

# Recognition of foreign professional qualifications

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

REGULATION/LEGISLATION

 GERMANY

## Timeline

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

ID number 50216

## Background

Labour migration is increasingly recognised as a key policy intervention to fill vacancies for skilled or qualified professionals needed to counter a shrinking workforce population. Germany is actively looking to third countries to plug its gap in skilled labour. Recognition of foreign professional qualifications is required to practice legally regulated occupations (e.g. nurses, teacher, medical doctor) and is also beneficial for non-legally regulated occupations. Since 2012, the Federal Recognition Act (including the Professional Qualifications Assessment Act BQFG) enables recognition procedures of foreign qualifications for all persons with a foreign degree.

## Objectives

The aim of recognising foreign professional and vocational qualifications is to significantly improve the economic integration of skilled workers with foreign qualifications and to promote the integration of migrants living in the country into the German labour market. In practice, this goal is to simplify and accelerate the recognition procedure so that qualified workers from abroad can quickly access the labour market.

## Description

The procedure for the assessment and the recognition of foreign professional and vocational qualifications is regulated and standardised through the Federal Recognition Act (including the federal states recognition acts for professions regulated at this level), which was adopted in 2012. It provides individuals with the right to have their foreign-acquired qualifications matched and assessed for equivalence to a German qualification by an appropriate authority. The entitlement to a recognition procedure applies regardless of nationality or place of residence. This means recognition can be applied also from abroad.

Over 600 certified occupations including those in dual training, the master craftsperson or other advanced vocational qualifications are regulated by this act, as well as legally regulated professions such as nurses, medical doctors and lawyers. Depending on the sector, assessment and recognition of foreign occupational qualifications is carried out by

the recognition body for foreign qualifications, the chamber of commerce and industry for foreign skills approval (IHK FOSA), or lead chambers among chambers of skilled crafts (*Leitkammern*). Further, the central office for foreign education (ZAB) evaluates certificates of foreign academic degrees and offers digital information on professional qualifications (DAB) for applying for a residence permit.

The implementation of the recognition process is monitored and documented in reports published regularly by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) on behalf of the Federal education ministry (BMBFSFJ from May 2025 and BMBF until May 2025).

Information and guidance are essential to success in the recognition process. The federal government has established a range of comprehensive services, such as the:

- (a) 'Recognition in Germany' website which is the central information platform for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications (run by BIBB on behalf of the education ministry),
- (b) counselling network of the Integration through qualification (IQ) programme (funded by the Federal labour ministry BMAS) and
- (c) 'Working and living in Germany' telephone hotline, a project run jointly by the Federal Employment Agency (BA) and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF).

Where documentation of the acquired qualification is missing or incomplete, a skills analysis conducted by regional chambers can help to demonstrate professional competences in a practical way (via a work sample, a work test at a company or an interview). A project of the education ministry and the association of German chambers of commerce and industry (DIHK), which started at the end of 2015, offers recognition consultants in some countries to provide personal consultancy for people interested in having their qualifications recognised while still in their countries of origin (ProRecognition). Further, the information portal for foreign professional qualifications 'BQ-Portal', funded by the Federal ministry of economic affairs, supports the implementation of recognition procedures for foreign professional qualifications through a knowledge management system of country profiles with information on foreign vocational education and training (VET) systems and occupational profiles. The internal area for the professional chambers contains results of recognition procedures.

The funding and residency options available for upskilling training where a foreign qualification has not been judged fully equivalent to a German qualification were substantially expanded in 2015, 2020 and 2023-24 with the skilled immigration acts (please refer to the corresponding PDs). Since 2020, the Service Centre for Professional Recognition (ZSBA based at the Federal Employment Agency in the Central office for foreign and professional placement ZAV) has made the entire recognition process more transparent and efficient for applicants living abroad through dedicated counselling services.

The federal government's law on assessing professional qualifications has proven an effective instrument in helping people with qualifications acquired outside Germany to integrate into the labour market and in securing a supply of skilled workers.

### 2017 Implementation

In 2017, the Vocational Qualifications Recognition Act (BQFG) was monitored and documented and the June 2017 report evaluated its first 5 years. Also, since 2017, the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) and the national organisations of German chambers (DIHK and ZDH) have been carrying out the *Enterprise professional recognition communication* campaign (*Unternehmen Berufsankennung*), on the advantages of recognising foreign qualifications. A travelling exhibition provides nationwide companies with information. A *We for recognition* prize was awarded for the first time in 2017 by the BMBF, DIHK and ZDH, honouring exemplary corporate practice and good ideas in the field of recognition of foreign qualifications in companies. The language options of the portal Recognition in Germany were expanded to French and Russian, in addition to the previous nine languages, including Arabic.

## 2018 Implementation

## 2019 Implementation

Vocational Qualifications Recognition Act (BQFG)

In 2019, there was a major innovation regarding the data collection on the recognition of foreign professional qualifications: for the first time, the report presented the data from the Federal Government, the Federal States and the Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB) together.

Recognition of professional qualifications by way of qualification analysis

On 1 January 2019, the *Network Qualification analysis* project (NetQA, *Netzwerk Qualifikationsanalyse*) was launched as a joint project with several partners from the IHK and HWK sectors. NetQA aims to support the industry, trade and crafts chambers in the recognition process in establishing a regional expertise and network structure for qualification analyses (QA). The project promotes the networking of the chambers in all matters relating to QA, from the initial consultation with those seeking recognition to the decision on the equivalence of the professional qualification. By offering appropriate exchange and support services, the project aims to ensure by 2022 that QAs are conducted in an efficient and quality-assured manner nationwide.

NetQA builds on previous projects. The QA instrument was developed in the *Prototyping* project (2011-14) coordinated by the West German Association of Chambers of Skilled Crafts (WHKT) and scientifically accompanied by the Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training in the Skilled Crafts at the University of Cologne (FBH) and established in the recognition procedure from 2015 to 2018 in the Prototyping transfer project coordinated by BIBB.

## 2020 Implementation

Since 2020, the Service Centre for Professional Recognition (ZSBA) based at the Federal Employment Agency in the Central office for foreign and professional placement (ZAV) has made the entire recognition process more transparent and efficient for applicants living abroad through dedicated counselling services.

Vocational Qualifications Recognition Act (BQFG)

On 26 August 2020, the Federal Statistical Office announced the new figures for official statistics on recognition procedures in 2019 (§17 BQFG). The recognition monitoring team in BIBB published an initial overview with results on occupations under federal law. There were around 279 400 applications for recognition of foreign professional qualifications from 2012 to 2018: 140 700 under federal law; 46 100 under federal state law and 92 600 certificate assessments for non-regulated higher education qualifications.

Recognition of professional qualifications by way of qualification analysis

In 2020, the network on skills analysis NetQA published a flyer on skills analysis in 15 languages as well as an article on a best practice in skills analysis, with experts supporting each other across Federal State borders.

The new application procedure for funding, from the skills analyses special fund, started in July 2020. Those involved in a recognition procedure for a dual training occupation or master craftsman qualification, and who are seeking recognition via a skills analysis, may apply, under certain circumstances, to the relevant competent authority for funding from the skills analyses special fund. The IHK FOSA, the national competence centre of the German chambers of industry and commerce for the evaluation and recognition of foreign vocational qualifications, now also accepts funding notices, in addition to the WHKT. The funding notices are forwarded to BIBB.

## 2021 Implementation

In 2021, as part of the NetQA project, the networking of the participating chambers in

In 2021, as part of the NetQA project, the networking of the participating chambers in all matters relating to the recognition of foreign qualifications on the basis of qualification analysis was continued. The project published a brochure in April 2021 with answers to the most common questions, e.g. on the procedure or on financial support.

## 2022 Implementation

In 2022, BIBB conducted a survey amongst skilled workers with foreign professional qualifications to collect experiences with recognition.

BIBB published in June 2022 a Discussion Paper on *Recognition of Ukrainian vocational qualifications - Exploiting potential, improving processes: Results of BIBB's Recognition Monitoring*.

In 2022, the project NetQA continued to promote the networking of the chambers in all questions concerning qualification analysis - from the first counselling interview with those seeking recognition to the decision on the equivalence of the professional qualification. Through appropriate exchange and support services, the aim is to achieve a quality-assured and efficient process of qualification analysis nationwide by 2023. A flyer with information on qualification analyses was published in 15 languages.

BIBB published in December 2022 an updated discussion paper on 'How long does the recognition of foreign vocational qualifications take? Analyses of the duration of procedures based on official statistics for the years 2017 to 2021; results of the BIBB recognition monitoring'. This discussion paper also points out the challenges surrounding the goal of acceleration as well as possible levers.

On 30 November 2022, the Federal Government adopted key points for reforming the immigration of skilled workers from third countries. One aim is to simplify and accelerate the recognition of foreign professional qualifications.

## 2023 Implementation

According to the government's annual recognition monitoring report, between 2012 and 2022, there were around 600 000 applications for recognition of foreign professional qualifications (including the certificate evaluations for higher education), of which around 95 000 were submitted in 2022. In 2022, the 10 reference occupations with the most applications were: general nurse, medical doctor, engineer, teacher, nursery schoolteacher, physiotherapist, dentist, electronics technician, electrical fitter, cook. In 2022, the most applications came for qualifications acquired in Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Philippines, Syria and Tunisia - with increasing numbers of applications directly from abroad. Half of these qualifications acquired abroad were certified as being fully equivalent to the relevant German reference qualifications. Most of the qualifications recognised were in the legally regulated professions, especially in healthcare (nurse, doctor).

The 'Recognition in Germany' portal is the central information platform for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications. The portal recorded around 3.9 million visits in 2023, the majority of which (53%) were from abroad. The Recognition Finder provides specific information on the recognition procedure and the body responsible for recognition. The portal is also enabling access to online applications in more and more professions.

The ESF Plus funding programme 'IQ - Integration through Qualification' has been relaunched in 2023 for the funding period 2023 to 2028. There are 60 recognition and qualification advisory centres nationwide for people seeking advice on foreign qualifications. In 2023, 63 489 people were advised by IQ Recognition and Qualification Counselling Centres.

In 2023, the BQ portal presented 105 country profiles with information on foreign VET systems and 5 780 occupational profiles. The internal area for the professional chambers contains 2 855 results of recognition procedures.

Since 2023, the recognition team at BIBB (on behalf of the BMBF and in coordination with the federal states) has developed nationwide templates (so-called sample notices) for the competent bodies of the recognition procedures – starting with the profession ‘nursery school teacher’. With a clear structure and simple language, the model notices ensure improved readability and greater uniformity - for the skilled workers applying, advice centres, training providers and employers.

In January 2023, BIBB submitted its report on the evaluation of the Service Centre for Professional Recognition (ZSBA). It documents that the ZSBA has supported almost 10 000 people living abroad for obtaining recognition for their qualifications during this period. Most are from third countries and have frequently completed training in healthcare or technical occupations.

The Skills Analysis Network (NetQA) was a joint project with partners from the chambers of crafts and trades (HWK) and from the chambers of industry and commerce (IHK) which established a quality-assured and efficient process for the skills analysis across Germany between 2019 and 2023. Where documentation of the acquired qualification is missing or incomplete, a skills analysis can help to demonstrate professional competences in a practical way (via a work sample, a work test at a company or an interview).

The second Skilled Immigration Act passed in July 2023 and expands the options to enter Germany from a third country to undergo the recognition procedure of a foreign professional qualification or to sign a recognition partnership with an employer. The issuing of a residence permit and the recognition of a foreign professional qualification are examined in separate procedures. Recognition may be important for entry to Germany. The ‘Act to strengthen university nursing education, facilitate the recognition of foreign nursing qualifications and amend other regulations,’ which came into force in December 2023, also introduced specific changes to the recognition process in nursing. This means that applicants can now, among other things, go directly to the knowledge test or an adaptation course if they definitively waive an equivalence assessment. This is intended to speed up recognition in the field of nursing.

## **2024 Implementation**

The implementation of the Recognition Act is monitored and documented in reports published regularly by BIBB. The 2023 report was published in February 2024. The BIBB Recognition Monitoring fact sheet provides a concise graphical overview of key findings from official recognition statistics – since the 2023 reporting year, it has provided a comprehensive overview of occupations under federal and state law:

Between 2012 and 2023, there were around 730 000 applications for recognition of foreign professional qualifications (including the certificate evaluations for higher education), of which around 138 000 were submitted in 2023. In 2023, the 10 reference occupations with the most applications were: general nurse, medical doctor, engineer, teacher, nursery schoolteacher, physiotherapist, dentist, electrical fitter, electronics technician, cook. In 2023, the most applications came for qualifications acquired in Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, Tunisia and Syria – with increasing numbers of applications directly from abroad, reaching 44%. About half of these qualifications acquired abroad were certified as being fully equivalent to the relevant German reference qualifications.

The ‘Recognition in Germany’ portal recorded around 6.2 million visits in 2024, the majority of which (59%) were from abroad. Since 2024, the Recognition Portal has been developing a database of local contact persons and qualification programmes. The counsellors shall help, for example, with the selection of the reference occupation and qualification measure, the search for a suitable company or they will accompany the applicant during the entire recognition and qualification process.

The digitalisation of application for recognition was fully rolled out at the beginning of 2024. The funding period of the BQ-Portal was extended from April 2024 to December 2026. The United Nations honoured the BQ portal with the United Nations Public

Service Award 2024 (UNPSA) for innovation in public institutions.

An article on 'Recognition of Ukrainian professional qualifications - Findings from official statistics and practice' was published in 2024.

The second Skilled Immigration Act came partly into force in March and fully in June 2024. Here are some new regulations in 2024, with a strong link to recognition:

Since March 2024, skilled workers from third countries have the possibility to wait until they have entered Germany to have their foreign qualifications recognised, while still being able to take up qualified employment: by entering a recognition partnership with their employer, who will support the procedure. Since June 2024, the so-called 'search option' to obtain a visa to seek employment or to undergo adaptation / compensation measures for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications has been improved with the 'Opportunity card' (*Chancenkarte*), a new residence status for this purpose.

Up to March 2024, a recognition procedure in Germany used to be required to apply for a work visa. With the new law, workers from non-EU countries, who hold a formal qualification (state-recognised in the country of training or VET certificates issued by chambers of commerce abroad AHKs), can obtain a work visa in Germany and earn a specified minimum salary (or collective agreement – to avoid wage dumping). Further, workers from non-EU countries, who have extensive professional experience (at least two years), but lack an officially recognised foreign degree (equivalence check with German qualification), now have limited access to the German labour market in occupations for which professional experience is proven. This does not apply to legally regulated occupations like nurses.

## 2025 Implementation

The publication 'On the path to professional recognition – motivations and experiences of skilled workers with foreign professional qualifications' (March 2025) presented the results of a BIBB online survey in 2024 of skilled workers with foreign professional qualifications who have applied for recognition or certificate evaluation or are planning to do so. The survey provided insights into their motivation, their experiences with the procedure and the effects of recognition on their professional integration. The results showed that, in addition to better labour market opportunities and financial prospects, residence and social factors also play an important role in the application process. The study highlighted the central importance of recognition for attracting international skilled workers and their long-term integration into the German labour market.

The recognition partnership instrument makes it possible now to recognise foreign professional qualifications after arrival in Germany, in parallel with employment. The BIBB conducted a study from February to April 2025 among employers, chambers and other stakeholders to examine the implementation of the regulation, which entered into force in 2024, in practice. The study highlighted the advantages and limitations of recognition partnerships, as well as possible solutions.

The Recognition in Germany portal and its Recognition finder provides specific information on the recognition procedure and the body responsible for recognition. The portal is enabling access to online applications in more and more professions. An 'Advanced Profi-Filter' is in place since 2025. This is mainly aimed at specialist advisory staff and now provides an even more convenient and differentiated way of searching by competent body and occupation. In June 2025, the 'Recognition in Germany' portal has added a chatbot to its information offer to provide skilled workers with the best possible support on their way to recognition of their professional qualification.

Concerning the ESF Plus funding programme 'IQ - Integration through Qualification', in 2025 there were 60 recognition and qualification counselling centres nationwide for people seeking advice on foreign qualifications. According to the statistics published in 2025, 137 902 people were advised by IQ Recognition and Qualification Counselling Centres in 2023-24.

In 2025, the BQ-Portal presented 107 country profiles with information on foreign VET

systems and 6 238 occupational profiles.

IHK FOSA is the recognition body for foreign qualifications comparable to IHK professions (covering 250 reference professions). In 2025, it serves as a nationwide competence centre for 76 Chambers of Industry and Commerce, carrying out the recognition procedure for qualifications acquired in 157 countries. Applications are usually submitted digitally. Companies can apply for accelerated recognition procedures via the foreigner's authority at their place of residence.

In June 2025, the 'Unternehmen Berufsanerkennung' (UBA) project run by the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK Service GmbH) has launched a new corporate network for skilled worker immigration and recognition. The UBA network provides interested companies with practical and targeted support as they embark on skilled worker immigration. It offers concise information on immigration procedures and recognition processes, supplemented by individual advice, regular consultation hours, clear tutorials and practical guidelines. An exclusive offer for member companies in the network is access to the UBAconnect matching service. This service enables companies to get in touch with international skilled workers whose professional qualifications are already partially recognised.

## Bodies responsible

- Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ) (since 2025)
- Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) (until 2025)
- Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)
- Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS)
- Federal Employment Agency (BA)
- Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWE) (since 2025)
- Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) (until 2025)
- Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK)
- German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH)
- Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF)

## Target group

### Learners

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

### Education professionals

Trainers  
Adult educators  
Guidance practitioners

### Entities providing VET

Companies  
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)  
VET providers (all kinds)

### Other stakeholders

Social partners (employer organisations and trade unions)  
National, regional and local authorities

## Thematic categories

### Modernising VET offer and delivery

Using learning-outcome-based approaches and modularisation

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

Developing and applying qualifications smaller/shorter than full

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

Providing for individuals' re- and upskilling needs

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

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

VET internationalisation strategies

## **European priorities in VET**

### **VET Recommendation**

Flexibility and progression opportunities at the core of VET

VET as an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training and skills

### **Osnabrück Declaration**

European Education and Training Area and international VET

## **Subsystem**

IVET CVET

## **Further reading**

[Portal on recognition of foreign professional qualifications](#)

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[Monitoring of the implementation of the Federal Recognition Act](#)

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[Statistics on the Federal Recognition Act](#)

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[Information on the second Skilled Immigration Act 2023-24](#)

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[IHK FOSA - Chambers for foreign skills approval](#)

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[Service centre for professional recognition abroad \(ZSBA\)](#)

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[BQ-Portal for foreign professional qualifications](#)

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[Network IQ \(Integration through Qualification\)](#)

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[NetQA - Recognition of professional qualifications by way of qualification analysis](#)

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[Discussion Paper on the duration of recognition procedures based on official statistics for the years 2017 to 2021 \(BIBB, 2022\)](#)

## Related policy developments

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2025 Implementation

### Validation of non-formally acquired skills

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

 GERMANY

#### Type of development

Practical  
measure/Initiative

#### Subsystem

IVET CVET

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2025 Implementation

### Recruiting skilled workers from abroad

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

*Legal framework for access to labour and training market*

 GERMANY

#### Type of development

Strategy/Action  
plan

#### Subsystem

IVET CVET

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2025 Implementation

### Second Skilled Immigration Act (2023-24)

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

 GERMANY

#### Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

#### Subsystem

IVET CVET

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2025 Implementation

## International cooperation in VET

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

 GERMANY

### Type of development

Practical  
measure/Initiative

### Subsystem

IVET CVET

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2025 Implementation

## Promoting international mobility of VET learners

Outgoing mobility:

 GERMANY

### Type of development

Practical  
measure/Initiative

### Subsystem

IVET CVET

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2023 Completed

## First Skilled Immigration Act (2020)

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

 GERMANY

### Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

### Subsystem

IVET CVET

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2025 Implementation

## Integrating migrants and refugees in VET and work

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

 GERMANY

**Type of development**

Practical  
measure/Initiative

**Subsystem**

IVET CVET

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“ ... ” **Cite as**

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