



DOCUMENTATION

Skilled Immigration and Migrant Entrepreneurship for Local Economic Development

CONNECTIVE CITIES INSIGHT SESSION: THE ROLE OF MUNICIPALITIES AT THE INTERSECTION OF MIGRATION AND MUNICIPAL ECONOMIC PROMOTION



56 Experts



from 27 Municipalities



in 10 Countries

Commissioned by



Partners of Connective Cities



with its



Introduction

Migration policy may be a national issue – but whether economic participation succeeds depends largely on what happens at the local level. Convinced by this, around 50 local government professionals came together for a virtual Insight Session organised by Connective Cities. The focus was on the question of what role municipalities can play in the immigration of skilled workers and in supporting migrant entrepreneurship.

„In the end, it’s not just about work – it’s also about feeling at home in Germany.“

Annika Abellán, District Administration Pinneberg

BACKGROUND

Regions and countries with shortages of skilled workers - mostly high-income economies - stand in contrast to those with a surplus of (skilled) labor, which are largely lower-income economies. In Germany, a shortage of 768,000 skilled workers is expected by 2028. Skilled immigration offers great potential for all parties – provided the conditions are fair. Migrant entrepreneurship is also of interest, since it in turn creates jobs. In two-thirds of OECD countries, migrants are more willing to launch a start-up than the non-migrant population.

Brief Overview of the Event

Connective Cities invited 56 experts from 27 municipalities in 10 countries to participate in an online discussion about effective municipal strategies for promoting the successful and fair immigration of skilled workers and migrant entrepreneurship. This exchange of expertise and experiences aims to empower municipal experts to utilise local policy leeway to advance the local economy through skilled worker immigration and migrant entrepreneurship. In addition to a study by the IAB, practical examples from the German Pinneberg District, Mersin (Türkiye) and Oberhausen (Germany), Munich (Germany) and Gharb Irbid (Jordan) formed the basis of in-depth working group discussions.

My main area of expertise is:

039



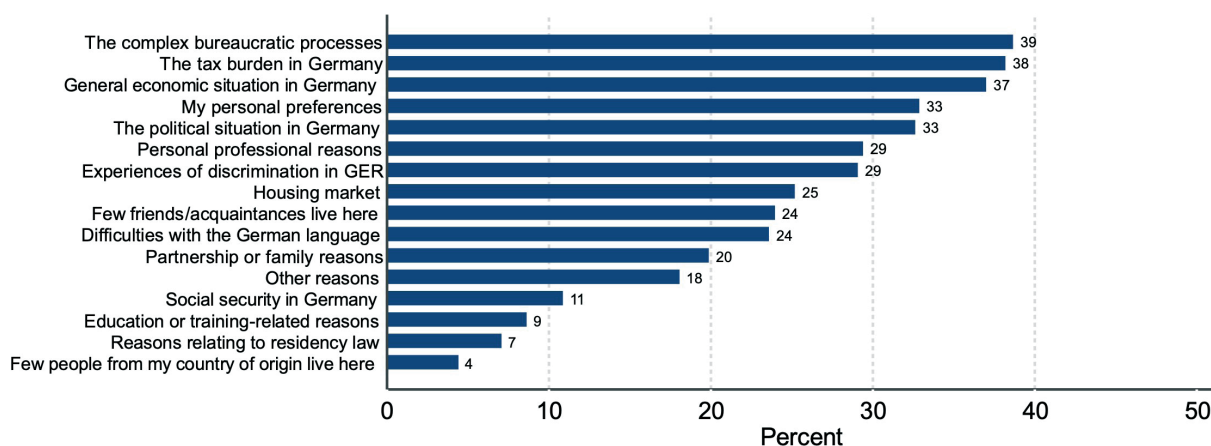
Unlocking linkages between international cooperation and economic development in local administrations
© Poll during the online event

A STUDY OF RETURN AND ONWARD MIGRATION INTENTION

An online study conducted in 2024 by the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) on the return and onward migration intentions of immigrants in Germany is encouraging. According to the findings presented during the Insight Session, around three-quarters (73.3 per cent) of the migrants surveyed had not considered leaving the country in the past 12 months and had no such plans for the next 12 months either. When skilled workers plan to leave the country, they primarily explain this by the complex bureaucratic processes, the tax burden and the general economic situation in Germany. 47 per cent would then return to their country of origin, while 53 per cent would move on to another country, primarily Switzerland, other European countries and the USA.
More: [Germany as a Stopover?](#) IAB [pdf]

POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

Primary responsibility for migration policy decisions - including those concerning skilled worker immigration - lies at the national level. The international political framework for skilled immigration is primarily provided by the United Nations' 2018 'Global Compact for Migration'. The member states express their commitment to improving conditions for migrants – albeit not in a legally binding way. In Germany, the Skilled Immigration Act, passed in 2019, applies; it regulates and aims to facilitate the immigration of skilled workers from non-EU countries. A brand-new initiative in this area is the initiative 'WE-Fair – Business and Development Policy for Fair Recruitment of Skilled Workers', launched in March 2026 by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Within this framework, private sector and development policy stakeholders are working together to promote fair recruitment and skilled migration.



“Germany as a stop-over?” Dr Lukas Olbrich from the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) presented the findings of a study on return and onward migration intentions of immigrants in Germany. © Institute for Employment Research (IAB)

Practical Examples

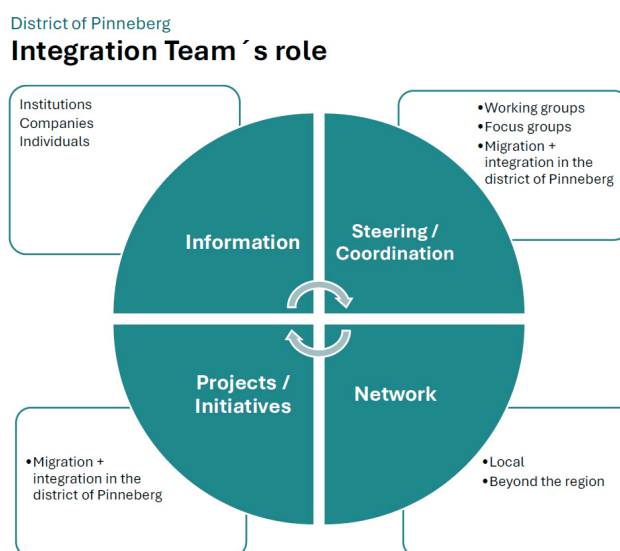
At the Insight Session, four municipalities presented how they coordinate skilled immigration and migrant entrepreneurship.

Annika Abellán from the **German District of Pinneberg** began by highlighting the wide range of stakeholders involved in the skilled immigration process, thereby illustrating its complexity. The focus is always on the migrant skilled worker and the employing company. Furthermore, while the individual is still in their country of origin, the German Embassy, the Federal Employment Agency and the local immigration authorities are involved. As preparations continue (and later in Germany as well), providers of language courses and intercultural training, as well as institutions responsible for the recognition of professional qualifications, come into the picture. Finally, when it comes to building a life in Germany, players such as housing providers, registration authorities, health insurance providers, tax authorities and – depending on the individual case – services for family members such as daycare centres and schools are relevant.

Each of these players involves a great deal of information, which is why the Pinneberg District Administration offers guidance as a key service. “Our goal is simple, yet ambitious: to share information where it is needed and to bring the right people together”, Annika Abellán explained. A key tool is the app ‘Integreat’, which is available to any interested municipalities. Through this app, the five-person team – drawn from various departments of the district administration—provides bundled access to all relevant information for skilled workers. In addition, information is shared via a dedicated newsletter, targeted mailings, the district’s online portal, social media and the local press. Furthermore, the district engages in regional

networking and beyond and brings stakeholders together to discuss key issues, such as women in the labour market. To encourage the immigration of skilled workers, targeted projects are also being implemented: The “Skilled Care Workers Alliance” focuses on skilled workers in the healthcare sector. Planning to take part in the nationwide project “THAMM Plus,” the district intends to promote the immigration of skilled workers from North Africa for positions in local kindergartens in the future.

More: [Good practice presentation, District of Pinneberg](#) [pdf]



Responsibilities of the five-member team at the Pinneberg District Administration. © Pinneberg District

The City of Munich (Germany) is tackling the challenge in a similar way: It also addresses all phases of skilled immigration and consolidates its activities within the “Munich Employment and Qualification Programme (MBQ)”. “What we intend to offer is a customer’s journey: From pre-integration abroad to coming to Munich to hopefully a long-term perspective”, said Dr. Magdalena Ziolk-Skrzypczak from the Department of Labor and Economic Development (RAW). The “Make it in Munich” website provides skilled workers living abroad with information and advice, as well as – in cooperation with partners such as the Goethe-Institut – free language courses and IT training. A new feature is the job portal “Munich Job Board”, which boosts the visibility of Munich-based companies on the international labour market.

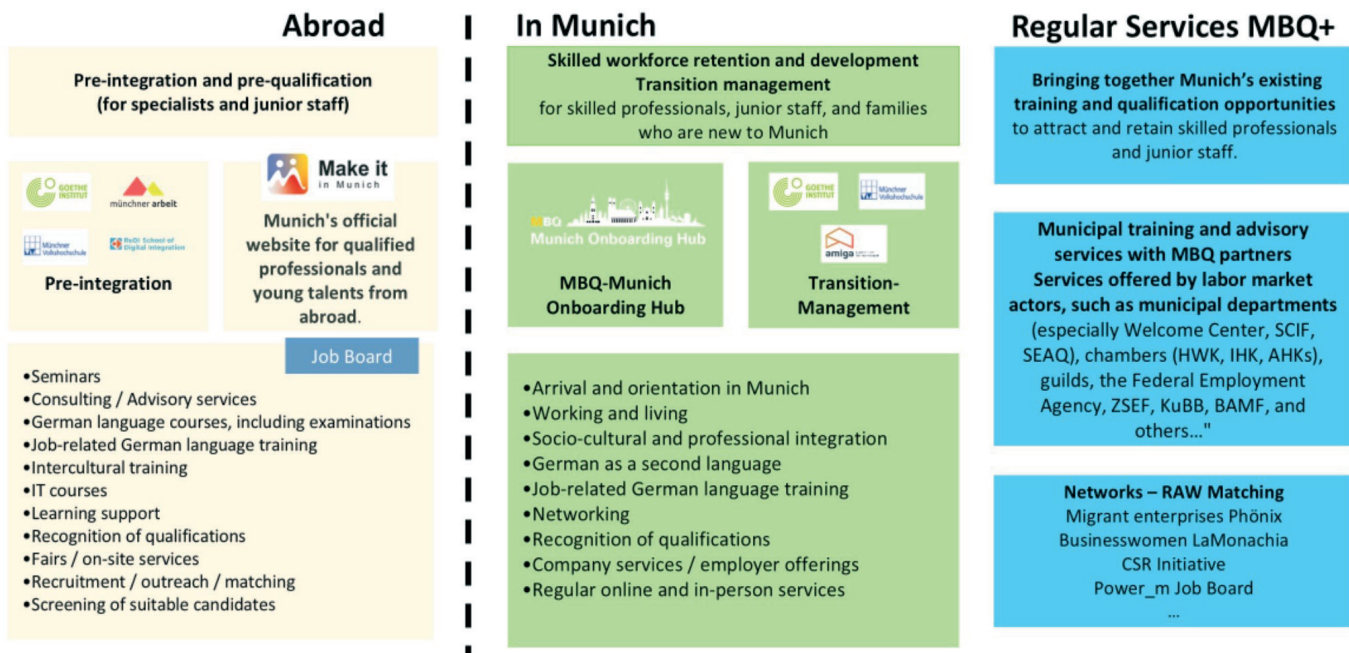
Skilled workers arriving in Munich will find a central one-stop service for all work- and life-related queries at the “MBQ Munich Onboarding Hub”. It offers an After-Work Weekly Open House, a support programme for job search and the application process, and specific support for migrant communities through the Munich Global Village. In order to provide long-term support for migration entrepreneurship, the city has also been awarding the ‘PhoenixPrize’ since 2024. It recognises successful business development, the creation and safeguarding of jobs and apprenticeship, and diversity within migrant-owned companies.

More: [Presentation – Welcome to the City of Munich](#) [pdf]

MBQ Skilled Labor Strategy

Municipal Skilled Labor Strategy Munich

From pre-integration abroad to arrival in the domestic labor market and long-term workforce retention



MUNICIPAL PARTNERSHIPS

Local economic development in the context of migration is also a topic in municipal partnerships.

As an example, the partner cities of **Mersin** in southern Türkiye and **Oberhausen** in the Ruhr region of Germany presented a jointly conducted study from 2024. In both municipalities, and in their respective countries, migrant-led businesses contribute significantly to the gross domestic product. According to Elif Tanburoğlu from Mersin, this trend has been further exacerbated in Türkiye in particular by the recent influx of refugees. The aim of the study was to identify the specific challenges and needs faced by migrant entrepreneurs – based on the observation that these struggle particularly during the start-up phase and have poorer access to business support services and networks.

Key findings of the study are: The presence of other migrant communities and the attitude of the host society have a strong influence on the development of migrant-run businesses. Over the past decades, migrant enterprises in Oberhausen have gained stability. In Mersin, comparatively liberal conditions are accelerating the establishment of businesses.

More: [Migrant entrepreneurship and municipal measures to support migrant start-ups and their impact on local economic structures](#) [pdf]

A second example is the project partnership between Gharb Irbid in Jordan and Munich. Together, they are working to build up local capacity to support women, young people and refugees in the labour market. To this end, a municipal company specialising in the production of waste containers was established in Gharb Irbid. A local business start-up centre for women offers training courses and marketing opportunities for craft products and also involves migrant women. A particularly favourable factor is that in Munich both the Unit for European and International Affairs and the Unit for Local Employment Policy and Qualification are located within the Department of Labor and Economic Development (RAW), allowing cross-border thinking and economic development to easily intertwine.



Start of the local business start-up centre. © City of Munich

Key Take-aways

The final working groups distilled some of the key insights of the event:

Municipalities that are just beginning to address the issue of skilled immigration should start small: “Think big – start small!”, was the advice of the Insight Session. Networking is key; as well as streamlined information services through one-stop solutions. Programmes promoting social integration are crucial. “People will only stay if they can fully establish their lives here,” said a participant. A close collaboration between international offices and the economic departments is particularly effective. Moreover, international comparison serves as a stimulus: in Mersin, for example, migrants need only around three years to establish a business, whereas in Oberhausen it takes seven.

Companies should be approached proactively about recruiting foreign skilled workers and supported throughout the process to alleviate concerns about bureaucratic hurdles.

Migrant entrepreneurship needs support. The biggest challenges lie in bureaucracy, immigration law issues, and achieving long-term sustainability. Migrant communities are an important resource and should be included in the services offered by local administrations. It is important to note that integration into the labour market is a key factor in broader social integration – and vice versa.

The practical approaches and lively discussion during the Insight Session clearly demonstrated that local governments can play a crucial role in helping the economic potential of migration to be realized at the local level.

Further Information

WE-FAIR – BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY FOR FAIR RECRUITMENT OF SKILLED WORKERS ALLIANCE

This joint initiative by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the German business community aims to ensure that the recruitment of skilled workers is transparent, fair and sustainable. It aims to achieve a 'triple win': for the skilled workers themselves, for their countries of origin, and for Germany as a business location.

<https://www.bmz.de/de/fachkraefteallianz-we-fair-288174>
<https://www.deutschland.de/en/news/radovan-launches-skilled-worker-recruitment-alliance>

SURVEY ON THE RETURN AND ONWARD MIGRATION INTENTIONS OF IMMIGRANTS IN GERMANY, INSTITUTE FOR EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH (IAB):

The "International Mobility Panel of Migrants in Germany (IMPa)" is a new longitudinal online survey designed to gather reliable data from 2024 onwards on the causes, patterns and effects of migrant mobility. In the first survey, approximately 50,000 migrants were interviewed..

<https://iab.de/publikationen/publikation/?id=14977550>

APP INTEGREAT

...is a digital solution designed to help local authorities and federal states provide migrants and refugees with easily accessible information in multiple languages. It is available to users as a mobile app. Local authorities can easily upload information without the need for an IT department.

<https://integreat.app/landing/en>

GLOBAL COMPACT FOR MIGRATION (GCM)

With the GCM, the international community agreed in 2018 for the first time on a comprehensive framework for improved international cooperation in the field of cross-border migration.

<https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration>

GERMAN SKILLED IMMIGRATION ACT / DEUTSCHES FACHKRÄFTEINWANDERUNGSGESETZ

The new Skilled Workers Immigration Act – which came into force on 1 March 2020 – establishes a framework for the targeted and increased immigration of qualified workers, apprentices or university graduates from third countries (non-EU countries). It defines the term 'skilled worker', aims to reduce formal and bureaucratic hurdles, and facilitates the mobility of skilled workers overall.

<https://www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/visa-residence/skilled-immigration-act>

PROJECT THAMM PLUS

The project promotes the migration of skilled workers from Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. It is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Federal Employment Agency in close cooperation with the relevant government institutions in the countries of origin.

<https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/vor-ort/zav/projects-programs/crafts-technology-construction/thamm-plus/technik>

CITY OF MUNICH

The City of Munich has a comprehensive skilled labour strategy offering a range of services covering all stages of skilled immigration.

- Munich Employment and Qualification Program (MBQ)
<https://stadt.muenchen.de/en-old/info/munich-employment-qualification.html>
- Make it in Munich: <https://www.make-it-in-munich.com>
- MBQ Munich Onboarding Hub
https://stadt.muenchen.de/infos/munich_onboarding_hub.html
- PhoenixPrize
<https://stadt.muenchen.de/infos/phoenix-preis-muenchen.html> (German only)
- Partnership project Gharb Irbid:
<https://skew.engagement-global.de/munich-gharb-irbid-container-production-and-women-start-ups.html>

IMPRINT

Published by

Connective Cities
International Community of Practice for
Sustainable Municipal Development
info@connective-cities.net
www.connective-cities.net/en/

Connective Cities is a joint venture between

The Association of German Cities
Gereonstraße 18 –32 | 50670 Cologne | Germany

The German County Association
Lennéstraße 11 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

The German Association of Towns and Municipalities
Marienstrasse 6 | 12207 Berlin | Germany

The Association of Municipal Enterprises
Invalidenstraße 91 | 10115 Berlin | Germany

Engagement Global gGmbH and its
Service Agency Communities in One World
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 40 | 53113 Bonn | Germany

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32+36 | 53113 Bonn | Germany

Author

Katrin Riß

Text layout and image editing

Burkhard Vielhaber
Vielhaber und Geilen Partnerschaft

Editorial revision

Nikola Krause

Picture credits

Cover photo: HappyEva, Shutterstock

Basic design and layout

blickpunkt x – Büro für Kommunikation und Design

April 2026

Commissioned by

German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
(BMZ)

BMZ Offices

Bonn Office
Dahlmannstraße 4 53113 Bonn | Germany

T: +49 (0) 228 99 535-0

F: +49 (0) 228 99 535-3500

Berlin Office

Stresemannstraße 94
10963 Berlin | Germany

T: +49 (0) 30 18 535-0

F: +49 (0) 30 18 535-2501

poststelle@bmz.bund.de

www.bmz.de

Connective Cities – International Community of Practice for Sustainable Municipal Development

Since 2013, Connective Cities has been promoting the worldwide exchange of municipal expertise. Within the framework of structured learning processes, the platform disseminates proven-practice solutions for sustainable municipal development and supports peer learning between German and international municipal experts, as well as the joint development of project ideas.

Connective Cities is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). It is a cooperation between the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Engagement Global with its Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW) and the Association of German Cities (DST), the German Association of Towns and Municipalities (DStGB), the German County Association (DLT) and the Association of Municipal Enterprises (VKU).

Further information can be found here:
www.connective-cities.net/en

Disclaimer:

This is a Connective Cities publication. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the opinions and policies of the Connective Cities cooperation partners.