

Between Bureaucracy and Dignity: How German Visa Policy Blocks Church Programs and the Recruitment of Skilled Workers

United Evangelical Mission Calls for Fundamental Rethinking

(Wuppertal, 15 April 2026) Germany needs international skilled workers – this is a political consensus. However, anyone who actually tries to bring these professionals into the country encounters a visa system that exposes a deep gap between aspiration and reality. The United Evangelical Mission (UEM), which has been engaged in active exchange between Africa, Asia, and Germany for decades, knows this contradiction from painful experience.

Waiting times of up to a year for a visa decision, months-long struggles to secure embassy appointments, and arbitrarily changing requirements from one country to another – this is the reality regularly faced by UEM staff, partners, and young volunteers from Africa and Asia. For privileged German travellers, this reality is almost unimaginable.

DNA Test Instead of Birth Certificate

The systemic failure becomes particularly evident in the case of Rev. Félicité Ngnintedem, Head of the Global Program Division and member of the UEM Executive Board. For over a year and a half, she has been trying to bring her husband and ten-year-old son from Cameroon to Germany.

The documents initially requested by the German embassy in Yaoundé – including birth certificates – were submitted on time. However, they apparently did not suffice to adequately verify the identity of her family members. Further verification of her husband's documents by the embassy itself cost the family around €600. In addition, there were the costs of a DNA test for the son: although his birth certificate had initially been accepted, the embassy later required genetic proof of his relationship to his mother. This lengthy, non-transparent, and degrading process for all involved demonstrates how official documents are increasingly being replaced by complex and costly substitute procedures.

No Presumption of Trust for Church Organizations

UEM's volunteer program is also suffering under restrictive visa policies. Young people from the Global South in particular face significant challenges in credibly demonstrating their intention to return to embassy officials. The result: for years, no young volunteers from Cameroon or Sri Lanka have been able to participate in UEM's South-North exchange program.

“Although the number of absconders over decades of youth exchange can be counted on one hand, the church is not granted any presumption of trust here,” says Maren Hager de Galindo, who is responsible for visa matters at UEM.

Arbitrariness as a System

Church partnership work faces the same problems. German embassies apply different procedures depending on the country, rules change without notice, and suddenly required additional documents must be submitted within extremely short deadlines. For example, the German embassy in Windhoek has recently begun applying formal declarations of commitment – originally intended only for private individuals – to church institutions as well. As a result, inviting church districts must first approach local immigration authorities and prove their financial capacity by providing a security deposit. For partnership visas from Tanzania, deposits of several thousand euros are also required before partners are allowed to enter the country.

An Appeal for Justice and Dignity

UEM calls on the responsible political authorities to fundamentally rethink German visa practices. On the one hand, Germany seeks to attract skilled workers from around the world and maintain international relationships; on the other hand, it confronts people with bureaucratic hurdles, mistrust, and degrading procedures. This sends a contradictory message. Justice, dignity, and the willingness for genuine encounter must not end at the gates of German embassies.

About „UEM“

The United Evangelical Mission (UEM) with offices in Germany, Indonesia and Tanzania is an international, equal communion of 39 members. The UEM consistently pursues a holistic understanding of mission. This includes improving the living conditions of suffering and disadvantaged people while respecting their personal dignity and taking their cultural context into account.