

## BUSINESS &amp; INNOVATION

# Germany: top destination for skilled workers

Germany's employment market offers many opportunities - and thus attracts international skilled workers.



Skilled workers have attractive prospects in Germany - in the healthcare sector, for example. © AdobeStock

Germany's stable employment market offers attractive career opportunities to professionals from around the world. On average, 46.1 million people in Germany were in gainful employment in 2024 - the highest number since German reunification in 1990.

## “Kurzarbeit” reduced-hours scheme protects jobs in times of crisis

This success is built on Germany's strong economy, but the employment market has also been supported by tried-and-tested crisis response measures implemented by the government. For example, government intervention to support workers on reduced hours had already proved its worth during the 2008-2009 financial crisis, and made a vital contribution to mitigating the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Where a crisis

causes a significant loss of work to businesses, the “Kurzarbeit” scheme allows employers to temporarily transfer employees to state-supported reduced hours. This helps avoid redundancies and makes it easier to restart work after the crisis.

## Reforms to create a modern employment market

As part of creating a modern, fair and transparent employment market, the Federal Government (#) has implemented a number of groundbreaking projects in employment policy.

- The legal minimum wage came into force in 2015 and is updated regularly.
- A [quota for the proportion of women](https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/life/women-in-germany-society-politics-education) (<https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/life/women-in-germany-society-politics-education>) is bringing about more equality at management level. Since 2016, publicly listed and equally co-determined companies have been required to have at least 30 percent of the seats on their supervisory boards filled by women.
- The regulations on pay scale uniformity ensure that employers do not apply different pay scales to the same work.

## Mobile work models: the key to greater flexibility?

The world of work in Germany is going through a period of change. Digitalisation is making its mark, but another significant change is that many roles no longer need to be carried out from specific locations, along with the opportunity to work from home at least some of the time. The Covid-19 pandemic gave a huge boost to mobile working, with up to a third of employees now working from home at least part of the time. The Federal Government (#) is ensuring that their rights and protections are guaranteed, even when working away from the office.

## Flexibility at work in Germany

Many workers in Germany now have far more influence over how they organise their working time than even a few years ago. Employees also have the right to reduce their working hours for up to six months to allow them to care for relatives. In addition to working part time, they can use flexitime to decide for themselves (within certain limits) when their work day begins and ends.

# Germany remains a top destination for skilled workers

There is an important trend in increasing mobility within the European labour market. Freedom of movement is one of the fundamental principles of the EU, so migration within Europe is an important issue for professionals, and Germany is a major destination.

## Why do many jobs remain vacant?

Germany lacks skilled workers. In view of demographic shifts, [ensuring a sufficient supply of skilled workers](https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/business/skilled-workers-in-germany-simplifying-immigration-from-abroad) (<https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/business/skilled-workers-in-germany-simplifying-immigration-from-abroad>) for the German economy is one of the most pressing challenges facing the Federal Government (#). According to the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DIHK), 43 percent of the nearly 23,000 companies surveyed were unable to fill vacancies due to a lack of suitable applicants in 2024.

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## Why are skilled workers in such high demand in Germany?

- Demographic shifts: Germany has an ageing population. This means that more people are retiring than are being replaced by young workers. This trend is being reinforced by a birth rate that has been low for decades and thus further limits the size of the next generation of workers.
  - Structural changes in business and society: digitisation, automation and technological innovations (#) are creating new occupations and transforming existing jobs. This raises the requirements for employee qualifications, which in turn increases demand for workers with specialist skills.
  - Economic growth and investment: new infrastructural projects, the energy transition and modernisation require highly qualified skilled workers, especially in the construction, engineering and technology sectors.
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## Which sectors are facing the most acute shortage of skilled workers?

- Childcare and education
  - Social work and social pedagogy
  - Healthcare and nursing
  - Geriatric care
  - Electrical professions and the skills crafts and trades
  - Construction
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## How many immigrants does the German employment market need?

A 2024 study conducted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung shows that the number of workers in Germany will decline by 10 percent by 2040 without immigration (#). To meet the demands of the employment market in future and ensure that the potential workforce does not slump, around 288,000 international workers will be required by 2040.

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## What opportunities does the Skilled Immigration Act offer?

Germany has made long-term preparations to support the migration of skilled workers. One important element is the [Skilled Immigration Act](https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/business/the-skilled-labour-immigration-act-working-in-germany) (<https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/business/the-skilled-labour-immigration-act-working-in-germany>) that has been in force since 1 March 2020 and is subject to continuous revision. The Act makes it easier for skilled workers from countries outside the EU to access the German labour market. Previously, this was only possible for workers with academic qualifications. Since 2020 this access has also been open to workers who have gained a vocational qualification abroad. Because of the special features and high standards of Germany's [dual vocational training system](https://www.tatsachen-ueber-deutschland.de/en/working-germany/dual-vocational-training) (<https://www.tatsachen-ueber-deutschland.de/en/working-germany/dual-vocational-training>), the Skilled Immigration (#) Act also improves opportunities for people to come to Germany to obtain qualifications. Those interested in embarking on a course of training are now also eligible for a residence permit.

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