

International Conference 2025 ‘Securing Skilled Labour in Europe’

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On 14 November 2025, the Senate Department for Labour, Social Services, Gender Equality, Integration, Diversity and Anti-Discrimination held this year's European conference at the Umweltforum in Berlin. The conference was titled ‘**Securing Skilled Labour in Europe**’.

The Senate Department responsible for labour is currently developing a strategy for skilled labour in Berlin. This year's European conference addressed this issue. Together with international and national experts, discussions were held on how to meet current and future skilled labour needs, how to utilise experience from other countries, and how to successfully design Berlin's skilled labour strategy.

The conference focused on labour market participation and the earning potential of underrepresented groups, the potential of artificial intelligence, and the importance of good work and training for young people in securing a skilled workforce.

Opening and keynote speech

The conference opened with a welcome message from Kai Wegner, the Governing Mayor of Berlin, who emphasised the equivalence of master craftsman and master's degrees. This was followed by an opening speech from Cansel Kiziltepe, the Senator for Labour, Social Services, Gender Equality, Integration, Diversity and Anti-Discrimination. The Senator emphasised that artificial intelligence can close skills gaps and make better use of employment potential. However, she also stressed that: ‘This transformation will only succeed if everyone has the opportunity to continue their education, acquire new skills, and find good work.’

In a subsequent **keynote speech**, Stefan Olsson (European Commission, DG Employment) outlined the Europe-wide extent of the skills shortage, setting the tone for the event. The most effective strategies for securing skilled labour prioritise people. To achieve this, competition must be balanced with social inclusion.

The European Commission’s draft proposal for a European talent pool has identified acute shortages in the STEM and care sectors that cannot be resolved without recruiting skilled workers from outside the EU. Alongside the Commission's action plan to secure skilled labour and the ‘Union of Skills’, as well as a stronger focus on labour market integration measures and social investments in the next Multiannual Financial Framework, Mr Olsson cited some excellent practices that support specific target groups with a holistic approach (social and career counselling, language courses, orientation services,

etc.). According to Stefan Olsson, Berlin's skilled labour strategy is an important part of the Union of Skills. He emphasised that practical approaches ultimately inspire the European Commission's strategies.

Moderated talk

During a discussion with moderator Dr Julia Kropf, Senator Kiziltepe, Dr Nicola Brandt (Head of the OECD Berlin Centre) and Stefan Olsson explored the potential challenges and opportunities of implementing the EU's action plan within the member states. Although some of the EU's targets (e.g. 60% participation in continuing education by 2030) are challenging, Berlin is playing a progressive role across Europe. In addition, Germany's dual education system puts it in a strong starting position and makes it an attractive option. However, the actors and systems in Germany are not yet sufficiently coordinated with regard to continuing education. Dr Nicola Brandt cited a recent European Investment Bank survey in which 80% of the 13,000 European companies questioned in 2024 stated that the shortage of skilled labour was the biggest obstacle to investment.

The experts did not consider the competition for skilled labour between member states to be critical, since all countries had the capacity to activate and mobilise large numbers of people within their own borders, and there were millions of job seekers across numerous countries. However, most countries, including Germany, need to improve at matching job seekers with companies and in supporting language acquisition.

Take-Aways from the LearnLabs

Following these insights into the current debates on securing skilled labour, the European and Berlin based experts in attendance had the opportunity to develop the most effective solutions through knowledge transfer in four LearnLabs. These solutions were then evaluated by the respective lab rapporteurs on the main stage.

LearnLab 1: 'Unlocking Potential – Pathways to Employment'

Good qualification programmes should adopt a holistic approach to individuals. Accompanying services, such as social counselling and language acquisition, must be closely linked to employers.

LearnLab 2: 'Human-centred AI – Opportunities & Practice'

LearnLab 2 consisted of two parts: a panel discussion and four AI application examples presented in the style of a 'World Café'. The panel concluded that when introducing AI, intensive cooperation between management and specialists is essential when introducing

AI in order to develop the necessary skills. Employees are the experts in their processes and, with the necessary basic training, are best placed to optimise them.

The second part, **'AI in Practice'**, presented specific examples of AI applications that demonstrate its use in various areas, such as maintaining employability, advising skilled workers and companies, and matching jobs and skills profiles.

LearnLab 3: 'Attracting Talent – Retaining Skilled Workers'

Now, more than ever, creating attractive conditions is closely linked to developing a 'culture of welcome'. The prospect of staying is extremely important if employees are to engage in further training and long-term development in the workplace. Discrimination in the housing and labour markets can hinder this progress. In Berlin specifically, the wide range of support services must be made more accessible and visible.

LearnLab 4: 'Decent Work, Strong Education System – Enablers of Workforce Sustainability' (online seminar)

Securing skilled labour requires a focus on identifying and nurturing talent, where the quality of work determines the occupational field's attractiveness. When it comes to skills development, not everyone can receive the same training, so elements that can be integrated with existing processes and systems must be made more personalised.

Dialogue forum

In parallel to the main programme, participants had the opportunity to exchange ideas with various stakeholders in the field of securing skilled labour at stands in the Dialogue Forum, where they could also learn about the stakeholders' organisations.

Keynote: 'Skilled Labour Shortages in the Digital Age: Potentials and Challenges'

In her keynote speech, Prof. Dr Melanie Arntz (Deputy Director of the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) of the Federal Employment Agency (BA)) presented the potential and challenges associated with digitalisation in relation to the shortage of skilled labour.

Although employment subject to social security contributions is currently at an all-time high, this has already begun to stagnate and will now decline after a long period of advance warning. Germany – and Berlin in particular – also has high youth

unemployment. The number of young people without vocational training is a cause for concern, with many of them ending up in unskilled jobs.

‘We are faced with a rigid labour market that is not responding to investment’, said Prof. Arntz. This must be overcome by increasing the mobility of skilled workers, which in turn cannot be achieved sustainably without a more welcoming culture in Germany. AI could also be used to maximise production in previously less progressive sectors, provided it is accompanied by investment in human capital.

Professor Dr Arntz also emphasised Mr Olsson's plea in his keynote speech:

People must be placed at the heart of the digital transformation.

Panel discussion: ‘Joint Responsibility for Securing Skilled Workers’

During the final panel discussion, Micha Klapp (State Secretary for Labour and Equality), Carina Knie-Nürnberg (Operations Manager at the Berlin-Brandenburg Regional Directorate of the BA), Alexander Schirp (Chief Executive of the Berlin-Brandenburg Association of Business Associations), Nele Techen (Deputy Chair of the DGB Berlin-Brandenburg) and Professor Dr Melanie Arntz debated the criteria for good work that must be agreed upon as part of a fundamental cooperation on a skilled labour strategy.

Carina Knie-Nürnberg reported that the most successful companies in the competition for skilled labour offer good working conditions of their own accord, and that women’s workload depends heavily on these conditions. Good work also requires flexibility.

With a view to a possible standard working week of up to 70 hours, Prof. Dr Melanie Arntz made a particularly strong case for good working conditions that are sustainable in the long term. Without such conditions, skilled workers would not be able to work until a higher retirement age.

Both Micha Klapp and Carina Knie-Nürnberg emphasised the necessity for enhanced joint knowledge management in administration.

Alexander Schirp highlighted the measure of every schoolchild in Berlin getting to know two professions through internships as an exemplary one. This requires a great deal of effort on the part of companies, but it can open up more perspectives for young people.

Nele Techen also emphasised the importance of preparing young people early on for the complexities of society and the world of work through qualifications.

When asked by moderator Dr Julia Kropf to name Berlin's strengths in securing skilled labour, experts from the capital cited diversity, cosmopolitanism and innovation as key factors, alongside many others. This is a good starting point for transformation.

Closing remarks

In her closing speech, State Secretary Micha Klapp thanked all participants, both in person and watching via livestream, for their enthusiastic engagement in the exchange and networking opportunities. The input and examples from other countries brought together stakeholders at a European level, who are always dependent on legislative powers, resources, and financial frameworks. Berlin intends to incorporate this impressive commitment and input into its daily work.