

## Key points in brief

The German healthcare system is experiencing an acute shortage of skilled workers – in particular in nursing. An ageing population means the situation is increasingly exacerbated in care facilities. Recruiting skilled workers from abroad is an important approach to addressing this shortage.

Employing a person qualified as a general nurse from abroad requires recognition of their professional qualification. There has so far been very little recognition within the occupation field of elderly care, in many states, the profession of “geriatric nurse” does not exist as a standalone profession. For this reason, up until the introduction of general nursing training in 2020, recognition procedures in the healthcare sector were generally concerned with the reference occupation “nurse” in combination with adaptation measures, which predominantly had to be completed in hospitals instead of the reference occupation as “geriatric nurse”.

However, new opportunities have opened up for care facilities since the introduction of the general nursing training in 2020. Within the framework of recognition for “general nurses”, care facilities are now, in principle, able to offer adaptation measures themselves and in this way can be more actively involved in recognition procedures. This provides opportunities for retaining international skilled nurses at an early stage in the care facility.

This is because it is particularly difficult for care facilities to recruit already recognized general nursing professionals, as they are in direct competition with hospitals, which have often been specifically recruiting international skilled nurses for years and actively supporting them in the recognition process.

While a number of care facilities are already successfully making use of these opportunities, others are more hesitant – often due to a lack of information and resources in terms of staffing and finance or due to concerns that recognised skilled general nurses will later move on to jobs at hospitals.

However, those care facilities already involved in adaptation measures within the framework of the recognition procedure are reporting clear advantages. Professional and social support at an early stage reduces labour turnover and increases loyalty to the facility. Long-term employed assistants with a qualification from abroad are also benefiting as they are now able to complete an adaptation measure for recognition of their qualification in a familiar environment.

In order to make effective use of this opportunity, care facilities need to know precisely which opportunities are available to them, which adaptation measures they can offer and organise, and how to specifically implement this.

In principle, applicants whose professional qualification cannot be recognised as fully equivalent due to substantial differences have a choice between a knowledge test and an adaptation period with a final interview. The study shows that, so far, care facilities overall have had very little experience of providing adaptation measures – and if they have any at all, this mainly relates to the knowledge test with a preparational course. For international skilled nurses, however, an adaptation period is also a good opportunity to acquire skilled worker status in Germany. It generally has a longer duration compared to a preparation course for the knowledge test. This means it offers more time for the professional learning process and ongoing language acquisition, facilitates integration into day-to-day working life, and entails fewer obstacles in terms of passing compared to the knowledge test. Employers also have the opportunity to apply to the competent authority for the adaptation period to be shortened if the necessary competencies can be demonstrated over the course of the adaptation measure.

Both adaptation measure options – either the knowledge test or the adaptation period – can be successful if they are structured effectively to ensure quality and are closely linked with integration management. It is key that professional support, social integration and ideally also language development is integrated into the adaptation period or preparation for it and occur in parallel and – as far as possible – are tailored to the individual requirements of international general nurses.

The following success factors have emerged in relation to ensuring a sustained supply of international skilled nurses:

Adaptation and integration measures are equally important and are only effective in combination with one another.

Implementing adaptation measures without the relevant integration management is not sustainable as there is a risk that skilled workers will leave and take jobs at hospitals. However, implementing adaptation measures is essential for care facilities in order to attract and retain nursing professionals who are qualified abroad and recognized in Germany for the respective institution.

Specific integration management: This includes a dedicated contact person, support in the country of origin itself and practical help when starting in Germany – for example when searching for accommodation and with general day-to-day organisation.

Staffing continuity: Qualified practice trainers support international skilled nurses in their day-to-day work and during the adaptation measure, and can make a decisive contribution to the successful completion of the adaptation measure. It is important they are also prepared specifically for instructing general nurses with international qualifications.

Cooperation: Close regional cooperation with nursing colleges, training providers and other institutions, e.g. municipal and federal state bodies, enables the pooling of resources and allows the implementation of adaptation measures to be organised efficiently.

Financial backing: Funding instruments are also necessary so that smaller care facilities can also cover the costs and therefore provide the relevant resources. Existing financing and funding opportunities should be made more widely known.

Increase participation: In order to recruit more care facilities and nursing colleges to support adaptation measures, the reasons for not participating should first be understood at a general level in order to develop tailored support offers based on these findings. There should be a specific focus on the former geriatric nursing colleges for the implementation of adaptation measures. The recommendations from the AZAV Advisory Board for simplifying the certification procedures for education provider approval and measure approval in accordance with SGB III and the German Regulation on Accreditation and Approval for Employment Promotion (AZAV) should be made more widely known. Possible examples include targeted information events.

Overall, the study shows that care facilities can make an important contribution to securing skilled workers with the new legal options – provided that adaptation measures are understood as part of a comprehensive integration concept and embedded in binding structures.