

ANNEX 12 STUDENT EXCHANGE

Instrument objectives

The overall objective of the student and researcher exchange programmes between Finland and Egypt is to strengthen the cultural understanding and improve the dialogue between the two countries. The Centre for International Mobility (CIMO), which is a government organisation functioning under the Ministry of Education, has been guiding most of the student and researcher exchange programmes in Finland. They provide information both to Finnish and foreign students and researchers and administer many of the exchange programmes. CIMO was mentioned especially in the Transition Strategy as a possible actor for helping to enhance the student and researcher exchanges further.

There are various funding sources and possibilities for short and longer term students and researcher exchanges between Finland and Egypt including among others:

- The North-South-South (NSS) programme administered by CIMO (also teacher exchange);
- The EU TEMPUS and Mundus programmes administered by CIMO;
- National Finnish and Egyptian government pools for student and researcher exchanges and CIMO Fellowship funds, all administered by CIMO;
- Student and researcher exchanges taking place via bilateral higher education institutes agreements (mostly governed by Memorandums of Understanding) including also teacher exchange visits;
- Short courses and seminars organised by the Finnish Institute in the Middle East (FIME);
- Researcher cooperation within the MFA supported Development Research projects;
- Exchanges taking place under the new HEI ICI cooperation programmes; and
- Exchanges taking place via the Finnish public diplomacy funds support to higher education institutions cooperation.

Due to the large number of programmes providing possibilities for student and researcher exchanges, this evaluation will not concentrate on any single one of them, but provide an overall evaluation of the possibilities. Most of the above mentioned programmes function in various other countries as well, including for example the NSS, EU Tempus and Mundus programmes, HEI ICI programmes, FIME courses, Development Research projects and public diplomacy funds.

The North-South-South programme's first phase was launched at 2004 and Egypt was involved in it from the beginning. The programme finances higher institutions cooperation networks. However, Egypt was involved until 2006 only in one programme (Mikkola & Snellman, 2006) and also during 2009–2010 there is only one network involving Egyptian universities, the N-S-S Public Health Higher Education Network, PHEN, and the Finnish University of Kuopio (CIMO website). Egypt was

included in the programme from the beginning similar to the other transition countries, Peru and Tanzania. The programme is administered by CIMO but managed in cooperation with the MFA. (Stenbäck & Billany, 2009)

The funds available for student and researcher exchanges governed by the bilateral Cultural Cooperation Agreement (of 1983) are agreed for few years in a row under the Executive programmes. The programmes agree on the exact bilateral funds that will be made available for student and researcher exchanges for each year. The development research and HEI ICI instruments do not have the main goal of providing possibilities for student and researchers exchanges, but in practise these programmes can include in particular researcher exchanges (depending on the exact projects made within them).

The public diplomacy funds have been used by the Finnish Embassy in Cairo especially for promoting cooperation in a vertical way e.g. in the fields of music, equality and high technology. Some researcher, teacher and student exchanges have been also taking place for example in the cooperation between the Finnish Sibelius Academy and Cairo Music Academy. The use of these funds started, however, also only in the 2008–2009 period, after the official transition period was over.

Teacher exchanges agreed upon under the governmental cultural agreement's Executive programmes and for example under the NSS programmes have been mostly only for few weeks.

Design, Implementation and Results

Figure 3 below shows the statistics of CIMO on the number of bilateral scholarships awarded each year and the total number of months these scholarships cover for the student and researcher exchanges between Finland and Egypt from 2002 onwards. It

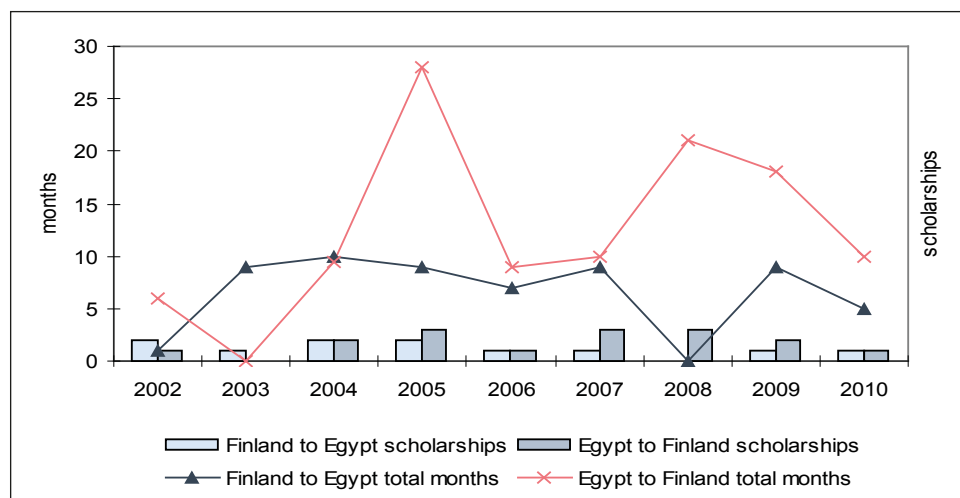


Figure 3 Number and months of scholarships awarded bilaterally

Source: CIMO statistics

should be noticed that these statistics include only the student and researchers exchanges that are administered by CIMO. There is no clear evidence of an increasing trend in the number of scholarships awarded or in the total number of exchange months these scholarships cover between the two countries. While these numbers are indeed not total, the number of exchanges taking place via other routes seems to be relatively small as well. For example, under the public diplomacy funds only few students and researchers did a short exchange period under the music institutions cooperation according to the Finnish Embassy in Cairo.

According to the CIMO statistics, most of the Egyptians arriving to Finland came to study natural sciences (especially physics, biology and geology). On the other hand, the most scholarships awarded by the Egyptians to Finnish students and researchers were for studying Arabic language and culture, Islam and political sciences.

All of the funds agreed upon for student and researcher exchanges between the two governments (under the executive programmes of the Cultural cooperation agreement) have not been always used. Apparently it was difficult to find more interested students/researchers. For example, in the Executive programmes of the cultural agreement it was agreed that Egypt will provide annually two study and research scholarships (to Finns) for nine months. These funds are administered by CIMO and the above statistics show that there has been only 1 scholarship of 9 months used in 2007, one in 2009 and none in 2008. Similarly, the Finnish funds for Egyptians students and researchers have not been fully used every year.

Under the development research funding possibilities, two projects have been executed in Egypt, but there is no information on how many student and researcher exchanges have taken place within these projects. (Helland, Namaalwa Jjumba & Tostensen, 2009) Similarly, there is no exact information on the number of exchanges made under the other programmes and funds mentioned that are not administered by CIMO, although these provide also possibilities.

On Coherence, Complementarity and Compliance:

Ad 4. The Egyptian authorities are very interested in student and researcher exchange possibilities and programmes between Finland and Egypt. The Finnish Universities are considered of high quality and offering interesting cooperation possibilities and education programmes. Therefore, Egyptian higher education institutions interviewed were very interested in increasing the mutual cooperation and exchange programmes further. In general, the experiences on the past exchanges were found positive by them.

The evaluation of the NSS programme found that some foreign students coming to Finland found the scholarship tight financially. However, this statement did not specify the nationality of those students. Further, the teacher exchanges, which are mostly only for a few weeks (e.g. for 10 days), were found to be slightly too short by the Egyptians for effectiveness and longer-term cooperation building.

On Effectiveness:

Ad 7. The understanding of the various student and researcher exchange funding programmes seems to be relatively high in Egypt, but additional information could be still beneficial. For example, the authorities interviewed did not know of the information and administration functions of CIMO in Finland. However, especially considering that not all the possible funds for student and researcher exchange have been used, the level of current funding possibilities is considered to be more than enough.

Ad 8. The level of satisfaction in Finland to the student and researcher exchange possibilities has been quite high. For example courses and possibilities for studying the Arabic language receive often more applications than the places available.

Ad 9. Based on the actual numbers of student and researchers exchanges that have been taking place, the (new) funding possibilities under the transition strategy seem to have only a minimal positive impact on the level on student and researcher exchanges if at all.

Ad 10. See section B on the use of the funds.

On Potential Sustainability:

Ad 12. Not applicable.

Ad 13. Yes, there has been funding possibilities for student and researcher exchanges for a longer period, since the signing of the cultural agreement in 1983. In addition, some researcher exchanges took place based on own funding.

Ad 14. Universities have been funding also parts of the exchanges depending on the programmes. In addition, students and researchers have provided often little funding themselves for their exchange period (depending again on the specific funds used).

On Value Added:

Ad 16. Due to the rather limited number of exchanges that have actually taken place, the value added of these instruments used in Egypt can be considered limited for the whole Finnish society. However, it should be again noticed that these instruments are used in various other countries as well and that this evaluation will not analyse their overall value added.

Ad 17. See above.

Forward looking:

Ad 18. The general strengths and weaknesses of student and researcher exchange possibilities are relatively well known. These include e.g. possibilities for cultural exchanges at the micro level and expanding of cultural understanding and knowledge; on the other hand, there is danger of brain drain and often limited impact on wider scale cooperation. However, this evaluation is supposed to concentrate on the specif-

ic strengths and weakness of this type of cooperation between Finland and Egypt. Further, for example within the NSS programme the possibility for Brain Drain has been tried to be mitigated by funding only exchange parts that will be included in the domestic degree of the student, but no funding is provided for doing the whole degree abroad. (Stenbäck & Billany, 2009)

More specifically, these instruments provide good opportunities to also concentrate on the priority areas of cooperation between Finland and Egypt. Many students from Egypt have arrived already to study natural sciences in Finland and further exchanges in the fields of environment and ICT could be boosted.

According to the interviewed stakeholders, one of the main weaknesses of these tools also in the Egypt-Finland cooperation is found to be the often rather limited impacts on wider scale institutional cooperation and limitations to the specific persons involved. However, especially the researcher and teacher exchange periods have been found to create also more lasting institutional ties, but this has depended heavily on the personal ties and activity levels of the people to create further cooperation.

Ad 19. Further advertising of the possibilities provided by these instruments could be considered especially in Egypt. Many Egyptian students are interested on studying in European countries, but the numbers coming to Finland are rather limited. The exact reason for this could not be explained sufficiently. It was mentioned that the relatively cold climate in Finland could have decreased the interest of Egyptian student if they had similar opportunities provided in other countries. On the other hand, many Finnish students prefer to study in well-known and ranking universities abroad. Most Finnish students in Egypt have been studying the Arabic culture and language, but otherwise the interest in other fields has been relatively small.

Ad 20. The current funds and programmes seem to offer more opportunities than there is demand for and hence no new instruments in this field seem to be needed.

Recommendations

- Given the relatively large number of funding possibilities for programmes that include student and researcher exchanges between Finland and Egypt and the relatively low use of these funds, a more detailed study on the interest of students and researchers from both sides for exchange periods could provide important additional information. This study should cover a relatively large number of students in both countries and the level of funding could be better adjusted based on the study results.
- More information distribution and advertising on the various student and researcher exchange funding possibilities in both countries could be done.