



WERTE EXECUTIVE SEARCH

TWO MARKETS, TWO MINDSETS: Senior Hiring Between Germany and Serbia

Annual Market Insight Report 2025



Opportunity-Driven vs Structure-Driven Markets

Approach Strategies and Candidate Engagement

Compensation Expectations and Negotiation Culture

Since our establishment, we have been publishing our Annual market insight report and covering relevant topics regarding senior hiring. The data is collected from our implemented executive search projects and detailly analyzed, so that each of our Annual market insight reports represents a result of a compact empirical research.

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Senior Hiring 2025: Comparing Market Maturity in Germany and Serbia

Introduction

Since 2022, Werte Executive has supported clients in identifying and attracting senior leadership talent across both the Serbian and German markets. Working closely with international corporations, mid-sized companies, and growing organizations allows us to observe hiring dynamics not from surveys or assumptions, but from real executive search processes. The annual report is based exclusively on insights gathered through active mandates – candidate interactions, client decision-making patterns, and measurable market behavior.

In 2025, one theme became particularly visible: **the difference in market maturity between Serbia and Germany strongly shapes how senior hiring processes unfold.** While both markets face talent shortages, the underlying candidate mindset, hiring expectations, and organizational behavior differ significantly.

This report highlights key comparative insights observed throughout the year.

Market Maturity: Opportunity-Driven vs Structure-Driven Markets

At its core, the Serbian senior talent market remains largely **opportunity-driven**, while Germany operates as a more **structure-driven hiring environment.** In Serbia, senior professionals are generally highly responsive to direct outreach. Depending on industry and role, outreach response rates range between **80 – 90%**, significantly higher than in Germany, where response rates typically vary between **10 – 30%**. However, high responsiveness does not automatically translate into openness to career change.

Serbian candidates often enter early conversations out of curiosity and a desire to stay informed about market developments. Initial discussions frequently serve as exploratory exchanges rather than specific career decisions. In many cases, candidates have not yet discussed potential career moves with their families or evaluated practical implications of a transition. A commonly observed mindset can be summarized as: “Let’s see what happens if the right opportunity appears.” This exploratory openness creates a dynamic market environment but also introduces a level of unpredictability. Approximately **20 – 30% of senior candidates** demonstrate financial or role expectations that are not fully aligned with realistic market conditions – a nuance that typically becomes visible only through experienced assessment and deep local market understanding.

Germany presents a contrasting picture. Lower response rates reflect a more selective engagement pattern: candidates who agree to conversations usually have clearly defined motivations and evaluate opportunities against structured personal and professional criteria. Discussions often follow prior consultation with family members or long-term career planning considerations. In other words, conversations start later – but with significantly higher commitment levels.

Ultimately, these differences highlight the importance of a **trusted advisory role** in both markets – albeit for different reasons.

In Serbia, the value lies in **interpreting intent behind engagement.** An experienced executive search consultant with deep local market understanding can distinguish between candidates who are merely exploring the market and those whose initial curiosity can realistically evolve into a viable opportunity – for both the client and the candidate. Guiding conversations in the right direction from the earliest stages, setting realistic expectations, and anticipating potential risks becomes essential in maintaining process integrity and avoiding late-stage misalignment.

In Germany, the challenge is less about interpretation and more about **building sufficient momentum despite lower accessibility**. A successful search requires a highly engaged and resilient approach, with continuous expansion of the target pool to compensate for lower response rates. Strong market knowledge, combined with disciplined execution, ensures that a sufficiently broad and qualified shortlist can be built – ultimately securing a successful outcome despite more selective candidate engagement.

Across both environments, **market understanding alone is not enough** – it is the ability to translate that understanding into precise, adaptive search strategies that defines successful executive hiring.

Approach Strategies and Candidate Engagement

Interestingly, outreach methodology also reveals market maturity differences.

In Germany, **direct phone outreach (cold calling)** consistently delivers the strongest engagement results, increasing response rates by approximately **15 – 20%** compared to written outreach alone. Personal interaction signals seriousness and professionalism in a market where candidates are selective about engagement.

In Serbia, the difference between communication channels is significantly less pronounced, as candidates are generally more accessible across multiple outreach formats.

Documentation and Commitment: *The Role of Arbeitszeugnisse*

A distinctive feature of the German hiring market is the formal role of **Arbeitszeugnis** – official employment certificates issued by employers at the end of each engagement. These documents provide structured evaluations of an employee's

performance, responsibilities, and conduct, and represent a standardized and widely trusted reference framework.

It is common practice for candidates in Germany to submit a comprehensive application portfolio, including **all relevant Arbeitszeugnisse alongside academic credentials**, particularly in senior-level processes. As a result, candidate profiles are supported not only by self-reported experience but also by formally documented career history.

This practice has a direct impact on candidate commitment. When a candidate has progressed through initial discussions, participated in in-depth conversations, and shared their full documentation, it typically signals a **high level of seriousness and intent** toward the opportunity.

In Serbia, there is no equivalent institutionalized format with comparable weight. While reference letters do exist, they are neither standardized nor consistently used, and their significance in the hiring process is more limited. As a result, it is far more common for candidates to share only a CV in the early stages of a process.

This difference influences engagement dynamics. In Germany, the act of submitting a complete set of documents reinforces commitment and process ownership. In Serbia, where such documentation is not expected, sharing a CV alone does not necessarily carry the same level of intent – and candidates may engage more fluidly.

In this context, the role of a **trusted advisor** becomes critical. Beyond formal documentation, it is the consultant's responsibility to **assess the depth of candidate engagement from the earliest interactions and continuously evaluate how that engagement evolves throughout the process**, ensuring that both client and candidate are aligned not only in qualifications, but also in intent.

Compensation Expectations and Negotiation Culture

Differences in market maturity are also visible in how compensation is discussed.

In Serbia, compensation expectations are predominantly expressed as **net monthly salary**, often complemented by performance bonuses. Discussions tend to focus on immediate income comparison and perceived upgrade potential.

In Germany, compensation conversations are more structured. Candidates and employers almost exclusively operate with **annual gross compensation**, with clear differentiation between fixed and variable components and detailed discussion around target achievement metrics.

German candidates typically demonstrate a high level of transparency in compensation discussions. Even when they proactively initiate financial topics, these conversations are in most cases approached in a **practical and non-opportunistic manner**. There is a clear understanding that neither side should invest time and resources into a process unless there is sufficient alignment in expectations to enable a realistic outcome. In this context, the role of a trusted advisor is to validate alignment early, structure discussions efficiently, and ensure that both sides are operating within compatible frameworks from the outset.

In Serbia, compensation discussions often require a more **actively guided approach**.

While expectations are not inherently misaligned, a portion of candidates may adopt a more opportunity-sensitive stance once financial topics are introduced. This does not preclude the possibility of a strong and successful match – on the contrary, many processes do result in well-aligned outcomes.

However, it places greater importance on the role of an experienced executive search consultant who can navigate the discussion with precision, distinguish between underlying motivation and situational opportunism, and ensure that both

client and candidate remain aligned throughout the process.

Careful moderation of these conversations helps establish realistic expectations early and reduces the risk of misalignment at later stages.

Notice Periods and Mobility Constraints

Legal and cultural frameworks further reinforce structural differences between the markets.

In Serbia, statutory notice periods typically range between **15 and 30 days**, which in practice often translates into relatively fast transitions once agreements are reached.

While this legal framework sets the baseline, market reality can be also flexible, or not. Although not so often, in certain cases, employers release employees earlier than required, allowing transitions to happen at an accelerated pace.

At the same time, discussions around availability in Serbia often reveal an additional layer of candidate behavior. Despite relatively short formal notice periods, many candidates proactively express willingness to extend their transition timeline in order to support their current employer – particularly in ensuring sufficient time for successor identification and onboarding.

This dynamic highlights the importance of a trusted advisor who can **interpret both formal constraints and informal intentions**, aligning expectations on all sides. Managing availability discussions carefully helps balance business needs with candidate positioning, ensuring that timelines remain realistic while preserving commitment and trust throughout the process.

In Germany, the standard practice for senior professionals is a **three-month notice period** calculated from the end of the calendar month or even quarter, effectively extending transitions to several months. This longer transition period influences planning discipline on both candidate

and employer sides and encourages earlier strategic hiring decisions.

Hiring Process Dynamics and Decision-Making Speed

While Serbian hiring processes often begin quickly due to high candidate accessibility, overall timelines are not always shorter.

German clients typically demonstrate strong market awareness and structured decision-making. Interviews are organized quickly after candidate submission, and in approximately **60 – 70% of our projects**, second-round interviews are scheduled immediately following positive first meetings. Feedback cycles tend to be fast and clearly communicated.

One contributing factor is organizational structure: executive search processes in Germany are frequently conducted directly with decision-makers. In Serbia, local management teams often align decisions with regional or global headquarters, extending approval cycles related to budgets, role definitions, or final hiring decisions.

Conclusion: Market Maturity Shapes Hiring Outcomes

The comparison between Serbia and Germany demonstrates that talent availability alone does not define hiring success. Market maturity – reflected through candidate behavior, compensation transparency, organizational readiness, and decision-making structures – plays an equally critical role.

Across all observed dimensions – from outreach response and candidate motivation, to documentation standards, negotiation culture, and process dynamics – it becomes clear that these are not isolated differences, but parts of broader systemic patterns that shape how hiring processes evolve and conclude in each market.

Opportunity-driven markets generate energy, accessibility, and a high level of initial engagement. At the same time, they require more careful navigation of expectations, stronger interpretation of candidate intent, and continuous alignment throughout the process. Structure-driven markets, on the other hand, demand greater effort at entry points and a more persistent approach to building candidate pipelines, yet provide higher predictability, transparency, and commitment once alignment is established.

In both environments, success increasingly depends on the ability to **adapt hiring strategies to market realities rather than applying uniform approaches across geographies**. Organizations that recognize these differences are better positioned to define realistic timelines, structure competitive offers, and engage candidates in a way that reflects local expectations.

This is where the role of a trusted advisor becomes essential. Beyond access to talent, effective executive search today requires the ability to **interpret market signals, guide both clients and candidates through differing behavioral patterns, and translate complexity into clear, actionable hiring strategies**.

Ultimately, organizations that approach executive hiring with this level of market awareness and adaptability are not only more likely to secure the right leadership talent, but also to do so in a way that ensures long-term alignment and sustainable success across different market environments.