

Perfect match programme for SMEs

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 GERMANY

Timeline

2016 Implementation	2017 Implementation	2018 Implementation
2019 Implementation	2020 Implementation	2021 Implementation
2022 Implementation	2023 Implementation	2024 Implementation
2025 Implementation		

ID number 35211

Background

The programme *Perfect match for SMEs* was introduced in 2007 and in its annual reports the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) considers the programme as an important tool in addressing the challenge of matching between applicants and companies providing apprenticeship placements.

Objectives

The aim is to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in filling open training places with suitable young people.

Description

The *Perfect match* programme (2015-20; funding volume per year: EUR 6 million including ESF funding) is designed to counteract matching problems on the training market. The programme is funded by the ESF and the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) budget as well as financial participation of the economy. The German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH) is the lead agency for the implementation of the programme. The *Perfect match* programme supports advisors at the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Chambers of Skilled Crafts, Chambers of Liberal Professions and other business organisations that support SMEs in filling their vacant training places with suitable young people from Germany and abroad. The advisors are involved in the process from the analysis of training needs in the company to selection interviews and recruitment tests.

In 2018, the counsellors ensured some 5 600 placements of young people in dual training and introductory training (5 011 and 661 respectively). Moreover, from 2007 until 2018 more than 84 000 training places and 10 300 places for introductory training have been successfully filled.

2016 Implementation

2017 Implementation

2018 Implementation

2019 Implementation

In 2019, about 7 200 SMEs and more than 30 000 young people were advised on the best match. In the process, 4 371 dual training places and 470 introductory training places were filled with young people.

2020 Implementation

In the first half of 2020, 3 678 SMEs and more than 8 892 young people were advised within the framework of the Perfect match programme: in the process, the advisors achieved 1 259 placements of young people in apprenticeship programmes and 137 placements in introductory training.

In May 2020, the funding programme was extended until 31 December 2023 so that the current 140 advisors at 84 chambers and other business organisations can continue to support SMEs to find apprentices in the context of the pandemic. The funding programme Welcome guides (*Willkommenlotsen*) complements this programme for refugees looking for an apprenticeship placement.

2021 Implementation

In 2021, the programme was continued. For SMEs offering apprenticeships, contacting suitable applicants was one of the biggest challenges due to COVID-19 contact restrictions. Accordingly, the advisers have established new, previously unusual ways of reaching young people. More and more counsellors were using social media channels to approach new groups of applicants or were contacting graduating classes via digital classrooms. Contact and counselling were made possible either by telephone or video conference or, in some cases, by WhatsApp on request.

Many companies appreciated the support of a counsellor when conducting job interviews via video conference. In 2021, trainee speed dates or training fairs were organised and held in digital form for the first time at many locations.

In 2021, the Internship Week platform was created as a start-up. Three 20-year-old founders developed a format through which they are able to strengthen contact between local companies and students and support companies in recruiting young talent. Employers can get to know the skilled workers of tomorrow without requiring a lot of time and organisation: the company registers on the website and posts internships for the holidays free of charge. Many media, including the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce, promoted it. So far, more than 5 800 internships have been carried out in 11 regions and 600 companies.

2022 Implementation

The term was originally until the end of 2023. The new directive is to apply from 1.1.2024 with a term until 31.12.2027. The focus of the directive will be aligned with the current needs of SMEs as well as current scientific knowledge. The first focus will be on promoting sustainable and quality employment, start-ups and entrepreneurship, and adaptation to change.

As of 2022, around 150 counsellors are working at 89 chambers and other business organisations. The list of regional contacts is updated regularly.

2023 Implementation

In 2023, 6 400 SMEs and almost 18 500 young people received counselling as part of the Perfect Match programme. In the process, 3 300 dual training places (including

almost 500 with young people from a migrant background) and 232 introductory qualifications (including 25 with young people from a migrant background) were filled.

The funding programme 'Perfect Match and Welcome Guides' is the successor programme to the previously separate funding programmes 'Perfect Match' (for filling training positions with young people without refugee status) and 'Welcome Guides' (for the integration of refugees into training and work), both of which expired on 31.12.2023.

2024 Implementation

From 1 January 2024, the Perfect Match and the Welcome Guides programmes have been merged, adding up to more than 200 chamber guides supporting companies in filling their vacant training places with suitable young people from Germany, abroad or with a refugee background. The new directive of this programme applies from January 2024 until end of 2027.

Industry contributes 40% of the costs for the new funding. The programme is administered by the Federal Office of Economics and Export Control (BAFA). The funding programme is supported on an ongoing basis by the Alliance for Initial and Further Training.

In 2024, more than 10 400 employers and over 17 400 young people - including around 2 900 refugees - received individual guidance thanks to the support programme. In total, this resulted in over 4 900 placements in training, work and introductory qualification programmes, including around 800 with refugees and 355 with young people from EU and non-EU countries.

2025 Implementation

In 2025, around 100 project implementation bodies with 200 advisors are involved in the programme nationwide. The high quality of the counselling is ensured by regular training and professional support from the NETZWERK Unternehmen integrieren Flüchtlinge (for the 'Welcome Guides' module) and the German Economic Institute (for the 'Perfect Match' module). In June 2025, an explanatory video and an information leaflet on the funding programme were published.

On 12 and 13 June 2025, around 140 advisors from the 'Perfect Match and Welcome Guides' programme gathered to their annual meeting at the Federal ministry of economic affairs (BMWE) in Berlin.

Bodies responsible

- German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH)
- Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWE) (since 2025)
- Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) (until 2025)
- Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) (until December 2021)

Target group

Learners

Young people (15-29 years old)
Learners with migrant background, including refugees

Entities providing VET

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

Other stakeholders

Social partners (employer organisations and trade unions)

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Financial and non-financial incentives to learners, providers and companies

Lifelong guidance

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

Osnabrück Declaration

Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET

European Education and Training Area and international VET

Subsystem

IVET

Further reading

[BMW website on Perfect Match and Welcome Guides programme for SMEs](#)

[Programme website of the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts \(ZDH\)](#)

[Platform Internship Week](#)

[Website of Federal office for economic affairs and export control](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Implementation

Second Skilled Immigration Act (2023-24)

The German government published the 'Key points on skilled labour immigration from third countries' in 2022.

Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2023 Discontinued**Securing apprenticeship placements during the COVID-19 crisis**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal Government (BMBF, BMAS, BMWi) decided on key measures to support apprenticeship and to secure skilled labour in June 2020 with a total funding budget of up to EUR 500 million.

 GERMANY**Type of development**Practical
measure/Initiative**Subsystem**

IVET

2025 Implementation**Future Starters programme for young adults without initial vocational qualification (Zukunftsstarter)**

The Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) and the Federal Employment Agency (BA) joint initiative to provide initial vocational training for young adults *Training will be something - late starters wanted (AusBILDUNG wird was - Spätstarter gesucht)* started in 2013

 GERMANY**Type of development**Practical
measure/Initiative**Subsystem**

IVET

2025 Implementation**Supporting SMEs to provide future-proof VET**

Under the umbrella initiative, VET 4.0, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) initiated a special funding line (Initial and continuing vocational training in the economy 4.0 - Support structures for SMEs in the adaptation process of in-company training) within the JOBSTARTER plus

 GERMANY

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Alliance for initial and further training

The 2015-18 Alliance for initial and further training was agreed between the Federal Government, Federal States, business and industry, the unions and the Federal Employment Agency at the end of 2014.

 GERMANY

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2023 Completed

First Skilled Immigration Act (2020)

The Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) has drafted the Skills Immigration Act in December 2018, in the context of the government's Strategy to secure skilled labour. The Act features the following:

 GERMANY

Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Integrating migrants and refugees in VET and work

Since 2015, in line with the federal ESF integration guideline, the IvAF integration programme (Integration of asylum seekers and refugees) has contributed to the sustainable integration of asylum seekers, asylum applicants and refugees in training and employment through comprehensive counselling

 GERMANY

Type of development

Practical

measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Expanding vocational guidance and support from school until completion of training

Nationwide standard support measures anchored in the Social Code (e.g. SGB III) cover the transition from school to work, for example with various forms of vocational preparation and continuous support during training.

 GERMANY

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET

2021 Completed

Pact for vocational training

The Pact for VET (*Der Berufsbildungspakt*) includes the following measures, partly addressing work-based learning:

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Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

“ ... ” **Cite as**

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Perfect match programme for SMEs: Germany. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/35211>

