

EMPLOYEE'S IMMIGRATION GUIDE TO GERMANY

A practical guide for foreign professionals.

Welcome to Germany! As a nation with a strong economy and a high demand for skilled professionals, Germany offers numerous opportunities for talented individuals from around the world. This guide is designed to provide you with a clear and comprehensive understanding of the immigration process, helping you navigate the complexities of moving to Germany for work with confidence. We aim to demystify the legal requirements and provide practical advice to ensure a smooth transition for you and your family.



Step 1: Determine Whether You Need an Entry Visa

The first crucial step is to determine whether you require an entry visa to enter Germany. It's important to understand the distinction between an **entry visa** and a **residence permit**. An entry visa allows you to travel to Germany, while a residence permit allows you to stay and work long-term. More to this here: [🌐 List of Countries \(not\) Requiring a Visa to Enter Germany](#)

Visa Waiver Countries: Citizens of the following countries generally do not need an entry visa for short stays, but will still require a residence permit for long-term work:

- Australia
- Canada
- Israel
- Japan
- New Zealand
- South Korea
- United Kingdom
- United States of America

EEA Citizens: Citizens of the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland have freedom of movement and do not require a visa or a residence permit to live and work in Germany.

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Step 2: Choose the Correct Residence Permit

Germany offers various types of residence permits tailored to different purposes.

- **EU Blue Card:**
For highly qualified individuals with a university degree and a job offer meeting a specific salary threshold.
- **Employment Residence Permit:**
For skilled workers who do not qualify for the EU Blue Card but possess recognized qualifications and a concrete job offer.
- **Opportunity Card (Chancenkarte)**
For qualified professionals to come to Germany to look for skilled employment
- **Vocational Training Permit:**
For individuals pursuing vocational training in Germany in order to beef up their qualifications that they can be recognized here.

Step 3: Prepare Your Documents

Gathering the necessary documents is a critical part of the application process. While specific requirements can vary, you should generally prepare the following:

- **Valid Passport:** Must be valid for at least six months beyond your intended stay.
- **Employment Contract:** A signed contract detailing your position, salary, and working conditions.
- **University Degree or Diploma:** Original and translated copies.
- **Diploma Recognition Documents:** Proof that your foreign qualification has been recognized.
- **Professional Licenses:** If your profession requires a specific license.
- **Curriculum Vitae (CV):** A detailed resumé outlining your work experience and education.
- **Passport Photographs:** Recent, biometric passport-sized photos.
- **Proof of Health Insurance:** Confirmation of adequate health coverage.

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Step 4: Obtain Health Insurance

Health insurance is **mandatory** for everyone residing in Germany. As an employee, you will typically be covered by the statutory health insurance system (*Gesetzliche Krankenversicherung - GKV*), with contributions shared between you and your employer. Ensure that you have adequate coverage from the moment you arrive. You will find more information on this very important topic here:

www.vonEngelhardt.com/health.

Step 5: Submit Your Visa Application

If you require an entry visa, you must apply at the German embassy or consulate in your home country or country of legal residence *before* traveling to Germany. You will typically apply for a **National Visa (Type D)**, which is issued for long-term stays. Be prepared for an interview and to submit all your required documents.

Step 6: Arrive in Germany and Secure Accommodation

Upon arrival in Germany, your immediate priority should be securing any kind of place to live, and after that, suitable accommodation. Suitable accommodation can range from temporary housing to a long-term rental agreement.

Step 7: Register Your Utilities

Once you have secured accommodation, you will need to register for essential utilities and services. This typically includes:

- **Electricity**
- **Gas** (if applicable)
- **Internet/ Telephone services**

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Step 8: Register Your Address (*Anmeldung*)

Within **two weeks** of moving into your new address, you must register it at the local citizens' office (*Bürgeramt* or *Einwohnermeldeamt*). This is a mandatory step, and you will receive an **Anmeldebestätigung** (confirmation of registration). This document is essential for many other administrative processes, including applying for your Tax Identification Number (*Steueridentifikationsnummer*), which is automatically sent to your registered address. Your employer needs your tax ID to pay your salary. Find out about the tax ID here: www.vonEngelhardt.com/numbers.

Step 9: Open a German Bank Account

Opening a German bank account is essential for practical reasons, especially for receiving your salary payments. You will typically need your passport and registration confirmation (*Anmeldebestätigung*) to open an account.

Step 10: Apply for Your Residence Permit

If you entered Germany with an entry visa, you must apply for your **residence permit** at the local Immigration Office (*Ausländerbehörde*) before your visa expires. If you entered visa-free, you must apply for a residence permit before your period of authorized stay ends. You will likely need to schedule an appointment, and you may be issued an interim permit, aka **Fiktionsbescheinigung**, if your application is being processed and your entry visa resp. visa waiver time is about to expire.

Step 11: Be Prepared for the Review Process

The German authorities conduct a thorough review of your application. It is important to be patient and prepared to provide any additional information or documentation they may request. Ensuring your application is complete and accurate from the outset will significantly expedite this process.

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The EU Blue Card: Your Pathway to Highly Qualified Employment

The **EU Blue Card** is specifically designed for highly qualified professionals from non-EU countries seeking to work in Germany. It is typically issued for a period of up to four years, depending on the duration of your employment contract.

Main Benefits of the EU Blue Card:

- **Earlier Permanent Residence:**
You may be eligible for a permanent residence permit after just 21 months of employment and sufficient German language skills (B1 level).
- **Easier Job Changes:**
You have more flexibility in changing employers compared to other residence permits.
- **Greater EU Mobility:**
Facilitates movement to other EU member states for work and residence.
- **Favorable Family Reunification:**
Simplified procedures for your spouse and children to join you. Your parents and parents-in-law are also welcome.
- **Longer Validity During Stays Outside Germany:**
Your residence permit remains valid for longer periods if you need to travel abroad.
- **Simplified Procedures:**
Generally, a more streamlined and preferential application and renewal process.

Note: A significant advantage is that your academic qualification no longer needs to correspond directly to your employment. The key is that you have a recognized university degree and a job offer that matches your qualifications and salary level. More to this on www.vonEngelhardt.com/BlueCard

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Requirements for the EU Blue Card:

To qualify for the EU Blue Card, you must meet the following criteria:

- **Recognized German or Foreign University Degree:**
Your degree must be officially recognized or comparable to a German university degree.
- **Employment Contract:**
You need a concrete job offer or a binding employment contract.
- **Statutory Minimum Salary Threshold:**
Your gross annual salary must meet a specific threshold set by the German government. There are two tiers:
 - **Standard "Big" Blue Card:** For most professions.
 - **Reduced Salary "Little" Blue Card:** A lower threshold applies for certain professions experiencing shortages, including STEM fields, healthcare professionals, teachers, veterinarians, dentists, pharmacists, nursing professionals, and managers. This also applies to recent graduates of German universities.
- **No Legal Grounds for Refusal:**
Your application must not be rejected based on specific legal grounds (e.g., public safety concerns).

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Residence Permit for Employment (Not an EU Blue Card)

If you do not qualify for the EU Blue Card, a Residence Permit for Employment may be the appropriate route. The requirements generally include:

- **Recognized Qualification:**
Your vocational training or academic education must be recognized in Germany.
- **Employment Offer:**
A concrete job offer from a German employer.
- **Appropriate Working Conditions:**
The employment conditions must be comparable to those of domestic workers.
- **Federal Employment Agency Approval:**
In many cases, the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit) must approve the employment. This is to ensure that no suitable German or EU/EEA candidate is available for the position.
- **Compliance with Regulations:**
Your employment must meet all relevant German labor laws and regulations.

Recognition of Qualifications

The recognition of your foreign qualifications is a crucial step for many work permits. Germany distinguishes between:

- **Skilled Workers with Vocational Training:**
Requires at least 2 years of formal vocational training acquired abroad that is recognized in Germany.
- **Skilled Workers with Academic Education:**
Requires a university degree that is recognized or comparable to a German degree.

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Employment Contract Requirements

Your employment contract should clearly outline:

- **Position Title, Job Description and Responsibilities**
- **Salary and Payment Terms**
- **Working Hours**
- **Vacation Entitlement**
- **Benefits** (e.g., bonuses, additional insurance)
- **Start Date**

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Opportunity Card (*Chancenkarte*)

Introduced on 1 June 2024, the Opportunity Card ("*Chancenkarte*") allows qualified professionals to come to Germany to look for skilled employment. Unlike a traditional work permit, it enables you to search for a suitable job while living in Germany and to work on a limited basis during your search.

If you do not find suitable employment within the initial validity period, you may be eligible to obtain a follow-up Opportunity Card, subject to approval by the immigration authorities.

Who Can Apply?

You may qualify if you:

- are recognized as a skilled worker through a university degree or vocational qualification; or
- meet the requirements of Germany's points-based system;

and

- can demonstrate sufficient financial resources to support yourself during your stay.

Applicants generally apply from outside Germany.

Working with an Opportunity Card

The Opportunity Card allows you to:

- work up to **20 hours per week**; and
- undertake short-term trial employment with potential employers.

Its purpose is to help you find permanent qualified employment and transition to a residence permit based on employment or an EU Blue Card.

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Important Limitations of the Opportunity Card

Before applying, it is important to be aware that:

- you must demonstrate sufficient financial means for your stay;
- the Opportunity Card does **not** permit self-employment or freelancing;
- time spent on the Opportunity Card does **not** count towards permanent residence;
and
- family reunification is generally only possible after obtaining a qualifying employment residence permit.

If you are unsure whether the Opportunity Card, an EU Blue Card, or a standard employment residence permit is the most suitable option for your circumstances, obtaining legal advice before submitting your application can help you choose the pathway that best supports your career goals in Germany.

Note: if you are interested in building your business network in Germany, you can use the Opportunity Card for this approach. However, the application is for finding a job, but not preparing a business! Once you are in Germany, built up your business/opened your company, you may apply for freelancing or entrepreneurship from the Opportunity Card.

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German Language Requirements

While not always a strict requirement for all work permits, possessing German language skills can significantly improve your integration and career prospects. For certain **regulated professions** (such as healthcare), a specific level of German proficiency is mandatory for practicing and obtaining the relevant license.

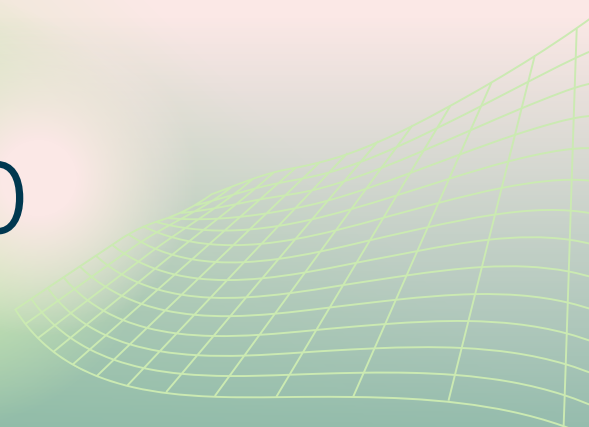
Processing Times

Processing times for visa and residence permit applications can vary. Generally, expect:

- **Visa Applications Abroad:**
Can take several weeks to a few months, depending on the embassy or consulate workload.
- **Residence Permit Applications in Germany:**
Approximately two months, but can be longer if the case is complex.
- **Fast-Track Procedures:**
When you plan to apply for employment from abroad, you/your employer can apply for pre-approval under the fast-track procedure. The advantage of this procedure is that immigration in Germany quickly tests your application for pre-approval. This will take around two months – which is really quick! Strict time limitations exist here. The consulate must and really does then issue the entry visa pretty quickly. More on this at www.vonEngelhardt.com/fast-track

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Practical Tips for a Smooth Relocation

- **Start Early:**
Begin gathering documents and information well in advance of your planned move.
- **Ensure Qualifications Recognized:**
Verify the recognition status of your degrees and vocational training early on.
- **Translate Documents:**
Have important documents officially translated into German.
- **Register Your Address Promptly:**
Do not delay your *Anmeldung* (address registration).
- **Keep Copies:**
Maintain copies of all submitted documents and especially correspondence.
- **Respond Promptly:**
Address any requests from authorities quickly and accurately.
- **Seek Professional Legal Advice:**
Consult with an immigration lawyer for personalized guidance and support.

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We Are Here to Help !!!

Immigration to Germany has become significantly more attractive for international professionals, but the application process remains document-intensive and highly regulated.

Professional legal guidance can help you avoid unnecessary delays, prepare a complete application, and maximise your chances of obtaining your residence permit quickly and successfully. All costs for professional guidance are tax deductible, which means you will get a reimbursement after submitting your tax return.

If you require assistance with your move to Germany, we would be pleased to support you throughout every stage of the immigration process. We recommend the following approach:

1. If you just have generic questions: take out an initial consultation:
www.vonEngelhardt.com/initial-consultation.
2. If you want to see if you are eligible for a Blue Card or employment permit, take out our Employment Test, www.vonEngelhardt.com/Test-Employment.
3. If you do not (yet) have a job but want to search for one from Germany, then let's go with the **Opportunity Card**, we help you to get that here:
www.vonEngelhardt.com/Test-Employment.
4. When inside Germany, you can always call our Service Number for quick questions! Call 09008 529 366 00. More to this on
www.vonEngelhardt.com/Service-Number

