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Welcome  
to Fraunhofer

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## Welcome message



### Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you on behalf of everyone here at the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft. We are delighted that you are interested in working for Fraunhofer and joining our professional staff.

To fulfill its mission as a research organization, Fraunhofer depends on the creativity and commitment of its workforce. People of different nationalities enrich our scientific and cultural expertise. One of the hallmarks of our open-minded corporate culture is how we value this diversity as a source of creative potential, which is a foundation for innovation.

We offer an engaging working environment and a friendly atmosphere that supports social interaction. Getting to know new people is an important aspect of our lives at work because it enriches everyone's personal experiences. Our interpersonal relationships are non-judgmental and respectful.

As you will soon discover for yourself, Fraunhofer is a research organization that combines scientific excellence with entrepreneurial thinking; we develop processes, products and systems all the way to commercial maturity. This approach to applied research is unique in Germany. As a future member of Fraunhofer's workforce, you will play an important role in this work. That is why it is important to us that you and your family have a good start to your stay in Germany, that you can start working without any problems and that you can become a part of the Fraunhofer family. Please do not hesitate to ask colleagues at your institute for help if you encounter any difficulties.

In this spirit, I invite you to share with us the exciting task of creating new technology, designing new products, opening up new avenues — in short: inventing the future.

We look forward to meeting you.

Prof. Alexander Kurz  
Executive Vice President for Human Resources, Legal Affairs and IP Management



# Welcome to Germany

Anyone who decides to go and live and work in another country will face a number of challenges at first: What needs to be done and when so that my arrival in Germany goes well? What do I need in order to start working without any problems? And how can I integrate well at Fraunhofer? We have written this brochure to provide you with answers to these questions and help solve the types of problems typically encountered by newcomers to Germany. Your new colleagues and the administrative staff of your institute will be happy to lend a hand if you need advice on day-to-day issues.



## Preparations before leaving your home country

### Visas

Visas are required for entry into Germany. There are various visas depending on the duration and purpose of your stay in Germany.

A **Schengen visa (Tourist Visa, category C)** allows the holder to stay in Germany for a maximum of three months. It cannot be extended or modified. After the three months are over, you must leave Germany again for at least 90 days. This type of visa does not allow you to work. However, it does allow you to travel to other Schengen countries — provided that your visa has not yet expired. The Schengen area covers all EU member states — with the exception of the United Kingdom, Ireland and Cyprus — plus Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

A **National Visa (category D)** allows the holder to stay in Germany for longer than three months. This is the type of visa you need if you intend to work in Germany. It also entitles you to spend up to three months in the other countries of the Schengen area — but it does not allow you to work anywhere outside Germany.

**Not everyone requires a visa to enter Germany.** EU citizens, holders of Icelandic, Norwegian and Liechtenstein passports (EEA citizens) and Swiss citizens are exempt from visa requirements. However, they must always carry a valid passport or identity card while on German soil.

Citizens of Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America do not require visas to enter Germany either. In these cases, you can apply for the necessary residence title **after** your arrival by submitting a request to the immigration authority (Ausländerbehörde) responsible for your place of residence. However, please note that this involves a waiting period of several weeks, during which you are not allowed to work in Germany. Consequently, we recommend that you apply for your work visa at a German diplomatic mission a few weeks before your departure from your home country.

If you are a citizen of any other country, you have to apply for the visa in your home country **before** you enter Germany. Please remember to state your reason for entry (e.g., employment) on the application. As a general rule, entry visas issued by a consulate or embassy (including residence title and work permit, if applicable) are valid for a limited period. If you wish to extend your residence title after you have entered the country, you must obtain the necessary authorization from your local immigration authority in Germany.

[Comprehensive information on visas and multilingual application forms can be found on the website of the German Federal Foreign Office. This information is available in English and other languages: www.auswaertiges-amt.de](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de)

#### Note:

It can take several months for the authorities to process visa applications, so please submit your application — for yourself and any accompanying family members — well in advance of your planned arrival. Detailed information can be found on the websites of the German missions abroad in your home country.

## Residence title and work permit

- Citizens of the **European Union (EU)** or the **European Economic Area (EEA)** do not require a residence title and can freely work in Germany.
- Spouses of EU or EEA citizens are permitted to work in Germany. They need a residence title, which is available free of charge.
- **Swiss** nationals must register with their local immigration authority if their stay in Germany exceeds three months and/or they intend to work in Germany. As a general rule, they will be issued with a freedom of movement certificate (Freizügigkeitsbescheinigung) under an EU-Swiss agreement. This document also serves as a work permit.
- **Citizens of states not mentioned above, regardless of whether or not** they need a **visa** to enter Germany, require a residence title if they intend to take up residence and/or paid employment in Germany. The type of residence title required depends on the purpose and duration of your planned stay:
  - **Visa-free entry and signed employment contract**  
In this case, you have to apply for your residence title and work permit at your local immigration authority after entering the country. Please note: It can take four to six weeks for your application to be processed. You are not allowed to work until you receive a valid residence title.
  - **Mandatory entry visa and signed employment contract**  
You must apply to the German embassy or consulate in your home country for a combined residence title and work permit. If you wish to extend the duration of this title after you have arrived in Germany, please submit your request to your local immigration authority at least four to six weeks before your current residence title expires.
  - **Entry without a signed employment contract** (e.g., if you are participating in an exchange program or have been engaged as a visiting scientist and are receiving a foreign stipend). **In this case, the rules differ depending on the planned duration of your stay in Germany and whether the competent authority regards your activity as paid employment.**

If you are a national of a country for which Germany does not require an entry visa, the competent authority is your local immigration authority; if not, it is the German embassy or consulate in your home country. It is therefore best if your institute contacts the competent authority beforehand to find out whether or not you need a residence title (combined with a work permit) for your research assignment in Germany.

- The following applies to **students from third countries enrolled at a foreign university** who, for example, wish to intern at Fraunhofer for a maximum of 12 months or who wish to work at Fraunhofer during their holidays for a maximum of three months per calendar year: You need the approval of the International Placement Services (Zentrale Auslands- und Fachvermittlung, ZAV). The human resources department of the relevant Fraunhofer Institute is responsible for submitting this request. In some cases, you may also need a residence title. Depending on whether you are allowed to enter Germany with or without a visa, you may apply at the embassy/consulate in your home country (if you require a visa) or at the responsible immigration authority once you are in Germany (if you do not require a visa). **Note:** No ZAV approval is required for internships that form part of an EU-funded program (e.g., Leonardo, Tacis, Erasmus, Socrates). In this case, the embassy or local immigration authority is responsible for approval.

- **Foreign students enrolled at a German university** normally already possess a valid residence title. This also permits working as a student assistant or carrying out a mandatory internship as part of their studies.

More details of how to apply for a visa from your local immigration authority are provided on page 11.

Information about residence titles and work permits can be found on the website of the German Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, BA): [www.arbeitsagentur.de](http://www.arbeitsagentur.de)  
Information sheets in German and English are also available there. Information from the German federal government regarding working in Germany can be found at: [www.make-it-in-germany.com](http://www.make-it-in-germany.com)

## Health insurance

People can fall ill unexpectedly and accidents do happen. That is why you — and accompanying family members and persons living together in the same household — must be covered by a health insurance policy while you are living in Germany. Proof of health insurance coverage is required to obtain a residence title. Does your existing health insurance provide adequate cover? Or do you need to take out health insurance in Germany? Please ensure you know the answers to these questions **before arriving in Germany**.

If possible, ask your health insurance at home to confirm that your policy adequately covers the costs of medical treatment, hospital stays and accidental injuries incurred during your stay in Germany. If you have a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) issued in another country, it will be sufficient for temporary visits to Germany, but it is not suitable for longer stays.

### Essential questions to be answered before traveling to Germany:

- Does your health insurance coverage include medical costs for yourself and your family members after your arrival in Germany? Is it valid for the entire duration of your stay and for all necessary medical interventions?
- Do you need to take out (additional) health insurance in Germany?

There are two types of health insurance schemes in Germany: statutory health insurance (GKV) and private health insurance (PKV). Employees whose annual income exceeds a specific level (2021: 64,350 euros) can opt out of the statutory health insurance and choose to be insured privately instead. Employees whose income lies below this level are usually insured through the statutory health insurance.

If you decide to take out statutory health insurance, you can choose from a number of providers. All of these statutory health insurance providers guarantee a basic level of medical care, but some are more flexible than others when it comes to reimbursing the cost of alternative treatments such as holistic or homeopathic medicine. Under certain conditions, family members may be insured under the same policy free of charge. Private top-up schemes are also available to cover expenses not normally included in the basic reimbursement scheme, such as dental prostheses.

Statutory health insurance premiums are determined by law. In 2021, the general premium rate is 14.6 percent of liable income. Health insurance funds may also charge an additional premium. This may be up to 1.9 percent in 2021. One half of this amount is paid by the employer and the other half by the employee — deducted directly from their salary.

Private health insurance plans vary widely, in terms of both the benefits provided and the level of premiums. Certain preexisting or debilitating health conditions may not be covered by this type of insurance. Illnesses diagnosed prior to the insured party's arrival in Germany are not automatically covered — the same applies to pregnancy. We therefore strongly recommend that you seek competent advice before signing a contract with a private health insurer and that you carefully read the fine print in the proposed insurance policy. Employees with private health insurance pay the contributions out of their own pocket, but are entitled to a payment from their employer to cover part of this expense, according to the prevailing legal regulations.

More information on statutory health insurance, the basic principles and a list of providers is available here: [www.gkv-spitzenverband.de](http://www.gkv-spitzenverband.de)  
There are several online options for comparing health insurance providers and their benefits, e.g., [www.krankenkassen.de/krankenkassen-vergleich](http://www.krankenkassen.de/krankenkassen-vergleich), [www.krankenkasseninfo.de/krankenkassen/krankenkassenvergleich](http://www.krankenkasseninfo.de/krankenkassen/krankenkassenvergleich), [www.check24.de/gesetzliche-krankenversicherung/krankenkassenvergleich](http://www.check24.de/gesetzliche-krankenversicherung/krankenkassenvergleich), [www.krankenkassenvergleich.de](http://www.krankenkassenvergleich.de)



# Settling in Germany — first steps

## Accommodation

Many people dream of owning their own home — preferably with a garden. But while it is true that home ownership is rising, the majority of people in Germany still live in rental accommodations. When you start looking for a house or apartment, the first thing is to find the right location. Your new colleagues at the Fraunhofer Institute can provide helpful tips, such as which areas of town are most convenient for traveling to work and which are the best locations in terms of safe and friendly neighborhoods and a multicultural community.

There are many sources of information on available properties. Local newspapers regularly publish special advertising sections for home hunters — usually in the Wednesday and Saturday editions. Accommodation is also often advertised online, and you can even place your own classified ad on some websites.

Links that may be of interest include:

[www.immobilienscout24.de](http://www.immobilienscout24.de), [www.immonet.de](http://www.immonet.de),  
[www.wohnungsmarkt24.de](http://www.wohnungsmarkt24.de), [www.immowelt.de](http://www.immowelt.de),  
[www.wg-gesucht.de](http://www.wg-gesucht.de)

As a general rule, rental accommodation in Germany is unfurnished and often does not include a fitted kitchen.

The tenant typically pays a so-called cold rent, which includes a flat rate for heating costs, water, garbage collection and facility management, but not electricity or telephone/internet costs. A deposit of between one and three times the monthly cold rent is normally required before the tenant can move in. This deposit is paid into a special bank account set up by the landlord and the tenant receives a receipt for the transferred amount. The precise terms of the agreement concerning the deposit must be stated in the rental contract. If there has been no damage to the property when the tenant moves out, the owner must return the deposit to the tenant plus accumulated interest.

Your new colleagues at the institute may also be able to help you with your search.

## Registering your place of residence

The first formality required after your arrival in Germany is to register yourself and any accompanying family members with the residents' registration office (Einwohnermeldeamt). This must be done within one week of your arrival. The address of your nearest office and the appropriate registration form can be found on the governmental website for your new place of residence.

### The following information and documents are required for registration:

- Valid passport or identity card
- Entry visa, if required
- Name of your landlord (and sometimes also the rental contract)

If you have moved to Germany with members of your family, you will also be required to present their birth certificates and your marriage certificate. Many German authorities require these documents to be in German — so it is best to have a certified translation prepared. If you encounter any problems in this respect, please do not hesitate to ask someone at your institute for help.

The residents' registration office will issue you with **proof of registration** and you will also be allocated a **tax identification number**. Please take good care of these documents: they are important and you will need them again occasionally. You must report any change of address in Germany to the residents' registration office in your new place of residence, and deregister when you permanently leave Germany.

## Local immigration authority

(This section does not apply to EU or EEA citizens, see page 8.) If you do not need a visa to enter Germany and wish to work here, you must visit your local immigration authority to obtain a residence title (including work permit) after your arrival. Under certain circumstances, persons requiring a visa to enter Germany may also have to visit their local immigration authority, for example if they need to renew the residence title (including work permit) that was issued together with their entry visa. See page 8 above.

**You are not allowed to work in Germany without a valid, correct residence title. Please note: You may have to wait several weeks to receive your residence title, so make sure you apply in good time.** If you are unsure about anything, please speak to the appropriate person at your institute.

### You will need the following documents, both the original and a certified copy, in order to apply for a residence title (other documents may also be required):

- Valid passport or identity card
- Visa, if required, including visas for accompanying family members
- Proof of residence received from the residents' registration office
- Employment contract
- Proof of accommodation (e.g., rental contract for your house or apartment)
- Proof that you possess adequate health insurance coverage (insurance certificate or EHIC)
- 2 biometric passport photos

The fee charged for issuing a residence title varies between 80 and 250 euros, depending on your place of residence. It is advisable to have the biometric passport photos taken in Germany, to be sure that they comply with the official requirements.



## Opening a bank account

In Germany it is usual for employees to receive their salary in the form of monthly transfers to a bank account. Rents for accommodation, too, are usually paid by bank transfer or by direct debit. This means that, if you intend to stay in Germany for a significant length of time, it is strongly recommended that you open a local bank account with either a traditional bank or a mutual savings bank (Sparkasse). Bank charges and the range of services such as interest rates and the availability of online banking can vary greatly. Opening hours also differ from bank to bank.

### The following documents are required to open a bank account:

- Your passport
- Proof of registration
- Pay statement from employer (if requested)
- Residence title (if requested)

## Debit card and cash withdrawals

As soon as you have opened a current account, the bank will issue you with a debit card (EC-Karte) and a PIN. These are normally sent separately to your postal address. You can use this card to make cashless purchases in numerous stores and to withdraw cash or print out statements at ATMs. However, there is one important detail concerning cash withdrawals: these are only free of charge when you withdraw cash at branches of your own bank or other banks that have an ATM partnership agreement with your bank, such as "Cash Group" or "CashPool" banks. Nowadays, it is often possible to withdraw money in the supermarket when buying groceries and paying by debit card.

Standing orders can be set up for recurring payments such as rent for accommodation. Direct debits are a convenient way to pay for insurance or telephone bills and the like; the invoiced amount is debited automatically from your account by the beneficiary. If you wish to transfer money to your home country, you should ask your bank whether it has a cooperation agreement with a German financial institution. This way, you can avoid transfer fees. International money transfer providers, such as Western Union, have branches all over Germany.



## Credit cards

If you have a credit card, you can use it to pay for purchases and withdraw cash, but you may have to pay additional charges for cash withdrawals. The most commonly accepted credit cards in Germany are Eurocard, Mastercard and Visa.

If you lose your credit card, it can be blocked by calling the toll-free service number **116 116**.

# Employment contract, taxes and social security

## Employment contract with Fraunhofer

Have you already signed an employment contract with Fraunhofer? If so, you will see that your pay is based on the German Federal Collective Bargaining Agreement for the Public Service (TVöD). In other words, the same conditions apply as for all public service employees in Germany. For instance, the TVöD stipulates the number of working hours per week, the annual vacation entitlement (number of paid vacation days) and the pay scale grades that determine how your compensation is calculated. If you have any questions concerning your terms of employment, please contact your institute's human resources department.

### Note:

Different countries, different customs — and different professional requirements. Is your professional qualification or university degree equivalent to the corresponding German qualification? This question often needs to be resolved before an employment contract can be signed. The online database [anabin.kmk.org/](http://anabin.kmk.org/) lists a substantial number of educational certificates and degrees issued by foreign schools and universities. If you cannot find your particular qualification in this list, you can take steps to have it recognized by the appropriate body in Germany. For this you will need certified copies of your certificates together with German translations of these documents. More information can be found at: [www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de](http://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de)

## Taxes

As a general rule, any money that you earn in Germany is taxable in Germany. Your tax liability depends on whether you are working as a salaried employee or as a freelancer. Special dispensations may apply, for example in the case of scholarships, which may be tax-free. If your home country has a double taxation agreement with Germany, the terms of this agreement apply. This allows you to avoid paying the same taxes twice. If you are not sure whether you are liable to pay tax in Germany, your institute's human resources department can provide assistance — in consultation with Fraunhofer headquarters.

If your income is taxable in Germany, Fraunhofer automatically deducts income tax, the solidarity surcharge and church tax, if applicable, from your pay and transfers the deducted amount to the tax authorities. Similarly, Fraunhofer pays your social security contributions for pension insurance, health insurance, long-term care insurance and unemployment insurance before transferring the remaining net income to your bank account. You should file an income tax return with your local tax authority each year (if you are married and jointly assessed, filing an annual income tax return is usually mandatory). The officials who work there will calculate the actual amount of tax you owe according to your marital status and number of dependent children, the amount you have earned and various other relevant factors. If you need help with your tax return, you can call on the services of a professional tax advisor or one of the voluntary associations that provide tax assistance.

For information on double taxation agreements and other tax issues, see: [www.bundesfinanzministerium.de](http://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de)

## Social security

Sickness, unemployment, old age and the need for care can affect us all. Employees in Germany are therefore insured against such risks by a comprehensive social security system. All salaried employees are obliged by law to pay contributions to this statutory social security. The amounts payable depend on each person's individual income. Contributions to health insurance and pension insurance, on the other hand, have a ceiling known as the income limit for the assessment of contributions (Beitragsbemessungsgrenze). These contributions are split 50:50 between the employee and the employer. Insurance against work-related injuries, on the other hand, is paid in full by the employer.

More information can be found at:  
[www.arbeitsagentur.de/en/welcome](http://www.arbeitsagentur.de/en/welcome)

## Corporate pension

In addition to the statutory pension insurance, Fraunhofer also has a corporate pension fund that pays a pension to employees or their surviving dependents on reaching pensionable age or in case of disablement and/or death. All new employees of the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft are registered with this voluntary pension scheme, managed by the pension institution of the German federal government and states (Versorgungsanstalt des Bundes und der Länder, VBL). Special rules apply to research staff.

More detailed information can be found at: [www.vbl.de](http://www.vbl.de)

## Other types of insurance

The social security system covers a wide range of risks, but it is often advisable to extend your insurance coverage beyond these. It is important to take out private third-party liability insurance (private Haftpflichtversicherung) that covers your civil responsibility in the event that you or one of your underage children inadvertently causes injury to another person or damages their property. If you own a car, you must also take out third-party vehicle liability insurance.

More information can be found at:  
[www.verbraucherzentrale.de](http://www.verbraucherzentrale.de)

# Health

## Health insurance card

When you take out insurance with one of the statutory health insurance funds, you will be issued with an electronic European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). This entitles you to medical care in all EU member states as well as in Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. **You must present this card every time you visit a doctor's office.**

## Medical practitioners

The standard of medical care in Germany is very high and you rarely have to travel far to find a doctor. If you have a health problem, the first person to consult is normally a general practitioner. If they are unable to help, they will refer you to a specialist or a hospital. But how to find the nearest doctor's office? Sources of information include the website of your local community, the nationwide list of medical services [www.weisse-liste.de](http://www.weisse-liste.de) or the website of the National Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians [www.kbv.de](http://www.kbv.de).

If you need medical treatment, it is usually best to make an appointment by phone beforehand to avoid sitting for hours in the waiting room. In critical cases, you can explain the urgency of the situation on the phone or go directly to the doctor's office.

If you need a doctor outside of regular office hours, there is a special toll-free number that you can call from anywhere in Germany: **116 117**

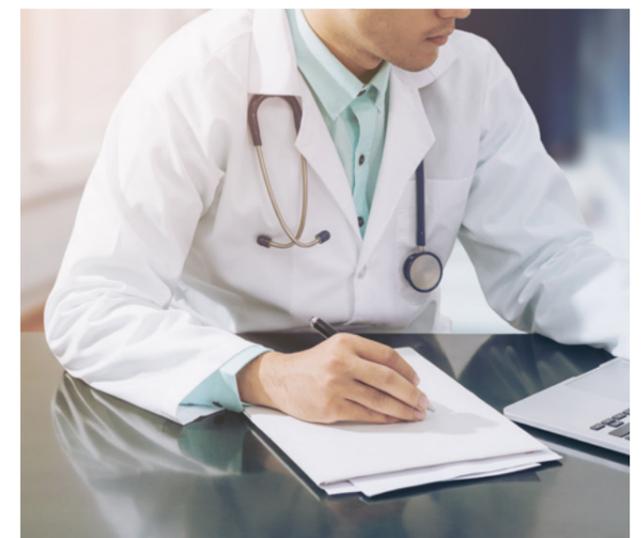
In a genuine emergency — i.e., a life-threatening situation — please call the national emergency number **112**.

If you are insured with a statutory health insurance fund, you will not be billed for medical treatment since the doctor is paid directly by the health insurance fund. The procedure is less simple if you have private health insurance. In this case, you will receive a bill that you must pay yourself in the first instance and then forward to the health insurance provider for reimbursement.

## Pharmacies

Pharmacies are not allowed to dispense certain medications to patients without a signed prescription from a doctor. You must present the prescription when you collect the medication at the pharmacy. If you are insured with a statutory health insurance fund, you often have nothing to pay apart from a minimum, non-reimbursable charge levied on all dispensed medication. If you are privately insured, you will have to pay the full amount when you collect your medication. You must then send the receipt to your health insurance provider for reimbursement. Over-the-counter medicines that do not require a prescription can be bought in any pharmacy at your own expense.

Pharmacies are open during normal shopping hours (usually from 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.). There are emergency pharmacy services available at other times: you can call the mobile number **22833** (chargeable), call the landline number **0800 00 22833** (free of charge) or find them in the local newspaper. A notice giving the address of the nearest on-duty pharmacy is also displayed on the door of every pharmacy. When you reach the on-duty pharmacy, press a buzzer for the pharmacist. Your medication will be delivered through a special window. You usually have to pay a supplement for this service.



# Everyday life



## Mobility

### Public transportation

Most German cities have a well-functioning public transportation network served by a combination of buses, trams, underground and above-ground rail systems. In essence, this means that you will not have to walk far to the next bus or tram stop or the nearest station on the urban rail network. In the major cities, commuter trains run every few minutes — especially during rush hour. But even during the rest of the day, public transportation makes scheduled stops at all pickup points several times each hour.

There are ticket vending machines at many bus/tram stops and stations and often also onboard the vehicle. Tickets can also often be bought at newspaper kiosks or via smartphone apps.

The cost of a bus, tram or rail ticket is based on the tariffs charged by the local public transportation authority. In most cases, reduced tariffs are available for specific categories of users such as children, students or people with physical handicaps. If you use public transportation on a regular basis — for example for the daily commute to and from work — it is usually cheaper to buy a monthly or annual ticket.

To find out more about public transportation networks, visit [www.nahverkehr-info.de](http://www.nahverkehr-info.de) or consult the relevant pages of the general website for the city in which you live.



### Long-distance travel by train, bus or air

One way to travel to other places in Germany or other European countries is to take the train. Train services are principally provided by Deutsche Bahn ([www.bahn.de](http://www.bahn.de)), but other operators may run services on regional routes. Deutsche Bahn tickets can be purchased at counters in the station itself or at ticket machines. We recommend that you buy your tickets before boarding the train because they often cost more if you buy them on board. Heavy fines are imposed on travelers caught without a valid ticket. There are numerous cut-price offers including budget prices for early bookers, weekend excursion tickets or the “Bahncard,” which offers generous reductions for frequent travelers. Rail travel is free for children under the age of six. If accompanied by a parent or a grandparent, children can travel free of charge up to the age of 15. It always pays to look into the available options beforehand! If you intend to travel on a Friday or Saturday — when trains are normally full — it is best to reserve seats in advance.

Long-distance bus services are becoming increasingly popular in Germany as a low-cost alternative to rail travel. As well as providing intercity travel in Germany, they also serve many destinations in other European countries: [www.busliniensuche.de](http://www.busliniensuche.de)

The quickest way to travel to a remote destination in Germany or another country is to fly. Germany is covered by a dense network of airports offering passenger services.



### Driving and driver's licenses

Germany is famous for its excellent road infrastructure. Vehicles drive on the right and overtake on the left. Unless road signs indicate other speed limits, the maximum speed in built-up areas is 50 km/h and 100 km/h on open roads. Theoretically, there is no speed limit on Germany's autobahns, but a guideline speed of 130 km/h is recommended by the road safety authorities.

Anyone driving in Germany must be in possession of their driver's license and the vehicle registration documents at all times when they are behind the wheel. Holders of driver's licenses issued in other EU countries or in Liechtenstein, Norway or Iceland can use these to drive in Germany. Nationals of other countries can continue to use their existing driver's license for the first six months of their stay in Germany — after that, they must exchange it for a German driver's license. Information on the validity of foreign driving licenses in Germany can be found here: [www.adac.de](http://www.adac.de), [www.ace.de](http://www.ace.de) (both only available in German).

**Note:** When you exchange your driver's license for a German driver's license, your old driver's license will be withdrawn. When you return to your home country after your stay in Germany, you can recover your original license by handing in your German driver's license at your local driver's license office.

### Important rules that drivers must remember:

- Do not drink and drive (if your blood alcohol level exceeds 0.5 ppm, you are over the legal limit).
- Always use your seat belt (this also applies to all passengers; child safety seats are mandatory for children under the age of 12 or measuring less than 150 centimeters in height).
- All vehicles must be equipped with a first-aid kit, warning triangle, high-visibility safety vest and emergency blanket.
- The use of telephones is only allowed with a hands-free device.
- Winter tires are necessary when driving in wintry conditions.
- Cars may only be washed in closed-cycle washing stations.

If you are involved in an accident, it is advisable to call the police (phone **112**). You must not leave the scene of the accident until all parties have exchanged their names and addresses, otherwise you could be found guilty of a criminal offense.

Special parking spaces are often reserved for people with physical handicaps. They are usually located close to the entrance of supermarkets or public buildings to facilitate access. Special areas are also often reserved for women in underground parking facilities. They are located close to the exit and equipped with video cameras to provide additional security.

Car sharing is becoming increasingly popular in Germany. If you want to join a car sharing scheme, you must first sign up with a provider. Once you are a member, you can reserve a hire car at short notice and collect it at a pickup point (in and around major cities or airports).

Germany also supports electromobility. At the time of publication in 2021, more than 30,000 charging stations are already available all over Germany. Fraunhofer itself has installed its own charging stations at 37 locations.

### Cycling

For short journeys and errands, a bicycle can be just as practical as a car. Bicycling allows you to avoid the annoyance of slow-moving traffic in busy city centers, is good for the environment and beneficial for your health. Most German towns and cities have plenty of marked cycle paths or lanes and parking areas with cycle racks. Over 80 percent of Germans use the bicycle, 55 percent believe it to be an essential means of transport and hence enjoy using it.

If you decide to buy a bicycle, make sure that you keep it in good working order and observe the traffic rules while riding it, because traffic rules apply to all road users — and that includes cyclists as well as motorists. There is no legal requirement to wear a helmet, but it is recommended for your safety — for adults as well as children.



## Telephone and internet

### Landline services

If you want a landline connection at home, you have a wide choice of telephone and internet service providers. These days, it is usual to sign a contract with a single provider for telephone and internet access. Broadband or DSL networks are available in almost all areas of Germany, providing sufficient bandwidth for data-intensive applications such as downloading music or movies. In many cases, providers also supply the necessary DSL modem. Most offers in Germany usually include a flat rate for data services. Prices vary depending on the product, the duration of the contract and the data rate required or available.

International calls are often cheaper over the internet than through a conventional phone service.

We advise you to consult your chosen provider to find out what type of telephone connection they can provide and what data rates are available in your new home. This information may help you to choose the telephone and internet service that best meets your needs. There are several options for finding out an address or telephone number:

[www.teleauskunft.de](http://www.teleauskunft.de), [www.dasoertliche.de](http://www.dasoertliche.de), [www.gelbseiten.de](http://www.gelbseiten.de) (the latter for business addresses, doctors, restaurants, handymen, etc.).

### Cell phones

To use a cell phone, you need either a prepaid card or a subscription plan. However, you must register with a photo ID for both options; anonymous usage of a prepaid card is no longer permitted in the EU. It is worth comparing mobile phone providers since prices differ and reception quality and data rates may vary depending on the geographical area in which you intend to use your cell phone. We therefore recommend that you find out which providers guarantee the best reception in your specific region before signing a contract.

## Language

German is the most widely spoken native language in the EU, where no fewer than 120 million people grow up speaking German. German language skills are therefore a vital prerequisite for integration, not only in everyday life but also professionally. To make the best of your new environment, it is essential that you acquire these language skills.

We therefore strongly recommend that you sign up for a German language course as soon as possible. The experience of many people like you has shown that the sooner you and your family members are able to understand and speak German in everyday situations, the greater your chances of advancing your career and personal integration. Your institute has people who can help you to find suitable language training courses and may also offer special integration courses, in which you can not only improve your language skills but also learn more about German culture. Information on integration courses in your area can be found at the website of the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF): [www.bamf.de](http://www.bamf.de)



## Accompanying children

Do you intend to move to Germany with your family? In this case, the new experience will no doubt be as challenging (and exciting) for your spouse and children as it is for you.

Different forms of daycare are available for small children, depending on their age. Compulsory schooling in Germany starts at age six.

### Daycare centers, registered childcare providers, occasional daycare

Daycare for children up to the age of six is provided by daycare centers (Kindertagesstätten), where they are looked after by childcare professionals. This service includes professional care as well as meals or bottle-feeding. By playing together, children learn essential social skills that will prepare them for school later on. There is no obligation for children to attend these. The fees are based on your income and on the number of hours per day spent in the daycare center. In Germany, "Kindergarten" refers to facilities for children aged between 3 and 6; facilities for the under threes are referred to as "Kinderkrippen".

Daycare centers usually open in August or September, but to obtain a place you have to submit an application several months earlier, in the spring. Places are limited in many regions, so you are strongly advised to start looking for a place for your child as early as possible.

An alternative solution is to find a registered childcare provider, who looks after a small group of children in his or her own home. Your local municipal council can provide you with a list.

Is there an emergency at work, e.g. an appointment that you have to attend for Fraunhofer, which is not covered by your regular childcare? Fraunhofer has a standing agreement with an agency (pme Familienservice) that can provide occasional childcare services in such situations. For details, please contact the human resources department at your institute.



### Schooling

From the age of six, children in Germany are enrolled in a primary school (Grundschule) for the first four years of their compulsory education. The local school authorities will assign your child to a specific primary school based on the school district in which you live. The length of the school day varies from one establishment to another. Many schools have introduced all-day schooling in which the children are in school until 4:00 p.m. each day. In those that use the traditional system, classes start at 8:00 a.m. and finish by 1:00 p.m. or earlier. In this case, you may have to arrange for after-school supervision. Numerous options are available, including lunch-time supervision (until 2:00 p.m. or 3:30 p.m.) or after-school centers (normally open until 5:00 p.m.). There is no obligation for children to attend these. Each locality and region is different in this respect, which extends to the childcare options available during school vacations. To find out which options apply in the specific area in which you live, please contact your municipal council. As in the case of daycare facilities, the fees charged are based on your income and the number of hours per day for which your child attends these centers.

### The next level of education after primary school is divided into different categories:

- General schools (Mittelschule) provide secondary education up to year 9 or 10, leading to a general certification of education (Mittelschulabschluss).
- Middle schools (Realschule) provide secondary education up to year 10, leading to a middle school certificate (Mittlere Reife).
- High schools (Gymnasium) or technical schools (Fachoberschule) provide secondary education up to year 12 or 13, leading to a general school-leaving certificate (Abitur) or a technical school-leaving certificate (Fachabitur).
- Comprehensive schools (Gesamtschule) provide secondary education at all or most of these stages, leading to the corresponding qualifications.

Holders of a general school-leaving certificate are entitled to pursue further studies at any university, while the technical school-leaving certificate entitles holders to study at a university of applied sciences. We recommend that you inquire about local schools by contacting the education office (Schulamt), consulting the internet or asking other parents. Education at state schools in Germany is free of charge. On the other hand, private or international schools charge tuition fees.

## Leisure time and cultural activities



### Entertainment and eating out

Germany has a lot of cultural activities to offer. Opera houses, theaters and cinemas offer plenty of entertainment, while museums and historic monuments provide interesting perspectives. Other ways to spend your free time include visiting sporting events, leisure parks and local fairs and festivities. Good sources of information on programs and events are the website of your new place of residence or the cultural section of the daily newspapers.

Many cities have a wide choice of restaurants, cafés, bars and night clubs. It is best to book a table in advance if you want to eat at one of the more popular places. If you are satisfied with the service, it is customary to leave a tip — as a general rule, up to 10 percent of the bill.

Smoking is forbidden in public buildings. However, the regulations may differ from one German state to another, with some regions allowing smoking in special, marked smoking areas. If in doubt, it is always best to ask whether you are allowed to smoke before lighting up.

### Media

The major national newspapers include the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), the Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ) and Die Welt. Besides these, there are also numerous regional daily newspapers and monthly news magazines such as Der Spiegel and Focus. You can subscribe to most newspapers and magazines and have them delivered to your home. Nowadays, nearly all newspapers and magazines are also available in electronic form.

TV and radio still enjoy great popularity in Germany. Consequently, every person living in an apartment or house in Germany must register with the contribution service for public broadcasters and pay a broadcasting license fee.

More information can be found at:  
[www.rundfunkbeitrag.de](http://www.rundfunkbeitrag.de)

### Sports

There are a numerous opportunities for sport and exercise in most localities, including sports clubs, fitness studios and courses held by the local evening school. A good source of information is the website of your new place of residence.

### Public holidays

Germany has a mainly Christian religious culture. This is reflected in its public holidays. The following public holidays apply throughout Germany:

- January 1  
New Year's Day
- Friday before Easter  
Good Friday
- Easter Sunday and Easter Monday  
March or April
- May 1  
Labor Day
- Thursday in May (10 days before Whitsun)  
Ascension Day
- Whit Sunday and Whit Monday  
May or June (50 days after Easter)
- October 3  
German Unity Day
- December 24 (from the afternoon onward)  
Christmas Eve
- December 25 and 26  
Christmas holidays
- December 31 (from the afternoon onward)  
New Year's Eve

There are also a number of other public holidays that only apply in specific German federal states.

See [www.schulferien.org](http://www.schulferien.org) to find the calendar of public holidays in the state where you are living.

## Shopping

Food and other daily necessities can be bought in supermarkets, shopping malls and specialized stores. There are laws in each federal state governing the hours at which stores are allowed to open. As a general rule, you can shop on weekdays and Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. All stores are closed on Sundays — with the exception of bakeries and florists, which are allowed to open on Sunday mornings.

You can pay for your purchases in cash or with a debit card (see also page 12). Many items can now also be purchased via the internet. If you shop online, the usual safety precautions apply: Make sure that the payment method is secure and check that you are dealing with a genuine, trustworthy website.



## Returnable deposits, recycling and waste sorting

When you buy bottled or canned drinks, you often have to pay a deposit. The aim of this system is to encourage people to bring empty bottles and cans back to the store so that they can be reused or recycled. If you do so, your deposit will be returned. To speed up and simplify collection, many supermarkets and beverage markets have installed reverse vending machines.

In Germany, households are required to sort their waste before it is collected. The local council usually provides separate bins for different types of waste (compostable waste, paper, plastic, non-recyclable waste). Collection points for glass and other recyclables are usually set up in convenient locations. Hazardous waste and bulky items must be brought to special waste disposal centers.

# Practical tips

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## Dos and Don'ts — typically German?

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Some people say that Germans are heavy beer drinkers with a strong sense of duty but no sense of humor. That is not really true — or only partly.

It is true to say that Germans have a strong sense of duty. Loyalty to family and friends is taken very seriously, but equal importance is given to hard work and professional achievements. Punctuality is seen as a virtue by the majority of Germans — so if you expect to be late for a business appointment or even a meeting with friends, you should call to let them know that you have been delayed.

At work, it is important to remain focused and objective. The tone of discussions and meetings might occasionally appear to be harsh, but this is simply because the participants are focusing on efficiency and getting quickly to the heart of the matter, so that the discussion can move on. This leaves little time for personal acclaim or feedback — something that is (as yet) relatively uncommon — so do not feel discouraged if your comments go unheeded.

Germans have a particularly direct manner of talking to one another, which differs from the custom in many other countries, so do not feel affronted if someone comes across as overly single-minded and direct. Open criticism — expressed directly but in respectful words — tends to be considered as constructive advice in Germany. Saying “yes” when you really mean “no” can lead to misunderstandings, even if you were only being polite. So do not be afraid to say “no” if you are unable or unwilling to accept a request to do something.

Most Germans draw a clear line between their professional and private lives. Unless you know someone personally, you should address them as “Sie” rather than “du” and use their last name rather than their first name. If you are not sure which form of address you should use, it is best to wait until the other person addresses you. To greet someone, you should shake their hand while making eye contact.

Men and women have equal rights in Germany. Many women now hold management positions, and both parents share responsibility for bringing up their children and earning money for the family.

The following websites provide further information on research in Germany:

[www.research-in-germany.de](http://www.research-in-germany.de)  
[www.entdecke-deutschland.de](http://www.entdecke-deutschland.de)



## Checklist: Documents you will need in Germany

- Visa, if necessary (including for family members and others in your household)
- Valid passport or identity card
- Birth certificate (original and certified copy; certified translation, if applicable)
- Marriage certificate (original and certified copy; certified translation, if applicable)
- Several biometric passport photos
- Proof of insurance coverage (e.g., health insurance, private third-party liability insurance, accident insurance, third-party vehicle liability insurance) and documents proving that this coverage is valid in Germany
- Driver's license (if applicable)
- Doctoral certificate (if applicable)
- Enrollment certificate (for students, if applicable)
- Vaccination record, letter from doctor listing required medication (if applicable). Information on importing medicines from a non-EU country can be found at: [www.zoll.de](http://www.zoll.de)

## Publishing notes

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