



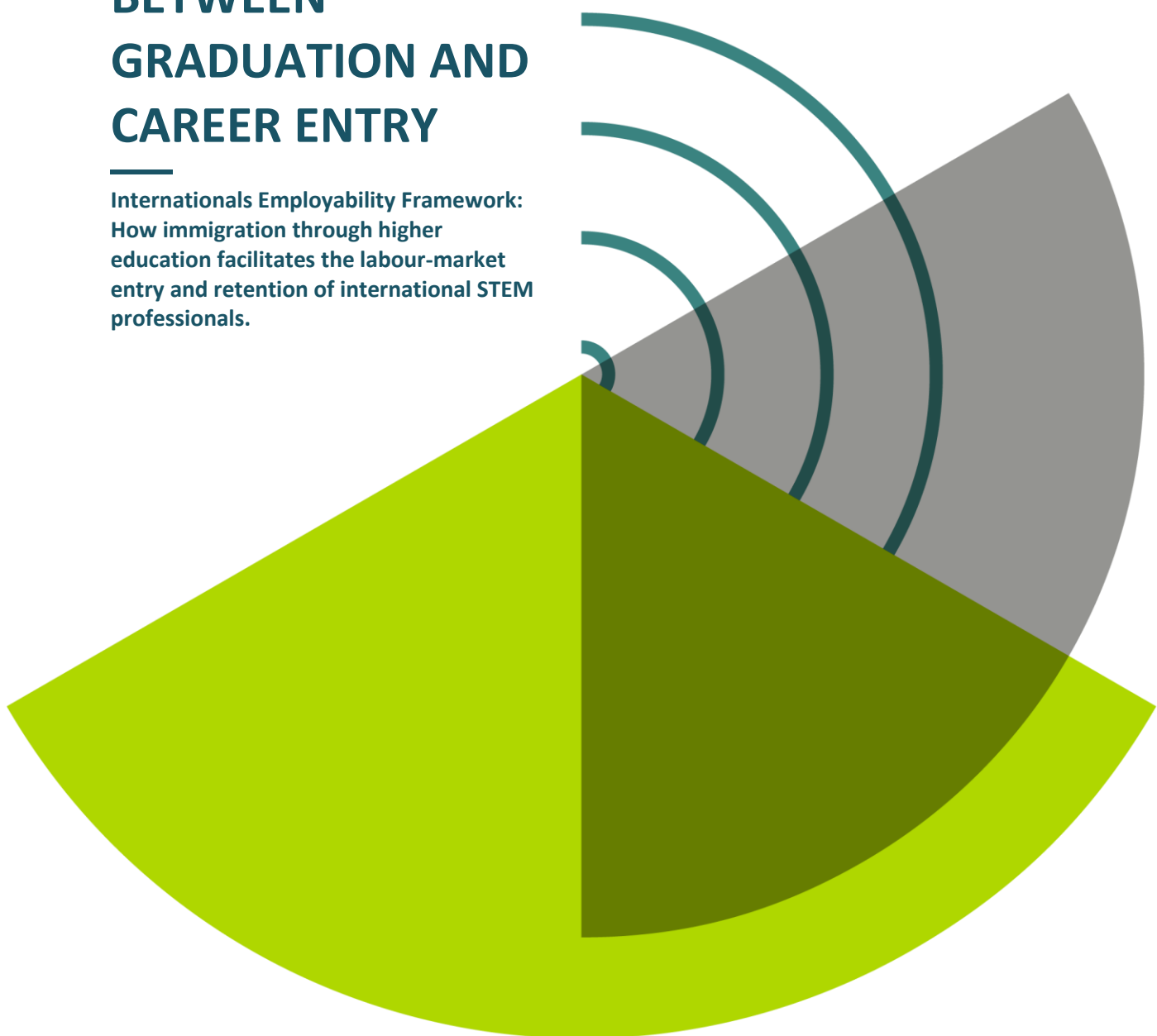
STIFTERVERBAND

 **DEGIS**
Deutsche Gesellschaft
internationaler Studierender

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BETWEEN GRADUATION AND CAREER ENTRY

**Internationals Employability Framework:
How immigration through higher
education facilitates the labour-market
entry and retention of international STEM
professionals.**



BETWEEN GRADUATION AND CAREER ENTRY

Internationals Employability Framework: How immigration through higher education facilitates labour-market entry and retention of international STEM professionals.

- **Regardless of economic crises, Germany must expand its skilled workforce and promote employment in STEM fields to safeguard its long-term innovative capacity.**
 - **Higher-education-based immigration is particularly well suited to this purpose: compared with those who come directly to seek work, international students who have studied in Germany are three times more likely to find employment, integrate more easily, and are more likely to intend to stay.**
 - **German-language proficiency, self-efficacy, academic performance, and practical experience gained during studies are key factors in a successful transition into employment.**
 - **International students who find employment, feel integrated at work, and are satisfied with their job are happier in Germany and are more likely to stay long-term.**
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1. Why immigration remains central despite a weaker economy

The current economic downturn and the structural challenges Germany's economy is facing stress the urgent need to secure the country's long-term competitiveness and economic strength. A key factor: An innovation-oriented, globally connected and well-qualified workforce. With its industrial focus on technology and STEM (mathematics, computer science, the natural sciences and engineering), Germany stands at a crossroads. The upcoming demographic shift in its workforce will put further pressure on the economy, as particularly large birth cohorts are set to leave the labour market in the coming years. Nearly a quarter of Germany's STEM workforce – around 1.85 million people – is currently over the age of 55 and expected to leave the labour market within the next ten years (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2025, own calculations). At the same time, domestic talent alone is unlikely to meet the resulting demand for STEM professionals. Between 2015 and 2024, the number of first-year STEM students decreased by 5 percent, while the number of STEM trainees remained largely unchanged, rising by just 1 percent (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, Statistisches Bundesamt, 2025, own calculations). Despite the weaker economy, Germany still faces a shortage of around 148,500 STEM professionals, especially in energy and electrical engineering, mechanical

- Immigration remains essential despite the economic slowdown: with 1.85 million STEM workers approaching retirement, labour shortages could further weaken the economy.

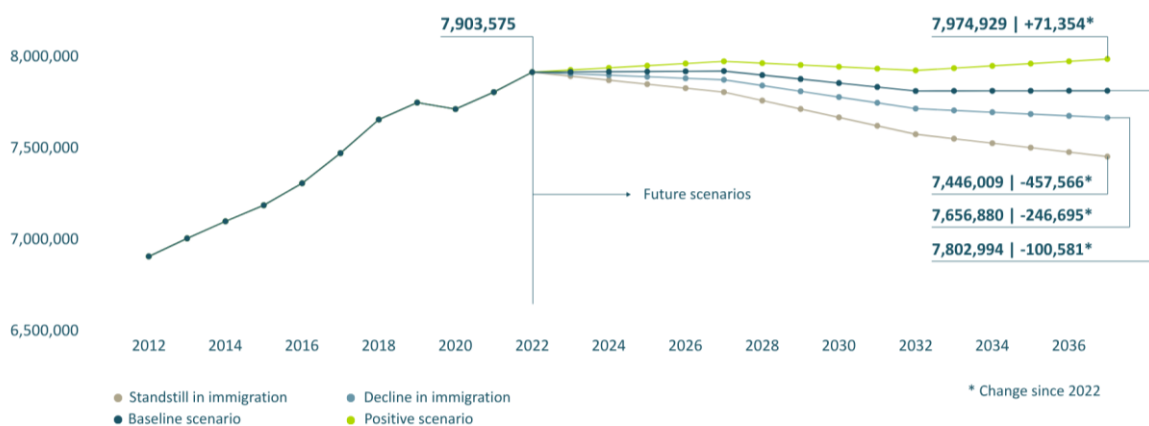
and automotive engineering, metal processing, and construction (Anger et al., 2025). This emerging structural challenge – the need for talent and skills to support the transformation of the economy as a whole, and of STEM sectors in particular – is being overlooked in the debate about the current economic downturn.

Yet the immigration of international students and skilled workers can stabilise the demographically driven structural shift in STEM employment, provided that, despite economic weakness, investment in the support of Internationals takes place now. These activities will only take effect in a few years' time, by which point the impact of the current crisis is expected to have been overcome. That immigration into STEM occupations can be an effective stabiliser of Germany's economic innovation capacity is already evident today. Foreign skilled workers compensate for around 20 percent of the demographically expected decline in GDP. Were the increase in foreign STEM professionals to be as low as the increase in domestic STEM professionals, the skills shortage would be around 3.2 times higher, at 480,600 people (Anger et al., 2025).

- Immigration helps mitigate the skilled labor shortage: with slower growth in international skilled workers, the STEM skills gap would be 3.2 times larger today.

Figure 1: Future scenarios for STEM professional numbers under varying immigration intensity

Employees subject to social-security contributions in STEM, Germany-wide. Future scenarios estimated from 2023 onwards.



Source: IW Köln, commissioned by MINTvernetzt, 2025

Note: Scenarios are based on the 15th coordinated population projection of the Statistisches Bundesamt and on the employment statistics of the Bundesagentur für Arbeit. Further information on the methodology is available [here](#).

Baseline scenario: Extrapolation of past employment figures under projected population development.

Positive scenario: "High immigration" scenario of the population projection.

Decline in immigration: "Low immigration" scenario of the population projection.

Standstill in immigration: Extrapolation of past employment figures without migration flows in the population under 40.

The fact that addressing demographic change is the key issue facing the German economy is also emphasised by the economic players themselves. In a 2024 survey by IW Köln, 900 surveyed companies stated that demographic change and skills shortages would have the greatest influence on Germany's competitiveness and rated the immigration of Internationals as the most important solution (Plünnecke / Hüther, 2025).

Just how important it is to support international students right now is also illustrated by a look at future scenarios for the development of STEM professionals, calculated by the IW Köln for MINTvernetz (Figure 1). Even in the positive scenario with high immigration, the number of STEM specialists merely remains constant, following a continuous rise over the past ten years.

Immigration through higher education can be regarded as the central element for stabilising the skilled-worker base over the long term. Among international students, Germany is the most popular non-English-speaking destination country (DAAD, 2025), and the number of international students continues to rise (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2025, own calculations). Immigration through higher education is a particular opportunity for the STEM industry, since around 55 percent of international students come to Germany for STEM degree programmes (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2025, own calculations). If international graduates succeed in entering the German labour market after their studies, they generate positive economic effects rapidly, as highly qualified professionals (Geis-Thöne et al., 2025). However, this comfortable position must not be taken for granted. The crisis in parts of the German economy is also being noticed internationally. While around two-thirds of international students overall express the intention to remain in Germany after their studies, either certainly or probably, almost one-third are uncertain. In particular, uncertainty regarding career prospects and the at times difficult transition into employment continue to pose challenges for many Internationals (DAAD, 2025).

The present discussion paper addresses this issue. Drawing on a survey of international students, jobseekers and labour-market entrants, the analysis identifies what is needed to ensure that the transition and integration of international talent into the German labour market succeeds more reliably in the future. This understanding is the foundation for better realising the potential of Internationals for the German economy and for enabling Internationals to successfully realise their plans for permanent residence in Germany.

2. Internationals Employability Framework: How Internationals successfully transition into the German labour market

In September 2025, Stifterverband, together with Fintiba GmbH, conducted an online survey of 6,418 international students, graduates and working professionals from 134 countries drawn from Fintiba GmbH's customer base (see info box). Fintiba GmbH provides a digital platform for international students and jobseekers and supports them on their journey to Germany, among other things with insurance and the setting up of blocked accounts (Sperrkonten). The platform thereby offers unique access for a survey that includes not only international students but also working professionals. The aim of the study is to understand under what conditions Internationals successfully transition into the German labour market, and to derive courses of action for supporting the

- If the immigration of international skilled workers slows, there could be 250,000 fewer STEM skilled workers in Germany in 2037 than in 2022.
- Immigration through higher education shows considerable potential for securing the STEM workforce and the innovative capacity of the German economy.

labour-market transition and the long-term successful integration of international students.

Sample

The online survey was conducted in September 2025 and sent to approximately 130,000 Internationals from Fintiba GmbH's customer base. From around 20,000 individuals who opened the survey link, a final sample of N = 6,418 participants remained after data cleaning.

Demographics

63 percent of respondents were male, with a mean age of M = 28.3 years (SD = 6.2). On average, respondents have been in Germany for 2.4 years (SD = 2.2). The majority came from Asia (60.1 percent) and Africa (28.2 percent). The most frequent countries of origin were India, Syria, Turkey, Egypt and Pakistan.

Higher Education Statistics

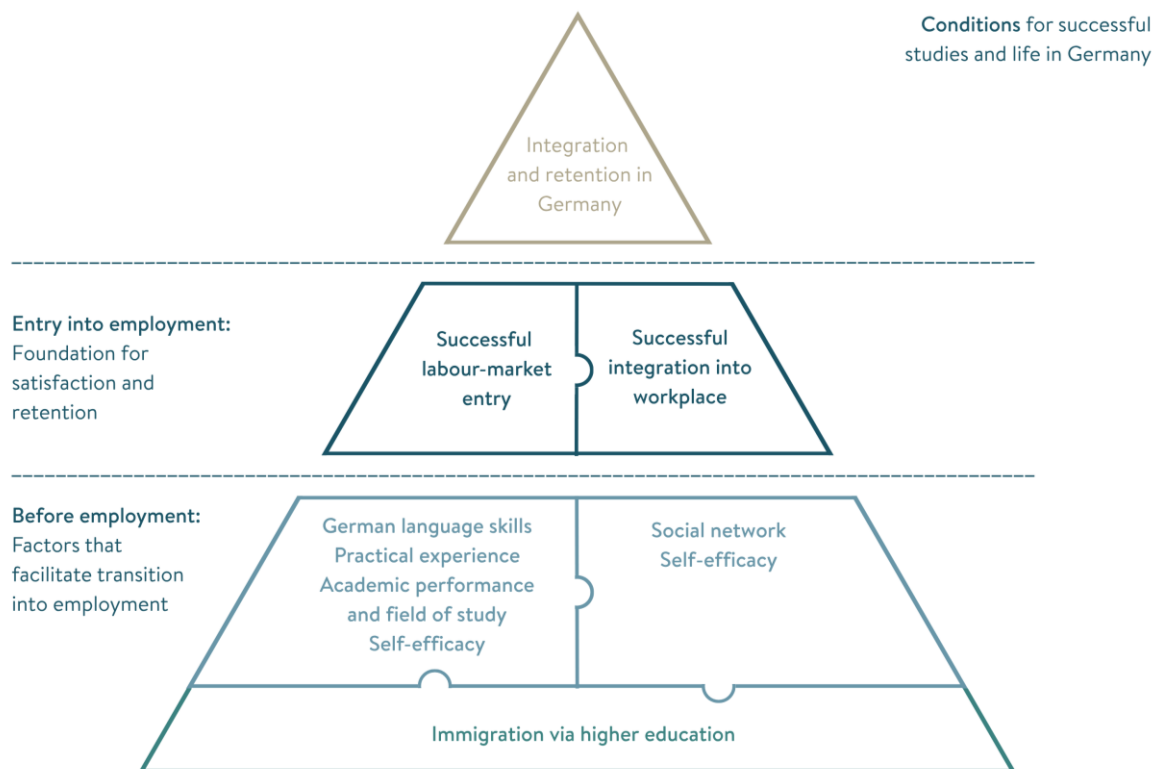
N = 2,844 respondents are studying in Germany, N = 826 are working, and a further N = 1,070 are job-seeking. N = 1,503 are still preparing for their stay in Germany; N = 175 have already left Germany. Among the students and graduates in Germany, 55.4 percent attend universities of applied sciences (Hochschulen für angewandte Wissenschaften), and 43.4 percent attend universities. The remaining 1.2 percent are split between art / administrative colleges and pedagogical / theological colleges. 70.5 percent attend a public-law higher education institution; 29 percent attend private institutions. In terms of fields of study, the largest share of 44.2 percent study engineering (incl. computer science), followed by business administration / management (16.3 percent), human medicine and health sciences (13.3 percent), and law, economics and social sciences (9.3 percent).

As a theoretical frame for the following analysis of the data, an *Internationals Employability Framework* was developed (Figure 2). It allows the identification of various influencing factors that are positively associated with successful labour-market entry and with successful job integration: German-language proficiency, points of contact with the German labour market and practical components in the degree programme, self-efficacy and academic performance, as well as field of study, are influencing factors for successful entry into the German labour market. A strong social network and self-efficacy are important factors for easier integration and higher satisfaction – that is, for settling into the job. This professional success in turn underpins satisfaction with having immigrated to Germany and the intention to remain in Germany over the longer term. As a foundation, immigration through higher education supports settling into the job, integration and retention in Germany particularly effectively – through the building of a social network, the acquisition of language skills,

and the provision of points of contact with the German economy. General conditions for staying and living in Germany were also identified as a basis for successful labour-market entry and long-term retention.

Figure 2: Internationals Employability Framework

Developed on the basis of survey data from 6,400 international students, jobseekers and employees.



Source: Stifterverband / Fintiba, 2026

Not all internationals who come to Germany are equally successful in transitioning into the German labour market and establishing themselves there. At the lowest level of the International Students' Employability Framework, factors that support a successful career start are identified. To this end, two questions are examined:

- (1) **Who manages to make a successful career start?** To answer this, we examine which factors are positively associated with finding a job, finding a job that matches one's academic qualifications, and finding a job with adequate pay.
- (2) **Who goes on to establish themselves successfully in their career?** Here, we examine which factors are positively associated with how easily one integrates into German workplace culture and how satisfied one is with one's job.

In the empirical analysis, individual differences (self-efficacy, language proficiency, academic performance, social networks) and situational differences (field of study, practical components in the degree programme, student jobs) were considered as potential influencing factors.

Method

To identify the conditions for a successful labour market entry, the mean values of the various influencing factors were compared between the group of Internationals who have found a job in Germany (N = 701) and those currently job-seeking (N = 1,070). In addition, the mean characteristics of Internationals who immigrated via the higher-education route (N = 1,093) were compared with those who came to Germany directly for a job or for the job search (N = 678).

The groups differ in length of stay in Germany: Internationals who have already found a job have been in Germany for around 4.3 years; jobseekers for 2.5 years. Those who immigrated via higher education have been in Germany for an average of 4 years — more than twice as long as those who came to Germany to take up a job or to look for one (m = 1.4 years). These differences in length of stay were controlled for in the following group comparisons, where relevant.

The analysis considered only academic professions; auxiliary jobs (e.g., waiting tables, delivery driving, cashier work) and vocational occupations such as healthcare professions were excluded.

The challenges of the job search in Germany are assessed very differently. Whereas those who have found employment, in retrospect, rate the search as “easy”, jobseekers perceive the situation, on average, as “challenging”. In addition, some Internationals search for a job in Germany for a long time. Around 41 percent of those who have not yet found a job have been searching for more than six months, and approximately 17 percent have been searching for more than a year. The job search thus represents a major and protracted challenge for many Internationals. But what factors might explain why the reality of the job search varies so greatly?

Internationals who succeed in transitioning into the labour market are characterised by, on average, better German-language proficiency, higher self-efficacy and better final grades. Furthermore, on average, they had already had more contact with the German work environment prior to the job search, through a stronger focus on practical components in their studies (for example, mandatory internships, a thesis at a company, project work), through a student job related to their field of study, or professional networking with Germans.

In this regard, internationals who immigrated through higher education have an advantage in almost every respect: they have been in Germany longer and are therefore able to build language proficiency and a social network, as well as gain initial professional experience through accessible student jobs. Moreover, German universities offer precisely the contacts

with practice that can be valuable for labour-market entry, as well as a degree that is recognised on the labour market. As a result, internationals who have migrated through a university are three times more likely to make the transition into employment than international students who have migrated directly.

The analyses and findings regarding these group differences are described in more detail below.

Direct effect of immigration through higher education

Internationals who immigrated through higher education find employment around three times as often as Internationals who came to Germany directly to look for work (Annex, Table 1). In addition, a longer length of stay in Germany is associated with a higher probability of finding employment. However, it is not possible to logically examine how these factors might interact within a single model, as there is a significant difference in the timeframes during which international students are looking for work and those who have entered the country specifically to seek employment. By the time an international with a job-seeking visa must have already found employment, international students are still at the beginning of their studies.

Immigration through higher education is therefore an advantage for labour-market entry. This is likely, on the one hand, because Internationals have already been in Germany for longer, have been able to acclimatise, build networks, develop their language proficiency and familiarise themselves with the German academic and professional systems. On the other hand, the skills and contacts acquired during studies in Germany may also be associated with better prospects for entering the workforce. Lastly, a German degree may be assigned more value, since employers know the German educational standard and can more easily compare German university degrees amongst applicants.

To better understand how universities can support Internationals' transition into the labour market, the role of immigration through higher education is also examined for each of the following influencing factors.

German-language proficiency

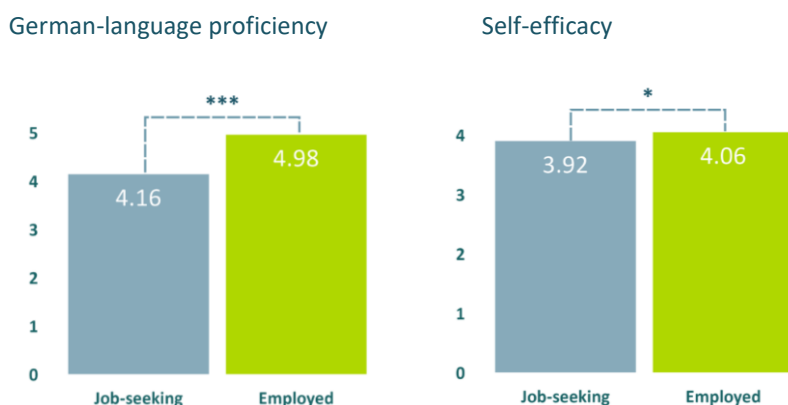
Internationals who have successfully entered the labour market speak German significantly better than those who are still job-seeking, even after accounting for differences in length of stay in Germany (Figure 3). At the same time, a longer length of stay is associated with better German, and there is a tendency for language skills to converge between those still looking for work and those already working during a longer stay in Germany (Annex, Table 2). This effect is evident even though half (52 percent) of Internationals state that they primarily use English as the language of communication in their job. Overall, this suggests that a higher level of German is important for navigating the labour market and for managing the transition into employment, even when the job subsequently taken up is English-speaking. At the same time, entry into

- Those who migrate through higher education are 3 times more likely to enter employment. This advantage is partly driven by longer durations of stay in Germany and skills acquired during their studies.

- German language skills help during the job search. Time spent studying the language during studies in Germany is advantageous, although language acquisition largely depends on individual initiative.

employment itself, or a longer length of stay, may also play a positive role for language acquisition.

Figure 3: Group differences in language proficiency and self-efficacy
Group means for job-seeking and employed Internationals



*** significance level $p < 0.001$, * significance level $p < 0.05$
Source: Stifterverband / Fintiba, 2026

German-language proficiency and immigration through higher education

On average, an International who immigrates through higher education speaks German significantly better. However, this effect disappears when the length of stay is taken into account: if one compares the language proficiency of international students who have immigrated through higher education with that of those who have come to Germany directly to look for work and have the same length of stay, it becomes clear that those who come to Germany directly to look for work speak better German (Annex, Table 3). Thus, the key factor is those who migrate through higher education can use the longer period before looking for work to develop their language skills. Whereas, those who come directly to look for work must learn German either before entering the country or under time pressure – and thus relatively more quickly than international students.

However, it cannot be assumed that international students learn German during their studies, as the majority (80 per cent) study in English and must therefore attend German language courses in addition to their degree programme. Among respondents attending a private university, only 3 per cent study in German. Their German language proficiency is significantly poorer compared to international students at state universities. Consequently, most international students do not automatically improve their German language proficiency during their studies. And only 14.5 per cent state that attending a German language course is compulsory during their studies.

The acquisition of German among Internationals therefore currently rests largely on personal motivation. The main reasons cited for learning German are better job prospects (67.1 per cent), coping better with everyday life (61.4 per cent), efforts to integrate (60 per cent) or making social

- 80 percent of internationals study in English. Only about 15 percent have mandatory German courses anchored in their curriculum.

contacts more easily (50.6 per cent). Studying in Germany, however, offers the opportunity and the means to expand one's language proficiency prior to the job search and thus to be better positioned for it. Further expanding this provision and embedding it in the curriculum can help international students make a smoother transition into the labour market.

Self-efficacy

Internationals who have already found a job also report, on average, significantly higher self-efficacy — that is, a stronger conviction that they can achieve goals and deal with obstacles through their own abilities (Figure 3). This reveals an interplay between length of stay and self-efficacy. The longer internationals stay in Germany, the greater the difference in self-efficacy scores between jobseekers and those in employment (Annex, Table 4). This suggests that higher self-efficacy plays a positive role in labour-market entry. Those who place greater confidence in their own abilities can also better navigate the demanding job search in a foreign country. At the same time, the interaction between length of stay and self-efficacy suggests that positive experiences of self-efficacy in the workplace, compared with more negative experiences, could further exacerbate the differences between jobseekers and those in employment during a prolonged, unsuccessful job search. This is particularly relevant given that the labour market is more saturated in some sectors due to the weaker economy, which can prolong the search for a suitable job. The perceived challenges of entering the workforce could thus become even greater for international workers. There is no difference in self-efficacy between international migrants who came to Germany through higher education and those who came directly to Germany to look for work.

Networking in Germany

In addition to having, on average, a higher level of German language proficiency and greater self-efficacy, internationals who have successfully entered the labour market have significantly stronger networks with Germans — both privately and, in particular, professionally (Figure 4). Furthermore, the length of stay does not significantly help to explain differences in networking. A better network may help by providing assistance in the job search or by offering greater stability during the search. At the same time, the differences may mean that — regardless of how long someone has been in Germany — one's own network with Germans grows through entry into employment. These two components are also reflected in respondents' reports of how they found their job: 72.6 percent found their position through individual application, and one in five (22.4 percent) through their network.

Networking and immigration through higher education

Internationals who immigrated through higher education have significantly better social networks. Here, too, this advantage appears to stem from their longer stay in Germany. Indeed, when length of stay is also considered as a predictor, a longer stay is associated with greater networking (Annex, Table 5). Beyond that, the type of immigration does not explain any differences in networking. This means that, because the

- Higher self-efficacy can ease the job search. A long search, however, may lead to a decline in self-efficacy.

- Those who immigrate through higher education have stronger social networks and therefore have better chances in the job search.

international students have been living in Germany for longer, they have also had more opportunities to network. And that can be an advantage when looking for a job.

Figure 4: Group differences in networking in Germany

Group means for job-seeking and employed Internationals



*** significance level $p < 0.001$

Source: Stifterverband / Fintiba, 2026

In addition to these individual factors influencing labour-market entry, there are also various factors during one's studies that can play a role in professional success, such as academic performance, whether a part-time job is taken up during studies, or practical components of the degree programme. As higher education systems are difficult to compare internationally, we consider here only those international students who studied in Germany prior to entering the labour market ($N = 541$) or starting their job search ($N = 552$). As these factors clearly precede entry into the labour market, we have not included an additional control for the length of stay in Germany.

Academic performance and field of study

Academic performance was operationalised through self-reported final grade. On average, Internationals report a final grade of 2.03. A better final grade is positively associated with successful labour-market entry (Figure 5). Whether someone studied in a STEM or non-STEM subject is not a significant indicator of how likely an International is to have managed labour-market entry. By contrast, level of study is a factor: Internationals with a master's degree have found employment 1.6 times as often as Internationals with a bachelor's degree (Annex, Table 6).

Contact with practice

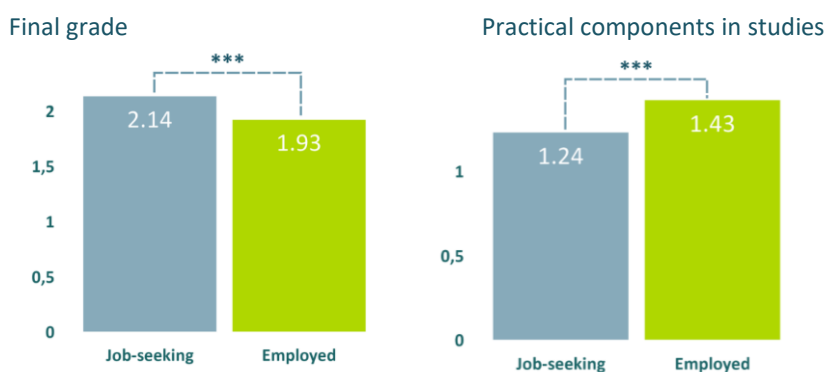
In addition, the number of practical components in the degree programme — for example a voluntary or mandatory internship, a thesis with a company, or course content with practical application (e.g. project work) — is significantly higher among international graduates who have found employment (Figure 5). Examined more closely, Internationals who have found a job in Germany had, on average, one to two practical

- Practical experience during studies, such as theses completed in companies or project work, increase the chances of entering employment.

components in their studies; Internationals who are job-seeking had only one. The role of final-year theses with company partnerships is particularly prominent. These are significantly more common among international students who have successfully entered the workforce in Germany after completing their studies. In this group, just under two-fifths (38.8 per cent) wrote such a final-year project. Among jobseekers, the figure was just under a third (30.4 per cent). This shows that it is not practical work alone, but in particular practical components in the degree programme – such as contacts with potential employers or actual experience in the labour market – that carry weight when it comes to starting a career.

Figure 5: Group differences in final grade and practical components in studies

Group means for job-seeking and employed Internationals



*** significance level $p < 0.001$
Source: Stifterverband / Fintiba, 2026

Anchoring practice elements in the curriculum

Immigration through higher education can therefore have a particularly positive impact on international students' career prospects, especially when such labour-market-oriented content is integrated into the curriculum. Building a network with companies and prospective employers and placing international students in final-year projects and dissertations, is a central lever for further amplifying the advantage that immigration through higher education brings for Internationals at labour-market entry. These opportunities are particularly evident in the STEM sector, for computer science and engineering degree programmes, as this field is already more closely integrated with industry research and development projects.

Student jobs

Further evidence of the importance of establishing links with the German labour market whilst still at university can be seen when looking at the part-time jobs held by international students. Internationals who held a student job during their studies that was related to their field have an 84

- Work experience through student jobs increases job chances by 57 percent. Student jobs unrelated to the field of study, by contrast, reduce the probability of successful labour-market entry.

percent higher probability of finding a job, compared with Internationals without such a student job (Annex, Table 7).

However, part-time work during one's studies can also hinder entry into the labour market. For instance, international students who undertook student jobs unrelated to their studies (such as delivery work, or assistant roles in the catering industry or supermarkets) are around 28 per cent less likely to successfully enter the labour market (Annex, Table 7). This shows that contacts with professional environments, whether integrated into the study curriculum or gained through study-related part-time jobs, can provide valuable support for the subsequent transition into the labour market, as students can already demonstrate relevant professional experience or gain initial experience with the application system in Germany.

Funding and career services at universities

To prepare Internationals for the labour-market transition, it is central to start as early as possible during studies — for example through career-service centres — with advice and support in finding a field-related student job. High living costs may otherwise lead, out of necessity, to the taking up of more easily accessible but field-unrelated student jobs, which may in turn make studies — and thus subsequent labour-market entry — more difficult. Access to financial support for international students is relevant not only for life during studies but can have long-term implications for the labour-market transition.

Field-relatedness of the job

Various factors can therefore help in finding employment in the first place. Decisive for a successful and sustainable labour-market entry is also whether Internationals manage to pursue the career path implied by their choice of subject. Generally, this appears to be the case: among working Internationals, 95.4 percent state that the occupation they currently hold relates directly or indirectly to their field of study.

Entry-level salary

When examining entry-level salary as a final indicator of successful labour-market entry, the picture is more heterogeneous. The median entry-level salary of working Internationals surveyed lies between EUR 45,000 and EUR 50,000 (annual salary, gross full-time equivalent; Figure 6).

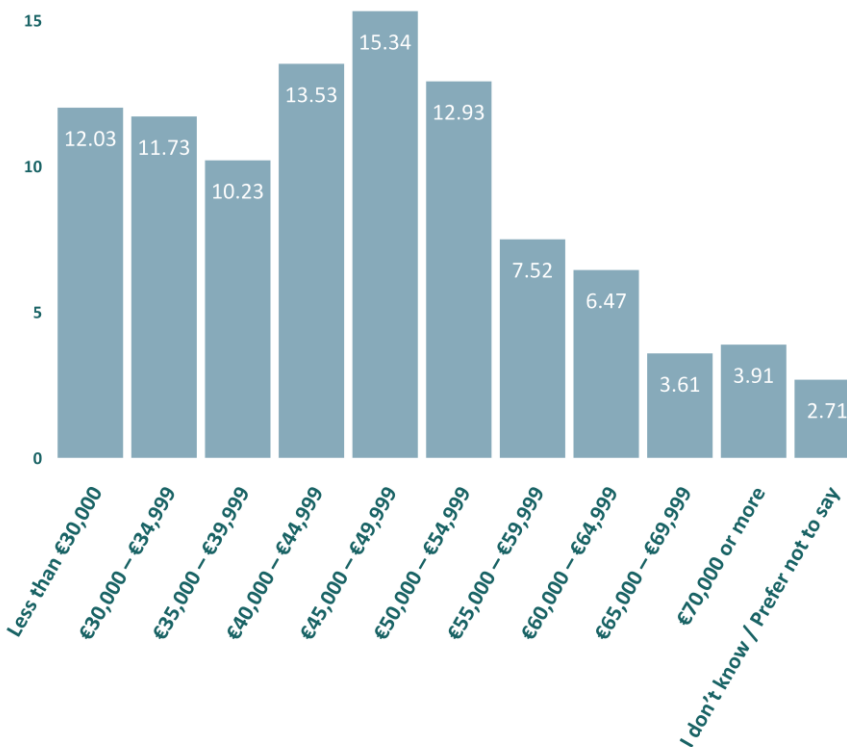
Just under a quarter (23.8 per cent) reported earning less than EUR 35,000 gross per year in their first job in Germany, even though they were working in academic professions relevant to their degree. Analyses of the immigrant earnings gap also show that international workers often earn significantly less than their German counterparts when entering the labour market. According to these, internationals in Germany earn on average around 43 per cent less than German labour-market entrants. One reason cited for this is that internationals generally work in lower-paying sectors or in lower-paying companies. On the other hand, they are also

- Just under a quarter of international career entrants earn less than €35,000 per year. This is well below the average of academic career entrants.

sometimes paid less than their German colleagues within the same company (OECD, 2025).

Figure 6: Distribution of entry-level salaries

Annual salary (gross full-time equivalent), shares in percent



N = 665

Source: Stifterverband / Fintiba, 2026

Higher pay among international graduates in academic professions is linked not only to a strong professional network in Germany, but also to better final grades and higher self-efficacy. Furthermore, it is evident that the level of study and subject specialisation are decisive factors. On average, Master's graduates report a significantly higher starting salary compared to international graduates with a Bachelor's degree. Furthermore, international graduates with STEM degrees start their careers in Germany with a significantly higher salary compared to international graduates who studied in a field other than STEM. Whilst respondents with STEM degrees and master's degrees report an average starting salary of between EUR 45,000 and EUR 50,000, international graduates with a degree in another field—regardless of their qualification level—or with a bachelor's degree start on an average salary of between EUR 40,000 and EUR 45,000. When these potential factors influencing a higher starting salary are considered together, differences in starting salary are significantly explained by a professional network with Germans, a focus on STEM subjects, and a Master's degree rather than a Bachelor's degree. There is also evidence of a correlation with final grade (Annex, Table 8). Internationals who studied a STEM subject, perform better in their

- Internationals in STEM, with a stronger professional network and a higher degree level, have higher entry-level salaries.

studies, hold a master's degree and have a stronger professional network also tend to receive a higher starting salary. However, whether the international students came to Germany through a university or directly to seek employment is not a decisive factor in determining the level of their starting salary.

4. Success factors for labour-market integration and professional success

The findings described thus far show which factors play a role in achieving a successful labour-market entry. For long-term integration into the German labour market, however, it is not only labour-market entry but settling into the job that is decisive — factors such as job satisfaction and the ease with which one integrates into German workplace culture.

Networking and self-efficacy

While performance-related factors such as academic performance, language proficiency or practical experience have been identified as decisive for successful labour-market entry, the factors that are positively associated with higher labour-market integration can be summarised as socio-psychological factors: networking and self-efficacy. On average, the working Internationals surveyed state that they find it “moderate” to “easy” to integrate into German workplace culture (5-point Likert scale, mean = 3.34). Easier integration into German workplace culture is significantly explained by better networking and higher self-efficacy (Annex, Table 9). This means that individuals with higher self-efficacy who are also better connected in Germany find it easier to navigate the German work environment.

Beyond this, the working Internationals surveyed are, on average, “quite satisfied” to “satisfied” with their job (7-point Likert scale, mean = 5.74). Here too, higher job satisfaction is associated with higher networking and higher self-efficacy (Annex, Table 10).

Settling into the job and immigration through higher education

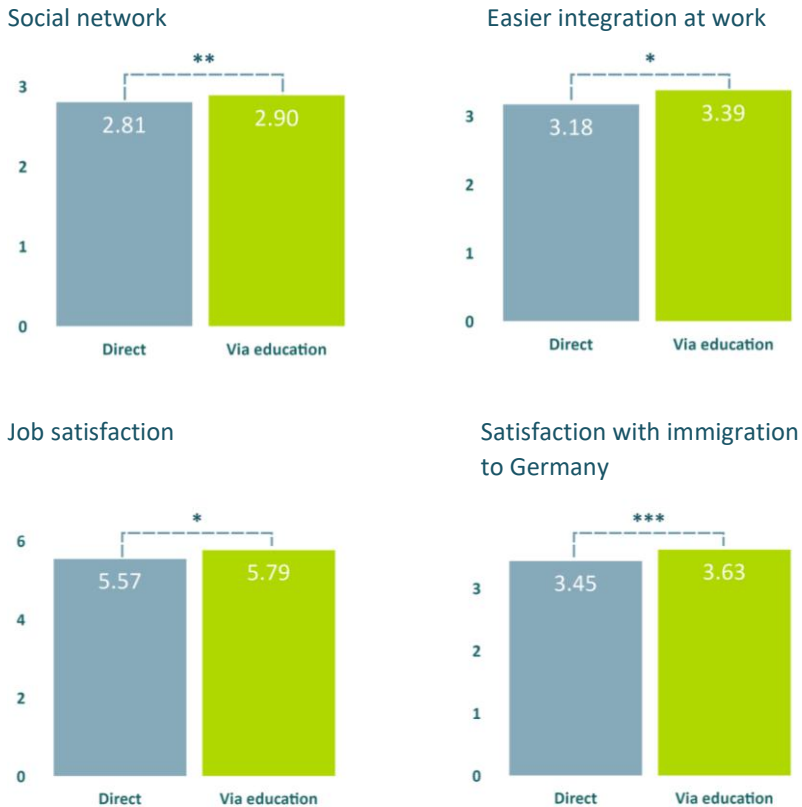
Internationals who immigrated through higher education are significantly better connected. In addition, immigration through higher education is associated not only with a higher probability of finding employment but also with a smoother transition into the workplace — that is, significantly easier integration into German workplace culture and significantly higher job satisfaction (Figure 7). These effects remain stable even when controlling for length of stay. This once again demonstrates a positive influence of immigration through higher education, both directly and indirectly: on the one hand, a longer stay in Germany prior to job-seeking creates the opportunity to build social networks, which can have a positive impact on professional integration. Furthermore, the experiences gained whilst studying at a German university help individuals to find their feet more easily in the German labour market and to be more satisfied in their jobs.

- Internationals who have good social networks and who have higher self-efficacy integrate more easily into German workplace culture and are more satisfied with their jobs.

- Internationals who immigrated through higher education find it easier to integrate into German workplace culture and are more satisfied with their jobs.

Figure 7: Group differences by type of immigration

Group means between Internationals immigrating directly for labour-market entry and Internationals immigrating through higher education



*** significance level $p < 0.001$; ** significance level $p < 0.01$; * significance level $p < 0.05$

Source: Stifterverband / Fintiba, 2026

4. Success factors for staying in Germany

The analyses highlight the factors that contribute to a successful transition into employment in Germany and a successful career start. Furthermore, the *International Employability Framework* assumes that someone who, for example, has a strong network in Germany or has been successful in language acquisition and academic studies, not only establishes themselves in a profession more successfully but that this also lays the foundation for successful integration and a long-term intention to remain in Germany. To investigate this, a mediation analysis was conducted to determine whether the influencing factors described in the framework are associated with higher satisfaction with one's own immigration to Germany and to what extent this relationship is explained by higher job satisfaction or by easier integration into the workplace culture. To examine the intention to stay, the study analysed the initial immigration plans reported by the international employees as well as changes in their intention to stay up to the time of the survey.

Satisfaction with immigration to Germany

A stronger social network is associated with greater satisfaction with one's own immigration to Germany. This effect is partly explained by greater job satisfaction. Furthermore, higher self-efficacy is linked to greater satisfaction with one's own migration to Germany. Here, too, the relationship is partly explained by greater job satisfaction (Annex, Figure A). Internationals in the workplace are therefore more satisfied with their jobs when they have a stronger network and report higher self-efficacy, and are consequently also more satisfied with their migration to Germany. These factors are thus two key elements in promoting the long-term successful integration of internationals in Germany and into the German labour market.

In addition, a higher starting salary is associated with higher job satisfaction. For satisfaction with one's own immigration process to Germany, entry-level salary plays a secondary role only.

As with satisfaction, easier integration into German workplace culture acts as a mediator for the relationship between networking and self-efficacy, and satisfaction with one's own immigration to Germany (Annex, Figure B). Those who are better connected and who report higher self-efficacy integrate more easily into German workplace culture and, partly as a result, are more satisfied with their immigration to Germany. This demonstrates the central role, particularly of networking, in professional and social integration in Germany.

Staying in Germany

A successful labour-market entry is therefore a cornerstone of greater satisfaction with one's own immigration to Germany. But what does this mean for long-term retention in Germany? Among those surveyed, around 46 per cent intend to stay in Germany permanently upon arrival. The intention to stay permanently is more widespread among internationals who are still looking for work than among those who have already secured employment. This could be an indication that people with firm intentions to stay are more likely to stick to their plan to remain, even if they do not immediately find a job.

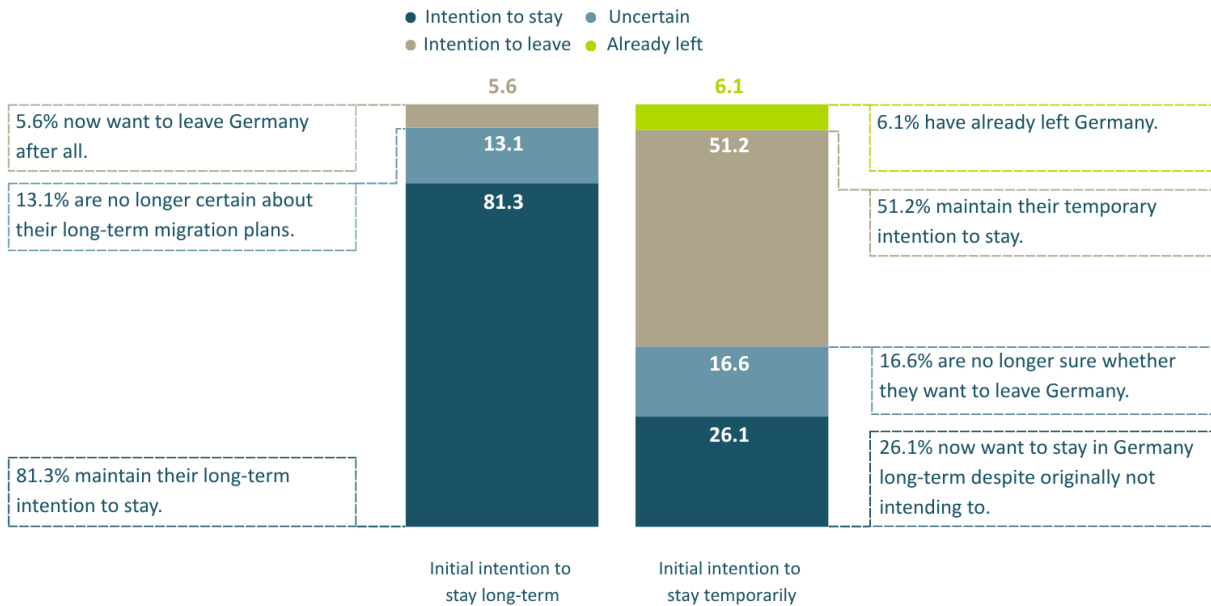
At the same time, starting a career plays a major role in deciding whether to stay in Germany long-term, particularly for international students who do not yet have firm plans for their stay in Germany or who only intend to stay temporarily – to study or gain initial work experience. Overall, around one in four (26.1 per cent) of the 2,000 or so internationals who initially intended to stay in Germany only for their studies or for the medium term had, by the time of the survey, decided to immigrate long-term. Just over half remain true to their original plan to leave Germany (51.2 per cent), 6.1 per cent want to leave Germany earlier or have already done so, and 16.6 per cent are unsure about their plans (Figure 8).

- Internationals are more satisfied in Germany when they have stronger professional networks and higher self-efficacy. This relationship is partly explained by greater job satisfaction and easier integration into the workplace.

- A higher entry-level salary is associated with higher job satisfaction but is not relevant for general satisfaction.

Figure 8: Changes in Internationals' intention to stay

Shares of Internationals by change in intention to stay, in percent.



Source: Stifterverband / Fintiba, 2026

Individuals who, contrary to their original plans, wish to remain in Germany for longer are significantly over-represented in the group of working Internationals compared to jobseekers (Annex, Table 11). If internationals who intended to stay in Germany only temporarily upon arrival find employment, they are 60 per cent more likely to want to stay in Germany permanently than those still looking for work. Greater satisfaction with one's own development in Germany is also significantly and positively correlated with an extension of plans to stay in Germany (Annex, Table 11). Other influencing factors described, such as networking, easier integration into the workplace or job satisfaction, do not directly distinguish whether someone has revised their plans for the better or not, with the exception of immigration through higher education.

- If Internationals who only wanted to stay in Germany temporarily find a job, they are 60 percent more likely to want to stay permanently.

Satisfaction in Germany and immigration through higher education

Internationals who immigrated to Germany through higher education are, on average, more satisfied with their immigration to Germany (Figure 7). Furthermore, immigration through higher education is associated with a higher likelihood of extending one's intention to stay, contrary to their original plan. Internationals who have immigrated through higher education are around 1.6 times more likely to want to stay in Germany permanently, even if that was not their original plan, compared to students who come to Germany directly for a job or to look for work (Annex, Table 11). So, those who have already studied in Germany are happier and are also more likely to decide that they want to stay in Germany long-term. This once again highlights how important the time spent studying in Germany can be for settling in and putting down roots here.

- Internationals who immigrated through higher education are 1.6 times more likely to want to stay in Germany permanently, even when that was not their original plan.

5. Supportive and inhibiting general conditions

If, for example immigration through higher education, equips Internationals with the skills necessary to make a successful labour-market entry, the foundation for long-term retention in Germany is in place. To enable this trajectory, however, basic general conditions for arriving and living in Germany must simultaneously be guaranteed. This is because a lack of such conditions can lead to long-term plans to stay being revised or to people having to leave Germany again despite an original intention to stay. Among those surveyed who originally intended to stay long-term, 5.6 per cent intended to leave Germany again at the time of the survey, and a further 13.1 per cent were no longer certain of their original plan to remain in Germany (Figure 8).

When clustering the 335 open-ended responses regarding why their plans took a turn for the worse, just under a third of respondents cited difficulties in finding a job or the tight job market, as well as difficulties integrating into a society that is often closed off or even hostile toward international students. One international, for example, describes his situation as follows: *“Integrating into the system is quite hard; landing a good job is difficult.”* A good fifth also cite economic and political conditions (*“The economy doesn’t seem promising anymore [...]”* or *“The bureaucracy has defeated me [...]”*). Fifteen percent cite personal reasons for the change in plans. Less frequently, the language barrier or better career prospects in other countries are cited. For most, a combination of several personal and professional factors ultimately proves decisive in their decision not to stay in Germany, or no longer to do so with certainty in the long term, contrary to their original plans.

Beyond Internationals who are no longer sure of their long-term migration to Germany, 175 of those surveyed have already left Germany. Among them, 42.5 percent left Germany as planned after completing their studies. One in five were looking for work before leaving; another fifth were unable to complete their study programme. The remaining 15 percent had already been working in Germany.

Not every decision to leave is a free choice against living in Germany. Among the international residents who have left Germany, around a third had intended to stay in Germany long-term. This highlights just how significant external circumstances are in determining whether people stay in or leave Germany. Thus, 48.2 per cent state that leaving Germany was not an entirely free decision, but was (partly) determined by external factors. These were primarily visa issues, the high language barrier, problems with funding, a lack of career prospects, mental health challenges, or lack of social connections (Figure 9).

Migrating to and settling into Germany is therefore associated with many challenges. Internationals must manage these alongside their studies or preparation for a labour-market entry. Considering how important social networking, practical experience, and self-directed German-language acquisition are for the labour-market transition and for arriving in Germany

- 5.6 percent intend to leave Germany despite a long-term intention to stay at entry. 13.1 percent are no longer sure of their plans to stay.

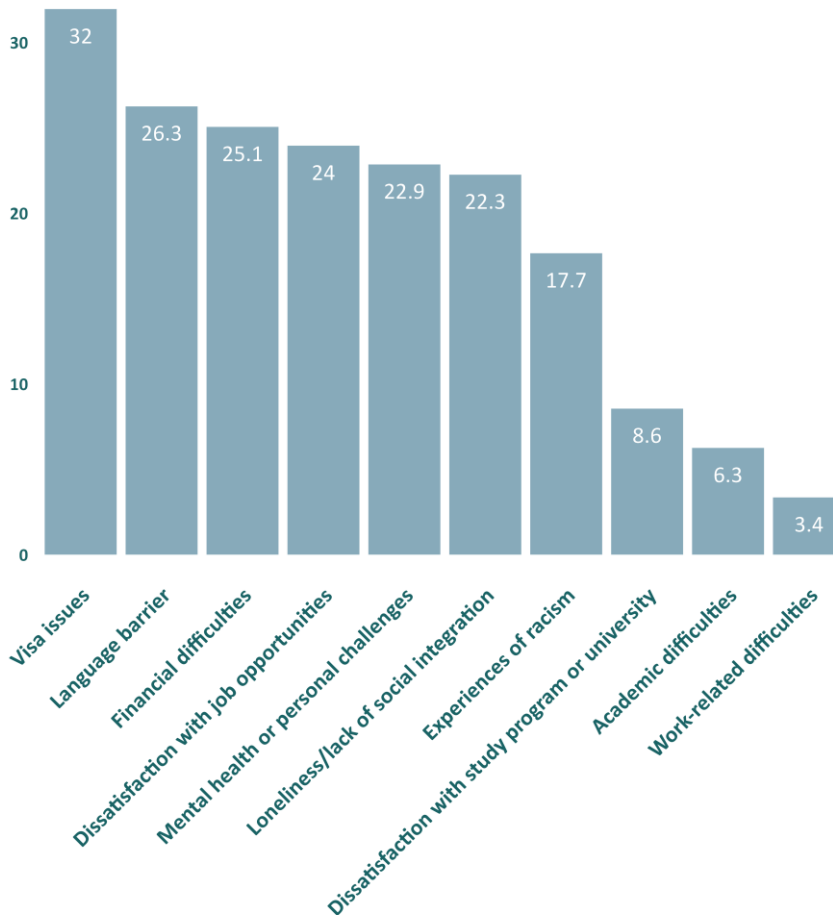
- The strained labour market and the difficult integration into German society are the main reasons for shortening the intention to stay.

- Almost half do not leave Germany entirely voluntarily. Visa issues, the language barrier and financial challenges are the main reasons for leaving.

generally, it becomes clear how important it is to create improved framework conditions for Internationals in Germany — so that Germany remains attractive as a destination country and Internationals can successfully navigate the path into employment.

Figure 9: Reasons for leaving Germany

Multiple responses possible, figures in percent.



Source: Stifterverband / Fintiba, 2026

6. Conclusion

Demographic and technological change are expected to exacerbate shortages of skilled professionals while increasing demand, particularly in technical occupations. Therefore, attracting international students and supporting their transition into the labour market will remain a key task for higher-education institutions and companies. This is especially relevant as Germany faces growing international competition from other economic and higher-education hubs.

The *Internationals Employability Framework* identifies the steps and key factors for successful integration of Internationals: first, general conditions for immigration to Germany must be in place, such as

straightforward visa rules or financial support. Those who then succeed in establishing themselves in Germany through labour-market entries are more satisfied and are also more likely to want to stay in Germany – irrespective of whether this was originally the motive for entry into Germany.

Central findings of the study

Various influencing factors are decisive for labour-market entry and for settling into the job. When it comes to starting a career, key factors include skills and experience, such as proficiency in the German language, academic performance and practical experience gained during one's studies. When it comes to settling into the work environment, however, other factors are more important. People with stronger networks are happier and find it easier to integrate into the workplace culture. A higher sense of self-efficacy is a beneficial factor both for entering the labour market and for settling into the job.

Immigration through higher education is a supportive element in almost all examined areas, because during the time of study, intercultural competencies and German language proficiency can be developed. Furthermore, universities can serve as important links to work environments, enabling international students to gain valuable experience that will provide an advantage when they later look for work. At the same time, the social networks and sense of belonging that international students develop in Germany during their studies can directly lead to them integrating more easily into the workplace, feeling happier in Germany and extending their plans to stay. This immigration pathway is particularly relevant for the STEM industry, since over half of international students study a STEM subject (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2025, own calculations).

Recommendations for action

Our data show that immigration through higher education is, in many respects, advantageous compared with other immigration paths. This applies both to labour-market entry and to subsequent retention in the labour market. How can higher education institutions be better supported and provided with more resources as a promising route for immigration to Germany?

- Immigration through universities must be given greater political priority as a successful means of attracting skilled professionals and must be better integrated with programmes for direct skilled labour immigration, such as 'Make it in Germany'.
- Investment in skilled labour immigration and integration should be channelled much more heavily into universities, where it has the greatest potential to close the skills gap. Services there must therefore be significantly expanded to provide better support and guidance for international students.
- Universities and companies must work together more closely:
 - Universities must integrate more German language courses and practical components into the curriculum, and strengthen the support provided by career services in

helping students secure work placements or student jobs early on in their studies.

- Companies must network more closely with universities to make potential practical projects, theses and student activities at universities more visible and accessible.
- Social networking is the key to integrating in Germany. Immigration through higher education provides a valuable ecosystem for this. International offices must pay greater attention to this social component. For example, by supporting access to extra-curricular activities at the university.
- Bureaucracy must be reduced through digitalised processes, and visa rules must be simplified and made more realistic. In addition, financial support schemes must be expanded to provide the necessary conditions for international students in Germany.

Only through joint initiatives by universities, industry, and policymakers that actively support immigration - particularly through higher education - can Internationals successfully realise their plans to build a life in Germany and contribute to the stability and transformation of the German economy.

About DEGIS

This Discussion Paper is a joint publication of Stifterverband and DEGIS.

DEGIS — Deutsche Gesellschaft internationaler Studierender — is the policy lab of Lumeira Group. This non-profit organization is committed to supporting the success of international students and skilled workers in Germany. Through its brands Fintiba and Expatrio, the Lumeira Group supports more than 100,000 international students each year on their path to Germany and is part of the publicly listed CHAPTERS Group AG.

ZUKUNFTSMISSION BILDUNG

With its Future Mission: Education (“Zukunftsmission Bildung”), the Stifterverband aims to help shape an education system for a changing world that equips more people, more quickly, with the necessary skills through initial and continuing education.

The Alliance for STEM Talent (Allianz für MINT-Fachkräfte), as part of this joint initiative, aims to increase the number of STEM graduates in order to reduce the skills gap in STEM fields.



[zukunftsmission-bildung.de/
mint-fachkraefte](https://www.zukunftsmission-bildung.de/mint-fachkraefte)

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Tabular annex

Table 1: Logistic regression of university-pathway immigration and transition into employment

Probability of being employed rather than job-seeking, depending on the type of migration

Coefficient	b	SE	OR	97,5 % CI (OR)	p
University-pathway immigration	1.15	0.11	3.17	[2.57; 3.94]	< 0.001 ***

Source: Stifterverband, Fintiba, 2026

Table 2: Linear regression of German language proficiency as a function of employment status

$F(3, 1230) = 45.45; p < 0.001$

Coefficient	b	SE	t	p
Intercept	4.32	0.06	75.47	< 0.001 ***
Employment vs. job search	0.59	0.09	6.76	< 0.001 ***
Length of stay	0.14	0.02	5.67	< 0.001 ***
Interaction	-0.06	0.04	-1.63	0.104

Source: Stifterverband, Fintiba, 2026

Table 3: Linear regression of German language proficiency by university-pathway immigration

Coefficient	Model 1 $F(1, 1590) = 28.15; p < 0.001$				Model 2 $F(3, 1230) = 43.2; p < 0.001$			
	b	SE	t	p	b	SE	t	p
Intercept	4.24	0.06	69.94	<0.001 ***	5.13	0.11	48.54	<0.001 ***
University-pathway immigration	0.41	0.08	5.31	<0.001 ***	-0.59	0.12	-5.02	<0.001 ***
Length of stay	-	-	-	-	0.42	0.04	9.60	<0.001 ***
Interaction	-	-	-	-	0.29	0.05	-5.81	<0.001 ***

Note: Model 1 includes university-pathway immigration only. Model 2 additionally controls for length of stay and includes an interaction term.

Source: Stifterverband, Fintiba, 2026

Table 4: Linear regression of self-efficacy and employment status

F(3, 1309) = 9.27; p < 0.001

Coefficient	b	SE	t	p
Intercept	3.91	0.03	125.1	<0.001 ***
Employment vs. job search	0.11	0.05	2.30	0.021 *
Length of stay	0.01	0.01	0.66	0.51
Interaction	0.05	0.02	2.19	0.029 *

Source: Stifterverband, Fintiba, 2026

Table 5: Linear regression of networks (private and professional) and university-pathway immigration

F(3, 1282) = 7.78; p < 0.001

Coefficient	b	SE	t	p
Intercept	2.83	0.04	70.23	<0.001 ***
University-pathway immigration	0.05	0.04	1.05	0.29
Length of stay	0.05	0.02	2.74	0.006 **
Interaction	-0.05	0.02	-2.59	0.009 **

Source: Stifterverband, Fintiba, 2026

Table 6: Logistic regression of employment status by degree level

Probability of being employed rather than job-seeking, depending on degree level

Coefficient	b	SE	OR	97,5 % CI (OR)	p
Degree level (Bachelor vs. Master)	0.47	0.17	1.61	[1.13; 2.28]	0.007 **

Source: Stifterverband, Fintiba, 2026

Table 7: Logistic regression of employment status by student employment

Probability of being employed rather than job-seeking, depending on type of side job

Coefficient	b	SE	OR	97,5 % CI (OR)	p
Side job related to field of study	0.61	0.12	1.84	[1.44; 2.34]	< 0.001 ***
Side job unrelated to field of study	-0.32	0.12	0.72	[0.56; 0.92]	0.008 **

Source: Stifterverband, Fintiba, 2026

Table 8: Linear regression of entry-level salary by professional networks and study characteristics

$F(5, 322) = 9.15; p < 0.001$

Coefficient	b	SE	t	p
Intercept	3.89	0.87	4.49	<0.001 ***
Professional networks with Germans	0.43	0.16	2.75	0.006 **
Practice components	0.14	0.13	1.13	0.258
Final grade	-0.04	0.24	-1.62	0.106
STEM focus (non-STEM study field)	-1.25	0.24	-5.16	< 0.001 ***
Degree level (Master's degree)	0.89	0.41	2.21	0.03 *

Source: Stifterverband, Fintiba, 2026

Table 9: Linear regression of ease of integration into German workplace culture by professional networks and self-efficacy

$F(2, 625) = 34; p < 0.001$

Coefficient	b	SE	t	p
Intercept	1.06	0.28	3.78	< 0.001 ***
Networks	0.48	0.07	6.52	< 0.001 ***
Self-efficacy	0.21	0.05	4.38	< 0.001 ***

Source: Stifterverband, Fintiba, 2026

Table 10: Linear regression of job satisfaction by social networks and self-efficacy

$F(2, 610) = 35.26; p < 0.001$

Coefficient	b	SE	t	p
Intercept	3.12	0.33	9.31	< 0.001 ***
Networks	0.66	0.09	7.52	< 0.001 ***
Self-efficacy	0.17	0.06	3.02	0.002 **

Source: Stifterverband, Fintiba, 2026

Table 11: Logistic regression of extended intention to stay

Probability of extending intention to stay, by (1) employment status, (2) satisfaction with immigration, and (3) immigration pathway

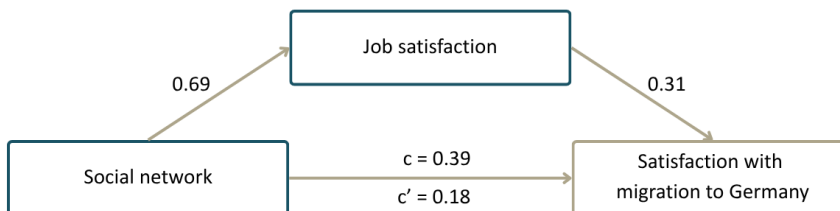
Coefficient	b	SE	OR	97,5 % CI (OR)	p
Employment vs. job search	0.48	0.19	1.61	[1.12; 2.32]	0.01 *
Satisfaction with immigration	0.35	0.11	1.43	[1.16; 1.76]	< 0.001 ***
University-pathway immigration	0.52	0.22	1.67	[1.08; 2.62]	0.02 *

Source: Stifterverband, Fintiba, 2026

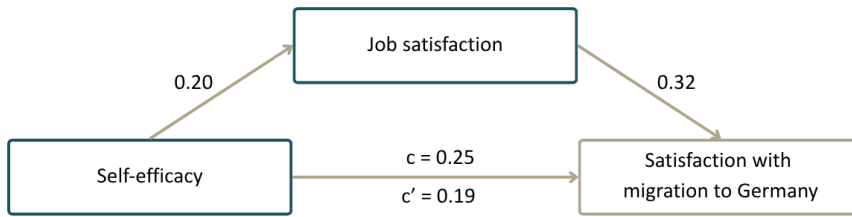
Figure A: Mediation analyses of the relationship between social networks, self-efficacy, and immigration satisfaction

Estimated effects between variables, controlling for the respective covariates

$F(2, 678) = 95.86, p < 0.001$



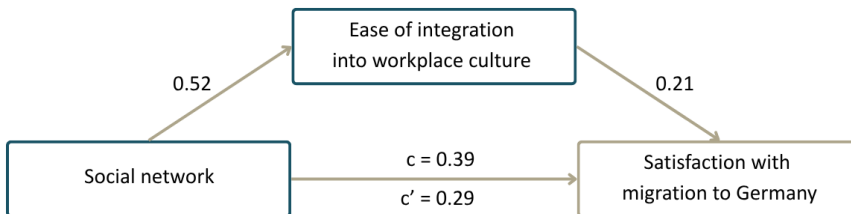
$F(2, 678) = 106.18, p < 0.001$



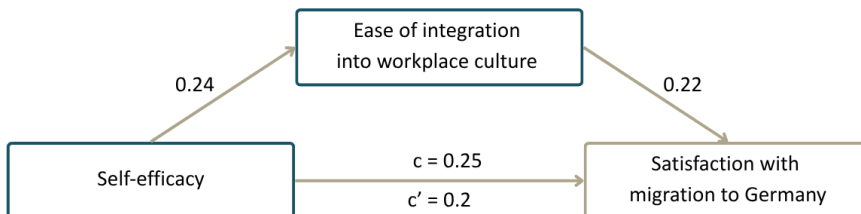
Total effects from the regression model are reported.
Source: Stifterverband/Fintiba, 2026

Figure B: Mediation analyses of the relationship between integration into German workplace culture and immigration satisfaction
Estimated effects between variables, controlling for the respective covariates

$F(2, 678) = 44.07, p < 0.001$



$F(2, 678) = 42.19, p < 0.001$



Total effects from the regression model are reported.
Source: Stifterverband/Fintiba, 2026

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