

ALBERT EINSTEIN GERMAN ACADEMIC REFUGEE INITIATIVE (DAFI) AT UNHCR

UNHCR's Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) is a scholarship programme that helps refugee students to attain an undergraduate degree in their first host country.

The aim is to foster refugees' selfreliance by providing them with an opportunity to obtain qualifications for their future employment. Through the dedicated support of the German Government and additional private-sector donors, over 14,000 refugee students have been awarded scholarships since the programme's inception in 1992. The DAFI programme continues to be the largest single programme providing higher education scholarships to refugees worldwide. The management of the programme is overseen at UNHCR Headquarters by the Education Section's Division of Resilience and Solutions, while UNHCR's country offices are responsible for implementation, either on their own or with the support of a partner.

Asmaa Ahmad Aljamous studies Arabic Literature at Zarqa University on a DAFI scholarship:

"I finally got my hopes back up. Thanks to DAFI now I only study. I don't have to work anymore. Life has changed for the better. Before I was sad. I was often crying. I had lost hope. Now I feel confident and successful. I am first in my class."

Five million refugees around the world are eligible for higher education, and demand is growing. But higher education is virtually out of reach for refugees; only 1% of young refugee women and men are enrolled in higher education, compared to 37% of youth globally. UNHCR's objective is to expand the percentage of refugee youth acquiring a tertiary education to 5% in the coming years.

GENDER PARITY



Chantal, 30, is a young professional based in Kigali, Rwanda. She is originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. From 2006 to 2011, she studied Applied Statistics at the National University of Rwanda in Huye, Southern Province, on a DAFI scholarship. Currently, she works for the Health Development Initiative (HDI), an NGO promoting sustainable, community-based interventions – such as disease prevention, health training, and capacity building – at both the individual and institutional level.

Other barriers that are being addressed by the DAFI programme include poverty, a lack of certification and language acquisition. A promising role model can be seen in Syria's neighbouring countries, where as a result of intensified support in recent years, university enrolment of Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq reached 5% in 2017.

The DAFI programme has tripled in size in the past two years. This ability to grow has been facilitated by additional funding from the German Government and increasing support from private sector partners. The number of students rose from 2,321 in 2015 to 6,723 in 2017. Young Syrians make up the majority of DAFI students (38%), with a large number in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Hodan, 24-year-old Somali student in Kenya:

“The campus is a safe place. No one cares there if I’m a refugee or not. I’m just a student.”

Furthermore, the programme expanded to 13 new countries and awarded 2,582 new scholarships from 12,570 applications in 2017, thus indicating the large unmet need for higher education. In 2017, the DAFI scholarship programme was implemented in 50 countries, of which Turkey had the largest number of students (818),

followed by Ethiopia (729), Jordan (721), Pakistan (490) and Uganda (438). Other beneficiary countries with a significant number of students are Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan. Altogether, 39 nationalities were enrolled in the DAFI programme in 2017, with an average funding period of four years.



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Irené, Congolese refugee student, Finance BA, University of Rwanda:

“With a good education, I will be able to improve my living conditions. My goal is to become a business woman in the tailoring sector.”

The DAFI scholarship programme provides opportunities through financial assistance and tailored support, including preparatory and language courses, as well as psychosocial support, mentoring and networking opportunities, based on the individual student’s needs. To increase their employment opportunities, DAFI students are encouraged to obtain internships and to get involved in community engagement.

Marie Chantal, a Rwandan DAFI alumna living in Mozambique, does not only mentor other DAFI students but also treats patients in a health clinic in Maratane refugee camp twice a week. Reflecting on the impact of the experience Marie Chantal says:

“The DAFI scholarship is extremely important for all refugees. It helps them to gain skills so that they can become contributors to society and support their families, instead of relying on international aid.”

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



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Simon, 25, fled his home in South Sudan (then in the Sudan) as an unaccompanied child in 2000 and sought asylum in Keri Transit camp in Northern Uganda. With the support of the DAFI programme, he pursued a bachelor’s degree in Petroleum, Geoscience and Production Studies at Makerere University. Whilst at University, Simon became active in supporting his peers in their academic studies, especially around science. Building on this experience, he dedicated time to helping high school students to improve their mathematics, physics and chemistry and co-founded the South Sudan Science Club (SSSC), a student mentorship platform where university science students support secondary and primary school students. Simon is also the co-founder and Programme Manager of the African Youth Action Network (AYAN), a refugee youth-led organisation supporting peaceful coexistence initiatives in Kampala and South Sudan.

Samuel, a 26-year-old South Sudanese student attending Jomo Kenyatta University in Nairobi:

“DAFI is like a family to me. I am really thankful. Through DAFI I’ve met students from Rwanda, Somalia, Uganda and other countries. Education is not all about being good in class. You also learn how to coexist with different people from different backgrounds. Appreciating this or that person sitting next to you or that you are meeting with is really valuable. Now I am okay with anybody. I became very tolerant.”

The main objective of the programme is to enable young refugee women and men to build a secure future and make informed life choices. The DAFI programme enables refugees to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to transition towards employment and greater self-reliance, thereby providing them with the opportunity to become role models in their communities and increasing their capacity for self-determination both while they are displaced and once they return to their home countries, which will benefit from their skills and experience. The aim of developing refugee communities’ human capital is thus to foster sustainable solutions, including rebuilding political, economic and social structures upon return.



Tamanna Amin, 18-year-old Afghan refugee, studies Dentistry in Pakistan:

„I know becoming a doctor costs a lot which I can’t afford. But I believe dreams come true when a person is devoted.“

SELF RELIANCE



Former Afghan refugee, **Riaz**, was born and raised in Pakistan. He was a DAFI scholar during his studies in Pakistan. After completing his degree, he returned to his war-torn country, where he serves as Director of Water Supply, Sewerage and Environmental Affairs in Kabul. Riaz says: “As a refugee, it is always challenging to pursue higher education. DAFI eased my worries and helped my higher studies to run smoothly.”

Female students only account for a third of the student population in countries such as Zimbabwe, Kenya, Ethiopia and Pakistan. In 18 of the 50 DAFI programme countries, however, the percentage of female sponsored students has reached 50% or more. Currently, 41% of all DAFI scholarships are awarded to young women. Female DAFI graduates serve as role models for other girls in their communities and help to change attitudes towards girls’ education.

As an additional effect, the prospect of a future university degree makes more parents enrol their children in primary and secondary school. This is especially relevant for refugee girls, who are particularly vulnerable and less likely than boys to have access to education in a significant number of regions.



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