



POLICY BRIEF

GERMANY: Initial support is the key to successful workplace integration of migrant health workers

KEY POINTS

- Before taking up a job, employment in the German healthcare sector presupposes a high level of investment of migrant health professionals in language acquisition and recognition of qualifications.
- At the workplace, migrant-specific integration challenges occur mostly at the beginning of employment. Catching up with new working processes and culture and with high job-related language requirements is demanding, but inevitable for successful utilization of migrants' skills. Adaptation to the new workplace can be facilitated by supportive measures, particularly related to job-specific language training and mentoring in the first months of employment.
- Migrant health professionals often experience that colleagues and patients doubt the value of their qualifications which diminishes migrants' satisfaction with the workplace and affects negatively the working atmosphere. Mistrust against foreign-trained workers can be reduced by intercultural training and awareness campaigns, drawing attention to the value of their qualification.
- General factors such as working conditions and career prospects matter for migrants' stay at the specific workplace in the long run, as it can be assumed also for non-migrant workers. Retention of migrant workers can thus be achieved by creating attractive workplaces in the sector with better working conditions and more career opportunities.

WHY IS WORKPLACE INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS IMPORTANT?

Migrant health workers meet urgent needs in the present healthcare labour market and are an important part of the future workforce. Their successful integration contributes to the intercultural opening of the sector that benefits an increasingly diverse society.

For the healthcare facilities, successful workplace integration means full valorization of migrants' skills, greater acceptance in the team and a better working atmosphere – factors associated with better patient care.

WORK-INT is a European research and advocacy project aimed at better understanding, increasing awareness and improving policies and practices on workplace integration of migrants working in the health sector based on primary research carried out in Dublin (Ireland), Hamburg (Germany), Oxford (UK), Madrid (Spain), and Turin (Italy).

GERMAN CONTEXT

The German healthcare sector is severely affected by labour shortages, particularly of doctors and nurses. The need for health workers will further increase and migration and integration of foreign-trained health professionals is considered as one of the main ways to address this need in the short and long run.

Active recruitment of doctors and nurses takes place intensively in regions already experiencing shortages, whereas big cities as Hamburg that are still benefiting from an oversupply of doctors and showing only first signs of shortages in nursing are at the very beginning of active recruitment abroad.

150,000 foreign nationals worked in the German

healthcare sector in 2012, making up 5.4 per cent of the total working population of the sector. Both absolute numbers and shares of foreign nationals are on the rise, showing their increasing relevance for the sector.

Good employment opportunities make the German healthcare sector internationally attractive. However, in international comparison, it is characterized by high language requirements and distinct occupational profiles as e.g. vocational training for nurses – that bear a challenge to migrants' workplace integration in terms of access to and satisfaction with the job.

SPOTLIGHT ON EVIDENCE

Field work in two hospitals in the city state of Hamburg shows experiences with integration in specific workplaces. 48 interviews give insight into the perspectives of migrant health professionals, hospital managers, works councils and external stakeholders.

In the two hospitals, active integration of migrant health workers in the workplace is at the very beginning. **Active recruitment abroad** has been initiated only recently in the framework of pilot projects. **Special support measures** targeting migrant workers as language training and training for nurses in recognition procedure have been newly launched.

Migrant health workers are recruited primarily because of their professional qualifications. Utilization of **culture-related human capital** – as foreign language skills or intercultural competences – is presented as a positive side-effect of their employment.

The **presence of migrant workers** in the hospitals is to be attributed to a large extent to long-term residents and less to recent labour migrants. Recent migrants hold often temporary positions as guest doctors and researchers. Many migrants obtained their healthcare qualifications in Germany and their workplace integration appears to be easier than that of **foreign-trained workers** that are confronted more severely with challenges related to language acquisition, recognition of qualifications and adaptation in the workplace.

The **country of origin** matters mostly for the general labour market access and recognition of professional qualifications. Compared to non-EU migrants, EU migrants benefit from better migration opportunities due to free movement within the EU and easier access to practice the profession due to an automatic recognition of qualifications.

Migration options for non-EU doctors and nurses have been considerably extended in the last few years by the Blue Card, the Whitelist with shortage occupations and pilot programmes for international recruitment in the field of nursing.

Opportunities for **recognition of professional qualifications** have been improved by the Recognition law of 2012, but still, chances of non-EU migrants are affected by a lack of standardization and transparency in the procedures, partly due to the federal structures in Germany.

In the workplace, essential **adaptation** to language requirements, working processes and culture is undergone in the early stage of employment but is not systemically supported. Especially job-related **language skills** turned out to be demanding, but also indispensable to utilising migrants' professional skills in the workplace. **Support** in the workplace is often informally provided and more structured mentoring is favoured.

In general, migrant health workers encounter the same **working conditions** as their non-migrant colleagues. They seem not to be exposed to systematic **discrimination** in the workplace, although mistrust against their foreign qualifications is present and affects satisfaction with the workplace. The **intention to stay** in the

job is mostly linked to the general working conditions and career prospects in the workplace, as it can be assumed also for non-migrant workers.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Workplace integration of migrant health workers has been substantially improved in recent years by making the access to the German healthcare sector easier. Better migration opportunities and opportunities for recognition of professional qualifications abolished major obstacles to entering the sector. Challenges related to job finding, adaptation to and satisfaction with the workplace still remain and can be addressed by measures at EU, national, local and firm level. Three fields of action, which were identified in the field work for two Hamburg hospitals, can be extended to facilities in the German healthcare sector in general:

Field of action 1: JOB-RELATED LANGUAGE SKILLS

As a key prerequisite for workplace integration, language skills can be improved by more learning opportunities. An online multilingual language-learning platform for health professionals, funded for example by the EU, will enable language training even before migration and continuously on the job. At national level, more job-related language courses sponsored by state institutions can be organised. In the workplace, language facilitators who accompany new workers during part of their work can support individual learning strategies in the first months of employment. Language facilitators can be, for instance, workers on parental leave or in early retirement who are offered part-time work as a retention measure in the workplace.

Field of action 2: ADAPTATION TO A NEW WORKPLACE

Adaptation to working processes and culture in a new workplace is needed for full utilization of migrant workers' skills. The adaptation process can be facilitated, particularly by assigning a mentor who provides guidance to the new employee in the first months of employment. Mentoring systems show satisfactory results when both newcomers and mentoring colleagues are given extra time and resources for this task.

Field of action 3: WORKING IN MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

Satisfaction with the workplace in the long run is strongly related to good atmosphere in the team. Working atmosphere free of prejudice against migrant workers and their qualifications can be supported, for instance, by intercultural training for employees and particularly for doctors and nurses in leading positions. Furthermore, awareness campaigns in healthcare facilities stressing the value of foreign professional qualifications can address prejudice against migrant workers and increase their acceptance on the part of colleagues and patients.

