Guide: nursing and medical specialists from abroad to Germany

Recognition, work authorisation and placement - updated for Saarland and the DACH region

Publisher	Saar-Care Placement Services, Hochstrasse 63, 66115 Saarbrücken, Germany
Status	16 October 2026
Reference point	Saarland - competent authority: State Office for Social Affairs (LAS)
Legal basis	Residence Act (AufenthG), Employment Ordinance (BeschV), Nursing Professions Act, Federal Medical Regulation, EU Directive 2005/36, annex to section 38 BeschV
Scope	Recognition, labour market access, placement

> Note: All information reflects the position as of 16 October 2026 and is given without guarantee. Federal state forms, fees and deadlines change regularly. Before use, always verify with the State Office for Social Affairs in Saarland, the Federal Employment Agency and the local immigration office. This guide is not legal advice.

1. What this guide is for

Saar-Care places medical professionals from abroad with hospitals, care homes and medical practices in the German-speaking region. Professionals create a profile with Saar-Care, institutions describe their need, and Saar-Care brings both sides together.

This guide describes the path a professional takes from a third country to working in Germany. It addresses the professional, the institution and the advising party alike.

> Note: This guide supersedes the previous version. Two points were corrected: the competent authority follows the federal state of the place of work, and the recruitment restriction under section 38 BeschV was checked against the specific countries of origin.

2. First question: where the person comes from decides the route

Nurses and physicians are regulated professions in Germany. Without recognition or licensure to practise medicine, no practice is permitted. Nursing assistants are not regulated but still require labour market access.

Country of origin	Professional recognition	Labour market access and visa
EU / EEA / Switzerland	Recognition required, but under Directive 2005/36 usually without individual assessment for harmonised diplomas	No visa, no permit, free movement
Third country	Full recognition or licensure required, depending on the federal state	National visa plus approval by the Federal Employment Agency and the immigration office

3. Important check: section 38 BeschV and your countries of origin

Section 38 BeschV states that recruitment in, and job placement from, the countries listed in the annex to that ordinance, for employment in health and care professions, may be carried out only by the Federal Employment Agency.

Saar-Care has compared the annex with the countries in question. Result for the usual countries of origin:

Country of origin	Listed in the annex to section 38 BeschV	Consequence for Saar-Care
Algeria	no	Direct recruitment and placement permitted
Lebanon	no	Direct recruitment and placement permitted
Egypt	no	Direct recruitment and placement permitted
Syria	no	Direct recruitment and placement permitted
Jordan	no	Direct recruitment and placement permitted
Morocco	no	Direct recruitment and placement permitted

> Note: None of these six countries appears on the restricted list. The exclusive role of the Federal Employment Agency does not apply to them. Check the annex again before opening any new country of origin, because the list is amended.

4. Competent authority: determined by federal state, not in general

The recognition authority follows the federal state in which the person will actually work, not the seat of the placement agency. For Saar-Care the Saarland is the obvious case, but every deployment in another federal state has a different authority.

For Saarland the following applies:

Procedure	Competent authority in Saarland
Recognition of nurses and other non-academic health professions	State Office for Social Affairs (LAS), Department of Health
Licensure to practise medicine for physicians	State Office for Social Affairs (LAS) - not the medical chamber
Specialist medical recognition	Saarland Medical Chamber
Residence permit after entry	Local immigration office of the relevant district
Labour market access and approval	Federal Employment Agency, Central Agency for Foreign Skills

> Note: The previous version of this guide referred to Baden-Württemberg throughout. That is incorrect for deployments in Saarland. Other federal states have their own authorities. Ask for the specific place of work before making a match.

5. The complete route from a third country to Germany

1. Apply for professional recognition with the competent authority of the federal state where the person will work. For non-regulated professions, have the qualification assessed.
2. Provide proof of language skills: nurse B2, nursing assistant B1, physician B2 plus medical professional language.
3. Employment contract or binding offer, plus approval by the Federal Employment Agency.
4. National visa at the German mission abroad.
5. Entry and issue of the residence permit by the immigration office.
6. Where necessary, a compensatory measure in the form of an adaptation course or an aptitude test, followed by further qualification.

> Note: Possible accelerators are the fast-track procedure for skilled workers under section 81a of the Residence Act and prior approval by the Federal Employment Agency.

6. Route 1: nurse from a third country

Competent in Saarland: the State Office for Social Affairs. Application for permission to use the professional title under the Nursing Professions Act.

- Application form, signed and dated
- Continuous tabular CV in German
- Copy of passport, birth and marriage certificates
- Diploma, certificates, subject and lecture overview, clinical placement, certificate of professional registration, each with a certified translation
- References with description of activities
- Offer of employment or employment contract, alternatively a certificate of counselling from the IQ network or the central offices for foreign educational qualifications
- Declaration whether an application for recognition has already been filed in Germany
- Police clearance certificate from the country of origin or training with translation, and German police clearance certificate of type OB
- Medical certificate no older than three months
- Proof of language level B2 from a certified body, at the latest when the certificate is issued

Procedure and outcome

- Statutory decision period of four months after complete submission
- Outcome equivalent: certificate is issued
- Substantial differences: aptitude test with at least three nursing situations, or an adaptation course; the decision sets out the consequence
- An adaptation course may be shortened on application
- Waiver of the equivalence assessment is possible, but then an aptitude test or adaptation course is compulsory
- The certificate is valid nationwide; one recognition is sufficient

Costs and funding

- Fees differ by federal state and are usually in the three-digit euro range
- Translations, certifications and apostilles are additional and can be substantial
- Recognition grant of up to 600 euros and qualification grant from the federal government, applied for before the application is filed
- Where the person is unemployed or seeking work, the Federal Employment Agency covers the costs
- For third-country nationals without funding from the Federal Employment Agency a declaration of cost assumption is required, normally from a person resident in Germany or the employer

> Note: Should the placement agency issue declarations of cost assumption to professionals from third countries? This is a question of contract and liability and should be clarified with the employer and a lawyer. It cannot be decided from the guide alone.

7. Route 2: nursing assistant from a third country

No recognition required, but labour market access is. There are three routes.

Option A: Western Balkans rule under section 26 (2) BeschV

- Countries concerned: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia
- Quota of 50,000 approvals per year by the Federal Employment Agency

- No formal qualification required; under current guidance of the Federal Employment Agency no priority check
- Requirements: employment contract or binding offer, conditions equal to those for domestic workers, no receipt of asylum seeker benefits in the last 24 months
- From 45 years of age: salary of at least 55 per cent of the pension insurance contribution assessment ceiling, or a pension provision
- For care and health: proof of language level B1
- Process: employer applies for prior approval, valid nine months, then visa, then residence permit after entry
- Cannot be combined with the fast-track procedure

Option B: section 22a BeschV

- For nursing assistants with a state-recognised nursing assistant qualification or an equivalence finding
- Not subject to a quota, section 9 BeschV does not apply

Option C: section 6 BeschV

- For nursing assistants with substantial professional practical experience, without formal recognition
- Not subject to a quota, alternative when the Western Balkans quota is exhausted

8. Route 3: physician from a third country, licensure

Competent in Saarland: the State Office for Social Affairs. Application under section 3 of the Federal Medical Regulation. The medical chamber is not competent for licensure, only for specialist medical recognition.

- Application form and tabular CV in German
- Passport
- Diploma with apostille or certification by the German embassy or consulate, together with the curriculum of the study plan
- Certificate of entitlement to practise in the country of origin or training
- Certificates of good standing from every country where the person worked more than six months in the last three years, no older than three months
- German police clearance certificate of type OB and medical certificate
- Job offer from the receiving institution
- Proof of language level B2 plus medical professional language C1, examined by the district medical chamber

Equivalence assessment

- Document-based assessment by expert opinion including the curriculum, or
- Aptitude test, oral and practical, 60 to 90 minutes, internal medicine and surgery, case-related with patient presentation
- Physicians from the EU, EEA and Switzerland: licensure in principle without individual assessment, possibly only the professional language test
- After licensure, the specialist qualification requires recognition by the state medical chamber

9. Route 4: entry without completed recognition

Not every route leads to the goal in a single step. Three variants occur in placement and were missing from the previous version of this guide.

Variant A: entry for a compensatory measure

- Legal basis is section 16d of the Residence Act for entry to an adaptation course or aptitude test
- A job offer is required, and usually proof of language at the level required by the federal state

- During the measure, work is permitted within the specified scope
- After successful completion, permission to practise is issued

Variant B: opportunity card under sections 20a and 20b of the Residence Act

- Points system based on qualification, language skills, professional experience, age and ties to Germany
- The residence permit is initially limited to twelve months for job search
- The work permit follows only with a concrete employment contract
- Interesting for placements because a first stay without an employer is possible

Variant C: training in Germany

- Legal basis is section 16a of the Residence Act for in-company vocational training
- For care, the generalist nursing training counts
- Normally an age limit of 35
- Language requirement depends on the training occupation, usually B1 to B2
- The route with the longest lead time, but with the most stable outcome

> Note: Which variant makes sense depends on the individual case and on the training structure in the country of origin. This assessment belongs in the counselling, not in an automatic process.

10. Applications and forms at a glance

Step	Application or form	Competent body	Cost (indicative)
Recognition nursing	Application under the Nursing Professions Act with official checklist	State Office for Social Affairs, Saarland	three-digit range plus certificate
Licensure physician	Application under section 3 Federal Medical Regulation with annexes	State Office for Social Affairs, Saarland	according to state fee schedule
Professional language test	Registration with the district medical chamber	Medical chamber	varies by chamber
Specialist medical recognition	Application for specialist recognition	State medical chamber	varies by chamber
Federal Employment Agency approval	Declaration on the employment relationship	Federal Employment Agency	free of charge
Prior approval Western Balkans	Declaration on the employment relationship online	Federal Employment Agency	free of charge
Fast-track skilled worker procedure	Agreement, power of attorney, recognition application	Immigration office	411 euros, charged to the professional
National visa	Videx-National	German mission abroad	75 euros
Residence permit after entry	Application with the immigration office	Immigration office	around 100 euros for first issue
German police clearance certificate	Type OB with direct submission	Citizen's office	around 13 euros
Medical fitness	official form	General practitioner	private

11. Timetable and costs

Total cost for a nurse from a third country, rounded off:

- Recognition: several hundred euros, depending on the federal state

- Translations and certifications: around 200 to 600 euros
- Language course or certificate: private sector, varies widely
- Prior approval by the Federal Employment Agency: free of charge
- Visa: 75 euros
- Residence permit: around 100 euros
- Together without a language course realistically around 500 to 1000 euros, plus 411 euros for the fast-track procedure

Duration of the stages

- Decision on recognition: four months at most by law, in practice considerably longer including a compensatory measure
- Adaptation course: 20 to 36 months, can be shortened on application
- Aptitude test for physicians: 60 to 90 minutes of examination, preparation depending on prior knowledge
- Fast-track skilled worker procedure: target of about four months in total
- Prior approval Western Balkans: a few weeks, then a quick visa

12. The commercial side: how Saar-Care places

This section adds the contractual and economic dimension to the guide. It was missing from the previous version, although it decides the success of a placement transaction.

12.1 Contractual relationships

Relationship	Recommendation	Why it matters
To the professional	Contract for advice and placement, not an employment contract	An employment contract would make you the employer, with social security contributions and all duties
To the institution	Placement contract with success-related remuneration	The remuneration only arises on successful deployment
Terms of use	One version for professionals and a separate version for institutions	Roles and duties differ

12.2 Remuneration model and the rates behind it

- A share of the gross annual salary of the person placed is possible
- In Germany, 20 to 30 per cent of gross annual salary is customary for recruitment; the range is 15 to 35 per cent depending on sector and position
- It falls due on hiring and is never paid by the applicant, but by the employer
- An hourly rate as a basis is easier to justify for care, because it grows with actual deployment. For physicians, a share of the annual salary fits better

Care: collective agreement basis

Pay group	Who	Gross per month 2026	Calculated per hour
P 5	Nursing assistant without training	2,907.18 to 3,629.25 euros	
P 6	Assistant training of at least one year	3,012.49 to 4,013.41 euros	
P 7	Three-year nursing training, surgical and medical technical assistants	3,510.30 to 4,305.40 euros	
P 8	Practice instructor, particularly demanding work	3,701.21 to 4,488.98 euros	
P 9	Nursing exam plus specialist training, intensive care	3,992.39 to 4,662.42 euros	

> Note: Collective agreement for the municipal employers, valid from 1 May 2026, increase of 2.8 per cent, running to 31 March 2027. Weekly working time 38.5 hours in hospitals and 39 hours in care and support facilities. Hourly values are calculated from the monthly pay and 39 weekly hours. The special annual payment is 90 per cent in P 5 to P 8 and 85 per cent in P 9 to P 16.

What this means for the remuneration

- A nurse in pay group P 7 to P 9 earns roughly 21 to 28 euros gross per hour
- Annual gross pay is roughly 45,000 to 55,000 euros, including the special annual payment
- At 20 to 30 per cent that is roughly 9,000 to 16,500 euros per successfully placed nurse, around 12,000 euros in the middle of the range

Physicians: a different structure

- In outpatient care, remuneration runs through the medical associations, with a fee budget per physician and an increase of the reference value by 2.8 per cent in 2026
- The fee negotiations for 2026 initially failed and were concluded through arbitration, including in Saarland
- In hospitals the fee schedule does not apply; collective agreements or DRG-based remuneration do
- The actual annual figure depends on speciality, region and position and can be obtained from the fee report of the relevant regional medical association
- Remuneration should therefore not be calculated with a flat rate for all physicians, but with the actual annual salary of the position

> Note: The care figures are backed by collective agreement. There is no uniform figure for physicians, because remuneration is regulated differently in outpatient and inpatient care. The current figure for the specific region is available from the fee report of the regional medical association.

13. Austria and Switzerland

The German route does not automatically apply in Austria or Switzerland. Both countries have their own recognition procedures and their own registers.

13.1 Austria

- Anyone who trained outside Austria needs recognition by the competent Austrian authority before practising
- Registration in the health professions register is additionally required
- Practising without recognition and registration is an administrative offence punishable by a fine. This also applies to anyone who deploys such a person

- For nursing professions there is a fast one-stop procedure which, with complete documents, is processed within a very short time
- The guide of the Austrian Federal Ministry responsible for labour, social affairs, health and consumer protection clarifies whether recognition or nostrification is required and names the competent body
- Where content and scope are not equivalent, supplementary training is possible

13.2 Switzerland

- Medical professions are handled by MEBEKO, health professions by the Swiss Red Cross (SRK)
- A distinction is made between diplomas from EU and EFTA states and those from third countries; the procedures differ
- For third countries, waiting times and assessments are to be expected, the requirements are stricter than under German law
- Language requirements differ by canton and by profession
- The Federal Office for Vocational Education and Training (SBFI) is the central source of information

> Note: This information does not replace country-specific advice. Before the first placement into Austria or Switzerland, clarification with a law firm or the competent authority is necessary.

14. Guidance for placement

- Regulated professions: keep recognition or licensure in view at all times, also after the contract is signed. The certificate is valid nationwide
- Check section 38 BeschV before every new country of origin. The list of restricted states changes
- Fast-track procedure under section 81a and the Western Balkans route cannot be combined
- Observe the salary threshold for first approvals for people from 45 years of age
- Plan language levels early, they are often the longest element
- Ask for the competent authority based on the federal state of deployment, not the seat of the agency
- Clarify the costs of recognition in advance and record in writing who bears them
- Document the status of the recognition as a separate process step

15. Sources

- Federal Government portal for skilled worker immigration
- Federal Employment Agency, Western Balkans, prior approval, Central Agency for Foreign Skills
- make-it-in-germany.com
- saarland.de, State Office for Social Affairs, health professions and licensure
- Saarland Medical Chamber, recognition of foreign educational qualifications
- Gesetze im Internet: Residence Act, Employment Ordinance including the annex to section 38, Nursing Professions Act, Federal Medical Regulation
- nursinginaustria.at, the guide of the Austrian Federal Ministry
- bag.admin.ch and sbfi.admin.ch for Switzerland
- General Data Protection Regulation, articles 9 and 28