

# DAFI PROGRAMME EVALUATION SUMMARY

2022

RELEVANCE, EFFECTIVENESS, IMPACT



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# Evaluation of the UNHCR Tertiary Education Scholarship Programme (DAFI): relevance, effectiveness, impact

## Summary Report

### Background

Since 1992, the **Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI)** scholarship programme has reached **over 22,500 refugee students worldwide**. It is one of the most renowned and long-standing higher-education scholarship programmes specifically for refugees. The programme, funded primarily by the German Government with additional support from the Danish Government and other partners, is implemented **in over 55 countries with an annual enrolment of over 8,500 currently**. The programme is available across various displacement settings, mostly in low to middle income refugee hosting countries.

This brief summarises the key findings and recommendations of an independent evaluation of the DAFI scholarship programme that was conducted in 2022. It also highlights opportunities for expansion, optimisation, and partnership.

**Notable findings** that emerged from the evaluation include:

1. Academic counselling and awareness of the DAFI programme **improve secondary education retention rates**, with stronger effects for female students and in refugee camp settings.
2. Programme-wide **graduation rates** have **steadily increased** since 2014, and currently stand at 84%.
3. **Financial support** for students – in the form of tuition payment and living allowance – is **fundamental to maintaining high completion rates**: most students report that they would not have been able to finish their degrees without financial support from the DAFI programme.
4. **Job-readiness** is a major concern for DAFI scholars with many reporting a desire for more career preparation and job placement opportunities.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### 1. Improved Secondary Retention Rates

The evaluation found that improved secondary school retention rates are a positive indirect outcome of student awareness of the DAFI program. This effect is more pronounced in camps than in urban settings and stronger for girls than boys. Around 83 per cent of respondents indicated that the possibility of being selected for the DAFI programme represented an incentive to complete secondary education. The evaluation also found,

however, a relatively low level of awareness of the programme, indicating that more should be done to ensure refugee youth know about the DAFI opportunity.

**Table 1:** Pull effect of DAFI awareness on the completion of secondary education

	Refugees who became aware of DAFI before finishing secondary school	Refugees who felt strongly encouraged to complete secondary school thanks to an awareness of DAFI
Males	21%	74%
Females	15%	85%
Total	18%	79%

Source: DAFI refugee survey (2021)

**Table 2:** Pull effect of DAFI awareness on the completion of secondary education by country

Country	Refugees who became aware of DAFI before finishing secondary school	Refugees who felt strongly encouraged to complete secondary school thanks to awareness of DAFI
South Africa	22%	100%
Rwanda	54%	89%
Uganda	58%	80%
Turkey	12%	71%
Jordan	42%	69%
Ecuador	9%	33%

Source: DAFI refugee survey (2021)

Note: Highest values in green, lowest in red

## 2. Steady Rise in Graduation Rates

Between 2014 and 2020, the graduation rate among DAFI scholars stood at an average of 84 per cent with a spike to 87 per cent between 2016 and 2019. Financial support for students – in the form of tuition payments and living allowances – was fundamental to maintaining high completion rates, as most students would not have been able to finish their degrees without financial support from the DAFI programme. Moreover, approximately 50 per cent of DAFI beneficiaries received either counselling or mentoring which supported retention when students encountered unexpected difficulties.

## 3. Increased female participation

*“As a woman studying engineering, a field that is male dominated, this scholarship helped me become self-confident. I now feel that I am able to do anything that I put on my mind”.*

– Female DAFI student

The DAFI programme is committed to achieving gender parity by 2025. UNHCR has taken action to improve the rate of female participation which stood relatively static at around 40 per cent between 2014-2020. Several country operations indicated that this that this

stagnation was due to refugee girls' high dropout rates from secondary education which consequently affected the rate of eligible females for the DAFI program.

Student-led DAFI clubs provide information sessions to refugee youth, in secondary schools and to community groups to expand awareness of the DAFI scholarship and to promote participation of girls and young women in higher education.



#### 4. Support Transition into the Labour Market

One of the most important programme components for DAFI scholars is accessing support to gain employment upon graduating. Survey response show that almost **half of DAFI beneficiaries surveyed wanted more direct support with this endeavour**. Systematic transition to employment is complicated by the fact that 70 per cent of refugees live in countries where that have restricted access to the formal labour market. Despite this, upskilling opportunities such as internships to allow students to gain entry level work experience, ICT and soft skills development are important investments in the student journey. Since 2014, only around 30 per cent of DAFI beneficiaries completed an internship. To increase this number and meet the students' demand, support from companies and governments is crucial. The evaluation recommended that investment in internship opportunities and skills development should be enhanced in all programme countries.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Good practices for increasing female participation

Implement **outreach initiatives** in refugee communities that encourage schools, parents, and religious leaders to prioritise the importance of higher education for girls.

Ensure the **availability of female representatives** throughout the application process – such as a female hotline operator, a designated email address for female students and so on.

**Leverage existing women's networks** in communities to share information about the DAFI programme and encourage girls to continue their education.

*“As a girl studying in a prestigious university in South Africa, I have become a role model in my community. Younger girls come ask me for advice on how to get a degree”*

– Female DAFI student

**Monitor the progress** of promising female secondary school students and promote the DAFI opportunity via tailored messaging or direct support.

**Provide “bridging” scholarships** to high-performing female refugee students who are in their last year of secondary school and are facing financial hardship. This could help to offset the financial constraints which typically prevent refugee girls from completing their secondary education.

Ensure that **at least 35 per cent of representatives on the DAFI selection committee/selection panels are women**, as they are more likely to produce gender-balanced pools of beneficiaries.

**Pair female students with female academic advisers** and ensure that all staff working with female students are trained in age, gender and diversity approaches and understand the programme objectives for gender parity.

Provide **targeted academic support** to female students to ensure timely progression, proactively identifying at-risk students, and making interventions according to personalized action plans.



## B. Improving the implementation of DAFI

**Streamline the operation:** UNHCR country operations should reduce variations in the DAFI experience by retaining components of the programme design that have worked best.

**Ensure consistency regarding intake:** To exploit the pull effect on the completion of secondary education, UNHCR should award scholarships regularly and consistently, and should maintain a stable intake of new DAFI students every year:

Enhance **exchange of good practices** across DAFI programme countries and between implementing partners.

**Facilitate timely payment:** avoid delays in transferring tuition and allowance funds to ensure students can begin study terms on time, pay lodging and food bills, etc.

Expand the funding base to ensure **predictable, multi-year funding**.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the evaluation found that the DAFI programme consistently and efficiently delivers higher education scholarships to refugee students. The DAFI programme acts as a pull factor towards higher education and empowers young refugees, particularly women, to continue their schooling. Moreover, the effects extend beyond the direct beneficiaries as DAFI scholars serve as role models for younger generations and implement projects within their communities. The evaluation report highlights the importance of access to hardware, connectivity and teaching and learning materials to support online learning, the need to provide a minimum standard of ICT skills and to strengthen transition to employment and career readiness opportunities according to context.

