

# First Skilled Immigration Act (2020)

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

REGULATION/LEGISLATION

 GERMANY

## Timeline



ID number 28124

## Background

Against the background of demographic changes and current and future skilled labour shortages in some sectors, Germany needs to attract skilled professionals both from EU and non-EU countries.

## Objectives

As part of the 'skilled workers strategy' of the Federal government, the aim of the law is to facilitate the immigration of skilled professionals, to ease their access to the labour market and to offer good prospects to specialised staff from non-EU countries.

## Description

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:

- (a) access to work visa for skilled workers from non-EU countries with recognition in Germany of their foreign vocational or academic degree, without restriction for bottleneck occupations;
- (b) measures for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications become more attractive and practical, including quicker, closer counselling;
- (c) immigration for job search also for skilled workers with recognised vocational training and the possibility of trial work for up to 10 hours per week;
- (d) with qualified employment, a permanent residence is possible for skilled workers with a German qualification after two years or with a foreign qualification after four years.

### 2018 Legislative process

### 2019 Approved/Agreed

The law was passed on 15 August 2019 and came into force on 1 March 2020.

The granting of a residence permit and recognition of a professional qualification will continue to be checked in separate procedures. However, the relationship between immigration and recognition has been revised at various levels.

For entry, skilled workers from third countries seeking qualified employment in Germany need to have their professional qualification or – in the academic non-regulated sector – a university degree, recognised as equivalent to the corresponding German qualification. There is one exception: IT specialists with highly developed practical professional knowledge can come to Germany without recognition and practise their occupation. In the case that full equivalence cannot be confirmed, it is possible to complete the missing competences for full recognition through supplementary courses.

New actors were established to accelerate the recognition process and limit its duration to just two months. For initial orientation guidance, applicants can contact the hotline, Working and living in Germany. The hotline redirects those interested in recognition to the recently established Service Centre for Professional Recognition (ZSBA), which makes the entire recognition procedure more transparent and efficient for applicants through counselling. The ZSBA is based at the Federal Employment Agency Central office for foreign and professional placement (ZAV) in Bonn. It is funded for the initial phase of four years by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

### **2020 Implementation**

The Skilled Immigration Act came into force on 1 March 2020.

The 2020 Skilled Immigration Act sets the compass of the new German approach to labour migration by simplifying requirements for skilled workers through two novelties. First, it expanded the definition of skilled workers to include workers who completed vocational training and not only highly-qualified professionals and made their employment no longer subjected to a labour market test (so-called priority check). Second, it introduced a 'search option' that enables prospective migrant workers to immigrate under certain conditions in order to find a training (up to six months) or a work opportunity.

From 1 March 2020 to 31 December 2020, in spite of the pandemic, German diplomatic missions abroad issued almost 30 000 visas to qualified specialists and apprentices from third countries. Several German Federal States have set up central authorities for non-nationals, specialising in the immigration of skilled workers. A central service point for professional recognition for interested professionals abroad (ZSBA) has been set up at the Federal Employment Agency. The important new instrument of the fast-track procedure for skilled workers is being used increasingly.

In June 2020, the information portal of the German Federal Government for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications was relaunched and is available in 11 languages. The content of the website is now aligned more specifically to the requirements of each of the three main user groups. For international skilled workers, counsellors, and employers there is a dedicated access point. The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) is responsible for the monitoring of the data on recognition. The BIBB runs the Recognition portal on behalf of the BMBF.

### **2021 Implementation**

In August 2021, the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI) published recommendations that should serve e.g. the immigration authorities to adequately apply the regulation.

### **2022 Implementation**

In 2022 the German government published the 'Key Points on Skilled Labour Immigration from Third Countries' with the intention to further develop the Skilled Immigration Act. This key issue paper was to become the basis for a more

comprehensive draft law on labour immigration in Germany. This new law was to be part of a broader strategy to secure skilled labour.

In 2022, 97 292 work visas were issued, 499 200 people have applied for the recognition of their foreign professional qualifications.

### **2023 Completed**

The second Skilled Immigration Act (also known as the 'Law on the further development of skilled worker immigration') was passed in July 2023 and supports the Federal Government's skilled labour strategy (see corresponding PD).

## **Bodies responsible**

- Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) (since 2025)
- Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI) (until 2025)
- Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI) (until 2021)
- Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ) (since 2025)
- Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) (until 2025)
- Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS)
- Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)
- Federal Employment Agency (BA)

## **Target group**

### **Learners**

Young people (15-29 years old)

### **Other**

Learners, apprentices and skilled workers from non-EU countries

## **Thematic categories**

### **Governance of VET and lifelong learning**

Coordinating VET and other policies

### **Transparency and portability of VET skills and qualifications**

Developing and applying qualifications smaller/shorter than full

### **Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation**

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

### **European and international dimensions of VET**

International qualifications

## **European priorities in VET**

### **VET Recommendation**

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

VET promoting equality of opportunities

## Osnabrück Declaration

Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET

European Education and Training Area and international VET

## Subsystem

IVET CVET

## Further reading

[Make-it-in-Germany portal](#)

[Information on Skilled Immigration Act](#)

[Information portal for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications](#)

[Strategy to secure skilled labour \[Fachkraftestrategie der Bundesregierung\] 2022; \(in German\)](#)

## Related policy developments

### 2025 Implementation

### Validation of non-formally acquired skills

The ValiKom project aimed to promote the validation of non-formally and informally acquired skills in Germany and was initiated by the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (DHKT) and the German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK), together with the Federal Ministry for Education and Resear

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#### Type of development

Practical  
measure/Initiative

#### Subsystem

IVET CVET

### 2025 Implementation

### Recognition of foreign professional qualifications

The procedure for the assessment and the recognition of foreign professional and vocational qualifications is regulated and standardised through the Federal Recognition Act (including the federal states recognition acts for professions regulated at this level), which was adopted in 2012.

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**Type of development**

Regulation/Legislation

**Subsystem**

IVET CVET

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**2025 Implementation****Recruiting skilled workers from abroad**

There are various approaches and actors contributing to a sustainable skilled labour immigration.

*Legal framework for access to labour and training market*

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**Type of development**

Strategy/Action  
plan

**Subsystem**

IVET CVET

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**2025 Implementation****Second Skilled Immigration Act (2023-24)**

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

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**Type of development**

Regulation/Legislation

**Subsystem**

IVET CVET

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**2025 Implementation****International cooperation in VET**

The subject of bilateral VET cooperation is usually the intentions of a partner country to reform its VET system. Project funding in international VET cooperation serves to make expert knowledge and implementation competences from Germany available to the partner countries.

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**Type of development**

Practical  
measure/Initiative

## Subsystem

IVET CVET

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2025 Implementation

### Perfect match programme for SMEs

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.

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#### Type of development

Practical  
measure/Initiative

#### Subsystem

IVET

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2025 Implementation

### Intercultural competences for trainers

Following the enormous influx of refugees in 2015-16, BIBB expanded its support offer to trainers on developing intercultural competences and training refugees.

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#### Type of development

Practical  
measure/Initiative

#### Subsystem

CVET

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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

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#### Type of development

Practical  
measure/Initiative

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IVET CVET

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“ ... ” **Cite as**

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