

Study without worries!

Internationalization strategy of the
Studentenwerk Potsdam (effective 2023)



Studentenwerk Potsdam
Anstalt des öffentlichen Rechts

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Preamble

The Studentenwerk Potsdam (SWP) has always provided indispensable support for international students¹ in Potsdam, Wildau and Brandenburg an der Havel through its diverse social offers and services. The present internationalization strategy aims for the SWP to increase its efforts to address the needs of a steadily growing number of international students, making it possible for them to study without worries in the future, too. Furthermore, the SWP recognizes the strategic importance of internationalization for itself and strives to further position itself internationally and interculturally.

As an institution with a clear social mission, the SWP is equally committed to the more than 33,000 students in its area of support. Whether it is by providing affordable housing, helping with questions about BAföG applications, offering a healthy lunch, counselling in difficult times, or referring a job – the SWP is there for all students.

However, the increasing number of international students, combined with the internationalization efforts of universities and the state², has changed the requirements and expectations for the work of the SWP. In the last 10 years, the share of international students in the SWP's area of support has increased from about 11% to about 16%³. Language and intercultural challenges, but also new topics regarding contents and structures, need to be addressed now.

In light of these developments, the SWP has identified internationalization as a complex, strategically important task that needs to be worked upon from various angles to ensure its comprehensive and sustainable implementation.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, international students in this document refer to students who have a foreign (non-German) citizenship.

² These efforts are reflected in the internationalization strategies of the universities and the state and include the topics such as English-language teaching, strategic partnerships abroad and international students.

³ Source: statistical analysis by the SWP.

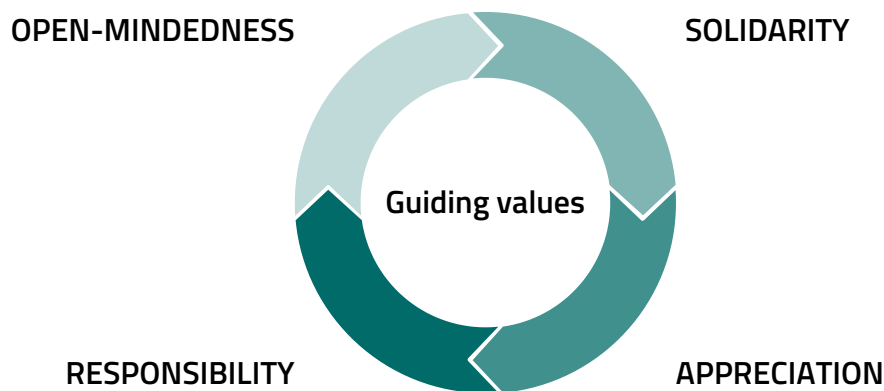
In accordance with the target agreements between the Ministry of Science, Research and Culture of the State of Brandenburg (MWFK) and the SWP for the years 2022 to 2026, and complemented by additional, new ideas, this strategy describes different fields of action with corresponding goals and subgoals.

The SWP sees internationalization as an opportunity to develop and learn from each other together with students, employees and university partners. Hence, the strategy is also the result of an extensive internal and external exchange on the topic of internationalization. The target agreements between the MWFK and the SWP, along with the broad stocktaking on the topic of internationalization at the SWP from the years 2022 and 2023, serve as a starting point. When conceiving and implementing future measures, the strategy is meant to serve the SWP and its employees as a clear orientation.



Guiding values

When formulating its internationalization goals, the SWP takes into account fundamental values and ideas in line with its social mission.



The SWP is open-minded.

The SWP sees itself as a diverse and tolerant organization that clearly condemns racism and other forms of discrimination. The SWP considers values such as tolerance and open-mindedness to be fundamental pillars for the successful work in the university context.

The SWP is solidary.

The SWP acknowledges that international students in Germany have to overcome additional bureaucratic, linguistic and cultural hurdles. SWP offers and services take this into account and are equally accessible to both domestic and international students.

The SWP is appreciative.

The SWP views international and intercultural experiences of its employees as an asset for the organization. Efforts by departments and employees to adapt to work in the intercultural and international higher education landscape are appreciated and supported.

The SWP acts responsibly.

The SWP sees itself as an important partner in the region and assumes responsibility in international and intercultural topics in the context of higher education. Sustainable solutions to current challenges can only be found together with the universities and other partners.



Fields of Action

The SWP's internationalization strategy is intended to be as comprehensive and context-oriented as possible. In order to cover the diverse tasks, four thematic fields of action have been defined, to each of which individual main and sub-goals are assigned.

The positioning of the SWP as an open-minded institution, along with related aspects of human resources management, serves as a starting point for all further fields of action. After that, communication with international students and the offers and services of the SWP move into the focus of the strategy. The qualification and support of employees makes up for another important field of action. And since the SWP does not act alone, networking and cooperation with the universities and relevant actors in the university environment also play an important role.



OPEN-MINDED STUDENTENWERK: POSITIONING



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: COMMUNICATION AND OFFERS



EMPLOYEES IN THE SWP: QUALIFICATION AND SUPPORT



NETWORK: COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS

Goals

OPEN-MINDED STUDENTENWERK: POSITIONING

GOAL 1

The SWP clearly positions itself internally and externally as an open-minded institution. In doing so, the SWP is clearly committed to tolerance and diversity and condemns racism and other forms of discrimination.

1.1 The SWP writes an official and public statement in which it refers to its core values as an institution, especially in the context of international and intercultural affairs.

1.2 The SWP seeks solidarity and exchange with relevant persons from other student services, universities, and city and civil society in order to jointly stand up for and raise awareness of the aforementioned values.





OPEN-MINDED STUDENTENWERK: POSITIONING

GOAL 2

The SWP promotes a culturally diverse workforce. By doing so, the SWP benefits from the knowledge and personal experience of its employees and credibly exemplifies interculturality and diversity. This increases the SWP's attractiveness as an employer, especially in times of a shortage of skilled workers.

2.1 Culturally diverse groups of people are specifically addressed when filling positions. The SWP expressly welcomes applications from international applicants, applicants with a migration history and/or applicants with experience abroad.

2.2 Diversity aspects are taken into account in HR management and the welcoming culture is strengthened.

2.3 Collaboration in intercultural teams is encouraged and supported by the SWP as needed.

GOAL 3

The SWP develops structures for dealing with racism and discrimination. By doing so, the SWP protects students and employees in different discrimination situations.

3.1 The SWP expands official and confidential complaint channels for students and employees affected by racism or discrimination.

3.2 The SWP considers the introduction of an anti-discrimination officer with a focus on anti-racism and diversity, who advises those affected, investigates allegations and is in close contact with the anti-discrimination offices of the universities and the state.



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: COMMUNICATION AND OFFERS

GOAL 4

The SWP communicates its offers and services in German and English. This reduces language barriers for students and allows the SWP to reach the entire student body with its offers and services.

4.1 All departments with student contact offer consultations in both German and English.

4.2 Public communication with students is always bilingual (DE/EN). All written information and documents relevant to students are made available bilingually (DE/EN).

GOAL 5

1.The SWP regularly solicits feedback from international students. This gives it an up-to-date picture of their challenges, their needs, and their satisfaction with the SWP's offers, and enables it to respond adequately.

5.1 International students are regularly surveyed by the SWP about their situation or explicitly considered as a target group in the context of larger surveys.

5.2 The SWP actively communicates its desire for feedback towards international students in order to continuously improve its offers and services.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: COMMUNICATION AND OFFERS

GOAL 6

The SWP expands specific counselling and support services for international students. The special challenges and needs of international students can thus be covered in a more targeted manner.

6.1 The perspective of international students is reflected in the offers and services of the SWP, e.g. in welcome events for international students at the beginning of the semester, in the information offered on applying for a place in a residence hall, as support in the residence hall by the residence tutors and the residence worker, in financial support offers or as help with bureaucratic challenges.

6.2 The SWP has the flexibility to adapt its offers and services to the changing needs of international students in a timely manner.





EMPLOYEES IN THE SWP: QUALIFICATION AND SUPPORT

GOAL 7

The SWP offers its employees information and training opportunities in the context of internationalization. By doing so, the SWP actively supports employees in the internationalization process while promoting their personal and professional development.

7.1 The SWP regularly organizes seminars and workshops on intercultural topics for its employees in order to promote their intercultural skills and to adapt to the diverse challenges of international students.

7.2 The SWP establishes a sustainable and practice-oriented training concept to promote the English language skills of employees in order to be able to offer English-language consultations.

7.3 Employees have access to current figures, developments and information in the context of international students.

GOAL 8

The SWP makes use of the connection between digitalization and internationalization. This saves resources and exploits the joint potential of both major topics for the optimization of processes and workflows.

8.1 (New) digital tools and software are actively used as means to help employees with translations as well as challenges in communicating in English or other languages.

8.2 When introducing new digital solutions, relevant aspects are taken into account from the beginning, in particular bilingual or multilingual features of tools and accessibility from an international perspective.

NETWORK: COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS

GOAL 9

The SWP expands the exchange and cooperation with the universities in the context of international affairs. The most important contact points for international affairs at the universities are the International Offices.

9.1 The SWP exchanges information with the universities on a regular basis and at different levels on identifiable developments or known events in the context of international affairs.

9.2 The SWP intensifies cross-institutional collaboration with universities on key challenges, such as the growing shortage of affordable housing or international crises, and participates in the joint development of solutions.

9.3 In the interest of sustainable cooperation, the SWP strives to pool resources with the universities, e.g. in the organization of information and training opportunities for employees.



NETWORK: COOPERATION WITH PARTNERS

GOAL 10

The SWP expands its contacts with other student services and relevant actors in the state and cities. Thus, the SWP can draw on a diverse and constantly growing network of expertise and resources. Work processes are made more efficient by avoiding overlapping responsibilities and complement each other.

10.1 The SWP regularly exchanges best practices with other student services in the context of internationalization.

10.2 The SWP regularly communicates with local authorities and other relevant actors on the topic of internationalization in order to clearly define responsibilities and to coordinate respective offers in a complementary way.

10.3 The SWP advocates to consider and ensure social framework conditions for international students in exchanges at the state level.



Implementation

Measures, governance and framework conditions

While the SWP's internationalization strategy with its objectives provides a clear orientation and direction of action, concrete measures are elaborated separately and recorded in a catalogue of measures. This collection of measures is meant to be regularly evaluated and revised independently of the strategy.

Responsibility for internationalization at the SWP lies with the management and the individual departments. The Public Relations and International Affairs staff unit offers accompanying support and coordination. The development and evaluation of the internationalization process and corresponding measures always follows the needs of the students and employees within the framework of the guidelines described in the strategy.

The SWP sees internationalization as an ongoing, continuous process and as a component of its organizational development. For internationalization to succeed at the SWP, transparent and sustainable processes and structures are required. The successful implementation of measures in line with the strategy and the acceptance of internationalization are ensured by the commitment of the management, the department heads, the staff council and the employees.

The SWP bases its internationalization strategy primarily on the target agreements with the MWFK (currently 2022 - 2026). In addition, it aims to take into account aspects of the internationalization strategies of the universities and the state where possible and appropriate. In the long term, the SWP's internationalization strategy will be most effective if it is taken into account accordingly by the universities and the state of Brandenburg.

Appendix: Latest numbers

Housing

In the context of housing, international students are particularly dependent on the support of the SWP. Accordingly, international students at the locations Brandenburg an der Havel, Potsdam and Wildau make up a significant proportion of the tenants in the Studentenwerk's residence halls.

Proportion of international tenants in the three locations of the SWP
(as of 09.11.2023)



The intercultural community life in the residence hall is greatly supported by the 31 residence tutors, as well as by the residence worker, who is also on hand to help residents in case of problems.

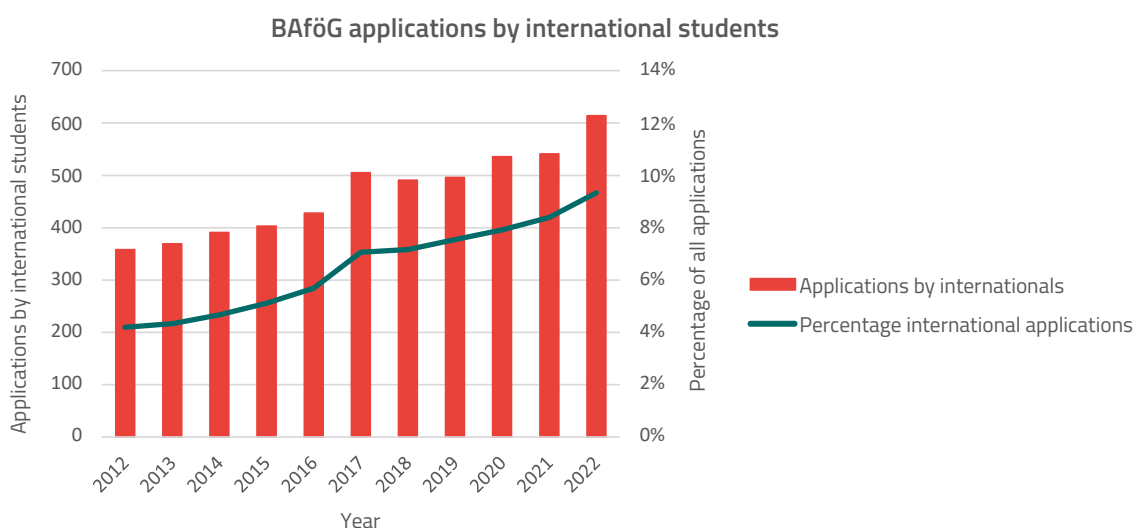
Social counselling

Due to high demand, many applicants cannot find a place in a residence hall. Through the "Homesharing" ("Wohnen für Hilfe") program, the SWP additionally creates match-making opportunities between students looking for a place to stay and private households who provide accommodation in return for support in everyday life. Since the start of the project in 2020, 49 homesharing partnerships have been established, among them 21 (43%) with international students.

In 2022, international students accounted for 32% of all social counselling contacts. 25% of all consultations were held in English. In the same year, international students made up 23% of the new psychosocial counselling consultations. The percentage of international students among new registrations in the SWP's job placement service was 39% in 2022. The challenge here: many international students only have limited German language knowledge, but at the same time German is a prerequisite for many job offers.

BAföG

The number of BAFöG applications¹ submitted by international students to the SWP's BAFöG office has been rising steadily for 10 years. Applications have risen strongly from 358 (4.2%) in 2012 to 614 (9.3%) in 2022.



BAföG is clearly regulated by law and is primarily aimed at German students. International students must fulfill a number of requirements in order to be eligible for BAFöG, e.g. have the appropriate residence status. Nevertheless, BAFöG can also be relevant for international students under certain circumstances, for example for students from Ukraine.

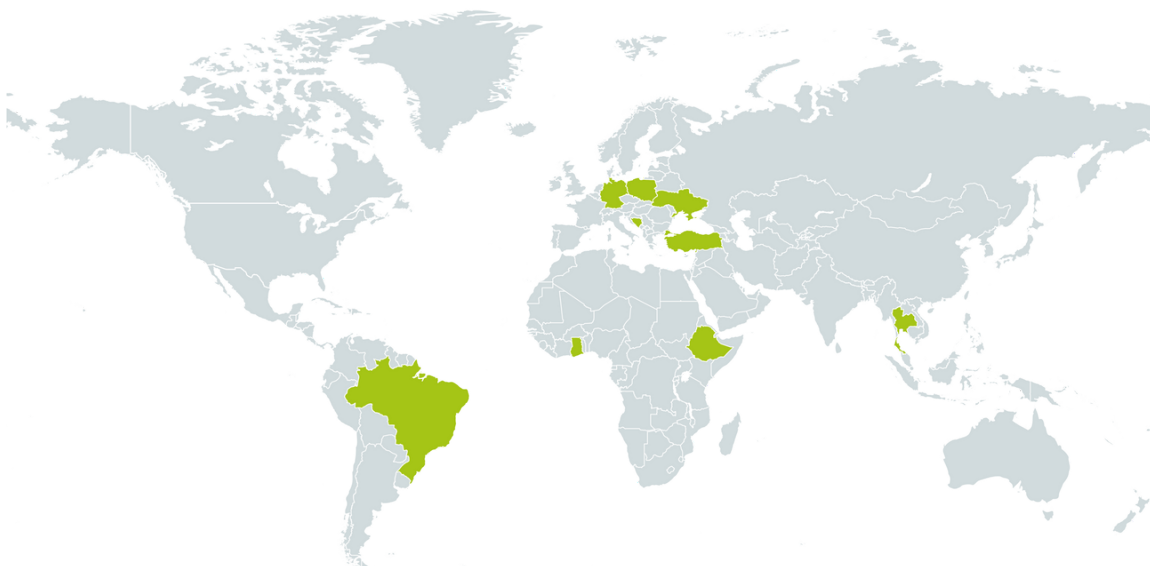
¹ Note: Students from private universities can also submit BAFöG applications to the Studentenwerk. You can find a full list of all universities on the Studentenwerk website www.studentenwerk-potsdam.de

Canteens and cafeterias

The canteens and cafeterias of the SWP are international: whether it is the choice of meals, communication with international guests at the food counter and checkouts, or the bilingual display of the current menu.

Working together in intercultural teams is also of great relevance. In the canteens and cafeterias of the SWP, colleagues of nine different nationalities work together. This diversity is a great enrichment for the SWP and makes the Studentenwerk an international organization itself.

Nationalities of the colleagues working in the canteens and cafeterias
(as of 27.11.2023)



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