

ARRIVING IN GERMANY

The first steps



Diakonie 
Deutschland

Arriving in Germany: the first steps

Are you planning to move to Germany on a long-term basis? When moving to another country you have to organise a lot of things and also take account of legal preconditions.

This brochure informs you of the necessary steps to take in order to make your move easier. It explains where you can obtain cost-free information and advice before you move to Germany and it explains necessary steps after arriving in Germany.

We wish you every success with your preparations and a good start in Germany.

Advice and support in your country

Prepared and successful migration to Germany – pre-departure advice on migration (Diakonie)

The experts offer individual advice on:

- preparing for integration into society and the employment market
- assistance with the recognition of vocational qualifications
- successfully integrating your family or children in the educational system
- financial security/health
- protection from dubious offers, exploitation at work, and other kinds of dependencies

You can contact the team of pre-departure services about all your questions regarding preparation for your move to Germany and about all the topics of this brochure.

Contact the experts via: www.legal-migration.de/en

Advice and support in Germany

For information, personal advice and tips contact the migration counselling for adult immigrants (from the age of 27 years, www.migrationsberatung.org/en) or the Youth Migration Services (for people between 12 and 27 years, www.jugendmigrationsdienste.de/en).

First Priorities

1. **Before departure, it is mandatory** to open a bank account, get a health insurance and find an apartment for the visa process

2. **Take important documents with you and scan them:** school certificate, certificates and diplomas of vocational training, university including an overview of grades and subjects, work certificates and reports, birth certificate, certificate of marriage, family register

3. **Immediately after arrival:** buy an internet/phone card and find a temporary apartment if necessary

4. **The first two weeks:** register at the local registry office in your town of residence in Germany

5. **First 3–4 weeks:** extend the residence permit/apply for the residence permit. It is important to find a permanent apartment, get internet at home and prepare for your new job

6. **Starting the new job:** communicate your tax ID, check your pay slip, clarify your work permit and the recognition of qualifications

7. **Starting everyday life:** open your bank account in Germany, if you have not done it, register broadcasting license fee (Rundfunkbeitrag), organise school and childcare

8. **Taxes and finances:** check your tax category, you should prepare your tax declaration and get important insurances sorted

9. **Integration further learning:** German classes, local networks, associations and further qualifications

Internet and Communication



WIFI for free

- **Airport/train stations:** available with time limit
- **Public spaces, restaurants and cafés:** WIFI hotspots in many places and towns
- **Hotels:** mostly available

Security Advice

- Public WIFI is not coded and therefore not safe
- Don't transmit sensible data (passwords, banking app)
- Using a VPN (Virtual Private Network) to prevent hacker attacks





German SIM Card (recommended for mobile data and calls)

Requirements

- Personal ID/passport/electronic residence permit
- Often your address in Germany is needed for invoices

Prepaid Option (immediately available)

- No credit check needed
- Available in supermarkets, petrol stations, other stores
- Usable in a flexible way without long-term commitment
- Register via Video or Post Ident
- **Common providers:** Telekom, Vodafone, O2, Aldi Talk, congstar

Postpaid Contract

- Cheap tariffs, often with a smartphone
- Credit check and a German bank account is needed
- Possible after registering in registry office and after opening a bank account

TIP:

Start with the prepaid option and change later if needed. You can then transfer your phone number to the new contract. Always read contracts carefully to understand all the details, prices and conditions.

Accommodation and Mobility



Temporary housing and long-term apartments

- Hotel/Airbnb/holiday apartments for the first days or WG (Wohngemeinschaft) – shared apartment or Zwischenmiete – for a specific period



Public transport

Download Apps

- **DB Navigator** (long distance and short distance transport) www.bahn.de
- **Local apps:** for example MVG (Munich), BVG (Berlin), VRR (North Rhine-Westphalia)

Ticket Purchase

- **Machines** (usually also in English and in other languages)
- **Smartphone Apps** (digital tickets)
- **Bus driver** (not always possible)

AFTER ARRIVAL (THE FIRST 72 HOURS)



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TIP:

The **Deutschlandticket** costs currently € 58 per month (September 2025) and under subscription. You can use it for local public transport all over Germany. A credit check is necessary.

Important Rules

- **Validate your tickets from the machine!** Sometimes the stamping machine is at the platform, sometimes in the train or tram or bus
- There are trains, buses and trams where you are only allowed to get in with a ticket and where you cannot buy one. In case you cannot buy a ticket beforehand, ask immediately the staff members and explain the problem to ask what to do.
- Without a ticket they might charge you € 60 fine. Using transport without a ticket is a criminal offense and might have consequences for your residence permit in case of denunciation/conviction.
- Ticket control happens often



Taxi-Services

- **Apps:** Uber, Bolt or local taxi apps
- **Phone:** national phone number for taxis 22456
- Only use licensed taxis (taxi sign, taximeter)

Save emergency contacts



- **Police:** 110
- **Fire fighters/rescue:** 112 (emergency doctor/transport, if it is necessary to be very fast, in case of life-threatening accidents or conditions)
- **On call service:** 116 117 (in case the doctor is closed but you need a doctor. In case of emergency: 112)
- **Employer/human resources department**



Register with your new address (obligatory within 14 days!)



Official language in agencies, but also with doctors, bank officials and insurance companies is German. Therefore, you might need documents in German or a certified translation of your documents. Open an e-mail account, you will need it for communication with agencies.

Where: Bürgeramt/registry office of your town or municipality

Required documents

- Personal ID or passport
- Certificate of the house owner (Wohnungsgeberbescheinigung)
- Residence permit/visa
- Contract of the apartment

TIP:

- Frequently, appointments are made online. You can find the information at the website of the agencies.
- Temporary accommodation (Airbnb/holiday apartments) is accepted for the registry – you can change the address later again.
- The certificate of the registry of your address (Meldebescheinigung) is important for other issues (bank account, residence permit, health insurance). Keep this document.

Opening your bank account



A German bank account is needed for receiving your salary. Most employers don't accept foreign bank accounts. Therefore, it is important that you open your bank account early enough.

Common and traditional banking (Sparkasse, Deutsche Bank, Commerzbank, Volksbank)

- Big network and offices for personal advice, they know the local situation
- Better conditions for credits and financing
- Opening a new bank account might take more time

Online-Banking (N26, DKB, ING)

- Opening a bank account is usually fast
- Lower fees
- Limited local services/no local offices

Required documents

- Passport/personal ID
- Residence permit
- Registration card (Meldebescheinigung)
- Work contract/certification of your salary
- Video identification or local appointment at the office to identify yourself



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Labelling your mailbox at home



- **Immediately after moving in**, put your name and surname on the mailbox and the bell (sometimes the house owner labels it).
- **Important:** without your name on the mailbox, you cannot receive important documents from the offices like the immigration authority.
- **Be aware: in case you receive letters in yellow-gray envelopes:** it is often very important letters with a deadline to respond! Always look at them immediately.
- **Broadcasting Licence:** register your apartment to pay the mandatory fee for public TV and radio (Rundfunkbeitrag): www.rundfunkbeitrag.de



Insurances



You need a valid health insurance from your first day in Germany. Check the incoming health insurance for the time until you start working and the health insurance options from your first working day.

Health insurance

Compulsory Health Insurance (GKV)

- Mandatory with an income of up to € 73,800 per year (2025)
- Employer pays 50 % of the premium
- Family members are automatically covered
- You can choose the health insurance, the usual basic services are mandatory.
- **Important:** private health insurance for holidays is additional if you travel outside the European Union (€ 15 to € 20 per year).

Private Health Insurance (PKV)

- Possible with an income above € 73,800 per year or for freelancers
- They often have a wide range of services
- Higher costs
- Changing back to the compulsory health insurance later is difficult
- Family members are not covered automatically for free



Other important insurances



Public Liability – Haftpflichtversicherung (recommended)

- It covers damages that you cause other people or other people's property.
- **Costs:** approximately € 50 to € 80 annually
- In Germany costs of liability loss can get very expensive. Without a personal insurance you are responsible for possible expenses.
- Use **Check24** (www.check24.de) to compare the options.



Household Insurance – Hausratsversicherung (if you have your own apartment or you rent one)

- It covers usually theft, fire, water, storm damages of your personal belongings and properties.
- Recommended when you start renting your long-term apartment
- **Costs:** it depends on the size of the apartment and value of furniture and property

TIP:

Get a public liability (Haftpflichtversicherung) immediately after arrival, it is one of the most important insurances and it is relatively cheap.

Apply for the residence permit/extension



Responsible: Immigration authority (Ausländerbehörde) of your town

Required documents

- Application forms (online or printed)
- Biometric passport picture
- Work contract and qualification certificates
- Registration card (Meldebescheinigung) and certification of health insurance
- Check the website of the local immigration authority which documents are needed in your case

Important: make appointments beforehand (online or via phone call)

TIP:

1. Always apply for the extension of your residence permit before it expires (otherwise you might have to leave and get a new visa from your country); save the proof that you asked for appointments or that you applied in time.
2. Check the current status online constantly.
3. Send polite reminders via e-mail
4. Contact via phone call if you don't get answers
5. Document and write down content of phone calls and save e-mails
6. You can ask for urgent appointments.
7. As soon as possible apply for an unlimited residence permit (Erlaubnis zum Daueraufenthalt, Niederlassungserlaubnis/permanent resident card) or Einbürgerung (German passport).

Housing and Internet



Searching for an apartment

Online platforms

- [ImmobilienScout24](#), [Immowelt](#) (main websites)
- [WG-Gesucht](#) (for rooms in shared apartments and small apartments)
- [Kleinanzeigen](#) (be aware of scams!)
- Register at the local residential building cooperative (Wohnungsbaugenossenschaft) – they often have cheaper options.

Offline options

- Local newspaper
- Realtor or estate agent
- Network of colleagues and employer

In some cases you can apply for a certificate of eligibility of social housing (Wohnberechtigungsschein, WBS). You can get information at the local housing office.



Internet at home

- **Most common providers:** Deutsche Telekom, Vodafone, 1&1, O2
- **Installation:** it might take 2–6 weeks
- You can use mobile data in the meantime

Starting the new job



- **Communicate your bank account details**
- **ID number of social insurance (Sozialversicherungsnummer):** you will get it automatically by the pension insurance after starting the job.
- **Tax category:** it is usually category I for non-married people, category III/V or IV/IV for married couples.
- **Work contract:** check all details and sign if necessary
- **Hand in your work permit** if necessary

Recognition of qualifications

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

- 1. Firstly: get advice by the counselling services (Anerkennungsberatung)** It varies from case to case which application makes sense and what you need to consider.
- 2. Submit the application online:** find the suitable process of recognition on the website
- 3. Prepare the documents:** certificates of qualifications, trainings and diploma, certified translations
- 4. Submit the application:** at the office responsible (it varies depending on your profession)
- 5. Waiting for the reply:** it can take 3 to 6 months
- 6. If partly recognized:** you can get further qualifications via trainings or adjustment

IMPORTANT DISTINCTION:

Regulated professions: you can only work in these professions if your qualifications are recognized. They include, for example, doctors, nurses, lawyers, teachers in a state school

Non-regulated professions: you can work in these professions without an official recognition of qualifications, but it is recommended for better job options. It concerns for example jobs like IT specialist, graphic designer, business administration, craftsmen



Counselling and Support

- **Make It In Germany:**
www.make-it-in-germany.com/en
- **Counselling about recognition of qualifications:**
www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/html/en/index.php and ProRecognition www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/html/en/pro/prorecognition.php and for diploma www.anabin.de
- **Service Center for Professional Recognition:**
www.arbeitsagentur.de/fuer-menschen-aus-dem-ausland
- **Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IHK – Industrie- und Handelskammer):** for commercial and technological professions www.ihk.de
- **Chamber of Crafts (HWK – Handwerkskammer):** for all trading and crafts professions
www.handwerkskammer.de
- **Welcome Center:** a lot of cities and regions have specialized centers for skilled workers.
www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/service/advisory-contact-services/in-germany

Taxes and Finances



- **Tax-ID:** you will get it automatically and you have to communicate it to your employer.
- **Tax category:** it depends if you are married or not, you can change it online.
- **Tax declaration:** often you can get a refund, especially in the first year and especially for married couples and families with children.
- **Counselling and advice:** www.bvl-verband.de

For international workers and skilled workers

- **Agreement on taxes between countries:** be aware of possible agreements between Germany and your country of origin.
- **Tax Counselling** is recommended in case of complicated international situations



TIP:

You can also get information at the responsible finance office. You can get further support from associations of income taxes (Lohnsteuerhilfvereinen), a membership is relatively cheap, or from tax consultants that you must pay on your own.

Integration & further education



German Language

- The Goethe Institute offers language classes as well as cost-free online material www.goethe.de/en/spr/ueb.html and www.goethe.de/prj/mwd/en/index.html
- Integration and orientation courses (BAMF): <https://bamf-navi.bamf.de/en>
- German courses for skilled workers for professions
- **Online websites and apps:** Babbel, Duolingo, Deutsche Welle (learngerman.dw.com/en/learn-german/s-9528)
- Volkshochschulen (VHS) www.volkshochschule.de



Social Integration

- Local associations (sport, music, voluntary work), Volkshochschulen
- Migrant and diaspora organisations, for example: www.bundeskonferenz-mo.de
www.damigra.de
www.bv-nemo.de
- Welcome Center: www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/service/advisory-contact-services/in-germany
- Migration counselling for adult immigrants: www.migrationsberatung.org/en
- Youth Migration Services for people under 27 years: www.jugendmigrationsdienste.de/en

Checklist

Week 1: Preparation and what you can do immediately

- Get a sim card for mobile data and phone calls
- Temporary housing (in case you don't have anything yet)
- Register at the registry office (mandatory within the first 14 days)
- Open a bank account and communicate it to your employer

Week 2: Official Basis

- Get a health insurance (compulsory health insurance or private health insurance)
- Label your mailbox with your name
- Wait for your tax ID and communicate it to your employer

Week 3: Prepare for your new job and clarify housing

- Search for a long-term apartment (if you are in a temporary apartment)
- Get WIFI at your new apartment
- Send bank details to employer
- Check your work contract and sign it, if needed
- Apply for the residence permit (make an appointment)

Week 4: Starting your new job and integration

- Start of work
- Check your first salary certificate and understand it
- Finish your recognition of qualifications (if not done yet)
- Look for German classes and register
- Check and get insurances (liability/Haftpflicht)
- Explore local services and infrastructure
- In case you need any support, contact the migration counselling or welcome center in your new hometown

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