



# Germany: Reform of care education to tackle the overall shortage of care professionals

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*The Care Professions Reform Act (Pflegerberufereformgesetz) passed the German Federal Parliament (Bundestag) in June 2017 and was approved by the German Federal Council (Bundesrat) in July. It is aimed at modernising care education, providing for better training conditions, strengthening the identity of care professions and thus raising the appeal of care professions in order to tackle the overall shortage of care professionals in Germany.*

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## Description

Under the Grand Coalition governing from 2013 to 2017, the long-term care insurance scheme (LTCl) in Germany has seen major changes, enacted by three so-called Long-term Care Strengthening Acts (I to III) coming into force between 2015 and 2017. Of particular importance is the fact that the definition of the need for long-term care (LTC) and the procedure for assessing this need have been completely revised following the recommendations of an expert group, submitted in 2009. Subsequently, the range of beneficiaries of LTCl has been extended, providing for better access, particularly for people suffering from dementia. Almost all actors involved described this reform as overdue.

Nevertheless, a number of severe problems linked to ensuring adequate care remain to be solved, above all the upcoming, or already existing, shortage of carers (the “care crisis” – “Pflegernotstand”), predominantly affecting LTC. According to experts’ projections, there is a need for additional LTC staff, ranging from approximately (full-time equivalents) 263,000 (best case scenario) up to almost 500,000 persons (worst case scenario) in 2030 (Rothgang et al. 2012: 51-55), due to an increasing demand for care and, simultaneously, a decreasing labour force potential, both

arising from demographic change. At the same time, working conditions for carers are poor, particularly in LTC: wages are low, the work is demanding and working hours are unattractive.

Against this background, in March 2016 the German federal government submitted a draft law amending the regulation of training for care professions (Deutscher Bundestag 2016a). This Care Professions Act was aimed at:

- modernising care education,
- providing for better training conditions,
- establishing a coherent job profile, and thus
- raising the appeal of care professions
- in order to tackle the overall shortage of care professionals in Germany.

At the very heart of this draft law was a reform of professional qualifications. The draft law sought to merge the training for care professions, which was previously separated into three distinct degrees for nursing (Krankenpflege), paediatric nursing (Kinderkrankenpflege) and care for the elderly (Altenpflege), into one degree (“care expert”) qualifying degree

holders to provide care in each of its branches ("generalist training").

However, in the course of reform, this issue itself proved to be very controversial (Deutscher Bundestag 2016b) – not only between governing parties and interest groups, but also among the governing parties (Social Democrats and Christian Democrats), though the Grand Coalition had initially agreed on this amendment. Whilst the Social Democrats mostly continued to support the concept of generalist training, doubts arose among the Christian Democrats. In particular, apprehensions emerged that the policy instruments as initially envisaged might trigger a movement of degree holders away from care for the elderly and into nursing or children's nursing, as these occupations are better paid and more prestigious. These concerns were shared by the public service trade union (ver.di). Supporting this criticism, experts in the areas of paediatric care and psychiatric care for the elderly objected that turning away from the specialist approach might result in a decline in the quality of care.

In the end, after months of intensive discussions, the Care Professions Reform Act passed the German Federal Parliament (Bundestag) in June 2017, and was approved by the German Federal Council (Bundesrat) in July. Actors at the federal and Länder levels agreed on a compromise: all apprentices will have to pass a two-year generalist training course and will then be able to choose whether to continue with generalist training in the third year (their degree being acknowledged in the EU, based on Directive 2005/36/EC), or to specialise in one of the three key areas.

Beyond these core elements, the reform contains a number of further provisions, inter alia:

- supplementing vocational training, a care study course (of minimum three years) leading to a degree will be introduced in order to qualify to provide professional care.
- Care education will be free of charge for trainees; hitherto, in some of the Länder, trainees have had to pay a "school fee". Moreover, in future an adequate training allowance will be paid for trainees.
- In order to ensure high quality training, minimum requirements (e.g. with regard to professional qualification of teachers) are to be imposed on care schools.

The reform will come into force gradually, with the provisions on reorganisation of care training and degrees applying from 2020.

## Outlook & commentary

Whilst some of the Care Professions Reform Act's regulations are being supported by almost all actors involved (e.g. the abandonment of the "school fee"), the core provisions affecting diplomas have been, and presumably will remain, highly controversial. How far this reform will contribute to successfully tackling the shortage of care professionals remains to be seen. In order to ensure that care is delivered by an adequate number of well-trained professionals, it seems crucial that, in addition to this reform, working conditions for carers should be significantly improved and salaries considerably increased.

## Further reading

Deutscher Bundestag (2016a): Gesetzentwurf der Bundesregierung: Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Reform der Pflegeberufe (Pflegeberufereformgesetz – PflBRefG). Bundestagsdrucksache 18/7823 v. 09.03.2016. [German Federal Parliament (2016a): Draft law submitted by the Federal Government: Draft law on the reform of care professions (Care Professions Reform Act). Document No. 18/7823, 9th March 2016.]

Deutscher Bundestag (2016b): Ausschuss für Gesundheit, 76. Sitzung am 30.05.2016: Stellungnahmen zur Anhörung über den Entwurf des Pflegereformgesetzes. <https://www.bundestag.de/ausschuesse/ausschuesse18/a14/anhoerungen/stellungnahmen-pflbrefg/423456> [German Federal Parliament (2016b): Health Committee, 76th session, 30th May 2016: Written statements submitted to the hearing on the draft law by national associations and individual experts.]

Rothgang, Heinz; Müller, Rolf; Unger, Rainer (2012): Themenreport "Pflege 2030": Was ist zu erwarten – was ist zu tun?, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung. [Issue Report "Care 2030": What is to be expected – what is to be done?, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation].

## Authors

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