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# Evaluation der Philipp Schwartz-Initiative der Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung

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**Endbericht**

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# Executive Summary

The Philipp Schwartz Initiative (PSI) is a relatively new programme of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH) that was launched in 2016 in close cooperation with the Federal Foreign Office. PSI enables universities and other research institutions in Germany to host exiled, threatened, and displaced scientists as Philipp Schwartz Fellows for a period of two years, in order to allow the continuation of their research. Hosting institutions receive funding to award Philipp Schwartz Fellowships and to establish structures that support the integration of the threatened researchers into the host institution. The AvH promotes the exchange of information and networking through accompanying events. Working with threatened researchers is new for the AvH as well as for most German science organisations, since, in contrast to other AvH programmes, PSI does not focus on scientific excellence, but on supporting threatened researchers.

## *Aims and objectives of the evaluation*

The first four selection rounds (between May 2016 and August 2018) define the evaluation period. The evaluation aims to take stock of programme implementation, to collect interim results and to provide recommendations for the further improvement of the programme. The main question guiding this evaluation was to which extent PSI has achieved the following four programme goals:

1. Development of structures that facilitate the hosting of threatened researchers for German universities and other research institutions (target group: host institutions)
2. The temporary integration of fellows into research to create career perspectives (target group: scholarship holders)
3. Raising awareness within the German science system for the situation of threatened researchers (target group: academic community)
4. Leading role for the AvH in establishing a platform for information exchange and in maintaining the network of German institutions (target group: academic community)

In addition, the evaluation process should also include an analysis of the fellows in terms of socio-demographic, legal and social characteristics, gather initial experiences from the beneficiaries and provide a systematic comparison of PSI to other relevant funding initiatives and programmes.

## *Design and implementation of the evaluation*

To answer the evaluation questions, an evaluation concept combining strong qualitative and quantitative elements was developed together with the AvH. The evaluation team participated in the "Forum for Academic Freedom" organized by the Alliance of Science Organizations under the leadership of the AvH and familiarised themselves with fellows, host institutions and important stakeholders. Following this conference, we conducted two focus groups with fellows.

In the data collection phase, we analysed programme data and documents, interviewed project leaders, mentors and fellows during on-site visits and on the phone. Moreover, we conducted a survey among the host institutions (both project leaders and mentors) and fellows. Based on our impressions on site, we produced case vignettes for illustrative purposes. In addition, we conducted interviews in the programme environment - i.e. with stakeholders, programme managers of the AvH and from other organizations, as well as with members of the jury - which were then also incorporated into the systematic comparison of funding initiatives and programs. A media resonance analysis based on data on print and broadcast media (provided by AvH) and independently gathered data on social media complemented our analysis.

## *Main findings and conclusions*

The evaluation shows that the objectives have been achieved to a large degree. The focus lies on helping threatened researchers by enabling institutions to host them. Other objectives, especially the development of structures at the host institutions are also considered important, but less central and therefore do not receive the same attention at all institutions.

Through PSI project funding, many German scientific institutions have established responsibilities and competencies, as well as contact persons who are aware of the needs of threatened researchers and are able to meet them through either individual or structural measures.

The institutions set up structures for threatened researchers to facilitate their residence. The most important structure, which is mandatory according to the programme requirements, is the scientific mentor, as these are considered to be central to integration in the department. The project leaders become contact points for refugee or threatened scientists within the host institution and are affiliated to the Welcome Centre or similar offices of the institution. Furthermore, institutions can set up additional structures they consider appropriate. Since structures are envisaged to facilitate the reception of endangered scientists, from an institution's perspective, they become more reasonable the more threatened scientists are or will be hosted. In fact, we observe that structures are developed more frequently at large and medium-sized institutions, which on average accept more fellows. However, events aimed at raising awareness of the situation of researchers at risk are organised by both small and large institutions. A small number of institutions have not established structures.

Structures can be legal, administrative, social and/or scientific. The most important structures set up in the context of projects are of an administrative-legal nature (e.g. a clear responsibility of a body or an explicit commitment to the topic). Such structures are likely to persist beyond the project. Structures established with the lump sum that are of similar importance are training, education, training or coaching measures, career development events specifically for threatened researchers, and awareness raising events. Often the PSI lump sum is used for these purposes.

The lump sum is intended for the development of appropriate support structures and for expenses tied to the establishment of the topic "threatened researchers" at the institution. The lump sum is used for the above-mentioned training courses, but more often for other purposes the institutions could define in their applications. In practice, these may include e.g. the purchase of research funds or office supplies. Conversely, structures are often established without the direct use of financial resources. The flexible use of the lump sum is reasonable because it benefits the reception and integration of the fellows, the area with the highest difficulties. Difficulties arise, however, because the inconsistent use of funds can lead to unequal treatment of the fellows, for which some showed a high degree of sensitivity.

The results of the survey show that there is a good and well-used offer of language courses and information events on the German science system. This also means that fellowship holders quickly aim to improve their language skills. However, regarding information events on German residence law, psychological support and support in the initiation of internships, the demand on the part of the scholarship holders has not been fully met yet.

Moreover, the question of whether and how mentors can be supported appropriately often remains unanswered. However, all those involved feel the need to convey the AvH's understanding of the mentor's role more clearly and to encourage the institutions to explicitly define this role for the respective projects in the application phase.

The Philipp Schwartz initiative **allows to support the temporary reception and integration of threatened researchers well**, to enable them to resume their research activities and furthermore - in an area of great difficulty and at a moment of great potential for distraction - to direct the project participants' attention to the time after the fellowship.

The PSI made it possible to admit fellows during the evaluation period, and it has been successful in dealing with the many hurdles in the area and in integrating most fellows into the department and the institution. For the completed and started projects, our survey shows that the project participants

consider both the projects and the integration, to be largely successful. Fellows and mentors expect the fellows to resume and publish their research – an expectation that so far has been largely fulfilled and in some cases even exceeded. While career perspectives are being created within the bounds of possibility, in many cases, they are not yet available. This task is often difficult even for non-threatened researchers, but for threatened ones the difficulties are increased by the specific challenges they face: Shortly after arriving at the institutions, the importance of German as an everyday language both in the private life and in professional contexts becomes apparent. While non-threatened, international researchers are facing the same problem, PSI fellows often also have to find suitable accommodation for their whole family (including several children) as well as carry out all their administrative tasks. In addition, the question of the time after their fellowship and worries for relatives, colleagues and acquaintances who remain in the country of origin is an early issue. This is one reason why the attention among those involved in the programme, but also, for example, the financial resources spent, is focused on this target area - and, in our view, largely rightly so.

The respective mentor is central to admission and integration, and often receives support by service centres and the management of the respective institutions. Project leaders are the anchor point of the projects at the institution and coordinate the structure development and other support measures. Responsibility for questions regarding employment and residence law, as well as for support in finding accommodation and dealing with public authorities generally lies with other persons or service points of the institution. Both the survey and the evidence gathered in interviews on site and in focus groups clearly show a high level of commitment among those involved in the programme, which is particularly aimed at the integration of the funded persons.

In most cases, mentors are tasked with supporting the academic integration at the department, being available as mentors for the academic careers of the fellows, as well as organizing the social integration at the department. Even though the mentors are busy with their everyday scientific work and are working voluntarily and without compensation, 92% of the mentors say they would be available for this role again. Regarding the concrete research project, mentors would pay more attention to the disciplinary fit or even the fit of the research topics in the future, as this would facilitate the scientific integration in the department.

Mentor and project leaders see the greatest need in mentoring with regards to a possible non-scientific career, a task for which at the same time no one is responsible. From the fellows' point of view, there are additional needs for counselling regarding the time after the scholarship, for a clearer communication of responsibilities concerning aspects of labour law, and for support in finding accommodation. The role description of the mentors' tasks could also be clearer. Concern for the future casts a shadow over the research stay, even for well-integrated fellows. Here the general problem of precarious employment and highly competitive conditions in the academic field becomes intensified further.

Particularly in the humanities and social sciences, there are indications that – as expected by their mentors – the fellows bring new research perspectives through their specific experiences as well as new methods of working scientifically in non-free contexts. The research topics of the projects also show that the scholarship holders use their language skills and their experiences with flight, threat and migration to open up new research topics - this is also a reason why their research topics change. In addition, mentors generally agree that their departments have become culturally richer as a result of hosting the fellows, showing that host institutions can also benefit from the threatened researchers.

The evaluation shows that funding through a fellowship can be problematic because a fellowship can make integration at the institution more difficult - at least symbolically, since it seemingly grants a special status to the fellows compared to most other researchers at the department. Fellows, but above all mentors and project leaders, consider the fellow's networking in the German and international academic community to be less successful. For some threatened researchers, networking is also difficult for the threatened researchers because for some of them the political tensions from their countries of origin are also present in Germany and some fellows are therefore particularly cautious about establishing contacts and networking. Nevertheless, scholarship holders are active in networking.

With PSI and the associated activities, **central actors in the German scientific system became more aware of the situation of threatened researchers** – and at the same time, it broadened the view of important actors on the AvH itself.

The Philipp Schwartz Initiative and the associated activities of the AvH have contributed to raising awareness of the situation of threatened researchers at institutions and in the academic community. Various external factors have also played a role in this, making the issue of endangering scientific freedom very visible in recent years. With PSI and its associated activities, the AvH was then in a good position to use and further increase awareness of the topic.

With the PSI project, the situation of threatened researchers becomes also more visible at the host institutions up to their management levels. This also seems to be the case in the academic community as a whole. The AvH has played an important role in increasing the visibility of the topic. From the stakeholders' point of view, the AvH has also changed - today the foundation is strongly associated with the topic of "endangering academic freedom" in addition to the topics of "internationalization" and "excellence". This topic, which is largely new for the foundation, is often enough in tension with the concept of excellence that the AvH cultivates in its other programmes - here it is not centrally about outstanding scientists, but about dealing with heterogeneous scientific performance in the context of endangerment, biographical fractures and - from a scientific perspective - trivial everyday problems with high difficulty. From the perspective of stakeholders, by participating in this debate, the foundation has grown.

During the first four years of PSI, **the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation has succeeded in becoming a central player in the field of threatened researchers in Germany**. The AvH plays a leading role in establishing a platform and maintaining the network of institutions. It has organised central events in this thematic field and initiated an important platform for exchange with the German section of Scholars at Risk. In doing so, the AvH took up the topic at an early stage and continues to be in charge of its management.

#### *Avenues for improvement of the PSI*

**1. Continue the programme in its current format:** the evaluation shows that the objectives of PSI have been largely achieved so far. We therefore recommend the continuation and the appropriate extension of the programme as needed.

**2. The recent increase in the lump sum is correct and should be accompanied by more transparency about its use:** During the course of the evaluation, the AvH opened the lump sum for new uses and increased it to EUR 20,000 per fellow. In view of the fact that it does not make sense for all institutions to develop structures and the challenges in the area of reception and integration of the fellows, we consider this to be a sensible improvement. In the programme monitoring, particular attention should be paid to reporting on the use of the lump sum and thus also to the exchange of experience between institutions.

**3. Allow the fellows to be funded through an employment contract.** In order to facilitate integration at the host institutions, we recommend the use of employment contracts.

**4. Clearly define the role and tasks of mentors, accompanied by an increased exchange of experience among current and potential mentors:** The mentors play a central role in the integration of the fellows. The tasks and the range of tasks of mentors should be clearly defined on the basis of experience reports and the expectations of the AvH. The AvH should act as a platform for this.

**5. Continue the annual PSI event with its satellite events and develop it further:** The annual PSI-related meetings are highly appreciated and should therefore be continued and, in the interest of the scholarship holders and host institutions, be used even more as a platform for the exchange of experience, mutual consultation or to signpost to relevant other offers.

**6. Actively communicate the evaluation results and increase incentives to continuously improve the host institutions' structures:** On the one hand, the evaluation results point to the

high contribution of PSI, but in several respects they also showed a need for further development of structures which should be communicated to the institutions.

**7. Involve stakeholders from industry:** In order to increase career prospects outside of academia, the AvH in cooperation with other applied research funding organisations should seek to involve industrial partners more closely in the programme.

**8. Integration the promotion of academic freedom as a core element into the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation:** PSI should be integrated into the self-representation of the AvH and should also be made better known, for example, in the Foundation's academic networks.