

1 Low-qualified workers and their career guidance options in Germany

The COVID-19 pandemic and pre-existing structural trends put pressure on the low-qualified workforce, particularly those in jobs at high risk of automation, to reskill and upskill. Career guidance programmes can support this group in navigating CET offers, career options and sustainable job transitions. Advice can also target companies to support them in developing their skill development strategies and thus their employees' skills and opportunities. This chapter discusses i) the labour market opportunities and prospects of low-qualified workers in Germany; ii) current patterns of their participation in CET and career guidance; and iii) the available career guidance offers and networking initiatives at the federal level.

Introduction

In Germany, the three ‘Ds’ – Digitalisation, Decarbonisation and Demographic Change are dominating the headlines. Countless studies have analysed the impact of these megatrends on the world of work and documented how job profiles are changing. The impact of these megatrends is likely to be particularly large in Germany, where around 54% of all jobs are expected to undergo significant change or disappear entirely over the next 15 years, compared to 47% in the OECD on average (Nedelkoska and Quintini, 2018^[1]).

When it comes to specific skill needs, the megatrends are generally strengthening the demand for high-level cognitive skills and complex social interaction skills, potentially leaving behind low-qualified adults working in jobs that are very intensive in simple and repetitive tasks (OECD, 2019^[2]). Reskilling will be very important to prepare for these changes but adults in the jobs most at risk rarely participate in continuing education and training (CET), exposing them to a high risk of (long-term) unemployment due to skills obsolescence.

In response to these trends, many countries have developed career guidance programmes to support individuals and companies in navigating career options and sustainable job transitions (Box 1.1). Through these programmes, governments hope to maintain competitiveness, prevent increases in unemployment and foster inclusiveness. **In this context, this report provides an overview of the career guidance landscape in Germany with a particular focus on services that low-qualified workers can access and puts forward concrete recommendations on how to strengthen provision for this group.**

This report also covers publicly (co-)funded guidance for companies. Most training already takes place in the workplace but employers are less likely to provide training to their low-qualified employees than to those with high qualifications (OECD, 2021^[3]). Helping companies to assess their own skills needs and invest in training for their employees is thus particularly important for low-qualified workers.

Lifelong learning and career guidance have received significant public attention in Germany in recent years. This materialised for example in programmes such as Learning Regions (*Lernende Regionen*, 2001-2008), Learning on Site (*Lernen vor Ort 2009-2014*), the Education Premium (*Bildungsprämie*, since 2008), the set-up of CET networks (*Aufbau von Weiterbildungsverbänden since 2020*) and, more recently, the Skills Development Opportunities Act (*Qualifizierungschancengesetz*, in 2019) and the Work of Tomorrow Act (*Arbeit-von-morgen-Gesetz*, in 2020). In addition, the coalition agreement of the recently formed government mentions the need to better network CET and guidance actors and to facilitate access to their services. While in theory stakeholders in politics and society agree that lifelong learning requires a neutral and interdisciplinary career guidance service, it is striking that there is no sustainable programme in Germany that draws low-qualified workers and provides services targeted at their needs to them. Small pilot projects have targeted adults in this group and often shown very positive results (see Chapters 2 and 3) but have not been scaled-up so far.

Low-qualified workers face a broad range of barriers to actively engage with career guidance providers and to develop their career plan and they need advice on how to overcome them. When approaching career guidance, adults in this group often face barriers related to a lack of awareness of existing services and their benefits, but also linked to scepticism towards training, limited finances or lack of time. Qualitative interviews conducted to accompany this report (see Annex B) suggest that guidance for low-qualified employees is most successful when it is holistic, i.e. when it helps adults navigate education and training offers as well as access other relevant services at the same time. This requires: i) skilled counsellors, who have sufficient time and resources to provide tailored assistance to each individual and to those who are not aware or remain sceptical of guidance offers; and ii) outreach activities to improve engagement. Existing guidance approaches fall short of these requirements, limiting participation by low-qualified workers. The current approach to solving this issue is to set up small-scale pilot programmes for sub-groups in certain regions, industries or occupations, but this approach creates support gaps for some

groups. To address the needs of low-qualified workers, it is important to draw from the outcomes of successful pilots and adapt existing guidance structures.

The setup of career guidance offers in Germany varies considerably across federal states, resulting in unequal access and difficulties in navigating available services. In this context, a recent study published by the OECD (2021^[4]) has already stressed the need to offer career guidance under a single brand. This report provides a brief overview of career guidance provision at the national level and goes on to analyse provision in two federal states: Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). They provide detailed examples of well-developed guidance offers and are therefore useful for other federal states and countries looking to improve career guidance service co-ordination.

The analysis conducted in this report draws from several sources, including virtual interviews with German stakeholders, quantitative employment statistics collected by the Federal Employment Agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*, BA) and micro census data collected by the statistical offices of the federal states and the federation following the labour force concepts of the International Labour Organization, ILO (see Annex A). As mentioned above, the report also presents new insights from qualitative interviews on career guidance (QIG) that have been conducted with 50 low-qualified employees specifically for this study to learn more about their experiences with and their barriers towards the use of career guidance. In addition, it uses results of the online Survey of Career Guidance for Adults (SCGA) carried out by the OECD in 11 countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand and the United States) to better understand the experience of adults with career guidance and the barriers adults face in accessing career guidance services.

Box 1.1. The definition of career guidance used in this review

Career guidance refers to a range of services intended to assist adults to make well-informed educational, training and occupational choices and – in the short or longer term – to improve their employability. Services can include different activities such as the provision of information, personalised counselling, mentoring schemes, skills assessments, or group sessions.

Career guidance services aim to help people plan their careers in a long-term perspective, typically balancing professional and personal goals. They have the potential to strengthen skill development, facilitate labour market transitions and support a better match between the supply and demand of skills and labour. Adults have varying levels of knowledge about the labour market and training opportunities, as well as varying abilities to plan and visualise their futures. Career guidance can help address these inequalities. It may also support labour market inclusion of vulnerable groups by referring adults to relevant services, including training opportunities.

Source: OECD (2021^[5]), *Career Guidance for Adults in a Changing World of Work*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a94bfad-en>.

The specific needs of low-qualified workers in Germany

In a country like Germany, where the economy is producing increasingly high-quality and knowledge-intensive goods and services, low-qualified workers risk losing their jobs with few options for re-employment. In hiring processes, Germany's labour market is also still strongly focused on a person's completed formal qualification. While this is slowly changing with the development of partial qualifications and micro credentials, it still makes access to high quality employment difficult for workers without a completed formal diploma.

Two definitions of what constitutes a low qualification are provided in Box 1.2. While the definition used in the Census is consistent with the international definition, the definition used by the German PES (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*, BA henceforth) is based solely on having completed a vocational or higher education qualification, underscoring the importance of the dual vocational training system within the German education system.

Box 1.2. Definition of adults with low qualifications

Definition used in the micro census and in international comparison

Adults with low qualification levels are individuals whose highest educational attainment level is at most lower secondary education (ISCED 0-2) (*Geringqualifizierte*). In the German context, these adults have left education after compulsory comprehensive school or earlier (*Primär- und Sekundarbereich I*) and at most hold a lower secondary school certificate (*Realschulabschluss/ Mittlere Reife*). They have not completed a full vocational qualification.

Definition by the Bundesagentur für Arbeit (BA)

The term “persons with low qualifications” is not defined by law. The statistical delimitation of the group of persons follows § 81 Para. 2 No. 1 and No. 2 SGB III, according to which “persons with low qualifications” are to be understood as those employees who:

- do not have a vocational qualification for which a training period of at least two years is stipulated under federal or federal state law, or
- have a vocational qualification but have worked in a semi-skilled or unskilled job for more than four years, which makes them be considered to be no longer likely to be able to work in their profession (occupationally alienated).

As such, this definition includes a broad range of adults. In some cases, adults classified as low qualified by the BA have genuinely poor skills and labour market difficulties, notably: school drop-outs by the census definition (i.e. adults who have neither completed higher education – *Abitur* – nor a vocational qualification) or adults who return to the labour market after several years or parental leave. In other cases, adults classified as low qualified by the BA may possess higher qualifications that are not easily recognised in the labour market, notably adults who have completed higher education, adults without a vocational qualification who have long professional experience, and people with unrecognised qualifications acquired abroad. Adults without a vocational training degree are generally defined as “auxiliary workers” or “helpers” (*Hilfsarbeitskräfte* or *Helfer*) in Germany.

Source: OECD (2021^[4]), *Continuing Education and Training in Germany*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1f552468-en>; BA (2021^[6]), *Glossar der Statistik der Bundesagentur für Arbeit*, <https://statistik.arbeitsagentur.de/DE/Statischer-Content/Grundlagen/Definitionen/Glossare/Generische-Publikationen/Gesamtglossar.pdf?blob=publicationFile&v=7>.

Low-qualified workers faced a good labour market outlook prior to the pandemic

Up until 2020, a decade of robust economic growth in Germany had translated into very low unemployment rates and high employment growth, yielding high standards of living and high levels of well-being by OECD standards. In addition to an increasing demand for higher qualifications and skills described above, the buoyant economy also generated shortages in middle- and low-skilled jobs. This tight labour market held many advantages for low-qualified adults as employers were competing for workers from a smaller pool of available workers. This gave low-qualified adults stronger bargaining power in terms of wages and

employment conditions. It also incentivised employers to invest in their existing staff in the form of certified training.

During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, at the beginning of 2020, German real GDP initially dropped by more than 10 percentage points, similar to other OECD countries. This far exceeded the impact of the 2008/2009 global financial crisis (OECD, 2021^[7]). However, economic output rebounded rapidly in the second half of 2020 and through 2021 but with some clouding of economic prospects in late 2021 and early 2022 as a result of the rapid spread of the omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus.

The prospects of low-qualified workers are affected by the pandemic and by structural trends

The need for social distancing, a temporary drop in consumer demand and disruptions in global markets and supply chains due to the pandemic have dampened employment growth more in certain sectors, occupations and regions than in others. Overall, German unemployment and employment are not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels before 2023. Low-qualified workers have been particularly affected by the pandemic as teleworking was not always possible for this group (OECD, 2021^[8]). The recovery is also expected to be slower or more disrupted for this group as a whole, although temporary labour shortages have emerged for some low-skilled jobs in some sectors such as retail and hospitality.

The long-term prospects of low-qualified workers will also be negatively affected by a number of megatrends leading to a growing demand for high-level cognitive skills and complex social interaction skills (OECD, 2020^[9]). Already before the pandemic, employment growth was much lower in occupations at high risk of automation than in occupations at low risk, where low-qualified workers are concentrated. For the time being, slow employment growth in jobs at high risk of automation has not yet led to a drop in the employment rate of low-qualified workers, largely because the number of workers with a low education has fallen in line with the demand for these workers (OECD, 2021^[10]). As the labour market prospects of low-qualified workers are likely to deteriorate further, career guidance regarding training opportunities is key to improve their chances of transiting to more sustainable and better quality jobs.

Box 1.3. The urgency to focus on low-qualified adults varies from one federal state to another

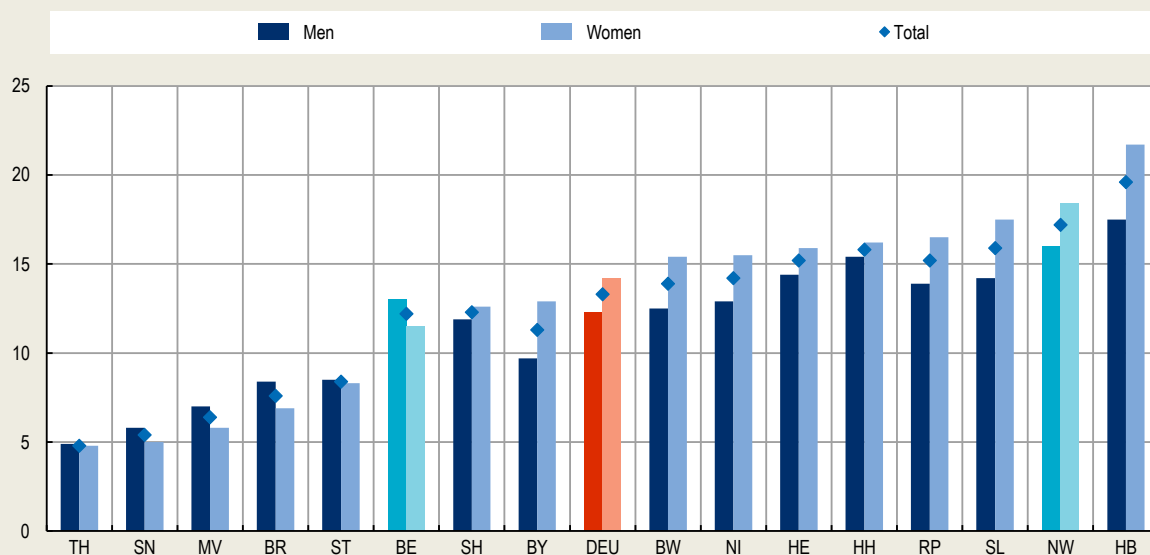
Differences in the supply of and demand for low-qualified adults varies significantly across the federal states. As a result, while the need for low-qualified adults to upskill and reskill is relevant throughout the country, the urgency is much more pronounced in some federal states than in others.

On the supply side, on average, 14% of adults in Germany are low qualified. Yet, there are large differences in the share of low-qualified adults between federal states and by gender (Figure 1.1). The lowest share of low-qualified adults can be found in the Eastern German states Thuringia, Saxony, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt. They are also the only states, including Berlin, where there are fewer low-qualified women than men.

At the other end of the scale, NRW and Bremen have the highest shares of low-qualified adults, particularly among women. The share of low-qualified women varies between less than 5% in Thuringia and almost 22% in Bremen, and for men between 5% and 18% in the same federal states. The scope for investing in upskilling varies accordingly.

Figure 1.1. The share of low-qualified adults varies from one federal state to another

Share of adults with low qualification levels by gender, 2019, percentage



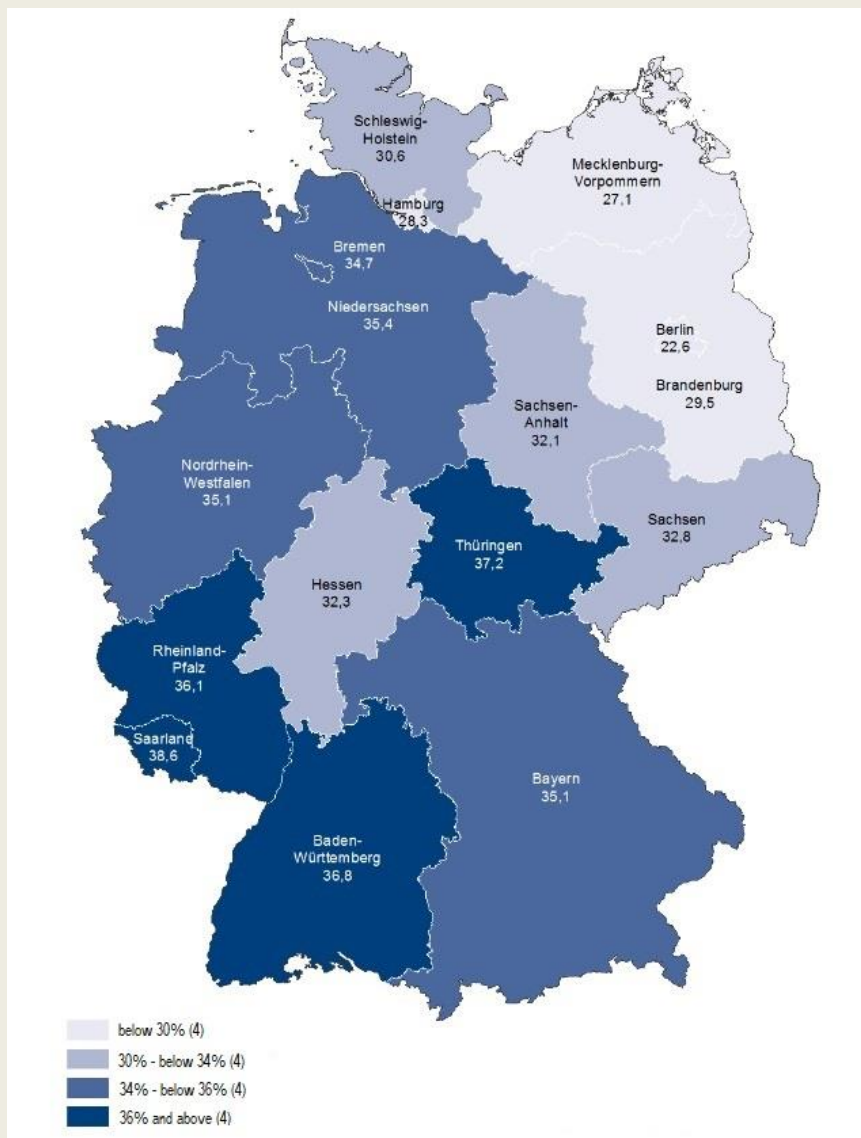
Note: Adults 25 to under 65-year-olds, who do not have an upper secondary qualification (without vocational qualification and without a higher education entrance qualification – ISCED 3) in the population of the corresponding age group.

Source: Statistical Offices of the Federal Government and the federal states, Micro census data 2019; Heinze et al. (2013^[11]) *Strukturpolitik zwischen Tradition und Innovation – NRW im Wandel*; Elmshäuser (2016^[12]), *Geschichte Bremens*; Zimmermann et al. (2009^[13]), *NRW 2025: Vom Hort der alten Industrien zum Magnet der Moderne?*.

On the demand side, federal states are affected to different degrees by the structural changes brought about by the megatrends (Figure 1.2). The risk of job automation, for instance, varies widely, ranging from 27.1% in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern to 38.6% in Saarland.

Figure 1.2. Different degrees of automation potential suggest varying degrees of urgency

Employees in jobs with high automation potential (> 70%) in the federal states, 2019



Note: Automation potential = share of activities that could already potentially be done by computers or computer-controlled machines today.
 Source: Dengler and Matthes (2021^[14]), *Auch komplexere Tätigkeiten könnten zunehmend automatisiert werden*, IAB-Kurzbericht 13|2021, <https://doku.iab.de/kurzber/2021/kb2021-13.pdf>.

Low-qualified adults are also the least likely to participate in CET

The OECD's Priorities for Adult Learning Dashboard (PAL) looks at differences in CET participation between different socio-economic groups across OECD countries. Data is available for all adults, including workers. It shows that, on aggregate, Germany has some of the largest inequalities in CET participation in the OECD especially by qualification and skill levels. The 2018 AES data for Germany confirm that these gaps in participation remain large. Both data sources highlight particularly strong gaps between low-qualified adults and their high-qualified peers (OECD, 2021^[4]). OECD analysis, based on the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), suggests that the differences are very similar when restricting the analysis to employed adults.

The latest available data on low-qualified adults' participation in CET by federal states, including Berlin and NRW, date back to 2015 from the German micro census (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018^[15]). The published data equally refers to adults, as opposed to workers only. To the question "Have you taken part in one (or more) further education or vocational training courses in the last 12 months?" 6% of low-qualified adults answered 'yes' compared with 12% among all adults. The likelihood that a low-qualified person would participate in CET was almost twice as high in Saxony-Anhalt (9%) as in North Rhine-Westphalia (5%). Participation in NRW is thus below average, while it is slightly above the national average in Berlin but remains very low.

Both NRW and Berlin would benefit from increased commitment to encouraging low-qualified adults, especially workers threatened by automation (Figure 1.2), to take up learning opportunities. Career guidance can play an important role in creating awareness and steering individuals towards suitable offers.

Low-qualified workers face multiple barriers to participation in CET

Low-qualified workers face multiple, multi-layered and interconnected barriers to participation. The academic literature on adult learning typically distinguishes between dispositional, situational and institutional barriers¹ (OECD, 2021^[4]). Several studies have shed light on the barriers that the low qualified face in the uptake of CET, although they generally cover all adults, rarely focusing on workers only. Knowledge of these barriers – and ideally tools to overcome them – can considerably improve the quality of guidance. The barriers that low-qualified workers face are very different from those faced by workers with higher qualifications.

Looking at general findings for adults, the low qualified face, on average, a higher number of barriers to participation than those with higher qualifications. While adults with university degrees named one barrier to learning participation on average, low-qualified adults named close to three (Osiander and Stephan, 2018^[16]). As described in detail below, institutional barriers are starker in some regions in Germany than in others. The National Skills Strategy (*Nationale Weiterbildungsstrategie*, NWS) has also acknowledged that existing gaps need to be closed and regions with weaker guidance offers need support to strengthen them.

Dispositional and situational barriers are highly individual for each adult. Nevertheless, several studies have found that dispositional barriers are more prevalent for low-qualified adults than for higher qualified adults (Osiander and Stephan, 2018^[16]; BA, n/a^[17]). This is in line with the finding that 67% of low-qualified German adults report the concern of "not being used to learning anymore" (OECD, 2021^[4]).

One of the barriers that is most specific to low-qualified workers is the scepticism or anxiety towards re-entering a learning environment. The perception of not being able to learn anymore, fears of exams and of returning to a classroom environment and low confidence are reasons often cited by this target group for not participating. Data, referring to adults, show that not being used to learning is the most cited reason (67%) for not taking up CET among low-qualified adults according to an online survey by the German Institute for Employment Research (IAB), conducted in 2017 with 800 employees (Figure 1.3). This compares to 43% among adults holding a vocational training degree. Qualitative evidence is available specifically for low-qualified employees. The following quote from interviews with low-qualified employees commissioned in the context of this study (QIG) illustrates the barriers that exist to return to formal learning in particular:

I am not interested in opportunities for continuing education and training these days, because I am already a little bit older. It's not worth it. [...] They offered me a vocational training – but I said no, I am not going back to school. That doesn't work for me.

49-year-old female hotel housekeeper

Another frequently cited barrier for taking up training is the expectation that participation does not provide obvious and immediate benefits, such as financial benefits after completion, a promotion or another improvement in job quality. This expectation keeps them from even considering the different training options they have access to. The view that CET may not yield financial benefits after completion is the second most mentioned barrier (53% among low-qualified, 42% among those with a vocational degree) in the IAB's survey. Insights from the QIG highlight that career guidance for this group of adults may need to bring up considerations other than financial on the benefits of participation in training:

Someone once asked me 'how to you imagine your future, do you always want to earn so little money?' Yes, money is nice, but you know what you also need to consider is: do I enjoy it, do I want it? And you also have to consider if you are happy with your boss; does he deserve that you are leaving from one day to another?

31-year-old male janitor

The QIG suggest that low-qualified employees are also generally content with their work, working environment and employer and do not see enough reasons to initiate bigger changes to their current situation. This could reflect risk-aversion and a myopic attitude towards inevitable forthcoming change in their current jobs, which outreach activities and career guidance services would need to address. The following quotes illustrate the point that many low-qualified employees interviewed in the context of this study highlight the good working relationships with their boss and co-workers as key to the satisfaction with their work:

I enjoy the work. I like my boss and colleagues. It is a relaxed working atmosphere; you know what you got to do, but you can also ask questions if you are not sure. They explain things to you. [...] I would like to continue working in this job, because I enjoy it and am interested in the profession.

34-year-old male interviewee

The job is very varied and you can implement your own ideas. The colleagues are nice. Even if clients are sometimes difficult, it is possible to handle.

48-year-old female administrative assistant

As such, what may look like lack of interest in participating in CET may be closely connected to the characteristics and preferences of this group. In addition, some situational barriers have been found to prevent or complicate the participation in training by low-qualified employees, such as frequent changes of work and employer and lack of time due to work schedules.

Tackling dispositional and situational barriers to training requires personalised holistic support...

Dispositional barriers are highly personal while situational ones require actions on several fronts, including timing, length and format of provision. For this reason, personalised and holistic support are crucial to valuable career guidance services for low-qualified workers.

The expertise of career guidance counsellors plays an important role in reaching out to low-qualified adults. To play a strong motivational role and address dispositional barriers, guidance advisors need to be well trained, well paid and equipped with the right tools, information and time to motivate and guide this target group. In addition, well-trained counsellors and coaches can accompany low-qualified adults to invest in their careers. In many cases, one-stop-shop settings have proven effective to address a combination of barriers.

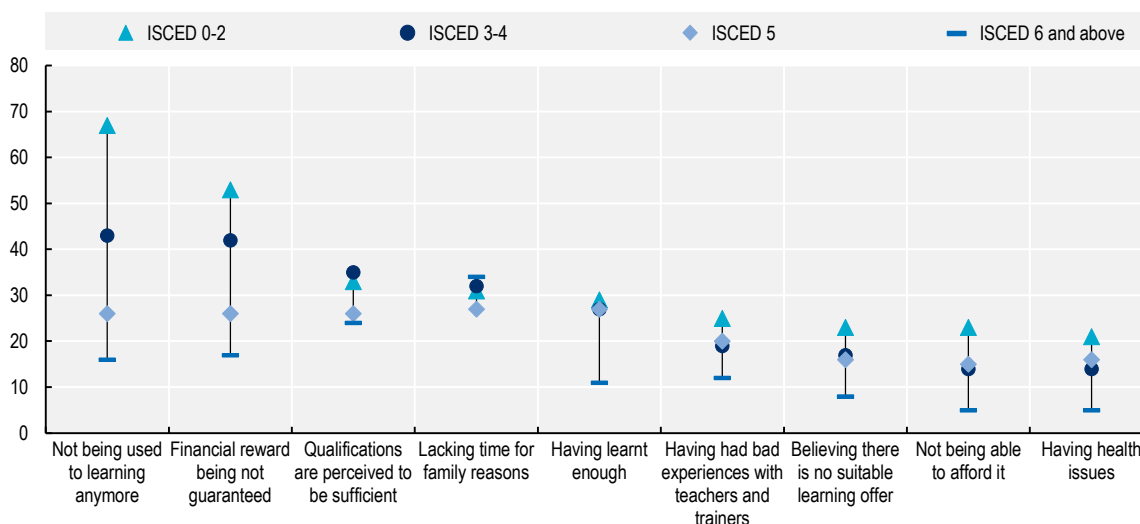
The findings from the QIG interviews and quantitative data also point at the need to facilitate the recognition of prior learning and to direct adults in this group to modular and partial qualifications. Rather than achieving a full qualification in two or three years of training, partial qualifications could be completed step-

by-step according to individual need and disperse worries about re-entering learning environments. As these systems are generally complex and not widely known, career guidance providers play a crucial role in supporting low-qualified workers throughout the process.

Establishing a first contact is often a challenge when workers do not search for career guidance themselves (OECD, 2021^[4]). Around half of the low-qualified employees interviewed in the context of this study had looked for information on CET, typically online. Mobile services and outreach activities play a crucial role in overcoming barriers that keep adults from looking for career guidance.

Figure 1.3. Strong dispositional barriers call for high quality accompanying guidance

Self-reported reasons for not taking part in job-related education and training, by qualification level, 2017, percentage



Note: ISCED 0-2 = No vocational qualification; ISCED 3-4 = Initial vocational degree (*Lehre/Ausbildung/Fachschule*); ISCED 5 = Graduate degree or vocational equivalent (*Meister/Techniker/Bachelor*); ISCED 6 = Post-graduate degree (*Master/Diplom* or higher). Low-qualified adults were underrepresented in the IAB survey. Results should not be considered representative for the German population.

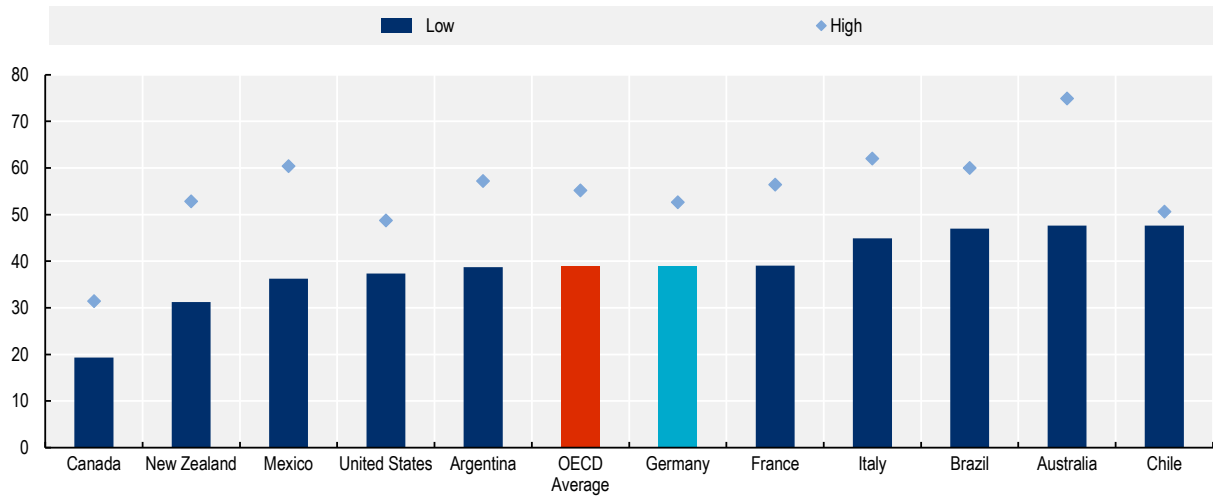
Source: Osiander and Stephan (2018^[16]), *Gerade geringqualifizierte Beschäftigte sehen bei der beruflichen Weiterbildung viele Hürden*, www.iab-forum.de/gerade-geringqualifizierte-beschaefigte-sehen-bei-der-beruflichen-weiterbildung-viele-huerden, IAB-Forum; IAB online survey on CET.

...but the use of career guidance is limited

Despite the need for support to overcome barriers to CET participation, the OECD Survey of Career Guidance for Adults SCGA finds that less than 39% of low-qualified workers in Germany used a career guidance service in the five years prior to the survey compared to 55% among high-qualified workers (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4. Low-qualified workers use career guidance less

Percentage of workers who have spoken with a career guidance advisor over the past five years, by qualification level



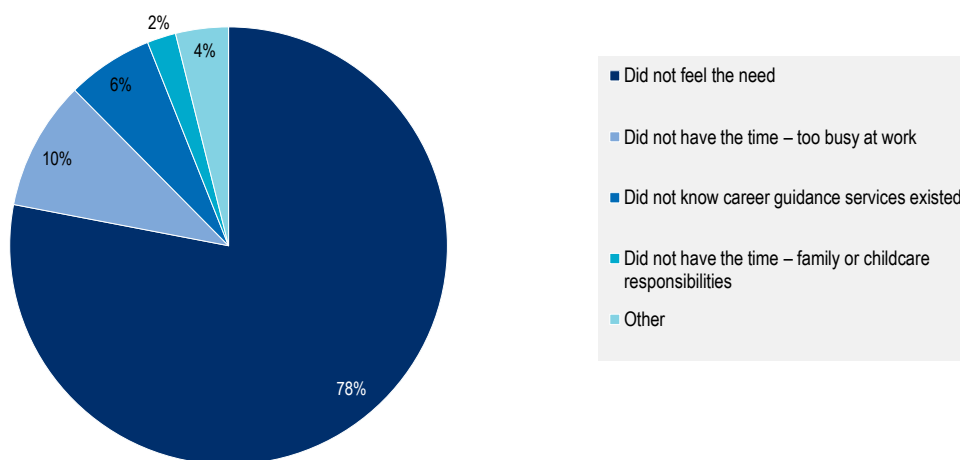
Note: The low educated group includes adults with a low or medium level of education (i.e. less than a bachelor's degree).

Source: OECD 2020/21 Survey of Career Guidance for Adults (SCGA).

The SCGA also sheds light on the reasons why low-qualified workers do not use career guidance (Figure 1.5). Most of them report that they do not feel the need for guidance. The qualitative interviews (QIG) do suggest, however, that this may hide a number of other barriers.

Figure 1.5. Low-qualified workers seem to not feel the need for career guidance

Percentage of low-qualified workers who did not speak with a career guidance advisor over the past five years, by reason



Note: The low educated group includes adults with a low or medium level of education (i.e. less than a bachelor's degree).

Source: OECD 2020/21 Survey of Career Guidance for Adults (SCGA).

Career guidance provision in Germany – structure and networks

The provision of career guidance for employed adults is limited at the federal level, with most guidance activities being co-ordinated at federal state level. BA's Lifelong Vocational Guidance service (*Lebensbegleitende Berufsberatung*, LBB), which is still being rolled-out in many regions, is the only face-to-face career guidance programme available consistently throughout the country. The LBB aims to shift the BA's approach from employability in the short term to supporting individuals in career planning and decision-making over the life-course. In addition to its branch focusing on students, the section focusing on employed adults is called Lifelong Vocational Guidance in working life (*Lebensbegleitende Berufsberatung im Erwerbsleben*, LBBiE).

The programmes CET Guide and CET Telephone (*Weiterbildungsratgeber / Weiterbildungstelefon*) by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung*, BMBF) are also available everywhere in Germany but services are limited to career guidance online and via telephone. Social partners, the Adult Education Centres (*Volkshochschulen*, VHS) and universities provide career guidance everywhere in Germany. However, despite their nationwide presence, they are often governed in a decentralised way, with significant differences between local branches and federal states (OECD, 2021^[4]). None of these services include an outreach or mobile component.

As a consequence of Germany's career guidance landscape that has grown organically over time and differs substantively across federal states, several networking initiatives aim at increasing exchange and co-ordination between the regions and at sharing learnings among the different actors at local, regional and national level. What is, however, still lacking in Germany is a nationwide initiative on career guidance that takes on the co-ordination between federal states and regions and sets out a global vision on career guidance for all stakeholders to follow.

Career guidance programmes exist in all federal states but the degree of co-ordination in provision varies

Career guidance programmes are available in all federal states in Germany (Table 1.1). Each federal state has its own online platform that serves as a single entry point to information on guidance. However, the degree to which these offers are integrated into an actual guidance network differs significantly, creating inequalities between the federal states. The offers fit into three different approaches to the provision of career guidance. A first group merely presents all career guidance providers in the federal state on one website, in some cases including offers by social partners, VHS, private providers and others. Offers in a second group follow a more centralised approach, with a responsible body, for example a ministry, that co-ordinates a network of subcontracted providers following an official call for tenders. This is the approach used in Berlin and NRW. The third approach is followed by federal states that provide career guidance through one specialised agency, not a network of independent organisations. The agencies may have one or several offices across the federal state, with varying numbers of career guidance staff at each office. This approach is often found in city-states.

In addition, some federal states have set up career guidance offers for specific target groups including women, refugees, parents, individuals re-entering the labour market who may benefit the most from additional guidance and from the focus on their particular needs. So far, none of these initiatives provide services that are adapted to the specific needs of low-qualified workers.

Table 1.1. Career guidance offers for adults in the federal states

Federal State	Original name	English name	Actors involved (incl. funders)	Target group	Guidance channel	Guidance offices
BW	Landesnetzwerk Weiterbildungsberatung	Federal state network on CET guidance	VHS federation Baden-Württemberg, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport	Individuals	Face-to-face, chat, telephone, video call	74*
BY	Komm weiter in B@yern	Get ahead in Bavaria	Bavarian State Ministry for Family, Labour and Social Affairs	Individuals, companies	Online	-
BE	Berliner Beratung zu Bildung und Beruf	Berlin guidance on education and profession	Berlin Senate Administration for Integration, Employment and Social Affairs, k.o.s. GmbH	Individuals, SMEs	Face-to-face, telephone, video call, chat, e-mail	10
BB	Weiterbildung Brandenburg	CET Brandenburg	ESF, Wirtschaftsförderung Brandenburg GmbH (WFBB), Land Brandenburg	Individuals, companies, providers	Face-to-face, telephone, e-mail, chat	1
HB	Weiter mit Bildung und Beratung Bremen	Ahead with education and guidance	ESF, Chamber of employees Bremen, city of Bremen, IQ Network	Individuals, companies	Face-to-face, telephone, e-mail, video call	2
HH	Weiterbildung Hamburg	CET Hamburg	Authority for school and vocational training Hamburg	Individuals	Face-to-face, telephone, e-mail, fairs	15
HE	Bildungsberatung Hessen	Education guidance Hessen	ESF, Weiterbildung Hessen e.V., Land Hessen	Individuals	Face-to-face	124*
HE	Hessencampus (HC)	Hessencampus (HC)	Hessian Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs	Individuals	Face-to-face	17
MV	Weiterbildung MV	CET in MV	ESF, Verein zur Förderung der Weiterbildungs-Information und Beratung e.V.	Individuals, companies	Face-to-face, telephone, chat	1
NI	Bildungsberatung in Niedersachsen	Education guidance in Lower Saxony	Lower Saxony Agency for Adult and Further Education, Association for Free Adult Education, Ministry for Science and Culture	Individuals	Face-to-face, video call, chat, e-mail	12
NRW	Weiterbildungsberatung in Nordrhein-Westfalen	CET guidance in North Rhine-Westphalia	ESF, NRW Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, Gesellschaft für innovative Beschäftigungsförderung mbH (G.I.B.)	Individuals, SMEs	Face-to-face, telephone, webmail, events	250+
RP	Weiterbildungsportal Rheinland-Pfalz	CET portal Rhineland-Palatinate	Rhineland-Palatinate Ministry of Science, Continuing Education and, and Culture and Ministry of Economics, Transport, Agriculture and Viticulture	Individuals, companies	Online resources	-
SH	Beratungsnetz Weiterbildung Schleswig-Holstein	Guidance net CET Schleswig-Holstein	ERDF, Schleswig-Holstein Ministry of Economy, Transport, Labour, Technology and Tourism, ver.di-Forum Nord, oncampus GmbH, Arbeit und Leben Schleswig-Holstein e.V., FuE-Zentrum FH Kiel GmbH and others	Individuals	Face-to-face, phone, e-mail, WhatsApp	7

Federal State	Original name	English name	Actors involved (incl. funders)	Target group	Guidance channel	Guidance offices
SL	Weiterbildungsportal Saarland	CET portal Saarland	Saarland Ministry of Economic Affairs, Labour, Energy and Transport (MWAEV), Ministry of Education and Culture (MBK), Saarland Chamber of Labour (AK)	Individuals, companies, providers	Online resources	-
SN	Bildungsmarkt Sachsen	Education market Saxony	Saxon State Ministry for Economic Affairs, Labour and Transport, Sandstein Neue Medien GmbH	Individuals, providers	Online resources	-
ST	Fachkraft im Fokus	Skilled worker in focus	ESF, Saxony-Anhalt Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Integration	Individuals, companies	Online resources	-
TH	Bildungsportal Thüringen	Education Portal Thuringia	Thuringian universities	Individuals	Online resources	-

Note: * Number of member organisations.

Source: OECD (2021^[41]), *Continuing Education and Training in Germany*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/25206125>.

The public employment service offers the only federal career guidance programme covering employed adults

The BA's responsibilities for guidance are defined in the Third Book of the Social Security Code (§ 29 SGB III following), which was adjusted/ expanded via the 2019 Skills Development Opportunities Act (*Qualifizierungschancengesetz*). In § 30 SGB III it defines the BA's mandate for guidance to improve individual employability and the development of individual career prospects, including for employees. This Act enabled the BA for the first time to introduce lifelong vocational guidance (*Lebensbegleitende Berufsberatung*, LBB), including for employed adults (*LBB im Erwerbsleben*, LBBiE) at any point in their careers (see Box 4.3 in (OECD, 2021^[41])). The BA envisages LBBiE to complement existing programmes in the federal states rather than introducing a rigid nationwide model. While this allows integration with and adaptation to well-established programmes in the different states, it is also likely to accentuate existing differences between states without fostering much-needed co-ordination mechanisms.

The nationwide rollout of the LBB approach in co-ordination with the relevant ministries of the federal states was completed in January 2021. However, integration with local programmes is still ongoing in many federal states. Four hundred and fifty LBB advisors are being hired or trained between 2020 and 2022. LBB advisors are not present in each local offices of the BA: Each labour market region has a team of 10-20 LBB staff, who can be placed in selected local offices from where they can provide guidance in person, via telephone or video call (BA, 2019^[18]). There is no specific distinction between advisors for services provided to students or to employees (LBBiE). LBB is financed by employees' and employers' unemployment insurance contributions.

There is currently no data on how many adults have received career guidance through LBB, or on the duration of the sessions, the waiting times to receive an appointment or any other data related to guidance provision. Information from the QIG conducted in the context of this study suggest that about two in five low-qualified interviewees have been contacted by the federal employment agency for career guidance purposes. The type of guidance services and the satisfaction with the guidance that was provided varied strongly between interviewees:

I spoke to the people from the federal employment agency/ the job centre [...] I spoke to them about what I wanted to do and that I hadn't found my path yet. [...] They also forwarded me to a different career guidance service, which discussed my professional goals with me, helped me find vacancies and draft applications.

35-year-old male district helper

First there was the job centre [...] they are responsible to help people find a job and to what extent (financial) support is available [...] Then I took part in a vocational preparation measure, which provided an overview of different occupations.

23-year-old female salesperson

One week ago I got a call from a lady at the job centre [...] She asked what my plans are after I finish school and I told her about my plans to become an emergency paramedic. She didn't ask for an appointment, she just asked questions about my professional future. [...] What I didn't like is that they are trying to encourage me to find a different professional path.

21-year-old male first-aid assistant

Social partners, Adult Education Centres and other education providers offer career guidance nationwide

Social partners, such as the Chambers of Commerce and Industry (IHK), local Chambers of Skilled Crafts or professional organisations and trade unions offer some guidance schemes that are available nationwide. However, depending on the organisational setup and the degree of independence at the local level, the guidance offers and channels can differ considerably between federal states and communes.

Also the Adult Education Centres (VHS) provide career guidance across Germany.² Several low-qualified individuals interviewed in the context of this study had received guidance services through the VHS. They were typically sign-posted by other institutions, e.g. rehabilitation centres, job centres, to the guidance offer of the VHS. A positive experience of such guidance experience is provided below:

I first thought what kind of conversation will this be. They will just tell me that I haven't managed very much in my life to date. I was surprised myself that this guidance conversation [with the VHS] took such a positive turn. I finally learnt that there is someone who is not focusing on the negatives, but someone who first asks me: who are you, what do you have, what do you want? [...] I think you could attract many individuals with this kind of offer.

46-year-old male interviewee working in retail

Other public and private education and training providers also provide career guidance services, including to low-qualified workers, and often do so on behalf of the federal public employment services.

Support for companies to provide career guidance is also available

An important share of career guidance and training for adults happens in companies. According to data from the SCGA, almost 17% of adults in Germany who received career guidance did so through individual employers or employer organisations. Staff associations are obliged by law to provide career guidance to employees in Germany (OECD, 2021^[4]). Employers also have an intrinsic interest in keeping their employees' skills up to date with the objective to stay competitive and foster innovation within the company. In-house training and career guidance are also a signal of appreciation to the employees and increase the attractiveness of the employer. Despite this self-interest, some firms may need support to deliver career guidance to their employees. The provision of career guidance and training require an analysis of individual

skill development needs and expertise in the organisation of career guidance and training. SMEs, in particular, tend to lack the necessary capacity. Furthermore, when employers do provide career guidance and training, they are less likely to provide guidance to low-qualified employees or to employees in jobs at high risk of automation than to their higher-qualified peers (OECD, 2021^[3]). Well-designed policies can assist companies with the implementation of skill development strategies that include career guidance services (OECD, 2021^[4]).

Evidence from the QIG provides insights on the extent to which low-qualified employees are interested in receiving career guidance through their employers or if they would rather receive this guidance through other channels. Opinions vary, with half of the interviewees being positive about receiving guidance from their employer or at least open to the possibility. Those in favour typically emphasised the benefits of leveraging the relationship with their current employers and their knowledge of the context for the provision of career guidance:

It depends on what position one holds and what the opportunities are [...] When there are development opportunities within an enterprise it makes sense to receive guidance from an employer [...] An external guidance counsellor has nothing to do with the company and may misunderstand the situation. I would rather discuss with the employer directly.

40-year-old female interviewee working in transport services

The other half of individuals interviewed were not interested in career guidance provided through employers, notably because of a lack of trust, the perception that advice would not be independent and that it may focus on company – rather than individual – needs:

I don't think that guidance conversations between employee and employer can be open and truthful. Many employers – in particular in elderly care – expect that one continues working for them [...] but opportunities and wages may be better elsewhere.

20-year-old female interviewee working in elderly care

Several support initiatives for companies exist at the national level in Germany (see Table 4.5 in OECD (2021^[4])). Some of these are part of broader public strategies to support enterprises, focusing for example on the quality of work (*unternehmensWert: Mensch* within *INQA* by the Federal Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, BMAS) or artificial intelligence (*KI Strategie* by BMBF, BMAS and BMWi). Social and economic partners also play an important role in the provision of advice on CET to companies. In addition, trade unions and employer organisations provide advice to companies in the form of information material, conferences or seminars on-site via their staff associations.

The BA has its own offer for companies, the Counselling for Upskilling Programme for Companies (*Qualifizierungsberatung für Unternehmen*) which has been in place since 2013. It is one of the most comprehensive advice programmes for companies with a focus on SMEs. Specially trained BA consultants support employers with a tool for demographic staff analysis, assessment of training needs, selection of training providers and appropriate learning forms, and tracking the effects of training. The programme is modularised, i.e. companies can run through some or all of the modules available. In addition, all companies can access advice on different labour market topics provided by the BA (*Arbeitsmarktberatung*) free of charge. The guidance for companies is part of the wider training strategy (*WEITER.BILDUNG! – die Qualifizierungsoffensive*), initiated by BMAS.

Via this programme, the BA has already established connections with companies in many regions. This network could now be leveraged within the LBBiE to reach out to employees and especially to low-qualified employees, who are difficult to reach through standard career guidance outreach channels. So far, low-qualified adults are not a specific target group of any of the programmes, despite them being least likely to receive career guidance or training from their employer.

The NWS mentions the need to assess whether the support for companies provided by the BA and the support programmes of the federal states could be better linked, although no further commitment is made to establish these linkages in practice (OECD, 2021^[4]).

Literacy initiatives provide another opportunity to deliver career guidance

The number of adults with low literacy levels, of whom the majority is also formally low qualified, remains stubbornly high in Germany. Many programmes, at all government levels, have tried to increase the participation of this target group in training. Today, literacy courses are mostly offered by Adult Education Centres (VHS) as well as by some other for profit and non-profit providers and are accompanied by career guidance services, to encourage potential learners to take up literacy courses. An overview of the providers and networks of literacy courses and guidance can be found in OECD (2021^[4]). The Berlin's Centre for Basic Education (*Grund-Bildungs-Zentrum Berlin, GBZ*) is described in more detail in Chapter 2.

In addition, the overarching National Decade for Literacy and Basic Skills (*AlphaDekade*) was set up in 2016. This initiative brings together the federal government (BMBF), the federal states and a range of partners, including the BA, education providers, scientific institutions, social and economic partners, interest organisations, foundations, and representatives of municipalities. Its objective is to improve adults' reading and writing skills. Between 2016 and 2026, the Decade aims to implement activities in five areas: i) raising awareness; ii) research; iii) provision; iv) professionalisation of adult educators; and v) establishment of structures. Under the umbrella of the Decade, separate projects will take place, each funded by the federal government or the federal states.

More details about the implementation at the federal state level are given in Chapters 2 and 3. Most federal states have established a co-ordination office that connects the different actors in the area of basic CET. In NRW, for example, the office is located in the federal state's Association of Adult Education Centres (*Landesverband der Volkshochschulen*).

Networks play a central role in strengthening career guidance on CET

Providers, facilitators and organisers of career guidance have a long tradition of engaging with each other through different forms of networks. Networks have been created at different administrative levels, as well as by civil society organisations and providers themselves. A detailed presentation of the networks in Berlin and NRW can be found in the respective sections below and an overview of all networks at federal state-level can be found in OECD (2021^[4]).

A recently developed initiative under the auspices of BMAS is the **Federal programme for the development of continuing education and training networks** (*Bundesprogramm zum Aufbau von Weiterbildungsverbänden*). The objective of this initiative is to open up new ways for SMEs to access CET for their employees. SMEs often struggle to organise and fund CET for their employees, which is why employees in SMEs are known to train less than their peers in bigger companies. To achieve this objective, the networks connect SMEs with CET providers, career guidance providers, chambers of commerce, the BA and other institutions active in the adult learning environment, ideally from the same sector or the same region. As such, the networks address several barriers to training at the same time. The networks draw the attention of HR managers, company owners and works councils to the growing need for CET in the wake of intensifying shortages of skilled workers. More specifically, the networks are then meant to co-ordinate CET and career guidance needs of different SMEs, organise joint CET and guidance provision at shared costs as well as to share best practices and information.

Concretely, BMAS provides funding for the creation of networks. Funding is allocated following a call for tender. Several CET networks have been set up since the end of 2020. A large number of expressions of interest during the call for tenders suggest that the demand for such support is high (BMAS, 2021^[19]). In total, the budget will allow for public support of 39 networks. In addition, another programme was launched

that will follow the same idea but with a specialisation on the automotive industry. The funding supports the creation of a co-ordination office for each network that is responsible for building up the network. This office can be, for example, in an economic development agency, within an education provider or even within an SME. While the programme is designed to encourage SMEs to train their employees, it also encourages bigger companies to foster CET along their value chains. The new CET networks will also focus on retraining employees for a change of sector. In addition, a central co-ordination centre will be set up for all CET networks. This will ensure an efficient exchange of knowledge and best-practice transfer between the individual networking initiatives.

In practice, a pilot network in Baden-Wuerttemberg, run by the federal state of Baden-Wuerttemberg and the BA, has shown that it takes time to develop the structures and the trust necessary to co-operate effectively on the above-mentioned objectives. It is therefore important to ensure the longevity of networks and to identify options to ensure their continuity early on. Other lessons could be drawn from similar programmes in Austria (*Impuls-Qualifizierungsverbund*) and the Netherlands (*MKB!dee*), where evaluations may be published earlier.

For individuals with a migration background, the initiative **Integration through Qualification** (*Integration durch Qualifizierung*, IQ) is a co-operative approach funded by BMAS and ESF and involving the Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), BMBF and BA introduced in 2005. The programme aims at improving labour market opportunities for people with a migration background. Sixteen IQ networks (*IQ Netzwerke*), one in each federal state, have been set up to improve and facilitate co-ordination among the different labour market actors to integrate the target group in the labour market. The networks have defined four priority areas for action: i) counselling for the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad; ii) adjustment qualifications; iii) intercultural competence development of key labour market actors; and iv) counselling for employers on hiring and integrating individuals with a migration background (IQ Netzwerk, 2021^[20]). Examples for the concrete implementation of the networks can be found in the Chapters 2 and 3 of this report.

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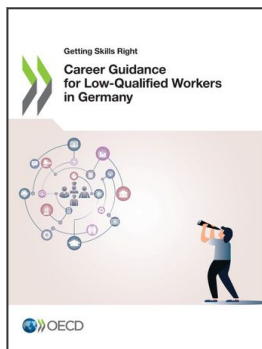
Notes

¹ • **“Dispositional barriers** refer to adults’ attitudes, personality traits, perceptions and expectations around learning. Examples for this type of barrier include lack of interest, concerns about one’s ability to succeed, having no hope of improving one’s labour market chances, and the perception that one has learnt enough already or is too old to acquire new skills. Dispositional barriers can be grounded in innate personality traits as well as prior experiences with education and training that shaped the individual’s view.

• **Situational barriers** pertain mostly to the personal and family situation of the individual. This includes their financial situation, existence of care responsibilities, lack of family or employer support and lack of time due to work commitments, among other factors.

• **Institutional barriers** relate to the availability, or lack thereof, of appropriate learning opportunities. This includes a lack of flexibility in the available provision concerning time and location, as well as a lack of relevant learning opportunities tailored to the specific learning needs (e.g. specific andragogic approaches) (OECD, 2021^[4]).

² www.volkshochschule.de/kurswelt/arbeit_und_beruf/vhs-Bildungsberatung.php.



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