The new Skilled Immigration Act at a glance

The new Skilled Immigration Act (FEG) makes it easier for skilled workers with vocational training and individuals with practical knowledge to immigrate to Germany.

With the new law, existing mechanisms for skilled workers with a **university** degree, such as the **EU Blue Card**, continue and were in some cases extended. In addition, the new **opportunity card** *(Chancenkarte)* enables third-country nationals to seek employment.

The new law has several parts. The provisions were phased in since November 2023. Here is an overview of the amendments:

The new EU Blue Card since November 2023

In implementing the requirements of Directive (EU) 2021/1883, the German legislator has restructured and widened the migration possibilities with an **EU Blue Card**:

- **Lower salary thresholds:** The salary thresholds for the EU Blue Card in regular and **shortage occupations** was significantly lowered. A minimum salary of 45.3% of the annual contribution assessment ceiling for pension insurance (in 2026: **€45,934.20**) now applies to shortage occupations and new entrants to the labour market; for all other occupations, the figure is 50% (in 2026: **€50,700**).

- **Wider group of people:**

  New entrants to the labour market: The possibility of obtaining an EU Blue Card was opened to a wider group of people. For example, foreign people who have graduated from university within the last three years can obtain an EU Blue Card if their job in Germany earns them a minimum salary of 45.3% of the

annual assessment ceiling for pension insurance (in 2026: **€45,934.20**). This applies to both regular and shortage occupations.

IT specialists: Another change is that **IT specialists** now are able to obtain an EU Blue Card if they do not have a university degree but can prove that they have at least three years of comparable professional experience. In this case, the lower **salary threshold** for shortage occupations applies (45.3% of the annual assessment ceiling; in 2026: **€45,934.20**).

Extension of the list of shortage occupations: The **list of shortage occupations** for the EU Blue Card was significantly expanded. In addition to the existing shortage occupations (mathematics, IT, science, engineering, and human medicine), skilled workers in the following occupations are able to obtain an EU Blue Card if they meet the other requirements:

- Manufacturing, mining, construction, or distribution managers
- Information and communications technology service managers
- Professional services managers, such as child care or health services managers
- Veterinarians
- Dentists
- Pharmacists
- Nursing or midwifery professionals
- School and out-of-school teachers and educators

You can find the detailed list of shortage occupations **here**.

Here, too, the lower salary threshold for shortage occupations applies (45.3% of the annual assessment ceiling; in 2026: **€45,934.20**).

- **Short-term and long-term mobility**: Holders of an EU Blue Card issued by another EU Member State are now entitled to short-term and long-term mobility in Germany. For a maximum stay of 90 days, Blue Card holders from other EU countries are able to come to Germany and stay here for the purpose of a business activity directly related to their employment. Neither a **visa** nor a work permit from the **Federal Employment Agency (BA)** is required for such short stays.
  After a minimum stay of twelve months with an EU Blue Card in another EU country, long-term residence in Germany is possible without a visa. After entering Germany, the professional must apply at the **foreigners authority** for a German EU Blue Card.
- **Facilitated family reunification for EU Blue Card holders:** EU Blue Card holders who have already lived in another EU Member State with their family are entitled to privileged **family reunification**. If these family members require a visa due to their nationality, they are entitled to enter and reside in Germany as family members of an EU Blue Card holder with the **residence permit** issued in the previous Member State

without having to undergo a visa procedure beforehand. When a residence permit is issued in Germany, the requirements of sufficient living space (**Section 29 para. 1 no. 2 of the Residence Act [AufenthG]**) and the requirement to secure one's livelihood (**Section 5 para. 1 no. 1 of the Residence Act [AufenthG]**) no longer apply.

You can find further information on the EU Blue Card in the "**EU Blue Card**".

Further changes since November 2023

Entitlement to residence permit for skilled workers and abandonment of the link between qualification and employment

The two central legal bases for residence permits for skilled workers with a non-academic vocational training qualification (**Section 18a of the Residence Act [AufenthG]**) and skilled workers holding a university degree (**Section 18b of the Residence Act [AufenthG]**) were amended in two respects:

- First, applicants are now entitled to a residence permit if all requirements are met.
- Second, the restriction that individuals may only work on the basis of the skills acquired with the qualification was removed. In other words, if applicants have a **non-academic vocational qualification** or an academic qualification, they are not restricted to jobs related to that qualification when looking for employment. There are exceptions for **regulated professions**.

In the **"Work visa for qualified professionals"** section, you can learn about what concrete requirements are set in place in order to receive this visa or **residence title**.

Employment of professional drivers

The granting of approval by the Federal Employment Agency for employing professional drivers from third countries was simplified. As a result, it will no longer be checked whether the applicant has the required EU or **EEA** driving licence and the initial qualification or accelerated initial qualification. In addition, the **priority check** was abolished, and language skills are no longer a requirement.

You can find further information on the regulations for professional drivers from abroad in the **"Special regulations for professional drivers"** subsection of the "Visa" section, as well as on our website for employers in the **"Professional drivers from third countries"** section.

New employment and recognition rules since March 2024

Residence for the recognition of a foreign qualification

The scope relating to residence for participating in qualification measures in Germany was extended. The previous 18-month residence permit for the purpose of completing adaptation measures (**Section 16d para. 1 of the Residence Act [AufenthG]**) is now granted for 24 months when issued for the first time. It is now possible to extend the permit for a further 12 months, up to a maximum residence period of three years. This amendment gives employers greater flexibility.

The possibility of **secondary employment** during the **qualification measure** was increased from 10 to 20 hours per week. This makes it easier for prospective skilled workers to find their way into the labour market.

The purpose of undergoing qualification measures in Germany is for applicants to receive full recognition of their foreign qualifications. The new Skilled Immigration Act introduced two new access routes for this purpose:

- **Entry and employment under a recognition partnership:** The **recognition partnership** now makes it possible for applicants to obtain a residence title for **qualified employment** and to complete the necessary **recognition procedure** after entering the country. In contrast to the previous options for undertaking qualification measures, it is not necessary to initiate a recognition procedure or to have a notice of partial recognition prior to entry. The granting of a visa is linked to the obligation of the prospective **skilled worker** and the employer to apply for recognition after entry and to actively pursue the procedure. The basic requirements for a recognition partnership are, in addition to an employment contract, the existence of a non-academic vocational qualification requiring at least two years of training or an academic qualification – both of which must be recognised by the country of training – and German language skills at level A2 (according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [CEFR]. Residence permits are usually issued for one year and can be extended to up to three years.
- The previous residence for recognition under the old version of Section 16d para. 3, where there is a lack of practical business experience, no longer applies. Individuals who have received a notice of partial recognition and who mainly lack practical business experience now have two options for the purpose of having their qualifications recognised in Germany: they can – as before – enter Germany either to complete a qualification measure (**Section 16d para. 1 of the Residence Act [AufenthG]**) or within the framework of a recognition partnership (**Section 16d para. 3 of the new Residence Act [AufenthG]**).
- **Entry for the purpose of undergoing a skills analysis:** Individuals seeking recognition who, in the opinion of the competent authority, should undergo a **skills analysis** in Germany to determine the equivalence of their foreign qualifications, may be granted a **residence permit** for up to six months for this purpose. One of the requirements is that they can prove their German language skills. As a rule, German language skills at level A2 or better (CEFR) are required.

Employment of (skilled) workers

- **Special provision for practical professional knowledge:** The employment of people with highly developed practical professional knowledge was expanded. The new provision now applies to **all non-regulated professions in all sectors**. For **people with practical professional knowledge**, the requirement is that they have a non-academic vocational qualification or an academic qualification recognised by the country of training. In the case of a non-academic vocational qualification, a **training period** of at least two years is required. As an alternative to a state-recognised qualification, a qualification from a German Chamber of Commerce Abroad may be sufficient under certain conditions. In addition, applicants must have a minimum of two years' work experience in the occupation they wish to enter. Formal recognition of the qualification in Germany is not required. The job offer in Germany must assure an annual **gross salary** of at least **€45,934.20** (as of 2026). If the employer is bound by collective agreements, remuneration according to the **collective agreement** is sufficient. An employer can be bound by collective agreements either according to Section 3 (1) of the Collective Agreements Act (TVG) or if they fall under the rule of universally applicable collective agreements according to Section 5 of the Collective Agreements Act (TVG). The **collective agreement** must (also) explicitly include regulations for remuneration.

  For **IT specialists**, access to the labour market was further facilitated by reducing the required professional experience to two years (from three). A non-academic vocational or academic qualification is still not required. Language skills are no longer required for **visa purposes**. In this case, the minimum gross salary of at least **€45,934.20** (as of 2026) per year or remuneration according to the collective agreement applies as well.

- **Access to the labour market for assistants in nursing from third countries:** The changes added a provision for assistants in nursing from third countries to the rules for access to the labour market for **healthcare professionals**. All third-country nationals with less than three years of regulated nursing training are now able to work in the health and care sector. The prerequisite for this is that such individuals either have relevant vocational training in nursing in Germany or a foreign nursing qualification that is recognised in Germany.

- **Job seeking following training in healthcare and nursing professions:** Nursing and care assistants from third countries who have completed their training in Germany are now able to apply for a **residence permit for jobseekers**. The residence permit is issued for up to twelve months and can be extended by up to six months if the applicant's livelihood is further secured.

- **Settlement permit for skilled workers from abroad:** Foreign professionals who hold a residence permit in accordance with Section 18a, Section 18b, Section 18d or Section 18g of the Residence Act (AufenthG) and who have neither completed domestic vocational training nor a degree in Germany now receive a **settlement permit** in Germany after only three years (previously four years). In addition, EU Blue Card holders are now able to obtain a settlement permit even more quickly: it is possible to obtain a **settlement permit** after 27 months of employment with an EU Blue Card; if the applicant has sufficient knowledge of German (level B1 CEFR), this period is reduced to 21 months.

For those who have completed university or vocational training in Germany, the current special provision on the settlement permit remains in place: after only two years of holding a residence permit for being employed as a "qualified professional" (residence titles according to Sections 18a, 18b or 18d of the Residence Act [AufenthG]), they can be granted a settlement permit.

- **Facilitated family reunification for skilled workers:** Spouses or minor children moving to Germany to join certain skilled workers are no longer required to provide proof of sufficient living space. In addition, these skilled workers are now also able to bring their parents and – if the spouse is also a permanent resident of Germany – their parents-in-law to join them if they received their residence permit for the first time on or after 1 March 2024.
- **Residence permit for holders of start-up grants**: Skilled workers as defined in **Section 18 para. 3 of the Residence Act [AufenthG]** may now be granted a residence permit for up to 18 months for the **purpose of setting up a business** if they receive a grant from a German research organisation or public body for this purpose.

Employment of students and trainees

- **Expanded employment opportunities for international students:** The possibilities for secondary employment for third-country nationals studying in Germany on a **student visa** were expanded. The previous annual working time account of 120 full days or 240 half days was increased to 140 full days or 280 half days. Alternatively, the new rule allows student employees to work up to 20 hours per week. The amount of the salary and the type of employment are irrelevant. Secondary employment is now also possible from the outset when prospective students participate in preparatory measures for university study.
- **Residence for the purpose of seeking a place at a university with career prospects:** Entry and residence for the purpose of applying to study at a German **higher education institution** remains possible for third-country nationals. Prospective students are now able to take up a part-time job of up to 20 hours per week while **looking for a place to study**.
- **Extension of the possibilities of residence for the purpose of seeking an apprenticeship:** Third-country nationals may also continue to enter Germany for the **purpose of seeking vocational training**. The age limit for potential applicants was raised from 25 to 35 and the German language requirements were lowered to level B1 (CEFR). This opens up residence for the purpose of seeking vocational training to a larger group of third-country nationals. The previous maximum residence period of six months was increased to nine months. In addition, people with this residence permit are now able to take up secondary employment of up to 20 hours per week and to do job trials for up to two weeks.
- **Expanded opportunities for secondary employment for apprentices:** Secondary employment of up to 20 hours per week is now possible for all apprenticeships.

Short-term quota employment

The changes to the law introduced a new possibility for short-term employment of third-country nationals, regardless of their qualifications. As soon as the Federal Employment Agency (BA) sets a demand-oriented quota – which can also be differentiated for certain economic sectors or occupational groups – interested employers can apply for a work permit or approval for a residence title for foreign workers. This will be granted if the following applies:

- The employer is bound by collective agreements and the workers are employed in accordance with the applicable collectively agreed terms and conditions of employment;
- The employer undertakes to pay the necessary travel expenses in full;
- The planned employment does not exceed eight months within a 12-month period; and
- The working week is at least 30 hours.

Further amendments in June 2024

Introduction of a job search opportunity card

The **opportunity card** was introduced to enable jobseekers to stay in Germany to look for employment. This card can be obtained in two ways: Third-country nationals who receive full recognition of their foreign qualifications and are therefore considered "skilled workers" under **Section 18 para. 3 of the Residence Act (AufenthG)** can obtain an opportunity card without any further special requirements. All other applicants must provide evidence of a foreign **academic degree**, a non-academic vocational qualification of at least two years' duration (in each case recognised by the state in the country of training) or a non-academic vocational qualification issued by a German Chamber of Commerce Abroad. In addition, a basic knowledge of German (level A1 CEFR) or English (level B2 CEFR) is required.

If these requirements are met, points are awarded for criteria such as recognition of qualifications in Germany, language skills, professional experience, age, links to Germany, and the potential of accompanying partners or spouses. Applicants must score a minimum of six points to receive an opportunity card.

Opportunity cards are issued for a maximum of one year, provided that the holder is able to financially support themselves for that period. It allows the holder to do work trials or take up secondary employment for a maximum of 20 hours per week during their stay in Germany. If an applicant is subsequently unable to obtain another residence title for employment purposes under Part 4 (Sections 18 to 21 of the Residence Act [AufenthG]) but nevertheless has an offer of qualified employment, the opportunity card can be extended for a further two years.

Find out about your opportunities: do the self-check

Simply answer the questions in the self-check: opportunity card to find out if you are eligible to apply for an opportunity card.

Additional information

Please select country

The Western Balkans regulation

The **Western Balkans regulation** gives nationals of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia access to the labour market in Germany for any type of employment in non-regulated occupations. The scheme was originally set to expire at the end of 2023. The Regulation on the Further Development of Skilled Immigration extended the Western Balkans Regulation indefinitely. Since June 2024, the quota will be 50,000 approvals per year issued by the Federal Employment Agency.

What steps must I take to become a skilled worker in Germany?

- **Recognition of foreign qualifications**: It is important that you have a recognised qualification or one that is eligible for recognition. Therefore, you at least need to be in possession of a state-certified or state-recognised foreign qualification. To ensure that the qualification can be recognised, the regulations of the Residence Act demand that the vocational training must have taken at least two years to complete, especially in light of a recognition partnership. In several cases, you will need to apply for recognition of your foreign qualifications before entering Germany. In some cases, you can apply for recognition of your qualification after you have arrived in Germany. For individual advice on the recognition procedure and immigration to Germany, please contact the **"Working and Living in Germany" hotline**. Further information on the recognition of foreign qualifications is available in the "**Recognition of foreign qualifications**" section.
- **Language skills**: You need to be able to prove your language skills, especially if you are entering the country to look for a place to train or study, as well as for some other types of residence. You can find more information on learning opportunities in the "**Learning German**" section.
- **Who to contact regarding visas/residence**: If you are still in your home country, the German diplomatic missions are responsible for issuing the necessary visas. You can find the addresses of German contact

points near you in our **overview of advisory and contact points**. If you are already living in Germany, please contact your local foreigners authority if you have any questions about residence and visas.

As an employer, where can I get more information and support?

- **Initial guidance**: There are different issues to consider depending on whether you are recruiting a foreign skilled worker or a trainee, and depending on which country your candidate is from. Get initial guidance using the **Quick-Check for employers**.
- **Individual advice**: Do you have any questions or comments, or are you looking for support in recruiting skilled workers abroad? Simply send us an email or contact us via our **"Working and Living in Germany" hotline**. Our experts will be happy to assist you!
- **Projects for recruiting skilled workers**: Our partners' projects can help you implement your recruitment plans. Find the right project for your company in the "**Current projects for recruiting skilled workers**" section.

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