

Executive summary

In a changing world of work, job profiles constantly develop and the demand for skills and qualifications with them. Particularly, jobs that mainly involve simple and repetitive tasks are threatened by technology, which fosters demand for high-level cognitive skills and complex social interaction skills. Reskilling and upskilling initiatives, through continuing education and training (CET), could foster transitions to emerging sectors and occupations, but participation by low-qualified workers is low.

This study looks at the career guidance programmes available for low-qualified workers in Germany to help them navigate the ongoing changes and identify the most appropriate training and employment opportunities for them. In Germany, these services exist at national level and in the federal states and help adults overcome barriers to participating in CET or invest in their professional development. The report gives an overview of career guidance provision at the federal level and then describes career guidance needs and provision in the states of Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the labour market outcomes of low-qualified workers were good in Germany thanks to strong demand for these workers in several manufacturing and low-skilled service sectors. However, the need for social distancing, a temporary drop in consumer demand and disruptions in global markets and supply chains due to the pandemic have disproportionately affected low-qualified workers. While most economic indicators are close to their pre-pandemic level on average, the recovery is expected to be slower for this group. In addition, the labour market prospects of low-qualified workers are affected by structural changes.

Low-qualified workers are less likely to receive career guidance than those with higher qualifications, as employers focus their efforts in guidance and training on the high qualified. They are also less likely to receive training than those who are unemployed, as the public employment service systematically provides counselling to the unemployed. A range of multi-layered and interconnected barriers complicates the use among low-qualified workers, including finding time to attend counselling sessions, given their work and family responsibilities and scepticism or anxiety towards re-entering learning. Tackling these barriers requires individualised support, which is why the quality of career guidance plays an important role.

The career guidance offers differ significantly from one federal state to another in Germany. The Federal Employment Agency's (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*, BA) new Lifelong Vocational Guidance in Working Life (*Lebensbegleitende Berufsberatung im Erwerbsleben*, LBBiE) aims at closing provision gaps. In addition, regional and sectoral networks intend to connect career guidance and CET providers with employers to plan and organise CET for employees better.

Policy recommendations

Streamline and connect existing guidance offers

- *Streamline current provision under a 'single brand' at national level:* Creating a nationwide brand can significantly improve the access to guidance provision, guarantee more consistent quality of services nationally and close provision gaps.
- *Ensure the sustainability of regional and sectoral networking initiatives:* Networking among career guidance and CET actors and companies is a promising strategy to encourage lifelong learning, especially for low-qualified employees.
- *Support existing career guidance offers at federal state level in engaging low-qualified workers:* Low-qualified workers need tailored career guidance services to address multiple barriers (e.g. lack of time, aversion to change, anxiety to return to classroom learning, financial or social barriers).

Strengthen outreach measures

- Outreach activities can help raise awareness of career guidance opportunities. Institutions that are already in contact with low-qualified adults could be leveraged to function as mediators.

Improve the framework conditions of career guidance services for low-qualified workers

- *Introduce guidance leave:* Policy makers in Germany are considering the harmonisation and expansion of nationwide CET leave and it should include the option to use the leave for guidance sessions.
- *Set-up one-stop-shops:* Guidance offers should help adults identify their professional development needs and matching CET opportunities, as well as address any other barriers they might face (e.g. financing, health issues, care responsibilities).
- *Integrate career guidance with the validation of skills and partial qualifications:* Establishing a working group composed of the key stakeholders in career guidance, validation of skills and CET could explore linkages between these three policy areas and issue recommendations.

Pursue the further development of the Public Employment Service (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit, BA*) towards a combined Public Employment and CET Service

- *Increase the capacities of Job Centres to provide career guidance:* The guidance needs of clients in the Job Centres are often high and their situations very complex. Caseworkers should be accompanied by specialised (LBBiE) counsellors and coaches to provide individualised support.
- *Grant flexibility in the use and combination of different delivery channels:* While digital and online guidance should continue to be used, low-qualified workers clearly prefer face-to-face guidance.
- *Collect and analyse data on guidance sessions and users:* While most co-ordinated guidance offers in the federal states collect and publish some data, no data is collected by the biggest nationwide provider of guidance, the BA.

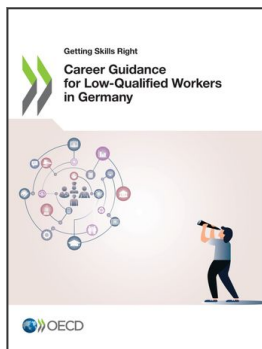
Provide support to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) on providing career guidance and training for low-qualified employees

- *Target existing programmes for companies to support low-qualified workers:* Existing support programmes for companies should raise awareness of the importance of supporting lower qualified staff.

- *Guidance services for companies should go beyond the initial analysis and recommendations:* Support throughout the implementation process and with the administrative requirements is crucial to increase take-up.

Improve the quality of career guidance services

- *Implement a nationwide quality standard framework:* Such a framework should cover both the continuous development of a provider's internal processes and a competency profile for counsellors.
- *Set clear qualification requirements for career guidance counsellors:* This is particularly important when counsellors will be dealing with low-qualified adults facing multiple participation barriers.
- *Provide incentives for regular training of career guidance providers:* Counsellors need support to keep the abilities and knowledge required to work with low-qualified workers up to date.
- *Expand the use of AI solutions during the career guidance process:* While it is crucial that some components of career guidance are conducted by skilled counsellors, others could be automated leveraging advances in AI.



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