise visits within their own country than in many foreign countries where the pandemic conditions and regulations may be very different and subject to constant change. Moreover, when considering the various funding organisations, no clear pattern emerges with regard to reductions, curtailments and postponements to visits in 2020. The key reason for this is probably the sometimes considerable differences between the conditions and objectives of the respective funding activities.