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**Abstract**

From 2015 onwards, German universities started to develop a broad range of activities for refugees with academic aspirations. In this article we focus on the institutional changes that go along with those developments. While our main focus is in Germany, we also consider developments in some other European countries. Firstly, we reflect on some of the most important challenges refugees face when pursuing higher education. Secondly, we highlight central characteristics and tendencies of the newly established pre-study programmes at universities funded by the Federal Ministry of Education. Finally, we present some recommendations that might be of interest to decision makers in higher education beyond German borders. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)