

Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Germany

Please cite as:	Cedefop (2025). <i>Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Germany</i> . CareersNet national records. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices-germany-0
CareersNet Contributor:	Peter Weber
Acknowledgements:	Minh-Tuan Nguyen (alternate CareersNet member)
Reviewed by:	Cedefop
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Disclaimer:	
Previous versions:	2020

Introduction

Lifelong guidance provision reflects the constitutional setup of the education and employment system in Germany distributing tasks between the federal, the states (*Länder*) at regional level and municipalities. While general and higher education policies are based on regional level, vocational and employment policies are national.

The development of Career Guidance and Counselling (CGC) across the board (education, occupation, employment) and for specific target groups (young people, unemployed people, people with a history of migration, people with health impairments) has received more attention in the past decade and services have been further developed and expanded (nfb, 2022). Relevant developments relate to, among other things:

- The further development of careers guidance and counselling in schools (secondary 1 and secondary 2);
- The expansion of counselling at universities, including through Career Services;
- The continuation of the partial expansion and partial reduction of counselling services for adults by the federal states and the Federal Employment Agency ([National Continuing Education Strategy](#));
- Increased promotion of further vocational training ([Arbeit-von-Morgen-Gesetz](#); SGB III);
- The reform of support for the long-term unemployed ([Citizens' Benefits Act](#), SGBII) and the ongoing reform of the reform, planned for end of 2025;
- Improving the framework conditions for immigrants ([Skilled Labour Immigration Act](#), [Aufenthaltsgesetz](#)).

However, the design and professionalisation of CGC cannot be regarded as comprehensive and systematic. The aforementioned division of tasks leads to innovations in certain areas, but also to a very diverse and sometimes confusing picture. For example, the [OECD \(2022\)](#) states that "Career guidance services vary significantly across federal states and sometimes across regions in the same state. There are currently no co-ordination mechanisms to enhance consistency, creating imbalances in access to and quality of provision" ([OECD, 2022](#)).

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Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders

The institutionalisation of guidance in Germany is thus developing in a complex system. Coordination and collaboration are important approaches that must, however, be categorised in the national context for Germany. Some responsibilities and mechanisms are presented by way of introduction.

Federalism

The Federal Republic of Germany is a federally organised state. Different levels of government are responsible for different parts of the education, vocational and employment system. For example, school education is primarily the responsibility of the 16 states, each of which is responsible for its own legislation and curriculum development. Vocational training and labour market promotion are the responsibility of the federal government. Cooperation is sought in areas where the topics overlap (vocational orientation in schools, continuing vocational training).

Corporatism

Corporatism is a specific form of participation of social groups in political decision-making processes. German corporatism is largely based on the voluntary participation and co-operation of various stakeholders in the processing and solution of social tasks and problems. The involvement of employer representatives (trade unions, works councils) and employee representatives (employers' associations, chambers) is particularly important.

Subsidiarity

Subsidiarity describes a principle according to which tasks should be dealt with at the lowest possible level. Personal contribution and self-determination (individuals, families, communities) should take precedence over the state assuming responsibility where possible. "The (subsidiarity principle) demands that state intervention (e.g. by EU, federal government) and public services should only be supportive and only if the respective lower hierarchical level (states (*Länder*), municipalities, families) is not in a position to provide the necessary (own) services. The S.-P. plays an important role above all in education policy and social policy (...)" ([BPB](#)) (authors' own translation).

Project funding

Project funding in Germany is often used as a means of further developing and financing advisory services across all levels. In addition to the typical objectives of project funding (risk minimisation, planning reliability, implementation of sustainable services) and the use of EU funds to complement national or regional funds, projects in Germany are also used by the federal government to promote topics that fall within the remit of the states. This allows innovations to be supported. One disadvantage is that projects often cannot be continued after funding.

One consequence of the mechanisms described is that no overarching coordination of counselling services has been able to develop to date. Instead, forms of cooperation and, in some cases, coordination have developed in individual fields (e.g., counselling for pupils, counselling at universities, counselling on further education issues).

School education

Vocational guidance and career counselling at secondary levels 1 and 2 in Germany is based on the shared responsibility of various stakeholders, in particular the federal states, schools (municipal) and the Federal Employment Agency (FEA) which is the German Public Employment Service (PES). This shared responsibility was redefined in 2004 with a cooperation agreement and renewed in 2017. At state level, this agreement is organised between the state ministries for education and the FEA. The individual schools are locally responsible for implementation in cooperation with the other stakeholders, in particular the local FEA. Coordination therefore takes place at all three levels (national, regional, local). (See section [Career guidance](#)

for school pupils).

Young people at risk and NEET young people

Young people at risk and NEET young people (as well as all pupils) are supported within schools. In schools, the aspect of school social work has been expanded in recent years. Funding is also regulated differently. Social work in schools is financed by youth welfare (SGB 8, § 13), by local school boards, or by projects of the federal states. More guidance professionals have also been established to support young people in the transition from school to vocational training. The establishment of "youth employment agencies" in many municipalities combines the support, counselling and guidance of young people by municipal youth welfare services (Social Code VIII), careers counselling (Social Code III) and the job centre (Social Code II) under one roof. There were 353 youth employment agencies in 2021 ([Service centre for youth employment agencies](#)). The youth employment agencies cooperate with school education providers, extracurricular education providers, employers, and other stakeholders. Coordination takes place locally. (See section [Guidance for young people at risk](#)).

Vocational training

The laws for vocational education and training are regulated by the federal government. This takes place in a corporatist process. Vocational training is implemented locally by local school authorities and in the dual training system, in which employers play an important role. Counselling during vocational training is provided by the career guidance practitioners of the FEA ([§ 29 SGB III \(3\)](#)) and the chambers (depending on the affiliation of the respective occupations). The programmes are coordinated locally. (See section [Guidance for VET participants](#)).

Higher Education

The mandate to provide counselling before, during and at the end of studies at universities and other higher education institutions arises from federal higher education law (federal government, [Higher Education Framework Act, HRG §14](#)) and the higher education laws of the federal states. The legal framework stipulates that the universities (locally) work together with the agencies responsible for career counselling and other bodies. Cooperation with the FEA also takes place within this framework. (See section [Guidance for higher education students](#)).

Further education and vocational reorientation

Responsibility for adult education and continuing education lies partly with the 16 states and with the FEA with regard to vocational reorientation and vocational qualification. In addition, many chambers, trade unions and local further education providers are involved in the cooperation. To date, there has been no overarching coordination. The "National Continuing Education Strategy" calls for "the existing counselling services, particularly those provided by the federal government, federal states, chambers, associations and educational institutions, to be closely interlinked and expanded into a nationwide, high-quality counselling structure" (own translation) ([BMBF/BMAS 2021](#)). In recent years, a distinct landscape of coordinated and cooperative counselling on continuing education has developed, particularly at municipal and state level. According to [dvb \(2022\)](#), this should be strengthened and maintained as a complementary structure as part of the increased involvement of the national PES and the local FEA (See section [Guidance for adult learners](#)).

Labour market and unemployment

The Federal Employment Agency (FEA) offers counselling for unemployed people as part of its legal mandate ([SGB III, §29](#)). The Federal Employment Agency's offer is committed to the goal of promoting employment ([SGB III, §1](#)): "Employment promotion is intended to counteract the emergence of unemployment, shorten the duration of unemployment and support the balance of supply and demand on the training and labour market. In particular, long-term unemployment is to be avoided by improving individual employability" (own translation). The FEA itself is coordinated and managed by various stakeholders. Employer representatives, employee representatives and other socially relevant stakeholders are represented on the BA's administrative boards. Operationally, the FEA cooperates nationally, regionally and locally with other players in the labour market (including employers, chambers, training providers). (See section [Guidance for unemployed adults](#)).

Long-term unemployment and basic income support

People who have been unemployed for a longer period of time or who are not entitled to unemployment benefit (in accordance with SGB III) receive counselling as part of basic income support ([SGB II](#)). Job centres are responsible for providing basic income support for jobseekers. In most cases, the implementation of basic income support measures (including counselling) for jobseekers is carried out in so-called joint facilities. This cooperation between the employment agency and the local authority is intended to ensure that benefits are granted in a citizen-friendly manner. In addition to the joint institutions, in around a quarter of municipalities, authorised municipal agencies are solely responsible for providing basic benefits for jobseekers. These institutions (job centres) are responsible for providing financial support, advice and integration into training or work ([SGB II, Section 1 \(3\)](#)). The job centres cooperate locally with various training providers and other agencies to carry out and implement measures to support those entitled to benefits. (See section [Guidance for unemployed adults](#)).

Immigration

Various actors play an important role in counselling immigrants. Migration counselling for adult immigrants (MBE) is a special integration service for adult immigrants over the age of 27 and is the responsibility of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and implemented by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees ([BAMF](#)) (BMI, 2023). The counselling services are part of the overall offer for integration, language acquisition and naturalisation. Job-seeking migrants and refugees from Ukraine are supported and advised by the local job centres (see Basic income support). Local cooperation with the relevant authorities (foreigners' registration office, city administration, language schools) on residence law, language and integration courses and the recognition of foreign school qualifications is particularly important. Cooperation with welfare advice centres is also relevant. (See section [Guidance for immigrants](#)).

Vocational rehabilitation

Vocational rehabilitation counselling can provide access to many vocational rehabilitation services for young people and adults within the framework of [SGB IX](#). Various institutions in Germany can be rehabilitation providers, including the Federal Employment Agency, statutory health insurance, statutory pension insurance and statutory accident insurance ([SGB IX, §5 and §6](#)). The rehabilitation providers are obliged to provide sick or disabled people with comprehensive information and advice on possible measures. The legal basis already refers the parties involved to the necessary and obligatory case-related cooperation (e.g. [SGB IX, § 117f](#)). (See section [Guidance for persons with disabilities](#)).

Overarching cooperation and coordination

Along the counselling fields, it became clear that structures of cooperation, and in some cases partial coordination, have been established and are being maintained everywhere. At the same time, it is clear that due to the decentralised and thematic responsibilities, there is no overarching coordination for the entire field of lifelong guidance. Actors such as the National Forum for Counselling (nfb) and other professional associations ([nfb, 2022, p. 28](#)) play an important role here in initiating and critically supporting developments.

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Access to guidance

The regulations on access and the promotion of access to counselling are as diverse as the counselling landscape in Germany. There is a fundamental desire to promote counselling and information in all areas and to offer corresponding regulations and structures. At the same time, coverage is not always guaranteed, e.g. if counselling centres are only available selectively. In this respect, the services differ along the various fields of counselling. The strongest coverage can be found where institutions such as schools and the FEA are available nationwide and have a clear mandate to offer counselling.

School education

Legal Framework: The [school laws of the 16 states](#) and the KMK agreement on vocational guidance and counselling. In addition, the counselling mandate for the FEA is anchored in [SGB III](#). FEA counsellors have been working in local schools since [lifelong guidance](#) was established in 2019 and has led, among other things, to the FEA careers counsellors working directly in schools, which improves accessibility for pupils.

Policy: Career guidance is implemented in schools in cooperation with schools, FEA counsellors and other providers. Each federal state/province develops its own concept, which is implemented by the school authorities and the individual schools (see section [Career guidance for school pupils](#)).

Practices: Every pupil in Germany has access to careers guidance and counselling. The presence of these services at schools and the integration of careers guidance into lesson time ensures access. Digital services (see section [Career Information and ICT in Lifelong Guidance](#)) facilitate access to valid information and supplementary services, e.g. self-exploration, search for training places, etc. Although there are offers that are disseminated via social media, the offer of counselling via social media is low.

Young people at risk and NEET young people

Legal framework: The aforementioned laws ([Social Security Code III](#)) also apply to young people who are exposed to particular risks (§§28b-31). With a reform started in 2024, the focus on this target group will be strengthened. In Summer 2025 the new law was not yet established. In addition, the local authorities are responsible for youth employment assistance under [Social Security Code VIII](#). Job centres are responsible for NEET young people under [Social Security Code II](#).

Policy: The importance of this target group is recognised by many studies (e.g. [Vocational Training Report 2024](#) and [Data Report](#)). In Germany, there are a large number of young people who do not obtain a school-leaving qualification and/or do not make a successful transition into vocational education and training. There are various measures and projects to reach these young people at an early stage. The most important policy is the establishment of youth employment agencies. The German Social Security Codes II and III contain many opportunities for individualised support in order to achieve school-leaving qualifications, catch up or enter vocational training (see sections [Guidance for NEET](#) and [Career guidance for young people at risk](#)).

Practices: Young people who have not completed school or are not in vocational training are often more difficult to reach. In practice, schools try to reach young people with particular risks at an early stage. Youth employment agencies focus on low-threshold and outreach programmes (e.g. in cooperation with youth social work).

Vocational training

Legal framework: Vocational training is regulated by the [Vocational Training Act](#). Trainees can obtain counselling from the FEA within the framework of [SGB III](#).

Policy: Vocational education and training receive political attention above all for aspects such as the shortage of skilled labour, young people's readiness for training and drop-out from training. The further development and attractiveness of the training system is also a relevant topic (see section [Guidance for VET participants](#)).

Practices: The relevant chambers provide counselling services during the apprenticeship. The FEA counsellors are also present at the vocational schools with counselling services. Counselling is offered locally at vocational schools by other stakeholders and providers as well as trade unions. At-risk young people are to be supported through special measures (see section [Guidance for VET participants](#)). An overview about the services is available on the "[German Educational Server](#)".

Higher education

Legal Framework: The mandate to provide counselling before, during and at the end of studies at universities and colleges arises from federal higher education law (federal government, [Higher Education Framework Act, HRG §14](#)) and the [higher education laws](#) of the federal states. The FEA also offers counselling within the framework of [SGB III](#) on choosing a course of study, the transition from studying to working life and for students who drop out.

Policy: Comprehensive student counselling is offered at large universities in "Central Student Counselling Centres". These offer counselling on various issues such as study orientation, study counselling during your studies and preparation for the transition from university to the job market. The 'student services organisations' (*Studierendenwerke*) also offer in-depth psychosocial counselling, for example for learning problems, psychological stress or related issues. Smaller universities also use these central centres. Access for students at these universities is therefore possible, but more difficult as these are geographically separated and not known to all students. In recent years, greater attention has been paid to the development of "Career Services" with counselling and guidance services for the transition from studying to employment.

Practices: The accessibility of counselling centres at universities and colleges is generally ensured by good information media. To date, universities have mostly offered their services in person; online services and supplementary digital services have increased in recent years. Online self-assessments (OSA) are often offered for subject-specific study, particularly orientation in particular. These are accessible via a national [OSA portal](#). A wide range of information portals (e.g. [Hochschulkompass](#), Overview [German Educational Server Bildungsserver](#)) make it easier to find information on study programmes and admission requirements.

Further training

Legal framework: [Various continuing education laws in the federal states](#) regulate access to and the provision of continuing education for adults. In many federal states, these laws also regulate special leave for continuing education and thus increase the access for guidance and continuing education. The federal government (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) is responsible for labour market policy. The Ministry of Labour regulates the promotion of continuing vocational training through legislation. In recent years, several laws have been passed to improve access to further training.

In 2023, the "[Act to strengthen the promotion of training and further education](#)" was passed. It expanded the opportunities for promoting further training for people in the labour market. In 2020, the "[Work-from-tomorrow-law](#)" was passed to adapt the instruments for promoting further training for various target groups. The aim of the "[Qualification Opportunities Act](#)", which came into force in 2018, is to increase the adaptability of the workforce to technological changes in the labour market. In particular, it encourages workers to undertake further training by providing career guidance combined with financial incentives. As a result, the law has extended the legal mandate of the Federal Employment Agency to provide career guidance for employees.

Policy: Policy supports cooperative development, involving employers and employees, trade unions and works councils. Access to counselling especially for employees in small and medium-sized enterprises shall be increased - in some cases low-threshold and close to the company. Furthermore, in many states the establishment and funding of counselling centers for adults on further education issues is being maintained and continued (see section

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Quality assurance

Various systems for quality assurance and quality standards are in place including several binding regional standards in the field of education. The concrete design of concepts for quality assurance depends on the responsible institution, the project context, or the guidance provider. Some project context service providers apply the quality standards developed by the [National Guidance Forum](#) (nfb). Others use regional certification systems or have in-house concepts for quality assurance. No binding national quality framework exists for lifelong guidance provision covering all dimensions and service providers.

In its [Mission Statement](#), the National Guidance Forum underlines the importance to promote the quality of guidance as well as exchange of information and experience (e.g. own publications, ELGPN work including translations into German). The forum has produced a [Quality concept for Guidance](#) (BeQu – *Beratungsqualität*) consisting of a competence profile and a framework for quality development in public and private sector organisations. These guidance quality standards (BeQu *Beratungsqualität*) comprise five areas:

1. overarching principles (client-orientation, voluntary and open-ended, transparency and accessibility, ethic principles, continuous quality improvement);
2. counselling competences and professionalism;
3. process standards (working relationship, assessment of individual needs, interests, problem-solving approach);
4. organisational standards (mission, structures and processes, organisational and communication culture, staff and material resources, cooperation and networks) and
5. societal context and objectives such as self-efficacy and shaping competences.

While this model is not implemented as a binding frame, it is functioning more like a meta-standard, where local or regional projects or service provider orient itself. Most of the services are under the responsibility of the federal states (see section [Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders](#)).

For this reason, several federal states have developed their own quality standards and quality assurance procedures for their counselling services. Some examples are given here:

- Federal State Hessen: As other federal states, Hessen introduced a quality label for education guidance ([Gütesiegel Bildungsberatung](#)) based upon a procedure of certification for public-funded guidance providers.
- Federal State Baden-Württemberg: For [LNWB](#) (State network for continuing education counselling) the nfb-Standards are adopted for the quality assurance in the 180 service providers.
- Federal State of Niedersachsen. The [quality concept](#) define requirements for the structural and procedural organisation as well as proof of the quality of guidance. In a quality report, the advisory organisation documents the professional and methodological basis of its advisory services and describes the procedures and instruments introduced and implemented to provide and ensure high-quality and competent educational guidance.

For Career guidance and career education in schools, different actors are responsible. The federal state together with FEA define the frame for each federal state. Also, in this context different measures for quality assurance are developed. FEA set [Quality Criteria for vocational orientation](#) which are organised by third parties (training providers) within the framework of [SGB III \(§48\)](#) at schools.

The federal state Saxonia, like several other states (*Länder*), issued a Directive setting standards for career education and orientation at schools as precondition to apply for funding ([Quality seal for vocational orientation](#)). This is a two-stage procedure consisting of a written application (questionnaire) and an on-site visit (audit).

The federal state Hessen provides a comparable model. The [quality seal](#) offers schools with lower secondary level and/or upper secondary level the opportunity to analyse the implementation of their VO curricula themselves and have them certified as part of the application process. The certification is valid for three years. After that, schools can be recertified.

On national level, the *Partnerschaft Schule Wirtschaft* (Partnership Schools – Business) awards a *„Berufswahlsiegel“* (Quality label career choice). In 2024 1.700 schools held this award (from more than 30.000 in general education). Individual schools can apply for the award and at regional (federal state) level juries assess the applications. The BDA (Confederation of German Employers' Associations), the FEA and several large companies participates in this network including financial support.

The Project Guiding Schools was project funded by the Erasmus plus (KA2) program and involves 8 partners from 7 European countries. The project works to define internationally and locally implement a [quality framework for career guidance in secondary schools](#). For Germany the [dvb](#) (German Association for Educational and Vocational Counselling) was partner in this project.

The Federal Employment Agency complies with the Social Code. This suggests that guidance has to correspond to individual needs, to respect confidentiality and impartiality. The Federal Employment Agency has a dedicated department for Quality management including guidance services. As an essential element of quality assurance, the Federal Employment Service Germany has an elaborated detailed *„Beratungskonzeption“* (Guidance conception) for career counselling in the fields of vocational orientation and labour market integration. The [Foundation paper](#) was actualised in 2021 (Rübner & Weber 2021). These set operational internal quality standards for delivery of guidance services:

- Guidance concept for career guidance counsellors for vocational orientation (including choice of VET or tertiary education);
- Guidance concept for integration of unemployed (employment-oriented guidance and placement including choice of job, training for jobseekers);
- Guidance concept for integration support in a situation of complex problems (including cooperation with social and health services).

The manuals specify concepts derived from guidance research for the setting of the employment agency. They provide guidelines for the concrete counselling process and present counselling techniques for different types of clients including those with complex problem constellations. In addition, they present operational guidance on how to deal with difficult situations, such as combining a supportive with an administrative role (activation, monitoring up to sanctioning). They also invite to a continuous process of reflection.

These manuals are a common basis for initial and further staff training together with supervision and case conferences.

Quality of guidance forms also part of the counselling training offered within the Bachelor study courses "Labour market management" (*Arbeitsmarktmanagement*) and "Career guidance" (*Beratung für Bildung, Beruf und Beschäftigung*) at the FEA corporate [University "Hochschule der Bundesagentur für Arbeit"](#) in Mannheim (University of Applied Labour Studies). A large part of FEA counsellors are graduates from this university, the others undergo internal training courses for vocational guidance having work experience as employment counsellors.

Regarding guidance services as part of Active Labour Market Policies or financed guidance, coaching or training measures, basic quality standards are set by the tender specifications as part of the procurement procedure. In this context state supervision of the quality assurance, the Accreditation and Approval Regulation for the Promotion of Employment (AZAV) and the Upgrading Training Assistance Act (AFBG) are of relevance. Both focus on publicly funded training programs support continuing vocational learning for adults (formal and non-formal learning).

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Career management skills

In Germany, career education in schools lays the foundation for the development of career management skills (CMS), as do university guidance services and services for adult learners, the unemployed and the employed that aim to improve career management skills throughout the life cycle (Weber,2025).

CMS in School

Since the reform of careers guidance and counselling in the early 2000s, responsibility for vocational training has been divided between the schools and the FEA's careers counselling service (KMK 2017). Some overarching aspects can be summarised as follows:

- CMS are increasingly seen as an important basis for stable careers in German specialist literature. However, the term "vocational biographical competence" (*Berufsbiografischen Gestaltungskompetenz*) is usually used here.
- The concept of CMS is hardly ever explicitly used under this designation; instead, it continues to be referred to as vocational orientation.
- The implicit overlaps between the CMS concept and career guidance instruments focus more on traditional aspects of the concept (learning about professions, getting to know one's own strengths, deciding on a profession, an apprenticeship or a course of study).

The orientation of career counselling and career guidance in Germany has always adapted to changes and developments in the world of work over the past decades. One example is the shift from supplying large companies with workers who can fulfil the requirements of a precisely defined task to the demand for flexible, adaptable, socially competent and independent employees in the service world of the early 21st century.

This future-oriented view, which is geared towards the conditions and longer-term developments of today's labour markets, is contrasted by the need to prepare young people (as before) as much as possible for the first transition (school-to-work). This is what the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) writes:

The course for a successful career choice and thus for the transition to vocational training is set by the mandatory practice-orientated careers guidance with individual recommendations at lower secondary schools. As part of this careers guidance, pupils receive information about different professions in various subjects. They can develop a practical picture of the world of work, particularly through work placements in commercial enterprises, administrative authorities or social organisations, some of which last several weeks. This helps young people to make their career choices based on a realistic assessment. For the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder, careers guidance in schools and a successful transition are of central importance for the educational and professional biography of young people (KMK, n.d.).

If we look at the career guidance (and counselling) concepts currently being implemented, the focus is on the following goals (NRW, n.d.):

- Recognising your own 'potential', specifically your personal, social and professional skills. Portfolio tools such as the career choice passport are generally used for this purpose.
- Familiarisation with occupational fields. Occupational fields should be familiarised with as part of lessons in various subjects, but also specifically through exploring occupational fields at extracurricular learning locations. This is intended to expand knowledge about the regional professional and working world and about various professions.
- Internships are designed to familiarise students with and test the practical side of the world of work. In the preparatory classes, pupils should gain direct and in-depth insights into the world of work through one or more work placements and be able to compare their own skills, aptitudes, and interests with the world of work.
- Concretise their career or study choices and prepare for the transition. At the end of the penultimate school year, pupils who leave general education school with the SEK I qualification should decide whether they want to (and can) apply for a dual training programme or whether they want to (and can) gain further school qualifications by attending SEK II. Pupils who require further support in order to achieve vocational maturity are to receive targeted support. Pupils in the upper secondary school and other school types in SEK II should also be supported in their choice of

career and studies through cooperation between schools and companies, universities and career and study counselling services. This late phase of career guidance also includes specific job application training as well as career and study counselling from the FEA.

- The updated framework agreement between the KMK and FEA from 2017 emphasises the need to prepare young people for lifelong learning and career choice as an ongoing process (KMK, 2017).

These and similar objectives are now widely implemented in the *Länder* through programmes which are planned to be implemented in individual schools. Nevertheless, development tasks can still be identified. In organisational terms, these are determined by the responsibilities and resources available in the schools (staff, budget). In terms of content, the question arises as to whether these concepts place sufficient emphasis on the future-oriented development of skills for career management (CMS) later in life.

The still too strong focus of vocational orientation on the direct promotion of the first transition has been critically discussed in Germany for some time (Preißer, 2014). It is increasingly being recognised that a broader promotion of different skills is useful and necessary (Fischer, & Reimann, 2017). However, this implies the need to design CMS models in such a way that the development of career management skills is also linked to the promotion of basic social and emotional competences and is not only geared towards direct usability in the transition. Current projects point in this direction. For example, the 'Careers Around Me' project presented a CMS model that integrates skills for a healthy and successful life in a modern society (Careers Around Me, 2021).

To achieve such a more holistic approach to career education in schools, it is suggested that education ministries to bring together various interdisciplinary competences, e.g. on democracy education, gender equality, violence prevention, dealing with digital media and others, and to anchor them in the curricula of primary and secondary schools (Weber et al., 2025).

CMS in higher education sector

For the higher education sector, it seems sensible to link transitions (into higher education, into a career) with a good and successful course of study, which is relevant in view of the high rates of career uncertainty among students and drop out and, in some cases, poor academic success rates. CMS are aimed both at the successful organisation of a current educational or professional phase and at the preparation and management of future planned transitions and unplanned changes in the professional biography (Vogel 2017).

Transdisciplinary competences are part of higher education (Wissenschaftsrat 2022; HRK 2013; Seidl 2017). While universities have always offered a wide range of opportunities to acquire various generic competences outside of the subject-specific curricula, the Bologna reform created greater scope (but also higher requirements) to promote these through curricular offerings. The HRK (German Rectors' Conference) (2013) argues, among other things, that Bachelor's degree programmes in particular prepare students less for specific professions than for general 'employability' and non-academic careers.

In Germany, further concepts are currently being introduced into the discussion under the heading of 'future skills' - not least encouraged by the "Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft" (Donors' Association for the Promotion of Sciences and Humanities in Germany). In addition to the 'classic skills' (problem-solving skills, creativity, initiative, entrepreneurial thinking and intercultural communication), 'digital key competencies' and 'transformative competencies' (e.g. judgement, innovation skills, change skills or dialogue and conflict skills) are being called for as relevant (Stifterverband 2021; Ehlers 2020). These concepts differ both in the differentiation of content and in their objectives. What the concepts have in common is that they describe skills that may be necessary or helpful for coping with current and future tasks (mainly in professional life) and that they formulate interdisciplinary competences across the study subjects. What the concepts also have in common is that they are linked to the recommendation that they be taken up and implemented in the education system and, in some cases, explicitly in higher education.

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Evidence, monitoring and assessment

Since 2000, the counselling debate throughout Europe has developed in the direction of lifelong guidance. In Germany, it was intensified following the studies of the OECD and the World Bank, the resolutions of the EU Council and the founding of the European Lifelong Guidance Network (ELGPN) in 2007. At the same time, a discussion about quality standards, evaluation and monitoring of counselling developed (CEDEFOP 2023; Weber, 2022; Weber 2013). However, monitoring based on standards is only in the initial phase of implementation (Schober u.a. 2022; Schiersmann & Weber, 2017). The main reasons for this are the complexity of the political system (especially federalism and fragmented responsibilities) and often limited or lacking resources. There is also a debate involving numerous national experts who are calling for methodological quality and the development of suitable methods for monitoring and evaluation.

The Federal Employment Agency uses its own monitoring system, the counselling index, to record the quality of counselling and monitoring. This is based on an indicator model and is collected regularly and systematically by surveying users of the counselling services.

The National Forum for Guidance (nfb) continuously pursues the goal of promoting and coordinating monitoring systems. In the view of the nfb, evidence-based guidance policy and guidance practice require continuous monitoring of important key data on the guidance process, its structures and effects in the various fields of BBB guidance. Such a monitoring and reporting system only exists in a few federal states in Germany, in some regional or local networks or at individual counselling centres, but not nationwide. Furthermore, the concept and methods of data collection vary greatly, and the available database is thin. Nfb explains suggested recommendations for what needs to be done to improve the situation in the article '[Conceptual considerations for a national monitoring and reporting system in BBB counselling](#)'.

Quality standards and monitoring in Germany

Activities for quality assurance, quality development or quality management have been largely established in Germany since the 1990s - particularly in [Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Germany](#)

the context of continuing education - and have become part of everyday practice. A key driver of this development is the funding of measures by the BA and the European Social Fund, which is generally linked to the establishment of quality management (QM) (See section [Quality assurance](#)).

Monitoring in Federal States

In different federal states Guidance activities are combined with monitoring systems. One example is the state of Lower Saxony. The [evaluation of Educational Guidance Lower Saxony](#) comprises two survey areas: a guidance documentation of all guidance sessions carried out in an online database (including all relevant data on those seeking guidance) and a standardised survey of those receiving guidance after the end of the guidance process on results and effects according to the IOSM model (success indicators for increasing professional capacity to act: informed, oriented, structured, motivated) and on satisfaction with the guidance. The results of both surveys are summarised in a reporting system for joint evaluation and reflection by the participants in annual quality circles and published on the AEWB website. A second example is the LNWBB Network in Baden-Württemberg (more than 200 Guidance providers in the context of further education). The "[Landesnetzwerk Weiterbildungsberatung](#)" (LN WBB), which is funded by the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, introduced a monitoring and reporting system at the same time as it was founded in 2015 - initially in analogue form and digitised in 2016. The main aims of introducing the monitoring and reporting system include creating transparency in the provider and provider landscape and its development based on comparable data; ensuring the quality development and quality assurance of counselling work for counsellors and institutions based on uniform, binding, quality standards (see section [Quality assurance](#)) and competence profiles; and ensuring the coordination and management as well as strategic and fiscal planning and controlling of the funding provided or required for continuing education counselling.

Monitoring at the Federal Employment Agency - The Counselling Index

In line with the strong emphasis on the preparation and continuous training of counsellors employed by the German FEA (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*, BA) and the link between professional competence, quality and the results of counselling interventions, this section describes the BA's current evaluation and monitoring strategy for counselling. Firstly, the indicators created for the 'Counselling Index' are outlined and linked to counselling standards (Rübner & Höft 2017; Schiersmann, Petersen & Weber 2017; Kraatz 2011). In 2018, the BA trialled and introduced a new internal monitoring strategy ('guidance index') for several guidance services. The instruments used are based on the former 'Customer Satisfaction Index'. This has been used since 2005 (Deinzer & Schopf 2021). The Counselling Index is the responsibility of the BA's head office in Nuremberg (Finance and Controlling Division, responsible departments). The counselling index is part of the BA's controlling system (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit* 2023a). Since 2013, qualitative elements have also been included in the BA's target system in this context. The target system is divided into an 'impact and efficiency' sub-index and a 'quality and organisational culture' sub-index. Since 2020, the three guidance indices 'guidance index for employers', 'guidance index for employees' and the 'guidance index for young people' have been integrated into this sub-index (Federal Employment Agency 2023a; Federal Employment Agency 2019; Deinzer & Schopf 2021). There is a separate counselling index for counselling for adults in employment (Federal Employment Agency 2023b). This procedure was established in 2019 and has been implemented continuously since then. The customer groups surveyed are employees, young people in transition from school to training, rehabilitants and employer customers (employer counselling). The aim is to regularly monitor the quality of counselling and record the results locally, at agency level.

All monitoring measures are based on a series of indicators that are divided into two categories. The 'guidance quality' category comprises input and process factors, while the 'guidance impact' category is referred to as 'labour market impact'. There is also the category 'Further use/recommendation' of the service (Federal Employment Agency 2023b). The survey is based on the subjective assessment on a school grading scale (1-6) by those seeking advice. In addition, there are questions that generate information through the selection of possible answers, e.g. on the counselling issue, the current professional situation, access to counselling or the networking of counselling.

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Career information, ICT in guidance

Career information and ICT in lifelong guidance is developing rapidly in many forms. Kraatz, Rübner and Weber (2021) have summarised the most important forms and their development status in Germany in an overview article. Since then, development has continued to accelerate and differentiate:

Table: Status and planned development of digital guidance and counselling services in the German FEA

[Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Germany](#)

Strategic areas	Specific approaches	Youth	Adults
Digital self-service	information	national	national
	Online self-assessment	national	piloting
	Search	national	national
Online guidance and counselling	Administration	NA	national
	Video	national	national
	Email	explorative	explorative
Digitally enriched f2f counselling	Social media	explorative	explorative
	Extended hardware	piloting	NA
	Digital tools	explorative	NA

NB: 'national'=Available nationally in all German *Länder*; 'NA'= not available, 'piloting' = practices that are nationwide in introduction/piloting, 'explorative' = are local initiatives or exploratory studies not on national scale

Source: Adapted by author from Kraatz, Rübner and Weber (2021).

In addition to the general use of digital elements of guidance and career counselling, the aim is to strengthen mixed and hybrid counselling approaches (Kraatz et al. 2021). It is important that digital services are not limited to providing information and isolated tools for specific groups. It may be more promising to systematically integrate the use of ICT into existing lifelong guidance services while adapting guidance services to ICT. Overarching coordination and strategies are needed, both within institutions and between the different providers of lifelong guidance. Digital services should be part of a broader, coherent national e-government strategy (NFB, 2021).

The following is a brief overview of relevant perspectives on counselling. In principle, there are many great offers which cannot be presented in full.

Digitalisation as a context for guidance consulting

Digitalization affects guidance not only in terms of the services offered and the media used. At the same time, the contribution of career counselling to overcoming the risks of the digital transformation of the world of work must be explored (Kraatz et al. 2021). It is not only guidance that is being digitalized, but the world of work as a whole, and in this context, a further 'flexibilization' of employment, employment biographies and lifestyles is taking place, which can be accompanied and supported by (digital) guidance. Current projects are focusing on this context and further developing advisory services (DigiTrans). The projects of the Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (fbf) 'Future Centres' (*Zukunftszentren*) in various regions of Germany also support employers and employees in SMEs on their way into the digital world.

Digital competences of guidance practitioners

The importance of guidance counsellors' skills in dealing with digitalisation in the labour market and in counselling has been increasingly discussed in Germany for several years (Kraatz et al. 2021; Weber & Schulz 2023). This need has been addressed in the FEA's further training courses for counsellors. At the same time, it is necessary to systematically thematise this aspect in the national competence descriptions. The National Forum for Counselling has now taken this up and is presenting initial models (Weber, 2025).

Digital information platforms and databases

One of the strengths of digital services is the provision of information and databases for the various target groups. This concerns information on professions (*Berufe-Net*), employment opportunities (*Job-Suche*), of study programs (e.g. *Studienwahl.de* or *Hochschul-Kompass*), further education programmes (*MyNow*) and labour market statistics (*Statistik-Arbeitsagentur*). In addition to the national offerings, the federal states provide their own local offerings, in particular for educational opportunities (e.g. *NRW, Berlin*). A overarching search platform is provided at the National Educational Server (*Deutscher Bildungsserver*).

A current trend is to integrate these offers into personalised platforms, such as *MyNow*. Here, people can create their own profiles and plan their educational pathways and careers, get funding information, document learning outcomes and gain access to guidance and counselling.

Digital Self-Assessment

Self-assessment programs are another important segment. In recent years, the FEA has invested heavily in creating differentiated and integrated programs for various target groups. These programs are aimed at the target group of young people (*Check-U*) and adults (*NewPlan*). In addition to the actual assessment tools, the instruments also integrate links to further education and training pathway planning. Self-Assessment in the Context of Higher Education (Online-Self-Assessment) (*OSA-Portal*). Some of these offers are also available as an app for smartphones from FEA (*Azubi-Welt*) or the "Berufswahlpass-APP" (*Berufswahl-APP*).

Digital Platforms for Users

Various platforms are available for career and degree program voters. The FEA offers the platform *PLANET BERUF*. The Ministry of Education has also developed a new platform for career and study choices in cooperation with other stakeholders (*ZYND*). For adults, the national platform *MyNOW* is intended to bundle offers for further education and careers. The FEA provides also a digital *platform for job search*. The *Bildungsserver* provides a comprehensive overview of counselling and guidance services in Germany.

Digital Platforms for Practitioners and Providers

In recent years, it has become increasingly possible to offer centralised services that are carried out locally across the country and to develop nationwide digital platforms for these services with information and resources for practitioners and providers. This exists for the vocational orientation (*ÜBERAUS*), educational chains (*Bildungsketten*), or local, for example in *North-Rhine-Westphalia, Baden-Württemberg* or *Hamburg*. Platforms are also available for youth employment agencies (*Servicestelle Jugendberufsagenturen*), vocational integration for young people from other countries (*Make-it-in-Germany*), counselling for the long-term unemployed (*SGB II*) (*Servicestelle SGB II*), counselling for refugees and recognition (*Integration and Qualification Network*), recognition of foreign educational qualifications (*ANABIN*). Comprehensive information platforms are particularly promising in a complex federal system with distributed responsibilities (see section *Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders*), as the concepts and methods provided can be used nationwide, networking takes place and the quality of the services can be better assured.

Use of Digital Media for Service Provision

Many guidance and counselling services have increasingly been offered digitally in recent years. In the areas of online and digitally supported counselling, the Public Employment Service (FEA) is currently in a phase of intensive development, which has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated contact restrictions (Kraatz et al. 2021). While in some areas the decision for a nationwide introduction has already been made (e.g. video counselling, hardware equipment for face-to-face events), in other areas new approaches are being tested at local level, in some cases supported by implementation studies (e.g. use of social media for peer counselling). *Video based counselling* has been implemented as a standard service for the target groups of young people, people with disabilities and the long-term unemployed. In addition to video counselling, hybrid counselling formats are also currently being tested (counselling in networks, involvement of third parties in counselling sessions). Video counselling. Other providers in the federal context also offer digital chat or video counselling formats. Digital counselling services are also available for specific target groups, including for people with disabilities, e.g. from welfare organisations such as *Caritas*, by *FEA* or by the *German Pension Insurance Scheme*.

Digital outreach counselling

Outreach and mobile counselling as a low-threshold counselling service has long been called for in professional and political discussions (most recently, for example, in the implementation report of the German National Continuing Education Strategy and in OECD recommendations) in order to ensure that as many people as possible have access to counselling services of sufficient quantity and quality. The National Forum for Guidance (nfb) also reiterated this demand in its [impulse paper on continuing education counselling 2020](#). The nfb [published a series of articles](#) and examples around this issue.

Artificial Intelligence in Career Guidance

In recent years - and not just with the Large Language Models - the development of AI has also accelerated in Germany. Many potential uses are emerging or are already being implemented in public administration and the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*, 2025). Examples include the statistical processing of job advertisements, process optimization in administration by importing documents and customer data, preparing responses to customer enquiries, anonymizing training data or evaluating the quality of financial calculations, etc.).

Different implementations of AI also in Guidance practice can be observed. In secondary school careers guidance lessons, students use AI chat programs to improve e.g. their job applications. The counsellor shows the students how to achieve better results with good prompts. An AI assistant for the [Berufe.net database](#) ('*BERUFEBOT*') is currently being developed for career and rehabilitation counselling for all age groups. Currently the system is in a test-phase and will be launched in 2025. Counsellors can use voice input to filter out suitable career and educational opportunities for their clients.

The '[NewPlan](#)' platform offers self-assessment and derivations for educational planning in employment counselling. AI is integrated into this tool to generate data-based results. It helps clients to implement action plans.

AI applications are used for the training and further education of counsellors. Based on large language models, the AI can simulate client personas and learners can train their counselling skills. The application acts in various client roles and provides detailed and friendly feedback after the exercise. Such systems have been developed and are used both at the Federal Employment Agency's University of Applied Sciences ([HdBA](#)) and at the Ohm University in Nuremberg (Lippert et al. 2024).

An independent AI system is being developed at the HdBA to support advisors in counselling sessions (Weber and Ertelt, 2025). Together with AI experts from the University of Trier and the [German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence](#) (DFKI), work is underway on an AI application that provides support during counselling sessions. The AI records the customer's career and study choice criteria and maps them in a model. On this basis, the AI can support the counselling session with suggestions for more in-depth advice and, at the same time, access databases to suggest suitable study or further training opportunities, for example.

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Training and qualifications

In Germany, as in many other countries, career guidance is not a (legally) regulated profession. Training requirements are set by the providers and vary across the provision landscape. Existing models of quality standards and competence models cover various aspects that are to be described and safeguarded by these standards (see section [Quality assurance](#)). Categories of professional competences for educational and vocational guidance, the qualification and further training of guidance practitioners (e.g. minimum requirements) and the description of the core services or processes of vocational guidance (e.g. characteristics of guidance processes and services) have been integrated into these standards. The national forum for guidance (nfb) published [competence profile](#). The dvb association provides a [position paper](#), including competence and knowledge requirements. However, the standards have so far been used very differently in the various contexts and states and therefore have different effects.

Federal Employment Agency

The Federal Employment Agency (FEA) has its own training system for practitioners. The qualifications, skills and competences required of career guidance counsellors who provide lifelong guidance services are described in a model of the FEA as a field of activity and competences. The entry qualification for counsellors in this position is EQF 6 (bachelor's degree or comparable qualifications and 2 years of professional experience in FEA) or EQF 4 (vocational training with several years of professional experience and further training). Upon entering this position, all FEA counsellors undergo training to develop basic counselling skills and knowledge related to a counselling approach (Rübner & Weber, 2021). The basic qualification for guidance practitioners also includes training on aspects such as the use of labour market information or knowledge about occupations. With the introduction of "lifelong guidance" at the FEA in 2019, a mandatory qualification was introduced for guidance practitioners: the Professional Guidance Certificate Programme (Weber, 2020). This programme builds on the basic training and was developed and managed by the University of Applied Labour Studies (FEA University) in cooperation with the FEA local directorates. Academic training was introduced in 2020 for up to 6,000 guidance practitioners based on an agreed competency framework. From 2025 this program will continue for up to 400 practitioners per year.

The FEA Germany trains career guidance counsellors at its corporate University of Applied Labour Sciences (HdBA - *Hochschule der Bundesagentur für Arbeit*) in a [dedicated bachelor's degree course](#) in Career guidance for Education, Career and Employment (*Beratung für Bildung, Beruf und Beschäftigung*). Modules include an intensive training in counselling techniques for different target groups, labour market and education system and trends, sociology, networking (for more information please see [here](#)). A specialisation is possible either in career guidance for orientation (i.e. vocational or educational choices) or in management, consisting of holistic career guidance for integration targeted at clients facing complex problems. A second bachelor's degree in Labour market management (*Arbeitsmarktmanagement*) qualifies employment counsellors (and other FEA specialists). Several modules are dedicated to career guidance and counselling techniques. Both study courses apply the *Beratungskonzepte* (Guidance concepts). These manuals have been elaborated within the agency's strategy for quality assurance (see section [Quality assurance](#)). Since 2015, the University of Applied Labour Studies offers the part-time master's course Labour market-oriented guidance (M.A.).

A large number of the FEA's specialist staff has completed this qualification. In addition, the Federal Employment Agency recruits employment and career guidance counsellors externally, though numbers are decreasing. They receive an initial training including a module on guidance, equally based upon the Guidance manuals (*Beratungskonzepte*). A certified comprehensive training is provided for case managers in job centres providing integration guidance in case of multiple problems. This specialisation is aligned with the [curriculum of the German Association for Care and Case Management](#).

Study Programs in Universities

Several universities offer Master study courses in guidance or coaching, focusing on different profiles: e.g., [University of Applied Sciences Münster](#) – Guidance, mediation, coaching; [University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt](#) – Guidance in the world of work: Coaching and Supervision; [University Dresden](#) – Master of Counselling; [University Kassel](#) – Coaching, organisational development and supervision; [University of Applied Sciences Kempten](#) – job-accompanying Master in Supervision, organisational consulting, coaching (for further information see: www.hochschulkompass.de). An overview can be found [here](#).

Counselling teachers

Several *Länder* (states) have binding rules for the training of orientation (guidance) teachers responsible for the coordination of career orientation at school. In addition, counselling teachers (*Beratungslehrkräfte*) must complete a training, for example in [Bavaria](#), [Baden-Württemberg](#) or [North Rhine-Westphalia](#). Training can help in case of learning problems, problems with teachers or other students, education problems etc. Specialist help is provided by school counsellors or school psychologists who have degrees in psychology. Many youth coaches providing intensified support for transition management for young people at risk are social workers or social pedagogues. The latter is also the case for career and integration counselling in complex situations as provided by various contracted commercial or not-profit organisations in active labour market programmes. Guidance for further training of adults in municipalities is often provided by teaching staff having a pedagogical background.

Further training for counsellors

Many counsellors who are active in educational and vocational counselling have a first degree that is not specific to counselling or guidance. Therefore, further training through certificate programmes plays an important role. For several years, the Association of regional training centres („*Verbund regionaler Qualifizierungszentren*“) offered a certified training course in "Educational guidance and competence development" in cooperation with various universities. This consortium has ended. Today, the Centre for Scientific Continuing Education at the University of Mainz offers a similar [programme](#). An overview about different certification programs for guidance, counselling, vocational orientation, case-management and others can be found [here](#). Often further training is provided within certain projects and services.

Associations

Career counsellors are organised in several professional associations that provide training or give their members orientation about relevant training requirements.

1. *Nationales Forum für Beratung* (nfb – [National Forum for Counselling in Education, Career and Employment](#));
2. *Deutscher Verband für Bildungs- und Berufsberatung* (dvv – [German Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance](#));
3. *Berufsverband für Beratung, Pädagogik und Psychotherapie* (Professional Association for Counselling, Pedagogy and Psychotherapy);
4. Career Service Netzwerk Deutschland: www.csnd.de;
5. *Gesellschaft für Information, Beratung und Therapie an Hochschulen* (GIBeT – [Association or information, guidance and therapy at universities](#));
6. *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Beratung* ([German Association for Counselling](#));
7. *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Karriereberatung* ([German Association for Career Guidance](#));
8. *Bundesverband der Träger im Beschäftigtentransfer* ([Federal Association of service providers for outplacement](#)).

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Funding career guidance

Provision for funding of lifelong guidance in Germany corresponds to the distribution of competences and responsibilities (see section [Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders](#)). Sources for funding include:

Unemployment insurance

Unemployment insurance is related to all measures under Social Code III (SGB III) and is financed based on shared contributions by employees and employers (See sections [Guidance for unemployed adults](#), [Guidance for older adults](#), [Guidance for young people at risk](#)). The insurance finances career guidance services for career choices as a preventative service and guidance for the unemployed as a curative activity. The share of FEA staff directly in contact and dealing with clients stands at 23.4% in Germany, which corresponds to 23,000 employees. Some of these have tasks other than career guidance, such as counselling for employers, information for clients at the reception or in call centres. Guidance delivered through Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP) measures is also financed by the unemployment insurance.

Tax-funding

Guidance services for long-term unemployed (related to [SGB II](#)) (See section [Guidance for unemployed adults](#)) receiving social allowances are financed by the federal budget and partially by municipalities. Specific training programs are also co-funded by the [European Social Fund](#) (ESF). Specific national projects or programs to develop and support systems, e.g. for students, are also financed by taxes (see section [Career guidance for school pupils](#)).

Services and support for people with special needs (See section [Guidance for persons with disabilities](#)). In addition to general social benefits, people with disabilities receive special benefits to prevent disadvantages in working life and participation in society from arising in the first place or to overcome them as quickly as possible. These benefits are regulated in the SGB IX and covered by taxes and/or by health insurance funds or pension funds.

Guidance services at universities (see section [Guidance for higher education students](#)) are funded by each university and thus mostly by the states (*Länder*), while school psychologists at schools or social workers at schools are financed by the states (*Länder*).

Services for adult learners (see section [Guidance for adult learners](#)) that are covered by the states (*Länder*) are also tax-funded or funded in a mix by taxes and European programs (ESF).

Membership fees

Chambers of Commerce and Industry offer guidance services above all in the context of VET and apprenticeships and for adult Learners. These are funded through membership fees by employers.

European Social Fund

Guidance within active labour market programmes (SGB II and III) (See section [Guidance for unemployed adults](#)) or special programmes like Transition coaching for acquisition of an occupation or Integration through qualification for migrants are often co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF).

HR consultants for vocational orientation, commercial orientation camps or coaching are paid by the private funds.

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Career guidance for school pupils

Provision of vocational orientation and career guidance in schools by the Federal Employment Agency is based on a framework agreement regarding the cooperation between schools and the FEA Germany in the field of career orientation. The state ministers of culture and the Federal Employment Agency renewed the agreement of 2004 in 2017. The aim is to equip young people with competences to manage the transition from school to VET, another school or university.

Orientation shall start as early as possible, be anchored in the school curriculum (see also section [Guidance for immigrants](#)), and include a variety of methods such as information, meetings with parents, practical experience and work placements, group and individual counselling and support for searching an apprenticeship, further education at school or a study course. All states set up vocational orientation and guidance schemes involving the FEA Germany at state level and other relevant stakeholders to support youth at risk and disabled. Based on a dedicated state administrative regulation, individual schools and local employment agencies set up concrete schemes for career orientation considering the specific features of the school. If we look at the career guidance and counselling schemes currently being implemented, the focus is on the following goals (MAGS):

- Recognising one's own "potential", more specifically personal, social, and professional skills. Portfolio tools such as the career choice passport are typically used for this purpose.
- Familiarisation with occupational fields. Occupational fields should be introduced as part of lessons in different subjects, but also specifically through exploring occupational fields at extracurricular learning locations. This is intended to expand knowledge of the regional professional and working world and of different professions.
- Practical work placements allow pupils to familiarise themselves with and try out the world of work. In the semi-final year of school, pupils should gain direct and in-depth insights into the world of work through one or more work placements and be able to compare their own skills, aptitude, and interests with these.
- Concretising career and/or study choices and initiating the transition. At the end of the penultimate school year, pupils who leave general education school at the end of SEK I should decide whether they want to (and can) apply for a dual vocational training programme or whether they want to (and can) gain further school qualifications by attending SEK II. Pupils who require further support in order to achieve vocational maturity should be given specific support. Pupils in the upper secondary school (gymnasium) and other forms of upper secondary school should also be supported in their career and study choices through cooperation between schools and companies, universities, and vocational and study counselling services. This late phase of careers guidance also includes specific training on job applications as well as careers counselling and study guidance from the FEA.

At state level, this agreement is organised between the state ministries of education and the FEA. The individual schools are responsible for the local implementation in co-operation with the other stakeholders, in particular the local FEA. In order to strengthen careers guidance and counselling, more projects and instruments have been developed and implemented in recent years.

One example for such a scheme is from the state Northern Rhine Westphalia, introduced the programme *Kein Abschluss ohne Anschluss (KAOA)* - No school leaving without subsequent education) in 2012-2013, promoting a concept for systematic management of the transition from school to VET or university starting in grade eight (analysis of pupil's potential, exploration of occupational fields, work placements and reflection, concrete decision - application or transition to upper secondary education, exploration of universities and study courses, concrete decision). At each stage, individual career guidance is foreseen. Each municipality coordinates the actors involved (municipal coordinating body). In the actual program (2023) *KAOA-Star* is an additional instrument to support students with certain barriers or disabilities.

In accordance with its [renewed Concept for Career Orientation in Baden-Württemberg](#), issued in 2023, this state refine the aims for vocational orientation and career guidance and agree to intensify cooperation with the careers counselling service of the Federal Employment Agency. A new internship concept with partners of the training alliance and a digital matching platform is developed to strengthen educational partnerships between schools, companies, and local businesses in order for pupils to gain practical insights into the professional and working world. The renewed model is based on a cooperative [concept for career education](#) launched 2018 related administrative regulation for all secondary schools.

A third example is the programme careers orientation programme *Boby* in Bavaria equally, starting from grade five. It promotes as further element, setting up pupils' companies to enhance entrepreneurship.

In a fourth state, Hamburg, schools have to offer at least 34 hours of [career orientation lessons](#) during the last three school grades based upon a dedicated curriculum to be in place at each school. Moreover, performance has to be assessed and marked.

A [Specialist centre for vocational transition](#) ("ÜBERAUS") has been established by the *Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung*, BIBB (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training) to support vocational orientation and transitions. This is realised by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training and offers up-to-date information, links and concepts for vocational orientation.

Specific projects to improve career guidance at school

Education chains - cooperation for coordinated transition management in general secondary schools. To reduce early school leaving and to ensure "completion of schools and continuation - education chains until the end of VET", the Federal Ministry for Education and the states (*Länder*) organised in 2008 an education summit (source?). As a follow-up, the German government launched in 2010 the initiative "*Bildungsketten*" (Education chains) targeted at general secondary schools. The renewed agreements have a term from 2021 to 2026. Agreements exist between the ministries and 14 states. The education chain agreements cover several fields of action, for example vocational orientation, the further development of the transition area into a system and individual support at the transition from school to work. Successful support measures are to be further developed, expanded and, where possible, stabilised (BMBF/BMAS, 2023).

The federal level and the states cooperate together to coordinate orientation programmes at local level and improve the management of transitions from school. For this purpose, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, federal states and regional directorates of the Federal Employment Agency conclude agreements on programmes and measures including guidance and orientation. Key components of such a chain are networking of partners, support for school Career Orientation programmes (*Berufsorientierungsprogramme* - BOP) and Transition coaching for acquiring an occupation (*Berufseinstiegsbegleitung*), as well as support measures during VET.

The Career orientation programme includes a comprehensive analysis of the potential (strengths, weaknesses, interests, practice-oriented tests) and internships to test occupations in priority fields identified. All states implement career orientation programmes. Orientation programmes offered by the states start at the latest at class seven or eight. Then the Federal Employment Agency offers specific information, guidance and support for transition in classes eight, nine and ten depending on the type of school. In several regions, the introduction of education chains for transition management has received funding from the European Social Fund.

Education chains include a special form of support, "transition coaching" for acquiring an occupation (*Berufseinstiegsbegleitung*). At general secondary schools, the transition coaches (mostly social pedagogues) hold regular meetings and appointments with final class students at risk of early leaving from education and training or those aiming for a lower qualification in secondary level 1, e.g. secondary school leaving certificate. In cooperation with the individual student, the coach prepares a transition plan. This involves general career guidance and cooperation with specialised vocational guidance counsellors from the FEA Germany as well as work placements. Anchored in the German Social Law (Social Code III), this programme is managed by the FEA Germany and was co-funded by the European Social Fund during a project phase. The tool was successfully [evaluated](#) in 2015. In the 2018/2019 school year, around 25,000 places were made available nationwide. Since the 2019/2020 school year, the federal states have had to bear 50% of the costs. As a result, some of the federal states have withdrawn from the vocational placement programme. Currently, around 5000 coaches work at 3000 schools, the total financial volume for this measure accounts for EUR 1.1 billion including EUR 500 million co-financing by the national budget. Some parts of the program are now carried by FEA within the SGB III, §47. In 2025 BMAS reports: "The new education chain agreements further strengthen cooperation between the federal government, the states and the FEA. Previous agreements focused on mainly career guidance, but now the emphasis is on

ensuring a smooth transition into working life. This can be supported, for example, by career start coaches and other measures” (BMAS, o.J.)(own translation).

Implementing education chains for transition management has triggered the development of quality standards and binding elements of career orientation with a view to developing career management skills. States define standard elements including expected competences and minimal requirements. The use of ESF has considerably contributed to this development. Concepts of implementation slightly vary across the states, even if sustainable consolidation is not easy.

Instruments

Above all, in secondary schools, but also in career services at universities, specific tools and instruments have been developed to make career orientation more effective:

An internationally recognised good practice is the so-called *Berufswahlpass* (Vocational choice passport) for young people. This is a portfolio documenting the steps in a process of occupational or educational choice including tasks completed and the progress that has been made. The instrument is also available as an app (*Berufwahlapp*). Schools use it for orientation classes. It is structured as follows:

1. *offers for orientation* - presentation of providers and who does what;
2. *my path towards an occupational choice* - profile includes strengths and weaknesses, self-assessment and assessment by others, objectives; learning plan; occupational fields and profiles; practical experience; steps to prepare the transition, e.g. checklist for application;
3. *documentation* - includes a Vocational choice passport, overview of orientation activities, documents and certificates including social or sport activities and
4. *help for life* - templates, looking for accommodation, financial management, insurance etc.

In 2020, the FEA in cooperation with the Foundation of German Business (*Stiftung der Deutschen Wirtschaft*) issued a curriculum to strengthen orientation at upper secondary schools. This reference manual titled "Effective support for career orientation – tertiary education and VET", includes modules on strengthening the sense of self-responsibility, self-assessment, search for information using various sources, taking a decision and tools to strengthen transversal competences. It also presents recommendations for schools, such as working methods and assessment of performance (Source: *Berufsorientierung wirksam begleiten. Bundesagentur für Arbeit – Stiftung der Deutschen Wirtschaft* 2020). The document contains examples from 14 states on how it has been used and adopted to state-specific needs.

The [internet portal for career orientation](#), run by the FEA Germany, is structured along with key questions in the process of career orientation.

- School (paths after leaving school, overview of secondary schools, school-leaving qualifications at vocational schools, catching up on second chance school-leaving certificate);
- Vocational training (discovering strengths, exploring occupational fields, information on desired occupation, decision-making, searching for suitable apprenticeships, applying for an apprenticeship)
- Studies (identifying strengths, finding a degree programme, making a decision, choosing a place to study, securing a place)
- In the meantime (doing voluntary service, going abroad, doing an internship, working).

The internet source is lined to different digital tools and gives access to career counselling offers by the local FEA.

Specialists from the *Hochschule der Bundesagentur für Arbeit* (University of Applied Labour Studies of the Federal Employment Agency) have elaborated a web-based self-assessment tool "Career choice readiness". The tool allows for a short and simple assessment along five dimensions: a) problem awareness and motivation; b) vocational preferences; c) level of career information; d) decision-making behaviour and e) skills for implementation. After having been tested for two months in 2015, a slightly adjusted version will be rolled out soon. According to the evaluation, more than two of three career guidance counsellors found the tool useful for the first as well as for follow-up meetings (Höft & Rübner, 2019).

The *ProfilPASS®* coordinated by DIE (*Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung* - German Institute for Adult Education) has become a tool to assess the competences developed during formal, informal and non-formal learning and activities for other groups, such as young people and migrants. It was initially developed for adult learners, but versions adapted for different target groups are now available. Its sections include: a) my life - experience; b) my activities; c) my competences + competences level; d) my objectives and e) collection of documents. Like it encourages self-assessments, self-reflection, self-awareness and self-understanding and supports the development of career plans. Many schools use it for the analysis of potential during the vocational orientation programme from class seven.

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Guidance for VET participants

In general, all the measures described in section [career guidance for school pupils](#). All described measures are also available for young people who are in vocational training or want to change from one training activity to another. However, to particularly support VET, a large number of activities are established. In section [Career guidance for young people at risk](#) these are described in detail.

In recent years, the VET market has developed positively for young people, with more training opportunities than young people seeking them. There is regular monitoring and reporting on this ([Report on Vocational Education and Training \(Berufsbildungsbericht\)](#)). Nevertheless, there is a mismatch. Many young people do not succeed in finding or completing vocational training, and many apprenticeships remain unfilled. Different political measures try to focus on that. In order to enable all young people without vocational qualifications to access a fully qualifying training programme, ideally in a company, there will be a [training guarantee](#) in the future. In the phase of a vocational training young people are for example supported by [Assisted training \(Assistierte Ausbildung\)](#), a legal [entitlement to external training \(Rechtsanspruch auf außerbetriebliche Ausbildung\)](#) and support in the form of a [vocational training grant \(Förderung durch Berufsausbildungsbeihilfe\)](#).

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Guidance for higher education students

Legal Framework: The mandate to provide counselling before, during and at the end of studies at universities and colleges arises from federal higher education law (federal government, **Higher Education Framework Act, HRG §14**) and the **higher education laws** of the federal states. The FEA also offers counselling within the framework of **SGB III** on choosing a course of study, the transition from studying to working life and for students who drop out.

Policy: Comprehensive student counselling is offered at large universities in "Central Student Counselling Centres". These offer counselling on various issues and for different users (women, international students, students with special needs, etc), in particular on finding study programs, issues during the studies and the transition from university into the labour market. Specific and structurally separate services also provide counselling on social and psychological problems (especially through the 'student services organisations' (Studierendenwerke). Aside the general educational guidance, faculties offer subject-specific study counselling. These central centres established in the larger Universities offer services also for students from smaller higher education institutions. In recent years, greater attention has been paid to the development of "Career Services" with counselling and guidance services for the transition from studying to employment. These services are offered in cooperation with FEA services. The transition from higher education into labour market became more important and universities established more service centres in this regard, as documented by **CSND**. A specific and relevant field of work is the prevention and reaction to student who do not complete their studies.

Practices: The accessibility of counselling centres at universities and colleges is generally ensured by good information media. To date, universities have mostly offered their services in person; however online services and supplementary digital services have increased in recent years. Online self-assessments (OSA) are often offered for subject-specific study orientation in particular. These are accessible via a national **OSA portal**. A wide range of information portals (e.g. *Hochschulkompass* Overview *German Educational Server Bildungsserver*) make it easier to find information on study programmes and admission requirements. The **Alumniportal** offers a platform for companies, universities and organisations operating at international level who wish to stay or get in touch with Germany-Alumni.

Regarding career guidance at universities, the Plenary of University Directors (*Hochschulrektorenkonferenz*) issued a Recommendation already in November 2011 to establish Career Services as interface between universities and the employment system. A new position paper "**Guidance in the student lifecycle**" was adopted in 2021. The recommendation underlines that the existence of career services should be considered a quality component of all universities. These complement the central study advice service (*Zentrale Studienberatung*) and the connected service for psychosocial support for students. The Federal Employment Agency coordinates its career guidance services with university career services that are offering, for example, individual career guidance or training for job search.

Many universities offer workshops and start-up guidance for students and graduates interested in setting up a business. The **Federal Ministry for Economics and Technology** (*Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie, BMWI*) provides financial- and imatrial support.

A particular focus is currently on the permeability of vocational and higher education. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) (Since 2025 BMFTR, Federal Ministry of Research, Technology, and Space) has various funding programmes in this area. These include, in particular, the **Educational Chains project** (*Projekt Bildungsketten*) and **VERONIKA-UP**.

The Ministry of Education launched the project "*Studienabbruch - und was dann?*" (Dropping out from a study course - what next?) which is now also integrated in the "Educational Chains" project. This provides support through information and guidance about different options including VET. An interactive map presents information points at chambers and the FEA Germany as well as job - apprenticeship vacancies. The website informs also about local activities for those at risk of dropout or early leaving and guidance services offered by universities and the Federal Employment Agency. Another important activity in this regard is the project "*Queraufstieg*" (lateral access).

GIBeT is dedicated to the further development of the professionalization of information, counselling and therapy at universities (also) for students with disabilities. To this end, it promotes the expertise of those working in academic and psychological counselling, e.g. with annual conferences. It supports the systematic exchange of information and experience among study and student counsellors and advises institutions and their staff. This association provides **standards for the training, qualification and certification** for the profession of student counselling.

The **Career Service Netzwerk Deutschland** (CSND) is the association of the career guidance centres from universities. It aims to enhance the quality of the guidance services provided in HEIs by developing standards and offering trainings. It presents good practice.

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Guidance for adult learners

In principle, the counselling services for adult learners do not differ from the services described in section **Guidance for the employed**.

In Germany, approximately 60% of the adult population participates in informal learning or in non-formal education or formal continuing education programmes each year (BMBF 2022; Schober et al. 2022). Most of this participation in education can be attributed to informal learning. 48% of learning activities take place in a work-related context. 16% of individuals learn through work-related continuing education initiated by the individuals themselves. 18% of individuals take part in non-work-related continuing education (Schober et al., 2022, p. 2).

Continuing Education Guidance or Career Guidance for adult learners in the country is an offer for adults who are seeking orientation in the context of continuing education projects or, more generally, their own professional and personal development. Politically and conceptually, CET is understood as a lifelong service that should be available to all citizens (Council of Europe, 2008; BMAS, 2020). In this context, the term has been expanded in the discussion to include a comprehensive concept of guidance for education, career and employment (Schober et al., 2022).

The special role of career guidance for adult learners for individuals and society is seen in Germany as arising from the tension between the increasing importance of education as an important prerequisite for professional careers and social participation and, at the same time, the empirically verifiable lower participation of adults with a disadvantaged social background (OECD, 2021). The reasons for this can be seen in educational biographical experiences, but also in poorer economic and work-organisational conditions (BIBB, 2016). For these users, career guidance for adult learners could be a possible support service to enable participation and social inclusion through education, especially if the guidance also opens financing options and enables continuing education despite unfavourable conditions. As pointed out by Weber et al. (2016) it is important in the context of adult learning, which applies to the case of German policy development, not to make the fundamental assumption that a lack of interest in personal or professional development is due to previous educational experiences and successes. However, this requires easily accessible offers that are close to where people live, as well as suitable funding opportunities. The current offers reach the so-called educationally disadvantaged target groups only to a limited extent (Muth, 2019).

Publicly funded programmes for guidance for adult learners have been expanded in recent years (Schober et al., 2022; Käßlinger, 2020). In addition to services provided by local authorities and state-funded programmes, which have been established in almost all federal states, the new Qualification Opportunities Act and the promotion of continuing education by the Federal Employment Agency are intended to open opportunities for further education to employed and unemployed people (SGB III and SGB II) (BMAS, 2020). The German Education Server offers an overview and search options for continuing education advice (*Bildungsserver*).

Since 2019, a broad alliance of stakeholders has adopted the “*Nationale Weiterbildungsstrategie*” (National Strategy for Continuous Training) under the lead of the Federal Ministry for Education and the Ministry of Labour. Other partners include the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection (BMWK), the Federal Employment Agency, the specialist ministerial conferences of the 16 federal states (*Länder*), social partners and business organizations. Components of the action plan include a digital platform for continuous professional training (*Digitale Plattform Berufliche Weiterbildung*, *INVITE*) and a databank to search for education and training (*my Now*) with modular, interactive learning platforms, strengthening assessment and validation of competences for persons without any formal vocational qualification, establishing mentors for continuous training in enterprises, promoting regional alliances for further training and strengthening career guidance by the Federal Employment Agency and other actors in this field.

To make continuous professional development more attractive, the ministry introduced a Funding scheme *Bildungsprämie* (learning subsidy) for individuals with a lower income to finance up to half of the training fees.

Starting with adult learners, the *ProfilPASS*[®] coordinated by DIE (*Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung* - German Institute for Adult Education) has become a tool to assess the competences developed during formal, informal and non-formal activities for other groups, such as young people and migrants. Its sections include:

1. My life - experience;
2. My activities;
3. My competences + competences level;
4. My objectives;
5. Collection of documents.

Like it encourages self-assessments, self-reflection, self-awareness and self-understanding and supports the development of career plans.

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Guidance for the employed

Career guidance with a view to the labour market is a legal right in Germany. The Social Code III (*SGB III*) states that the Federal Employment Agency offers vocational guidance and guidance for further training to adults participating in the labour market or intending to do so.

In 2019, the Federal Employment Agency adopted a lifelong guidance strategy. It extends and intensifies career guidance for young people before entering the labour market and plans to set up career orientation for adults, employed and those needing support when returning from a period of parental leave or from a stay abroad.

Since 2018 different adaptation of the Social Code 3 led to new opportunities for lifelong learning and lifelong guidance for employed persons (“*Qualifizierungschancengesetz*” (Law on improvement of qualification opportunities); “*Arbeit-von-Morgen Gesetz*” (Work-of-Tomorrow Act)). Based on these legislations, within the Social Code III the §81 and §82 aims to increase adaptability of the workforce to technological changes on the labour market. Above all, it entitles workers to further training and expands the legal mandate for provision of guidance by the Federal Employment Agency with a view to career guidance for employees, individually or in the context of the workplace.

During the last decade, access to guidance for adults has indirectly been promoted by various guidance initiatives aiming at employers. After having piloted and evaluated three delivery models, since 2013, the FEA Germany is offering *Qualifizierungsberatung* (Guidance for upskilling) for companies, above all for SMEs, as an in-house service to be delivered by specially trained FEA consultants for employers. They support employers with a tool for demographic analysis, assessment of recruitment and training needs, selection of training providers and adequate learning forms, controlling methods of upskilling.

Since the last years various initiatives exist at regional level, financed by the federal states or municipalities, and operationally run by non-profit provider or public institutions (Schober et al., 2022; Gatsby, 2024).

Northern Rhine Westphalia offers a range of services and projects under the umbrella of the G.I.B. They are tailored for people who are employed or wishing to return to work, and especially for ones who seek recognition of prior learning and qualification (*Weiterbildung.nrw*). Lately in this federal state the Guidance services itself has been reduced or even stopped. Guidance providers are mostly adult education centres (e.g. *Volkshochschulen*), but also several NGOs and chambers. The Baden-Württemberg State Network for Continuing Education Counselling (*LNWBB*) was developed to offer career guidance and secure access to further education opportunities. More than 170 providers are part of the network, financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

In Berlin the *Berlin Way* offers career Guidance for adults through a network of 10 service centres run by independent or non-profit organisations that deliver a service under a single quality management framework. It provides independent advice and guidance to connect people with education and training opportunities. The federal state of Niedersachsen offers Guidance (education, further education) (*Bildungsberatung in Niedersachsen*). All educational guidance centres operate in a local or regional network together with other specialized counselling centres and continuing education providers. The Agency for Adult and Continuing Education steers the collaboration of all guidance centres in the state-wide network.

Also in the federal state of Hessen, more than 100 public advice centres provide free information on further education, financing and funding, career paths, vocational training or starting a business.

These six federal states are good example of guidance services and networks. Also, the other federal states offer comparable or at least some services. More Information about the [Gatsby Study that researched also the Germany services for Career Guidance for Adults can be found online](#).

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Guidance for unemployed adults

Unemployment and therefore also counselling for unemployed people is a relevant area that is heavily focused on by the FEA (Federal Employment Agency). The FEA's annual report shows, among other things, that around 34 million people paid unemployment insurance contributions in 2023. 3,5 million people have been unemployed; 1,7 million unemployed received basic income support for job seekers; about 1,7 million people exit from unemployment due to commencement of employment in the primary labour market and 2,2 million person entered into unemployment from employment in the primary labour market.

In average, people have been receiving unemployment benefit for 23 weeks (Annual Report of the Federal Employment Agency, 2023, p. 18-19). Further training is one of the relevant labour market instruments. Guidance supports integration into labour market as well as qualification. However, FEA states that "(...) guidance is not an end in itself; rather, it supports and complements this mission" (ibid. p. 5).

The Federal Employment Agency offers integration-oriented guidance and placement for unemployed. This service is based on [Social Code III, §35](#) and focus firsthand on the placement in the labour market. Having registered with the FEA, every unemployed person makes a personal appointment with a labour agent. Based on an assessment of resources and challenges in terms of skills, competences, and the personal situation (mobility, childcare, health, economic and social situation, etc.), the employment counsellor draws up an individual action plan in collaboration with the unemployed person. An IT system for competence-based profiling, matching and action planning (*VerBis*) supports employment counselling. Depending on the needs identified, the actions are job search, job search training, other training/qualification or more in-depth support involving in-house or external services. As part of its [Lifelong Guidance Strategy](#), the Federal Employment Service has set up a more in-depth career guidance service for adults (see sections [Access to guidance](#); [Guidance for the employed](#)), which is open also for the unemployed person in case a more comprehensive qualification or vocational re-orientation can support a sustainable integration into the labour market.

Further guidance and continuous support is offered as part of a training or other ALMP measures by social pedagogues or social workers for all target groups including refugees. Contracted providers are responsible, while the FEA Germany ensures supervision. Many training measures include traineeships to facilitate placement into a job. Before a training measure ends, the unemployed meets with the employment counsellor to start job search, thus avoiding the log-in effect of training measures.

When dealing with complex support needs, integration counsellors are promptly brought into play to prevent long-term unemployment. They offer more intensive guidance and support (INGA - [Interne Ganzheitliche Integrationsberatung](#) - Internal Holistic Integration Counselling). Evaluation of pilots showed faster integration and higher integration rates due to more frequent guidance interventions (lower case load), thus justifying increased expenses for counselling staff and up-skilling of unemployed.

Workers and unemployed who are early school leavers or returning from inactivity (e.g. Women returning to the workplace) can get financial support from a second-chance programme ([Zukunftsstarter](#) - Future Starter) (see sections [Guidance for early leavers](#); [Guidance for NEET](#)).

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Guidance for older adults

Older adults play an important role in the labour market. It is not clear how the group of 'older adults' should be defined. On the one hand, the group over the age of 55 is relevant. This group is confronted with greater challenges, for example especially when people of this age become unemployed or remain unemployed for longer. The health situation of people over 55 is also worse (DGB, 2024). Therefore, the active labour market policy measures have been implemented to address this. Another relevant age threshold is the retirement age ('pensionable age'). Das [Gesetz zur Verbesserung der Beschäftigungschancen](#) (Law to improve employment opportunities) älterer Menschen soll hierzu beitragen. This However, the retirement age has also been raised in Germany and will be 67 until 2031 (Federal Employment Agency, 2024). In the next few years, the baby boomers will be approaching retirement age. For this reason, the promotion of older people in the labour market has already played a greater role in recent years. It can be seen that [people in Germany are working longer](#) today and more older people are working beyond retirement age. Between 2013 and 2023, the number of people continuing to work (mostly part-time) after retirement has doubled. Over the same period, the unemployment rate of older people on the labour market has fallen in line with the general trend on the labour market (Federal Employment Agency 2024).

Counselling and further training measures for older employees are available to meet the particular challenges of this target group (DGB, 2024). These include the Programme 'Further training for low-skilled and older employees in companies' (WeGebAU), and the improvement of funding opportunities for employee training through the Qualification Opportunities Act (QCG) and the Act on the Promotion of Continuing Vocational Training in Structural Change and the Further Development of Training Assistance (*Arbeit-von-morgen-Gesetz*, AvmG).

- The 'WeGebAU Programme' which ran from 2006 to 2018 was dedicated to promoting further training and supporting low-skilled and older employees (aged 45 and over) in companies.
- The QCG, which came into force at the beginning of 2019, expanded the previous funding opportunities. Employees can receive access to vocational further training funding in accordance with [SGB III](#) and [SGB II](#) regardless of their qualifications, age and company size.
- The AvmG, which came into force on 29 May 2020, strengthened the promotion of further training, among other things by increasing subsidies for and a legal entitlement to vocational qualification-related further training support for low-skilled workers.
- The Act to Strengthen the Promotion of Initial and Further Training (Further Training Act) simplified the promotion of further training for employees in accordance with Section 82 [SGB III](#) in 2024 and introduced the qualification allowance in accordance with Section 82a [SGB III](#) (DGB, 2024).

All these measures are part of the [SGB III](#) activities, carried out by the FEA and supported by Advice and Guidance (see sections [Guidance for adult learners](#), [Guidance for unemployed adults](#) and [Guidance for older adults](#)).

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Guidance for early leavers

In Germany, in the context of guidance provisions and support, the legal frame and measures for early school leavers from education and training, and young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) and career guidance for young people at risk are mostly the same (see section [Guidance for young people at risk](#) for complete details).

Dropping out of school represents a critical turning point in the educational biography of young people. In Germany, thousands of young people leave school every year without a secondary school leaving certificate - with considerable consequences for their career and social prospects (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2022). Young people from socio-economically disadvantaged families, with a migrant background or those with psychological problems are particularly affected. The following article sheds light on the phenomenon of young people dropping out of school, analyzes the life situations of those affected and discusses existing and necessary counselling services.

Who are young school dropouts?

According to the Federal Statistical Office (Destatis, 2023), the proportion of school leavers without a secondary general school certificate was around 5.8% in 2022. Young people between the ages of 15 and 18 are particularly likely to drop out, as compulsory schooling ends after nine or ten years in most federal states.

The group of school dropouts is heterogeneous, but there are recurring patterns:

- Boys are more frequently affected than girls.
- Young people with a migration background have an above-average risk.
- A low socio-economic status of the parents has a negative impact (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2022).

Life situations of young early school leavers

The life situations of young early school leavers are often characterized by multiple disadvantages. These can be described along the following dimensions. Dropping out of school usually also means a lack of a formal school-leaving qualification, which makes access to training and skilled employment considerably more difficult. Many young people report unstable family circumstances, experiences of separation, neglect or violence at home. Psychological stress such as depression, anxiety disorders, ADHD or experiences with bullying are overrepresented among school dropouts. Many early school leavers come from households at risk of poverty, which not only affects their educational opportunities, but also their nutrition, housing situation and health. Breaking away from the school environment often leads to isolation and a withdrawal from social structures. (Hurrelmann & Quenzel 2023; BMFSFJ 2020)

Counselling and support services

Counselling services are crucial for opening up new perspectives for early school leavers. The following approaches are considered central: School social work is a low-threshold offer directly in the school environment. It offers individual counselling, crisis intervention and coordination with other support systems. The youth employment agencies introduced nationwide in 2016 combine the services of employment agencies, job centers and youth welfare offices to facilitate transitions from school to training. Initiatives such as "Schulverweigerung - Die 2. Chance" or projects of the youth migration services offer intensive individual case work and socio-educational support. Career entry support (Section 49 SGB III) - this instrument is aimed specifically at lower-performing students in the transition from school to work and has a positive effect on starting training and completing school (see more in [Guidance for young people at risk](#)).

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Guidance for NEET

The abbreviation NEET (*Not in Education, Employment or Training*) refers to young people who are neither engaged in education, employment, nor training. In Europe and Germany, this group has become a central topic of labour market and education policy debates, particularly with regard to their integration into the labour market and society. Since NEETs are often affected by multiple, overlapping problem situations, their early support is considered crucial in order to prevent social exclusion and long-term detachment from the labour market (Eurofound, 2016).

Age group, extent and significance in Germany

The definition of NEETs varies slightly across international comparisons. According to the OECD and the European Commission, the category usually covers young people between the ages of 15 and 29 (Eurofound, 2016). In German labour market policy practice, however, the focus is particularly on the group aged 15 to 24, since they are statistically classified as "youth" and are recorded separately in education and labour market statistics (Statistisches Bundesamt, n.d.).

In 2022, the share of NEETs in Germany amounted to around 6.8% of young people aged 15 to 24 (Eurostat, 2023). While this figure is comparatively low in the European context, certain subgroups remain a particular challenge. These include, in particular, educationally disadvantaged youth, young refugees, and young people with health-related restrictions, who face an increased risk of becoming NEET (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2022). Their number is estimated at 626,000 people. This figure has risen in recent years, indicating that more and more young people are struggling to make the transition from school to working life (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024).

Specific life situations of NEETs

NEETs do not form a homogeneous group, but rather display a broad variety of life situations, often characterised by multiple dimensions of disadvantage. These include, in particular, school dropouts or missing qualifications, psychosocial problems such as depression, anxiety disorders, or addictions, family burdens such as poverty, caregiving responsibilities, or experiences of violence, as well as migration and flight experiences that may be linked to insecure residence status. In addition, a lack of social networks and limited access to support systems are common. These factors often reinforce one another, resulting in structural exclusion from education and labour markets (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2022).

Challenges for counselling

A key problem in working with NEETs is their lack of institutional attachment. Many young people in this situation are not registered with the Federal Employment Agency (Agentur für Arbeit) or the Jobcenter, do not make use of counselling services, and often do not respond to contact attempts (Göckler & Rübner, 2019). This creates a "blind spot" for policy interventions, which significantly complicates access to support.

Counselling services and intervention strategies

The career counselling services of the Federal Employment Agency provide low-threshold support for young people still enrolled in school. For those

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without training or employment, the Jobcenter's U25 teams are responsible. They typically work on a case management basis and develop individual support plans. In addition, specialised programmes exist that focus on more outreach-oriented work. Youth social work under § 13 SGB VIII Jugendsozialarbeit (Section 13 of Book VIII of the German Social Code: Youth Social Work) provides support services for school-weary and disadvantaged young people. This is complemented by initiatives such as counselling services for young people with a migration background, which are tailored to the specific living environments of the target group. Innovative approaches are also gaining importance. Streetwork and mobile counselling reach young people directly in public spaces. Peer-to-peer projects draw on the experiences of former NEETs to build trust. Furthermore, digital counselling and case management systems enable low-threshold contact as well as continuous support (see more in section [Guidance for young people at risk](#)).

Impact and challenges

The effectiveness of existing programmes strongly depends on building trust, individual casework, and effective inter-institutional cooperation linking youth services, schools, and mental health services. Particularly promising are systemic counselling approaches that take the entire life situation into account. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain: the available data on "invisible youth" is insufficient, monitoring processes are limited, and the institutional interlinking of support and funding systems remains inconsistent.

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Guidance for young people at risk

Early school leavers and young people without an education are particularly at risk because they have fewer opportunities on the job market and often only find insecure, low-paid jobs. They miss out on important social experiences at school, which leads to isolation and difficulty integrating into society. According to research (Nguyen 2022), the risk of poverty and dependence on state benefits is high, and many suffer from low self-esteem and mental health problems. In the long term, they have fewer opportunities for career advancement, which affects their quality of life and can reinforce the cycle of disadvantage.

In Germany, there are many counselling and support services for young people who are particularly vulnerable and in need of support during the transition from school to training/employment. These include, above all, students who dropped out of school, those who are at risk of school early leaving and have no training or prospects for a subsequent career.

The main legal basis for this is the [German Social Code III \(SGB III\)](#) and the [German Social Code VIII \(SGB VIII\)](#), which regulate the promotion of vocational training and employment as well as the rights of children and young people to support, advice and assistance. In addition, the municipalities offer youth vocational assistance within the framework of [SGB XIII](#). A selection of advice and support services and facilities are presented in more detail below.

Instruments in the transition system of Germany

Many programs and measures for advising and supporting these target groups can be found in the [transition system of Germany \(Übergangssystem\)](#). The transition system is a term used in Germany to describe the area of vocational qualification between school and entry into vocational training or the labour market. It is primarily aimed at young people who are unable to find a training position directly after exiting school who do not have a school-leaving qualification or whose qualification is not sufficient for training. The aim of the transition system is to qualify young people, prepare them for an apprenticeship or the job market and thus improve their chances on the job market.

[Pre-vocational training measures \(Berufsvorbereitende Bildungsmaßnahmen, BvB\)](#) are offers from the Federal Employment Agency for young people who have not completed school or have no training place and need support on their way into working life. These measures are aimed at young people who have difficulties making the transition from school to vocational training or whose professional aptitude has not yet been established. The BvB measures help to pave the way into training or a professional activity and also offer socio-educational support to tackle personal problems. As a rule, these measures last 10 to 11 months, with participants going through various modules such as vocational orientation, job application training and the completion of a vocational training course.

The [Career Start Support Program \(Berufseinstiegsbegleitungsprogramm, BerEb\)](#) is a support program designed to help young people and young adults make the transition from school to vocational training. Particularly, it is aimed at pupils who have difficulties in achieving their school-leaving certificate or who find the transition to vocational training difficult. The program offers individual support from so-called 'career starters' (Berufseinstiegsbegleiter) and includes support with learning in order to obtain a school-leaving certificate. Other support services include career orientation and choice, application training and the search for a training place, stabilization of the training relationship.

[AVdual - dual training preparation \(Ausbildungsvorbereitungsdual\)](#) is a school-based program in the state of Baden-Württemberg. It is aimed at young people who have completed compulsory schooling but have not yet found an apprenticeship or would like to catch up on their school-leaving qualifications. The special feature of AVdual is its dual approach, which combines theory and practice. By closely linking school and practice, the participants should develop an idea of their desired profession and acquire the necessary qualifications to successfully start an apprenticeship. The main contents are career orientation, work placements, individual support from educational staff and guidance during the apprenticeship.

[Production schools \(Produktionsschulen\)](#) are educational institutions in Germany that help young people and young adults who have not completed school or are experiencing difficulties in entering the world of work. In a production school, learning is combined with practical work to promote professional and social skills. The aim of production schools is to give young people prospects for training or the job market through practical learning. The participants work in real production processes, e.g. in crafts, gastronomy or other areas. The products they make are often sold. In addition to practical work, there are lessons that impart academic knowledge and prepare them for qualifications such as the secondary school leaving certificate. Educational specialists support the young people in their personal and professional development and in their search for an apprenticeship.

The [vocational preparation year \(Berufsvorbereitungsjahr, BVJ\)](#) is a one-year school program in Germany for young people without a school-leaving certificate or training place. It serves as preparation for vocational training (e.g. skilled trades, technology, business, home economics, health or social work) and teaches basic vocational skills as well as general education (e.g. mathematics, German, economics and social studies). In the BVJ, participants can gain practical experience in various occupational fields and, among other things, gain practical experience.

[Entry qualification \(Einstiegsqualifizierung, EQ\)](#) is a program in Germany that offers young people and young adults without a training place the opportunity to gain practical work experience in a company. It usually lasts 6 to 12 months and serves as preparation for an apprenticeship. Participants receive a salary, learn job-specific content and social skills and can often start an apprenticeship in the same company afterwards. The aim is to increase the chances of finding an apprenticeship and to make it easier to enter labour market working life.

The [workshop year \(Werkstattjahr\)](#) is a one-year program in Germany for young people who have not yet found a training position after leaving school and need support to enter working life. It combines practical work in workshops with theoretical lessons and usually lasts one year. The aim of the workshop year is to offer participants career prospects and improve their chances of finding an apprenticeship. The main content includes gaining practical work experience, career guidance, individual educational support and theoretical lessons in subjects such as German, mathematics and general education.

The [Voluntary Social Year and Voluntary Ecological Year \(Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr \(FSJ\) und Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr \(FÖJ\)\)](#) are voluntary services in Germany for young people between the ages of 16 and 27, which are completed in social, cultural or educational as well as ecological and environmental areas. They usually last 6 to 18 months and offers the opportunity to get involved in society and gain initial professional experience.

The FSJ and FÖJ also help to find a career and develop social and personal skills. The areas of assignment include work in hospitals, retirement homes, kindergartens, schools, facilities for the disabled, cultural institutions or environmental protection. Participants take part in educational seminars that develop their personal and professional skills.

Counselling and support facilities

In Germany, many public and private institutions and organizations offer advice and support. A selection of institutions and organizations is presented below.

The **Youth employment agencies** (*Jugendberufsagenturen*, JBA) in Germany combine the services of the employment agency, job centers and youth welfare offices to help young people make a seamless transition from school to work. Today in the majority of communities Youth Employment Agencies are established. Overarching aim is to support young people based on the cooperation of the different public actors (SGB II, SGB III, SGB XIII).

The **service center for the youth employment agencies** provide information, resources and monitoring. Young people can receive comprehensive advice and support here, ranging from career guidance to the search for apprenticeships or jobs. The most important services are support in choosing a career or apprenticeship and arranging internships. There is also support in preparing application documents and preparing for job interviews. If necessary, the young people are also supported by social education specialists who help with social problems such as family conflicts or financial difficulties.

School psychological counselling centers (*Schulpsychologische Beratungsstellen*) are usually located at schools or school authorities. They support pupils, parents and teachers with problems at school. Their services are not only aimed at pupils who have difficulties with learning or behaviour, but also at those who are not coping with school and are considering dropping out. The aim of school psychological counselling is to give pupils the tools they need to continue their school career. Pupils receive help with learning difficulties, exam nerves, motivation problems and conflicts with teachers or classmates. Parents are supported in how they can help their children with school problems and what alternatives are available. School psychologists work with pupils to find ways to avoid dropping out of school or to consider suitable alternatives such as changing to a different type of school.

Youth Migration Services (*Jugendmigrationsdienst*, JMD) are a central point of contact for young migrants between the ages of 12 and 27 who face particular challenges in the transition from school to working life. All over the country there are about 300 agencies established in the communities, carried by different providers. The youth migration services work closely with schools, training companies and social institutions and also organize projects to promote the social participation of young people. The most important services include individual advice on all aspects of vocational orientation, training and social integration. There is also support in learning the German language, which is crucial for integration into the training and employment market. In some cases, parents are also advised on how to better support their children. There is also networking with other services, such as cooperation with schools, companies and social services, in order to offer young people comprehensive support.

Welfare organizations such as *Caritas*, *Diakonie* and *Arbeiterwohlfahrt* offer many advisory and support services for the target group. These welfare organizations work closely with schools, youth welfare offices and the employment agency to offer young people individual support. The help includes support in difficult family or social situations, which often go hand in hand with school problems. There is also tutoring or support with catching up on school qualifications as well as help with career guidance and the search for apprenticeships or internships. Welfare organizations also offer preventative services such as programs to avoid dropping out of school and to promote social integration and academic success.

Institutions such as *Bildungswerke der deutschen Wirtschaft*, *Bildungswerke der deutschen Wirtschaft*, which are funded by employers' and trade associations, support young people and young adults in entering the world of work. One important program is "*VerA - Stark durch die Ausbildung*" (Strong through training), which is offered in cooperation with the Chambers of Industry and Commerce and the Chambers of Crafts. It is aimed at trainees and young people who have difficulties successfully completing their training. The aim is to provide close support to prevent trainees from dropping out and to facilitate the transition to permanent employment. Former employees and experts act as mentors and support the young people in successfully completing their training. They help with school, social or personal problems and are at the young people's side throughout the entire training period. VerA relies on a network of companies and educational institutions to support young people on their way into working life.

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Guidance for persons with disabilities

In accordance with Social Code Book IX, people with disabilities or those at risk of disability receive special support to ensure the best possible vocational education and labour market integration in Germany. "People with disabilities are individuals who have physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, in interaction with attitudinal and environmental barriers, can likely hinder their equal participation in society for more than six months" (§ 2 SGB IX, Abs. 1, Satz 1). "People are considered severely disabled if they have a degree of disability of at least 50; equal treatment is also possible" (§ 2 SGB IX, Abs. 3, 4).

In Germany, several institutions are responsible for the rehabilitation of people with disabilities (rehabilitation providers). The rehabilitation providers support the early identification of rehabilitation needs, particularly by providing and mediating suitable barrier-free information about the content and goals of participation services and clarifying responsibilities among themselves. To uniformly and verifiably determine individual rehabilitation needs,

the rehabilitation providers use systematic work processes and standardized tools (instruments) according to the performance laws applicable to them (§ 13 SGB IX, Abs. 1). The Federal Employment Agency (FEA) offers, financed through unemployment insurance, specialized career counselling, placement, and integration services for (young) people with disabilities and advises employers on work regulations and funding. If people with disabilities do not receive unemployment benefits but social assistance, tax-funded job centers are responsible for offering similar services as the insurance-based FEA Germany.

Career counselors for people with disabilities receive specialization in counselling for this group during their studies at the University of Applied Labor Studies of FEA Germany (HdBA). Each local employment agency has its own vocational rehabilitation team for the integration of disabled individuals. FEA counselors refer clients to specialized internal services for medical and psychological assessment when needed. Since 2018, there has also been supplementary independent participation counselling (EUTB according to § 32 SGB IX), where people with disability can receive additional counselling support independently of the rehabilitation providers.

To simplify and illustrate, individual rehabilitation can ideally be depicted as a "rehabilitation process" with individual process phases – a total of seven phases:

- Needs identification;
- Clarification of responsibilities;
- Needs assessment and determination;
- Participation planning;
- Decision on services;
- Implementation of participation services, and
- Activities during or after the end of a participation service.

The rehabilitation process is person-centered and thus individually designed. The person is always at the centre of the rehabilitation process and counselling.

The Federal Employment Agency (FEA) is responsible for services for participation in working life (§ 49ff. SGB IX) and advises (young) people with disabilities on initial integration and reintegration. The goals are: to maintain, improve, establish, or restore the employability of people with disabilities or those at risk of disability and to secure their participation in working life as permanently as possible. Services include, among others: assistance in maintaining and obtaining a job, vocational preparation measures, individual workplace qualification within the framework of supported employment, retraining, education or further training, services in a workshop for disabled people, and motor vehicle assistance. Vocational integration is mainly supported by two types of vocational training centers, which also offer counselling in addition to training. For initial vocational training, there are over 50 vocational training centers for young people with physical, intellectual, and mental disabilities. Another approximately 30 vocational promotion centers offer retraining and qualifications in professions that can be practiced with health restrictions (see table):

Vocational Training Centers (BBW) - (Initial Integration)

51 locations in Germany

Training in cooperation with companies: initial training and specific professions for people with disabilities and degree programs

Tests, individual support plans, and vocational preparation courses are components

Approximately 15,000 young people are trained annually (as of 2019)

Holistic care (medical, psychological, and social-pedagogical) with residential support

89% pass the final examination by the chamber

66% find employment in the general labor market after training

Vocational Promotion Centers (BFW) - (Reintegration)

Approximately 30 main locations, approximately 100 regional locations

Regional integration with companies for further training

Orientation courses and tests support the counselling and integration process

Approximately 12,000 training and further education courses annually

Holistic care (medical, psychological, and social-pedagogical) with residential support

79% have worked for at least one year since graduation (as of 2024)

84% find employment within two years after graduation

Additionally, there is a special rehabilitation preparation training for individuals with psychological and/or social problems. They work in small groups to reduce anxiety and improve learning and social skills with the support of psychosocial counselling and the involvement of vocational psychologists from FEA Germany. Sheltered workshops offer employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities

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Guidance for immigrants

Within migration to Germany, based on the legal framework, there are different status groups for which there are different legal structures (and, as a result, different offerings including career services and guidance) (BAMF, n.d.; BPB, n.d.):

Group 1: Citizens of a member state of the European Union, another member state of the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland. Members of this group enjoy freedom of movement. They can enter Germany at any time for a period of 3 months and stay in Germany. Members of this immigration group can stay in Germany for more than three months if they:

- are gainfully employed (self-employed or employed) or are in vocational training or studying,
- are looking for work,
- do not fulfil either of the above requirements, but have sufficient financial means to cover your living expenses and adequate health insurance,
- or have acquired a permanent right of residence through a legal stay of five years.

Group 2: Politically persecuted persons. Politically persecuted persons enjoy asylum on the basis of European and German law. Whether there are grounds for granting asylum is examined in a separate procedure. Depending on the course of this process, there are three groups that may reside in Germany: Asylum seekers before the end of the procedure, recognised asylum seekers and rejected asylum seekers who cannot be sent back to their country of origin for special reasons and are therefore considered "tolerated persons".

Group 3: other particularly vulnerable persons. This group includes people affected in very different ways. Of particular importance is the flight from acts of war; since 2022, for example, the largest group has been war refugees from Ukraine.

Group 4: Skilled workers and labour actively recruited by Germany. Due to the strong demographic shrinkage in Germany and the simultaneous high demand for labour, a separate legal basis for the immigration of skilled workers, the "Skilled Immigration Act", has been in place for several years.

Political context

Political discourse and political decisions in migration policy move between two poles (Kohn 2017; Treibel, 2020): On the one hand, against the backdrop of the aforementioned high demand for new skilled workers, political activity to open up the German labour market internationally is steadily increasing and specific legal options and opportunities for personnel marketing are constantly being expanded. On the other hand, against the backdrop of particularly high admission figures for immigration for humanitarian reasons compared to the rest of Europe, there are increasing efforts to limit and possibly reduce these numbers. In particular, more consistent implementation within existing legal possibilities is being sought here. One sign of the difficult balance between the two poles is the handling of a so-called "lane change". This refers to the subsequent change from temporary residence for humanitarian reasons to permanent residence for labour market reasons. In particular, push and pull factors for immigration to Germany were controversially discussed. As a result, however, the possibilities for permanent residence and labour market access were regularly facilitated -

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even in changing constellations for government formation (Kohn 2017; CMinaR 2019).

Career counselling

The right to comprehensive and needs-based advice on education, career and employment is standardised at a high level in social policy legislation. The corresponding Sections 29 and 30 of the Third Book of the German Social Code do not differentiate between the basic or substantive entitlement according to nationality, residence status or reason for immigration. The Federal Employment Agency (BA) is responsible for this. If and as long as employable immigrants are dependent on state assistance for subsistence, they are also obliged to make use of counselling. Closely linked to this counselling, which focuses on training and employment, is the offer of comprehensive migration counselling, which also addresses other areas of life for new immigrants. This service is funded by a second federal authority - the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) (BMI 2023). The advice is provided by a number of welfare associations and migrant self-organisations. The BA's employment-oriented counselling is carried out by its own counsellors, but is also supported by a wide range of independent organisations with their own services. A key player here is the "Integration through Qualification" (IQ) network, to which the BA has delegated counselling on the recognition of professional qualifications acquired abroad.

There is therefore a right to counselling for all four of the above-mentioned immigrant groups. In terms of content, counselling on education, careers and employment faces specific methodological challenges due to the particular social situation of new immigrants seeking advice. A migration-specific counselling concept was developed at the Federal Employment Agency's University of Applied Sciences (HdBA) and further developed and tested in a European research project (Kohn 2017; CMinaR 2019).

Recognition

For those immigrants who have already gained professional experience and acquired relevant skills in their country of origin, formal recognition of these skills is an essential building block for integration into training and work in Germany. The German labour market is highly geared towards formally recognised professional skills, for example through the design of recruitment processes or in the design of collective bargaining agreements. At the same time, the vocational education and training system is based on a very specific and highly regulated system of dual vocational training programmes in addition to academic universities. The formal "translation" of qualifications acquired abroad therefore poses a particular challenge and requires special counselling, so-called "recognition counselling" (see above), to identify the responsible offices. Not only immigrants residing in Germany are entitled to a corresponding review in an individual recognition process, but also applicants regardless of their global place of residence. This extremely far-reaching legal entitlement has existed since 2012 (Federal Government 2011) and is to be understood as a reaction to the national demand for skilled labour. It therefore also applies to all four immigration groups mentioned above. However, formal recognition can only succeed if the diagnosis of a person's professional competences allows. Corresponding test procedures face the challenge of proving the relevant competences without cultural or linguistic filtering in the process. There has been a development of corresponding procedures in Germany since the high intake of refugees from the Syrian war zone in 2015 and 2016. Procedures now exist at different levels and in different competence areas of vocational qualifications. One example of this is the MYSKILLS test programme, which was funded by the BA and developed together with vocational trainers and responds to specific action-oriented decisions made by the test subjects (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2023). The establishment of the multilingual information portal *Recognition in Germany* offers immigrants and those interested in immigrating to Germany the opportunity to conduct their own research and gain an initial overview of the recognition or assessment of qualifications (BIBB 2024).

Labour market access

With a few exceptions, access to the German labour market is generally possible for all immigrant groups. Unlike the unrestricted entitlement to counselling and recognition, however, the options here are differentiated in terms of time. Groups 4 (recruited labour) and 3 (war refugees) have unrestricted and unproblematic access to training or employment. There are different time limits for immigrants via the asylum route. As a general rule, asylum seekers may be permitted to take up employment as early as three months after their application for asylum, i.e. before the examination of their grounds for asylum has been completed. This regulation even applies to rejected asylum seekers, provided that their stay in Germany continues to be tolerated. The BA checks beforehand whether working conditions are comparable to those in Germany, for example whether the same wages are paid. A "3+2" rule applies to legally tolerated persons (geduldetete Menschen in Deutschland), according to which a deportation that has become possible in the meantime is also suspended if the person has taken up vocational training. They are then given time to complete their training (3 years) and then a further 2 years to take up employment. This paves the way for permanent residence in Germany and effectively enables the politically controversial "lane change" (see above).

Labour market support

In principle, access to the labour market in Germany also opens access to training and labour market policy support. The labour administration has a wide-ranging set of support programmes at its disposal - from the promotion of vocational orientation to the promotion of the transition from school to training to the vocational qualification of adults and the subsidisation of the recruitment of workers with specific challenges. The specific content and design for the target group of immigrants is carried out in close coordination between the labour administration and the numerous independent providers who implement the support measures. In this co-operation, the measures are adapted to the current needs of the cultural origins and socio-demographic data, which change considerably over time, especially for immigrants on humanitarian grounds. For example, while the majority of refugees in 2015 and 2016 were young, male and from Arab regions, the refugees seeking protection in Germany since the Russian invasion of Ukraine are often middle-aged women who are forced to raise their children alone in Germany. The framework conditions for employment-orientated offers are correspondingly different.

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Guidance for other groups

There are hardly any specific guidance services aimed specifically for ethnic groups. The services described in the other chapters are generally open to everyone. There are, however, programs for Sinti and Roma communities (EVZ, 2016; Lagranne-Stiftung) (see also section [Guidance for immigrants](#)).

Prisoners are entitled to career counselling and advice on vocational training and education under the Social Security Codes. The Federal Employment Agency also offers these services in penal institutions. Local clubs, associations and welfare organisations also provide services in this area ([Netzwerk Integration](#); FEA) (see also section [Career guidance for school pupils](#) and [Guidance for unemployed adults](#)).

Another special target group are people who belong to sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQIA+). In Germany, there are specialised career advice and coaching services that specifically address the needs of queer people and are accessible to both individuals and organisations. The "[Queer Career](#)"

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platform offers free and confidential professional and career counselling for lesbian, gay, bi, trans, inter, queer, non-binary and agender people. [Queere Bildung](#) networks over 80 queer education projects nationwide and as an association stands for counselling and empowerment of queer communities.

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Gender-based policies

Various [legal regulations](#) form the basis for equality policies in Germany. This is based on Article 3 of the German Constitutional Law (*Grundgesetz*), which stipulates equal rights for women and men ([GG, §3](#)). The [Social Code \(Part I, II, III, IX\)](#) stipulates gender equality as important principle of career development. In particular, the situation of women shall be improved to reduce disadvantages and gender segregation in VET and the labour market.

The Social Code (II, §1) states: "Equality between men and women must be pursued as a consistent principle"(own translation). Social Code (III, § 1 (2) 4.) claims: „Improve the professional situation of women by working towards eliminating existing disadvantages and overcoming a gender-specific training and labour market and promoting women at least in proportion to their share of the unemployed and their relative exposure to unemployment" (own translation).

In compliance with the Social Code, the Federal Employment Agency has "*Beauftragte für Chancengleichheit am Arbeitsmarkt*" (Commissioner for Equal Opportunities in the Labour Market) at all levels ([SGB III, § 385](#)). As well as advising jobseekers and employers, they are also responsible for ensuring that the FEA's guidance and other support is gender mainstreamed. A specific task of the FEA and the Commissioner for Equal Opportunities is to [promote the re-entry of women](#) after a family phase and to improve the compatibility of children, care work and employment for women (and men).

There are several initiatives to provide guidance for girls and women (and more recently for boys and men) in order to reduce gender segregation. In the field of careers guidance, Germany has been organising an annual [Girls' Day](#) since 2001 to give schoolgirls the opportunity to gain information about and experience in technical professions and trades that are predominantly male (STEAM occupations). Under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, this initiative brings together a broad alliance of partners, including the Federal Employment Agency, employers' associations and chambers, and trade unions. More recently, a [Boys' Day](#) has been introduced, which takes place on the same day as the Girls' Day, so that boys can familiarise themselves with professions in the fields of education, care and social work where women predominate (SAHGE occupations). The activity is aimed at boys and girls from grade 5. It is to be integrated into the programme of all secondary schools. The "*Nationales MINT Forum*" and "*Mint Vernetzt*" initiatives are also active in the STEAM professions.

Another initiative helps to overcome gender stereotypes in the bodies providing career orientation: *Initiative klischeefrei* (Initiative free from stereotypes). It brings together key actors like the Federal Employment Agency and federal and [state ministries](#). The initiative has many partners from different field, like Universities, Companies, employers' and employees' associations, clubs and associations, schools, foundations, chambers, careers advice centres, educational institutions, NGOs, etc. This initiative issues good practices, fact sheets on various topics of career orientation free from gender-stereotypes. Furthermore, it provides guidance on how to shape and carry out gender-sensitive career orientation. It also provides guidance on how to design and implement gender-sensitive careers guidance. In 2022 an [e-learning course "Cliché-free career counselling"](#) were developed and launched. The method set "Cliché-free career counselling" is an e-learning course specifically for career guidance professionals. In seven learning modules, you can choose from practical methods for counselling young people and young people in career guidance. The fbb (Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training) [published a guide to stereotype-free counselling](#).

The Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth offers support for those who wish to return to the labour market after a period of economic inactivity due to childcare (or other family members) through an action program and an online portal. The action programme "[Equality in the labour market. Creating Perspectives](#)" (GAPS) was launched in 2022 and follows on from the "Perspective Re-entry" (PWE) action programme, which the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth implemented in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency from 2008 to 2021. Under the umbrella of GAPS, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth is funding several pilot and development projects focussing on different target groups. The FEA also offers a focus on this topic in its counselling services for adults ([BBIE - Schwerpunkt Wiedereinsteigende und Beschäftigte](#)).

The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth is also committed to improving the chances of mothers with a migration background on the labour market with the federal programme "[Strong at work](#)".

The topic of women and work is dealt with in many aspects by various initiatives and projects, such as the newly established [Federal Equality Foundation \(Bundesstiftung Gleichstellung\)](#), the [innovative women project \(Projekt innovative Frauen\)](#), [Local alliances for families \(Lokale Bündnisse für Familien\)](#), the initiative "[What do women earn](#)" (*Was verdient die Frau*).

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