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The German State invests heavily in research and development at universities and non-university research institutions at the national and state levels. In order to maintain its position at the forefront of cutting-edge technologies and continue to attract global talent in various fields across academia and industry, it is essential to have a clear strategic focus. Most of this research is carried out by doctoral candidates (and postdoctoral researchers) enrolled in German universities. Of the involved doctoral candidates, 34% are international, with 22% being non-EU internationals [Wissenschaft weltoffen: Facts and Figures on the International Nature of Studies and Research in Germany and Worldwide, Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) and Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung (DZHW), 2024].

Conferences and workshops are essential avenues for presenting the latest research, facilitating discussions and fostering new collaborations in global academia, with the aim of advancing knowledge in respective disciplines. However, one in every five doctoral researchers in Germany encounters barriers to access and attend conferences/workshops outside the Schengen area. Usually, by the time one hears from the organisers that their contribution (talk/poster) has been accepted, it is too late to apply for visa approval before the intended travel. Closer to the intended travel, ticket fares are also significantly higher. In addition to this, the visa fee and supporting documentation represent a further financial and time-consuming expense. And the travel budget of PhD candidates or their departments is often greatly limited, and they are therefore unable to make spontaneous payments without risking their personal finances.

These additional costs associated with international conferences are significantly higher when considering the large number of researchers affected across Germany (and by extension, within the EU). This has an impact on the funding sources, which are primarily financed by the German exchequer. All sides would benefit if these funds were not utilised for bureaucratic costs but





reallocated to more productively advance research and development in the form of more positions, better salaries, more grants, etc.

We propose the following steps the German government can take to alleviate this problem:

- Initiate a recognition mechanism to fast-track visa applications for short-term (~15 days) travel by doctoral candidates enrolled in German Universities for conferences/workshops. This can be reciprocated by the other country for their corresponding doctoral students for similar visits to Germany. This can start as a pilot project between Germany and a few non-Schengen countries with considerable traffic amongst researchers.
- Introduce this recognition mechanism as a pan-EU initiative. It is not a problem that is solely faced by researchers in Germany. Given the number of member states in the EU, it is clear that more countries around the world would be in favour of such reciprocal recognition.
- Adopt a convention/agreement between countries to allow their doctoral (and even post-doctoral) researchers to travel visa-free for conferences/workshops for up to 15 (or 30) days, provided they hold a passport or residence permit in the country of the home university. This long-term solution will substantially remove the major roadblock a crucial section of doctoral researchers face for decades to come.

In conclusion, we want to emphasise that we are ready to engage in discussions on these important issues and welcome the opportunity for dialogue amongst key stakeholders. We look forward to hearing your perspectives and ideas to work together for a better academic environment.

Executive Council of the *Bundesverband Promovierende e.V.* on November 5, 2025

