Arrive motivated. Get started successfully.

Guide to starting your career in Germany
Foreword

Straight out of university or already have work experience? – regardless of whatever point you are at in your professional career, the growing demand for skilled workers in the German labour market means that there are opportunities for you.

As population change is leading to employment bottlenecks, companies are looking for well-trained and experienced skilled workers.

Experienced workers as well as qualified junior employees are even now being sought as a matter of urgency in specific occupational areas, sectors and regions of Germany.

This brochure is aimed at women and men who are looking for career prospects in Germany. It shows you step by step how the path to a career can be achieved because only when you know what you want and are able to do will you profit from the targeted advice and support of your Employment Agency.

In the following pages you will learn how to go about entering the German labour market and who can help you in doing so.

We’re looking forward to seeing you and wish you lots of success.

*Equal Opportunities Officers of the Federal Employment Agency*
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1 Getting your career started in Germany

You’re thinking about coming to Germany or living here? Or you have studied in Germany and want to get started on your career? You can find important information on living and working in Germany on the following websites:

The “Make it in Germany” Welcome Portal (Willkommensportal) for international skilled workers combines all important information on careers and living in Germany. It tells you in which sectors skilled workers are being looked for and the conditions under which an interested person can take up a job in Germany.

The International Placement Services (Zentrale Auslands- und Fachvermittlung, ZAV) of the Federal Employment Agency provides information not just about accessing the labour market in Germany. Everything that is worth knowing about living and working in the heart of Europe is contained in the brochure of the same name.

Under the heading “Welcome to Germany” (Willkommen in Deutschland) the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF) provides important information and advice so that you can feel at home in Germany as quickly as possible.

The Migra-Info information portal has been specifically created for women immigrants returning to work.

The following are the links to the portals outlined above:
• ZAV: http://www.arbeitsagentur.de/web/content/DE/service/Ueberuns/WeitereDienststellen/ZentraleAuslandsundFachvermittlung/VersionsDEEN/Englishversion/index.htm
• BAMF: http://www.bamf.de/EN/Willkommen/willkommen-node.html
• Migra-Info: http://www.migra-info.de/
Get complete information.
Avail of comprehensive support.
2 Your Employment Agency will support you

INFORMATION EVENTS AND ADVICE SERVICES

Every Employment Agency has Labour Market Equal Opportunities Officers who organise free information events for all women and men who want to be in gainful employment. Have a look at the Federal Employment Agency’s nationwide events database. Using a map you can search for all events taking place in a particular federal state or events taking place near you.

In addition, EURES network advisors are also available. Eures (EURopeanEmploymentServices) is the European internet portal for job mobility and is coordinated by the European Commission. The network supports workers in looking for jobs in participating countries and helps businesses to find suitable skilled workers.

ONLINE MEDIA PROVIDED BY THE BA

Get information about careers (BERUFENET), find out about further education opportunities (KURSNET), use the LERNBÖRSE’s e-learning services or look for vacancies on the JOBBÖRSE.

The LERNBÖRSE provides you exclusively with a selection of high-quality learning media which can help you in your career and in looking for a job or place on a vocational training programme. You will get exclusive access to the LERNBÖRSE when you register with an Employment Agency.

- www.berufenet.arbeitsagentur.de
- www.kursnet.arbeitsagentur.de
- www.arbeitsagentur.de/lernboerse
Find the best route.
Rely on experienced support.

CAREERS INFORMATION CENTRES (BiZ)

In the BiZ you can find information on current job profiles. The BiZ staff will answer your questions, help you to use the computer facilities and provide information about training and events. You can use all services free of charge without having to register or make an appointment, e.g. internet vacancies, online media, magazines, brochures and flyers, information folders on occupational areas and specialist books. You can use also special PCs to create and update your application material.

Brochure No. 18 “Women and Careers” (“Frauen und Beruf”) offers questions, answers and advice on everything to do with support opportunities provided by the Employment Agency.
Your first contact with the Employment Agency

The Employment Agency is happy to support you in getting started in the German labour market and has an extensive advice and support service available for you. For this, each Employment Agency maintains close contact with local businesses and knows the labour market – both jobs currently being looked for and job requirements. In order to use this service, you need to register with your local Employment Agency. There are three ways to register – as “seeking advice”, as “looking for work” or as “unemployed”.

YOU ARE SEEKING ADVICE IF YOU

… are initially just looking for some advice or want to work on new career prospects. This will enable you to first of all inform yourself about your current situation on the vocational training market or labour market without having to make any commitments. The Employment Agency offers “advice seekers” advice sessions for guidance and decision-making that are suitable for the following areas, e. g.

- If you have questions about career-related self-appraisal
- If you need specific information in relation to the labour market or the application process
- If you are unable to decide between different career options
- If you have problems re-entering the workforce

The advice session can be a one-off conversation or take the form of numerous meetings as well. “Advice seekers” are not registered as unemployed.
YOU ARE LOOKING FOR WORK IF YOU

... are looking for employment as an employee and have registered as a job seeker with the Employment Agency.

YOU ARE UNEMPLOYED IF YOU

... are looking for employment that consists of at least 15 hours per week and that is subject to social insurance contributions, are temporarily unemployed and have personally registered with the Employment Agency in your place of residence. It is important that you avail of the placement opportunities arranged by your Employment Agency.

MAKING AN APPOINTMENT VIA THE SERVICE CENTRE

It is always helpful if you make an appointment in advance via the freephone service hotline (0800 4 5555 00) but you can also make an appointment in person in your Employment Agency for an advice session.

First of all, your details such as name and address, telephone number, date of birth, CV and your query will be taken down. You will then receive a work pack either in the post or it will be handed to you in the Employment Agency. You can fill this out in your own time at home and hand it in again to the Employment Agency before you have your advice session. In this way, the expert advisor can prepare for the session. At the same time, it also serves as an orientation guide for the issue that you are looking for advice on and can help you to prepare for the arranged session.

The brochure “Unemployed persons not in receipt of unemployment benefit” ("Arbeitsuchende und Arbeitslose ohne Bezug von Arbeitslosengeld") contains further information and advice.

In the brochure “What? How much? Who?” ("was? wie viel? wer?") you can get an overview of financial assistance provided by the Federal Employment Agency.
You can arrange to have a review done to see to what extent your professional qualification is equivalent to a German qualification. The Professional Qualifications Assessment Act (Berufsqualifikationsfeststellungsgesetz, BQFG) is aimed at integrating applicants with a professional qualification obtained abroad into a job in Germany that is close to their qualification. The equivalency review normally takes three months and is subject to a charge. Information on the exact costs can be obtained from the agency or body responsible.

Responsibility for the equivalency review lies with relevant chambers of industry and commerce as well as chambers of trades and crafts and professional bodies. If no chambers or bodies exist for specific professional areas, each federal state will determine the agency responsible.

The “Recognition in Germany” portal (“Anerkennung in Deutschland”) provides information on specific professions and responsible agencies.

In the BQ Portal you can find information and tools that make it easier to assess foreign professional qualifications.

The nationwide “Integration through Training” network (“Integration durch Qualifizierung”, IQ) with advice centres in every federal state will gladly provide you with further assistance in relation to any queries you have on the review of equivalency of your qualification.

The initial advice hotline (Hotline zur Erstberatung) operated by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF) will provide you with initial information in either German or English on the recognition of foreign professional qualifications in Germany.
Verify your qualification.
Experience recognition.
5 You obtained a higher education degree in Germany

Complete your studies. Secure an income and residence.
Did you successfully complete a degree at a German higher education institution? Then you can start a job in Germany that corresponds to your degree. You can receive the required residence title from the relevant Immigration Office.

If you have still not found an appropriate job after your degree, you can be granted a residence permit from the Immigration Office for 18 months in order to find a job that corresponds to your degree. During this period you can take up any work in order to secure your livelihood.

For your information, the following legal text from the Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz) is included here:

Section 18b
Settlement permit for graduates of German universities
A foreigner who has successfully completed his or her studies at a state or state-recognised university or a comparable educational establishment in the federal territory shall be granted a settlement permit, if

1. he or she has held a residence title pursuant to Sections 18, 18a, 19a or 21 for two years,
2. he or she has a job commensurate with his or her degree,
3. he or she has paid compulsory or voluntary contributions into the statutory pension scheme for at least 24 months or furnishes evidence of having made expenditures for the purpose of accruing an entitlement to comparable benefits from an insurance or pension scheme or from an insurance company, and
4. the requirements of Section 9 (2), sentence 1, nos. 2, and 4 to 9 are met; Section 9 (2), sentences 2 to 6 shall apply mutatis mutandis.


The “Graduate Wage Indicator” (“Absolventen-Lohnspiegel”) internet portal of the WSI Collective Agreement Archive of the Hans Böckler Foundation offers special analyses on income and working conditions in graduate professions such as engineers, business graduates, social care workers, etc. The existing wage and salary check which was created as part of the “wage indicator” (“Lohnspiegel”) project contains information on a total of approximately 350 graduate and non-graduate professions.

The higher education team at your Employment Agency will support you with their expert knowledge in the search for graduate jobs.
Find the job that suits you

Only when you know the professional route that you want to take can you start a targeted search for suitable jobs.

When doing so, remember this – your previous career choice does not determine you for your whole life. Therefore, first of all thoroughly analyse your current personal situation. Think outside the box and look at interesting areas of work to which you could contribute your skills, experiences and talents. Don’t forget that among your strengths are also intercultural skills as well as the ability to speak more than one language! It is also helpful to talk to people who work in such jobs.

The Employment Agency will also support you in this. As part of the placement and advice session your personal strengths and skills are analysed and your integration into employment planned and agreed.

SHOW YOUR OWN INITIATIVE

You have analysed your situation and know what you want? Then let’s get started! Make use of the numerous ways to look for suitable job offers. You can receive help from, amongst others, the e-learning program for job-searching and applications (LERNBÖRSE) or instead using the online brochure for the JOBBÖRSE, “The BA JOBBÖRSE – guidelines for workers” (“Die JOBBÖRSE der BA – Leitfaden für Arbeitnehmer”) published by the Federal Employment Agency. Of course the placement officers in Employment Agencies as well as staff in Careers Information Centres will help you as well.

Check whether the profile requirements of the jobs in question match your knowledge and skills. You should meet the mandatory criteria, otherwise the application will probably not be successful. With the desired criteria companies create a wish list. If you don’t 100% meet this wish list, it is not the end of the world. Perhaps you can offer something that others don’t have.

With good planning, consistent performance and personal flexibility you will achieve your goal. Trust in your strengths and follow new paths. Don’t let setbacks put you down and remain determined.
Have a clear goal.
Seize the initiative yourself.
HOW TO FIND VACANCIES ON THE JOB MARKET

ONLINE VIA YOUR EMPLOYMENT AGENCY’S JOBBÖRSE

With approximately 1 million registered jobs and over 3 million applicant profiles the Federal Employment Agency has Germany’s largest internet service. The Agency’s database also covers job offers from external cooperation partners – therefore, it is not just limited to job offers that are registered with Employment Agencies.

As of now the BA’s JOBBÖRSE is already available in six languages. The interface texts of the JOBBÖRSE are offered as a choice in German, English, French, Italian, Russian and Turkish. In this way, foreign skilled workers are at anytime and anywhere able to look for current vacancies in Germany’s largest jobs pool.

“Finding a job easily and quickly” (“Einfach und schnell eine Stelle finden”), a brochure for workers, describes in a simple way the functions of the JOBBÖRSE and is translated into 12 languages (Spanish, Czech, Dutch, Romanian, Portuguese, English, French, Italian, Russian, Turkish, Polish, Greek). The brochure can be downloaded from the internet.

With the JOBBÖRSE app you are able to comfortably use all important functions of the JOBBÖRSE on a smartphone. The app can be downloaded for free directly from the iTunes app store and Google Play store.

ONLINE VIA JOB VACANCIES ON THE INTERNET

A steadily growing number of businesses are using the internet to search for skilled workers. Therefore you should properly integrate the internet into your personal strategy for looking for work. Access to jobs portals, including ones that are sector-specific, can be done very easily via the website of the Federal Employment Agency.

- Many companies advertise job vacancies on their website.
- Some newspapers also publish their careers sections with job vacancies online.
VIA NETWORKS

Networks are valuable when it comes to making a successful start (or re-start) to your career.

Everyone of us has informal networks, be it through a circle of friends or membership of a club. In this way you will learn from employees about job vacancies.

In Germany there are many organisations where people from migrant backgrounds come together. Most **migrant organisations** act on a local level as an association and work on a voluntary basis. In addition, there are some national umbrella organisations.

Formal career networks refer to, e.g. internet portals such as Xing or LinkedIn. If you prefer the personal approach, join a local careers network. Careers networks organise regular meetings and will invite you to special sessions.

RECRUITMENT AND JOBS FAIRS

You will also get to know potential companies with good employment opportunities at one of the many jobs fairs that take place across Germany. You can find dates for these, amongst other things, in the Federal Employment Agency’s **events database**.

It is not uncommon for job interviews to be done at jobs fairs. Therefore be well prepared and bring your current application documents with you.

APPLYING ON YOUR OWN INITIATIVE

Be proactive and apply to firms for your desired position even when no job has been advertised. You might just be successful. In doing so the application process may last somewhat longer. If your application fits what the company is looking for but there happen to be no suitable jobs, you will be put in an applicant pool. The company will then contact you at a later date.
Know what you want. Show what you are able to do.
You want to go back to working life or get started on your career after finishing higher education? You have done your research, heard about some interesting jobs and found lots of job advertisements? Do you trust in yourself to do these jobs? Now it is all about making a convincing job application.

YOUR APPLICATION LETTER

• Your application letter is an advertisement for yourself and should convince an employer that you are a suitable candidate.
• In your letter, set out why it is you are applying to this particular company.
  Avoid any empty phrases and show genuine and credible interest.
• Demonstrate how with your previous jobs you are exactly the right person for the job – your expert knowledge, skills and experience and not forgetting your successes.
• Show that you have familiarised yourself with the company and that you very much want to work in this area.
• Refer to the relevant job requirements and emphasise how you can and want to meet them.
• Find out who is the contact person in the company and use a personal form of address.
• Avoid spelling mistakes at all costs. In the event of doubt, show your letter to a friend or relative.
• Select application documents and folders that are appropriate to the job in question.

YOUR ONLINE APPLICATION

• Give your online application the personal touch and remember that when doing so the same ‘rules’ apply here as with every other application.
• Look for information on the company’s website.
• Attach your CV and any necessary documents in PDF format to your email.
  Pay attention to the relevant maximum size limits for electronic attachments.
• Check whether your email address reflects the necessary seriousness.
  The combination of Firstname.Lastname@xyz.de is tried and tested.
YOUR CV

• Create your CV in tabular format and start with current facts and information. In doing so, your professional experience comes first followed by your training or higher education studies.
• In relation to periods of family work, your CV should also emphasise the skills and experience that you obtained in doing this work, e.g. doing voluntary work, further education.
• Use a current and professionally taken photograph for your application.
• Enclose legible copies of any qualifications, references and important certificates for the job.
• If you are explicitly asked about your desired income, set out what you envisage to be appropriate. Here it is better to specify a salary range. Find out in advance about salary levels that are subject to collective agreement and that apply to specific regions of Germany and to specific sectors.

YOUR JOB INTERVIEW

• Make use of ‘small talk’ and answer questions about your journey, how long it took, etc, in a friendly way.
• Show an interest if you receive an introduction about the company. Always maintain eye contact and try to address everybody.
• Prepare a self-presentation. Make sure that the information you provide in your personal interview agrees with what is in your CV.
• During the interview make sure it is evident that you have properly informed yourself about the company.
• Develop your answers with reference to your motivation, your strengths but also your weaknesses.
• Do not promise anything that you cannot keep later.
• Do not be shy about asking questions about the job, the place of work or working hours. Questions about salary are not taboo either.
• Come across as persuasive in the interview by showing friendliness and competence.

The Federal Employment Agency’s LERNBÖRSE contains a training service on looking for work and making applications. Application training is also offered for university graduates.
Be confident and self-assured. Successfully achieve your goals.
In your private life you expand your skills and abilities according to your personal interests, e.g. learning a foreign language or doing a surfing course. But you should also be constantly further developing your professional life as well.

Professional requirements in the labour market are changing ever more quickly. Therefore adapting to or refreshing necessary professional skills can be decisive for your integration into employment.

The Employment Agency can support you here and as part of your advice session tell you about training opportunities. A required qualification can be supported even if you are not in receipt of unemployment benefit. This can be in form of in-company or school-based training, further education or an in-company internship.

In the advice session you will find out if the Employment Agency will cover the costs or if there are other opportunities to support your training.

USEFUL INFORMATION FOR PREPARING FOR YOUR ADVICE SESSION

- To find out information on the subject of further education (Weiterbildung), click on the heading “Citizens” (“Bürgerinnen und Bürger”) on the homepage of the Federal Employment Agency (www.arbeitsagentur.de).
- You can get an overview of training opportunities in your local Careers Information Centre (Berufsinformationszentrum, BiZ) or in the KURSNET database.
- You can get an overview of training opportunities that could be supported by the Employment Agency by selecting “Only training opportunities with training vouchers” (“Nur Angebote mit Bildungsgutschein”).
- The careers network BERUFENET offers comprehensive information on every occupation.
- In the LERNBÖRSE you can find free high-quality learning media tools which you can use for upskilling in many areas.
Brush up on your own skills.
Stand out in your new job from the start.

LERNBÖRSE exclusive (LERNBÖRSE exklusiv) is described in the “E-learning further education made easy” (“E-Learning Weiterbildung leicht gemacht”) brochure.

Brochure No. 6 “Supporting further professional training” (“Förderung der beruflichen Weiterbildung”) also provides information on all questions to do with support provided by Employment Agencies for further professional training.
So-called 'mini-jobs' refer to marginal employment. Following a legislative amendment two important changes apply to mini-jobs since 1 January 2013:

- The earnings limit is currently €450.00.
- Starting from 1 January 2013 persons who take up marginally paid employment are as a general rule compulsorily insured in the statutory pension insurance scheme.

In this way you receive an entitlement to the package of benefits associated with the pension insurance scheme with comparatively lower contributions to be made by you. Persons in mini-jobs are entitled to be exempt from being compulsorily insured in the statutory pension insurance scheme. Information on the advantages and disadvantages of doing so can be obtained from the statutory pension insurance scheme. Workers in mini-jobs have in principle the same rights (e.g. holiday entitlements, sick pay) as full-time workers and are considered to be part-time workers under Germany’s Part-Time Work and Fixed-Term Employment Contracts Act (TzBfG). They must not be treated less favourably than comparable full-time workers.

Persons in mini-jobs are often recruited for simple work and frequently paid worse than other employees. Social insurance coverage is considerably limited as no or only very few contributions are paid (particularly for the old-age pension, health insurance and insurance for old-age care). It is true that mini-jobs are suitable as a form of top-up earnings for particular groups, e.g. students. However, for getting started on (or re-starting) your careers they are more of a bridging opportunity until such time that you find an adequate job with longer-term prospects. For this reason, stay firmly focussed on your goal.

If you are already registered as unemployed, you can take up a mini-job if you have agreed this in advance with the relevant Employment Agency (keyword: additional income). It is the Employment Agency that will calculate if and to what extent a deduction will be made.
MIDI-JOBS

Midi-jobs refer to employment where on annual average terms you earn between a minimum of €450.01 and a maximum of €850.00 per month. For this the social insurance contribution for workers is reduced (the so-called ‘sliding zone’). This means that you initially pay a reduced amount of contributions to the statutory pension insurance scheme. The amount increases with earnings and reaches the full contribution rate at €850.00.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Mini-Job Head Office (Minijobzentrale) has gathered together all information about this type of employment on its website. The current customer service telephone number is also listed there.

If you have any questions about mini-jobs, midi-jobs and pension, you will find what you are looking for on the website of the German Statutory Pension Insurance Scheme (Deutsche Rentenversicherung).
Being self-employed has many advantages, e.g. not having a boss, making your own decisions, managing staff. But you should also be equally aware of the downside, e.g. high pressure of work and financial uncertainty are just two examples. Think about whether you are actually suited for professional self-employment.

A DECISION WITH FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES

Managing your own business is no small matter even if it is just a one-person enterprise. Be guided by the characteristics of successful entrepreneurs. Self-discipline, sense of purpose, communications skills, creativity and organisational talent are important. Businesses know their market and know how to interact with their customers. In addition, expert knowledge and business acumen are the basic requirements for every business activity.

Professional self-employment does not just change your own day-to-day life but that of your family as well. You are fending for yourself and every day have to show enterprise in the truest sense of the word in order to stay in the market and earn your livelihood.

With self-employment many business founders fulfil their dream and are satisfied with their decision. Others consider setting up their own business as a stopgap solution. Try to think as precisely as possible why you want to be self-employed and whether you really ‘have it in you’ to be an entrepreneur. Take plenty of time when it comes to planning and preparing the start of your business and avail of advice provided by experts, e.g. the relevant chamber of industry and commerce, chamber of trades and crafts or professional body or from friends who are self-employed. The important thing is that your family is behind you and supports your self-employment.

Advice and help on setting up your own business are summarised in a brochure published by the Federal Employment Agency, “A Guide to Self-Employment” ("Ein Wegweiser in die Selbstständigkeit"). This also deals with the subject of the “business start-up grant”.

A special issue of the “Getting started” (“durchstarten”) series is also dedicated to all questions to do with setting up your own business and business self-employment.
VOLUNTARY ADDITIONAL INSURANCE FOR UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Under certain conditions you can apply to be covered on a voluntary basis for additional insurance in the unemployment insurance scheme in respect of the period of self-employment. Information on this is available in the Information leaflet on “voluntary additional insurance” (“Hinweisblatt zur freiwilligen Weiterversicherung”).

USEFUL INFORMATION ONLINE

• General information on the topic of setting up your own business has been compiled by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Technology (BMWi).
• www.existenzgruenderinnen.de provides a comprehensive range of services and information from the BMWi to women entrepreneurs and women interested in setting up their own business.
• The Federal Employment Agency’s LERNBÖRSE also provides useful advice on the path to self-employment.

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

If you want to bring your business start-up idea to fruition, then as a rule you will need start-up capital.

• How much money is needed for a business start-up?
• How can you obtain it?
• Are there any suitable public support programmes and other financing opportunities?
• How can your local Employment Agency support you?

Financing is a particularly important part of setting up a business. It is essential that you get advice, e.g. from the relevant chamber of industry and commerce, chamber of trades and crafts or professional body, the KfW bank group, your own bank or savings bank and from your Employment Agency. Prepare well for your meetings so that your proposal can be properly assessed.

For questions to do with setting up your own business the Employment Agency is your first port of call for information requirements. Your placement officer has contacts in companies, the relevant chamber of industry and commerce, chamber of trades and crafts or professional body, has an overview of the local labour market and can there and then provide information on possible benefit payments as well as information, advice and support services.