LIVE & WORK EUROPE

A HAAS & COMPANY BRAND

Working in Germany

Routes, job market, salary, the first weeks and your family.

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How to use this guide

This guide is for experienced professionals from outside the EU who want to work in Germany. It explains the routes in our own words, as the authorities publish them. The authorities decide every application; check the official pages listed at the end before you apply. Amounts change every January; the figures here apply to 2026.

> In short: a recognised degree and a job offer of at least EUR 50,700 a year (EUR 45,934.20 in IT and engineering) is the most direct route into Germany: the EU Blue Card.

The job market in Germany

Germany is the largest economy in Europe, and many companies hire internationally, above all in software and IT, engineering, data and finance. In tech, English is often the working language, especially in larger companies and in Berlin, Munich, Hamburg and Frankfurt. In finance, sales and management, German is asked for more often, because you work with German-speaking clients and colleagues.

What helps most: a CV in the format employers here expect, clear evidence of results, language levels on the CEFR scale (A1 to C2), and a realistic plan for the visa and the move. Employers like to see that a candidate has thought this through.

Do you need a visa first?

- **Citizens of the EU, the EEA and Switzerland** need no permit. They can live and work in Germany and register like anyone else.
- **Citizens of Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the USA** may enter Germany without a visa and apply for the residence permit there, within 90 days of entry (§ 41 of the Residence Ordinance); while the application is open, you may stay. You start work only once the foreigners' office (Ausländerbehörde) has confirmed it in writing: a provisional certificate (Fiktionsbescheinigung) that allows the job, or the permit itself. In big cities this can take weeks or even months (Munich names up to seven months), so the start date in your contract should leave time for it.
- **Everyone else, including citizens of China,** applies for a national visa (type D) at the German embassy or consulate responsible for their place of residence, before the move. Plan for waiting times for the appointment.

Visa first, or not? A visa that allows the job lets you start work on arrival. For a fixed start date, or when your employer uses the fast-track procedure for skilled workers, the visa is often the better way, even if you could enter without one.

The routes into Germany

EU Blue Card

The EU Blue Card is the main route for university graduates (§ 18g of the Residence Act).

- **Degree:** a German degree, or a foreign degree that is recognised or comparable to a German one.
- **Job offer:** a job that matches your qualification, with a gross salary of at least **EUR 50,700** a year (2026).

- **Lower threshold of EUR 45,934.20:** for occupations where workers are short (among them IT, engineering, natural sciences, mathematics and certain management roles), and for anyone who finished their degree in the last three years.
- **IT specialists without a degree:** at least three years of IT experience within the last seven years, and the lower threshold.
- **Advantages:** your spouse does not need to show German skills and may work; a settlement permit is possible after 27 months with basic German (A1), or after 21 months with German at level B1.

Skilled-worker permit

If you have a recognised degree or vocational qualification and a job offer for qualified work, you can get a residence permit as a skilled worker (§§ 18a and 18b of the Residence Act). There is no general salary threshold, but in most cases the Federal Employment Agency checks that the working conditions are comparable to those of local employees. If you are 45 or older and apply for the first time, a salary of at least EUR 55,770 a year (2026) or adequate pension provision is required.

Professionals with experience

Without a recognition in Germany, you can still work in a qualified job if you have at least two years of professional experience within the last five years and a qualification that the country where you obtained it recognises (a degree or at least two years of vocational training). In IT, no formal qualification is needed. The salary must be at least EUR 45,630 a year (2026), unless the employer is bound by a collective agreement.

Opportunity Card

The Opportunity Card (Chancenkarte, §§ 20a and 20b of the Residence Act) lets you come to Germany for up to **12 months to look for a job**. While you search, you may work up to 20 hours a week and try out a job for up to two weeks.

You need a degree or a vocational qualification of at least two years that is recognised in the country where you obtained it, German at level A1 or English at level B2, and proof that you can support yourself (for example a blocked account; the monthly amount is set every year). If your qualification is fully recognised in Germany, you need no points. Otherwise you need at least **6 points**:

What counts	Points
Partial recognition of your qualification in Germany	4
German B2 or higher / B1 / A2	3 / 2 / 1
English C1 or higher	1
At least 5 years of experience in the last 7 years / at least 2 years in the last 5 years	3 / 2
Qualification in a shortage occupation (for example IT or engineering)	1
Age 35 or younger / 36 to 40	2 / 1
A legal stay in Germany of at least 6 months without a break in the last 5 years	1
Your spouse also qualifies and applies with you	1

Recognition of your degree

For the EU Blue Card and the skilled-worker permit, your degree must be recognised or comparable to a German degree.

1. **anabin:** look up your university and your degree in the anabin database of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education. If the university is listed as "H+" and the degree as equivalent, that is usually enough.
2. **Statement of comparability:** if your degree is not listed, the Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB) issues a statement of comparability (Zeugnisbewertung). It costs a fee and takes about three months, or about two weeks for an EU Blue Card, as the ZAB states; apply early.
3. **Degrees from China:** plan for the ZAB statement. Keep the graduation certificate, the degree certificate and the transcript ready, each with a copy and a translation.
4. **Vocational qualifications** are recognised by the chambers and authorities responsible for the occupation; the portal "Anerkennung in Deutschland" shows who is responsible.

Regulated professions such as doctors, nurses or lawyers need a formal licence; this guide does not cover them.

The rest of Europe

Almost every EU country issues the EU Blue Card; Denmark and Ireland do not take part. Many countries also have their own routes for highly qualified workers. The EU Immigration Portal of the European Commission links to the official pages of each country.

Salary, tax and social insurance

- **Gross per year:** salaries are quoted as the gross annual salary, sometimes paid in 12 and sometimes in 13 or more instalments.
- **Deductions:** income tax (progressive), the solidarity surcharge only on high incomes, church tax only for members of a church that levies it, and social insurance: pension, unemployment, health and long-term care insurance. Employer and employee share the social insurance.
- **Tax class:** after you register, you get a tax ID by post; your tax class depends on whether you are married and how you and your spouse earn.
- **Health insurance:** you need cover from the day you enter; until your job starts, that is usually a private travel or transition insurance. From the first day of work it is mandatory. Public health insurance covers your spouse and children at no extra cost if they live in Germany and have little or no income of their own; above an income limit you can choose private insurance instead.
- **Cost of living** depends mostly on rent. Munich, Frankfurt, Hamburg and Berlin are the most expensive cities for housing; many mid-sized cities are much cheaper.

Housing

- Rental markets in the large cities are tight. Start early, and consider a furnished flat for the first months.
- Landlords usually ask for a rental dossier: ID, proof of income (your contract), a credit report (SCHUFA, once you have one) and sometimes a confirmation from your previous landlord.
- A deposit of up to three months' net rent is common; by law it may not be higher.
- For your registration you need a confirmation from your landlord (Wohnungsgeberbestätigung).

Your first weeks

1. **Register your address** at the local citizens' office (Bürgeramt) within two weeks of moving in.

2. **Tax ID:** arrives by post a few weeks after you register; your employer needs it.
3. **Bank account:** needed for your salary and your rent.
4. **Health insurance:** choose a public insurer (or, above the income limit, a private one) before your first working day; you get a social insurance number through it.
5. **Residence permit:** if you entered without a visa, apply online at the foreigners' office (Ausländerbehörde) right after you register, within 90 days of entry, and start work only once it has confirmed the job in writing. Plan trips abroad only once you hold the permit: while you wait, your provisional right to stay does not let you re-enter. If you entered with a visa, book the appointment in time, before the visa ends.

Your family

- Spouses and children can usually join you. The rules depend on your route: spouses of EU Blue Card holders, for example, do not need German.
- School is compulsory for children who live in Germany. Public schools are free; international and bilingual schools charge fees and often have waiting lists.
- From the age of one, children have a legal right to a place in childcare, but in many cities places are scarce: register early.

A realistic timeline

1. **Months 1–2:** CV in the German-speaking format, LinkedIn, recognition of your degree (anabin or ZAB), first applications.
2. **Months 2–5:** interviews, often two or three rounds, many of them by video.
3. **After the offer:** the contract, then the visa application or, if you may enter without a visa, the move and the application in Germany. Without a visa, the start date should leave time for the foreigners' office.
4. **Waiting time:** depends on the embassy and the route, often several weeks.
5. **Arrival:** housing, registration, bank, health insurance, tax ID, residence permit appointment.

Checklist

☐ Passport valid long enough
☐ Degree certificate and transcript (from China also the graduation certificate), with copies and translations
☐ anabin printout or ZAB statement of comparability
☐ CV in the German-speaking format, in English (and German if you can)
☐ Language certificates, if you have them
☐ Employment contract or binding job offer
☐ Proof of health insurance
☐ For the family: marriage and birth certificates, with translations
☐ Biometric photos

Official sources

- Make it in Germany, the portal of the Federal Government: make-it-in-germany.com
- Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF): bamf.de
- Federal Foreign Office, visas: auswaertiges-amt.de

- Residence Act and Residence Ordinance: gesetze-im-internet.de
- anabin database: anabin.kmk.org
- Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB): kmk.org/zab
- Recognition in Germany: anerkennung-in-deutschland.de
- EU Immigration Portal: immigration-portal.ec.europa.eu
