

## Brochure

# First Steps in Germany with the Opportunity Card

### Congratulations on your opportunity card!

*You are about to start your journey to Germany and a new chapter in your life. This brochure is intended to help you prepare for your arrival in Germany and provide you with important information for the first steps in your new home.*

*You will find practical tips and advice on topics such as accommodation, employment, learning German and prospects under the Residence Act in Germany. We want to make sure that you are well informed and prepared in order for you to settle in quickly and feel at home.*

*We wish you a successful start in Germany!*

## Content

- › Arrival in Germany
- › Job search in Germany
- › Language acquisition in Germany
- › Prospects in Germany
- › The opportunity card: more than a job search
- › Checklist

# Arrival in Germany



©grinny - stock.adobe.com

## Accommodation



- › **First accommodation:** before finding permanent accommodation, you can temporarily stay with friends or relatives, in a furnished flat for sublease, a hostel, a hotel or a youth hostel. You should check whether you can also register your temporary address in your municipality.
- › **Register place of residence:** every person living in Germany must register their address at the Residents' Registration Office within two weeks of moving in. For this purpose, you will need a valid **identification document** (respectively passport and valid residence title) and a **tenancy confirmation letter** for rented flats confirming the date and place of moving in. Usually, you can find the form and the address of the Residents' Registration Office on the website of the municipality where you found a flat. Appointments can often be booked online.
- › **Find permanent accommodation:** there are different types of accommodation that you can choose from: a **flat let for rent** (usually unfurnished), a **sublease** (usually furnished) or a **shared flat** (own bedroom with shared common rooms). You can find accommodation through various channels, e.g.:
  - Search engines: "Wohnung + the respective city" or "WG + the respective city"
  - Online platforms: contact the party making the offer directly
  - Newspapers: regional daily papers, especially on weekends
- › **Sign rental agreement & deposit:** once you have found a flat, you must conclude a written rental agreement. A deposit of three months' rent and other documents are usually required as part of the rental agreement.



You can find more information on accommodation and how to find it on the website "Make it in Germany" under the section "[Housing and registration](#)".

## Health insurance



- › Health insurance is part of the provision for your living expenses and is compulsory in Germany. You must be covered by health insurance for your entire stay in Germany. For a successful visa application for the opportunity card, you can first get private health insurance that is valid in Germany. You can find and conclude offers from a range of health insurance providers online.
- › As soon as you have found employment subject to social security contributions, you can switch from private to statutory health insurance or remain on a private health insurance plan if you earn the required income.

## Register at the foreigners authority



- › Once you have found qualified employment or fulfil the requirements for another subsequent residence title, contact the foreigners authority to apply for a residence permit. Please note that you may have to wait a long time for an appointment.
- › If you have been granted a visa for the opportunity card for a **period of less than one year**, you must contact the foreigners authority just as early in order to either extend the opportunity card (to a maximum of one year) or apply for a subsequent title if you meet the requirements.

## Mobility & communication



- › Mobility is important for your job search in Germany. If you don't have a car, use public transport: bus, underground, suburban train, tram, regional train, long-distance train (ICE, IC) and long-distance bus. A monthly travelcard, such as the "Deutschlandticket", which is valid for local transport, is often worthwhile. Long-distance trains cannot be used with it. Find out about timetables and prices from the transport companies, e.g. [Deutsche Bahn](https://www.deutschebahn.com).
- › It is also important that you can be contacted by phone and have access to mobile internet while you are out: you can buy a **German SIM card**, for example, in supermarkets/discounters, drugstores, directly from mobile phone providers in shops and sometimes also in kiosks and petrol stations. You will need to present your passport with your visa or residence title and your registration certificate in order to activate the card.

# Job search in Germany



©iStock.com / Drazen Zigic

## Secondary employment and job trials



During your stay in Germany with the opportunity card, you can take up a part-time job of up to 20 hours a week. You can also work for each company for a trial period of two weeks.

## Job listings and websites



Start looking and applying for suitable job offers in Germany as early as possible. You can already do so while you are still in your home country. The following offers will assist you:

- › [„Make it in Germany” job listings](#)
- › [Job listings of the Federal Employment Agency](#): in addition to actively searching on the job website, you can register as jobseeker at the regional employment agency in your place of residence. This also entitles you to make use of the counselling and placement services offered there – but only once you are already in Germany.
- › Private job websites: in Germany, you will find a large number of specialised service providers who operate private job portals. These often have a large number of job offers. These portals also offer services – often at a charge – such as CV checks or career counselling.
- › Job listings on company websites: many companies also publish their vacancies on their company websites. You can search there using the keywords “Stellenangebote” (job offers), “Karriere” (career) or “Vakanzen” (vacancies). Unsolicited applications can also be worthwhile.
- › Social media: be proactive and publish your personal profile online in the different business networks to attract the attention of interested companies.



Find out about the [application process in Germany](#) in order to be successful with your application.

There are also a number of advisory services in Germany that can help you settle in and find a job. You can find these contacts in the section [“Advisory and contact services in Germany”](#).



# Language acquisition in Germany

©Gorodenkoff - stock.adobe.com

German language skills play a key role in your professional and social integration. There are many opportunities to learn and improve your language skills in Germany:

## › Language schools: :

Germany has many private and public language schools that offer German courses for all levels (A1 to C2). Well-known institutions are for example the [Goethe-Institut](#) and the [Adult education centres \(VHS\)](#). These schools offer both in-person classes as well as online options.

## › Online learning platforms:

If you want to learn more flexibly, you can use websites such as [Deutsche Welle](#) or the providers mentioned above. These allow you to learn German at your own pace and at any time. Further recommendations can be found at the [Federal Office for Migration and Refugees \(BAMF\)](#). There are also a number of apps available online to help you learn German.

## › Language cafés and tandem programmes:

Many German cities host language cafés where you can practise in a relaxed atmosphere with other learners and native speakers. Tandem programmes, where learners support each other in their language learning, are also a good way to improve your language skills. You can find information on these programmes online: type the name of your city, for example, together with the terms “Sprachcafé” (language café) or “Tandemprogramm” (tandem programme) into a search engine to get a list of suitable offers.

## › Language tests and exams:

If you would like to certify your German language skills, you can take official exams such as the [Goethe-Zertifikat](#) or the [TestDaF](#) exam. These certificates are often required to pursue your vocational training or to have your qualifications recognised in Germany.

## › Professional language courses:

These courses are specifically targeted at job-related communication and help you to use German confidently in a work environment. They are funded by the [Federal Office for Migration and Refugees \(BAMF\)](#) and are intended for people who are registered as jobseekers, would like to have their qualifications recognised in Germany or are already in employment.



You can find further information about these offers on “Make it in Germany” in the section “[Language classes](#)”.

# Prospects in Germany

©sepy - stock.adobe.com

## Prospect: Qualified employment in Germany



Once you have found qualified employment in Germany, you must convert your job search opportunity card into a residence permit for qualified employment before you can start working. Employment is considered qualified if it requires skills and knowledge that are generally obtained as part of academic studies or qualified vocational training. Depending on whether you already have a German qualification, a qualification recognised in Germany or a comparable qualification, you have the following residence permits available to you:

If you have a German qualification or the equivalence of a non-academic vocational qualification or recognition or comparability of a foreign academic qualification and – if required – a licence to practise a profession:

- **Residence permit to work for qualified professionals** (Section 18a of the Residence Act (AufenthG), Section 18b AufenthG)
- **EU Blue Card** (Section 18g AufenthG)

In case the qualification is not (fully) comparable or recognisable:

- **Residence permit to work for professionally experienced workers** (Section 19c (2) AufenthG in conjunction with Section 6 of the Ordinance on the Employment of Foreigners (BeschV))
- **Residence permit for a recognition partnership** (Section 16d (3) AufenthG)
- **Special titles for specific professions** (e.g., professional drivers, researchers)



You will find information on the requirements for the above residence titles in the section [“Types of visa”](#).

### Special case: Extension of the job search opportunity card

If you have found qualified employment in Germany but do not meet the requirements for any of the above residence titles, an opportunity card extension can be issued in some cases. You cannot receive an extension for auxiliary or semi-skilled work.

Example: If you do not have the required two years of professional experience for the residence permit for professionally experienced workers, you can start working in Germany with an opportunity card extension. As soon as you can prove that you have the required two years of professional experience, you can apply for the corresponding residence title.

**Figure: possible subsequent titles after a successful job search**

Formal qualification recognised/comparable	Qualification not (fully) recognised or comparable
EU Blue Card (Section 18g AufenthG)	Residence permit for professionally experienced workers (Section 19c (2) AufenthG in conjunction with Section 6 BeschV) Only applies to employment in non-regulated professions.
Residence permit for qualified professionals (Sections 18a, 18b AufenthG)	
Assistants in nursing: residence permit for other employment purposes (Section 19c (1) AufenthG in conjunction with Section 22a BeschV)	Residence permit for a recognition partnership (Section 16d (3) AufenthG)
	Special titles for specific professions: e.g. professional drivers, researchers etc.
<b>Alternative residence title:</b> opportunity card extension (Section 20a (5) AufenthG)	



# The opportunity card: more than a job search

©Rawpixel.com - stock.adobe.com

In addition to the job search, you can also use the opportunity card to explore other career paths.

Depending on your qualifications and interests, you can seek **full recognition of your foreign qualifications**, start **vocational training**, undertake **academic studies** or a **doctorate** or become **self-employed**. In all cases, it is important to take the necessary steps early on and apply for a suitable residence permit in good time. The following also applies here: all of these options have their own requirements. Just being in possession of an opportunity card is not enough.

## Prospect: Recognition of the foreign qualifications



You can already apply to have your **qualifications recognised** as you hold the job search opportunity card. If your qualifications are recognised as partially equivalent, you can undertake the necessary **qualification measures** in Germany. It is important to apply for the respective residence permit in good time before your job search opportunity card expires.

### Which residence titles are there?

- › Resident permit for the participation in a qualification measure (Section 16d (1) AufenthG): only after the completion of the recognition procedure with partial recognition
- › Residence permit for a recognition partnership combined with a job offer (Section 16d (3) AufenthG): also possible if no recognition procedure has been initiated yet

### What do you need to be aware of?

- › Language skills: both residence titles generally require German language skills of at least level A2.
- › Search for a suitable qualification measure: if you do not want to start a recognition partnership with a job offer from an employer, you will also need a suitable qualification measure in Germany. You can get assistance here, for example:

The [IQ advisory services](#) provide targeted **assistance** with job recognition and qualification measures.

You can find information on post-qualification and professional development on the website of “Anerkennung in Deutschland” under “[What happens after the notice](#)”.



## Prospect: Vocational training



As the holder of a job search opportunity card, you can also apply for **vocational training**. Vocational training can be a promising alternative for long-term professional development in Germany. Many employers have open training places – this increases your chances.

If you have found a suitable training place, you can apply for a residence **permit for vocational training** (Section 16a AufenthG) at the responsible foreigners authority before your job search opportunity card expires.

### What do you need to be aware of?

- › Language skills: qualified vocational training generally requires German language skills of at least level B1. This applies if the training institution has not already tested your language skills or if you have not completed a preparatory German course.
- › Search for a training place: there are several websites where you can find a suitable vocational training place:
  - [Job listings of the Federal Employment Agency](#): here you will find training positions in many professions and companies throughout Germany.
  - [“Lehrstellenradar”](#): listings of training positions of the Chamber of Crafts (ideal for vocational training positions in crafts and trades)
  - [Job exchange of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce \(IHK\)](#) (for commercial or industrial training occupations)
  - Job and training fairs: the portal [www.planet-beruf.de](http://www.planet-beruf.de) provides an overview of current trade fairs
  - Further information is available on “Make it in Germany” in the [“Vocational training Germany”](#) section



You can obtain **personal advice** on training opportunities in Germany from the employment agency in your region.

## Prospect: Academic studies or doctorate



Academic studies or a doctorate can open up new career prospects for you. Germany is recognised worldwide for its high-quality education and research opportunities.

If you have been accepted to a university to study or do a doctorate, you can apply for a residence permit before your opportunity card in Germany expires:

- Residence permit for studying (Section 16b AufenthG)
- For doctoral students, the residence permit for studying (Section 16b (1) AufenthG) and the residence permit for research (Section 18d AufenthG) or the EU Blue Card (Section 18g AufenthG) – if the required salary thresholds are met – are notably suitable. If the requirements for more than one residence permit are met, you have the right to choose.

### What do you need to be aware of?

- › [Academic studies in Germany](#):
  - Recognised university entrance qualification (information at [anabin](http://anabin.de))
  - Proof of language skills: Generally, B2/C1 is required for study programmes in German. German is generally not a requirement for study programmes in other languages.

› Doctorate in Germany:

- Completed Master's degree or comparable university degree.
- Concrete doctoral position at a university or research institution in Germany.



Contact the International Office of the higher education institution of your choice for **personal advice** on studying and doing a doctorate in Germany.

Further information can be found here:

- “Make it in Germany”: section [“Studies”](#) and [“Research”](#)
- You can find additional information on the websites of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) [„Study in Germany“](#) and [„Research in Germany“](#).

## Prospect: Self-employment / setting up a business



Setting up a business or becoming self-employed can be an interesting way to reach your career goals in Germany. Germany offers a wide range of opportunities for business founders from abroad.

Before your opportunity card expires, you must apply for a residence permit for self-employment (Section 21 AufenthG) at the competent foreigners authority if your start-up project is fully developed.

### What do you need to be aware of?

- › Work out the financing (equity, loans, etc.) of your start-up idea in advance.
- › Check whether you need certain qualifications and licences to be self-employed.

Further information can be found here:

- “Make it in Germany”: section [“Setting up a business”](#)
- Portal “Wir gründen in Deutschland” (We set up a business in Germany): overview of [advisory centres for international start-ups and self-employed people](#) in Germany.
- [Global Certification and Consulting Centre](#): assistance with the realisation of your start-up idea in Germany.

**Further information on working and living in Germany can be found on the website of the Federal Government**

**[www.make-it-in-germany.de](http://www.make-it-in-germany.de)**

# Attachment: Tips for a checklist

## Before arrival

You should bring the following documents with you to Germany:

- ☐ Passport
- ☐ Identification card / personal national ID card (if available)
- ☐ Birth certificate
- ☐ Credit card and some cash in euros
- ☐ Certificates of degrees (school/academic studies/profession)
- ☐ Certificate of German and English language skills
- ☐ If applicable, proof of financing: Declaration of Commitment, savings
- ☐ Proof of health insurance coverage for the first weeks of your stay
- ☐ If you come together with your partner: marriage certificate + notarised translation + apostil, if applicable

## The first days in Germany

- ☐ Registration of address at the Residents' Registration Office
- ☐ Mobility: e.g. purchase of local public transport ticket, rental or purchase of bike/car
- ☐ Purchase of German SIM card
- ☐ Opening of bank account
- ☐ Appropriate clothes for the season

## Accommodation

- ☐ Arrangement of accommodation for the first few days
- ☐ Preparation of documents for the apartment hunting
- ☐ If you are renting your own flat: find an internet provider and possibly an electricity provider and register for the licence fee

## Other things to arrange

- ☐ German course search + registration
- ☐ To change or extend your residence title: arrange an appointment at the foreigners authority (we recommend arranging the appointments as early as possible due to long waiting times).