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EDITORIAL

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The same entitlement for everyone!

Dear readers,

Germany's Recognition Act has now taken force: the competent bodies for vocational training have put the necessary structures in place and people with qualifications gained in other countries can find information online about requirements, contact addresses and recognition procedures. It is a subject of major interest, not least on the evidence of the hits counted on relevant Internet sites. For instance, the new online portal "Recognition in Germany" hosted by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training logged some 100,000 visitors within the first few weeks of its launch, and almost a million page views. A gratifying number of them came from outside Germany. Nevertheless, it will still take some time before this interest translates into specific applications and recognition procedures.

Initial experience in practice

So far the number of applications submitted has been manageable, and that is no bad thing. This approach allows the bodies responsible for recognition of foreign qualifications to gather experience and, if need be, develop their instruments further.

After the first few months, it has already become clear that prospective applicants need skilled advice. That is to say, the recognition of qualifications is not automatic: each case has to be reviewed individually. In some instances, assembling the documentary evidence can be very time-consuming; references must be translated and additional information researched and evaluated. It can only be done in dialogue with recognition applicants, by calling upon experts and accessing relevant databases. Specialist expertise is called for, not only on German vocational qualifications but above all on qualifications from abroad. Comparative international VET research must provide firm foundations for this aspect.

As to the success of the new Act and its benefits for individual applicants seeking recognition and for society, it will be some years before conclusions can be drawn. So it is right that the legislator not only established a flanking statistical survey but also specified the terms for an evaluation of the Act's implementation.

Further perspectives and challenges

The outcome of a recognition procedure may be that only parts of the qualification acquired abroad are equivalent to the German qualification. For employers this may already be a sufficient basis for assessing the employability of applicants. Meanwhile, from the viewpoint of education and labour market policy, the aim must be to offer recognition applicants various routes for achieving a fully equivalent qualification. Advanced vocational training options are needed which complement the existing qualification and are tailored to the individual situation. They need not be seminar-style courses alone; e-learning programmes or on-the-job learning can equally be considered. In this way, recognition also becomes a challenge for human resources development in companies.

A glance beyond Germany's borders at traditional immigration countries and at neighbouring European countries may yield some pointers on how recognition procedures can be practised. Denmark's example shows how recognition can be integrated pragmatically into existing structures. BIBB has set itself the goal of identifying and analysing such models. This is a field in which some further research is needed, and a theme to which BIBB will devote increasing attention.

In establishing the legal entitlement to have competencies examined, validated and – ideally – recognised if they have been acquired abroad, Germany has made important progress in the areas of transparency and permeability. In the long run, however, there is no good reason why this legal entitlement should only apply to people with qualifications from other countries. On the principle of equal treatment, this right must extend to all people who have acquired vocational competencies in informal or non-formal settings. It would be a significant step towards reducing the persistently high figure for people without a formal vocational qualification by awarding recognition for the competencies they have acquired in the course of their working lives.