



Visa

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WHO NEEDS A VISA?

Do I need a visa to work in Germany? And what regulations apply to me? This is the first question many people ask themselves. In a nutshell, the rules depend on which country you come from and what qualifications you have. We explain the main aspects – for example, who can apply for a Blue Card.

EU/EFTA nationals

As citizens of the EU with the right to freedom of movement, you have unrestricted access to the German labour market. You do not need a visa or a residence permit either to enter or work in Germany. The same applies if you come from Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland.

Nationals of non-EU/non-EFTA states

Nationals of Australia, Israel, Japan, Canada, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand or the USA may enter Germany even without a visa and apply for a residence permit giving entitlement to work before taking up employment. Only nationals of these countries can apply to their local foreign nationals' registration authority after having already entered Germany.

If you want to take up employment shortly after entering Germany, you are recommended to apply for the right kind of visa before doing so.

Nationals of all other third-party states must apply for a visa from their local German mission abroad before travelling to Germany.

WHAT KINDS OF VISA ARE THERE?



In Germany there are different visas serving different purposes. Whether for job-hunting, studying, training or doing research, visas and residence titles have different conditions attached depending on the purpose of people's stay in Germany. Here is an overview of the different purposes for which visas are granted.

Work visa

Academics: All academics with a recognised university degree or one which is comparable with a German university degree are entitled to the "EU Blue Card" single residence and work permit. To obtain it, you need to prove that you have a job in Germany which corresponds to your qualification. The only condition is that you must earn an annual gross salary of at least 49,600 euros.

Specialists in the fields of mathematics, IT, life sciences and engineering as well as doctors may be entitled to an EU Blue Card if they earn the same amount as comparable German workers, but no less than 38,688 euros gross per year. In this case, the BA (Federal Employment Agency) must approve your being employed. This approval is not required if you earned your university degree in Germany.

EU Blue Card holders are entitled to a permanent residence permit after 33 months. This is a residence permit with no time limit. If you can prove before this time that your required language skills comply with level B1 of the Common European Reference Framework for Languages (CEFR), you can obtain your permanent residence permit after just 21 months.

You don't meet the conditions for an EU Blue Card? No need to panic. If you are an academic there are other possibilities besides the EU Blue Card for working and living in Germany. If you have a job corresponding to your qualifications, under Section 18 [4] of the Residence Act you are on principle entitled to a "residence title for the purpose of taking up employment" if the Federal Employment Agency has approved your employment. You do not need to apply for approval yourself. As soon as you have a job offer, just talk with the Germany embassy which is responsible for you if you are still abroad.

In Germany you can get further help from the foreign nationals' registration authority or the Welcome Centre in the town where you live.

Graduates of German universities: Did you successfully complete your studies at a German university? In that case, you are entitled to take up a job in Germany which is in line with your studies. You will receive the necessary residence permit from the foreign nationals' registration authority which is responsible for you.

Following your studies, if you have not yet found a suitable job, the foreign nationals' registration authority can issue you a residence permit for 18 months for the purpose of seeking employment corresponding to your degree. During this period, you can take any job as a means of supporting yourself. You can find out what opportunities are available to you after completing your studies in Germany in the section "Studying in Germany – And after?"

Graduates of vocational training courses: Have you completed non-academic vocational training outside Germany? Then you will be able to take up employment on the basis of the qualifications you have obtained abroad, provided you meet the following criteria:

- ▶ There is a shortage of skilled workers in your profession. A whitelist of such professions is available here: <https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/web/content/whitelist>
- ▶ You have received a binding job offer. A list of vacancies is available in our Job Listings
- ▶ Your qualification has been recognised as being equivalent to a German qualification. Further information on the recognition of vocational credentials is available on the Web site Recognition in Germany. You will have to apply to have your qualifications recognised while you're still in your home country.

If the authority responsible for qualification recognition relevant to you concludes that you need to do further training to get full recognition (for example practical work as part of an adaptation period), you can get a permit allowing you to reside for up to 18 months in Germany (Section 17a of the Residence Act). While doing your additional training you can take up employment in line with your professional profile without any time restrictions.

Visa for jobseekers

If you have not yet found a job in Germany, with a jobseeker's visa you can come to Germany for up to six months to look for one on condition that you have a higher education diploma which is recognised in Germany. The important thing in this case is that you should have enough money to live on for the duration of your stay, since you are not allowed to be employed during this time. Once you have found a suitable job, you can immediately apply for the necessary EU Blue Card or a residence permit in Germany – without first having to depart the country – and can remain in Germany while your application is pending.

This provision applies to you even if you are already in Germany and previously had a residence title allowing you to exercise gainful employment, but which is no longer valid. However, note that a residence permit allowing you to hunt for a job that corresponds to your qualifications cannot be extended. You can only apply for another if, once your residence permit has expired, you spend at least as much time abroad as you spent in Germany seeking a job.

Visa for studying

Studying: Do you come from a non-EU state and want to come to Germany to study here? If you have already been accepted by a state or state-approved university, you can apply for a study visa. This is valid for up to 2 years, but can be extended on request. You have to be able to prove that you have the means to support yourself for the duration of your studies. To do so, you are allowed to work during your studies for up to 120 full or 240 half days. Once you have graduated, you can extend your residence permit again for up to 18 months to find a job that corresponds to your qualifications. While looking for a job, you can exercise any kind of employment.

Applying to study: If you have not yet been accepted by a German university but are interested in studying in Germany and meet the requirements for doing a university degree, you may be entitled to a residence permit for the purpose of applying for a course of study (Residence Act Section 16). This allows you to come to Germany for nine months to apply for a course of study or to prepare to start studying – for example by attending a language course or a preparatory course (called a “Studienkolleg”). The important thing is that you should have the means to support yourself during this time. Note that the residence permit for applying to study cannot be extended. Also, you are not allowed to take up employment at the same time (except during the holidays). You can find out how to prepare for studying in Germany in the section “Training & Learning”.

Visa for training

You can obtain a residence permit to do training in Germany even if you are a national of a non-EU state. If you meet the requirements for the training course you are interested in and have the means to support yourself while training, you will receive a residence permit for the purposes of “school education serving to acquire a vocational qualification” (Section 16 (5a) of the Residence Act). If you do your training with a company (“dual education”), you can obtain a residence permit for the purpose of “basic and advanced industrial training” (Section 17 (1) of the Residence Act). This also requires the agreement of the Federal Employment Agency. Approval is usually given if there is no German applicant or another applicant with priority rights for the training course. The vocational training course must last at least 2 years.

During your training period, you can take up employment for up to 10 hours a week. After completing your training, your residence permit may be extended for a year to allow you to find a job which corresponds to your qualifications. You apply for the requisite residence permit to the competent foreign nationals' registration authority. During this period, you can exercise any occupation as a means of supporting yourself. Once you have found a job corresponding to your qualifications, you can get the appropriate residence permit from the foreign nationals' registration authority. You can find out more about vocational training in Germany in the section “Training & Learning”.

Visa for an internship

Are you studying abroad and would like to come to Germany to do an internship? If you are not a national of an EU state, you will usually require a visa for your internship in Germany. Beside an offer for an internship with a company in Germany, you will also need the approval of the Federal Employment Agency (BA). Your employer should apply for this on your behalf as quickly as possible. If you have documents proving both of these, you should apply for a visa to the competent embassy or consulate before travelling to Germany. Your internship may not last more than twelve months and can only be extended in exceptional cases.

Some internships do not require the agreement of the BA. These include internships under EU-funded programmes (Leonardo, Socrates, Erasmus, etc.). Internships funded by international intergovernmental organisations are also exempt from approval. You can find out more about internships in Germany for students from abroad from the International and Specialized Services (ZAV).

Visa for research

Besides the EU Blue Card, special regulations apply for highly qualified professionals, for example regarding the employment of scientists, researchers and teaching staff or executives.

As an international qualified scientist or researcher you can apply to a recognised research institute for a temporary residence permit in Germany to pursue an activity in your field. You are not usually required to have any German language skills. With this residence title you can either work in the research institution named in the work contract or as a teacher. The residence permit can be extended as long as you still meet the basic requirements.

Moreover, researchers with special technical knowledge, as well as teaching personnel or scientific personnel in prominent positions – for example leaders of scientific projects and work groups – may be granted a settlement permit (pursuant to Section 19 of the Residence Act) directly if they can prove that they have an actual job offer in Germany. You can find out more about the provisions on residence for international scientists in the section Research in Germany.

Visa for self-employment

Do you want to set up a business in Germany? For nationals of non-EU states special visa regulations apply in this case.

Self-employed (“Gewerbetreibende”): If you wish to set up a manual trade or retail business you can get a residence permit for self-employment (Section 21 (1) of the Residence Act) if you satisfy the following requirements:

- ▶ There is commercial interest or regional demand for your products or services.
- ▶ Your business activity is likely to have a positive impact on the economy.
- ▶ You have secured financing for your business by way of capital or a loan commitment.

If you are over 45 years old, a residence permit will only be issued to you if you can also provide proof of adequate provision for old age.

Freelancers (“Freiberufler”): If you want to be self-employed in one of the liberal professions, you can get a residence permit for freelance work (Section 21 (5) of the Residence Act). This residence permit is granted if you can prove that you have the means to fund your project, to support yourself and a permit to exercise that profession. If you are over 45 years old, you must also provide proof that you have adequate provision for old age.

If your business idea is successful and you are able to make a living for yourself and your family as a result of your business, you can have your residence permit extended, which is initially limited to a maximum of three years. If you set up a manual trade or retail business, you can apply for a settlement permit after just three years. You can find out how to turn your business idea into a reality in Germany in the section Setting up a business.



HOW DO I APPLY FOR A VISA?

You must apply for your visa in your home country before travelling to Germany. We explain who to contact and what documents you need to apply.

You apply for a visa to the German embassy in your country. Make sure that you apply for the visa that corresponds to the actual purpose of your stay. This is the only way to ensure trouble-free extension or conversion of your visa by the foreign nationals' registration authority of your place of residence in Germany. For example, it is impossible to stay permanently on a visa that was issued only for a temporary stay. The best thing to do is to inquire in plenty of time to the German embassy in your country about which documents you need for your application.

Fees for visas and temporary and permanent residence permits: If you wish to apply for a visa or a temporary or permanent residence permit, you will usually have to pay a fee. The amount depends on the place, duration and purpose of your stay.

The fee for visa of any category is 60 euros. As a general rule, you can pay this to the German mission abroad in your local currency. The maximum fee for a first application for a residence permit and EU Blue Card is 140 euros. The fee for a settlement permit is 260 euros.

However, under certain circumstances you can get a reduction or even be exempted from the fee altogether. For example, the spouses and children of German nationals are exempt from visa fees. Also, if your stay in Germany is funded by a public scholarship, you do not have to pay any visa fees. You can find out more about this from the German mission abroad in your country (visa fees) or your local foreign nationals' registration authority (fees for temporary or permanent residence permits). The Federal Foreign Office also provides a list of visa fees.

SETTLEMENT PERMIT



You're already living in Germany with a temporary residence permit and would like to settle here permanently? That's not a problem! After a few years' residence in Germany, you can apply for an indefinite residence title, called a "settlement permit". A settlement permit opens numerous prospects: you have the unrestricted right to live in Germany with your family; moreover, you can work as an employee or take up self-employment.

General requirements

Nationals of non-EU and non-EEA states can apply for a settlement permit if they meet the following requirements:

- ▶ They have held a residence permit for 5 years.
- ▶ They have the means to support themselves without public funds.
- ▶ They have paid the compulsory or voluntary contributions to statutory pension insurance for at least 60 months.
- ▶ They are entitled to exercise gainful employment and have the permits to do so.
- ▶ They have a sufficient command of German and basic knowledge of the legal and social system and way of life in Germany
- ▶ They have sufficient living space for themselves and their family.

If you satisfy the above requirements, the best thing to do is make an appointment at your local foreign nationals' registration authority to make your application for a settlement permit. The foreign nationals' registration authority will also tell you which documents you have to submit.

You don't meet all the requirements? No need to panic! You might be entitled to a settlement permit under facilitated conditions. This is the case if you fall into one of the following groups:

- ▶ EU Blue Card holders
- ▶ Graduates of German universities
- ▶ Highly qualified professionals
- ▶ Self-employed persons

EU Blue Card holders

Anyone holding an EU Blue Card can apply for a settlement permit after just 33 months if they exercised skilled employment during that time.

If you have an EU Blue Card and also have sufficient command of the German language, i.e. at least Level B1, this period is reduced to just 21 months – under two years.

Graduates of German universities

As a graduate of a German university you can apply for a settlement permit after just two years. This is on condition that after completing your studies you held a residence title for the purposes of employment or self-employment, or an EU Blue Card, for at least two years. Moreover, you need to have a job commensurate with your qualifications and to have paid the statutory pension insurance for 24 months.

Highly qualified professionals

Highly qualified immigrants are entitled to a settlement permit from the outset as they do not need to satisfy a minimum period of residence. If you fall into the group of researchers with special technical knowledge or teaching personnel or scientific personnel in prominent positions, you can apply for a settlement permit as soon as you arrive in Germany. The important thing is to be able to prove that you have an actual job offer.

The best thing to do is compile all the documents you will need for obtaining a settlement permit immediately before travelling to Germany.

Self-employed persons

If you are self-employed in Germany, you also enjoy facilitated conditions for obtaining a settlement permit. You are entitled to one after just three years on condition that at the time you apply you have a valid residence permit for a self-employed activity. Moreover, you must have realised your project for self-employment. If you can also prove that you can support yourself financially in Germany on a long-term basis, there is no further obstacle to your obtaining a settlement permit.

Costs

When you apply for a settlement permit a fee is payable, the amount of which varies according to the type of activity you exercise. A settlement permit generally costs 135 euros, but for the self-employed the fee is 200 euros, while highly qualified people have to pay 250 euros when applying for a settlement permit.



NATURALISATION

After a certain time in Germany, numerous migrants decide to take Germany nationality. In 2014, 108,420 people of foreign origin were naturalised, according to figures published by the Federal Statistical Office.

5 reasons to claim naturalisation

Naturalisation makes you a German citizen and at the same a national of the European Union – with full rights and obligations:

1. **You get more say:** You are entitled to vote not only in the town where you live, but also at the Land and national levels, and even at the European level. Moreover, you can stand for parliament yourself and actively represent your interests politically.
2. **Free access to all professions:** You can choose any profession you like in Germany. For example, you would even be able to work as a public service employee.
3. **The European Union is open to you:** If you are not already the national of an EU state, your German passport gives you immediate freedom of movement within Europe. That opens up even more possibilities: you can study, work and live in the EU, the EEA states and in Switzerland without restriction.
4. **Travelling is easier:** You can travel to and get visas more easily for numerous countries outside Europe.
5. **Less bureaucracy:** You no longer need a residence permit and no longer need to go to the foreign nationals' registration authority.

Who is entitled to naturalisation?

If you are not German by birth, you can be naturalised if you meet the following requirements:

- ▶ You have been living in Germany legally for at least eight years.
- ▶ You have an indefinite right of residence in Germany (for example as an EU citizen with freedom of movement, or as the holder of a settlement permit, or a limited residence permit that can be converted to an indefinite residence title. However, a residence permit for studying is insufficient.
- ▶ You are able to support yourself and your dependents without social welfare benefits and unemployment benefit: You satisfy this requirement especially if at the time you apply for naturalisation you are in adequately paid employment.
- ▶ You have sufficient knowledge of German: You do not need to have a perfect command of the German language to obtain naturalisation. It is enough to be able to prove your oral and written German skills in a language exam to at least Level B1 (Common European Framework of Reference). A German school-leaving certificate or a vocational training diploma or university degree from Germany are also proof of your German-language skills.
- ▶ You have passed a naturalisation test. By passing the naturalisation test, you provide proof of your knowledge of the German legal and social system. Do you have a German school-leaving certificate or a degree in law, social or political science in Germany? If so, you are not usually required to take the naturalisation test: your German school-leaving certificate or degree will usually suffice in that case. You will find a questionnaire to prepare for the naturalisation test on the Internet: <http://oet.bamf.de>

- ▶ You have not been convicted of any criminal offence: If you have been convicted of a crime or are under investigation in Germany or abroad on suspicion of a crime, you must notify the naturalisation authorities. The naturalisation authorities will only be able to make a decision about your application when the investigation has been completed.
- ▶ You accept the Basic Law: The Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) is the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany. If you apply for German nationality you must acknowledge in writing and orally that you will respect the Basic Law and the laws of the Federal Republic of Germany and refrain from doing anything that could harm it. You make your acknowledgement to the naturalisation authorities.
- ▶ You give up your previous nationality: When you are naturalised you will have to give up your previous nationality. There are exceptions to this rule for certain countries of origin, however. For example, nationals of the EU member states and of Switzerland are allowed to keep their previous nationality when they obtain German citizenship. Other exceptions exist for certain states such as Morocco, Iran and Algeria. Deprivation of nationality is deemed unacceptable in these states.

As the issue of naturalisation includes many specifics and each case is different you should talk to the naturalisation authorities before applying. For example, underage children and the spouses of migrants who are entitled to naturalisation may also be naturalised at the discretion of the naturalisation authorities even if they have not lived in Germany for eight years.

You can find out which naturalisation office is responsible for your case from your local town hall or district authority, or the foreign nationals' registration authority of the municipality where you live.

The naturalisation process – what do I have to do?

Submit your application

Even if you have lived in Germany for eight years or more, you are not naturalised automatically. You always have to submit a written application to the naturalisation authorities. They will also give you personal advice and supply an application form which you must fill out and hand in with the required documents. You can apply for naturalisation in your own right from the age of 16. For children, the parents or other legal guardians can apply on their behalf.

Pay the fee

As a general rule, the fee due when applying for naturalisation is 255 euros. For children who are to be naturalised with their parents the fee is 51 euros per child. If one child alone is to be naturalised, a fee of 255 euros is also due. In exceptional cases the naturalisation fee may be reduced or waived altogether. This is the case, for example, if the applicant has only low income or several children are to be naturalised at the same time.

Naturalisation certificate

Once your application has been verified and accepted, you will receive notification from the naturalisation authorities as how to proceed next. Depending on which Land you live in, you will have to take the steps to renounce your previous nationality yourself. You will receive an assurance of naturalisation ("Einbürgerungszusicherung") which you can submit to the consulate of your country of origin to apply to renounce your previous nationality.

If by acquiring German nationality you automatically lose your previous nationality, or if it is impossible or deemed unacceptable to renounce it, there should be no further obstacle to your naturalisation. You will receive a naturalisation certificate, which will usually be handed to you in person or presented during a naturalisation ceremony. This document makes you a German citizen. How long it takes all in all from the time you apply to the presentation of the certificate varies from case to case. In many cases it can take several months. The best thing is to talk with your local naturalisation authority.

Applying for a German identity card and passport

With the naturalisation certificate you can have a German identity card and a German passport made out at your local residents' registration office ("Einwohnermeldeamt"). You have to be in possession of at least one of these documents in Germany to provide proof of your identity if required. It usually takes a few weeks before your identity papers are ready to collect.

Regulations concerning children

Principle of parentage and principle of birthplace: German nationality is based on the principle of parentage. That means that a child who has at least one parent with German nationality automatically obtains German nationality at birth. The principle of birthplace is also valid. According to this, a child of foreign parents can automatically obtain German nationality if born in Germany if one of its parents has lived legally in Germany for at least eight years and held a settlement permit or an indefinite residence title at the time of the birth.

Dual nationality: Children of foreign parents who have acquired German citizenship by birth can have German nationality in addition to the nationality of their parents. The prerequisite is that they grew up in Germany. According to the law, a person grew up in Germany if, by the time they turn 21, they:

- ▶ have lived in Germany for eight years, or
- ▶ have attended a school in Germany for six years, or
- ▶ have completed their schooling or vocational training in Germany.

CONTACTS

If you have questions on **visa regulations** please contact the German missions. You can find the addresses of German missions abroad on our world map: www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/making-it/germany-local.

If you have questions on **looking for a job** in Germany or **suggestions to improve the “Welcome to Germany portal”**, you may use this contact form: www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/contact.

▶ **Federal Employment Agency**

The missions of the Federal Employment Agency, a public-service body in Germany, include finding placements for workers and providing Germany's official employment exchange portal. [German, English, French, Italian, Russian, Turkish]

<http://jobboerse.arbeitsagentur.de/>

▶ **Federal Foreign Office**

On the Federal Foreign Office Web site, you'll find information on immigration law and visa procedures, working and living in Germany and German foreign missions. [German, English, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Chinese]

<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de>

▶ **Federal Ministry of Finance**

On the Federal Ministry of Finance Web site, qualified professionals can find out more about German income tax rates and estimate their income tax using the interactive tax calculator. [German]

<http://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de>

▶ **EURES**

The European Job Mobility Portal provides information about the conditions for living and working, as well as doing basic and advanced training, in numerous European countries including Germany. In the job exchange section, qualified professionals will find job offers from German companies. EURES is run by the European Union. [German, English, French, Spanish, Polish and other languages]

<https://ec.europa.eu/eures/>

▶ **Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF)**

One of the missions of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees is to help immigrants get settled in Germany. The Web site offers information about getting foreign diplomas recognised and tips on job-hunting in Germany. [German, English, Russian, Turkish]

<http://www.bamf.de>

▶ **Kompetenzzentrum Fachkräftesicherung**

[Centre of Excellence/Securing Qualified Professionals]

This centre of excellence provides information about which occupations in Germany are in urgent need of qualified professionals. The project is funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy. [German]

<http://www.kofa.de>

▶ **Recognition of qualifications in Germany**

This information portal belonging to the Federal Ministry of Education and Research explains how qualified professionals can get qualifications that they obtained abroad recognised in Germany. [German, English]

<http://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de>

▶ **Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB)**

Information about getting university and vocational diplomas recognised in Germany. [German]

<http://www.kmk.org/zab/anerkennung-im-beruflichen-bereich.html>

▶ **German Social Insurance**

This Web site explains about the German social security system, including health insurance and pensions. [German, English, French]

<http://www.deutsche-sozialversicherung.de>

▶ **Goethe-Institut**

The Goethe-Institut – Germany's institute of culture – offers language courses in 92 countries, online courses, free drills and information about Germany and German culture. [German, English]

<http://www.goethe.de/>

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