

Recruiting skilled workers from abroad

POLICY DEVELOPMENT**STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN** GERMANY

Timeline

**ID number 50197**

Background

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

Objectives

The objective of targeted immigration of qualified individuals is to partly cover the German labour market's long-term demand for skilled workers. Sustainable skilled immigration from non-EU countries shall be facilitated to support the Federal government's Skilled Labour Strategy, e.g. for skilled workers who have completed vocational education and training (VET) or a higher education qualification and for people with practical professional knowledge.

The aim is a broader access not only to the labour market but also to (continuing) education and training - to ensure that more third-country nationals come to train or study and subsequently work as skilled workers in Germany. In doing so, the needs of the country of origin are taken into account as well: a sustainable partnership in the sense of fair migration must avoid depriving a country of skilled workers who are needed there (brain drain).

Description

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

Legal framework for access to labour and training market

The legal framework for third-country nationals' access to the labour market and training in Germany was significantly liberalised from 2020 onwards. The first Skilled Immigration Act brought about a paradigm shift in 2020: from a fundamental ban with permission required to a principle of permission to work (see PD on first Skilled Immigration Act 2020).

The second Skilled Immigration Act improved access for third-country nationals to training and labour market from 2023-24 onwards. Recognition became optional in some cases: Workers from non-EU countries with a formal qualification, a specified minimum salary (or collective agreement – to avoid wage dumping) and extensive professional experience (at least two years) now have limited access (to a certain placement and not valid for the whole labour market) to the German labour market – even without recognition. Improvements were also made in the area of migration for education and training purposes, for example the duration of the residence permit issued for the purpose of finding a training place as well as the possibility of part-time or trial employment during the search (see PD on second Skilled Immigration Act 2023-24).

Recognition of foreign professional and vocational qualifications

As detailed in the corresponding PD, the recognition of foreign professional qualifications and its processes are essential to shape skilled immigration.

Since 2012, the Federal Recognition Act regulates the procedure for the assessment and the recognition of foreign professional qualifications. 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. There are many actors involved in the implementation of the recognition process, for example, the chambers as well as information and guidance services for different target groups. The Service Centre for Professional Recognition (ZSBA) has been offering advice to skilled workers living abroad for obtaining recognition for their qualifications since 2020.

Many actors contribute to shaping skilled immigration

Besides actors involved in the recognition process, the Federal Ministry of the Interior, missions abroad and competent foreigners' authorities are shaping the legal framework for skilled immigration and its implementation, e.g. issuing visas and residence permits. Further, the Federal government informs on skilled immigration in its portal Make it in Germany.

The chambers are very active as well in shaping skilled immigration on different levels. For example, the Hand in Hand for International Talents pilot project develops and tests an ideal-typical immigration process for skilled workers from third state countries in IHK professions. To this end, the project recruits qualified skilled workers with professional experience from abroad who wish to live and work in Germany on a long-term basis and connects them with companies located in Germany. The joint project of the Federal Employment Agency (BA) and the Association of German Chambers DIHK Service GmbH is funded by the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWE from May 2025). Another chamber project, 'Unternehmen Berufsanerkennung' (UBA), informs and supports companies interested in recognising professional qualifications from abroad and hiring international skilled workers.

Further, the new regulations under the second Skilled Labour Immigration Act make it possible for people in non-regulated occupations to access the labour market even without recognition in Germany. Among other things, this requires state-recognised training in the country of training. Specific qualifications from chambers of commerce abroad (AHKs) can also be used as an alternative. BIBB checks these qualifications at the request of the respective AHK.

Another important actor in facilitating skilled immigration is the Federal Employment Agency, e.g. with its international placement service ZAV, which is a contact for the international labour market and the placement of specific groups of people and professions in Germany and abroad. The service specifically recruits skilled workers and apprentices in sectors where they are urgently needed in Germany, based on specific inter-national agreements. However, a sustainable partnership in the sense of fair migration must avoid depriving a country of skilled workers who are needed there (brain drain). The ZAV cooperates in several projects with the German society for international cooperation (GIZ). Services are aimed at both employers and employees, including counselling and placement of personnel from abroad.

As already mentioned above, BIBB is contributing to sustainable skilled immigration

through various services. The following platforms are based at BIBB on behalf of the Federal education ministry (BMBF until May 2025 and BMBFSFJ from May 2025) and have been shaping international cooperation in VET for years (see PD on International cooperation in VET). Since 2023-24, there has been an additional focus on securing skilled workers from abroad:

iMOVE is a networking platform initiated in 2001 by the education ministry to enhance international cooperation in VET between German training providers and international partners. Since end of 2024, iMOVE is also promoting the recruiting of skilled workers through an internationally active German education sector. Foreign skilled workers and employers need to be brought together. For this, iMOVE at BIBB connects businesses with the active German education sector abroad. This international sector is engaged in recruitment, adaptation qualifications and the placement of skilled workers and potential apprentices in Germany.

Qualification measures by German actors abroad for the German labour market are a key component of skilled labour recruitment. As the German Federal Government's Central Office for International Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, GOVET advises and informs institutional actors on initial and continuing VET in the countries concerned, legal regulations and opportunities for labour market-oriented training abroad. So-called transnational skills partnerships are a promising approach designed to generate benefits for all parties involved.

2022 Design

In October 2022, the German government approved upon the Skilled Labour Strategy, which was developed together with social partners and all stakeholders concerned. The skilled labour strategy aimed to support companies and businesses in attracting and retaining qualified skilled workers through a range of measures, e.g. through modern immigration policy and sustainable labour market integration.

In November 2022, the German government published the 'Key Points on Skilled Labour Immigration from Third Countries', with the aim to further develop the first Skilled Immigration Act (2020). These key points were the basis for a more comprehensive draft law on labour immigration to support the Skilled Labour Strategy.

2023 Implementation

The second Skilled Immigration Act, which was passed in July 2023 and started to be implemented in November 2023, facilitates the labour immigration from non-EU countries in support of the Skilled Labour Strategy. It makes it easier for skilled workers who have a qualification in VET or higher education and for people with practical professional knowledge to move to Germany and work. Further, this law also broadens access to (continuing) education and training in Germany, ensuring that more third-country nationals come to train or study and subsequently work as skilled workers in Germany (see PD on the Second Skilled Immigration Act 2023-24).

Securing the supply of skilled workers from abroad was one of GOVET's key topics in 2023. The focus was on labour immigration, on transnational skills partnerships and on immigration to Germany for the purpose of training. The issue of securing skilled labour was also considerably reflected in the enquiries received by GOVET. In order to meet this demand adequately, GOVET has established expert dialogues and also conducted a virtual seminar entitled 'Training measures abroad as part of the acquisition of skilled workers for Germany' (see also PD on International cooperation in VET for other GOVET tasks).

2024 Implementation

Skills partnerships remained a key topic for GOVET in 2024. GOVET provided advice and information to support the recruitment of skilled workers and international exchange on migration. Transnational Skills Partnerships and combining international VET cooperation with securing the supply of skilled labour were also the subject of

numerous enquiries in 2024 and therefore also of GOVET's advisory work. Since the end of 2024, iMOVE has also promoted the recruitment of skilled workers through Germany's internationally active education sector, in addition to its other tasks (see PD International cooperation in VET).

The international placement service ZAV specifically recruited skilled workers and apprentices in sectors where they are urgently needed in Germany, based on specific inter-national agreements. Here is an example of an active recruitment project by ZAV which started in 2024: Shaping the future project (focusses on educators).

The federal government's portals 'Make it in Germany' and 'Recognition in Germany' provided information (also in form of a webinar) on the second Skilled Immigration Act, which continued to enter successively into force in March and June 2024.

As detailed in the PD on the second Skilled Immigration Act, improvements were made in the area of migration for education and training purposes. Further, the recognition procedure became optional in some cases: Workers from non-EU countries with extensive professional experience, a formal qualification and a specified minimum salary now have limited access to the German labour market without recognition.

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 provided a concise graphical overview of key findings from official recognition statistics (see Recognition portal and PD on Recognition of foreign professional qualifications).

2025 Implementation

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.

In 2025, the pilot project 'Hand in Hand for International Talents' with 22 chambers of industry and commerce brought together more than 50 companies located in Germany and in need of skilled workers with 4 partner countries with skilled workers wanting to work in Germany

Methods and experiences of fair recruitment and long-term prospects for foreign skilled workers and apprentices were the focus of the online event on 25 March 2025, which iMOVE held in collaboration with the University of Bremen and the SKILLS4JUSTICE project. iMOVE published new VET success stories on its portal, e.g. the Heimerer Group implements a German-Kosovar project in Pristina: nursing training to German standards at bachelor's degree level. This model can be transferred to other countries and will contribute to Germany's efforts to attract skilled workers.

The international placement service ZAV (based at the Federal Employment Agency) specifically recruits skilled workers and apprentices in sectors where they are urgently needed in Germany, based on specific international agreements. Here are some examples of active recruitment projects by ZAV which started in 2025: FIT project (Future International Talents for German Climate Businesses) together with the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts to recruit craftspeople, and 'IT for the public sector' project, to improve the staffing situation in the IT departments of public authorities.

In its Coalition Agreement (April 2025), the new German government planned to further optimise the process of skilled immigration, for example a digital agency for the immigration of skilled workers - a 'work-and-stay agency' - with a central IT platform is

to be established with the involvement of the Federal Employment Agency as a single point of contact for foreign skilled workers, which shall coordinate all processes relating to employment migration and the recognition of professional and academic qualifications and dovetail them with the structures in the federal states. A brain-drain in the partner countries is to be avoided: orderly migration of skilled workers while simultaneously promoting training in the country of origin. Further, processes are to be simplified through greater employer participation. Vocational language courses are to be extended.

In 2025, the Expert Council on Integration and Migration (*Sachverständigenrat für Integration und Migration* – SVR) published the annual report with the title ‘Reforms that work? The implementation of current migration and integration laws’. The report examined key reforms from recent years and to what extent and with what success these have so far been implemented. Based on its analysis of the implementation of the second Skilled Worker Immigration Act, the SVR recommended:

- (a) to involve employers in the recognition of professional experience gained abroad;
- (b) to centralise responsibilities for skilled worker immigration at the Federal level;
- (c) State-funded advisory services should primarily be provided to SMEs and employees.

Bodies responsible

- Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) (since 2025)
- Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI) (until 2025)
- Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS)
- Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBSFJ) (since 2025)
- Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) (until 2025)
- Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)
- 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)
- Federal Foreign Office (AA)
- Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK)
- German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHK)
- German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH)

Target group

Learners

Young people (15-29 years old)

Learners with migrant background, including refugees

Adult learners

Education professionals

Guidance practitioners

Entities providing VET

Companies

VET providers (all kinds)

Other stakeholders

Social partners (employer organisations and trade unions)

National, regional and local authorities

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Coordinating VET and other policies

Transparency and portability of VET skills and qualifications

Developing and applying qualifications smaller/shorter than full

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

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

Transnational VET initiatives, including joint VET programmes

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

Flexibility and progression opportunities at the core of VET

Osnabrück Declaration

Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET

European Education and Training Area and international VET

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Make-it-in-Germany portal - the official website for qualified professionals](#)

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

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

[Skilled labour strategy \[Fachkräftestrategie der Bundesregierung\] 2022; \(in German\)](#)

[BMAS - Overview of policies for a modern labour immigration](#)

[BIBB - Shaping skilled immigration](#)

[iMOVE Training - Made in Germany](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Implementation

Recognition of foreign professional qualifications

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

 GERMANY

Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

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

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.

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Vocational competitions EuroSkills and WorldSkills

WorldSkills - the World Skills Championships - and EuroSkills - the European Skills Championships - take place alternately every two years. The WorldSkills Germany network promotes and supports national and international competitions of non-academic professions.

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Promoting international mobility of VET learners

Outgoing mobility:

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Intercultural competences for trainers

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

Type of development

Practical

Subsystem

CVET

2023 Completed

First Skilled Immigration Act (2020)

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

 GERMANY

Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Integrating migrants and refugees in VET and work

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

 GERMANY

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

“ ... ” Cite as

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/50197>

