General visa information

In Germany, people with good business ideas are in demand. Find out below whether you require a visa to set up your business, and which other regulations might apply.

Citizens from the European Union, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland
Welcome to Germany. The freedom of establishment applies for you. That means that you do not require a visa or residence permit to set up a business here.

Citizens from other states
Welcome to Germany. In order to set up a business in Germany, you will need a residence permit for the purpose of self-employment (Aufenthaltserlaubnis zur Ausübung einer selbständigen Tätigkeit). If you are in Germany already and hold a residence permit for another purpose or a visa which was granted explicitly for the purpose of self-employment (Visum zum Zweck der selbständigen Tätigkeit), and if you have already planned your business and laid down your business plan in writing, you can apply for a residence permit for the purpose of self-employment. Additional information on planning your business and drawing up a business plan is available here.

Are you still resident in your home country?
Then you will need to apply for a visa for the purpose of self-employed occupation at the competent German mission near you. The points of contact in your home country can be found on our "Local contacts" map.

Before you apply, you should ask your competent German mission about the documentation you will require. You might also find support at the German Chambers of Commerce and at German Business Associations abroad. Similarly, institutions in the place where you intend to take up residence may be able to help: for example the Chambers of Industry and Commerce or the “Welcome Centres” which have been set up in some German states.

The German mission abroad will send your visa application to the foreigners authority (Ausländerbehörde) at your future place of residence in Germany. The foreigners authority will involve other agencies and professional associations as necessary. Processing your application will normally take two to four months. On the basis of the outcome, the German mission abroad will decide whether it can grant an entry visa for the occupation you would like to pursue. The entry visa is usually valid for a period of three months, and once you are in Germany, it will need to be converted into a term residence permit by the foreigners authority. You will not require an entry visa if you are a citizen of Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand or the USA. Citizens of these states can enter Germany without a visa, and will then need to apply for a residence permit within three months.

A residence permit for the purpose of self-employment will allow you to set up a self-employed or freelance business in Germany. Find out here what kind of business set-up is most suitable for you.
Information on the internet

Startup Portal
Requirements under residence law (German, English, French, Italian, Russian, Chinese)

BMWi Authority Finder
The Authority Finder will guide you to the right local public authorities and agencies for your requirements (German)

Recognition in Germany
Information on the recognition of foreign professional qualifications and a list of contact points (English, German, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Spanish, Turkish)

BMWi GründerZeiten no. 10: Gründungen durch Migranten (migrant startups)
Comprehensive information on the topic of “migrant startups” (PDF) (German)

14.08.2019, 14:21