



Careers in the skilled crafts and trades

RECRUITING TALENT

November 2025
English Edition

Contents

2025



FAQS

We answer your questions about training in Germany.

[p. 24](#)



WHY YOU SHOULD SAY "JA" TO THE SKILLED CRAFTS AND TRADES – FIVE GREAT REASONS

[p. 4](#)



OPPORTUNITY HOTSPOTS

Industrial mechanic Victoria Santacruz has got off to a flying start in Germany. We met her and four other skilled workers to find out about building a new life in Germany.

[p. 6](#)



GOLDEN FOUNDATIONS, A DIGITAL FUTURE

The skilled crafts and trades are a pillar of the German economy. Now the sector is facing fundamental changes.

[p. 18](#)



BRINGING TOGETHER TALENT AND OPPORTUNITY

How one Welcome Center is helping recruit skilled workers.

[p. 26](#)



SEWING: A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

The fashion house in Frankfurt that's home to a team of seamstresses from around the world.

[p. 32](#)



FIVE STEPS TO GAINING A QUALIFICATION IN GERMANY

From learning German to finding a job and applying for a visa: our helpful infographic explains the steps of your journey to Germany.

[p. 38](#)



ANA AND IMAD HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

The media designer from Mexico and the mechanic from Syria who have set out on their own. What does being self-employed mean to them?

p. 40

WOMEN WHO DARE

Women are in the minority in the skilled crafts and trades – for now...

p. 44



GERMAN FOR THE SPECIALISTS

How skilled workers are taking online courses to master the terminology of their trades.

p. 48

FACTS & FIGURES

p. 54

IMPRINT

p. 56

Dear Readers,

It was a moment that Victoria Santacruz will treasure forever when she and her family flew on an aeroplane that she had helped build. As an industrial mechanic, Victoria manufactures spindles and pins for a major machine manufacturing company on Lake Constance. "I was so proud!" she says. Victoria is from Ecuador. She came to Germany for a traineeship. Now she calls the country her home.



A win-win situation. On his travels around the world, Germany's Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul takes every opportunity to learn about collaborations in recruiting skilled workers.

More and more young people like her see their future working in the skilled crafts and trades in Germany. Some 70,000 men and women from all over the world began training programmes in Germany in 2024, many in the skilled crafts and trades. The proportion of trainees from outside Germany has doubled in the past ten years. International skilled workers who have completed their training are now playing a vital role in businesses across the country. We met the mechanic Aymen Ben Taghline and present his story in this issue.

Their experiences show that moving to Germany is a big step, and it needs careful reflection and preparation. This edition of DEUTSCHLAND.DE – THE MAGAZINE contains masses of advice and tips on how to make that step a success, where you can find advice, and why learning German matters. But the examples of Victoria Santacruz and Aymen Ben Taghline make one thing clear: it's worth it. As skilled craftspeople they are working in an industry that is all about innovation, driving change in sectors such as the energy transition. Germany welcomes skilled workers and motivated young people to pitch in and help shape a future we all share.

Best wishes, the Editors

Why you should say “Ja” to the skilled crafts and trades – five great reasons



1

Great working conditions

With modern workplaces, secure jobs and regulated working hours, a job in the skilled crafts and trades in Germany comes with excellent conditions. Workers are trained to a high level of expertise, and teamwork is a top priority in most businesses. When you include fair wages and social security, working in Germany is an attractive prospect. It's a place where skilled workers are valued and supported.

Secure jobs

Germany needs qualified workers in the skilled crafts and trades, especially in the food industry, construction and technical fields. Many firms are family businesses and, just as in other industries, they care about providing long-term employment. What's more, there is strong demand for the high-quality craftsmanship. If you work in the skilled crafts and trades in Germany, you can generally look forward to a safe and secure future.

2



Attractive earning potential

Well trained workers in the skilled crafts and trades enjoy pay that matches their skills. You even get paid while training. As you gain experience and specialise, your earning potential grows accordingly. On top of this, many firms offer additional benefits such as paid holidays, and they help their staff save for retirement, too. Employers usually provide tools and work clothing.



3

Ongoing professional development

Many companies offer training and courses to ensure their staff remain up-to-date on the latest developments and able to advance their careers themselves. Once their training period is complete, skilled workers can go on to gain qualifications as technicians or become a *Meister* – a master craftsperson. In many trades, you need to hold the *Meister* qualification to set up your own business. It also gives you access to more advanced studies in higher education.



4

International employment opportunities

The skilled crafts and trades in Germany open doors around the world, providing internationally recognised training and qualifications. What's more, German firms often work with partners in other countries. Working in the skilled crafts and trades can bring opportunities to work on exciting projects outside Germany through organisations such as "Craftspeople without Borders" and the *Internationaler Meister* qualification.

5



Opportunity Hotspots

Carpentry

JUAN GABRIEL QUICENO,
Colombia



Skilled baker

DIEU HUE TONG,
Vietnam



Photos p. 6-7: Tim Wegner, Christina Henning, Uli Sontag, Marius Kohn, Philipp von Dittfurth

Electro-mechanical engineering

AYMEN BEN TAGHLINE,
Tunisia



The careers in the skilled crafts and trades that offer excellent prospects for trainees from around the world – and the stories of people from five countries who now live in Germany.

Industrial mechanic

VICTORIA SANTACRUZ,
Ecuador



Road engineering

LIAQAT HUSSAIN SYED,
India



“Every day in my training I get to see what I have spent hours working on. I love working with wood. You have an idea and turn it into reality.”

JUAN GABRIEL QUICENO, Trainee carpenter



Juan Gabriel Quiceno from Colombia

Text: Christina Henning

Photos: Tim Wegner

“Careful – everything’s covered in dust here!”

Juan Gabriel Quiceno walks through the apartment in Frankfurt am Main which he and his colleagues are renovating. They have already fitted the windows and are now working on the doors. With an electric plane Quiceno smooths out the last few rough patches on a wooden frame before installing it in the doorway.

Juan Gabriel is 36 and has been training at the Christian Reul carpentry firm since August 2025. He actually holds a bachelor’s degree in political science, but when he came to Germany from Colombia for a semester abroad in 2020, he found out about the German dual vocational system through an electrician friend.

A passion for carpentry

Quiceno has always loved working with his hands. In Colombia he got experience in a workshop and renovated an apartment. He found he could not get the idea of training as a carpenter out of his head, so he decided to return to Germany and take up a new career. “I didn’t want to work in an office any more. In my training as a joiner, every day is different,” he says. Now Quiceno rotates between the workshop, his vocational college and different construction sites. He is always meeting new people and encountering different crafts and trades, and even the types of wood he works with are not always the same.



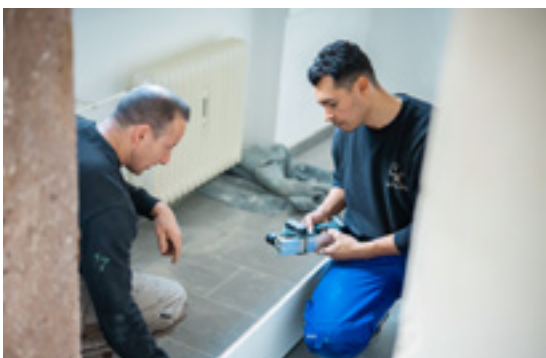
Carpentry

The right decision

Quiceno is very happy with his decision to live in Germany. The only headache is the bureaucracy. He holds a Colombian driving licence which is essential for his work, but he has had to pay expensive fees and sit time-consuming tests to have it converted. The German language can also be tricky at times, too: “Eighteen and eighty sometimes sound confusingly similar. When you’re making a cut, it’s important to understand the difference!” he says, laughing. Juan Gabriel stresses how important German is for his day-to-day work. “I would advise anyone who is thinking about training in Germany to learn the technical vocabulary beforehand.”

Planes and shavings

The dual vocational programme teaches trainee carpenters how to work with all kinds of wood. Covering everything from building furniture and fitting out apartments to repairing and restoring wooden objects, the three-year programme requires dexterity and creativity.



Dieu Hue Tong from Vietnam

Text: Anja Leuschner

Photos: Christina Henning, Uli Sontag

It's all going on in the sweltering bakery. The team are mixing dough, shaping cobs and icing cakes. Although this is all still quite new for Dieu Hue Tong, her skill is clear to see. The work is hard, but the 20-year-old is beaming with happiness. This is where her dreams are coming true.

Dieu Hue Tong has been in Germany since May 2025, and is training to become a baker at the Dries bakery in Rüdesheim am Rhein. The young woman from Vietnam is currently mastering the art of cakes and pastries. "Baking is my passion. I've always dreamed of doing something creative with my hands."

Passionate about craftsmanship

Working in the bakery is demanding. Dieu Hue Tong's day usually begins at 4 am when she and her colleagues make the dough. But the 20-year-old is getting on well in her new workplace. "At first, the language, organisation and working hours were big challenges, but step by step I've overcome each one. My colleagues have been especially helpful by explaining everything to me patiently."

Dieu Hue Tong loved baking in her homeland of Vietnam – cakes with fruit and jam were a particular favourite. After finishing school, she took a

language course to prepare to train as a baker in Germany. The programme lasts three years and she has big plans for what happens next. "I want to get my *Meister* qualification and blend the art of German baking with Vietnamese aromas," she says.

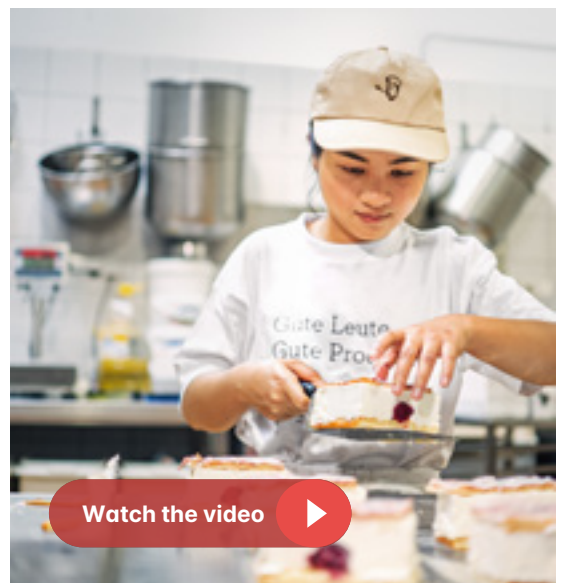
Old traditions, new techniques

It was not easy to understand what the lecturers at her vocational college were saying in German, Dieu Hue Tong explains, but she is fascinated by the material they are covering. She is studying the history of bakery in Germany as well as learning new techniques. And if problems arise, she can turn for help to her friends and colleagues at the bakery. "They're like a family for me, always warm, patient and helpful."



TRAINING AT THE OVEN DOOR

The dual vocational training programme to become a baker lasts three years (although that can be reduced under certain circumstances). There are almost 9,000 bakery businesses in Germany. They employ 235,000 people, of which over 10,000 are trainees. (data from 2024)



Watch the video



“I want to blend the art of German baking with Vietnamese aromas.”

DIEU HUE TONG, trainee baker



“In Germany, industry and the skilled crafts and trades are very advanced. I’m proud of myself for coming to work here.”

AYMEN BEN TAGHLINE, electro-mechanical engineer



Watch the video



Aymen Ben Taghline from Tunisia

Text: Christina Henning

Photos: Uli Sontag

One moment his head is deep inside the camper van while he works on the plumbing. The next, he's three metres up a ladder, installing the power supply. Aymen Ben Taghline works as an electro-mechanical engineer at a firm which builds and restores custom mobile homes.

The tiny village of Goddert in the Westerwald, a hilly region of Rhineland-Palatinate, is home to fewer than 500 people. Aymen Ben Taghline has been part of the community since March 2024. He came from Tunisia to take up a job as a technician there.

The journey to Germany

After finishing school in Tunisia, Ben Taghline studied electro-mechanical engineering, majoring in mechanical engineering. Through a recruitment agency he saw an advertisement for a job with the Motorhomes & Wunschmobile firm in Germany. "I applied, took the interview and signed the contract," he says. It took eight months to prepare, which included getting his degree recognised in Germany and applying for a visa. "Then the journey began," he explains.

PAIRING MECHANICS AND ELECTRONICS

A three-and-a-half year training programme for electro-mechanical engineering combines theory and practice. Depending their specialism, trainees can work in industries such as the electrical industry and car manufacturing. Electro-mechanical engineers assemble, programme and maintain mechanical equipment and systems.



Electro-mechanical engineering

Eight years' experience

In the workshop, Ben Taghline and his colleagues create custom mobile homes designed to customers' specifications. They are currently working on a model with an integrated lift to provide access to wheelchair users.

Ben Taghline already has eight years' experience, and his expertise is plain to see when he installs air conditioning, heating and lighting. The only challenge has been occasional difficulties with the German language, the 34-year-old says. "But my bosses and colleagues are really supportive," he adds.

Ben Taghline sees great opportunities for success in his career in Germany. "I'm proud of myself for coming to work here."



Victoria Santacruz from Ecuador

Text: Christina Henning

Photos: Marius Klohn

Victoria pulls on her gloves and puts on her safety glasses. She checks the plans one last time, then starts up the machine. The doors close, liquid splashes against the observation window, and the metal is milled into the desired form.

After completing her training, Victoria Santacruz took up a permanent role at Liebherr-Aerospace Lindenberg GmbH in summer 2025. As a trained industrial mechanic, she manufactures spindles and pins on the milling machine for use in assembling aircraft. "My family and I recently flew in an aircraft which was fitted with parts made by Liebherr. I was so proud!" she says.

Have tools and skills, will travel

Victoria's father was an industrial mechanic himself and she picked up the theoretical knowledge while she was still in school. "I grew up with machines," she says. During her final year in school in Ecuador, Victoria heard about the PAM programme, which promotes partnerships for development-oriented migration for training and employment. Run by the German development organisation GIZ on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the programme helped her find a job in Germany.



Industrial mechanic

Today's lessons: German and mechanics

Santacruz learned German while she was still in her homeland, and came to South Germany after finishing school. She completed her training in three years: six months ahead of the standard schedule. Victoria benefitted from her prior skills and knowledge, but at the same time she was able to develop new perspectives. "I love my job. I really enjoy learning new things."

[➤ Further information about the PAM programme](#)



SPECIALISTS IN MACHINERY

The dual vocational training programme for industrial mechanics lasts 3.5 years. Trainees learn to produce and monitor technical systems. They manufacture parts and machines, control manufacturing processes, and handle the maintenance of equipment. Qualified workers can find employment in almost all manufacturing sectors.

“My advice to anyone thinking about training in Germany is: be brave and motivated to try out new things.”

VICTORIA SANTACRUZ, Industrial Mechanic



Watch the video



“I’m really enjoying the practical element of my training – I can learn a lot from it. I learned the theory at university.”

LIAQAT HUSSAIN SYED, trainee road engineer



Liaqat Hussain Syed from India

Text: Christina Henning

Photos: Philipp von Ditfurth

Liaqat Hussain Syed is visible from miles away in his neon-orange jacket. He operates construction machinery weighing many tonnes, measures gaps down to the millimetre between paving stones, and levels ground. Syed is from the Indian city of Hyderabad and has come to the Black Forest to train as a road engineer.

Liaqat began his training at the Vogel-Bau company in September 2024. He alternates between attending vocational collage and working on various construction sites. "I meet so many people – I really like it," he says. It will take him three years to complete his training as a road engineer.

A chilly start in Germany

In India, Syed completed a bachelor's degree in civil engineering and gained on-the-job experience in construction. The idea of coming to Germany first came from a relative who lives in the Ruhr region. To prepare, Syed took a language course at the Goethe-Institut, and the *Handwerkskammer* in Freiburg and his future employer also helped.

ROAD STONE, ASPHALT AND MUSCLE POWER

The road network in Germany is around 830,000 km long. It is looked after by road engineers. In addition to mastering the technical and manual skills of the job, trainees need to be physically fit for the three-year training programme. As part of a "crew" working on a construction site, it's also important to be a team player.



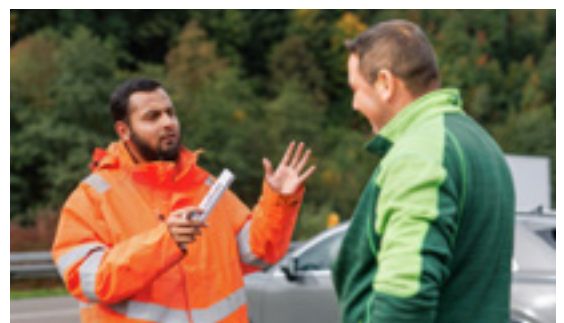
When he arrived on his first construction site in Germany, Liaqat had to get used to the colder weather in Germany. "I was wearing six layers of clothing! Nowadays a normal jacket is enough."

Keeping Germany moving

Syed's work is varied, from shovelling and measuring to controlling traffic or driving a wheel loader. "Driving such a big machine really isn't that easy," he observes. Liaqat and his colleagues build and maintain roads so people can get from A to B.

It's vitally important to have an eye for detail in everything he does. The part of the job Liaqat most enjoys is applying markings to the road as guidelines for future work. "I didn't have any experience in roadbuilding, so I wanted to learn," he says.

After finishing his training Syed is thinking about going on to train as an overseer or foreman. "But first I'd like to work as a road engineer for a few years," he says.



Golden foundations, a digital future

Text: Ralf Isermann

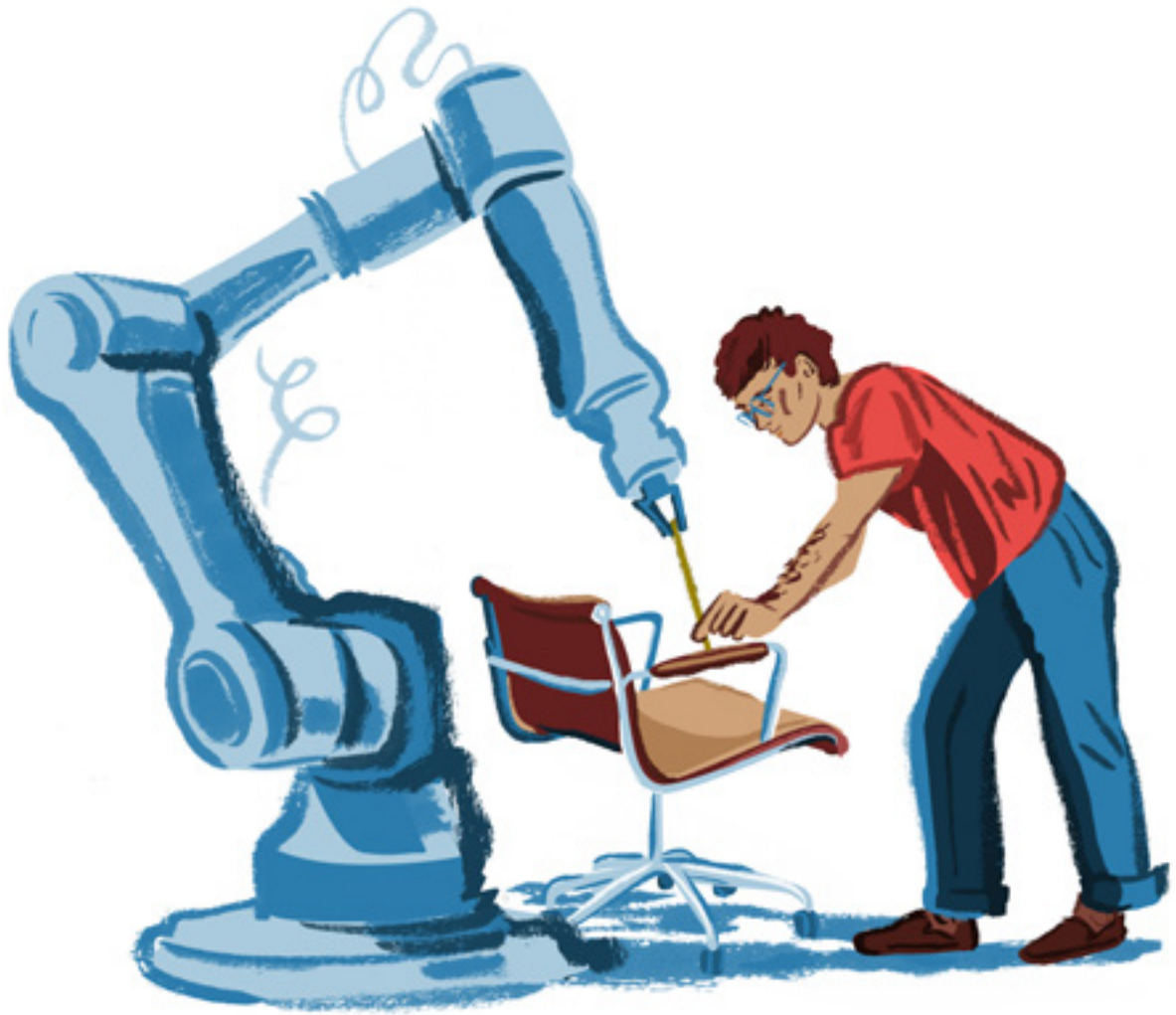
Illustrations: Christine Rösch

The skilled crafts and trades are a pillar of the German economy. Now the sector is facing fundamental changes. Digitalisation and sustainability are having a profound influence on the day-to-day work of millions of people, but despite these changes, the shortage of skilled workers is still making itself felt.



Paul Hobeck is passionate about renewal. When the 2025 *Dachkrone* prize ("Roof Crown") was announced, Hobeck from Saxony was one of the roofers selected for the most important prize in the industry in Germany. He now runs the roofing firm set up by his great grandfather one hundred years ago. He also received an award for successfully taking over the business from his parents, who ran the company before him. Paul has succeeded in taking a long-established firm of craftsmen and making it fit for the future.

"We always want to keep up with the latest technology," Paul says. His focus on the future is evident in his use of digital technologies. Where his great grandfather once had to inspect unsafe roofs for himself in highly dangerous conditions, Paul can now use drones for the job. Piloted from the safety of solid ground, the drones send back video imagery such as storm damage to roof tiles. They can even provide precise measurements for renovating a roof.



Top-to-bottom transformation

Through the influence of digital technologies, artificial intelligence and new careers in areas such as “green jobs” (jobs related to the energy transition), the skilled crafts and trades in Germany are going through a major process of change. The transformation is affecting over 130 careers, equal to the entire number of skilled crafts and trades in Germany, according to the ZDH (German Confederation of Skilled Crafts). They range from construction and demolition, metals and electrics, wood and plastics, to textiles and leatherwork, food and catering, health and beauty, and from chemicals and cleaning to graphic design.

But in spite of all these changes, most businesses in the sector remain profitable. According to ZDH data, the skilled crafts and trades had a total turnover in 2024 of €757 billion – a very slight decline in the face of challenging conditions for the economy as a whole. The number of businesses actually rose slightly, to 1.038 million, while the number of women and men employed in the skilled crafts and trades in Germany remained steady, at 5.6 million. The vast majority work in jobs that are liable for social security payments, meaning they help maintain a strong and stable social security system by contributing to their pensions, unemployment insurance and health insurance.



**28% of all
training places are
in the skilled
crafts and trades.**

Source: ZDH

Major player in training

Measured against the German economy as a whole, the skilled crafts and trades do not seem particularly significant, accounting for only 7.6% of all economic activity. However, other data emphasises the importance of what tend to be smaller businesses. For example, 12.8% of all jobs that meet the social security liability threshold are in the skilled crafts and trades.

What's more, firms in the sector offer 28% of all training places, helping tens of thousands of young people get started in their working lives every year. According to analysis carried out by the IAB (Institute for Employment Research), there are twice as many training places in the skilled crafts and trades as there are in the economy as a whole. For many young people, training in the skilled crafts and trades can be a springboard: there are a lot of engineers in the car industry, for example, who started out working as mechanics or mechatronics engineers. Many architects and structural engineers took their first steps working in construction before going to university, in fields such as bricklaying, carpentry and joinery.

According to an old German saying which is still in use today, "the skilled crafts and trades are built on golden foundations". The growing shortage in skilled workers is one of the reasons why trained craftspeople effectively have the pick of job vacancies. According to the Federal Employment Agency, 38% of the skilled crafts and trades face a shortfall: that's more than one-in-three careers. The shortage is impacting industries ranging from construction electricians, vehicle technology and industrial engineering to sanitary technology and heating and climate technology.



Fewer skilled craftspeople

The Federal Employment Agency has also reported that, over the past ten years, it has taken businesses longer and longer to fill vacant posts. In 2015, it took companies an average of 104 days – just over three months – to recruit a new skilled craftsperson. Now that figure is 224 days. That means that if there is a vacancy for a carpenter, hairdresser or solar panel installer, the company concerned will take on average more than seven months to find a replacement. In addition to this, a concerning trend is developing in the number of skilled crafts and trades jobs which meet the social security threshold. The number of such jobs has been declining since 2015, although the number of people in employment across all sectors actually rose by 13%.

According to *Bundesverband Metall*, the national association for metalworking trades, the shortage of skilled workers can be a great opportunity for applicants from outside Germany. “Metalworking trades in Germany offer outstanding prospects for skilled workers from abroad,” *Bundesverband Metall* told *deutschland.de*. The association explained that one consequence of demographic changes was that many experienced craftspeople would retire in the coming years, while the demands of digital technologies, automation and sustainability would rise.

224

days: the average time to fill a vacancy in the skilled crafts and trades.

(Source: Federal Employment Agency)



Rich and varied opportunities for skilled workers from around the world

"These developments open up a wide variety of opportunities for employment and professional development to people who come to Germany with foreign academic and professional qualifications," the association said. More and more professional and academic qualifications are now officially recognised. Amendments to the Skilled Immigration Act have also made it easier to find work in Germany. "Anyone who is willing to boost their professional and language skills and learn modern manufacturing processes won't just find a secure job here: they will gain long-term career prospects in an industry that is developing rapidly and tapping into many new business segments," the association added.

In the metalworking trades, it is no longer essential just to demonstrate the manual dexterity which is a hallmark of the industry, but also to possess a mastery of digital systems.

Companies expect their staff to have high levels of expertise in employing modern technology such as robots and electronically controlled machinery, or to gain the skills required to do so. It is also increasingly important to have a deep understanding of the importance of using energy and resources efficiently at work.

Are chimney sweeps the new energy consultants?

Another key development in the skilled crafts and trades is that the environment is now a core part of the industry mindset. Once upon a time, the idea of a chimney sweep called to mind a black-clad man with a long brush for the chimney and a face smeared with soot. Nowadays, though, a visit from the chimney sweep could also include advice on how to improve your energy usage. The trade has come to play a vital role in assessing the efficiency of heating systems and advising if a replacement is necessary.

According to the ZDH, 450,000 businesses in the skilled crafts and trades employ almost 2.5 million people in jobs that help protect the climate. There are also ancillary benefits to reducing the impact on resources from businesses such as firms that renovate old buildings, cycle repair shops and watch repair workshops. What's more, skilled craftspeople usually work locally, serving their customers without the need to travel long distances.

**Almost 2.5 million
people work
in climate
protection jobs.**

Source: ZDH



Interview with Jörg Dittrich

You can't have high tech without the skilled crafts and trades, says Jörg Dittrich, President of the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH). But if the industry is to continue to drive innovation, it needs highly motivated skilled workers.

Herr Dittrich, you are celebrating two anniversaries in 2025: the ZDH is turning 75, while the Handwerkskammer will be 125. What is the mood in the skilled crafts and trades in Germany in this very special year?

With regard to the anniversaries, we are aware of our task to carry forward the robust independent

“International skilled workers are indispensable.”

JÖRG DITTRICH, President of the ZDH

administration of the skilled crafts and trades with strength and optimism. The skilled crafts and trades remains an innovative pillar of our economy. Even during turbulent times, they demonstrate their resilience and cohesion, and continue to play a fundamental role in shaping the future.

What role can skilled workers from outside Germany play, and what have been the experiences of the businesses that are members of your organisation?

International skilled workers are indispensable. For many companies, the experience of working with young trainees or qualified workers from abroad has been great. What it comes down to is whether they settle down here: that means quicker processes, better language training, and targeted support to make integration a success in the workplace.

What solutions do the skilled crafts and trades have to offer when it comes to future tasks, such as digitalisation, AI and green technologies?

Businesses in the skilled crafts and trades are driving innovation on the ground, be that in energy refurbishment, smart home tech, or AI supported planning. The great strength of the skilled crafts and trades lies in how they connect tradition, practical applications and cutting-edge technology. High-tech goes hand-in-hand with manual skills. That is the future of “Made in Germany”.

?!FAQs

The key questions about dual vocational training in the skilled crafts and trades

Anyone interested in training in Germany will have a lot of questions. Here we answer some of the ones that get asked most often.

What does “dual vocational training” mean in the context of the skilled crafts and trades?

The *duale Ausbildung* system (dual vocational training) combines theory and practice, so trainees spend several days a week working in the business to learn the trade “hands-on”. On the other days, they attend a college of vocational education, where they are taught the theoretical subject knowledge they need. This means they can put what they have learned into practice straight away and acquire a 360° view of their career. Training usually lasts three years and is paid. It leads to a recognised qualification which opens up many career opportunities.

➤ How does training work?

What are the requirements?

If you want to pursue dual vocational training in Germany, you will need a visa for education purposes. You can apply for one at the German embassy or high commission in your home country. To get a visa, you will need a firm offer of a training place. In addition, if the gross pay is less than €1,048 per month, you will need to prove you have the funds to cover your living expenses. Furthermore, you will need to show you have good German skills – B1 level at least. Other important factors include your motivation, reliability and manual dexterity.

➤ Requirements for training

“Good language skills greatly increase your chances of getting an offer.”

KATHARINA PARFIL, Make it in Germany

Where can I find a training place?

You can get a training place in the skilled crafts and trades in Germany before you have even left your home country. Use online job portals, visit the website of the Federal Employment Agency, or check the websites of the *Handwerkskammer*, the regional bodies that represent and support the skilled crafts and trades. Firms post training

places there and you can apply directly. In some cases, there may be an online interview. Another route is to travel to Germany to find a training place. You will need a special visa for this: a *Visum zur Ausbildungsplatzsuche*.

➤ Finding a training place

How long does it take?

Where is a good place to find trustworthy information?

A great place to go for questions about dual vocational training is "Make it in Germany", the portal of the German Federal Government. It provides information in four languages and offers webinars, too. You can also request advice by phone. Unfortunately, there are a lot of questionable services out there – especially on social media – from agencies claiming to place international skilled workers. These companies often conceal costs and make false promises, such as "visa guarantees" or raising hopes of speeding up the visa application process. "Make it in Germany" has put together a checklist to help you judge whether a service is trustworthy or not.

➤ Identify reputable services

Most training programmes commence on 1 September each year. Places are awarded well in advance: sometimes up to a year ahead. Finding a training place takes time, as will the process of reviewing your visa application and, if necessary, bringing your German skills up to the right level. It is important to accept that you cannot start training overnight.

Beware of untrustworthy services! "Visa guarantees" and high fees are a red flag.

Bringing together talent and opportunity

Text: Friederike Bauer

The Welcome Center Rhein-Neckar is a hub for the skilled crafts and trades, trainees and official bodies, and it helped Prabesh Gautam from Nepal find success in Germany.

Prabesh Gautam planned his stay in Germany down to the last detail. Prabesh, 21, from Nepal researched training opportunities and studied German for years before commencing a training place as a model maker at Satzke, a firm in Reilingen near Heidelberg. "I started my research while I was still at school, and I decided to go to Germany because there is such a good connection between theory and practice here," he says. He describes how in Nepal you can either go to university or get a job when you finish school, and "there's no dual system like there is in Germany." That's why he made up his mind to leave home and study in Germany.

An asset to his employer

That was back in 2024. He is now in the second year of his training programme and is "a genuine asset", in the words of the firm's managing director Helmut Satzke. The company produces rubber seals for vehicles. "We are highly specialised and produce customised one-off pieces for our customers," Satzke says. They end up with companies such as Porsche or Rolls-Royce. Model makers produce patterns in industries of all kinds, from medicine to military engineering, but Satzke has long been an established figure supplying parts to the car industry. It is one of the so-called "hidden champions": companies that are global market leaders in their field, but which are hardly known among the general public.

A good trainee is hard to find

Despite this, in recent years Helmut Satzke has found it increasingly difficult to find trainees. "I've looked long and hard, placed adverts, visited schools, given talks – but nobody showed any interest." That was until he went to a meeting of a local trade association where he heard about the opportunity of employing young people from Nepal. At an event supported by the Welcome Center Rhein-Neckar he found out about the NSST (Nepal Secretariat of Skills and Training) which places trainees on programmes in Germany. NSST connected him with Prabesh Gautam, initially via video call and later in person.

Seamless transition

"Everything just clicks here," is Rainer Kettner's judgement of the Welcome Center Rhein-Neckar – initial approaches, organisation, and, ultimately, the human dimension, too. In this case, the Welcome Center provided indirect assistance having organised the event for the trade association and established contact with the NSST. "Information management is one of our tasks. We inform people about the opportunities to bring foreign skilled workers to Germany," he says.

Whenever he gives a talk, organises an event and meets skilled craftspeople, this task is on Rainer Kettner's agenda. In his experience, smaller firms in the industry are particularly likely to have reservations. What are we letting ourselves in for? How can we integrate a young person from a different culture into our workplace? Do the sums add up? For companies that are urgently seeking the next generation of skilled craftspeople, these and other questions need answers.

Reaching out to share information

That's why Kettner organises a range of events and takes an active approach to sharing information as a way of reaching out to businesses. In addition to this, he always stresses the benefits of employing skilled workers from abroad. According to the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts, there are currently an estimated 200,000 vacant positions across Germany. Even in the Rhein-Neckar region with its thriving economy the shortfall is tangible – even though Kettner can only give a rough estimate of the number of unfilled vacancies. One thing is clear, though: many people find themselves in the same position as Helmut Satzke.

"A genuine asset": Helmut Satzke and his trainee Prabesh Gautam



Advice and support

The Welcome Center Rhein-Neckar was set up in 2015, and is one of approximately 60 across Germany. In Baden-Württemberg, the 11 Welcome Centers receive up to 70% of their funding from the state Ministry for Business, Work and Tourism. Demographic shifts in Germany have created the need to establish service centres to assist with the recruitment of skilled workers from abroad and help them settle in in Germany. Five advisers work in the Rhein-Neckar office, supporting a range of industries. After many years working for a local *Handwerkskammer*, Rainer Kettner's portfolio includes the skilled crafts and trades, which benefit from his extensive expertise and contacts.

“Ultimately, it’s always about people.”

RAINER KETTNER, Welcome Center

Fitting the pieces of the puzzle together

This store of knowledge is important, as Kettner's work is rather like assembling a puzzle, in which he's constantly seeking to find the right “pieces” to fit together. Officially, Welcome Centers serve as central points of contact, primarily for businesses that need skilled workers from countries outside the EU. They also handle inquiries from people abroad, too. The centres act rather like pilots to help both sides navigate the system. They also act as intermediaries between agencies

Rainer Kettner (L.) with colleagues



such as immigration offices, *Handwerkskammer*, and government employment agencies. They are ready to help with anything from gaining official recognition for foreign qualifications to health insurance and driving licenses. Ultimately, the Welcome Centers are designed to ensure that foreign skilled workers integrate as smoothly as possible into life in Germany.

Activating the network

It's easier said than done! Every year, the centre advises around 120 different companies, "and every case is different," says Rainer Kettner. Even in complex administrative processes, ultimately "it's always about people." However, companies aren't always as well prepared as Helmut Satzke. Often, they come to Kettner "long after the horse has bolted," he says. He relates the story of a refrigeration engineer who recruited three skilled workers from Morocco on his own initiative, but faced a range of challenges when they arrived, from their residence status to work permits. "He was the sole proprietor of the business and was completely overwhelmed. So I activated my network and helped him with problems of all kinds."



When advising companies, the Welcome Center covers every stage of the process.

**Every year,
the centre
advises around
120 different
companies, and
every case is
different.**

Get in touch early

Rainer Kettner likes it best when companies contact him in good time so they can have a calm discussion of the necessary steps and put the wheels in motion. The processes can take some time, too. Kettner recommends allowing at least a year's lead time. In his view the most serious obstacles include the required level of German language skills and finding accommodation for applicants, which is often expensive and hard to find. Businesses in the skill crafts and trades should factor these into their planning at an early stage. "The sooner you have thought through the question, the easier it is for all involved, which includes us at the Welcome Center," he observes.

Housing difficulties

Prabesh Gautam speaks excellent German and appears to have everything under control in every other respect, but six months on, he still has not found a place of his own. Instead, he lives in a small flat on the Satzke site. Despite this, he is happy as he has a clear goal in mind: to complete his training as a model builder and start gaining experience in the workplace.



AT WORK AROUND THE WORLD

Contributing to sustainable development around the world while expanding your own horizons – that's the idea behind the *Internationaler Meister* ("International Master Craftsperson") qualification. The Frankfurt-Rhine-Main *Handwerkskammer* developed the concept with two "EZ-Scouts", experts in development co-operation who work on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. During the one-year course which runs alongside their work, participants acquire skills in international project management, intercultural skills and more. There are now almost 100 *Internationale Meisters*.

Sharing expertise on technology, pricing and quality assurance

Going the extra mile: how working abroad opens doors at home



One of the staff at a firm in Uganda which Katharina Zäpernick worked with

Orthopaedic shoemaker Katharina Zäpernick holds the “Internationaler Meister” qualification. Her work supporting others abroad has an impact on her business in Germany.

What made you decide to become an *Internationaler Meister*?

I gained my *Meister* qualification straight after completing my training as an orthopaedic shoemaker; I was only 21. About ten years later in my early thirties, I thought, “Have I really done everything there is to do?” By chance I heard about training to become an *Internationaler Meister*, and, as a keen traveller, I signed up – even though I had no idea at first what it had in store!

Where were you sent on your first assignment?

A one or two week assignment is actually included in the training programme. I went to a business in Uganda where I trained staff and advised them on commercial questions such as pricing. Another question that came up was quality assurance, and where they could find

better materials to improve their quality levels. That business also operates in Kenya, so I travelled there two years later, too.

Have your assignments changed how you see your work in Germany?

I have grown in confidence, even though I initially found it hard to work in English. In my business in Germany, I am more aware of resources and take care not to be wasteful in how we use things. On my assignments I have seen the value of having sufficient supplies of good-quality materials. It has also given my colleagues new perspectives, and one is now thinking about doing the *Internationaler Meister*, too. It's a fantastic opportunity to travel in your specialist capacity. You can do it during your training through schemes such as Erasmus+, there are fewer opportunities later on.

Where are you going on your next assignment?

Probably to Sri Lanka, where I will be training instructors in various crafts and trades, and teaching them about our dual vocational system.

Katharina Zäpernick provides tailored support and coaching.



Photos: H2Fotografie

The universal language of sewing

Text: Constanze Kleis

Photos: Tim Wegner

Shortage? What shortage? The Frankfurt-based fashion designer and bespoke dressmaker Claudia Frick found an innovative way to deal with the shortage of skilled workers. And it's gone on to prove a successful model.

There's an almost fairytale quality to the bright, spacious workshop of Stitch by Stitch in Frankfurt. It isn't just down to the opulence of the rolls of fabric and thread, the patterns immaculately sorted and hung on rails, while women bend over whirring sewing machines as they craft lovely things to admire and wear. What happens here is just as improbable as the tale of a Frog Prince or Puss in Boots, as these seamstresses, who were trained in Germany, produce samples and runs of up to 500 pieces for small designers and fashion brands.

How to do this was something that Claudia Frick, Managing Director of Stitch by Stitch, had to learn for herself, too. Back in 2015 Frick, a designer and bespoke dressmaker, was looking for a workshop in Germany for her own fashion label "Coco



Managing Director Claudia Frick (centre) with dressmakers
Tetiana Korenivska (l.) and Reyhane Heidari make a strong team.



She graduated top of her class in Germany: Reyhane Heidari had started working as a seamstress in Iran at the age of 13.

Lores". She wanted somewhere where skilled craftspeople could manufacture garments for her, but her search was fruitless. She did, however, find a gap in the market. "That was when I came up with the basic idea: a small-to-medium scale workshop like there used to be in the 1960s and 1970s." Frick is referring to the factories that served regional markets and produced small runs of products, sometimes as few as ten items, sometimes 500 pieces or more. These workshops sold to end customers and retailers alike.

Access to fair work and training

In 2015, the now 52-year-old Frick saw a report on television about refugees who were skilled craftspeople. Working in collaboration with the social entrepreneur and communications designer Nicole van Alvensleben, she made up her mind to set up a tailoring and dressmaking shop. Her ambition was not only to meet the demand for skilled workers in the dressmaking industry, but also make it easier for qualified seamstresses who had experienced being refugees or migrants to access fair work and training in Germany. In other words, women who had been trained in this field in their home countries, often to very high standards. "In countries from which refugees and migrants come to Germany, tailoring and dressmaking are widespread and often at a very high level," Frick says.

One member of her team who exemplifies this quality is Reyhane Heidari from Afghanistan, and whose family emigrated to Iran in the 1980s. Claudia Frick says, "I've never encountered anyone who contributes so much talent and ability.

“In countries from which refugees and migrants come to Germany, tailoring and dressmaking are widespread and often at a very high level.”

CLAUDIA FRICK, Managing Director

She is working at the level of a master craftsman.” Reyhane Heidari had started working as a seamstress in Iran at the age of 13, and she was in no doubt about getting qualified. In 2020, she finished top of her class, passing her dual vocational course with distinction. For her final assessment she created an asymmetrical suit with lapels in the shape of a female silhouette – to the quality of a couture fashion house. But the greatest challenge of the training process wasn’t the technical expertise, says Reyhane, a 32-year-old mother of one. Rather, it was the language barrier. “I had no problem with the practical tasks. I knew I could do it. I had to study a lot for the theoretical parts.”

Practising German at every opportunity

It was a big step, as at first she could barely even utter a friendly “hello”, she says. Despite this, Reyhane and Claudia Frick understood each other. “How you sew a blouse in Afghanistan or Venezuela is exactly the same as how you do it in Germany. Darts, grain, inlay: the craft of dressmaking is a universal language.” That principle is the bedrock on which Stitch by Stitch is built, such as in the after-hours German lessons which Rainer Vollmar, a lecturer, provides free of charge once a week. The workforce includes women from Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Syria, Venezuela and Ukraine, and Claudia Frick and Nadja Losse (a cultural anthropologist who has served as managing director since the departure of Nicole van Alvensleben) encourage the staff to try out and improve their German skills at work. “We focus on situations in everyday life, such as ordering food over the phone. They try to avoid that, as it can be stressful,” Frick says. Dressmaking vocabulary is written on a blackboard in the workshop.

The wraparound approach to language learning has achieved impressive results, such as for Tetiana Korenivska from Ukraine. She trained to be a pattern maker and technician there and went on to work in the industry. Claudia Frick says Tetiana’s expertise is a huge asset. “We were so lucky to be able to recruit her,” she adds. Tetiana, 45



Managing Director Claudia Frick (r.) and her Deputy Nadja Losse: women empowering other women

“I love my new career, particularly because there’s always something new. It never gets dull. There is always a new material, a new process.”

TETIANA KORENIVSKA, seamstress from Ukraine

and mother of three, has been in Germany since 2023, when she joined the 18-strong team at Stitch by Stitch. “I love my new career, particularly because there’s always something new. It never gets dull. There is always a new material, a new process. Sometimes I have to stop and think for a bit about how it could work. It might look as if I’m not doing anything, but I am working!” she laughs. In partnership with Claudia Frick, she develops new product ideas to extend the workshop’s range of products and boost its order book.

Award-winning entrepreneurs

Stitch by Stitch operates as a not-for-profit sustainable social business, funded by the City of Frankfurt am Main on behalf of the Frankfurter Arbeitsmarktprogramm, amongst others. Among the awards the businesses has achieved is the 2017 Hesse Award for. It has achieved this recognition for offering women from migrant and refugee backgrounds prospects for the future with fair work and training places. Nadja Losse says, “In conjunction with the opera house workshops, we have become one of the largest providers of training in tailoring and dressmaking in Frankfurt and the Rhine-Main region.”

18

**people from different countries work for
Stitch by Stitch.**

Tetiana Korenivska from Ukraine
develops new product ideas.





A space for ideas: the spacious, well-lit workshop in Frankfurt am Main



The workshop sets high standards for the quality of its tailoring.

But the workshop also meets a commercial need in the quality of its craftsmanship – which must always prove its worth on the open market, be that in commissions for businesses and organizations, when working on upcycling and recycling, or in its own products under the “Stitch” label. That is not easy in an industry infamous for wage dumping and is therefore concentrated in low-wage countries. Despite all this, Claudia Frick and Nadja Losse stress that their workshop enjoys many exceptional benefits, from the outstanding training to the high quality of their products and the cultural diversity the women bring with them.

Putting “Made in Germany” centre stage

A further benefit consists of the technical expertise that the workshop possess across the many different machines operated there. Nowhere is this more evident than when it comes to jersey – a notoriously difficult material to work with. “No problem!” says Reyhane Heidari, who specialises in handling complicated materials and tricky technology. She recently found the solution to a problem they had with a special type of sewing machine: she’s a real expert, just one of the many women on the team who puts “Made in Germany” centre stage every day.

Five steps to gaining a qualification in Germany

Rohan Gupta recently graduated from secondary school in his hometown of Mumbai. Now the 16-year-old wants to become an electrician and plans to train on a dual vocational programme in Germany. Rohan's story is just one example of how to come to Germany to work as a skilled worker. Yours may be different, depending on your country of origin, where you want to work and other factors.

1. Learn German

Rohan Gupta is already learning German to be ready to speak it at work and college. He is taking a language course with the Goethe-Institut, which offers courses around the world – online and in the classroom. He needs to achieve at least level B1 to apply for a visa to start his training in Germany. Alternatively, he could take a language course in Germany to prepare for his training job.

➤ Learn German with the Goethe-Institut



2. Find a company which offers training contracts

Rohan now needs to find a firm where he can train. He starts by looking on the Federal Employment Agency jobs website, and checks the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts' trainee jobs portal and the website of the *Industrie- und Handelskammer* (German Chambers of Industry and Commerce). He also looks at websites of big German companies and submits speculative applications. Most training contracts begin in August or September, but it is common for places to be awarded a year in advance.

➤ Make it in Germany



3. Apply for a visa

A company in Berlin wants to take Rohan on as a trainee! Now it's time to apply for a visa. The company confirms that his salary will be at least €1,048 a month (2025 figures). He arranges an appointment at the German Consulate in Mumbai and gathers all the documents he needs. He must also prove he has health insurance. As he is not yet 18, he also needs a consent form signed by his parents.

➤ German embassies and consulates

4. Prepare to travel

Rohan has ticked all the boxes for his visa and can travel to Germany. He books a flight and prepares for life in Germany. At the top of the list is finding a place to live. He might be able to ask his new employer for help with that, and his new home city in Germany will offer a range of services where he can turn for help.

➤ Where to find help



5. After arriving in Germany

Once he has arrived in Germany, Rohan makes an appointment at the *Einwohnermeldeamt* (Registration Office) to register his new address. He also goes to the *Ausländerbehörde* (Immigration Office) to apply for a residence permit.

➤ Living in Germany



Last updated: August 2025

Find more information at:

➤ Make it in Germany

Ana and Imad hit the ground running

Text: Wolf Zinn

Photos: Tim Wegner, Hardy Kromer

A media designer from Mexico and a vehicle mechatronics engineer from Syria dared to go it alone. Their experiences show that patience and preparation are essential.

Ana Paniagua gives free rein to her creativity. In her office in Frankfurt she draws sketches, tries things out on her computer, develops ideas – and tosses them into the rubbish bin. Then the perfect idea comes to her. She grins and throws herself back into her work. Around 300 km to the south in Hechingen in Baden-Württemberg, Imad Srywel is bent over the engine bay of a vehicle, deep in concentration. His movements are precise, then he checks everything one last time and wipes his oily hands on a cloth, a look of satisfaction on his face. Paniagua is a media designer, Srywel a master vehicle mechatronics engineer. It's hard to imagine two more different careers, but these two

young people share something in common: both are migrants and both have ventured into the world of self-employment.

"Mexicans are feistier – and happier, too, perhaps, but the Germans are more reliable. I like that a lot," is how Ana Paniagua describes the cultural differences. The 33-year-old comes from Mexico City and studied graphic design in her homeland. It was love that brought her to Germany, where she first worked in Frankfurt as an au pair and took a language course to get to C1 level. It would have been complicated to get her Mexican degree officially recognised in Germany, so she

"More than anything I always wanted to bring my own ideas to life."

ANA PANIAGUA, media designer



Ana Paniagua's office in Frankfurt am Main gives her room to be creative.

THE ROUTE TO A SUCCESSFUL STARTUP

Anyone who wants to build a successful startup in Germany needs to prepare well: especially if you come from a migrant background. Migrants from non-EU countries usually require a residence permit for freelance or self-employed work, under section 21 of the Residence Act (*Aufenthaltsgesetz*). If the founder of the business earns enough from their self-employed work to cover their living expenses, the residence permit, which is initially limited to three years, will be extended. After five years, the next step is a settlement permit (*Niederlassungserlaubnis*), which allows permanent residence in Germany.

The skilled crafts and trades are also governed by the rules of the professional bodies that regulate the industry. In most crafts, you either need to hold the title of *Meister* to start your own business or you need to employ someone with that title as the Technical Director. That said, certain crafts do not require a *Meister* title to start your own business. Local *Handwerkskammern* provide advice on all aspects of the process, such as applying, company registration, employment protection and training. In many cases, these bodies offer dedicated sessions for migrant entrepreneurs for help with topics such as gaining qualifications or getting official recognition for foreign qualifications.

YOU'LL FIND THE ADVICE YOU NEED

You can find information about visas for freelance and self-employed work at [↗ Make it in Germany](#).

If you are looking for seed capital, there are many sources of advice, funding programmes and affordable loans, such as the [↗ Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau \(KfW\)](#) bank. If you have previously been unemployed, a startup grant from the [↗ Federal Employment Agency](#) can help you get started.

Your local [↗ Handwerkskammer](#) is a vital source of information.

decided to take a three-year training course in media design at a small advertising agency in Wiesbaden.

Advice and start-up funding

"The training was excellent and my team were lovely, but more than anything I always wanted to bring my own ideas to life. And the best way to do that was by going freelance," Ana explains. She attended preparation courses, got advice from the Employment Agency, wrote a business plan and at last won start-up funding. Since 2023, she has been creating designs and websites for small and medium-sized companies. Online sales of her range of illustrations, jewellery designs and printed bags are growing, too.

School leaver – trainee – master

Imad Srywel's journey to Germany was a hard one, as the young Syrian fled the terror of the Assad regime in 2014, passing through Libya and Italy before reaching Bavaria. He learned German and gained a school-leaving certificate in the town of Fürth. After this he trained as a vehicle mechatronics engineer in his new home, the small town of Scheinfeld in Middle Franconia. "I am still grateful to the manager of the car dealership as she always stuck by me, even when I was having problems at the vocational school," the 28-year-old recalls.

"We take our own decisions, that feels good."

IMAD SRYWEL, vehicle mechatronics engineer



Imad Srywel (r.) and Mohamad Subhi Alb-diwi enjoy being their own bosses in their workshop.

After he completed his training, the economy was brought to a standstill by COVID and many businesses cut their employees' hours, so Srywel kept his head above water by working various jobs. The young mechanic is ambitious. "I wanted to develop myself, so I really gave it everything and passed the *Meister* exam in 2021," he says. He even gained German citizenship, too. For two years, Imad had a job at a garage, but he wasn't happy. "The conditions were bad: low pay and lots of unpaid overtime. So I decided to become my own boss."

A long to-do list

In October 2023, he teamed up with his electrician cousin and another partner to open a garage in Hechingen. But even before they opened the doors, the trio knew that success wouldn't come easy. Finding the right property, sourcing capital, meeting the bank manager, signing the rental contract, arranging insurance, registering as a business, investing in equipment: the to-do list was long and hasn't got any shorter. "It's pretty demanding, and there's a lot of paperwork to deal with," says the young entrepreneur with a shrug. "In Germany you have to pay high taxes, too," he

adds with a smile. Despite this, Srywel is happy with how things are going so far: "We are responsible for what happens and we take our own decisions. That feels good. And most important of all, we've got happy customers!"

New arrivals driving startup success

Despite all the challenges, it is clear that the career opportunities for skilled workers from abroad are excellent. Demographic changes mean that many businesses are looking for qualified staff. Figures for new startups show that migrants have long been part of the solution: of the 600,000 people who start their own primary businesses every year in Germany, one in five comes from a migrant background. And that figure is rising.

There is no guarantee of success, but courage and entrepreneurship are often rewarded. In Frankfurt, Ana Paniagua clicks "Publish", and the new website she has designed goes live. In Hechingen, the lifting ramp sinks down with a whir, and the car which Imad Srywel has repaired rolls off the yard.

Women who dare

Text: Friederike Bauer

Women are still in the minority in the skilled crafts and trades, but initiatives, campaigns and strong personalities are showing off how the industry is breaking down stereotypes.

Luisa Buck has always enjoyed working with her hands. As a child she helped her parents in the garden, pushing the wheelbarrow and building bird feeders. Luisa loved seeing how you could make things yourself, so she trained as a sheet metal worker after finishing school. “We work with sheet metal on jobs all over the house,” the 30-year-old explains. On a typical day, that might mean cladding, parts of roofs, gutters and drainpipes. Buck loves working with sheet metal “because you can shape it so nicely.” In addition to being physically active, what she enjoys about her work are the creativity and variety.

Still the exception on building sites

Being a woman makes her something of rarity on building sites, but that does not bother Buck, who hails from Wildberg in the Black Forest. Even if she sometimes has to let her older male colleagues “know who’s boss”. Buck tries to encourage young women to make a career in the skilled crafts and trades, even if industries such as construction remain dominated by men. “As a woman you can do anything. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise,” she says.

Working with your hands – the key to confidence and happiness

Julia Schäfer from Kraichtal in Baden-Württemberg has a similar view. She originally wanted to become a construction engineer, but things worked out differently. Julia, now 31, followed her parents’ advice and started out with a traineeship in an office, but eventually it became clear that, “I don’t want to study or sit in an office. I want to be outside on the building site.” Although she had the grades to go to university, she made up her mind to train as a bricklayer.

The job makes her happy and self-confident: she’s in her element with mortar and a trowel. Julia Schäfer has never regretted her decision not to go to university. She now holds the title of *Meister* bricklayer – the only woman to do so in the Nordbaden region – and she is in no doubt that craftspeople can earn more than someone who takes the academic route. Like Luisa Buck, Julia Schäfer wants to encourage more women to take up the skilled crafts and trades. “Just to it!” she says.

Sheet metal worker Luisa Buck loves the creativity of her work and wants to encourage other women.

Photos: Philipp Buck, Julia Schäfer



Julia Schäfer loves her work and choice of career.



**"As a woman
you can do anything.
Don't let anyone
tell you otherwise."**

LUISA BUCK, sheet metal worker

**“The idea that
construction
is a man’s world
should be
consigned to
the past.”**

KATJA LILU MELDER, metalworker



Through her talent as an influencer, Katja Lilu Melder is changing the face of the skilled crafts and trades.

Female Meisters on the rise

According to the IW (German Economic Institute), in 2024 a quarter of those employed in the skilled crafts and trades were women. Although that figure has hardly changed in recent years, the proportion of female *Meisters* has risen. Compared to 2013, there are now a good 7,000 more women who hold the *Meister* title, an increase from 13% to 17%. It is a significant step forwards and proof that women can achieve anything in the skilled crafts and trades.

Stereotypes persist

That said, the wider pattern continues to reflect established trends. When choosing the type of training they wish to pursue, “young women and men often still follow gender stereotypes,” the IW say. Women are still under-represented in traditionally male-dominated trades such as construction and manufacturing. Although there are exceptions: the number of women is rising in certain industries such as vehicle technicians, butchery and industrial cleaning.

Green job growth

Across the skilled crafts and trades, the proportion of women is growing most strongly in fields with long-term shortages of skilled workers. The energy transition is one such sector, along with related jobs such as construction electricians, sanitary engineers, heating engineers and climate technicians, and even roofers. Which just goes to show that women have a vital role to play in alleviating the shortage of skilled workers – and businesses are making efforts to recruit them, too.

According to the ZDH (German Confederation of Skilled Crafts), there are currently an estimated 200,000 vacant positions. Women have an increasingly important part to play in solving that problem. The ZDH is promoting more campaigns and initiatives to recruit women to the skilled crafts and trades, and is calling for careers advice to “encourage young women to pursue dual vocational training in the skilled crafts and trades.”

Breaking down stereotypes

The motto of the ZDH campaign is, “Stereotypes are a thing of the past.” The organisation is using social media, the Internet and an ad campaign to break down stereotypes and spark interest in the skilled crafts and trades among women. Mini portraits and slickly produced videos

present women who love their careers and illustrate how exciting a career in the skilled crafts and trades can be. The ZDH also works with the *Handwerkskammer* to promote national networking meetings to attract more women to the industry.

On top of this, a wide range of networks, projects and initiatives are all designed to further boost the role of women in the skilled crafts and trades: *Unternehmerfrauen im Handwerk*, *Gründerinnen im Handwerk*, *Initiative Klischeefrei*, *Unternehmerinnen für den Mittelstand* and *Handwerkerinnen Kompetenzzentrum* are all dedicated to supporting women in the sector. Prizes and awards are also helping raise awareness. Through photo competitions for craftswomen and awards such as “Miss & Mister Handwerk”, the aim is to encourage “new perspectives, creativity and strengths” in workshops, as the joiner and influencer Isabelle Vivianne (@die.tischlerin) says.

Miss Handwerk

Another woman who is using her voice to make a difference is Katja Lilu Melder (@katja_lilu_melder), who holds multiple *Meister* titles and was crowned Miss Handwerk 2025 – a “spokeswoman with attitude”, as she says. “The idea that the construction industry is still considered a man’s world where there is no place for women really should be consigned to the past,” Katja adds.

Women such as Melder and Vivianne are changing the face of the skilled crafts and trades. They give presentations, hold workshops and regularly post on Instagram and other social media sites. Luisa Buck (@lulu.metalroofer) and Julia Schäfer (@tschulique) are also regular posters. Julia now has over a million followers with slogans such as, “*Seid schlau, geht auf den Bau*” (“Be smart, be a builder”).

But these two women don’t just come up with snappy slogans. They also try to make arguments and share authentic insights through their videos. For example, Julia Schäfer shows that women have nothing to fear from physical labour – or male superiority, either – thanks to the wide range of assistive technologies now available thanks to advances in that area.

But despite excellent prospects, women are still in the minority in the skilled crafts and trades. Who knows: maybe these influencers will bring about a transformation on site and in the workshop through their clout and the real-world insights they share.



German for the specialists

Text: Luca Rehse-Knauf

Skilled workers from Egypt, Tunisia and Ukraine are taking an online German course to prepare for the specific demands of their jobs.

It's a Friday afternoon, but in the SprachHaus language school in Cologne, nobody is slacking off for the weekend. Six highly motivated people from Egypt, Tunisia and Ukraine are learning German here. Their studies are all directly linked to their careers in the skilled crafts and trades. There's good news at the start of the online session: yesterday Oleksandr passed the mental aptitude test for his career as a signalling technician with Deutsche Bahn, which operates the railways in Germany. The assessor rated him as highly reliable, he tells everyone. His classmates smile – nobody had ever doubted the result. The students are electricians, engineers and technicians and all work for Deutsche Bahn. The mood is helpful and supportive.

But they don't waste time before getting on with the first exercise: small talk with colleagues. The group is practising how to open and maintain a conversation then end it politely as you would in the canteen or at the beginning of the working day, for example. They think of suitable topics such as leisure activities, sport and work. At the same time, they discuss the topics which people in Germany rarely bring up unless they have to, such as politics or religion. The course leader Diana Kainz encourages the group to take every opportunity to engage in conversation – after all, small talk is all about practice. "It's like ping pong," she says, "it goes back and forth." But then they get down to business. The students pair up to reflect on the past week at work. The discussions cover highly specific topics, such as how to disassemble signal lights, testing electrical grounding, or inspecting measuring equipment. None of it is vocabulary which would be covered in a standard language course.

"I really like Germany. This language course is important because I'm learning so much specialist and technical vocabulary."

MOHAMED, 43, from Egypt



The qualified electrician has completed his training in his home country and achieved B1 level in a German course.

“Germany is the leader in my field. I can learn so much here and gain new experience.”

MOHAMED, 31, from Egypt



Turbocharging integration at work

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) is funding a career-specific language course through the “Job-Turbos” scheme, a government-funded programme designed to help skilled workers integrate more quickly into work in Germany. “We are trying to prepare people for the specific demands of their day-to-day work,” explains Christian Trömel, who coordinates the programme at the BAMF. The scheme is targeted at trainees and those already in work. Participants are expected to already have a fundamental knowledge of the language. Most students took beginners courses run by the Goethe-Institut while they were still in their home countries. “Most of those who already have jobs come to us at B1 level. If they haven’t got a certificate, the language course provider can give them an assessment,” Trömel explains.

Back in the classroom, the next activity is all about electrical technology terminology. The students have to fill in the gaps in a text with terms such as “current flow”, “charge”, “current density”,

With nine years’ experience as an electrician in the port of Suez, he wants to achieve additional qualifications in Germany.

“power source”, “semiconductor”, and “isolator”. After this, a series of pictures comes up on their screens showing common components used in electrical engineering. There is a small metallic cylinder with two wires, a row of tilt protection devices, a long black device with two connecting wires, a green printed circuit board covered in fine traces, a blue cylinder with wires, and a light switch. The students have to match the right term to each picture: transistor, fuse, resistance, circuit board, condenser, switch. “I can already see you know your stuff!” Kainz praises them. “We’ve got experts here.”

In reply, Ibrahim acknowledges the teacher's expertise. After all, he says, she is actually a German teacher, but she has to work with highly detailed specialist knowledge. "I'm learning a lot," Kainz agrees. She loves it when her student explain the technical details to her. "Linguistically, it is fantastic training when you have to explain your work to someone who knows nothing about it. It bridges the gap between us and has huge benefits."

Concentrated professional experience

Most of the students already have many years' experience of working in the industry in their home countries. The aim here is to allow them to leverage that expertise when finding a job in Germany. There's enormous value in this, not only for the willing students who are learning a new language, but for society as a whole, too, which benefits from their knowledge and contribution to the labour force.

"We need this course", says Houssam. On a normal language course the materials come from literature and the media. "We learned everyday German in our home countries, but there was nothing for our careers," he says. Mahmoud agrees, emphasising the value of the specialist training. He gives the course top marks: "I rate it five stars! I've already learned a large amount of technical vocabulary for use at work." Oleksandr has another tip for how to practise using technical vocabulary – visit museums of technology. There you can find everything from motors to magnets, he says, and they're perfect places to take your kids, too.

**"I really like living here.
Life is orderly and I
have significantly im-
proved my knowledge of
German."**

HOUSSAM, 33, from Tunisia

**He is a specialist electrician
for automated technologies
and has lived in Germany
since early 2025.**

Mastering the dialect

Technical jargon is not the only challenge. Even day-to-day language can be tricky for the students. "I'm learning a lot, but I still don't understand everything my colleagues say when they speak in dialect," Mohamed says. The situation is similar for Houssam: "At first I found it really hard because my colleagues only use colloquial German. I kept having to ask them, 'What do you mean? What did you say?'" Some of the students live in rural areas where people speak regional dialects. Diana Kainz says it can seem like a different language at first for many people, but she reassures the group. Languages develop, she says, and the longer you live in an area, the better you will be able to understand the local dialect.

"Many students also find it emotionally very challenging to be working well below the level of their existing qualifications and skills here in Germany, and having not just to start afresh, but 'right from the bottom'," Kainz explains. Engineers who have

not yet gained official recognition for their qualifications often start out as technical assistants. That said, many new arrivals see that as an opportunity in itself. Mohammed, for example, is considering studying for a second degree in Germany. Yevhen also talks about his plans to gain additional qualifications to allow him to apply for more senior positions. He greatly values the support that employers offer for professional development and training in Germany. Kainz says, "Something that often comes up in conversation with students is that Germany generally applies much higher safety standards than in many other countries. When discussing topics such as employment law and protections, many students also realise that Germany is often much stricter, but much fairer, too."



"The language course is great. I've learned a lot of technical vocabulary and the teachers are really patient."

MAHMOUD, 39, from Egypt

An electrical technician by trade, he used to work in maintenance and computerised machinery.



He is an engineer with ten years' experience as an electro-mechanical technician from before he moved to Germany.

"It's important to me to integrate into Germany. This course is a great help with that."

OLEKSANDR, 41, from Ukraine

Unlocking doors with language

Ultimately, language is not just essential for day-to-day work, but for life in general in Germany. The group stress how important language is to integration into their new home. Diana Kainz closes this Friday afternoon's session with an offbeat question: why don't birds get an electric shock when they sit on electric wires? Naturally all these students, who were trained to the highest levels in their home countries, know the answer: because the birds only touch one wire carrying the same voltage, which means that no current flows through their bodies. All the same, Kainz shows them an episode of the beloved German kids' TV show *Die Sendung mit der Maus* (The Show with the Mouse), which answers the question. After all, language is the key to understanding a country's culture.

"This language course is very helpful to me. The teacher explains everything precisely and in great detail."

YEVHEN, 39, from Ukraine

He spent 17 years working for Ukrainian railways and is now putting his experience to use in Germany as a signalling technician.

Information about language courses:

➤ BAMF

➤ Goethe-Institut

➤ Make it in Germany

Facts and Figures

**1,000,000
Businesses** employ



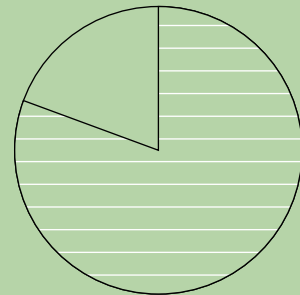
**5.6 million
people**

**in the skilled crafts and
trades.**

Source: ZDH

130

**careers in the
skilled crafts and
trades in Germany**



79.7%

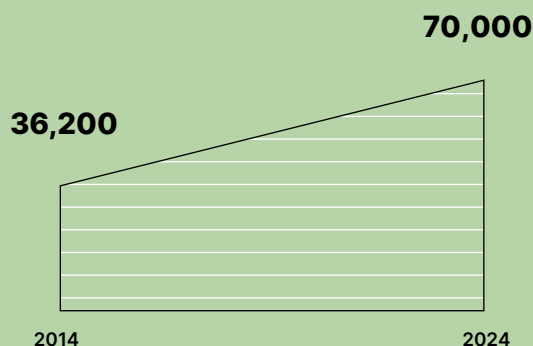
The percentage of skilled craftspeople who said they were happy in their job – compared to 55.3% of the population as a whole (representative study). Craftspeople know that making things makes you happy.

Source: IKK classic

**“My message to
young people is:
take the opportunity
of the skilled crafts and
trades. Germany
needs you!”**

FEDERAL CHANCELLOR FRIEDRICH MERZ

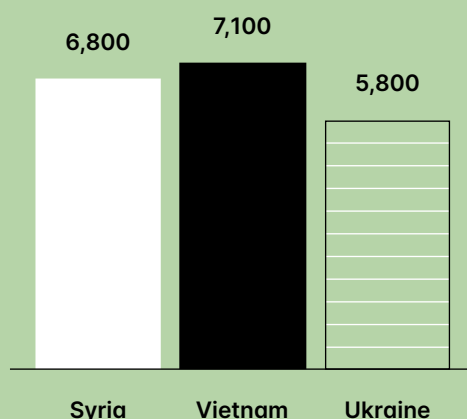
More and more trainees are coming from abroad



The number of trainees who are not German nationals has doubled over the past ten years.

Vietnamese, Syrian or Ukrainian nationals were particularly likely to start a new training contract in 2024.

Source: Destatis



20,426

Craftspeople passed the *Meister* exam in 2024.

Source: ZDH

**The skilled crafts and trades.
The economic powerhouse.
From next door.**

Although it is now 15 years old, this advertising slogan from the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts remains true today. In 2024, the skilled crafts and trades generated an estimated turnover of €757 billion.

Imprint

Publisher

"Deutschland Edition" is published by
Fazit Communication GmbH in cooperation with
the Federal Foreign Office, Berlin.

Editors

Fazit Communication GmbH
Pariser Straße 1, D-60486 Frankfurt am Main
Phone: +49 69 75 91 31 01
www.fazit.de
Senior Editors: Janet Schayan, Dr Helen Sibum
Editors: Christina Henning, Anja Leuschner, Wolf Zinn
Art Direction: 3st kommunikation GmbH
Production: Stefan Reichart
Assistant: Isabel Baron
www.deutschland.de

Editorial service

Email: kontakt@fazit.de
Phone: +49 69 75 91 31 01

Notes

Inquiries: kontakt@fazit.de
Editorial deadline for this issue: 01 November 2025
Cover photo: Tim Wegner
Copyright © by Fazit Communication GmbH 2025

➤ [deutschland.de](#)

➤ [deutschland.de App](#)

➤ [deutschland.de Bluesky](#)

➤ [deutschland.de Facebook](#)

➤ [deutschland.de Instagram](#)

➤ [deutschland.de X News](#)

➤ [deutschland.de X Service](#)

➤ [deutschland.de X Highlights](#)

➤ [deutschland.de X deutsch](#)

➤ [deutschland.de YouTube](#)

➤ [deutschland.de Weibo](#)

➤ [deutschland.de LinkedIn](#)

➤ [deutschland.de Threads](#)

