

# Germany relies on immigrants to ease child care crisis <sup>[1]</sup>

Germany has a shortfall of some 125,000 skilled workers in its day care centers. A kindergarten in Cologne has found a solution, hiring trained child care workers from abroad.

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## Excerpts

On a dull, overcast November morning in the city of Cologne, the voices of two dozen kindergarten children can be heard singing the Spanish song, "Sol solecito calientame un poquito," which means, "Sun, come out and warm me a little." Very few of these 2-to-6-year-olds can actually speak Spanish.

Their day care center is running things in two languages: Spanish and German. The bilingual day care center concept is a successful model, said staff member Jessica Rojas Flores. She was born in Bolivia, and came to Germany from Spain two years ago to work here.

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Does this mean Germany is luring skilled workers away from countries that urgently need them? "No. Many trained child care workers in Spain or Latin America often can't find work, and end up working as waitresses," said Malca-Buchholz. "In Germany, we can offer them a chance to work in the field that they studied for four or five years."

## Massive shortage of day care spots, qualified staff

The day care center's model of hiring skilled workers from abroad might well be an innovative solution to Germany's kindergarten crisis.

There is currently a shortfall of 430,000 day care spots in Germany. A survey by the Paritätischer Gesamtverband, an association of organizations dedicated to promoting parity, puts the shortfall of child care staff in Germany at 125,000. That means two educational specialists are lacking at every day care center.

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The child care crisis is also damaging the German economy. A recent study carried out by the Stepstone recruiting agency calculated that the day care crisis is causing €23 billion (\$24.2 billion) worth of damage to the national economy. It stated that due to inadequate child care services, some 1.2 billion working hours go unfilled every year. In fact, some companies are reducing staff working hours, or even making staff redundant due to a complete lack of child care options.

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"Every euro invested in early childhood education returns fourfold in the long term. Children who are well-supported at day care centers are more likely to achieve a higher level of education, which in turn impacts the pension fund," she said. "But courageous politicians are needed to get it started, politicians who can think beyond the four-year legislative term."

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