



Federal Office
for Migration
and Refugees



Research
Centre

Executive summary of the study "Development of skilled migration and effects of the fast-track procedure for skilled workers"

Accompanying research on the Skilled Immigration Act

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**Fachkräfte-
einwanderungsgesetz**

Objectives and approach of the study

The accompanying research project „Development of skilled migration and effects of the fast-track procedure for skilled workers" was conducted by the Migration, Integration and Asylum Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge – Forschungszentrum, BAMF-FZ*). The central objectives of the study were to provide an overview of the development of skilled labour immigration since the Skilled Immigration Act (*Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz – FEG*) came into force on 1 March 2020 and to determine how the new regulations have been applied, what challenges still exist and whether this makes skilled labour immigration to Germany more attractive. Data from the Visa Statistics and the Central Register of Foreigners (*Ausländerzentralregister – AZR*) were analysed to show the quantitative development of educational and labour migration. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted in 27 foreigners authorities (*Ausländerbehörden – ABHs*) nationwide from June to November 2021. This included all centralized agencies (*zentrale Ausländerbehörden*) responsible for the fast-track procedure, which were established in some of the federal states (*Bundesländer*), as well as other selected municipal foreigners authorities in all federal states. Further qualitative interviews were conducted between December 2021 and February 2022 in nine selected German missions abroad (*Auslandsvertretungen – AVs*).

The study refers exclusively to the status of the legal regulations after the entry into force of the Skilled Immigration Act up to December 2022. The key points on skilled immigration adopted by the Federal Cabinet in November 2022 and the bill adopted on 29 March 2023 as well as the ordinance on the development of skilled immigration were accordingly not subject of this study.

The full version of the research report in German with a comprehensive presentation of the results is available at:
www.bamf.de/fb45-feg

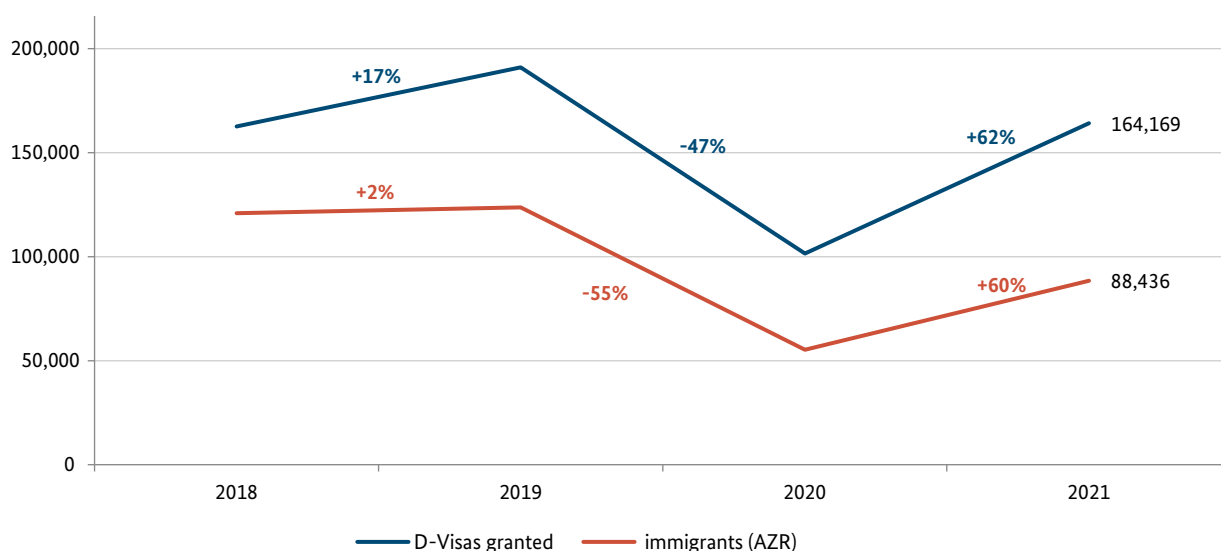
Quantitative development of educational and labour migration

As the analysis of Visa Statistics and AZR data show, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic far outweighed any positive effects of the FEG, especially in 2020. The pandemic-related entry restrictions led to a sharp drop in the educational and labour migration of third-country nationals to Germany. The number of granted visas and actual immigration both fell by around half compared

to 2019 (see Figure 1; for data sources, see Info Box 1). Both statistics show increases again in most areas, especially from the second half of 2021. At present, however, this primarily means a return to the level before the entry restrictions came into effect.

Despite the facilitation of immigration by the FEG especially in the non-academic sector, the most significant groups in terms of numbers in the context of educational and labour migration continue to be students and academic professionals (especially EU Blue Card holders) as well as persons who immigrated via the Western Balkans regulation (*Westbalkanregelung*).

Figure 1: D-Visas granted and immigrants within the context of educational and labour migration (Section 16-21 Residence Act) over time



Sources: Federal Foreign Office (own calculations) and AZR

Infobox 1: Possibilities and limitations of data sources

The Visa Statistics and the statistics based on the residence titles issued in Germany from the AZR each depict different sub-areas of educational and labour migration and have certain limitations in their analytical possibilities. For example, the Visa Statistics do not include persons who are exempt from visa requirements for employment purposes (e.g. citizens of the USA). However, only those persons can be represented on the basis of the AZR who were granted a corresponding residence title by a domestic ABH timely after their arrival. This is not necessarily the case, especially in the case of shorter stays and visas with a longer validity. Usually, this leads to significantly higher visa figures (cf. Figure 1). At the same time, not all visas issued can be analysed according to the specific legal or regulatory basis.

Overall, improvements are needed in the statistical registration of immigration for educational and employment purposes. Until then, the use of the individual data sources must always be precisely related to the question at hand.

The new opportunities introduced by the FEG which allow persons to seek for vocational training positions or non-academic professionals to seek for job positions were particularly hard hit by the pandemic-related restrictions. But even since the relaxations, there have not yet been too many increases in these areas. There are signs of positive developments for immigration in the context of vocational training and adaptation training for the recognition of foreign vocational qualifications. Both opportunities were also reformed by the FEG. These immigration channels were not previously used to any great extent.

Looking at all residence titles granted in Germany also makes it clear that not only new immigration is relevant for the number of labour migrants living in Germany. Changes of status, e.g. from educational measures, also lead to subsequent employment on the German labour market and thus represent an important component in curbing the shortage of skilled workers. Currently, (former) international students are still particularly important. These changes in status were one of the reasons why the number of migrant workers residing in Germany did not fall during the pandemic, but was merely limited in its growth (Figure 2). In addition, there are also people who continue to be gainfully employed in Germany, but who are statistically no longer counted as migrant workers, for example because they have been naturalised or have received a permanent residence permit (Section 9 of the Residence Act).

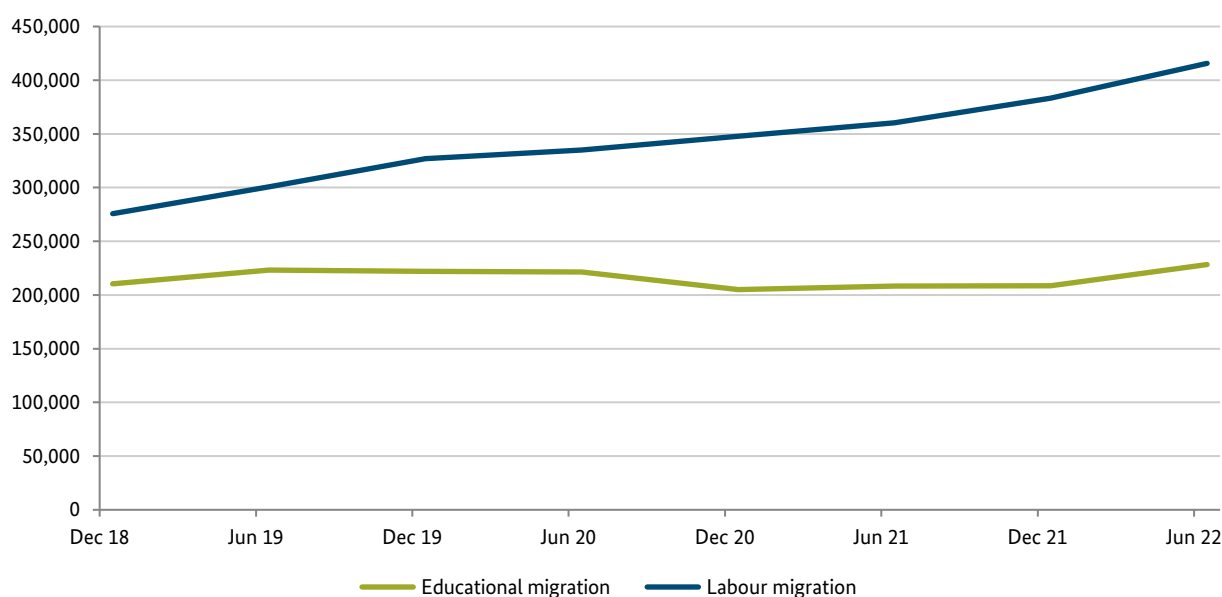
The international travel restrictions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic came almost simultaneously with the FEG's entry into force in March 2020. This makes it nearly impossible to determine the effect of the law on the volume of immigration. The positive developments since the removal of the main restrictions give reason to hope that a stabilisation of immigration for educational and employment purposes will be achieved in the near future.

Findings from the perspective of the ABHs

According to the interviews with selected municipal or centralized ABHs, the most frequently recruited occupational groups after the FEG came into force were, as expected - and as before - employees from the health sector, IT specialists and engineers. Among the non-academic professionals, the construction industry and skilled trades and crafts were particularly represented.

After the implementation of the new legal regulations from March 2020 (see Infobox 2), difficulties arose in providing a sufficient number of expert staff in the authorities. Especially in the beginning, many authorities needed longer training periods. The new and clear structure of the Residence Act and the corresponding

Figure 2: Resident third-country nationals with a residence permit for educational and labour migration from December 2018 to June 2022



Source: AZR (as of the respective cut-off date)

Infobox 2: Legal framework

Since March 2020, the FEG has made it easier for skilled workers from third countries to immigrate to Germany within the context of educational or labour migration. For this purpose, a legal concept of skilled workers was defined, which includes not only persons with a university degree recognised in Germany, but also those with a recognised vocational training. The FEG includes the following essential changes for (prospective) skilled workers:

- Non-academic skilled workers with a concrete job offer may pursue all occupations as well as related occupations for which their vocational qualification qualifies them, without restrictions to defined bottleneck occupations.
- A priority check by the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit* – BA) will be waived. The BA will continue to check the working conditions.
- The already existing entry option for job-seeking for academic professionals can now also be used by professionals with vocational training (Section 20 (1) Residence Act).
- The possibilities to complete an adaption training in Germany within the framework of the recognition of a foreign qualification (Section 16d Residence Act) or to enter Germany to take up a full vocational training (Section 16a Residence Act) have been expanded.
- Entry for the purpose of seeking an apprenticeship is also possible (Section 17 (1) Residence Act).
- Companies can apply for the fast-track procedure for skilled workers (Section 81a Residence Act) in order to employ a skilled worker who is still abroad more quickly in Germany. For this purpose, the employer initiates the procedure on behalf of the skilled worker at the competent ABH. By shortening the processing time, the duration until the visa is issued is to be significantly reduced. Thus, the entire process should generally not take longer than four months. The procedure can also be used for trainees and persons who want to attend an adaption training. Any accompanying spouses and underage children can be included in the fast-track procedure as well.

application notes (*Anwendungshinweise*) were highly approved as they provide support for reliable processing. However, it was criticised that the complexity of the legal basis has increased in some areas due to the FEG. On the one hand, the more detailed regulations enable a clear allocation of cases, but on the other hand they often make it more difficult to process special cases. With regard to a possible abuse of the new legal regulations, it was unanimously assessed by the ABHs that the FEG is not critical in this respect due to the continued high requirements for residence permits.

The FEG provides the basis for establishing one centralized ABH per federal state to bundle expertise and to be responsible for the implementation of the fast-track procedure for skilled workers. However, only some of the federal states have decided to set up such a centralized ABH. In the remaining federal states, the respective municipal ABHs take over this task. The newly created possibility for employers to apply for the fast-track pro-

cedure for skilled workers allows them to participate directly in the application procedure. This requires above all, in addition to reliable and clear information, individual support and counselling of the applicants by the centralized or municipal ABHs.

A new task for the ABH within the context of the fast-track procedure for skilled workers was the technical preparation and application of procedures for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications. There were high waiting times for recognition, especially for medical professions. In principle, the legislator has given the recognition offices a generally two-month deadline for processing. However, it only takes effect when all necessary documents are complete and it may deviate in individual federal states for regulated health professions. The very high administrative requirements for application documents to be submitted were criticised. Processing times of two to six months also occurred for non-regulated occupations with vocational trainings. Reasons

for this were sometimes a lack of staff in the recognition offices or difficulties for the employer or the skilled worker to obtain the necessary documents in a timely manner or even at all. In contrast, procedures with recognised higher education qualifications included in the anabin database (www.anabin.kmk.org) were processed relatively quick within two or three weeks. This is also the case for qualifications for which a certificate evaluation was carried out at the Central Office for Foreign Education (*Zentralstelle für ausländisches Bildungswesen* – ZAB).

Despite the sometimes lengthy recognition procedures, the use of the fast-track procedure for skilled workers was particularly attractive for many employers in order to obtain an appointment in the German AVs for the visa application in a timely manner during the pandemic-related restrictions.

Findings from the perspective of the missions abroad

The interviews of selected German AVs gave the overall impression that the introduction of the FEG was little noticed by potential skilled workers abroad. However, there are many sources of information for interested persons, such as the *Make it in Germany* (MiiG) website, the advisory and information services of the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (*Deutsche Außenhandelskammern* – AHKs) and the Goethe Institutes. So far, little is known about how skilled workers find their job offers. Particularly in the area of non-academic occupational groups, the desired increase in the number of immigrants has not yet occurred. This can probably be attributed to the lack of formal vocational training systems in the countries of origin and thus to a lack of recognizable qualifications in Germany. With regard to completing a full vocational training programme, there is also a lack of knowledge abroad about the possibilities of the German dual vocational training system and its good reputation. As a result, the view of the AVs was that the fast-track procedure for skilled workers alone – or without target group-specific support for employers and skilled workers – will not lead to a substantial increase in visas issued for employment.

The AVs registered that the application of the fast-track procedure for skilled workers has so far been limited mainly to a certain group of companies and sectors. In particular this new option offers employers greater planning security. The fast-track procedure for skilled

workers was worthwhile in cases where the BA's consent is required and was obtained in advance by the competent ABHs, as well as in the processing of group applications. Among the accelerated applications to date is a large proportion of EU Blue Cards that do not require approval, which can also be issued in the regular procedure within one week.

Several AVs confirmed that the fast-track procedure for skilled workers made their work easier in the decision-making process. As soon as the ABHs had given their preliminary approval, the processing of the fast-track applications was generally very efficient. Others pointed out that the time saved in the decision-making process was instead needed beforehand in organising the shortened appointment process.

Fields of action

The fields of action resulting from the interviews are based exclusively on the statements of the ABHs and AVs interviewed, whether through implicitly expressed suggestions for improvement or explicit recommendations for action. The topics presented were mentioned particularly frequently, but not necessarily by all respondents, and were partially summarised.

1. Optimisation of administrative procedures

Staffing and familiarisation with new procedures

By their own admission, many ABHs and AVs received too little information before the FEG came into force in order to familiarise themselves with the new regulations in the area of educational and labour migration. It is therefore useful to ...

- provide sufficient time for a familiarisation phase when new regulations are introduced and provide explanations in time in order to create a clear transition. New forms and processes must first be established and understood in order to be able to carry out the new procedures efficiently. In addition, timely familiarisation can be made more difficult by the rotation system of AV employees.
- ensure sufficient staffing in the authorities. Many new tasks that were added by the FEG were not backed up by new staff, so that the existing staff was often overworked. As a result, at times fewer proce-

dures could be processed than there was a demand for, especially in the municipal ABHs.

- provide a better and clearer explanation of the legal texts in the application notes of the FEG. The ABHs stated that the increase in complexity of the legal regulations often exceeded the expertise of the staff, many of whom work as case worker (Sachbearbeitende).

Clarification of responsibilities

Repeated difficulties were reported in the case of shared responsibilities between the AVs and ABHs with regard to both, regular procedures and fast-track procedures for skilled workers. This was especially the case in connection with rejected preliminary approvals by the ABHs and a double check of original documents by the AVs. There were differing views predominantly with regard to the authenticity of proofs and the recognisability of foreign qualifications. A uniform procedure would have to be found for an efficient examination of applicants' intentions to work and their foreign professional qualifications. It would be beneficial for cooperation to have clear instructions regarding responsibilities from the respective ministries responsible. This is also important for an orientation in the case of liability towards the applicants.

If the fast-track procedure for skilled workers is handled by a centralized ABH, this authority takes over the process until the preliminary approval is granted. After immigration, the respective municipal ABH is then responsible for issuing the residence permit and other residence law issues. This can lead to problems because it involves many ABH contact persons who may lack an overview of the individual procedures from application to immigration. Further changes in responsibility can also occur between municipal ABHs, e.g. due to relocations of immigrants and when a company has branches in different federal states. It is therefore important that information is passed on quickly to all authorities so that the procedures can be processed fast and they are able to provide information in the event of queries. This could be done by a digital platform within the authorities.

Stronger networking

In order to clarify many questions, the ABHs would like to have a stronger exchange with other authorities or to participate in networks with multipliers and external service providers. Since the ABHs are organisationally located in the respective federal state, an exchange across

the federal states is often difficult. It would be helpful if smaller federal states or authorities were integrated into existing networks on a supraregional level. Networking across federal states also contributes to a standardisation of procedures at the working level, which increases the transparency of decisions. At the national level, but also between the ABHs and AVs, it would in principle be conceivable to get to know each other better in the context of hospitations or secondments. In addition to improving the possibilities for exchange, however, sufficient personnel resources and digital communication channels would also have to be created for close networking.

Better networking is also recommended between the BA, the ABHs and AVs. In principle, the ABHs and AVs would like to see greater flexibility in their cooperation with the BA. Up to now, when it is necessary to obtain the BA's approval for the employment of a foreign skilled worker, a rejection by the BA leads to a completely new application for approval having to be submitted. Instead, a possibility for consultation on the basis of the existing application would be expedient and time-saving. In order to provide better information and support for the applying skilled workers and employers, it would also be helpful to have better access to the BA's approval procedure.

Improving digitisation

In order to further accelerate the processing of procedures and to avoid waiting times, the expansion of digitisation is helpful and desired by both the ABHs and the AVs. The registration of preliminary approvals in the fast-track procedure for skilled workers via the AZR was an important step. It is recommended to quickly remove existing technical hurdles and to include basic information such as e-mail addresses or telephone numbers of the applying skilled worker so that appointments with the AV can be made quickly.

Maximum acceleration can be achieved if not only the processing but also the application for the visa could already be done digitally. First pilot projects by the Federal Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt* - AA) for online applications for the EU Blue Card already exist. With regard to administrative cooperation, the AVs also suggested managing the documents digitally from the start of the application, so that the lengthy official mailing of documents by post could be avoided. A major concern for improving the application procedures is above all the expansion of the digital interfaces to the *RK-Visa-System* and to the BA or, alternatively, the creation of a common application for all authorities directly involved.

Improving the processes for the recognition of foreign qualifications

There were many reports of problems and long delays in the recognition of regulated qualifications or respectively non-academic foreign qualifications. Many applicants independently applied for the recognition of their foreign professional qualification before the fast-track procedure for skilled workers. Therefore, the completed preliminary approvals provide a distorted picture of whether acceleration is actually successfully implemented in the recognition procedure. Improvements were suggested in particular by the ABHs and some AVs both with regard to the implementation of the procedures and with regard to contacting the competent recognition offices:

- Many recognition offices require comprehensive application documents to be signed in original or sent as colour copies by post. The development of digital platforms could help to speed up communication and processing in the recognition procedures.
- It would be advantageous to establish a uniform recognition procedure between the federal states with regard to the required language certificates and the form of the documents. It was also suggested to strengthen the transfer of knowledge within and between the competent recognition offices or, alternatively, to establish a central recognition office.
- For the recognition of non-regulated academic professions, the central anabin database was highly approved. It would therefore be particularly helpful to supplement the database with further degrees from the main countries of origin. Greater advertising and optimisation of the user-friendliness of the database would be welcome measures. A certificate evaluation by the ZAB is more time-consuming but more valid, which is recommended especially for smaller ABHs with possibly less experiences.
- In countries with a high incidence of forgeries, it has proven useful for the AVs to have the original documents of the skilled worker presented on site, even if this additional step is not provided for in the fast-track procedure for skilled workers per se. In this case, it should be possible to make use of the experience of the AVs, e.g. by presenting original documents when picking up visas and/or by training the ABH staff to better identify faked documents, if necessary also in cooperation with the Federal Agency for Foreign Affairs (*Bundesamt für Auswärtige Ange-*

legenheiten - BfAA) or the recognition offices in Germany.

Feedback was also received on the fees of the recognition procedures: Especially for the recognition of non-academic vocational qualifications, the total costs are usually higher than for most academic qualifications. Despite the fast-track procedure for skilled workers, it often took up to half a year until a notice of recognition for foreign vocational training was received, sometimes because submitted documents were incomplete. In order to be attractive to foreign skilled workers as an employer, especially in the area of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), corresponding hurdles with regard to formalities, costs and duration of procedures must be considerably reduced. In the case of a certified partial recognition, there was also the obstacle of whether the employer can and wants to carry out the necessary in-company adaptation training at all.

Further opportunities for improvement for more efficient administrative action

In order to speed up the processes, which benefits both the competent authorities and the applying employers or (prospective) skilled workers, the following aspects also need to be improved:

- It would be helpful to have clear instructions for ABHs and AVs on the criteria to be used for assessing language and professional skills in different case constellations. For example, there were occasionally different assessments between the AV and ABH regarding the plausibility of language skills for the applicant's intended occupation. This was especially the case with regard to persons who wanted to enter the German labour market for non-regulated employment without any knowledge of German or English. Difficulties also arose in individual cases with regard to the verification of practical professional knowledge for IT specialists in accordance with Section 19c (2) of the Residence Act in conjunction with Section 6 of the Ordinance on the Employment of Foreigners. In order for the ABHs to be able to better assess the chances of success when advising the applying companies or immigrants, more in-depth knowledge would be helpful, even if the final examination of the practical professional knowledge takes place at the BA.
- As a result of additional checks, the visa applications of persons for whom a longer-term previous stay in Germany has been recorded in the AZR sometimes

take six to eight weeks longer to be processed. The advantages of a longer-term prior stay, e.g. in the context of studies, with regard to successful integration should actually benefit the applicants. Therefore, it should be reconsidered which measures should be taken to optimise the scope of checks of previous-stays.

- There is also potential for optimisation with regard to the waiting time until the immigrants receive the so-called electronic residence title, which is handed out by the ABH in the form of a card. It could take up to half a year until the time of collection. The reasons for this were often a lack of staff capacity and insufficient digitalisation in the ABHs. In order to reduce waiting times, it should be examined whether a secure mailing option could be created. The Federal Printing Office (Bundesdruckerei) can then deliver the electronic residence title directly to the immigrant by post.
- Existing cooperation projects and placement agreements such as Triple Win or Hand in Hand for Talent generally enable a faster procedure through the pre-selection of suitable candidates. There the necessary documents are known and are fully available when the application is submitted. An expansion is therefore recommended. In addition, professional support is provided for the migration process from learning the German language to the arrival in Germany. Hence potential hurdles for the urgently needed skilled workers can be removed and immigration is strengthened.

2. Legal measures

For the implementation of attractive immigration opportunities for educational and employment purposes, further relaxations were already announced in November 2022 with a key issues paper by the Federal Government on skilled labour immigration from third countries. A corresponding draft law and ordinance on the further development of skilled immigration was adopted by the Federal Cabinet in March 2023. This is to be welcomed, as companies in the skilled crafts sector in particular, which have many vacant positions and thus a high demand for skilled workers, expressed the wish for expanded legal possibilities to recruit persons in a demand- and competence-oriented manner. An evaluation of the currently planned regulations was not the subject of this research project. However, several indications of possible need for change expressed by the in-

terviewed authorities are reflected in the planned measures. The authorities referred to the following points, among others:

- The extension of Section 19c (2) of the Residence Act to industries outside of the IT sector would be expedient in order to open up access to the German labour market to those who are not formally qualified and have practical professional knowledge.
- The conditions for issuing visas for the purpose of seeking employment or training in accordance with sections 20 and 17 of the Residence Act should be relaxed overall. With regard to the shortage of skilled workers in IT professions, an opening of Section 20 of the Residence Act would be particularly welcome, which would also include specialists with practical IT knowledge without a degree recognised in their country of origin or without sufficient German language skills. This group of people can currently enter the country with an existing employment relationship in accordance with Section 19c (2) of the Residence Act in conjunction with Section 6 of the Ordinance on the Employment of Foreigners, but not to seek a job.
- In cases of vocational trainings for persons over 45 years of age, there has been the difficulty that, after completing their training, proof of adequate old-age provision must be provided in order for a residence title to be issued for the first time for the purpose of qualified employment (section 18 (2) no. 5 Residence Act). Easing the conditions and allow alternative ways of providing proof of old-age provision could help in cases where the salary is too low or private provisions are lacking, e.g. with an additional private pension insurance policy that can be financed by the job to be taken up.
- It was reported that some professional groups of skilled workers criticised the comparatively high requirements for a settlement permit, including sufficient knowledge of the German language (level B1) and taking the "Living in Germany" test. This was not understood by IT specialists in particular, as they often integrate successfully into the German labour market with English language skills. In this context, some ABHs spoke out in favour of a legal regulation that would allow for a relaxation of the requirements for the granting of a settlement permit according to Section 18c of the Residence Act in certain cases in public interest.

3. Clear structures, promotion and counselling for immigrants

For applicants and involved actors (AVs and recognition bodies), the different official responsibilities between the federal states were sometimes not clear. Taking into account the different federal competences, it would make sense to develop an overarching strategy for the recruitment of skilled workers at the federal level, to which the different actors can align themselves. Sufficient financial resources for the implementation of such a strategy as well as for nationwide support services in all federal states would enable contact persons to become more visible. Furthermore, uniform counselling services for skilled workers and employers can then be created nationwide. Otherwise, there is a danger that the competition for skilled workers between the federal states will become unfair in the long run and employers will lose track of the diverse landscape of actors.

Abroad, the information provided on the *MiiG* website was praised as particularly successful for promoting the FEG. The website could be expanded with regard to a larger selection of languages and the complete translation of the content. At the time of the interviews, there was also hardly any coordination between the German institutions abroad with regard to the counselling services for (prospective) professionals. A question that remains unanswered is that of public relations work to recruit skilled workers as there has not been given a strategy in this regard to the AVs by the federal government. There was explicitly expressed a continuing need for a clear division of roles and responsibilities. For targeted cooperation, the AHKs, with their expertise in labour law and recognition, and the Goethe-Instituts, with their wide reach, could be integrated into a coordinated campaign to recruit skilled workers. One advantage of these external actors is that the employees do not have to change their field of work or place of work every four years, as is the case with the employees at the AVs. Thus, a long-term cooperation can be established.

Attractive offers and the reduction of existing bureaucratic and financial hurdles are central to attracting skilled workers. Since the FEG is a complex legal basis, it was suggested that more counselling services should be created abroad. Alternatively, networking among already existing counselling centres that offer target-group-specific support for skilled workers should be promoted. With regard to the recruitment of highly qualified persons, Germany competes with many countries that are more attractive due to lower language barriers. There is potential especially in individuals who are interested

in employment in non-academic professions, but often have difficulty financially affording the process, travel to Germany and the language course. Targeted support through special funding programmes can help here.

4. Support and counselling services for employers

In the interviews with the ABHs, it became clear that the possibilities the FEG offers were not yet known among many employers and that they initially had difficulties researching relevant information independently on the internet. In principle, there was also a strong heterogeneity between the companies with regard to the level of information they have. It was therefore suggested:

- SMEs could be more motivated to recruit skilled workers from third countries through target group-specific advertising. Experience showed that the basic procedures and processes of labour migration were often not known among SMEs.
- The nationwide expansion of counselling services for employers or networking among existing counselling centres would be helpful. Appropriate offers can lead to companies familiarising themselves with the necessary documents in advance.
- In addition, ABHs consider early counselling for employers by the BA's employer service to be fundamentally important.
- Additional multilingual counselling services would be welcome, as there is an increased interest among employers with an own migration background, some of whom had difficulties understanding the complex regulations of the FEG in German.
- Information should be presented in a compact and practical manner. Even very well prepared information materials praised by the respondents will not replace the counselling in person, but they can be an essential complement to it.
- In order to simplify the search for the regionally competent ABH for the fast-track procedure for skilled workers, it would make sense to store this online using a postal code search. It would be conceivable, for example, to add a corresponding search function to the *MiiG* website.

It would also be important to make employers more aware of the possibility of qualifying people themselves

within the framework of training. For this, existing company barriers such as a lack of time resources and of training authorisations must be removed. In principle, the procedures for applications for training purposes had comparatively low requirements and visas for entry were granted quickly, so that in the long term a great economic benefit could be derived from this. However, if there were no connections abroad at all, it was difficult for SMEs to even locate interested (prospective) skilled workers there. Further low-cost counselling and placement services that support the matching of small and medium-sized employers with foreign skilled workers could reduce the existing reluctance to recruit internationally.

5. Promoting integration

Many questions regarding residence law only arise for foreign professionals after their arrival in Germany. Clear communication of responsibilities and an expansion of external counselling services in the municipalities could improve this situation, as the need for counselling for skilled workers does not decrease after their arrival. So far, many municipal ABHs have little or no capacity for this. Recruiting skilled workers can only work if the municipal authorities welcome the skilled workers and support them in the medium term. In this regard, skilled workers would benefit considerably from easier appointment procedures in the ABHs. For example, in a few of the ABH, an automatic resubmission for persons in the fast-track procedure for skilled workers was set up by the responsible case worker. This allows to contact them directly three months before the expiry of their visa to arrange an appointment.

Many professionals were not familiar with the possibilities and the procedure of family reunification. The possibilities of applying for family reunification visas should be made more widely known as part of public relations work on the FEG. Professionals should be better informed about the possibilities in advance and given more support in case of difficulties during the application procedure, so that the family members and the professional can immigrate simultaneously. In order to avoid waiting times, priority appointments for the application of family reunification visas of professionals could also be considered outside the fast-track procedure for professionals. In principle, a commitment by the municipalities is also welcome for family reunification, so that timely appointments for applying for a residence title or other registration matters as well as corresponding offers for childcare and social integration are available.

In addition to legal simplifications and the optimisation of procedures, employers are also called upon to invest in the sustainable arrival of skilled workers in Germany. The creation of further incentives, e.g. the voluntary assumption of procedural fees and the costs of language courses by companies (which is already happening in some cases), could lead to an increase in immigration to the German labour market. Smaller companies in particular may not be aware that a greater investment of time is necessary during the arrival phase of the (prospective) skilled worker. It therefore makes sense to plan company integration measures for the design of the onboarding process and an open company culture at an early stage and to make use of appropriate external support services.

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