

23 March 2016**Obstacles to mobility for international researchers in Germany are crumbling**

Over the last ten years, the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) has campaigned hard for the removal of obstacles to the recruitment of foreign researchers and to their admission to Germany. The five-year HRK project "Reducing mobility obstacles in the European Higher Education Area", which is funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), is now coming to an end.

In the view of HRK President Prof. Dr. Horst Hippler, the project has been a success: "Persistence and hard work are instrumental in achieving any progress in reducing obstacles to mobility," he said. "This is the only way that a country dependent on research and innovation like Germany can attract top-class researchers from other countries." Impetus to launch the activities was provided in 2005 when the HRK signed the "European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers," a recommendation by the European Commission.

The HRK has found solutions to many obstacles concerning laws on residency and social security benefits at conferences and workshops. It worked on residency issues with the registration authorities for foreigners and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees and with the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Foreign Office. Information about residency legislation was provided to the universities. Questions concerning retirement pensions were the subject of an ongoing dialogue with the Versorgungsanstalt des Bundes und der Länder (VBL) and the Deutsche Rentenversicherung. As a result, improvements have been made, such as the "findyourpension" information portal for internationally mobile researchers which is financed by the BMBF and operated by the VBL.

HRK President Hippler said: "The support provided by the BMBF has allowed the project to tackle some very challenging problems over a long period. For example, improvement to the residency situation for highly qualified researchers from non-EU states has been achieved in a large number of very small steps. German residency legislation for foreign researchers is probably the most liberal in Europe now. Researchers who previously had to sacrifice some of their retirement pension if they spent longer periods in Germany can now expect much better legal conditions and better advice. In the future, a top-class early career researcher from South Africa, for example, who spends over three years in Germany as a research assistant on a doctoral training programme will not lose any of the retirement benefits to which he or she is entitled." This is ensured by legislation adopted at the end of 2015 by the German Bundestag regarding the implementation of the EU Mobility Directive which has now been put in place by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS). "Research and innovation in Germany will benefit from these bright minds," said Hippler.

[See also the **press release on the MIND study** regarding the welcome culture]